

VEDANTA

and the West

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CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD
Some Visitors to Dakshineswar

SWAMI TURIYANANDA: FOUR SELECTIONS

Turiyananda Explains Ramakrishna's Philosophy
A Letter

Swami Turiyananda's Years of Wandering
In the Company of Swami Turiyananda
Swami Turiyananda's Correspondence



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EDITED BY

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

BRAHMACHARI PREMA CHAITANYA

BRAHMACHARINI USHA

EDITORIAL ADVISERS

GERALD HEARD

ALDOUS HUXLEY

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

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SOME VISITORS TO DAKSHINESWAR

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

The ninth chapter of a forthcoming book on Ramakrishna

AS I SAID in the last chapter, the arrival of the Bhairavi was the beginning of a new phase of Ramakrishna's sadhana. Until the Bhairavi came to him, Ramakrishna had been living alone, as it were, in the midst of a crowd. Many people at the Dakshineswar temple had learned to love him, but not one of them was sufficiently advanced in his own spiritual life to be able to understand the nature of Ramakrishna's struggle. The very object of sadhana—to obtain direct, unitive knowledge of God—can be, for most of us, only a hopeful phrase. It is not merely that we could never dare to attempt—we can scarcely even imagine—the supreme act of ego-surrender, surrender of all individual identity, through which God is known. And if we *can* dimly imagine it for a few moments at a time, it must appear to us as appalling as death itself; a leap into the utter void. For we lack faith that “underneath are the everlasting arms.”

In the first phase of Ramakrishna's sadhana, we see him as a lonely pioneer. He is finding out everything for himself, empirically. He has no books to instruct him. He has no one to tell him if his insights are unique or if they have been shared by others. He experiences everything as though for the first time in human history. This loneliness and the fear that went with it—that these insights were,

perhaps, nothing but self-deception—was the hardest trial that Ramakrishna had to undergo.

But now he had a teacher. The Bhairavi, herself a firm believer in the Scriptures and their authority, had undertaken to show him that what he was rediscovering for himself had already been known, throughout history, to the world's great seers. The object of her training was to reassure Ramakrishna by demonstrating to him how he could obtain the vision of God by following out exactly the instructions of the Scriptures.

We may accept Ramakrishna as an avatar and nevertheless understand that he had to assume a certain measure of ignorance in order to set us the example of a great spiritual aspirant, wrestling with genuine doubts, fears and temptations. We are familiar with the similar spiritual struggles of the avatar Jesus of Nazareth in the wilderness. But perhaps some of us will ask how, if the Bhairavi really regarded Ramakrishna as an incarnation of God, can she have presumed to teach him?

The answer is, no doubt, that the Bhairavi was *not* at all times aware that Ramakrishna was an avatar. Continuous awareness of such a fact would probably be unbearable for any human being. We find the same lapses into forgetfulness in the companions of other avatars; for example, in Arjuna, the companion of Sri Krishna. It is related, in chapter eleven of the Bhagavad-Gita, that Arjuna, wishing for an absolute confirmation of his faith, asked Krishna to reveal himself in his transcendent aspect, as Lord of the Universe. And Krishna does so. Arjuna sees Him in all the terror and glory of His power; as creator, sustainer and dissolver; father of mankind's many deities, architect of the universe, final flame into which every mortal must plunge, mothlike, and be annihilated. As the Gita puts it:

"Suppose a thousand suns should rise together in the sky: such is the splendor of the Shape of the Infinite God." Arjuna is overwhelmed and terrified by the vision. In his great fear, he bows down before Krishna, and says in a trembling voice: "To think that I used to address you quite casually, as 'Krishna' and 'Comrade'! It was my affection that made me presume, and my ignorance of your greatness. How often I must have shown you disrespect—joking with you familiarly, as we walked, or feasted, or lay at rest together! Did I offend you? Forgive me, Eternal Lord! I bow down, I lie at your feet, I beg for pardon. Forgive me—as friend forgives friend, father forgives his son, man forgives his dear lover!"

Krishna reassures Arjuna, and returns to his ordinary form. And Arjuna cries, in his relief, "Oh Krishna, now that I see you in your pleasant human shape, I am myself again!" In other words, the keen pain of Arjuna's awareness has been dulled; already, he is beginning to forget Krishna's god-nature and accept his outward human appearance. We may infer a similar attitude on the part of Peter, James and John, after their vision of the transfiguration of Jesus.

Is it desirable to be continuously aware that one is in the presence of an avatar? Theoretically, yes; practically, no. But it is still most important to distinguish between the two sorts of ignorance which may blind one to an avatar's real nature. Many people meet a Jesus or a Ramakrishna and disregard him as entirely ordinary, because of the ignorant grossness of their own perceptions. Or, if they do catch some hint of a mystery, they are unwilling, because of their anxiety, apathy or mental instability, to probe into it further. (In the strange interview between Jesus and Pontius Pilate, for example, we sense the momentary stirring

of the Roman's interest and then his lapse into cynical indifference and anxiety for his own political future.) But there are also those, like Arjuna, who are temporarily blind to the avatar's real nature because of their love for him. Such a one, also, was the Bhairavi. As Saradananda says, love prevents you from being conscious of power in the object of your love: love makes you feel protective toward the loved one, and so your awe of him disappears. The Bhairavi, as we have seen, regarded Ramakrishna as her son. Because of this attitude, she was able to teach him. Under her guidance, he began to practice the disciplines of the tantra.

RAMAKRISHNA said later that at first he had had some doubts about taking up the tantrik form of sadhana, and that, before doing so, he had consulted the Divine Mother Kali and received her permission. Once he had made his mind up, however, his eagerness was extraordinary and his progress was correspondingly rapid.

The object of the tantrik disciplines is to see, behind all phenomena, the presence of God. There are two main obstacles to this insight—attraction and aversion. Even the pursuit of knowledge on the material plane cannot be carried on without overcoming these obstacles, at least to some extent. The doctor must overcome physical desire for the bodies of his patients, aversion from a cancer-sore or a rotting limb, and fear of catching the infectious diseases he has to treat. Attraction and aversion both fasten our attention to the outward appearance and prevent us from seeing beyond it. If, however, we can get even a glimpse of God's presence beyond the appearance, then our attraction or aversion will immediately disappear. Therefore,

each of the tantrik disciplines is designed to help the aspirant overcome some particular form of attraction or aversion and realize the indwelling Godhead.

Some extraordinary psychic powers came to Ramakrishna at this time. He had not desired them, so they could do him no spiritual harm; and, after a while, they left him again. For example, it is said that he became able to understand the cries and calls of animals and birds, and to hear the great sound known as the *anahata dhvani*, which is a harmony of all the sounds in the universe, too profound to be heard by ordinary ears. Another result of his tantrik austerities, vouched for by many witnesses, was that he acquired for a time a strange and celestial kind of beauty. "It was as if a golden light were shining forth from my body," he recalled later. "People used to stare at me in wonder, so I always kept my body covered with a thick wrapper. Alas, I thought to myself, they're all charmed by this outward beauty of mine, but not one of them wants to see Him who dwells within! And I prayed to the Divine Mother earnestly, 'Mother, here's your outward beauty—please take it back and give me inner beauty instead!' And I used to slap my body again and again, crying to my beauty 'go in!' And at last that light went in, and the body became pale again."

Words which normally carry sensual associations suggested higher meanings to Ramakrishna in his exalted state. For example, the word *yoni*, which normally means the female sex-organ, would mean for him the divine source of all creation. Indeed, the most unconditionally obscene words were now as sacred to him as the vocabulary of the Scriptures, since all were composed of the letters of the same alphabet.

Ramakrishna continued his tantrik sadhana from 1861

throughout 1862, and completed it in 1863. By doing so, he had proved that even the severest of these disciplines could be practiced in complete chastity and without the companionship of a shakti—that is to say, a female sex-partner. But it should not be supposed that his self-control was an easy matter just because he was spiritually so far advanced. At a later period than this, Ramakrishna frankly admitted that he was once attacked by lust. Such attacks, he said, are caused by pride. If you say to yourself “I have conquered lust,” you will at once begin to feel lust. Ramakrishna’s advice was therefore to accept the existence of lust without shame or guilt. We should pray for it to pass, and meanwhile disregard it like any other disturbing behavior of the body. If we worry about our lustful thoughts, we give them added power over us. It is better to take it for granted that they exist and will visit us from time to time. No one can be absolutely free from them in this life.

At this time, Ramakrishna felt a strong desire to experience Mother Kali’s power to delude—her play of seeming creation, preservation and destruction, which is called Maya. He was granted a vision which would have terrified a lesser devotee. One day, he saw a woman of exquisite beauty come up from the Ganges and approach the Panchavati. As she came nearer, she seemed to become more and more obviously pregnant. Her womb swelled visibly, until she gave birth to a beautiful child, which she suckled with the greatest tenderness. But suddenly her expression changed. She became ferocious and terrible. She began to eat the child, grinding its flesh and bones between her teeth and swallowing them. Then she turned and went back into the Ganges.

It was at this time, also, that Ramakrishna was made aware by a vision that many disciples would come to him in his later life and receive enlightenment from him. He told

this to Hriday and to Mathur. Mathur replied, with a generous absence of jealousy, "that's very good, Father. We shall all be happy together, in your company."

As a matter of fact, more than fifteen years were still to pass, and Mathur himself was to die, before the boys who were destined to become the first monks of the Ramakrishna Order began to arrive at Dakshineswar. But, in the meanwhile, the temple compound was constantly being visited by all kinds of monks and devotees. Here are a few who Ramakrishna particularly remembered and would speak of in after-years.

"Once there came a sadhu here," Ramakrishna would recall, "who had a beautiful glow on his face. He just sat and smiled. Twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening, he'd come out of his room and look around. He'd look at the trees, the bushes, the sky and the Ganges, and he'd raise his arms and dance, beside himself with joy. Or he'd roll on the ground laughing and exclaiming, 'Bravo! What fun! How wonderful it is, this Maya! What an illusion God has conjured up!' That was his way of doing worship.

"Another time, there came another holy man. He was drunk with divine knowledge. He looked like a ghoul—almost naked, with dust all over his body and head, and long hair and nails. On the upper part of his body there was a tattered wrapper; it looked as if he'd got it off some corpse on a cremation-ground. He stood in front of the Kali Temple and fixed his eyes on the image and recited a hymn. He did it with such power that it seemed to me the whole temple shook and Mother looked pleased and smiled. Then he went to the place where the beggars were sitting, and got his pra-

sad. But the beggars wouldn't let him sit near them, because of his disgusting appearance. They drove him away. Then I saw him sitting with a dog, in a dirty corner where they'd thrown away the leaf-plates. He'd put one arm around the dog, and the two of them were sharing the remains of food on one of the leaves. The dog didn't bark or try to get away, although he was a stranger. As I watched him, I felt afraid. I was afraid I might get to be like him, and have to live like that, roaming around as he did. After I'd seen him, I said to Hriday: 'That's not ordinary madness; he is mad with the highest God-consciousness.' When Hriday heard this, he ran out to get a look at the holy man and found him already leaving the temple gardens. Hriday followed him a long way and kept asking, 'Holy Sir, please teach me how I can realize God.' At first, he didn't answer. But at last, when Hriday wouldn't leave him alone and kept following him, he pointed to the sewer-water around a drain in the road and said, 'when that water and the water of the Ganges seem equally pure to you, then you'll realize God.' Hriday said, 'Sir, please make me your disciple and take me with you.' But he didn't reply. He turned and went on. When he'd gone a great distance, he looked back and saw Hriday still following him. He made an angry face and picked up a brick, threatening to throw it at Hriday. When Hriday fled, he dropped the brick, left the road and disappeared. After that, he was nowhere to be found.

"This sadhu was a true knower of Brahman. Such sadhus go around in that state so people shan't bother them. They live in the world like boys, ghouls or madmen. Such a sadhu encourages boys to follow him and play around him, because he wants to learn to be like them. He wants to learn a boy's lack of attachment to things. Haven't you seen how happy a boy feels when his mother dresses him in a new

dhoti? If you say, 'please give it me' he'll answer, 'I won't—Mother gave it me'; and he'll tighten his grip on the cloth with all his might, looking at you in fear lest you should snatch it away from him. You'd think it was the treasure of his heart. But the next minute, if he sees a toy in your hand that's worth perhaps no more than half a penny, he'll most likely say 'give me that, and I'll give you my cloth.' And, maybe, a little later, he'll drop the toy and run to pick a flower. He's as little attached to the toy as he was to the cloth. And that's the way it is with the knowers of Brahman.

"There was another sadhu who had nothing with him but a waterpot and a book. The book was his treasure. Every day, he did worship before it, with offerings of flowers; and then he would read in it with intense concentration. After I got to know him, I begged him to let me have a look at it. But, when I opened the book, I found that, on every page, only the same two words were written, *Om Rama*, in bold red letters. And the sadhu said to me, 'what's the use of reading a whole library of books? God is the origin of all the Scriptures, and there is no difference between Him and His Name. Everything that you can read in the Scriptures is contained in His Name. I am satisfied with that.'"

It is worth pausing, at this point, to explain the significance of the word *Om* and to discuss at greater length the idea expressed to Ramakrishna by the sadhu with the book.

The Vedas, which are the earliest Hindu Scriptures, contain a verse: "In the beginning was Brahman, with whom was the Word; and the Word was truly the supreme Brahman (*Prajapatir vai idam agre asit, tasya vag dvitiya asit; vag vai Paramam Brahma*)."

This statement is, of course,

echoed by the first verse of the Gospel of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The belief that the Word is what it expresses has been entertained by mankind since the dawn of history. Certainly, words and ideas are inseparable. You cannot have the idea of God without the word which expresses God.

Of the many names for God, *Om* is almost certainly the oldest that has survived. It is still being used by millions of worshipers, in India and elsewhere, today. It is also the most general of the words used to express the god-idea. It refers to no one deity and implies no particular attribute. It can therefore be used by any and every sect.

How did the word *Om* come to be chosen for this great purpose? The Hindu explanation is very simple. *God* is the most comprehensive of mankind's ideas; it must therefore be represented by the most comprehensive word that can be found. And what is the most comprehensive word? The one which combines all possible positions of the throat, mouth and tongue in word-utterance. You start with *Ah*, the root-sound, which is made in the throat without touching any part of the tongue or palate. Then comes *Ou*, which rolls through the mouth from throat to lips. Finally, *Mm* is produced by the closed lips. And so you have *Ah-ou-mm*, which is approximately how *Om* should be pronounced.

In India, when a disciple comes to his guru for initiation, he is given what is called a *mantra*. The mantra consists of one or more holy names—*Om* is usually included—which the disciple is to repeat to himself and meditate upon for the rest of his life. It is regarded as very private and very sacred. You must never tell your mantra to any other human being. And the act of the guru in giving the mantra to the disciple has, in itself, a double significance. The

mantra is, as it were, the essence of the teacher's instruction to this particular pupil; having given this, he need give no more. Also, the mantra is a link in a spiritual chain; for, even as you are being initiated by your guru, so he himself was once initiated by *his* guru, and so on backward, perhaps, to some great holy man of the past, whose power is thus being transmitted to you.

The act of repeating your mantra is called "making *japa*." It is usually done with a rosary—thus relating thought to physical action (which is one of the great benefits of all ritual) and providing an outlet for the nervous energy of the body, which will otherwise accumulate and distract the mind. Most spiritual aspirants are instructed to make a certain fixed amount of *japa* every day. The rosary serves to measure this—one bead to each repetition of the mantra—so that you are not worried by having to keep count. The use of the rosary with some form of repetitive prayer is, of course, common to Hindus, Buddhists, Catholics and certain other Christian churches.

In these days of commercial and political propaganda which makes coldly scientific use of subliminal indoctrination and the hypnotic repetition of slogans, it should no longer be necessary to prove, even to an atheist, that *japa* is effective. If a television advertisement for some inferior and anyhow unnecessary product can so permeate the consciousness of a community that the little children sing it in the streets—if some demonstrable lie about a neighboring country can, by being repeated often enough, drive a whole nation war-mad—then how dare anyone claim that the repetition of the name and idea of God will have no effect upon the individual who practices it? We are creatures of reverie, not of reason. We spend a very small proportion of our time thinking logical, consecutive thoughts. It is within the

reverie that our passions and prejudices—often so terrible in their consequences—build themselves up, almost unnoticed, out of slogans, newspaper headlines, chance-heard words of fear and greed and hate, which have slipped into our consciousness through our unguarded eyes and ears. Our reverie expresses what we are, at any given moment. The mantra, by introducing God into the reverie, must produce profound subliminal changes. These may not be apparent for some time, but, sooner or later, they will inevitably appear—first in the prevailing mood and disposition of the individual; then in a gradual change of character. Those of my readers who do not believe this have only to try it for themselves.

IT WAS probably in the year 1861 that the wandering monk Jatadhari came to Dakshineswar. The story of his relations with Ramakrishna is a very strange one.

This Jatadhari was a devotee of Sri Rama, and he carried with him an image of Rama when he was a boy and was known by the child-name of Ramlala. (In North-West India, to this day, boys are affectionately called *lalas* and the girls *lalis* in honor of the child Rama.) Jatadhari worshiped this image—which was made of eight different metals—with the utmost reverence. And Ramakrishna, with his spiritual insight, saw at once that Jatadhari was no common devotee: that he had had, indeed, a vision of the Boy Rama himself and that he now regarded the image and the Boy as identical. His devotion fascinated Ramakrishna, who would sit with Jatadhari, gazing at the image of Ramlala and sharing his vision, for whole days at a time.

This is how Ramakrishna used to tell the rest of the story:

“As the days passed, I felt that Ramlala loved me more

and more. As long as I remained with Jatadhari, Ramlala would be happy and play around. But, as soon as I left and went to my own room, he followed me there at once. He wouldn't remain with the sadhu, although I ordered him not to follow me. I thought at first that this must be a fancy of mine. For how could that boy—whom the sadhu had worshiped for so long with such devotion—love me more than him? But I actually *saw* Ramlala—now dancing on ahead of me, now following me. Sometimes he insisted on being taken on to my lap. But then, when I picked him up, he wouldn't want to stay there. He would run everywhere, plucking flowers in places where there were thorns, or splashing and swimming in the Ganges. I told him over and over again: 'Don't do that, my child. You'll get blisters on the soles of your feet if you run in the sun; you'll catch cold and fever if you stay in the water so long.' But he never listened to my words, however much I warned him. He would go right on with his pranks. Sometimes he'd look at me so sweetly with his beautiful big eyes. Or else he'd pout and make faces at me. Then I'd get really angry and scold him. 'Just you wait, you rascal,' I'd tell him, 'I'll give you a big thrashing today. I'll pound your bones into powder.' I'd pull him out of the water or the sun, and try to tempt him with some gift to stay and play inside the room. If he went on being naughty, I'd give him a couple of slaps. But, when I'd done that, he'd pout and look at me with tears in his eyes, and I'd feel such pain. I'd take him on my lap and comfort him.

"One day, when I was going to take my bath in the Ganges, he insisted on coming with me. What could I do? I had to let him. But then he wouldn't come out of the water. I begged him to, but he wouldn't listen. At last I got angry and I ducked him, saying 'all right—stay in as long as you

like!' While I was doing this, I actually saw him gasping and struggling for breath! 'What am I doing?' I thought to myself in dismay. I pulled him out of the water and took him in my arms.

"Another day, he kept asking me for something to eat, and all I had there to give him was some coarse parched rice which wasn't properly husked. As he was eating it, the husks scratched his delicate, tender tongue. I felt so sorry! I took him on my lap and exclaimed 'Your Mother used to feed you with the greatest care on cream or butter; and I've been so thoughtless, giving you this coarse food!'"

When he retold this incident many years later, to his young disciples, Ramakrishna would burst into tears. Saradananda, who was one of them, records this, and adds that he and the other boys used to exchange glances of utter bewilderment as they listened to this story of Ramlala. It sounded to them, even in their youthful faith, absurd and impossible—and yet it was Ramakrishna who told it, and they could not think him capable of the smallest falsehood. The mature Saradananda, in his book, makes good-humored allowances for the incredulity of the reader: "Accept as much of this story as you can digest," he writes. "Omit the head and the tail, if you like." But, at the same time, Saradananda makes it clear that he himself has come to believe every word of it. And his judgment, as we must always remember, was based not only on personal knowledge of Ramakrishna but also on his own vast spiritual experience.

"Some days," Ramakrishna used to continue, "Jatadhari would cook food to offer to Ramlala, but he couldn't find him. Then he would come running in distress to my room, and there would be Ramlala playing on the floor. Jatadhari's feelings were terribly hurt. He'd say scoldingly, 'I take so much trouble to cook food for you. I look all over the place

—and here you are, all the time! You don't care about me. You forget everything. And that's how you always are. You do just as you please. You have no kindness or affection. You left your Father and went into the forest. Your poor Father died of a broken heart, and you never even came back to show yourself to him on his deathbed!" (This was a reference to Rama's behavior toward his father, King Dasaratha, as it is recorded in the Ramayana. But it must be added that Jatadhari was not being quite fair in his interpretation of it; for Rama only went into the forest because his Father had unjustly banished him.) "Talking like this, Jatadhari used to drag Ramlala back to his own room and feed him. Yet the sadhu stayed on at Dakshineswar, because he didn't want to leave me and go away. Also, he couldn't bear to leave Ramlala behind, having loved him for so long.

"But then, one day, Jatadhari came to me with tears of joy and said, 'Ramlala has revealed himself to me in a way I have never known before, and have always longed for; and now the desire of my life is fulfilled. Ramlala says he won't leave here; he doesn't want to leave you. But I'm not sad about that, any more. He lives happily with you and enjoys himself, and I am full of bliss when I see it. I have learned now to be happy simply in his happiness. So I can leave him with you and go away, knowing that he is with you.' Then Jatadhari gave me the image of Ramlala and said Good-by. And Ramlala has been here ever since."

In other words, Jatadhari had been suffering from jealousy and possessiveness in his relation to Ramlala. But now he had realized, as the result of his vision, that he could never be separated from the object of his love, as long as he did not seek to keep it exclusively to himself. Knowing this, he had no further need of the image. Ramlala would be with him wherever he went.

The image itself was kept in the Radhakanta Temple for many years. At the beginning of this century it was stolen, and has never been recovered.

IN 1863, shortly after Ramakrishna had completed his tantrik sadhana, his mother Chandra came from Kamarpukur to Dakshineswar and settled down to spend the rest of her life there. She lived in one of the two *nahabats* (music-towers): the one which stands to the north of the temple courtyard, in full view of the porch of Ramakrishna's room. So Chandra had only a few steps to walk when she wished to visit her Son.

I have already described how Mathur tried vainly to get Ramakrishna to accept money from him. Now, in his eagerness to serve Ramakrishna even indirectly, he attached himself to Chandra, spending hours in her company and always addressing her as "Grandmother." Chandra was delighted and Mathur soon became her great favorite. One day, he begged her to tell him what he might give her: she could have anything her heart desired. Chandra tried hard to make a suggestion, if only to please him, but she could think of nothing. She opened her trunk and showed him that she already had several wearing-cloths. "And since you look after me so well," she added, "that I have my food and drink and a place to sleep—what more could I possibly need?" But Mathur continued to press her: and she, after racking her brains over this difficult problem, was at last able to gratify him by asking for an anna's worth of tobacco leaves. For the old lady permitted herself one small luxury: she sometimes chewed a tobacco leaf which had been toasted with spices.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

A LETTER
BY SWAMI TURIYANANDA

IF a letter by St. Peter should come to light in which the apostle interpreted Christ's message, it would undoubtedly cause a sensation among religious-minded people all over the world. Although the letter which is printed below—published for the first time anywhere—is unlikely to cause such widespread excitement, it can be regarded as a find of comparable importance. The letter was written by an intimate disciple of a divine incarnation, and it is devoted to a discussion of the avatar's philosophy.

Swami Turiyananda was particularly well suited to comment on Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Not only did he have a special understanding of his master's message as a result of close association with him but Swami Turiyananda himself was a man of spiritual enlightenment, and also a deep student of philosophy.

Several concepts of Hindu thought are mentioned in Swami Turiyananda's letter. For the Western reader who may not be familiar with them, a brief explanation is added here.

Gaudapada's doctrine of no creation negates the world of time, space, and causation. Gaudapada declared that the absolute nondual Brahman, or Godhead, alone is real. Brah-

man neither created this universe nor transformed itself into this universe. The universe has no more reality than the magic of the magician. The magician alone is real.

According to Shankara's doctrine of superimposition, man in his ignorance superimposes the world upon Brahman just as in the dark one may superimpose a snake upon a coil of rope. The world is neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal: it is maya. It has a phenomenal reality as long as we are experiencing it. Superimposition ceases and maya disappears when Brahman is realized in transcendental consciousness.

Shankara's Brahman is attributeless and impersonal, whereas the philosopher Ramanuja believed in God with attributes (Saguna Brahman). Although according to Ramanuja's doctrine of transformation God has become the universe, he remains distinct from it. Individual souls are the experiencing subjects, matter is the object of experience, and God is the ruler of all.

Shivadvaita is a philosophy bridging Shaivism (in which Shiva is worshiped as the Chosen Ideal) and Advaita (nondualistic) Vedanta.

Swami Turiyananda's letter was translated from the original Bengali by Swami Prabhavananda, the founder-head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, who recalled how the letter came to be written: "When I was a young monk, we used to study the Brahma Sutras [Vedanta aphorisms] with Shankara's commentary under Swami Sharvananda, who was the abbot of the Ramakrishna monastery in Madras at that time. In the course of our study we discussed Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy. Several different points of view were expressed. Sharvananda wrote to Swami Turiyananda and asked him to set down some statements as to what the Master had really taught." Swami Prabhava-

nanda was in Madras between 1917 and 1920, therefore Swami Turiyananda's letter must have been written during that time.

Dear Sharvananda,

I received your letter some time ago, but I could not write to you until now because I was ill. Today I must reply. The subject is difficult. Yet, with the Lord's grace, let me try my best to answer your question.

It is not so easy to speak about Thakur's philosophy. [Sri Ramakrishna was frequently called "Thakur," which is the Bengali word for "Master."] He declared: "As many religions, so many paths to reach the same goal"—thereby encouraging the followers of all religions. Having practiced the disciplines of many faiths himself, he experienced the one absolute truth.

The ultimate truth is nondual. It is called by many names: Brahman, Paramatman, Bhagavan [Lord], God, and so on and so forth. Whosoever has realized that truth has tried to express it according to his own temperament by giving it a particular name. But nobody has been able to express the *whole* truth. "What He is He is"—that is the final conclusion of those who have known Him.

From different standpoints, Gaudapada's doctrine of no creation, Shankara's doctrine of superimposition, Ramanuja's doctrine of transformation, and the doctrine of Shivanadvaita—each one of these is true. Yet He is beyond all human expression and beyond the cognition of mind. All the founders of these philosophical systems practiced austerities; having received His grace, they preached the various doctrines at His command. He is the subject which all these doctrines develop; but He Himself is beyond them. To ex-

press this truth is the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna; that is what I think.

Why should it not be possible to see the worship vessels as Brahman, filled with spiritual consciousness? [This is a reference to Sri Ramakrishna's vision in the Kali Temple when it was revealed to him that everything is Pure Spirit.] "Throughout the universe He exists, pervading every being and thing, animate and inanimate." There is nothing but He; He verily is all. Because we cannot see Him we see objects instead; but the fact is that He is everything. Names and forms have their source in Him. The waves, the foam, the ripples—they are all nothing but water. What do I care if your doctrine of superimposition stands or falls! He who has known this truth [that Brahman is all] cannot be content with a lesser standpoint.

Thakur used to attain a state beyond all thought and expression. That state transcends name and form, words and mind. There exists just One without a second, beyond the realm of Prakriti [beyond relativity]. Where then is such a thing as the doctrine of superimposition or the doctrine of no creation? And yet again, all doctrines—whether of superimposition, or of no creation, or of transformation, etc.—rest in Him.

He alone is the Reality, the Truth. And it is also true that He is the source of all individual beings and of the universe—if only we do not forget Him. Name and form become "unreal" if we forget Him because they cannot exist without Him. [Sri Ramakrishna said: "Zeros added together amount to zero. Place the digit one before them, they add in value." The digit one is God.] But if He dwells in our thoughts, then alone we can understand the truth that "the pith belongs to the sheaths and the sheaths belong to the pith." [A reference to Sri Ramakrishna's saying that as long

as the plantain tree contains sheaths, it also contains pith. He was illustrating the point that while God keeps the "ego of a devotee" in a man, the Relative (the sheaths) is real as well as the Absolute (the pith).]

"I pervade all this." "Upon Me, these worlds are held like pearls strung on a thread." The real truth is: We must see Him. When we see Him everything else disappears. One experiences Him as everything. Before we see Him we have doubts and all sorts of theories. When we know Him, all doubts disappear. Then there are no more theories. He alone is. He is the absolute Reality. All doctrines rest in Him. Peace is attained when we find Him.

Thakur's philosophy therefore is: Somehow we must attain Him. "Tie the nondual Knowledge in the corner of your cloth and then do as you please." This means: Once you attain Him, it does not matter which doctrine your temperament bids you uphold.

Liberation is assured when you know Him. Then there is no more bondage. After death, whether you take another body or not depends upon your own wish. Those who want nirvana will consider this world a dream. They will attach their minds to Brahman the Impersonal, and will be merged in that great Light. And those who want to dwell in devotion to the Lord will consider this world a manifestation of His power. They will attach themselves to the Lord, who is Existence, Knowledge, Bliss Absolute [Sat-Chit-Ananda]. They will not be afraid to be born again and again, and be his playmates in his Divine Play. They will take delight in the Atman and be devoted to the Lord without asking anything in return. They will not accept nirvana if it is offered to them.

That is enough for today.

Turiyananda

SWAMI TURIYANANDA'S YEARS OF WANDERING

SWAMI RITAJANANDA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA died in August, 1886. His departure was a severe blow to his young disciples who had renounced the world. At once they had to arrange their life in a new pattern. While some of these young men—like Naren, Baburam, and Sarat—were setting up a monastery at Baranagore near Dakshineswar, Hari, with intense dispassion and determination, left his home, taking one piece of cloth and a bed cover as a shawl, and went straight to Shillong in Assam. He spent about six months there. He had never made such an experiment before—to eat what chance brought him and to sleep on the bare ground in a cold region, the altitude at Shillong being above 3,000 feet. He could not stand the rigor of this life, and when he finally returned to Calcutta he was very ill. He stayed with his brother-disciples at the new monastery at Baranagore.

Life at the Baranagore Math was extremely austere. Food was obtained by begging: it was mostly rice without any spices. The young monks had very few clothes between them. But they had been trained in a strong spirit of renunciation, and they did not bother much about their needs. Many hours were passed in meditation: spare time was spent in study of the scriptures. Through the influence of Sri Ramakrishna's holy company all longing for worldly pleasures

and even family attachments, which are generally so deep, were burnt away. On Christmas Eve 1886, before a "dhuni fire"—the sacred fire of the Indian ascetic—the disciples kept vigil the whole night, talking about Christ and his intense renunciation. On the following day they formally renounced the world. From that day onward Hari came to be known as Swami Turiyananda.

Turiyananda was a name befitting Hari's nature, which from his boyhood had been powerfully drawn to the goal of nirvana, the Turiya state. One who delights in it becomes Turiya-ananda, thus Turiyananda.

But this attitude of renunciation did not make the Swami a dry ascetic, without feelings of affection. He still loved his brothers by birth very much; although when a higher ideal has been accepted, lower attachments have to be given up. We are told that shortly after his adoption of the monastic life, Swami Turiyananda went to see his brothers one day, clad in gerrua (the ocher robe of the Indian sanniyasin), his head shaven. At first they could not recognize him. They wondered who the young monk might be, standing before them, shedding tears.

After some time Upendranath recognized Hari and said: "Why are you crying? This is what you wanted!"

"I am very much indebted to you both," Swami Turiyananda replied.

Then the brothers consoled him. "Let it be so, Hari. We have done our duty to you as elder brothers. You did not enter the family life. The alternative you have chosen is the best. We bless you that you may attain your goal."

On hearing these words, Swami Turiyananda felt as if a heavy load had been lifted from his heart. Now he knew his brothers would not feel offended by his leaving home.

The life of renunciation led by the young disciples at

Baranagore has never been fully recorded. It was a period when all the ideas they had received from Sri Ramakrishna were put to the test. They had before them the illustrious life of the Master, who had given them a living and unparalleled example of spirituality. Now they all plunged into the quest of the Supreme, and the disciplines they practiced helped the growth of the spiritual seed that had been planted by Sri Ramakrishna. But even this life was not completely satisfactory to Swami Turiyananda. For the scriptures say that a *sannyasin* is a free person—he is neither limited to a particular home nor to particular friends. He accepts the entire world as his country, all humanity as his kith and kin. The great sages have compared the man of renunciation to a lion that has come out of the cage. Soon Swami Turiyananda left his monastic brothers to wander by himself, to discover how deep his dispassion was, and how strong his faith in God.

As we have seen, Swami Turiyananda's mind tended toward austere spiritual practices from his childhood. The tradition of Hindu monasticism confirmed him in this tendency. For countless ages, Indian *sadhus* have practiced the spiritual disciplines that Swami Turiyananda now embarked upon: to live in solitude, to visit places of pilgrimage, to meditate intensively and to study the scriptures, to reduce the needs of the body to a minimum. Theirs is a life of utter dependence on the Lord as far as provisions of food and shelter are concerned. What little food is needed to sustain life is begged, and whatever is given is regarded as coming directly from God.

According to the orthodox Hindu ideal, a holy man is not expected to work in the worldly sense. His prayer and meditation are thought to be of benefit to all mankind, and his life of renunciation is therefore considered selfless—not an escape from duty. As far as the householders are con-

cerned, according to the scriptures it is their sacred task to feed the wandering sadhus, thereby worshiping God in them.

SWAMI TURIYANANDA left the monastery with his wearing apparel and a water bowl. He visited one shrine after another, traveling by foot all the way. From Calcutta he moved westward and reached Rishikesh, where the Ganges emerges from the Himalayas. There, with Swami Saradananda, whom he had met by chance along the way, and Vaikuntanath Sanyal, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, he practiced austerities for a time. The year was 1889.

From Rishikesh, Turiyananda went with Swami Saradananda to Gangotri. (Even today this pilgrimage is full of hardships. The footpath to Gangotri goes through a dense forest, and there is no human habitation—nowhere to beg food—for many miles.)

At length, the Swamis found themselves in a part of a reserve forest. The likelihood of finding anyone here was still more remote, as even woodcutters were, of course, prohibited. But one day, hearing the sound of an axe, the travelers realized they must be near a human settlement of some kind. They called aloud, but whoever had been cutting wood ran away, thinking perhaps he was being apprehended by government officers. For three days the Swamis wandered without food. Finally they reached a village, but it was empty. They reached a second village, and there also they could not get any food, for all the houses were closed. They finally arrived at a third village. Here they met a man who said that a famine was raging in that region and that the villagers had gone out in search of food, the women included. He told the Swamis that they would find people home only in the mornings or evenings. Having fasted three days, Turiyananda was very weak. Seeing some grass, he began to eat

it to stop the gnawings of hunger. It made him vomit, and he became weaker. Fortunately they met a wandering monk who took them to another village, and there they enjoyed what food the villagers were able to give. After that, Swami Turiyananda found it better to go on alone, and he returned to Rajpur near Mussoorie, where he entered upon a life of intense meditation.

While he was at Rajpur, police officers thought that the Swami was an anarchist posing as a holy man. One of them approached him and put all sorts of questions to him. Turiyananda replied fearlessly, showing his displeasure. At this the officer said: "How dare you talk that way! Are you not afraid of the police?"

Stung to the quick, the Swami shouted: "I afraid! I am not frightened even by Yama, the god of death, not to speak of the police!" The Swami had traveled all alone without any protection, without any weapon, in forests full of wild animals. For him there was no need to fear human beings. The police, balked in their attempt to find anything objectionable, left him in peace.

The Swami lived at Rajpur for some months, deeply absorbed in meditation. One day, in the early part of 1890, he met an astrologer who said that he was soon going to meet someone very dear to him. The Swami could not guess who that might be. It turned out to be none other than Naren—Swami Vivekananda. The latter had been making a similar pilgrimage that year with Swami Akhandananda, another brother-disciple. He had met Swami Saradananda, as well, at Almora, and they came to Rajpur. Thus, accidentally, after a separation of two years, the four friends were brought together, to their great joy.

They spent several happy days in Rajpur and then went to Rishikesh. Here Swami Vivekananda contracted a fever.

Turiyananda nursed him, and when Vivekananda recovered they both left for Kankhal, where they met one more brother-disciple, Swami Brahmananda, who was also practicing austerities. They proceeded to Meerut.

One day, Swami Vivekananda left for Delhi without telling anyone. He did not always enjoy being surrounded by a group. A sadhu seeks solitude at times because in this way he learns to understand his own mind. As long as a man lives in the company of other people, he does not really know how dependent he is on them and how much inner strength he is capable of.

Vivekananda's brother-disciples, out of their love for him, followed the Swami to Delhi, asking him to stay with them. But he said: "My brothers, just now I prefer to be left alone. That is why I came to Delhi by myself. Please don't follow me any more. Herewith I leave Delhi. I wish everyone to strive for his own goal according to his own light." Soon after that, the group broke up.

Swami Brahmananda had once been asked by Sri Ramakrishna to associate closely with Turiyananda. Now these two started on a pilgrimage, and were together for almost six years. They visited important sacred shrines and practiced contemplation. Their first place of pilgrimage was Jwalamukhi, in Kangra Valley, in the Punjab. It is one of the twelve sacred shrines of the Divine Mother, although it contains no image of the goddess. During special periods dedicated to the worship of the Divine Mother, thousands of Hindus visit the shrine of Jwalamukhi. Swami Brahmananda and Swami Turiyananda spent some time there. Seeing these two young men leading a pure, simple, and intensely spiritual life, the priests and others began to show them respect.

From there the Swamis moved on to Kulu, a place particularly congenial to spiritual practice and therefore inhab-

ited by hundreds of sadhus. The two pilgrims halted. Soon, their intense spiritual striving attracted the attention of the villagers, who gathered round them in large numbers and every day brought them generous amounts of food. These attentions at length became a kind of worship, to the Swamis' great embarrassment. So early one morning they left Kulu for Baidyanath, a few miles away. There an extraordinary incident took place.

Baidyanath is in an area where no water reservoirs of any kind existed. If it did not rain, the simple villagers had no other recourse except to pray. On the top of a hill was the shrine of Baidyanath Shiva. The people believed that by pouring water on the image of Shiva and praying for rain, the Lord might cause rain to fall. At the time the Swamis reached Baidyanath, the area was suffering from drought. So the village women went to the small spring at the foot of the hill, collected water, which now ran in a mere trickle, and carried it up the hill to the shrine to pour on the image. The Swamis saw their simple faith and devotion and heard their constant prayer: "O Lord, please bring rain, please bring rain!" The procession of women with water pots began early in the morning and continued all day. The Swamis, who sat in a corner of the shrine, were touched by the villagers' devotion and started to pray. Suddenly the clear sky became filled with dark clouds, and rain began to pour down.

From Baidyanath, the Swamis went to Patankot, Lahore, and other places suitable to their way of life, spending long periods in each location. At Sukkar they stayed at a Sikh monastery, where the president, impressed by their dispassion, received them warmly. After remaining there for some days, they proceeded to Karachi, and suddenly, once again, met Swami Vivekananda, who was then preparing to go to America for the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

They had not seen one another for two years, and their meeting made them very happy.

It left a deep impression on Swami Turiyananda. He found that Swamiji (Vivekananda) had undergone a great change and seemed filled with power. Recalling this meeting, Turiyananda said in later years: "I vividly remember some of the remarks made by Swamiji at that time. The exact words and accents and the deep pathos with which they were uttered still ring in my ears. 'Haribhai,' he said, 'I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion!' Then, with an expression of deep sorrow on his countenance and an intense emotion shaking his body, he placed his hand on his heart and added, 'But my heart has expanded much, and I have learned to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed.' His voice was choked with feeling; he could say no more. For a time profound silence reigned and tears rolled down his cheeks."

While narrating this incident Swami Turiyananda, too, was overcome with emotion. He was silent for a while, his eyelids heavy with tears. With a deep sigh he said, "Can you imagine what passed through my mind on hearing the Swami speak thus? 'Are not these,' I thought, 'the very words and thoughts of Buddha?' I could clearly perceive that the sufferings of humanity were pulsating in the heart of Swamiji. His heart was a huge cauldron in which the sufferings of mankind were being made into a healing balm."

These words show how deeply Swami Turiyananda loved Vivekananda and in what high esteem he held him. Turiyananda also recalled another incident which illustrated Swami Vivekananda's insight into the future: "'Haribhai,' he said. 'I am going to America. Whatever is happening there, it is for this (striking his chest). It is for this.'" Evidently Swami Vivekananda felt that the intense power that

was growing within him would be manifested at the Parliament of Religions, paving the way for the future organization of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The Swami had a great admiration for "Haribhai," and felt that this brother was capable of carrying on the work he would initiate.

From Karachi, the three Swamis moved on to Bombay. During the days before his sailing to America, Swami Vivekananda conducted classes and gave talks on religious subjects. One day he was ill, and he asked Turiyananda to give the talk in his place. Swami Turiyananda did not care for the assignment, but to oblige his brother-disciple he agreed to speak. Very soon he became absorbed in the subject of discrimination and dispassion, and eloquently praised the greatness of renunciation. When the talk was over, Swami Vivekananda called him and said: "Haribhai! You spoke with great vigor. But did you remember to whom you were speaking? These are all family men, with wife, children, personal property, and profession. If you talk of renunciation, they will get confused. It will be absolutely impossible for them to practice what you said."

Immediately Swami Turiyananda grasped his mistake. "I thought, since you were listening to my talk, I should not speak at random on whatever came to my mind, but on pure spirituality. I was carried away by my enthusiasm."

Swami Vivekananda, before he left India, asked Turiyananda to go back to the Baranagore Math and build up the organization there. But Swami Turiyananda still felt some desire for the wandering life. With Swami Brahmananda he went to a few more shrines and finally reached Brindaban.

ONE DAY, shortly after arriving in Brindaban, the two Swamis were so deeply immersed in meditation that they did not go

out to beg for alms as usual. The next day a man came to them, bringing a large quantity of food, as if sent by Radha Rani (the Divine Mother as she is worshiped in Brindaban). The two young monks offered her their grateful prayers. They spent six months at Brindaban. Many days they never exchanged a single word. It was winter. Swami Turiyananda had only cotton clothes. During the nights, sleep was difficult for lack of warmth. Swami Turiyananda used to get up at two or three in the morning. Then he would go to the well nearby, use the well water for bathing, and sit for meditation. After a time his meditation produced bodily heat, but due to the intense cold the skin on his face, hands, and feet cracked so that they bled. Still he did not mind the cold. Swami Turiyananda's disregard of ordinary comfort was observed by an elderly holy man who lived nearby. He saw that the Swami did not have even a single woolen blanket to cover himself. One night he brought a warm quilt for him. Swami Turiyananda at first refused to accept it, but later yielded to the affectionate insistence of the sadhu.

After some months at Brindaban, Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda went to the holy places close by: Radhakund, Shyamkund, Nanda-Gram, and Barshana, among others. When they reached Lake Kusum, they were so impressed by the surroundings that they stayed for some time. Throughout this period Swami Turiyananda never allowed his brother-disciple to go out for alms. He himself always collected the food from a few houses and brought it back. One day he could procure only some dry *roti* (unleavened bread), without any vegetables. They took the rotis to a well and dipped them in water before eating. Swami Turiyananda felt pained to see his brother eating so poorly.

"Maharaj!" he exclaimed. "You were very dear to our Master. How carefully he used to feed you with cream and

butter! And what have I given you?" Saying this, he was choked with sorrow.

When the Swamis were not meditating, they spent their time reading the scriptures. At Brindaban, Turiyananda studied the *Bhakti Sutras* of Narada, which express the essence of devotion. About that time he came in contact with another holy man who was a great scholar, and discussed with him topics related to the yoga of devotion. It was a particularly appropriate place to concern oneself with bhakti. The whole area, associated with the life of Sri Krishna, vibrates with the manifestation of love. The atmosphere can be felt even by a casual visitor. The people, although attending to the ordinary duties of life, seemed always conscious of the presence of the Lord. This devotion impressed the two Swamis exceedingly. We are told that in that holy atmosphere Swami Turiyananda had a number of spiritual experiences.

As we have already seen, during the period of their stay in Brindaban the two pilgrims obtained most of their food by begging. Generally it consisted of some bits of roti, collected from many houses. These were not sufficient even for a single meal. One day the amount obtained was even less than usual. Swami Turiyananda took the food to a nearby watering place and ate the pieces soaked in water. While eating, he addressed his body: "All these troubles are forced upon me on account of you. Take this and be content." But the meager ration could not satisfy his hungry stomach. The Swami lay down to rest, and being extremely tired went to sleep. Suddenly he saw himself as separate from the body. He was not the hungry or thirsty physical body but the completely separate, independent Atman. He observed his body lying there like a piece of rejected cloth. This unique experience made a tremendous impression on him. He now had

directly realized the truth of that great declaration from the Six Stanzas on Nirvana, which runs:

I am neither the process of eating, nor the food, nor
the eater.

I am the Embodiment of Knowledge, Bliss, Existence.

I am the Atman.

When he rose, his hunger was forgotten.

Not far from Brindaban is the large city of Muttra. Swami Turiyananda went there from Brindaban. In Muttra at that time lived a rich merchant who enjoyed feeding sadhus. Any holy man who arrived in the city was directed to his house. When Swami Turiyananda arrived, he was advised to go to this place. He went and had a good meal. Afterwards, the merchant approached him, wishing to talk about religion.

"Swami," he asked, "will you please tell me how I can develop dispassion?"

The Swami smiled. "You are asking *me* this question! Do you think I would have come to eat here if I really had dispassion?"

Swami Turiyananda continued to lead the life of a wandering monk, instead of going to Alambazar, to which the Math had now been moved. Letter after letter had been sent by the other disciples, asking him to come home. News of the great success of Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago had reached Calcutta. Accordingly, the other members of the brotherhood were more anxious than ever to have Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda return promptly in order to help carry on the work.

The two pilgrims finally left the Brindaban area at the beginning of 1894, and went to Lucknow. Here they unex-

pectedly met Swami Shivananda, another brother-disciple, who was on his way to Uttarakasi in the Himalayas. The meeting gave joy to all three.

Presently Swami Shivananda asked Turiyananda to go at once to the Alambazar Math, but the latter showed disinclination to go. He felt that he should not give up the contemplative life he was leading at that time. "Vivekananda has asked you to go, and you are not following his suggestion," Swami Shivananda said. "You yourself are leaving," Swami Turiyananda pointed out to his brother. "Why should you ask *me* to go?" Then he added, "Make your trip, and on your return we shall go to our Math together." And that is how it actually turned out.

AFTER parting with Swami Shivananda, the brother-disciples went to Ayodhya. Swami Turiyananda as usual went out to collect food. It was Ekadasi (the eleventh day after the new or full moon), which is traditionally observed by a complete or partial fast, and prayer. It is generally difficult to get alms that day, and Swami Turiyananda obtained only some boiled arum roots. Arum roots may produce severe soreness in the throat, and they did on this occasion. After taking a few bites, both Swamis began to suffer the effects. Swami Turiyananda was saddened to see the plight of his brother-disciple, for whom he tried to provide with loving care. He went out quickly in search of some sour fruit, which is useful in counteracting the irritation. At first he could not find any. He wandered here and there, and at last reached a lemon grove where some farmers were enjoying a smoke. He asked them to give him a lemon. But the farmers told him that the trees were in flower, and lemons were not in season. Swami Turiyananda was walking away when suddenly he noticed one ripe lemon on a tree. He went back to the farmers and

said he would be very grateful if they would give this lemon to him.

"There were no fruits before," the farmers informed him in surprise. "If one is there now, it is meant especially for you."

They plucked the lemon for Swami Turiyananda. He took it quickly to his brother-disciple, whose throat by that time was swollen, gave him some pieces, and took some himself. All the food the Swamis had for the day were the arum roots and that one lemon.

After that they went through the usual routine of prayers and meditation and lay down to sleep. But how to sleep with an empty stomach and a still itching throat! Swami Brahmananda felt annoyed in the extreme and complained to Sri Ramakrishna, as if he were physically present: "You made us all leave home. Why did you do it if you cannot provide a little food? All right—if we can get some kichuri [a rice preparation] and chutney [a pickled side-dish] tomorrow morning, I can believe you are with us."

The night went by and at dawn they went to the river Sarayu for a bath. When they returned to the bank after bathing, they found a Ramayat sadhu (a holy man who worships God in Rama) looking about him as if in search of someone. When his eyes fell upon the Swamis, he saluted them and said: "Sirs, both of you have fasted since yesterday, observing Ekadasi, haven't you? Please come with me to Rama's cottage and have something to eat."

The Swamis looked at each other. It was not the custom to eat at dawn after observing Ekadasi. "Are you going to make us break the fast so early?" they asked the holy man.

"I have just offered Rama some kichuri," he explained, "and I wish you to take some of the offered food."

The sadhu thus entreated them and took them to his cottage, which was just a small hut made of straw. He asked the Swamis to sit down, spread two leaves and placed on these kichuri, pickled tamarind, and lemon. This was the offered food. It was, of course, most welcome, and it also contained something to soothe their aching throats. While they were enjoying the meal, the sadhu said: "How fortunate I am! It is now twenty-four years since I started worshipping Rama. Day after day I have prayed, 'Lord, please speak to me. Let me have at least a kindly glance from you.' Finally he showed his grace today." With these words the sadhu burst into tears.

"Sir, what is the matter?" Swami Brahmananda then asked. "Tell us what happened."

The sadhu explained: "Last night I was resting when suddenly I felt someone with very gentle hands shake me and wake me up. He said: 'Hullo! Wake up! I am feeling very hungry. Cook some kichuri and offer it to me. In the early morning you will find two of my devotees taking a bath in the river. Bring them here and feed them.'" Then the sadhu looked toward the altar, where he kept the images of Rama, Sita, and Lakshman, and continued: "I clearly saw that it had been Rama's hands which woke me up; and it was he who spoke these words. So I got up quickly, prepared the food, and called you. It is all because of your kindness that I have had the good fortune of being blessed by the Lord."

The Swamis were intensely moved by what the sadhu told them. After thanking him, they left, and, when they were returning to their own place, Swami Brahmananda told Turiyananda how he had complained to Sri Ramakrishna the previous night.

Soon after, Swami Turiyananda left for Alambazar, near Dakshineswar. It was the early part of 1894.

ALTHOUGH Swami Vivekananda found that his mission to the West was successful, he considered it only preliminary to carrying out his plan for India. Hence he wrote frequently from America, asking his brother-disciples to take care that the organization they were beginning to form was well established.

People did not think so highly of the young monks when they had started the monastery, seven years before, in the dilapidated house at Alambazar. But when it was seen that the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna numbered among them a Vivekananda, the attitude of the public changed. Little by little the group of visitors to the Math increased. Young men, attracted by the pure and dedicated lives of the Swamis, came to join the organization. Many cultured people began to seek them out. Swami Turiyananda often met the visitors and talked to them on spiritual matters.

It was Swami Vivekananda's wish that Turiyananda and others should conduct scriptural classes every day, both morning and evening. He constantly wrote to the disciples, encouraged them to carry on the work of Sri Ramakrishna, and like a prophet foretold the great renewal of spiritual life in India generated by the grace of the Master. He knew of Swami Turiyananda's scholarship and wanted him to take the responsibility for holding study classes. But Swami Turiyananda's natural trend of mind was always pulling him back to a life of austerity and wandering. So, after a stay of little more than a year, he again left the monastery.

Soon after leaving the Alambazar Math, Swami Turiyananda went to places of pilgrimage in Western India, in Sowrashtra. He found that the mountain region of Girnar had an atmosphere conducive to meditation, and so he settled down there in a cave. After a few months he moved on toward the Ganges, and probably due to the frequent changes

of climate and to bad food he fell ill. Day by day the sickness grew worse. Finally he thought it wise to consult a doctor and started toward a village to find one. On the way he suddenly remembered a verse which has special reference to a holy man if he falls ill: "For the sick sadhu, the medicine is Ganges water; and Lord Narayana is the doctor." These words immediately made him feel ashamed to seek an ordinary doctor: it was as if he had lost his very faith in God. And so he could not go to the village, but went to the riverside, took some sips of Ganges water, repeated the Lord's name, and returned to his cave. Strangely enough, soon after that he was cured.

Later on, Swami Turiyananda moved to Tehri-Garhwal in the Himalayas. Here the lower hills were covered with thick jungle which was inhabited by wild animals. These sometimes endangered the lives of the neighboring villagers, who could do nothing beyond tightly closing the doors of their houses in the evening. One night the Swami was staying in a makeshift hut, when people began to shout warnings that a tiger had entered the village. Instinctively Swami Turiyananda got up to barricade the door, though actually the dilapidated hut could have given little protection if the tiger had wanted to get in. Just then he remembered the lines of scripture which declare that even death runs away by the grace of the Lord. So he turned to his usual habit of meditation, and gave up all attempts to prevent the tiger's entry.

Such incidents illustrate how the Swami's mind, which for years had been accustomed to dwelling on the elevating ideas of the scriptures, would always replace depressing and frightening thoughts with those which could make him extremely self-possessed.

The Swami's real joy lay in contemplation of the Lord,

and so he liked quiet places where he would not be disturbed. Generally, however, his austerity soon attracted people's attention and admiration to such a degree that he was compelled to move to a new place. It may be noted that the scriptures say the holy man should constantly change his residence, so that he does not get attached to any one location. We have no correct and detailed account of the places the Swami visited and how long he stayed at each. The information we have is based upon random statements he made during conversations and in letters.

From Tehri-Garhwal, Swami Turiyananda went to Uttarakasi. Uttarakasi is in the interior of the Himalayas. Life there is hard due to the cold and the difficulty in getting food; but it is quiet, and far removed from cities. Many contemplatives have chosen to live there, considering it a place conducive to meditation. A holy man by the name of Swami Satchidananda was at Uttarakasi at the same time as Turiyananda, and was much impressed by the manner in which the latter could lose himself in meditation. According to this Swami's report, Turiyananda used to wake up early in the morning and take a bath in the Ganges. He was only to be seen either at that time or later when they went to collect food; but there were days when Swami Turiyananda could not be seen even during these hours. He would sit for meditation the whole morning, with no thought of food. This is generally not possible unless one has experienced the state of samadhi. When we remember Swami Turiyananda's inherent temperament and his association with Sri Ramakrishna, we can easily understand that this was the case.

From Uttarakasi, Swami Turiyananda descended to Rishikesh and Hardwar, both of which are considered ideal locations for practicing spiritual disciplines. He spent a number of months at each place. "During that period," he

later recalled. "my mind always stayed on a high level. There was a constant stream of God-consciousness, unbroken like the flow of oil from one vessel to another. I used to get up at dawn, finish my ablutions, and sit for meditation. After meditating for some hours, I started reading the scriptures. Then it was time to go out to collect food, which was done very quickly. Next came some rest, after which I meditated until evening. No other thoughts were allowed to enter the mind. During that period I committed to memory eight of the principal Upanishads, all except the two longer ones. Whenever I found an Upanishadic verse which particularly appealed to me I used to meditate on it. Oh, what a joy this produced! I cannot describe it. I read the commentaries of Shankara along with the gloss of Anandagiri. Whenever I concentrated on a verse, I used to get new and fresh interpretations."

To the Swami, the Upanishads were not texts of philosophy but sacred words full of the divine Spirit. He regarded them as a limitless fund of spiritual knowledge. As previously mentioned, Swami Turiyananda also had committed to memory the whole of *Viveka-Chudamani* (or *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*), and had a very clear grasp of its inner meaning. In later years he could quote at random any important verse that he wanted to impress on the young novices he was training. Another book which equally attracted him was the *Bhagavatam* (the *Wisdom of God*). He read and meditated upon these scriptures without any intent to teach, but simply to have direct spiritual experience. He had learned from his master that the only purpose of the scriptures is to further spiritual awakening. He did not think of them as a source of knowledge to ornament his life but as an instrument to be thrown away as soon as it had served its purpose. So he used to pray to the Divine Mother: "Please take away

all this book-knowledge, Mother. May I have devotion!"

The Swami also learned new languages and enjoyed reading the sacred books in them. He learned the Gurumukhi language and studied the Grantha Sahib, the sacred book of the Sikhs. This comparative study helped him to have a clear intellectual understanding of spiritual experiences in addition to an intuitive one. As a result, whenever people discussed religious topics he could give direct and convincing answers. Once he was listening to a discussion about how difficult it was for the mind, once it had reached the state of nirvikalpa samadhi—beyond all worldly conceptions, beyond maya—to re-enter the world with all its variety. Finally the question was put to Swami Turiyananda. He immediately replied: "A person who returns to the world after the experience of nirvikalpa samadhi is not dependent upon himself. It is by the grace of God that one gets samadhi, and one's re-entry into the world is also by the will of God. Everything happens only by the will of the Lord."

As we have seen, the Swami had great faith in the scriptures even from his boyhood, and had punctiliously observed all their rules. Indeed, his whole life seems to have been shaped according to the sacred texts. He tried to follow them in all respects. Recalling his early days he once remarked: "When I was a lad, I read the following verse, which impressed me deeply: 'The first step of yoga is made up of control of speech, non-acceptance of gifts, non-expectation, non-action (control of activity) and a solitary life.'" This verse he endeavored to follow, as far as possible, all his life. He spoke few words, and those were mostly on spiritual matters. Constantly he tried to draw his mind inward and to keep it in the thought of God.

Swami Turiyananda returned to Calcutta in the latter part of 1896.

IN THE COMPANY OF SWAMI TURIYANANDA

PRAFULLA CHANDRA BANNERJEE

BANARAS, Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, 1919.
Three o'clock in the afternoon.

Swami Turiyananda was reclining on an easychair on the veranda of Ambika Cottage. His attendant, Swami Prabodhananda, was fanning him. Swami Achalananda, Chandrakanta Ghosh, and a few brahmacharis and devotees were present.

Chandrakanta to Swami Turiyananda: "Sir, you know how absorbed we are in worldly life. How can we find God?"

Swami: "If you think you will find him by doing this or by doing that—you're wrong. Swamiji rightly asked, 'Can God be bought like fish or spinach?'"

"The Master [Sri Ramakrishna] used to say, 'After acquiring merits in many past births a man's heart and lips become the same.' One must persevere. It won't do to practice japam and meditation for a little while and then give up. Ratnakar practiced hard austerities in one spot for such a long time that an anthill grew around him. [Later he became known as Valmiki, which means "sage of the anthill." He wrote the Ramayana.]

"Many rishis found God in diverse ways. Each one has recorded in the scriptures the particular path by which he

attained God. One rishi said, 'You must worship in this particular way.' Another said, 'Practice japam in that way.' The great seer Narada said: 'Just as the river runs straight toward the ocean without diverting its course, similarly he who wants God gives up all distractions, and with one-pointed mind moves toward him.'

"In the Gita, Sri Krishna says: '. . . if a man will worship me, and meditate upon me with an undistracted mind, devoting every moment to me, I shall supply all his needs and protect his possessions from loss.'

"Devotion is of two kinds. In the preparatory stage you must perform so much japam, worship the Lord in a particular way, and so forth. The next stage is love. When love grows, the devotee, with a yearning heart, thinks only of God. He doesn't enjoy thinking of anything else."

Chandrakanta: "Sir, what is meant by performing japam?"

Swami: "To perform japam means to chant the Lord's name with the tongue and to think of his luminous form within your heart—to think of him and to love him. What good is chanting God's name if the mind remains attached to the things of the world? The truth is, it doesn't matter how you do it—but learn to love him and make him your own."

Chandrakanta: "But, sir, what if somebody feels that because he has seen Sri Ramakrishna or Holy Mother [during their life on earth] he doesn't have to perform spiritual practices?"

Swami: "How can I say anything about such people? They know better about that."

A devotee: "Perhaps they mean to say—and it is the belief of many—that as long as the Mother has taken their burden on herself they don't need to do anything. They feel

that while Mother holds one hand of the devotee, with the other hand he can do whatever he pleases. Liberation to him is like a fruit in the palm of his hand."

Swami: "If one really has such faith, then of course one has attained the goal. But is that so easy? Careful self-analysis is needed in order to be sure that one isn't deceiving oneself. It is true that although one may have committed heinous sins in the past, if one can completely surrender oneself to the Lord, through his grace all sin is removed in a moment. Heaps of cotton, mountain-high, are turned into ashes by a tiny spark of fire. The room may have been dark for thousands of years; light the lamp and immediately the darkness is gone, not gradually.

" 'Though a man may be soiled with the sins of a life-time, let him but love me, rightly resolved, in utter devotion: I see no sinner, that man is holy. Holiness soon shall refashion his nature to peace eternal. O son of Kunti, of this be certain: The man that loves me, he shall not perish.' Even if the vilest of the vile lives in surrender to Him, that man is holy. 'Holiness soon shall refashion his nature.' Through the Lord's grace he no longer remains a sinner: he becomes a saint.

" 'He who knows how to dance doesn't take a false step.' Although one may have done evil deeds in the past, if one surrenders oneself to God, is it possible to continue to do evil?

"Take Girish Ghosh. for instance. He committed many sins. Once he said to me: 'I have drunk so many bottles of wine that if you place one bottle on top of another they will reach the height of Mount Everest.' Well, he was a poet, and so he expressed himself in this way.

"When Sri Ramakrishna told Girish to chant the name of God in the morning and in the evening, Girish said:

'I can't give my word that I'll do it. I don't know in what sort of state I'll be at those times.' So the Master asked him to say the Lord's name at mealtime, and Girish answered: 'I can't promise that either. My mind is restless all the time, and thoughts about lawsuits and other distracting matters arise.' Then the Master said: 'Give me the power of attorney.' Later Girish told us: 'Yes, I gave him the power of attorney, but gradually I came to understand how difficult it is really to do that. I had told him that I couldn't chant the Lord's name even once a day, but after I gave the power of attorney I found that I couldn't do even the most trifling thing without thinking of him every moment.'

"In one day Girish gave up his fifteen-year-old habit of taking opium. He said about it: 'I suffered the first three days. The body felt inert. But from the fourth day on I was all right.' Later he didn't even smoke tobacco."

Chandrakanta: "What proof is there that the aspirant is progressing spiritually?"

Swami: "He will know it in his heart of hearts. Others also will be able to see his progress. Passions like lust, anger, greed, and so on, will subside. Attachment to the objects of the world will lessen, and peace will grow within him."

Devotee: "But real peace doesn't come until one has the vision of God!"

Swami: "That's true. Peace is the last word of religion. But when an aspirant's cravings for enjoyment have subsided and there grows love in his heart for all beings, know that he is making spiritual progress.

"Mere repetition of the Lord's name doesn't help if the heart has 'holes' in it made by cravings. Then the effects of japam leak through such holes.

"There is a story of a farmer who worked all day to

irrigate his field, but in the evening the field was still dry. The water had leaked out through a hole.

"St. Durgacharan Nag [a householder-disciple of Sri Ramakrishna] once told me a beautiful truth. I went to his home. His father was practicing japam. With folded palms, Nag said to me: 'Please bless my father that he may have devotion.'

"I said: 'He has great devotion. He is always chanting the name of the Lord. What more is there to do?'

"Nag: 'What good does it do to row a boat that's anchored? My father is very much attached to me. So what good is his japam?'

"I replied: 'What's wrong in loving a son like you?'

"Nag: 'Oh, please don't talk like that! Please bless my father that he may not remain attached to me!'

"Ah, what a great soul Nag was!

"Do you know the parable about rowing the anchored boat? Once in the dark of night some drunkards wanted to go boating. They went to the riverbank, found a boat, got into it, and began to row. They rowed all night. When the sun rose, they found themselves in exactly the same place as when they had started rowing. They had forgotten to pull up the anchor."

LETTERS OF SWAMI TURIYANANDA

TRANSLATED BY
SWAMI PAVITRANANDA

EDITED BY
HENRY JAMES FORMAN

PRAYER

85. Wherever God keeps you, stay, and pray to him to your heart's content. One place or another does not make much difference, though, no doubt, one should try to choose a place in which it is more convenient to do spiritual practice. Make an effort to do your worldly duties with as much detachment as possible. Through practice, success comes in any undertaking.

Resigning yourself to His care, try to be at rest. He is behind everything. Through delusion, man thinks he is the doer and consequently becomes bound. "Not I, not I, but Thou; it is Thou, O Lord." Never for a moment forget this sacred text. Constantly think of Him and Him only, and you will find that all other thoughts will vanish.

When the body is ill, it is an obstacle to the remembrance of God. Therefore you should try to keep the body fit and free from disease. Not for the sake of the body should you take care of the body. It is necessary to keep well because thereby one will be able to do spiritual practice.

86. Why should you think that the capacity of your mind to assimilate has declined? Rather, the capacity to discriminate between good and bad has increased, and so you are not inclined to accept what is bad. Your humility is no doubt very praiseworthy, but I would not say that you are right when you declare that you are exactly where you were twenty years ago. But if you say this with reference to the Self, that is surely true, for the Self is changeless. Though a holy man has to deal with spiritual and material things, material things do not add to his stature. Only spiritual things befit a holy man. Your feeling of impatience will not last long. When you have become a little more indrawn it will pass away. Spiritual practice should be increased slowly and gradually. The Master used to say: "To seek God while living a life in the world is like fighting the enemy from the protected zone of a fort. Many advantages are there. Others [the monastics] fight from an open space. That is not for all." The point is, thoughts must be kept fixed on God—by whatever means. Only then will life be fruitful.

One has to give attention to food and drink—that is necessary as long as the body lasts. But the saint Ramprasad sings: "When you eat, think that you are making an offering to the Divine Mother." One should listen to these holy men. Only then will one be able to develop devotion to God. Ramprasad's song is this: "O my mind, worship the Divine Mother in whatever way you like. Repeat day and night the sacred Name you have received from your teacher. Think of lying down as a form of obeisance to the Mother. Consider your sleep a form of meditation, and while taking food feel that you are offering it to her. The words that reach your ears are the divine names, for all words come from her. The Divine Mother is everywhere and so, when you walk about in a city, feel that you are circling round the Mother."

Is there any realization higher than this? This is realizing Brahman everywhere, in all actions, in all living forms, in all ways. This state is spoken of in all scriptures.

You are right when you say that without the grace of the Lord spiritual practice is of no avail. But then, if one performs spiritual practices fervently, grace comes. God is the teacher. He resides within every heart. If one prays to him sincerely, he fulfills every desire. As the yearning for him increases his grace is felt more and more.

87. I sincerely pray to the Lord that you may go on with your spiritual practice with body fit and mind calm.

"I will soothe my heart by singing Thy Name, O Beloved"—there is no prayer better than this. "Love is the best form of spiritual practice." What else is spiritual practice? This only: love one and all. Swami Vivekananda said: "It is the only boat that takes one across the ocean of ignorance." In his own life he fulfilled that precept to the letter and in spirit.

The sage Narada said: "Divine love cannot be expressed in words, just as a dumb man cannot express in words the taste of delicious food." Then he said: "It is revealed to some fortunate souls."

As regards the method of attaining that love, Narada taught: "When the divine name is sung, God reveals himself without delay and makes the devotee experience that realization." Therefore, there is no better method to find God than to chant his name.

88. Your idea of staying some time at..... for spiritual practices is good. But don't feel restless; try to keep a calm and composed attitude. Always keep the current of remembrance of God flowing within, though this is very

difficult to do. Circumstances, no doubt, tend to cut off that flow of remembrance, but even then don't desist from the devoted attempt to keep the thought of the Lord steady. With all your determination, practice recollectedness of him.

89. "The more a tree is shaken by storms and winds, the stronger it becomes"—keep this advice always fixed before your mind's eye. The greater the difficulties and obstacles, the greater the need for persevering efforts. Through the Lord's grace, propitious circumstances will certainly come. What is wanted is patience, steadiness, and unshakeable faith. Have no fear! Take refuge in him and spend your days in constant remembrance of him. All good will come, there is no doubt about it.

Don't worry! Wherever the Lord keeps you, that will be for your good. He knows best. Leave everything to him, but don't forget him. That is your only duty. It is his responsibility where and in what condition to keep you and what trials to put you through. You on your part just see that you don't forget him. If you practice this continually for some time, everything will become easy. Therefore pray to him to make you remember him constantly. He is within every heart. A sincere prayer from within will certainly be fulfilled.

WORSHIP

90. The most important thing is to worship the Lord. Do that intensely and become absorbed in thoughts of him. That is what I pray for.

91. Wherever you are, try to worship earnestly. Then the

mind will become calm through God's grace. It does not matter where you go; you won't get peace anywhere without love for God. Know this for certain.

92. I am very happy to know that you are feeling much better after reading my letter to you. Earnestness is what is needed. The more you feel that the Lord is your own, the more you realize that he is very close to you, the more will worldly suffering fade away and you will experience great joy and comfort. The Master used to say, "The more you go toward the East, the farther you will be away from the West."

The Lord is always present in the heart, we only have to turn our attention to him. He is the Soul of our souls, the Self of our self. It is through his grace that we are alive and continue to live. Therefore he is truly the object of our foremost love. We suffer because we do not realize that. If one does realize it, all one's troubles are over. May this consciousness remain ever awake in your heart—this is my prayer. Then your life will be blessed.

The Lord said in the Gita: "Worship me, that is the most important thing. You find yourself in this evanescent world which is a breeding ground of misery. Forget everything else, and worship me and me only. Thus alone will you find peace: there is no other way. . . . Be absorbed in me, be devoted to me, worship me, and bow down to me. Thus concentrating the mind on me and making me the supreme object of love, you will realize me." Although these are the Lord's words of hope and assurance, we do not turn to him. What can be sadder and more unfortunate than this?

Happiness and unhappiness—neither is permanent in this world. Therefore the Lord advises: "Go beyond both."

That can be done only if one's thoughts constantly flow toward him. Therefore always think of his presence in your heart. Then he will set everything right.

93. In the twelfth chapter of the Gita, after describing the details of worshipping God with or without attributes, the Lord has clearly shown that the worship of God with attributes is the easier path, and that he himself lifts up his devotee. Why then should we neglect such a compassionate Lord and run after someone else? I can't understand that.

94. My heart goes constantly to you. Therefore I feel that you are all very near to me, although you live in distant mountain parts.

Only the will of the Lord comes to pass. What more can I say? I am very happy to know that you are doing well and serving people as a form of worship. When Swami Vivekananda complained that Sri Ramakrishna had too much affection for him, and quoted the mythical story of Jada Bharata, Sri Ramakrishna replied that there was no such danger as long as one saw God in the person loved. Similarly, you don't need to be afraid of having too much affection for others. You are worshipping God—all other things are only external. You know very well that they have no real value in life. "The doer of good never comes to grief"—that is what the Lord says in the Gita. So how can you misunderstand?

95. Doubt cannot be removed by correspondence or by the study of books. One has to practice spiritual disciplines. As one lives according to the scriptures and directions received, one develops faith; and from faith comes purity of heart. Then only are all doubts removed. Sri Krishna says

to Arjuna in the Gita: "Therefore cut asunder your doubts, which arise from ignorance, with the sword of knowledge; and stand up and fight."

Doubts have to be cut asunder by the sword of knowledge. This cannot be done by only hearing instructions. Practice is necessary. Through practice everything is achieved. The truth is: "Keep your mind fixed on God, gradually you will be united with him."

Results are bound to come from worship—whatever may be your ideal. The object of worship should be considered as the ultimate Reality. Ramprasad said: "She is the ultimate Reality whom I address as Mother. O my mind, can't you understand the rest? Do I need to explain any further?"

In this way, every saint has shown his steadfastness to his own Chosen Ideal. But then, one should be steadfast without being dogmatic. Sri Ramakrishna frequently cautioned people on this point. One should not listen to anybody and everybody. One should live according to the directions of one's teacher—that will bring success. By listening to the words of many or by diverting one's attention to this and that, one ruins one's spiritual life. "Books are like so many knots to tie you to ignorance"—said Sri Ramakrishna. Giving up this wild-goose chase, one should remember the words of the Gita: "Make your mind steady and one-pointed, O Arjuna."

MEDITATION

96. I am happy to learn of your noble resolve. It is very rare and improbable that a man will not make any mistake. But by realizing one's fault and desisting from repeating it, one shows one's manliness. If one is careful in the

present and in future, without brooding over the past, one derives great benefit. It is very essential that one should try to keep the body and mind strong, healthy, and pure. Otherwise one is not fit for any good work.

Before attempting meditation, one should acquire the requisite qualification. It is very difficult to meditate all at once. At first, one should try to withdraw the mind from sense objects and direct it to one particular thought. This is called *pratyahara*. If, after the practice of *pratyahara*, one can focus the mind on a particular part of the body—as for instance on the tip of the nose, or between the eyebrows, or on the heart, whichever is convenient—this is called *dharana* [concentration]. When one has mastered this practice one should attempt meditation.

If one can make the flow of thought on a particular object or idea as steady as the unbroken flow of oil, it is called *dhyana*, or meditation. The illustration of the flow of oil is given because there is no break in that flow. In *dhyana*, the thought flows continuously toward the object of meditation. Through long spiritual practice one acquires the power of concentrating the mind and thus becomes fit for meditation.

At first one should practice meditation on a concrete object, as, for instance, on the image of a deity. As it is not easy to meditate on the complete image right in the beginning, one should try to meditate on a particular part of the body—say, the face or the feet. When one is advanced in this practice one will find it easier to meditate on the full figure. Thus, gradually, one will be able to meditate on the subtle impersonal aspect of God. But one should be very careful, for various obstacles, such as confusion of the mind, distractions, and the like, arise in the course of meditation. One should beware of these things.

You have written that the mind becomes concentrated while thinking about the solution of some problems. Yes, that is an aspect of meditation. "If I try, I shall be able to be very meditative." This faith of yours, no doubt, is very good. In the sixth chapter of the Gita, Sri Krishna has given specific directions on meditation to Arjuna. If one daily reads the Gita, one's heart will be purified.

97. If you ponder a little, you will see that nobody can exist for a moment without talking. If one does not converse with others, one surely begins to talk inwardly. What else is thinking? It is talking to oneself. There is no escape from talk. Since this is the case, is it not better to take the name of God than to talk about unimportant things? When you are engaged in conversation with someone, you will undoubtedly have to talk on other subjects than God; but when you are alone, why should you waste your thoughts on useless matters? It is better to think of the Lord. In order to be established in recollectedness of him one has to practice japam, or the repetition of the Holy Name.

Japam is only the repetition of the Name of the Lord. Better than japam is meditation. The Master used to say: Better than rituals is the repetition of the Lord's Name. Better than that repetition is meditation. One who has become established in meditation has reached the state of liberation. While practicing japam one should think of God, because the name and what is denoted by the name are identical. The name is one with the person indicated by the name.

The Eternal One is within every heart. Therefore one finds joy in meditating on him. Later, when that feeling deepens, you will have realization. Everything comes by slow degrees.

DISCRIMINATION

98. In this very body dwells the Spirit, which is altogether untouched by good and evil. "I am the body"—this consciousness makes one a victim of happiness and misery. One should try to go beyond the reach of good and evil by cultivating the attitude that one is not body, that one is Spirit. There is no doubt that much suffering is alleviated by this way of thinking.

In this world, everything is the creation of thought. A man is what his thoughts are. Instead of always harping on the body idea, one should now and then think that one is the disembodied Being. By so doing, one will benefit greatly.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD was appointed guest professor at the University of California in Santa Barbara for the fall semester 1960-61. In 1959, he began the composition of a new biography on Sri Ramakrishna, which has been serialized since that time in issues of *Vedanta and the West*, commencing with #136.

Each of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples was unique, and each had a particular role to play. Swami Vivekananda, for instance, was the dynamic leader; Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual trainer. No comparison between any of Sri Ramakrishna's children is possible, for each was great in his own way. One of them, SWAMI TURIYANANDA, exemplified the ideal sannyasin. His master regarded him as the perfect embodiment of that renunciation which is taught in the Gita. Turiyananda is of special interest to Westerners because he is one who lived and preached in America.

In order to give a three-dimensional picture of Swami Turiyananda, it was decided to present in one magazine issue four selections concerning him. Two of them are from his correspondence, one is biographical, and one is a first-hand account by a contemporary.

The letters of Swami Turiyananda, addressed to various disciples and devotees, were published in book form in the original Bengali. From this correspondence SWAMI PAVITRANANDA, head of the Vedanta Society of New York, selected for translation only passages dealing with spiritual matters. These selections have been arranged topically for the readers' convenience. References to "the Master," in the letters as well as in other writings of Turiyananda, are to Sri Ramakrishna.

SWAMI RITAJANANDA is assistant minister at the Vedanta Society of Southern California. Chapters from his new book on Turiyananda—the first full-length life in English—have been scheduled for inclusion in future issues of this magazine.

PRAFULLA CHANDRA BANNERJEE'S recorded conversations with Swami Turiyananda were translated by SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA from the original Bengali article, which was published in the February-March 1959 number of the *Udbodhan*.

Vedanta and the West

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

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