

VEDANTA

and the West

144

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD
The Coming of the Bhairavi

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA
Perfection

SWAMI RITAJANANDA
Early Life of Swami Turiyananda



Vedanta Press

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VEDANTA AND THE WEST



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VEDANTA

and the West

144



VEDANTA SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Vedanta Press

1946 VEDANTA PLACE • HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA

First Published July-August, 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

The song on page 46 is reproduced
from Swami Nikhilananda's trans-
lation of *The Gospel of Sri Rama-
krishna*.

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Printed in the United States of America

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THE COMING OF THE BHAIRAVI

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

The eighth chapter of a forthcoming book on Ramakrishna

AS SOON as he was back at Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna resumed the performance of worship in the Kali Temple; but he did not continue it for long. After a few days, his awareness of the Mother's presence overwhelmed him once more, and he was unable to attend to any external duties. His earlier symptoms returned; the blood flushed his chest, his whole body burned, he could not sleep. But now, as he said himself, he could regard these symptoms more objectively, and they did not seriously alarm him.

They alarmed Mathur, however, just as much as before. Again, a doctor was consulted; new but equally ineffective medicines were prescribed. One day, however, when Mathur took Ramakrishna to the doctor's house in Calcutta, a colleague happened to be present. He too examined Ramakrishna and declared: "It seems to me that the patient's condition is due to some kind of spiritual excitement—medicine won't cure him." Ramakrishna used to say in after-years that this doctor was the first member of the medical profession to understand his condition. But the doctor's opinion was disregarded by his colleague and by Mathur.

When the news reached Kamarpukur that Ramakrishna had seemingly suffered a mental relapse, Chandra was in despair. Since all her planning and her financial sacrifices appeared to have been in vain, she decided that she must

now risk the sacrifice of her own life. She must practice the fast called *prayopavesana*, in which the devotee throws himself down before the deity in the shrine and remains there until his prayer is granted or he dies of starvation. Chandra attempted to practice *prayopavesana* first at the Shiva shrine at Kamarpukur, where she herself had had the vision at the time when Gadadhar was conceived. But a vision directed her to approach Shiva in another temple, in the neighboring village of Mukundapur; so there she recommenced her fast. After two days, Shiva appeared to her in a dream and said "Don't be afraid—your Son is not mad; he is in this state because he is so powerfully possessed by God." Chandra was largely reassured. She stopped fasting and returned home, where she devoted herself to the worship of Rama, the family deity, praying to him that her Son might find mental peace.

Recalling this period, Ramakrishna used to say: "No sooner had I passed through one spiritual crisis than another took its place. It was like being in the midst of a whirlwind—even my sacred thread was blown away, I could seldom keep hold of my dhoti. Sometimes I'd open my mouth, and it would be as if my jaws reached from heaven to the underworld. 'Mother!' I'd cry desperately. I felt I had to pull her in, as a fisherman pulls in fish with his dragnet. A prostitute walking the street would appear to me to be Sita, going to meet her victorious husband. An English boy standing cross-legged against a tree reminded me of the boy Krishna, and I lost consciousness. Sometimes I would share my food with a dog. My hair became matted. Birds would perch on my head and peck at the grains of rice which had lodged there during the worship. Snakes would crawl over my motionless body.

"An ordinary man couldn't have borne a quarter of that

tremendous fervor; it would have burnt him up. I had no sleep at all for six long years. My eyes lost the power of winking. I stood in front of a mirror and tried to close my eyelids with my finger—and I couldn't! I got frightened and said to Mother: 'Mother, is this what happens to those who call on you? I surrender myself to you, and you give me this terrible disease!' I used to shed tears—but then, suddenly, I'd be filled with ecstasy. I saw that my body didn't matter—it was of no importance, a mere trifle. Mother appeared to me and comforted me and freed me from my fear."

One day, Ramakrishna went into one of the Shiva temples and began to recite the hymn in praise of Shiva which is known as the *Mahimna-stotra*:

With the blue mountain for her ink,
With a branch of the heaven-tree for her pen,
With all earth for her writing-leaf,
Let the goddess Sarada describe your greatness—
She could not—though she wrote forever.

Having reached the end of this stanza, Ramakrishna was overcome with emotion. The tears poured down his cheeks and fell upon his clothing. "Oh great Lord God," he kept exclaiming, "how can I express your glory?" The temple-servants gathered round him, laughing and joking: "He's even crazier than usual, today. Another minute, and he'll be riding on Shiva's shoulders!" Then Mathur appeared on the scene. One of the bystanders respectfully suggested to him that Ramakrishna had better be removed before he misbehaved himself in some manner; he was standing dangerously close to the lingam. "Touch him—" said Mathur, with an exaggerated ferocity which was characteristic of him, "if you don't value your head!" Ramakrishna, needless to say, was

left undisturbed. After a little while, he regained outward consciousness. Seeing Mathur and the others standing around him, he seemed afraid, and asked guiltily, like a little boy, "did I do anything wrong?" "Oh no," said Mathur, "you were just reciting a hymn. I came here to see that no one interrupted you."

Mathur's faith in Ramakrishna was finally rewarded by a vision. One day, Ramakrishna was pacing up and down outside his room, on the veranda which faced the music-tower. Mathur was sitting alone in the house known as the Kuthi. Through the window, he could see Ramakrishna, who was in profound meditation and quite unconscious of being observed.

All at once, Mathur came running from his house, threw himself down before Ramakrishna, clasped both of his feet and began to weep.

Ramakrishna was startled out of his meditation. Mathur's action amazed and embarrassed him. Despite the fact that the Rani and Mathur treated him with such reverence and often asked his advice on spiritual matters, Ramakrishna still felt some of the respect which a country boy would normally feel for an immensely wealthy and powerful man who was also his patron and protector. "What are you doing?" he exclaimed to Mathur. "You're a gentleman and the Rani's son-in-law! What will people say if they see you acting like this? Calm yourself—please—get up!" But Mathur could not stop weeping for some time. At last, controlling himself, he explained: "Father, I was watching you as you walked up and down, just now—I saw it distinctly: as you walked toward me, you were no longer yourself; you were the Holy Mother Kali from the temple! And then, as you turned to walk in the other direction, you immediately became Lord Shiva! At first, I couldn't believe my eyes. I

rubbed them, and looked again, and saw the same thing. As often as I looked, it happened."

When telling this story, Ramakrishna would comment: "I wasn't conscious at the time that anything was happening to me. I knew nothing about it. But I couldn't make Mathur understand. . . . I was afraid someone would get to know of it and tell the Rani. Whatever would she have thought? She might perhaps have said I'd put a spell on Mathur!"

THAT WINTER, the Rani fell gravely ill with dysentery and fever. When she realized that her end was approaching, she became anxious to settle the endowment of the Dakshineswar Temple property so that the worship there might be guaranteed to continue. The deed of endowment had never been formally executed, and to do this the Rani had to get the signatures of her two surviving daughters, waiving their claims to the property. The younger daughter signed; the elder, Padmamani, refused. This refusal caused the Rani much sadness during her last days. Even a vision of the Holy Mother, which the Rani had upon her deathbed, could not altogether comfort her. Seeing that lamps had been lighted around her, she asked for them to be taken away, saying that they were useless—being dimmed by the brightness of the Mother's approach. Suddenly, "Mother—you have come!" she exclaimed. There was a pause. Then, she asked plaintively: "Padma hasn't signed—what's going to happen, Mother?" These were the Rani's last words, and they seem to epitomize the life of this deeply religious woman, this great devotee, who was nevertheless seldom free from the cares of wealth and worldly affairs. Indeed, the poor Rani's fears were quite justified, for the Dakshineswar property has frequently been the subject of litigation amongst the members of her family, from that time down to the present day.

AFTER the Rani's death, which took place on February 20th, 1861, Mathur became the sole executor of her estate. But this increase in his already great wealth and influence did not make him more worldly-minded. Since his vision of Ramakrishna in the aspects of Kali and Shiva, Mathur's faith had been strengthened; and thenceforth he devoted his life to serving Ramakrishna in every way he could. "Everything is yours," he used to tell Ramakrishna, "I am only your steward." Indeed, he would have gladly made over a fortune to Ramakrishna, if he had been allowed to do so; but, at the mere mention of such an idea, Ramakrishna scolded him severely. So he had to content himself by spending money in other ways which might please Ramakrishna. He loaded visiting pandits with gifts. He fed the poor lavishly. He bought gold ornaments for the Kali image in the temple. When Ramakrishna wanted to attend a religious festival, Mathur made all arrangements for him to do so; furthermore, he disguised himself and followed with a bodyguard, lest Ramakrishna should come to harm in the crowd. Mathur could not be grateful enough that he possessed "Father's" affection and had daily access to him; he was well aware of his extraordinary privilege. Speaking about Ramakrishna, he often used the beautiful phrase "he belongs to the country where there is no night."

Mathur had a family priest named Chandra Haldar. This man became jealous of Ramakrishna's influence on Mathur and of the favors he was receiving from him. Haldar had been planning for a long time to get Mathur under his own control and enjoy his generosity. Being low-minded and cunning himself, he interpreted Ramakrishna's simplicity as a cunning pose and took it for granted that he, too, was out to squeeze as much out of Mathur as he could.

One evening, just before dusk, Ramakrishna was lying

in a state of ecstatic semiconsciousness in Mathur's house at Janbazar in Calcutta. There was no one else in the room. Halдар saw his opportunity. He began to shake Ramakrishna, demanding "what did you do to make him obey you like this? Don't pretend! I know you understand me all right! How did you hypnotize him?" He kept repeating these questions, but Ramakrishna did not answer—for, in his ecstatic state, he had lost the power of speech. Halдар became more and more angry. "So you won't tell me, you scoundrel?" he cried, and he kicked Ramakrishna hard before leaving him, in disgust.

Ramakrishna said nothing of this at the time to Mathur, knowing that Halдар's punishment would have been drastic. But later on, when Halдар had been dismissed for some other offense, Ramakrishna told Mathur what had passed between them. "If I had known that," said Mathur, "I should have killed him." And he probably meant it.

NOT LONG after the death of the Rani, an event occurred which marked the beginning of a new phase of Ramakrishna's sadhana.

In those days, there were flower gardens on the river-bank below the Shiva temples. Although Ramakrishna no longer performed the worship in the Kali Temple, he was accustomed to collect the flowers which had to be used in the ritual. One morning, as he was doing this, a boat came up to the stairs of the ghat. In it sat a woman who wore the ocher robes of a Bhairavi—a female member of a community devoted to the worship of Shakti. The woman was in her late thirties, but she looked younger than her age and was still graceful, erect and beautiful. She wore her hair hanging loosely about her shoulders. Under her arm, she carried

several books; these, and a couple of wearing-cloths, were all her worldly possessions, for she was a wandering nun.

As soon as Ramakrishna saw the Bhairavi, he became excited, as though her coming were a long-expected event. He hurried back to his room and called Hriday to him. He described the Bhairavi, and said "go to her and ask her to come to me." "But why should she come to you?" Hriday asked doubtfully, "She doesn't know you." "You ask her in my name," said Ramakrishna, with complete assurance, "she will come." Hriday was surprised at his Uncle's eagerness.

He was even more surprised when he spoke to the Bhairavi, who by this time had disembarked and climbed the stairs to the portico of the ghat; for she accepted Ramakrishna's invitation as a matter of course and followed Hriday without any further questions. When she saw Ramakrishna, the Bhairavi's eyes filled with tears of delight: "Ah, my child!" she exclaimed, "here you are at last! I knew you lived somewhere along the banks of the Ganges—but that was all; and I've been searching so long!"

"But how could you know about me, Mother?" Ramakrishna asked.

"Through the grace of the Divine Mother, I came to know that I was to meet three of you. Two I met already, in East Bengal. And today I've found you!"

Both of them were deeply moved.

THE BHAIRAVI spoke little about herself, at that or at any future time. There was an atmosphere of mystery about her, which was heightened by her mature beauty and her air of distinction. We know only that her name was Yogeshwari and that she came of a Brahmin family from the district of Jessore in Bengal. (She is sometimes referred to by biogra-

phers as the Bhairavi Brahmani or simply as the Brahmani.) We do not know if she was ever married; or under what circumstances she decided to renounce the life of the world and become a wanderer.

As for the two to whom she referred—the two others whom she was told by the Mother in a vision to seek out—their names were Chandra and Girija. The Bhairavi had met them in the district of Barisal, and it seems that she spent some time in giving them spiritual guidance. Much later, the Brahmani brought Chandra and Girija to Dakshinewar to meet Ramakrishna. Both of them were spiritual aspirants of a high order, and both of them were suffering from the same obstacle to ultimate enlightenment; they had developed psychic powers of which they were foolishly vain.

Ramakrishna used to say of psychic powers, “shun them, like filthy excrement. Sometimes they come of themselves when you practice sadhana. But if you take any notice of them, you’ll stick fast. You won’t be able to reach God.” Chandra had developed powers of clairvoyance and clairaudience; he could tell what was happening in far-distant places. But all the good this did him was that he became entangled in a love affair with a rich man’s daughter, which ended in his humiliation. As for Girija, he could project a beam of light from his back—a not particularly useful accomplishment. Ramakrishna liked to make fun of such tricks by telling the following stories:

“A man had two sons. The elder left home while he was still young, and became a monk. Meanwhile, the younger got his education and became learned and virtuous. Then he married and settled down to fulfill his duties as a householder. After twelve years, the monk came to visit his brother, who was beside himself with joy. When they had eaten to-

gether, the younger brother asked the elder, 'Brother, you have given up our worldly pleasures and wandered around as a monk, all these years. Please tell me—what have you gained by it?' So the elder brother said 'you want to see what I've gained? Come with me!' So he took his brother to the bank of a neighboring river, and he said 'watch!', and then he crossed the river, walking on the water, to the other bank; and he called back 'did you see that?' But the younger brother just paid half a penny to the ferryman, crossed the river by boat, went up to his brother and said 'did I see what?' The elder brother said 'Why—didn't you see me cross the river by walking on the water?' So the younger brother laughed and said, 'didn't you see *me* cross the river by paying half a penny? Is *that* all you gained by twelve years of austerities?' Hearing his brother's words, the elder understood his mistake. And he now set his mind to realize God."

"There was once a yogi who had this power: whatever he said, happened. If he said to somebody 'die,' that person died immediately; if he said 'live,' he came back to life at once. One day on a journey, the yogi met a holy man. This holy man spent his life simply repeating the name of God and meditating upon Him; he had been doing this for many years. So the vain and arrogant yogi said condescendingly to the holy man, 'Well, tell me—you've been repeating the name of God all this time—what have you got from it?' The holy man answered humbly, 'what should I get? I don't want to get anything. I only want to realize Him—and that's only possible through His grace. So what can I do but call upon His name and hope He will have mercy on me?' 'All that effort for nothing!' said the yogi, 'You ought to try to *get* something!' The holy man was silent. But after a while he asked, 'And you, Sir, what have *you* got?' 'Watch this,'

said the yogi. And he turned to an elephant which was tied to a tree close by, and said 'Elephant, die!' The elephant dropped down dead at once. The yogi told the holy man 'now watch again,' and he said to the dead elephant, 'Elephant, live!' And the elephant came to life at once, shook the dust off its body and stood up under the tree as before. 'Well,' said the yogi triumphantly, 'now you've seen for yourself!' All this while, the holy man had been silent; but now he said 'I've seen an elephant die and come to life again. But what have you gained by having this power? Has it freed you from the wheel of death and rebirth? Will it save you from sickness and old age? Can it help you to realize God?' The yogi was speechless. His understanding was awakened."

As for Chandra and Girija, their understanding was awakened, also. After they had stayed for some time at Dakshineswar and been exposed to Ramakrishna's presence, their psychic powers left them. They lost their vanity and worldly desires and began once more to progress along the path toward enlightenment.

ON that first morning of the Bhairavi's visit, Ramakrishna sat down beside her in his room and began to describe, in the most intimate detail, his spiritual experiences, his physical symptoms, and the behavior which had caused so much scandal and concern to those around him. Already, he seemed to trust her judgment implicitly. "Mother," he asked, "what are these things that keep happening to me? Am I mad, really?" And the Bhairavi reassured him: "How can ordinary people understand your condition? I tell you—these same things happened to the Holy Radha and to Sri Chaitanya. It's all written down here, in these books I have with me. I'll read them to you—"

Hriday, watching them, was amazed to see his Uncle and this stranger talking together with all the intimacy and affection of blood relatives who are reunited after a long separation.

Later that day, the Bhairavi took rice and flour from the temple stores and cooked food in the Panchavati. This she offered to a stone image of Sri Rama which she carried about with her, hanging around her neck. Having made the offering, she began to meditate, and went into samadhi.

Soon after this, as if drawn by a subconscious attraction, Ramakrishna himself entered the Panchavati in an ecstatic state. Without being aware of his action, he took the food-offering from before the image of Rama, and ate some of it. Presently, both he and the Bhairavi returned to consciousness of their surroundings. Seeing what he had done, Ramakrishna was afraid that she would regard it as sacrilege. "Why do I do these things?" he exclaimed, "Why do I lose control of myself like this?" But the Bhairavi told him, "you did well. It is the One who is within you who acts in this way—that is what I saw in my meditation. And now I know that I need not perform ritual worship any more. My worship has borne fruit at last." So saying, she reverently took the food Ramakrishna had left over as her prasad. And later she consigned her image of Rama to the waters of the Ganges. She felt that it had served its purpose, since she had now had a glimpse of the living deity within the body and mind of Ramakrishna.

In this manner, a close relationship grew up between Ramakrishna and the Bhairavi. During the next few days, they were inseparable, talking eagerly together from morning till night. After a week, however, Ramakrishna began to feel that it would be better if the Bhairavi did not continue actually to sleep within the temple compound, lest peo-

ple might gossip about them. (It is to be noted that Ramakrishna was utterly indifferent to public opinion when it concerned only himself, but quite sensitive to it when there was a possibility that it might misjudge others.) He hinted at his anxieties to the Bhairavi, who at once agreed with him. It was arranged, therefore, that she should move to the village of Dakshineswar, which was about two miles upriver. Here she settled down in a room at the bathing-ghat. The villagers soon came to regard her with the reverence due to a holy woman and provided her with food and other necessities. She continued to visit Ramakrishna every day. She now began to establish between them the relationship of Mother and Child—seeing herself as Yasoda, the foster mother of Krishna, and him as the Baby Gopal. Thus, she could be, at one and the same time, his devotee and his mentor.

Mention has already been made of the burning sensation which Ramakrishna used to feel, all over his body. At that time, it became acute. The pain would begin at sunrise and grow until, by midday, it was almost unbearable. To ease it, Ramakrishna was obliged to immerse his body in the Ganges with a wet towel on his head, for two or three hours at a stretch. Not wanting to stay longer in the water, for fear of a chill, he would go into the Kuthi, shut all the doors and windows and roll on the marble floor, after first wetting it to make it cooler.

None of the doctors who attended Ramakrishna had been able to cure him of this malady. But the Bhairavi, consulting her books, found that it had also been suffered by Radha and Chaitanya. The scriptures prescribed a remedy, which sounded so simple that great faith was required to take it seriously. The sufferer had only to put on a garland of fragrant flowers and anoint his body with sandal-paste.

Ramakrishna did this, and was cured in three days! But the sceptics at Dakshineswar maintained that this was sheer coincidence, and that he had really been cured by the after-effects of an oil the doctor had given him.

At this time, also, Ramakrishna had one of the attacks of abnormal hunger which came upon him on several occasions during his life. To quote his own words: "I couldn't get my fill, however much I ate. As soon as I'd eaten, I felt hungry again. I felt equally hungry when I'd taken food and when I hadn't. It was the same, day and night. . . . But the Bhairavi said, 'don't be afraid, my child. The scriptures say that those who seek to know God may pass through such states; I'll cure you of it.' So she asked Mathur to store in a room a large quantity of food of all kinds. Then she told me to stay in that room day and night, and eat whatever I liked, whenever I liked. I did so—only walking around to help myself to different things that took my fancy. After three days, the hunger stopped."

As the Bhairavi continued to observe Ramakrishna and listen to his spiritual experiences, she became convinced that she was in the presence of something greater, even, than sainthood. She came to the staggering conclusion that Ramakrishna was other than mortal; that he was actually an incarnation of God upon earth.

It is important at this point to make clear once more just what a Hindu means by the term *avatar*, divine incarnation; for it is something quite precise and no mere vague expression of reverence. As I have already explained in chapter five, it is part of the Hindu belief that Vishnu—the Sustainer of the world and second member of the Hindu Trinity—actually manifests himself from time to time in human

form. Now, it may be asked, what is the difference between an avatar and a man who realizes union with his Atman in the highest form of samadhi? The man who realizes the Godhead within himself does so as the climax of many human births. His karma from past lives, growing ever better and better, has impelled him through countless births, deaths and rebirths to this moment of realization; it is, as it were, the apex of a huge karmic pyramid. The Hindu will therefore entirely agree with Oscar Wilde's epigram that "every saint has a past and every sinner has a future." But a saint is still a human being and an avatar is not; he is other than a saint. An avatar has no "past" in this sense, for he has no karma. He is not driven by his karma to be born; he takes human birth as an act of pure grace, for the good of humanity. Though he voluntarily enters the world of time and space, he remains eternal; he is not bound by time. He is not subject to Maya; he is the master of Maya.

We have already seen two of the avatar's peculiar powers demonstrated by Ramakrishna himself. One is his ability to remain for long periods in the state of samadhi, which would quickly destroy the physical body of an ordinary human being. The other is his power of transmitting spiritual enlightenment to another person simply by touching him—as in the case of Haladhari. This power was exercised by Ramakrishna on many different occasions throughout his life.

THE BHAIRAVI did not keep her conclusion about Ramakrishna's true nature to herself. She spoke of it to everyone at Dakshineswar, and it is not difficult to imagine the amazement and incredulity with which it was at first received. This half-crazy young priest, who was regarded as a laughingstock even by many of those who felt an affection for him, was

now declared to be Incarnate God! Even Mathur was not sure what to believe. He was convinced that Ramakrishna was no ordinary man. But an avatar—! That seemed altogether too good to be true! Probably Mathur said to himself—as people must have said about the Buddha and Jesus of Nazareth: No doubt God comes to earth from time to time—but whyever would He choose to come *here*, and in this form?

At first, Mathur had been inclined to mistrust the Bhairavi. Could such a beautiful woman really be as pure as she seemed? One day, when she was coming out of the Kali Temple, he asked her mockingly, "Well, Bhairavi—where is your Bhairava?" Bhairava is the masculine form of Bhairavi, and Mathur's gross insinuation was that the Bhairavi must have a lover somewhere in the neighborhood. But the holy woman was not in the least put out. She looked calmly at Mathur and then pointed with her finger at the image of Shiva, lying prostrate beneath the dancing feet of Kali, within the shrine. "But that Bhairava doesn't move," said Mathur, still sticking to his stupid and ugly joke. "Why should I have become a bhairavi," said the holy woman with majestic simplicity, "if I cannot move the immovable?" Her manner finally abashed Mathur, and he had the grace to feel ashamed of himself.

The Bhairavi not only maintained her conclusion that Ramakrishna was an avatar; she was determined to get it confirmed. She was ready to defend it, she said, in formal debate with any pandits Mathur cared to invite. The prospect of such a debate seemed to amuse and please Ramakrishna himself and, largely for this reason, Mathur agreed to arrange it. From Mathur's sceptical point of view, the debate could anyhow do no harm. No doubt the pandits would refute the Bhairavi, and that, thought Mathur, would be good

for Ramakrishna. As long as he believed this notion of the Bhairavi's that he was an avatar, he was apt to become more and more irresponsible—since God can do anything He pleases. Such was Mathur's reasoning.

The two chief guests invited to the debate were Vaishnav Charan and Gauri. Vaishnav Charan was famous both as a holy man and as a great scholar. He was the generally acknowledged leader of the sect of the Vaishnavas, the worshippers of Vishnu. Many came to him for spiritual guidance. Vaishnav Charan had met Ramakrishna about three years previously at a religious festival and formed a very high opinion of him. But they had never seen each other since. Gauri was also famous, as a scholar of Tantra and a man of remarkable psychic powers.

Vaishnav Charan arrived at Dakshineswar some days in advance of Gauri, so a preliminary meeting was held without him. The Bhairavi stated her case, with many quotations from the Scriptures. Then she challenged Vaishnav Charan: "If you disagree with me, please explain your reasons." As Saradananda puts it, she was like a proud mother coming to the defense of her child. Ramakrishna, meanwhile, sat in the midst of the assembly, smiling and apparently unconcerned; occasionally eating a few grains of aniseed from a small bag and listening to the conversation as though it were about somebody else. From time to time, however, he would pluck Vaishnav Charan's sleeve and explain some aspect of his spiritual experience which he thought was being misunderstood.

Some say that Vaishnav Charan recognized Ramakrishna's true nature from the first moment, by virtue of his own spiritual insight. But, in any case, he also approved all of the Bhairavi's arguments from the Scriptures. The Scriptures say, for instance, that there are nineteen kinds of spirit-

ual mood, and that these can only be found combined in an avatar, since the body of an ordinary man, however saintly, could not sustain them and live. Ramakrishna had been shown by the Bhairavi to have combined these moods—therefore, said Vaishnav Charan, he was in agreement with her: Ramakrishna was an avatar. This quite unexpected verdict from such a great authority as Vaishnav Charan caused a sensation. But Ramakrishna took it very calmly. Turning to Mathur, he said, “So he really thinks that! Well—anyway, I’m glad it’s not a disease!”

Now the question remained; would Gauri agree with Vaishnav Charan or not?

It has been said above that Gauri had remarkable psychic powers. There is a ceremony known as the homa fire, in which the devotee offers up all his actions to God and is symbolically purified by the flame. Normally, of course, the homa fire is lighted on the ground. But Gauri used to stretch out his left arm and pile wood upon it; then with his right hand he would light the wood and pour the necessary offerings into the fire. Considering that the wood weighed about eighty pounds, that the heat of the fire had to be endured on the bare arm, that the homa ceremony takes three quarters of an hour at the very least, and that the devotee must maintain his meditation throughout it, this feat can only be described as miraculous. But we have Ramakrishna’s word that he actually saw Gauri perform it.

Gauri had another power which caused an absurd scene, on the day he arrived at Dakshineswar and met Ramakrishna. It was Gauri’s custom, on coming to take part in a religious debate, to insure his victory by reciting the refrain of a hymn to the Divine Mother, together with certain syllables of warlike challenge, *ha, re, re*; all this he uttered in a voice of superhuman power which Ramakrishna described

as being like "the rumbling of a cloud." At the same time, he would slap his left arm with the palm of his right hand, menacingly, as Indian wrestlers do when they are about to engage their opponent. The effect seems to have been both intimidating and hypnotic. Gauri's adversaries usually lost all will to disagree with him; and he had won the dispute before he even sat down to begin it.

Ramakrishna knew nothing about this power of Gauri's. But when Gauri began, as usual, to thunder the menacing words, something prompted him to do likewise—and he found himself suddenly endowed with a voice even more tremendous! Gauri, amazed to find himself thus challenged, roared louder. Ramakrishna again outroared him. The noise the two of them made sounded like a whole band of robbers charging to the attack; and the gatekeepers of the Kali Temple, hearing it, armed themselves with sticks and rushed to the spot. When they saw who it was that was making the commotion, they went away again, laughing. It is said that Gauri lost his superhuman voice forever after. He was humiliated and angry at first, but soon he and Ramakrishna became friends.

The full debate with all the pandits present was to be held in the nat-mandap, the theater-hall which stands next to the Kali Temple. Since Vaishnav Charan, who was staying in Calcutta, had not yet arrived, Ramakrishna walked over to it with Gauri. But, before entering, he went into the Temple and prostrated before the shrine of Kali. As Ramakrishna came out of the Temple again, walking unsteadily in an ecstatic state, he met Vaishnav Charan, who prostrated before him and touched his feet. As so often with Ramakrishna, this act of accepting someone's prostration caused him to go into samadhi; the Atman revealing itself at the moment of worship. Ramakrishna sat on Vaishnav Charan's

shoulders, communicating ecstasy to him by his touch. Vaishnav Charan immediately extemporized a hymn in praise of Ramakrishna. When Ramakrishna came out of samadhi, they all went slowly over to the theater-hall, moved and shaken by the experience, and sat down.

And now Gauri spoke: "Since Ramakrishna has bestowed this grace upon Pandit Vaishnav Charan, I shall not debate with him today. If I did, I should certainly be defeated. But that is not my real reason for refusing. The truth is, we have nothing to argue about; because I agree with him. His opinion of Ramakrishna is the same as my own." And so the matter was finally settled.

Later, as if to test Gauri, Ramakrishna said to him, "Listen—Vaishnav Charan calls this—" (Ramakrishna often spoke of himself as "this," "this place" or "here," to avoid personal emphasis) "an incarnation of God. Can it really be so? Please tell me what you think."

Gauri replied, with characteristic energy: "Does Vaishnav Charan call you an incarnation of God? I consider that an understatement! I believe that you are He by a fraction of Whose power the avatars come forth and accomplish their mission."

Ramakrishna smiled and said "ah—so you outbid him? Well—I know nothing about it."

"That is as it should be," Gauri told him, "for the Scriptures have a saying: 'Thou dost not know Thyself.'"

Lest the reader should suspect that Vaishnav Charan and Gauri had given their verdict on Ramakrishna out of mere courtesy, or a desire to curry favor, or from any other unworthy motive, it must be added that both of them proved their sincerity by their subsequent behavior. Vaishnav Charan continued to visit Ramakrishna at frequent intervals, and to proclaim him as an avatar to all and sundry, without

fear that his own reputation as a pandit might suffer from ridicule in consequence. As for Gauri, he could not tear himself away from Dakshineswar. The more time he spent with Ramakrishna, the less taste he felt for scholarship and theology; he began to long to realize directly, in his own consciousness, the truths he had read about in the Scriptures. Gauri's wife and children kept sending letters to him, urging him to return to them. At length, it seemed probable that they would come to Dakshineswar and force him to do so. So Gauri had to make a quick decision; and he determined to renounce the world. Taking his leave of Ramakrishna, he said "I shall not return until I have realized God." Ramakrishna blessed him on his search, and he set forth. Later, many people tried to find out what had become of Gauri and where he was. But no one ever heard of him again.

PERFECTION

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

“BE ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” In this sentence Christ states the whole purpose of man’s life. If we go to the source of any religion, we find the same theme: Realize God! Seek perfection!

But what is meant by perfection? None of us can have a definite conception of what perfection is, because it is absolute, whereas we live in the relative world, which is limited by time, space, and causation. All we know about perfection is that it refers to a state where there is no lack—but abiding peace and fulfillment. In a way, every one of us is seeking perfection. The sick man hopes to attain perfection by gaining health. The poor man thinks wealth will give him perfection. In every field of life we crave perfection: the artist in his creation, the scientist in his experiments, and so forth. But when we have health or wealth or beauty or secular knowledge, we are still not satisfied. A sense of lack and imperfection continues to drive us to seek fulfillment—ultimately to end in frustration.

Of course it is perfectly true that our cravings can be temporarily satisfied in this world. We can have some measure of pleasure and success. But we always forget that they do not last. We simply cannot have success without failure, pleasure without pain. They are like two sides of the same coin.

Kapila, the ancient Hindu philosopher, expressed the

state of perfection negatively as "complete cessation of misery." Expressed positively, the Vedic seers called it *Sat*, immortal life; *Chit*, infinite knowledge; and *Ananda*, infinite love and bliss. Behind every human effort there is the desire—though usually unconscious—to find *Sat-Chit-Ananda*—what we call God. But since most of us are not aware that God-realization is our real purpose in life, we continue to repeat the same enjoyments and sufferings over and over again. We squander our energies in ephemeral achievements, hoping against hope to find infinite reward in the finite. Only after countless disappointments and hardships does spiritual discrimination dawn in us and we learn that nothing in this world can give us lasting satisfaction. Then we begin to see that our desire for abiding happiness, or perfection, can only be realized in the eternal truth of God.

This perfection is our divine heritage. In the words of St. Paul: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; the heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ."

BUT where are we to seek perfection? Where is God? Vedanta teaches that there is a divine Ground underlying the universe of name and form. The Hindus call it Brahman, Christians call it the Godhead. Since this Godhead is omnipresent, it must be within every creature and object in the universe. In its immanent aspect, Hindus refer to it as Atman, the Self within. Atman and Brahman are one. Man must first realize the Atman within himself in order that he may realize Brahman everywhere.

Patanjali, the father of Indian psychology, explained the existence of this Godhead in man by means of an illustration from agriculture. The farmer who irrigates one of

his fields from a reservoir does not have to fetch the water. The water is there already. All the farmer has to do is to open a sluice gate or break down a dam, and the water flows into the field by the natural force of gravity. The "water" is the force of evolution which, according to Patanjali, each one of us carries within him, only waiting to be released from the "reservoir." By our acts we "open the sluice gate," the water runs down into the field; the field bears its crop and is thereby transformed.

Like other great spiritual teachers, Christ stated very plainly that man is to seek God within himself. In the Gospel according to St. Luke we read: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Some theologians have interpreted this statement to mean that Christ was among his disciples during his life on earth. But if we do not accept Christ's statement as referring to the divinity within man, how can we understand his prayer to the Father: "I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one . . ." and the apostle Paul's reminder to the Corinthians: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you"?

What prevents us from realizing the truth that God is always within us? It is our ignorance—the false identification of our true nature, which is Spirit, with body, mind, senses, and intellect. "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." The light of God is shining, but the veil of our ignorance covers that light. This ignorance is a direct and immediate experience. It can only be removed by another direct and immediate experience—vision of God or union with him. Buddha likened our state of darkness to sleep and God-realization to awakening.

While in ignorance, it is hard for us to believe that God

can be realized. Yet in every age, among the followers of all religions, there have been men and women who attained him. Christ, Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna, and others not only realized God but insisted that everyone must do so. A Vedic seer declared: "I have known that Great Being of effulgent light, beyond all darkness. You also, having known that Truth, go beyond death." And Jesus said: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The German mystic Angelus Silesius explained Jesus' words as follows: "Christ may be born a thousand times in Bethlehem, but if he be not born anew within your own heart, you remain eternally forlorn." What does it mean to have Christ born in our hearts? It is to come face to face with God and thereby to attain perfection. That is the one purpose of religion.

Now let us consider from the psychological standpoint what this rebirth in spirit, or inner awakening, means.

Today a great emphasis is laid on what is known as logical positivism. Only data verifiable through sense-perception and intellectual reasoning are accepted as truth by the logical positivists. On the basis of this logic, scriptural truths and truths taught by illumined souls throughout the ages are not taken seriously because they cannot be verified through the senses or reason. The mistake in the reasoning process of the logical positivists is that they take for granted that truth can be verified only by the senses or the intellect. No doubt, sense-experience and intellectual reasoning are criteria of truth, but they do not include all human experience. Human consciousness extends above the surface consciousness as well as below. Modern psychology has explored below the level of surface consciousness. It has shown that there are different areas of the human mind—conscious,

subconscious, and unconscious. But still one important area of the mind has been left out: and that is the superconscious. Without taking into consideration the experiences at all levels of the mind, psychology and philosophy are only giving us half-truths.

It is the mystics who have supplied the experiences of the superconscious area of the mind. And their experiences are verifiable. We can test the truth of their experiences for ourselves, if we are willing to follow the methods taught by the great religious teachers of the world.

According to the psychology of the Upanishads, there are three states of consciousness known to all mankind. They are waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. But there is a state of consciousness transcending these three, known only to the mystics. It is called the Fourth. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that this state has nothing whatever to do with occultism or mysteriousness. It is the state of perfection which Christ and other God-men have asked us to manifest in our lives. When this consciousness becomes unfolded, the kingdom of God is experienced. In Hindu terminology, this Fourth is known as samadhi; the Buddhists call it nirvana, or the awakened state; and Christ has referred to it as birth in Spirit. The experience of this transcendental consciousness is not contradicted at any time by any other experience—unlike the dream state, for instance, whose fantasies are usually contradicted by our waking state. The Fourth is beyond time, space, and causation. Although it transcends the mind, it does not contradict reason. Moreover, there are tests to determine whether an individual has actually experienced the transcendental state or has become subject to hallucinations. The criteria are whether the same vision has been experienced by men of God, and whether similar experiences are recorded in the scriptures. Also, the

experience of the Fourth results in a permanent transformation of character. Swami Vivekananda said that if by chance a fool were to go into the transcendental state, he would come back a wise man.

In the Mandukya Upanishad the transcendental state is described as follows:

The Fourth, say the wise, is not subjective experience, nor objective experience, nor experience intermediate between these two, nor is it a negative condition which is neither consciousness nor unconsciousness. It is not the knowledge of the senses, nor is it relative knowledge, nor yet inferential knowledge. Beyond the senses, beyond the understanding, beyond all expression, is the Fourth. It is pure unitary consciousness, wherein awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated. It is ineffable peace. It is the supreme good. It is One without a second.

Why do we not see many individuals who have experienced this rebirth in Spirit? It is because few really struggle for perfection. As the Gita says: "Who cares to seek for that perfect freedom? One man, perhaps, in many thousands." Of course there are millions of Christians who attend churches regularly and millions of Hindus and Buddhists who worship in temples and pagodas. But of those who do, few make earnest efforts to be perfect. Most people are satisfied with living a more or less ethical life on earth, in the hope of being rewarded in an after-life for any good deeds they may have done. Christ's ideal of perfection is generally forgotten or not understood. True, many people read the Sermon on the Mount and other scriptures. However, the teachings do not sink deep into the consciousness. Few try to live them. But although theologians may argue today

whether perfection can be achieved in this life or not, Christ taught that man should be as perfect as God himself by realizing his oneness with him. And his disciples, who hungered for the truth of God, knew that their master could teach them how to satisfy that hunger.

Neither Christ, nor Buddha, nor Krishna taught that God can be known and perfection attained only after the death of the body. If we go to the actual founders of any religion, we find one truth expressed: Realize God here and now! The Upanishads tell us: "Blessed is he who realizes God in this life. If not, it is his greatest calamity." And Christ said: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . ." The great obstacle in the path of God-realization is mankind's laziness and lack of enthusiasm. Buddha called procrastination in the struggle for enlightenment the greatest sin. And Christ expressed the same idea when he said: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

"BUT what is God? How shall I think of him?" These are the first questions that come into the mind of the spiritual aspirant. He reads in the scriptures that God is indefinable, inexpressible, beyond all thought. Yet the great illumined teachers say that God is realizable in this very life. Sri Ramakrishna would explain the reason for the many different conceptions of God by saying: "The bees make a buzzing noise before they settle on a flower; while they sit on the flower and sip the honey they are silent; and having had their fill, they make a sweet humming noise." Similarly, before we know anything of God we fight and quarrel; we claim that God must be this and cannot be that. When we begin to taste the sweetness of God, we become speechless.

And the sages who have been immersed in God-consciousness try to express their experiences in various ways. They point out that God may appear as personal, as impersonal, with or without attributes, with or without form. All contradictions meet in God. To quote Sri Ramakrishna again: "Infinite is God and infinite are his expressions. He who lives continuously in the consciousness of God, and in this alone, knows him in his true being. He knows his infinite expressions, his various aspects."

There are many methods by which perfection in God may be reached. Different ways suit different temperaments. In the religious literature of the Hindus four main paths to the attainment of union with God (known as *yogas*) are generally recognized.

In *karma yoga*, the path of selfless work, every action is offered to God as a sacrament. By dedicating the fruits of one's work to God, one gradually achieves nonattachment and eventually goes beyond both action and inaction.

Jnana yoga is the path of discrimination. By analyzing and then rejecting all transitory phenomena, the Reality or Godhead in its impersonal aspect is finally perceived. It is a difficult path, not suited for the majority of spiritual aspirants.

Bhakti yoga is the path of devotion. By cultivating intense love for God as a personal Being, the worshiper merges his own ego in his Ideal. In this path, God is often worshiped as a divine incarnation—a Christ, or Buddha, or Krishna. Most believers in the world's religions are *bhakti yogis*.

Raja yoga is the path of formal meditation. It is the method of concentrating the mind one-pointedly on the Reality until complete absorption is achieved. This path may be followed exclusively, often by those who lead predominantly

contemplative lives. But, in a sense, raja yoga may be said to combine the other three paths, since meditation may include God-dedicated action, worship, discrimination, and concentration on the chosen ideal of God. Although a balanced spiritual life demands a harmonious combination of all four yogas, one or the other usually predominates, depending on the temperament of the spiritual aspirant. All four paths lead to the same transcendental experience of union with God.

Although in Christ's teachings there are suggestions of all four paths, Jesus emphasized the path of devotion, which is considered the easiest and most natural way to God-realization. Why? Because in every human heart there is the desire to love and be loved. Everyone wants the affection of a father, a mother, a friend, or a sweetheart—not recognizing that it is really a desire for God and nothing else. That is why, ultimately, in our human relationships we feel frustrated and alone, because the love we know and express on the human plane is merely a shadow. We are not aware that it is only a reflection of the infinite God dwelling in each heart, waiting to be manifested. This is the truth we have to recognize. That great love of God attracts us, but we misread it. And to read that love truly, to find fulfillment of the desire for love within each one of us, is to turn that love toward God, who is Love itself.

This does not mean that human love is wrong and must be avoided. On the contrary, it is an experience through which every soul must pass before it can realize God. Through human love such qualities as kindness and unselfishness are unfolded. But when the soul learns through repeated bitter suffering that the nature of its love is transitory because it is human, it begins to yearn for eternal fulfillment, which is possible only on the spiritual plane. Human affec-

tion need not be uprooted; it can be transformed into divine love when its object is adored, not as a human being, but as God himself. After all, the fact is that the universe of many names and forms which we perceive is superimposed by our minds upon the true Self, the all-pervading Spirit.

In the Upanishads we read that the sage Yajnavalkya taught his wife Maitreyi:

It is not for the sake of the wife that the wife is dear, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the husband that the husband is dear, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the children that the children are dear, but for the sake of the Self. . . . It is not for the sake of itself that anything whatever is esteemed, but for the sake of the Self.

We must know that the ideal of the path of devotion is to be united with God in one's consciousness and to see him, the one Self, in every being. But one cannot see God in anyone unless one first learns to find God in one's own heart.

THE QUESTION arises: How can we love God, whom we have never seen? Both Vedanta and Christianity point out that we must worship a chosen aspect of the Godhead.

A Hindu prayer says: "They call you by so many names; they divide you, as it were, by different names; yet in each one of these you manifest your omnipotence. You are reached through any of them." Whether we worship the Lord as personal or impersonal, with or without attributes, with or without form, we must acquire single-minded love for the aspect we have chosen. But at the same time we must remember that our own Chosen Ideal is also manifested in every other aspect of God. If we worship Christ, for in-

stance, we must know that he is the Atman, the Self within us, and at the same time he is the transcendent Godhead.

Swami Vivekananda has explained the necessity of accepting a Chosen Ideal as follows:

God is both the subject and the object. He is the "I" and the "you." How is this? How to know the knower? The knower cannot know himself; I see everything, but cannot see myself. The Self, the knower, the Lord of all, the real Being, is the cause of all the vision that is in the universe, but it is impossible for him to see himself or know himself, excepting through reflection. You cannot see your own face except in a mirror, and so the Atman, the Self, cannot see its own nature until it is reflected, and this whole universe, therefore, is the Self trying to realize itself. This reflection is thrown back first from the protoplasm, then from plants and animals, and so on and on from better reflectors, until the best reflector—the perfect man—is reached. Just as the man who, wanting to see his face, looks first in a little pool of muddy water, and sees just an outline. Then he comes to clear water and sees a better image, and at last to a looking glass, and sees himself reflected as he is. Therefore the perfect man is the highest reflection of that being who is both subject and object. You now find why perfect men are instinctively worshiped as God in every country. They are the most perfect manifestations of the eternal Self. That is why men worship incarnations such as Christ or Buddha.

It is true that you and I, and the poorest of us, the meanest even, embody that God, even reflect that God. The vibration of light is everywhere, omnipresent; but we have to strike the light of the lamp before we can see the light. The omnipresent God of the universe cannot be seen until he is reflected by these giant lamps of the earth—the proph-

ets, the man-Gods, the Incarnations, the embodiments of God. Our scriptures say, "These great children of Light, who manifest the Light themselves, who are Light themselves, they being worshiped, become, as it were, one with us and we become one with them."

As I have already mentioned, in the path of devotion the worshiper frequently chooses a divine incarnation—Christ or Krishna, for instance—as his Ideal. The Incarnations, who come to earth for the good of mankind, are like so many doors opening to the divine Beyond. We must remember here that it is the same Spirit who manifests in human form in various ages; he merely chooses a different dress.

The divine incarnations are always aware of their special mission, which is to remind man of the eternal truth which he has forgotten and to show him once more how to reach perfection. This is why Christ declares: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Similarly, Sri Krishna tells his disciple Arjuna: "Lay down all duties in me, your refuge. Fear no longer, for I will save you from sin and from bondage." And Sri Ramakrishna says: "I am the sanctuary. Give me the power of attorney. I release you from all the bonds of karma." We must understand that when these great religious teachers say "I," they do not mean the ego, the individual self. They are referring to the universal "I," God, because they are united with him in their consciousness.

To come to God, to surrender ourselves to him, is to observe what Christ called the "first and great commandment": "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." As he ex-

pressed it in the Beatitudes, it is to mourn for God, to hunger and thirst for him. But in order that this hunger may arise, there must be some preparation. We must practice spiritual disciplines in order to achieve the purity of heart that opens up the vision of God.

We read in one of the Hindu scriptures: "By gathering pure food, the heart is purified." By "food" is meant whatever we receive through our senses—the impressions we gather through sight, hearing, touch, and so on. The secret of this spiritual discipline is to cover everything with the presence of God. No matter where the unruly senses go and the mind wanders, we must try to see the Lord.

We are also to practice ethical virtues, such as chastity, nonviolence, and compassion, remembering that these are not the end but the means to the attainment of the vision of God.

And we have to pray and meditate regularly. In the words of the Hindu seer-philosopher Shankara: "To worship is to hold the Chosen Ideal of Godhead before you as an object of love, and in his living presence to direct your thoughts uninterruptedly toward him, like oil poured from one vessel to another, for a long time." This is what St. Paul called to "pray without ceasing."

Through these practices, constant recollectedness of God awakens in the devotee's heart. The thought of the beloved Lord is in his consciousness all the time. Then arises that intense longing for God expressed beautifully in the *Imitation of Christ*: "O Lord God, when shall I be made one with thee and be molten into thy love, so that I wholly forget myself? Be thou in me, and I in thee; and grant that we may so abide, always together in one."

Such yearning for God is beyond ordinary comprehension. Most of us do not know what selfless love is. In our

human relationships we are used to bargaining: "I love you, so you must love me. I am giving you this, you must give me something in return." But the true lover of God loves Him for His own sake, for love's sake only. No matter what the circumstances of his life are, he lives in complete self-surrender to God.

This single-minded devotion to God leads to absorption in him and to his vision. And the experience of joy which accompanies this vision has a lasting effect. Narada, the great Indian teacher of bhakti yoga, expressed the nature of this one-pointed devotion as follows: "Obtaining which, man becomes perfect, immortal, satisfied; he desires nothing, grieves not, hates none, does not delight in sense objects, becomes intoxicated—rejoices—in the bliss of the Atman." Such a devotee realizes God in all beings and all beings in God. Sri Ramakrishna once remarked: "When I close my eyes, I see God within; and when I open my eyes, I see him everywhere."

The ultimate experience in the path of devotion is complete union with God. Love, lover, and beloved have become one. This is the state of perfection. A Sufi mystic has described this realization by saying: "I am the Truth, I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I." And Christ expressed the same experience thus: "I and my Father are one."

EARLY LIFE OF SWAMI TURIYANANDA

SWAMI RITAJANANDA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA, the prophet of modern India, lived for only fifty years; within the short span of a dozen of these he practiced most of the major spiritual disciplines and attained perfection in each with a facility and rapidity that astonished his teachers, who had to devote an entire lifetime to achieve success in even a single discipline. For someone who has not gone through any of these disciplines, neither the hardships nor the benefits are very clear. What they involve is made convincingly vivid by the testimony of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, some of whom, according to their temperament, took up a single path and practiced it all their life. Swami Ramakrishnananda, for example, was a devotee by nature, and ritualistic worship strongly appealed to him. He felt that Sri Ramakrishna, after his passing away, continued to live in his photograph, and he performed his worship as if his master was there before him, in flesh and blood. Thus, in his case, he demonstrated to the world how Sri Ramakrishna himself felt the presence of the Divine Mother in the temple image of Kali. Swami Brahmananda, on the other hand, showed how the mind of his master dwelt always in the realm of the divine and that its contacts with the world

were superficial and self-imposed. And Swami Vivekananda, in supreme awareness of his identity with the Absolute, demonstrated how a man of God manifests detachment from the world and how he always conducts himself.

Swami Turiyananda had a different role to play. More than any other of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, he appears to many to exemplify the ascetic, since all his life, even from his boyhood, he treated his body harshly, regarding it with the same indifference that St. Francis looked upon his own body—"Brother Ass." Swami Turiyananda practiced austerities all his life, and he demonstrates to us what austerity really means and what its value is in the life dedicated to God.

The biographical material of saints is generally meager, since they are extremely reticent about referring to their early life. Whatever we have learned concerning Swami Turiyananda's boyhood is made up of scraps of information that he inadvertently revealed in talks with devotees. Although the details of this period of his life are not available, it is clear that his was obviously an austere character from the very beginning. His parentage, childhood, and temperament all seem to have combined in the development of the personality that soon made itself apparent to the world.

He was born in the year 1863 on January 3. His father, Chandranath Chatterjee, an orthodox brahmin who lived in the Baghbazar section of Calcutta, was well respected by the people of the district for his piety, courage, and capacity to foretell the future. It was said that Chandranath could feel the pulse of a dying person and predict the exact time of death. At that time, many religious people wanted to die on the shores of the Ganges, and these predictions of Chandranath gave much satisfaction to many by enabling them to make provisions for their last moments. Chandranath

worked as a storekeeper in a Calcutta firm. He had three sons and three daughters, and the youngest was Harinath, later to become Swami Turiyananda. The eldest son, Mahendranath, was twenty years older than Harinath; and the second son, Upendranath, was ten years his senior. Two of the sisters had died when they were quite young. The one remaining was about seven years old when Harinath was born.

The suburbs of Calcutta at that time were surrounded by thick jungle. Small wild animals lived there, emerging into the streets and freely entering houses in the evenings. One day, while Chandranath's wife, Prasannamayi, was working somewhere in the house, leaving little Harinath on the floor, a rabid jackal entered and was about to bite the child. The frightened mother came rushing in to save Harinath and was herself fatally bitten. Shortly after, she died. Harinath was too young at that time to have any memory of her. Fortunately by then his eldest brother, Mahendranath, had married, and his wife took care of the motherless boy.

Harinath even at this tender age revealed a stubborn, independent nature, always wanted his own way in personal matters, and was easily excited at the least provocation. At the same time he was not very particular about the needs of life, and whatever food was served he ate without complaint. At a proper age he was sent to the local Bengali school.

When Harinath was twelve, his father passed away. It was the first death the boy had seen close at hand, and it touched him deeply. While he was crying bitterly just before his father's death, the sister asked her father to say some words of consolation to him. "What is there to say?" the dying man replied. "Hari belongs to the world and the world belongs to Hari!" It was a true prophecy—Hari finally did belong to the world, and the world belonged to him.

So, Hari became an orphan when he was very young, with no brother or sister close to his age with whom to play or exchange confidences, though his two older brothers and sister-in-law did everything in their power to make him happy. The sister-in-law, in particular, attended to his physical needs and showered so much affection on him that all his life Hari felt a deep debt of gratitude to her. Years later, he told a group of young monks: "My mother died when I was a child. I was only three years old then. I grew up under the care of my eldest sister-in-law. I kept myself close to her always. I did not like to go anywhere without her. She was very affectionate and took good care of me and brought me up as if I were her own child. I could not get her out of my thoughts even after I joined the monastery. I was very much concerned about her welfare as long as she lived. Only after her death did I feel relieved of worry."

In school, Hari paid close attention to all his studies, but his special interest lay in religion and athletics. His ambition even then was to become an austere brahmin, observing all the rules and traditions. After he was initiated into the brahminical life with the sacred thread, he bathed three times each day, repeated the Gayatri regularly, slept on a hard floor, and ate the simplest food. In addition he took so much physical exercise that some feared he would overtax his constitution. The pictures we have of him show that he had a strong physique. This hardening of the body helped him later to remain unaffected by many of the severe hardships he faced. A third ideal he had was the observance of absolute continence. In order to keep his mind from lustful thoughts, he reduced his sleep and spent many hours in meditation.

Regarding this period of his life, Hari once said: "I do not think I ever slept longer than three or four hours a night.

The first part of the night I passed in meditation. Then I decided that sleep was an obstacle. So I used to sit up and watch the train of my thought. As a result, my mind began to discriminate continuously between the eternal and the noneternal. Then I could sleep no more. I thought to myself, 'Am I losing my mind?' I began to pray that I might sleep. But within me was a current of joy, as if someone were saying, 'But don't you want to discriminate like this?' . . . Then for a year I regularly sang the song:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
 What need have I of knowledge or reason?
 Make me drunk with Thy love's wine;
 O Thou who stealest Thy bhaktas' hearts,
 Drown me deep in the sea of Thy love!
 Here in this world, this madhouse of Thine,
 Some laugh, some weep, some dance for joy:
 Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Gauranga,
 All are drunk with the wine of Thy love.
 O Mother, when shall I be blessed
 By joining their blissful company?

He concluded: "This soothed my mind and brought me back from the realm of the Absolute to the personal aspect of God. If I had had a little more patience, I would have merged in the Absolute."

In addition to the external observances of baths and meditation, Hari learned by heart many devotional hymns, which he repeated whenever the mood seized him. He was also interested in the study of the Upanishads and he committed to memory the Chandi (a scripture praising the Divine Mother), *Viveka Chudamani* (*The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*), the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Ramayana of Tul-

sidas. An austere life seemed to him to be the ideal spiritual life. The baths in the Ganges gave him great pleasure, and the first one was always taken before dawn. He gained a certain satisfaction from finishing his bath before others and in his eagerness went to the river as early as two or three o'clock in the morning. He found that before the sun rose he had already spent hours in meditation.

Hari's study of Vedanta books left him with the strong impression that the inner Self within the body alone was the Reality, so that he developed an indifference to the body. Once, while he was taking his morning bath, an event occurred which strengthened him in his developing ideals. "When I was a young man," he told of it later, "I was always reading and practicing Vedanta. I constantly tried to remember that I was the Atman and not this body. I was in the habit of taking my bath early in the morning. One day I went to bathe as usual and I was in the river. I saw an object floating in the water. It was still dark, so that I could not distinguish it. Some people on the shore, however, recognized the object as a crocodile; they shouted, 'Come out quickly! That is a crocodile coming toward you!' Instinctively I rushed to the shore. But as soon as I got out, I thought to myself, 'What are you doing? You are repeating day and night, "*Soham! Soham!* I am He! I am He!" And now all of a sudden you forget your ideal and think you are the body! Shame on you!' I thought, 'Shiva, Shiva! that is true.' And immediately I went back. The crocodile never bothered to come near me. I bathed as usual. But I noticed I was hurrying to get through my bath quickly. Then I said to myself: 'No, I shall not hurry; I shall take my bath as usual.' And so I did."

After finishing his studies in the Bengali Institution, Hari went to the General Assembly School, operated by

a carriage stop in front of Deenanath's house with two men in it. Immediately the people around began to say, 'The Paramahansa has come, the Paramahansa has come,' and moved toward the carriage. First one of the men in the carriage got down. He was well-built. There was a big vermilion mark on his forehead. A golden amulet was tied on his right arm. Looking at him, one felt that he was a strong person and a very shrewd one. Standing close to the carriage, he helped the other person get down. The other appeared very thin. He had a shirt on his body, and his wearing cloth was securely tied over his waist. One foot was on the step of the carriage and the other was inside the carriage. He was completely unconscious, and it seemed as if someone quite drunk was being taken out of the carriage. But when he got down, what a wonderful sight! There was an indescribable radiance in his face. I thought, 'I have heard from the scriptures about the great sage Sukadeva. Is he the same Sukadeva?' By that time, many others joined them and took them to the second floor of the house. I followed them. When the Paramahansa became a little conscious of the outer world, he opened his eyes and saw a large picture of Mother Kali on the wall. He immediately saluted her and started to sing in a soul-bewitching manner. It stirred a unique wave of devotion in all who had gathered there. The song expressed the idea that Kali and Krishna are identical: 'O Mother, for Yasoda Thou wouldst dance, when she called Thee her precious "Blue Jewel. . ."' It is impossible to describe the extraordinary feeling this song aroused in everybody. After that, the Paramahansa spoke on many spiritual matters. Two or three years later I saw Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar in his room."

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After finishing his studies in the Bengali Institution, Hari went to the General Assembly School, operated by

Christian missionaries. In these schools there was an hour set apart for the study of the Bible. Since the classes were not compulsory, many of the Hindu boys absented themselves and the classrooms were always empty, except for Hari, who attended regularly. Though he was an orthodox Hindu, he took a keen interest in the Bible, and, in fact, any religious book had an attraction for him.

About this time, a sadhu visited and settled in the area for a while. Many people went to him daily, each with his own motives. Some asked the holy man to foretell their future; some wanted cures for diseases. It was rumored that the sadhu had occult powers and that whatever he said would take place. Hari also became interested and went to him every evening. Silently he sat there, watching all the visitors and the way in which the holy man dealt with them. After some days the sadhu said to Hari: "I find that every one who comes here is asking for some help or other, but not you. Have you any question or problem which I can solve?"

"Sir," Hari replied, "I don't have any such problem. I want only the capacity to lead an austere life, to repeat God's name incessantly, and to realize Him. This is all I need."

The holy man was highly pleased to hear these words from a mere boy, and said: "Excellent! Excellent! Surely you will succeed, my child. You will get what you want." These words encouraged Hari, and he renewed his spiritual practices with greater zeal.

This is the picture we have of Hari in his early teens. His life's ideal was already clear before him, and to reach it he believed one should lead an ascetic life, with complete indifference to physical comforts, a thorough knowledge of the scriptures, long hours of meditation, and strict observance of the brahminical traditions. We do not know whether

he desired a teacher to help him; at any rate, he sought none out at this time, instead following by himself the many disciplines which attracted him.

Although Hari's overzealous religious life drew the attention of his brothers, they did not raise any objection. Friends of the family would tell Mahendranath, "Do you notice how Hari is changing daily? Is he going to be a monk? You should warn him and make him take greater interest in his studies and prepare for a career." But Mahendranath would say, "After all, Hari is only doing what is fit for a brahmin boy. There is nothing wrong in that." Hari felt a great relief. Perhaps he would have led this kind of life up to the end, if he had not, around this time, met Sri Ramakrishna.

NO ONE will forget an occurrence which makes a vivid impression on the mind and brings a complete change in one's life. Hari's meeting with Sri Ramakrishna was such a momentous event.

"I first saw Sri Ramakrishna at Deenanath Bose's house in Baghbazar," he recalled in later years. "That was long, long ago. In those days the Master used to be often in the state of samadhi. About that time Keshab Chandra Sen had become acquainted with him. Kalinath Bose, Deenanath's brother, was a follower of Keshab Sen. He happened to see Sri Ramakrishna and was deeply impressed. So he asked his brother Deenanath to bring Sri Ramakrishna to their house, and that is how the Master came to visit Baghbazar. We were all young, about thirteen or fourteen years old. People referred to Sri Ramakrishna as the Paramahansa, and they were all talking about the Paramahansa's visit. I and some other boys were curious, and we all went to see him. We saw

a carriage stop in front of Deenanath's house with two men in it. Immediately the people around began to say, 'The Paramahansa has come, the Paramahansa has come,' and moved toward the carriage. First one of the men in the carriage got down. He was well-built. There was a big vermilion mark on his forehead. A golden amulet was tied on his right arm. Looking at him, one felt that he was a strong person and a very shrewd one. Standing close to the carriage, he helped the other person get down. The other appeared very thin. He had a shirt on his body, and his wearing cloth was securely tied over his waist. One foot was on the step of the carriage and the other was inside the carriage. He was completely unconscious, and it seemed as if someone quite drunk was being taken out of the carriage. But when he got down, what a wonderful sight! There was an indescribable radiance in his face. I thought, 'I have heard from the scriptures about the great sage Sukadeva. Is he the same Sukadeva?' By that time, many others joined them and took them to the second floor of the house. I followed them. When the Paramahansa became a little conscious of the outer world, he opened his eyes and saw a large picture of Mother Kali on the wall. He immediately saluted her and started to sing in a soul-bewitching manner. It stirred a unique wave of devotion in all who had gathered there. The song expressed the idea that Kali and Krishna are identical: 'O Mother, for Yasoda Thou wouldst dance, when she called Thee her precious "Blue Jewel. . ."' It is impossible to describe the extraordinary feeling this song aroused in everybody. After that, the Paramahansa spoke on many spiritual matters. Two or three years later I saw Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar in his room."

The first meeting with the God-intoxicated saint left an indelible mark in the mind of young Hari. He was charmed

by everything Sri Ramakrishna did. But at the same time his leaning toward Shankara's philosophy and his search for Brahman, the Absolute, kept him from wishing to become a disciple of one who was a devotee of the Divine Mother. So Hari continued his own way of life—a life of renunciation, austerity, and continence. He had made up his mind not to get married. His taste for schoolwork decreased, so that he did not try to go on to college.

Hari's second meeting with Sri Ramakrishna took place two or three years later. It was about the year 1880 when he went to Dakshineswar with some friends and saw the saint again. Hari was about seventeen or eighteen years old. Sri Ramakrishna, for his part, recognized that the boy possessed certain physical characteristics indicative of spirituality, and that Hari was to become one of his intimate disciples. Sri Ramakrishna resolved to train the boy in his own fashion. He told him to come on weekdays, when there were not many people present. So Hari started visiting Sri Ramakrishna when there was a good chance he might be alone with him; he would talk with the Master for hours. Sri Ramakrishna was surprised to find that the boy was drawn to the ideal of the Impersonal.

Before undertaking any direct spiritual training, the Master wished to make Hari enjoy being in his company. One day the boy said: "Sir, whenever I am here I feel very elated and spiritually roused, but as soon as I return to Calcutta the mood completely disappears. Why does that happen?"

Sri Ramakrishna replied: "How can it be so? You are Hari-das, the servant of Hari (the Lord). Is it possible for you to exist without remembering the Lord?"

"I cannot understand that, sir," Hari objected.

"The truth of something does not depend upon a per-

son's knowing or not knowing it," the saint replied. "You may or may not know it, but you are God's servant. You are a devotee of God."

DAY BY DAY Hari felt closer to Sri Ramakrishna, freely asking all sorts of questions concerning him personally. "Sir," he inquired one day, "how can we free ourselves completely from lust?" Sri Ramakrishna replied: "Why should it go, my boy? Give it a turn in another direction."

This was something new to Hari. He had thought that a brahmachari, or celibate, should completely destroy his lust. But here he found a new kind of advice, which he could never have thought of himself: the most powerful urge in a human being was to be channeled in a different direction, so that instead of becoming an obstacle in spiritual life it could become a help. Instead of wasting one's effort on overcoming lust, one should direct all one's intensity of emotion to God.

Another time the boy told Sri Ramakrishna that he was not at all interested in women, that he could not bear them. To this the Master replied: "You talk like a fool! Looking down upon women! What for? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Bow down to them with respect. That is the only way to escape from their snares." These words permanently changed Hari's attitude toward women.

Thus Hari received, mostly in private, not only answers to personal problems, but much instruction regarding meditation and other spiritual disciplines. Gradually he learned many secrets of the spiritual life, and by his close association with Sri Ramakrishna he came to see the Master's unique greatness.

Already noted was Hari's deep interest in monistic Ve-

danta. He had studied Shankara's works and accepted nondualism as his ideal. It was his faith in nondualism that had made him face the crocodile. Whenever he found time he would study the scriptures, for a seeker of Brahman must have a thorough grasp of them.

This interest sometimes became so strong that for days he failed to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Such absences did not go unnoticed. When Hari's friends came to Dakshineswar, the Master asked them: "What is the matter with Hari? He doesn't come here nowadays." They replied that he was absorbed in the study of Vedanta. Later, when Hari visited him again, Sri Ramakrishna said: "I hear you are studying Vedanta and meditating on its ideals. That is good, of course. But tell me, what is the teaching of Vedanta? Is it not that Brahman alone is real and the world unreal? Isn't that its substance? Is it anything else? Then why don't you give up the unreal and cling to the real?"

This Hari had to accept, for it was true. The whole of Vedantic literature is based on this statement. However much a man may read, it will not make him understand truth, for intellectual apprehension is not the same as spiritual understanding. Reading books can go on endlessly without giving conviction, for it is experience alone that convinces. Thus, even scriptures fall into the category of the unreal: Reality is not in books. So when Sri Ramakrishna asked him to cling to the real, Hari understood how in these few words he had been shown the importance of conviction. The Upanishads, he remembered, say repeatedly: "The Atman is not realized either by study or by intellect. . . ."

Sri Ramakrishna explained: "Hearing, thinking, and meditating. First, hearing—you first hear that Brahman is real, the universe unreal; then thinking—by reason and discrimination you get the idea deeply and correctly imprinted

in your mind; and after that, meditation—you apply your mind to Brahman, the real entity, by renouncing the universe, the unreal entity. That is all. One cannot attain Reality by means of mere intellectual knowledge. Conviction is necessary. . . .”

This teaching gave Hari a better understanding of what he should do. From that day on, he gave more attention to the practice of spirituality than to poring over books. Still there were some doubts. The books said that the Atman is realized by him whom it chooses. So, even though a man has renounced everything and is practicing intense austerities, that is no guarantee of realization.

This was confirmed by Sri Ramakrishna, who also explained the working of divine grace. One day the Master visited the house of his devotee Balaram. The house was in Baghbazar, near Hari's home. Sri Ramakrishna sent for Hari and, after inquiring about his welfare, said with great emphasis: “Nothing can be achieved—neither knowledge, nor devotion, nor direct spiritual experience—without God's grace.” Formerly, Hari had been a strong believer in self-effort; he had the idea that he could bring about whatever he wanted, and he used to say so. But this was another point Hari had to understand. The will has its place, no doubt; but it takes a man only as far as his own strength can take him. To reach the higher truth is too much for his limited power. He cannot so easily brush aside the tangible world, whose reality is perceived so vividly by all his senses, and which is constantly trying to dominate him. For this is needed the grace of God, over which man has no control.

Hari heard the Master continue: “Well, is it an easy matter to realize that lust and gold are unreal and to have the firm conviction that the universe is eternally nonexistent? Is it possible without His compassion? It is possible only if

His grace produces the conviction in us. Can a man have that conviction through his own efforts? Ah! How small is his power and how small is the effort he can put forth with its help!" We are told by Swami Saradananda that after these words Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi. After a while he returned to a semiconscious state and said: "Man cannot have a clear idea of even one aspect of God, and yet he wants another." So saying, he started a song of the *Uttara Rama Charitam*, where Hanuman tells the sons of Rama:

O Kusa! O Lava! why are you so proud?
If I had not let myself be captured,
Could you have captured me?

As Sri Ramakrishna repeated these words, tears began to fall from his eyes. It was such a moving sight that Hari could not control himself and he, too, began to weep. It took some time before the mood passed. Later, Hari referred to the incident and said: "That day I got a lesson which was forever imprinted on my mind. From that day on I understood that nothing can be achieved without the grace of God."

When we read the letters and conversations of Swami Turiyananda, we see how effective this instruction was. The need for complete self-surrender to the Personal God was borne in upon him over and over again; and thus the would-be monist, who was in danger of becoming dogmatic, was made to accept the doctrine of divine grace.

Recalling this, he told Swami Raghavananda later on: "When I was of your age [in the early twenties], I was an extreme Vedantist. My one ideal at that time was to attain nirvana. I used to consider that to be the supreme goal. But Sri Ramakrishna scolded me again and again and gave me another ideal. He pointed out that the path of

knowledge was not my way. He made me a devotee instead. I can still remember how the Master disciplined me."

Sri Ramakrishna's ability to know each disciple's spiritual path and how to guide him into it was unique. His way of training was also unique in this respect, that he insisted on broadness in his disciples' religious attitudes. He wanted them to be many-sided like himself. Since Hari leaned too much toward the nirvana ideal of the advaitic school, the Master had to convince him to accept the worship of the Personal God. One day he told him: "Why do you think nirvana should be the goal of life? There is a state higher than nirvana, and it can be attained."

Hari had never heard this before. "Can I attain that state?" he asked.

"Certainly," Sri Ramakrishna replied. "By the grace of the Divine Mother one can attain it."

There were many occasions when Sri Ramakrishna led his young disciple to look for a goal higher than nirvana. In a letter from Almora in later years (August 14, 1915) Swami Turiyananda wrote:

Sri Ramakrishna said: "Those who seek nirvana are mean-minded. They are full of fear. They are like those parcheesi players who are always eager to reach Home. An amateur player, once he sends his piece Home, doesn't like to bring it out again. Such players are unskilled. But an adept player is never afraid of coming out again, if by doing so he gets the opportunity to capture an opponent. Then he rolls the right number and returns Home once more. It seems that whenever he rolls the dice, the right number comes up for him. So do not fear. Play without any fear."

I asked: "Does it actually happen?" The Master said: "Of course it happens. By Mother's grace everything takes place. Mother likes people to play. Take the game of hide-

and-seek. [There is a Granny, there is a Thief who is blind-folded, and there are the children trying to escape being caught by the Thief.] The Granny likes to have the children keep running about and make the game go on. She may extend her hand to help a child so that it cannot be caught by the Thief, if she thinks it necessary. Similarly, the Divine Mother is not really pleased with those who seek nirvana, for they want to retire from the game. She likes to have the game continue. That is why devotees do not seek nirvana. They say, 'O mind, it is not good to become sugar, but I want to eat sugar.' "

The Master told me many a time: "What is there in the scriptures? They are like sheets of paper with a list of purchases written on them. They are only useful to check whether all the articles have been bought. When you have checked the articles, the list is thrown away. So you check your knowledge, your devotion. You consult the scriptures and see whether they agree. It is said, 'When you get the knowledge of the Absolute, the scriptures are worth only a straw.' " Sri Ramakrishna pointed out how the Divine Mother had shown him what is in the scriptures, the Puranas, the Tantric literature. So, though he was an illiterate person, he was able to lower the pride of pundits. He used to say, "If you get a tiny ray of light from the Divine Mother, it makes all learning pale into insignificance."

As we have seen, Sri Ramakrishna's teachings were far different from those of books and ordinary scholars. His simple presentation of the nature of God was something altogether new and wonderfully attractive. While advaitic, or monistic, religion describes only the path of the formless, Sri Ramakrishna taught that the *vijnanis* accept God both with form and without. The *vijnanis* are greater than the

jnanis, those who simply attain nirvana, or samadhi. In Sri Ramakrishna's words: "Jnana is the realization of the Atman through the process of 'Not this, not this.' One goes into samadhi through this process of elimination and realizes the Atman. . . . But vijnana means Knowledge with a greater fullness. Some have heard of milk, some have seen milk, and some have drunk milk. He who has merely heard of it is 'ignorant.' He who has seen it is a jnani. But he who has drunk it has vijnana, that is to say, a fuller Knowledge of it. . . . To know by one's inner experience that God exists is jnana. But to talk to him, to enjoy him as Child, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved is vijnana. The realization that God alone has become the universe and all living beings is vijnana."

Thus, Sri Ramakrishna taught Hari, guiding his life and gradually removing all its angularities. And he convinced his disciple that, when it came to actual practice, the devotional ideal was more suitable than the advaitic in the present age. "Since the ignorant 'I' asserts itself so often," the Master would tell him, "and since the attachment to the body is so great, it is difficult to reach the infinite and immutable Brahman. But still the door is not closed."

"I shall tell you of an incident," Hari, then Swami Turiyananda, recalled much later. "One day I went to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. There were many people who had come to see him. Among them there was a great Vedantic scholar. The Master asked him: 'Let us hear some Vedanta from you.' The scholar with all respect spoke for more than an hour, expounding Vedanta. Sri Ramakrishna was highly pleased. The people around were surprised at this. But after eulogizing the pundit, the Master said: 'As far as I am concerned, I do not like all those details. There is nothing but I and my Mother. To you people, knowledge,

knower, and known—the one who meditates, meditation, and the object of meditation—this sort of triple division is very good. But for me, “Mother and I”: that is all, and nothing else.’ These words ‘Mother and I’ he said in such a manner that it made a very deep impression on all present. At that moment all ideas of Vedanta paled into insignificance. The Master’s ‘Mother and I’ seemed more easy and simple and pleasing to the mind than the three divisions of Vedanta. From that time onward I learned that ‘Mother and I’ is the fit path to be followed.”

SRI RAMAKRISHNA’S relationship with his young disciples exemplified the attitude of the spiritual teacher in its most ideal form. He showed deep love for them and a steady interest in their welfare. If they did not visit him for many days, he missed their company badly. He himself would go in search of them, sometimes taking sweets to feed them. He knew that these young men were absolutely pure and the time spent on them was well spent. When we read of their later lives, we see what a deep mark he left on all of them—Swami Vivekananda, for example: in spite of the world’s appreciation he felt that Sri Ramakrishna’s love had no parallel.

In the scriptures we are told that the pupil should study his teacher, and if he discovers that he is an extraordinarily spiritual person he should develop great respect for him. Many of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were drawn to their master by discovering how perfect he was—that he had all the marks of a man of God.

Once Hari was busy and did not go to Dakshineswar. When he finally came, Sri Ramakrishna said to him: “Why don’t you come here? I want to see you quite often, for I know you are dear to the Lord. Otherwise, for what reason should I spend my time on you? You can’t give me any-

thing worth even a cent; and when I go to your house, you can't even spread a torn mat for me to sit on. Yet I love you so much. Don't forget to come here, because here you will get everything that is needed for your spiritual life. If you can find elsewhere opportunities for God-realization, you may go there. What I want is that you should realize God; that you should somehow go beyond the sufferings of the world and enjoy divine bliss; that you should attain him in this life. The Divine Mother tells me: 'If you only come here, without any effort you will have God-realization.' That is why I ask you to see me so often." Saying these words, Sri Ramakrishna was overcome with emotion and began to shed tears.

No wonder Hari was soon caught in Sri Ramakrishna's love. He had not found any other person who could so satisfy his spiritual longing, clear his doubts, guide his life, and give him such affection. He felt he had received the greatest of blessings in obtaining Sri Ramakrishna as his teacher. Hari knew that, according to the scriptures, if a person is earnest in his spiritual life, the teacher comes to him. Now he saw that this was true.

During the five or six years he was with Sri Ramakrishna, Hari had many opportunities to meet the other disciples of the Master. Early in this period he met Narendranath Dutta (more familiarly called Naren), who later became Swami Vivekananda. Naren was his close friend and from the very beginning had made a very deep impression on his mind. At the same time, Naren developed a great liking for him and called him Brother Hari, or Haribhai. Their approach to the spiritual life was by no means identical, yet Naren respected Hari's orthodox ways. Both lived in Calcutta and often came to see Sri Ramakrishna together, sometimes walking, sometimes by boat. One day they were

on their way to Dakshineswar, when Naren said: "Say something!" "What shall I tell you?" Hari asked. Then he started quoting from the Shiva Mahimna Stotra: "If the goddess of learning were to write eternally, having the biggest branch of the celestial tree for her pen, the whole earth for her paper, the blue mountain for her inkpot, and the ocean for her ink, even then, O Lord, thy attributes could not be fully described."

Naren began to talk about Sri Ramakrishna. He had been so powerfully moved by Sri Ramakrishna's affection that he described him as L.O.V.E.—love personified. Hari found that they had identical views about their master, and that Naren was really an extraordinary young man, possessed of a deep spirituality, just as the Master had pointed out to him.

Since Hari usually visited Sri Ramakrishna on weekdays, when there were not many visitors, records of his talks with the Master, in all their variety, are scarce. Only on a few occasions was he present at the same time as was M., the recorder of Sri Ramakrishna's Gospel. Two or three meetings of the Master and Hari appear in the Gospel, and these are brief.

Hari's recorded questions were simple and not in the least philosophical. They were really expressions of his own problems, rather than queries that came from his study of books. "Why is it that some people do not have the spiritual experience quickly?" "Why should human life be so full of misery?" "Why should God play with us and torment us?" The sort of question he asked indicates how deeply he had become absorbed in the thought of God-realization.

"As long as you are in the world of thought you can never know God," the Master told Hari one day. "He cannot be reached by argument. For as you proceed to dis-

criminate and argue, you cannot ignore the world. You cannot give up the senses of taste, smell, sight, touch, and hearing, and the objects of the senses. You get the knowledge of Brahman only after your discrimination stops. You cannot know it through the mind. It is known only by the Atman, or Self. Pure mind, pure intellect, and the pure Self are all one. In the world, when you want to see an object, you need light, the power of seeing, and the mind. If you leave out any of these, you cannot see. As long as the mind functions you cannot say that the world does not exist. When the mind is destroyed, i.e., when its functions of determination and imagination stop, then you achieve samadhi and have direct knowledge of Brahman."

In this manner, Hari was confirmed in his course of giving ever lessening attention to formal studies and in concentrating more on spiritual practices. He spent many days and nights in Dakshineswar, with Sri Ramakrishna training him in the art of intensified meditation. Sometimes, when Sri Ramakrishna was near him, Hari would sob like a child as he meditated; he did not know why. The Master explained this as a sign that Hari would soon go into ecstasy. And indeed he did. From what he related afterwards, we can gather that Hari had many high spiritual experiences during his days at Dakshineswar.

As the disciple's spiritual perception increased, so did his appreciation of his teacher. Sometimes Sri Ramakrishna taught directly, but often it was by indirection, as when he would answer questions of the disciples that were not expressed. At times the Master would appear to be talking to one individual, when he was actually addressing his remarks to someone else. M., according to the Gospel, was the recipient of such indirect counsel many times; other disciples have also mentioned receiving guidance in this manner.

One day Hari visited Sri Ramakrishna during lunch time. The Master was seated, in front of him a plate of rice and a number of small bowls containing a variety of side dishes. Seeing this big meal, it would have been logical for someone to think that the Paramahansa was fond of eating an overabundance of good food and to wonder how spiritual he really could be. But again, things were not what they might seem. Sri Ramakrishna's purpose, as always, was to instruct. "My mind always runs to the Infinite," he explained. "Since I want to talk with you all, in order to keep the mind on this plane [of everyday consciousness] I taste a little from this bowl, a little from that bowl, sampling different dishes by putting a bit on my tongue." And Hari saw him actually eat very little of that big meal.

His six years at Dakshineswar had convinced Hari that Sri Ramakrishna was a divine incarnation. Hence, when the Master fell sick, he could not believe that disease had really overcome him—the whole thing was a play of the Lord.

One day, toward the end of his life, when Sri Ramakrishna was lying in bed at Cossipur, suffering from cancer of the throat, Hari approached and asked: "Sir, how are you?"

The Master replied: "Oh, I am in great pain. I cannot eat anything, and there is an unbearable burning in my throat."

But Hari was not fooled. He saw that the Master was still confirming him in his devotion. For Hari knew that the Upanishads declare that the play of the Atman is all "as if"—not actuality. The Atman never experiences any illness or suffering. A man of realization is exactly the same. And Hari's master was such a man.

The more Sri Ramakrishna complained, the clearer it was to Hari that his teacher was testing him. Finally, Hari

could control himself no longer and burst out: "Sir, whatever you may say, I see you as an infinite ocean of bliss."

At this, Sri Ramakrishna said to himself with a smile: "This rascal has found me out!"

So when the Master left the world, Hari had gained all he needed from his guru—instructions and experiences of the highest kind, leaving no possibility of doubt about their reality.

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