

# VEDANTA

## and the West

### 151

SWAMI SATPRAKASHANANDA  
*Renunciation and Realization*

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA  
*The Message of Sri Ramakrishna*  
*Turiyananda in Almora and Puri*

SWAMI PAVITRANANDA  
*Letters of Swami Turiyananda*  
*On the Value of Pilgrimages*



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# VEDANTA AND THE WEST

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# **VEDANTA**

## **and the West**

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## **RENUNCIATION AND REALIZATION**

**SWAMI SATPRAKASHANANDA**

Brother Swamis and Friends:

I feel very happy to be with you this morning in this new Vedanta temple. It is a rare privilege to be in the company of holy persons and devotees of the Lord. Not many in this world are spiritually inclined. "Rare is the teacher, rare is the seeker of spiritual knowledge," says the Katha Upanishad.

As you all know, we have assembled here on an occasion of deep significance. Five Western girls have been initiated into the monastic life according to the Vedic rites. This means that they have been admitted into the sacred order of sannyasins, which has existed in India from time immemorial in an unbroken line of teachers and disciples. It is a life of consecration to God and service of God in man. In one sense it is complete renunciation of the world, in another sense it is wholehearted acceptance of the Divine Being, who is the one source of all life, all knowledge, all love, all joy, and all blessedness. It is abandonment of the temporal for the sake of the eternal.

Once a well-to-do person came to a holy man who was living under a tree with no belongings except two pieces of blanket and a loincloth. The gentleman was praising him for his renunciation. The holy man replied, "You are a man of greater renunciation than I am; because I have renounced

the ephemeral, the unreal, for the sake of the Real. But you have renounced the Real for the sake of the unreal."

An important function of the ceremony of *sannyas* is that at the time of initiation the teacher imparts to the disciple a terse formula by which the initiate tries to fix his mind on the Supreme Being. This precept is the very essence of spiritual knowledge. It furnishes the clue to the spiritual life of man. It presents in a nutshell the Vedantic view of God, the Vedantic view of man, the Vedantic view of man's approach to God, and the Vedantic view of the other religions of the world. This pithy sentence is called *mahavakya*, the great saying. The entire Vedic literature is an amplification of this supreme teaching. In each of the four Vedas there is such a saying. In the *Aitareya Upanishad*, which belongs to the *Rig-Veda*, this truth is expressed as "Consciousness is Brahman." It means that the individual consciousness, the center of the human personality, is no different from the Supreme Consciousness that manifests and sustains the universe. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, which belongs to the *Yajur Veda*, this same truth is presented in the form: "I am Brahman." Here "I" means not the physical or psychophysical "I," but the real "I," the spiritual Self that dwells in the psychophysical system, that integrates all the psychical and the physical elements into a coherent whole. The individual soul is essentially the same as the Supreme Self, the all-pervading Being.

In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, which belongs to the *Sama Veda*, this teaching is imparted as "That Thou Art." The Supreme Being, which is usually conceived as the farthest, as the most inaccessible, as that which is beyond the reach of the senses and the mind, is the very essence of the universe, the fundamental Reality underlying all transitory forms. "That" is the indwelling Self within each and every in-

dividual being. This instruction "That Thou Art" was given by the sage Uddalaka to his son Svetaketu. But the son did not understand. The Upanishad tells us that Uddalaka and Svetaketu were standing near a huge Nyagrodha tree—probably a tree of the fig family—and the father told the son to bring a fruit of this tree.

"Here is the fruit," said the son.

"Please break it," said the father.

"It is broken, sir."

"What do you find?"

"Innumerable tiny seeds."

"Please break one of the seeds."

"It is broken, sir."

"What do you see?"

"Nothing, sir."

"My child, what you do not see is the very essence which makes the tree germinate, develop, and by which it is sustained. Similarly, that subtle essence which is imperceptible to the senses, which is incomprehensible even to the mind, is the all-pervading Reality which produces, supports, and sustains the universe. That dwells within you as your innermost Self."

In the Mandukya Upanishad, which belongs to the Atharva Veda, this truth is given in another form: "This Self is Brahman." It removes completely man's misconception regarding himself and God. Man is not a physical or a psychophysical being. He knows the body, the senses, and the mind, and rules over them. As the knowing Self, he is the conscious spirit, ever pure, free, and luminous. Apparently he is mortal, but actually he is immortal; apparently he is bound, but actually he is free; apparently he is imperfect, but actually he is perfect; apparently he is human, but actually he is divine. Being falsely identified with the body, the senses, and the

mind, he ascribes to himself birth, growth, decay, death, hunger, thirst, pain, pleasure, virtue, vice, knowledge, and ignorance. The real Self, which sees through the eyes, hears through the ears, works through the hands, speaks through the mouth, knows through the mind, is not limited by the psychophysical system, but is identical with the all-pervading Supreme Being, who is self-luminous, being of the nature of Pure Consciousness. We live in Him, we move in Him, we have our being in Him; still we are unaware of Him. Just as blind people living and moving in the full splendor of sunlight cannot perceive it, similarly we fail to perceive that self-effulgent One because of our inner blindness. The moment the veil of darkness drops from our inner eye we realize That. This experience has been testified to in the life of Sri Ramakrishna in this modern age. He realized Supreme Consciousness as shining through each and every thing he saw: through the temple, through the doors, through the utensils with which the worship of the Divine Being was performed.

God is not an extra-cosmic Being far away from us. What can be nearer than the innermost Self? That which seems to be the remotest is the closest of all. That which seems to be inaccessible is already attained. That which seems to be hidden is self-manifest. Consequently, the way to God-realization is an inner approach. To reach the soul of the universe, you must reach your own soul. You contact Supreme Spirit through spirit. As Sri Ramakrishna says, "*Bodhe bodh*," that is, one communes with the Supreme Consciousness through the inner consciousness. There cannot be a more direct instruction regarding the Supreme Being than to declare Him the innermost Self of man.

This sacred formula "I am Brahman" is resolved into two factors: "I am He," "I am His." The first means that

the individual self is identical with the Supreme Self. This constitutes the direct approach to the Impersonal Absolute Being, (Nirguna Brahman). It is a very steep course and is technically called the path of knowledge. The other factor, "I am His," is the approach to the Personal God (Saguna Brahman) through the consciousness of the relationship between Him and the individual self. This is the path of devotion. It forms the basis of all the theistic religions of the world. The relationship between God and man assumes different forms in different religions. In some it is manifest particularly as the relationship between the master and the servant, in some as the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, in some as that between the parent and the child, and so forth. Thus each of these terse formulas: "Consciousness is Brahman," "I am Brahman," "That Thou Art," "This Self is Brahman" covers the entire religious life of man. It is the key to God-realization.

The same reality, Pure Consciousness, in relation to the universe, has different aspects. As the transcendent Being beyond all distinctions and differences, beyond the dualities of good and evil, of pain and pleasure, of life and death, it is Brahman. As immanent in the universe it is Paramatman, the Supreme Self. As the Ruler of the universe it is Ishwara, the Supreme Lord. As the Leader of all souls, as the Giver of Liberation, it is Bhagavan, the God of love and grace, worshiped by the devotees. The same nondual Consciousness is the indwelling Self of each and every individual. What is innermost in the universe is innermost in each and everyone of us.

All that a person has to do is to turn the mind toward the Supreme Being. The more the mind is turned toward the Supreme Being, the purer it becomes; because He is the holiest of the holy, the Light of all lights. One can turn the mind

to the Supreme Being through work, or through devotional worship, or through meditation, or through discrimination. The more the mind is purified, the more the light of the Supreme Being shines from within. By constantly dwelling on the Supreme Being, the mind, when it is completely purified, becomes tranquil and transparent and suffused with the Divine Consciousness. This is how God is realized.

Sri Ramakrishna refers to this inner approach when he says: "A man can know God if he can know himself." In trying to find your real Self you find God! And this very teaching has been given first place in the *Words of the Master*, compiled by Swami Brahmananda. "The Kingdom of God is within you," says Jesus Christ. Turn your thoughts inward, receive the light of the indwelling Spirit by whatever spiritual discipline you can practice, until you realize Him as the Soul of your soul. This is the way to freedom, this is the way to absolute peace and blessedness.

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## THE MESSAGE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

EASILY the most characteristic aspect of Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine can be summed up in the words tolerance, reconciliation, and harmony. The ideas these words represent are not, of course, new to Indian religion, which from its remote beginnings has seldom been narrowly exclusive or dogmatic; but in Sri Ramakrishna they found a comprehensive and definitive embodiment. He not only brought into agreement the diverse views of Hinduism, but also managed to include in his native faith all the faiths of the outside world. The idea of the unity of the religious sentiment could hardly be carried further.

In the ultimate reaches of Hinduism there were, to be sure, no diverse views to be reconciled. When the aspirant attained his ultimate goal, views, of whatever kind, ceased to exist. He was absorbed in Turiya, the transcendental consciousness; he had become one with God. But at lower levels, where the mind tried to determine the nature of God and the universe, differences early arose. Some said that God was personal, some that he was impersonal; some said that he was with form, some that he was without form. Sri Ramakrishna, bringing to bear his own mystic experiences, dissolved, in his simple way, all such oppositions:

Infinite is God and infinite are his expressions. He who lives continuously in the consciousness of God, and in this

alone, knows him in his true being. He knows his infinite expressions, his various aspects. He knows him as impersonal no less than as personal. . . .

Brahman, absolute existence, knowledge, and bliss, may be compared to an infinite ocean, without beginning or end. As through intense cold some portions of the water of the ocean freeze into ice, and the formless water appears as having form, so through intense love of the devotee the formless, absolute, infinite Existence manifests itself before him as having form and personality. But forms and aspects disappear before the man who reaches the highest samadhi, who attains the height of nondualistic Vedanta. . . .

So long as there is yet a little ego left, the consciousness that "I am a devotee," God is comprehended as personal, and his form is realized. This consciousness of a separate ego is a barrier that keeps one at a distance from the highest realization. The forms of Kali or of Krishna are represented as of a dark-blue color. Why? Because the devotee has not yet approached them. At a distance the water of a lake appears blue, but when you come nearer, you find it has no color. In the same way, to him who attains to the highest truth and experience, Brahman is absolute and impersonal. His real nature cannot be defined in words.

Following the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the highest vision of God can be described in the following words: He indeed has attained the supreme illumination who not only realizes the presence of God, but knows him as both personal and impersonal, who loves him intensely, talks to him, partakes of his bliss. Such an illumined soul realizes the bliss of God while he is absorbed in meditation, attaining oneness with the indivisible, impersonal Being; and he realizes the same bliss as he comes back to normal consciousness and sees this universe as a manifestation of that Being and as a divine play.

What is the relation of God to the universe? The Upanishads tell us that in the nondual unitary consciousness the universe disappears and there remains only Brahman—the absolute existence, knowledge, and bliss. Again, the universe is seen as Brahman when the divine sight opens up. In the Bhagavad-Gita we read about the illumined soul:

His heart is with Brahman,  
His eye in all things  
Sees only Brahman  
Equally present,  
Knows his own Atman  
In every creature  
And all creation  
Within that Atman.

To see God in the universe, to see Brahman in all, was considered by Sri Ramakrishna to be the highest spiritual attainment. Once when a young disciple came to him, the Master asked him what his goal of life was. When he received the reply "To see God everywhere," Sri Ramakrishna remarked, "Well, my boy, that is the last word of religion."

Sri Ramakrishna reconciled the two views of the universe, the one in which it dissolves in illusion, and the other in which it is one with God, in the following words:

In Turiya, the universe of plurality becomes annihilated—there is attained oneness with Brahman.

When, having attained the nondual Brahman in *samadhi*, one comes back to the plane of the ego, one realizes that it is Brahman who has become this universe of plurality. To get to the flesh of the fruit you discard its skin and seeds. But when you want to know the total weight of the fruit, you must weigh them all together. The skin, the seeds, the flesh—

all belong to one and the same fruit. Similarly, having realized the unchangeable reality—the one absolute Existence—one finds that he who is the absolute, formless, impersonal, infinite God is again one with the relative universe. He who is absolute in one aspect is relative in another aspect, and both aspects belong to one and the same substance. . . .

The sacred syllable Om is explained in the scriptures as a combination of the sounds A, U, M, representing creation, preservation, and dissolution respectively. I compare the sound of Om to the sound of a bell that dissolves in silence. The relative universe dissolves in the imperishable absolute—the great silence. The gross, the subtle, the causal—everything visible and invisible—dissolves in the Great Cause. Waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep, the three states of consciousness, are dissolved in the Turiya, the transcendental. Once more the bell rings. The sound Om is heard, and as it were a heavy weight falls on the bosom of the calm, infinite ocean; immediately the ocean becomes agitated. From the bosom of the absolute rises the relative; from the Great Cause issues forth the causal, the subtle, the gross universe; from the transcendental come the three states of consciousness—waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. Again the waves dissolve in the ocean, and there is the great calm. From the absolute comes the relative, and into the absolute the relative dissolves. I have experienced this infinite ocean of bliss and consciousness; and Mother has shown me how innumerable worlds issue from the ocean and go back into it. I do not know, of course, what is written in books of philosophy.

I see the truth directly: what need have I to philosophize? I see how God has become all this—he has become the individual beings and the empirical world. There is nothing but he. But this truth cannot be experienced until the heart is illumined. It is not a matter of philosophy, but of experience. Through the grace of God the light must first shine

in one's own soul. When that comes to pass, one attains samadhi. Then, though one comes back to the normal plane, one loses the material sense, one loses all attachment to lust and gold. One then loves only to hear and speak the word of God.

To reason out the truth of God is one thing, and to meditate on God is another. But again, when illumination comes through the grace of God, then only is the truth of God known and experienced. Just as a dark room is lighted up when you strike a match, so is the heart lighted up by the grace of God. Then alone are all doubts dissolved away.

The three main schools of thought in Vedanta—dualism, qualified monism, and nondualism—Sri Ramakrishna reconciled in the following manner. Quoting an ancient verse from the Hindu scriptures, he told how Rama, who was worshiped as a divine incarnation, asked his faithful devotee Hanuman how he looked upon him. Hanuman replied, "When I consider myself as a physical being, thou art the master, I am thy servant. When I consider myself as an individual being, thou art the whole, I am one of thy parts. And when I realize myself as the Atman, I am one with thee." Thus Sri Ramakrishna pointed out that dualism, qualified monism, and nondualism are not mutually exclusive and contradictory concepts, but successive steps in realization—the third and last being attained when the aspirant loses all consciousness of self in union with God.

Thus, in a way more or less peculiar to himself, through attention mainly to the mystic experience, Sri Ramakrishna harmonized conflicting notions of God and religion. But this was not his only way. Another, still more peculiar to him, might be called in current terms, pragmatic. Any idea of God, any mode of worshiping him, that *worked*—that led the

aspirant to the ultimate goal—must be valid and true. But how could one be sure that an idea or a method is really thus effective? Clearly, by trying it oneself. And that, in all simplicity and sincerity, is what Sri Ramakrishna did. First he practiced the teachings of many divergent denominations within Hinduism. Then he practiced the teachings of other faiths, including Mohammedanism and Christianity. Through each religious path he achieved the supreme realization of God.

In the end, Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the grand conclusion with which the ancient rishis of the Vedas began by declaring: "*Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*" ("Truth is one, sages call it by various names"). In Sri Ramakrishna's words: "So many religions, so many paths to reach one and the same goal."

In defining this goal Sri Ramakrishna was, of course, at one with all his spiritual ancestors. It was, simply, to realize God within one's own soul. Continuing, Sri Ramakrishna emphasized the importance of means:

Adopt adequate means for the end you seek to attain. You cannot get butter by crying yourself hoarse, saying, "There is butter in the milk." If you wish to make butter, you must turn the milk into curd, and churn it well. Then alone you can get butter. So if you long to see God, practice spiritual disciplines. What is the use of merely crying "Lord! Lord!"

To an aspirant who should ask about particular means to adopt, we can easily anticipate Sri Ramakrishna's answer. Pursue sincerely and diligently any spiritual path, he would say, and you will ultimately achieve realization.

As to what the basic paths are he accepted the Hindu be-

lief that for all religions they can be reduced to the four yogas: jnana yoga, the path of discrimination between the Real and the unreal; bhakti yoga, the path of loving devotion; karma yoga, the path of selfless work; and raja yoga, the path of concentration and meditation. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Sri Krishna advocated a harmonious combination of all the yogas. The spiritual aspirant should cultivate discrimination and devotion as well as concentration and meditation. Sri Ramakrishna stressed this again and again in his teachings. He did not want anyone to be one-sided.

To be sure, special emphasis should be placed on one or another path according to the temperament of the devotee. Sri Ramakrishna advocated emphasis on jnana yoga, however, only for an exceptional few, pointing out that if this path is followed without the necessary unfoldment of certain virtues, such as dispassion, meditation on the unity of Atman and Brahman will be misunderstood and misapplied. For most spiritual aspirants he recommended emphasis on bhakti yoga, because the path of devotion is a natural one leading to realization. Everyone has love in his heart—it merely needs to be directed towards God; and for a follower of bhakti yoga discrimination, dispassion, and all the other virtues unfold easily and naturally. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: “The more you move towards the light, the farther you will be from darkness.” He told his disciples how he himself prayed for devotion during a period of intense spiritual disciplines:

O Mother, here is sin and here is virtue; take them both and grant me pure love for thee. Here is knowledge and here is ignorance; I lay them at thy feet. Grant me pure love for thee. Here is purity and here is impurity; take them both and grant me pure love for thee. Here are good works and

here are evil works; I lay them at thy feet. Grant me pure love for thee.

But whatever path the aspirant chiefly follows, according to Sri Ramakrishna, meditation is the most important aspect of his spiritual life. Somehow or other he must keep his mind fixed on God. Meditation is performed not merely with closed eyes but with eyes open as well.

There are many ways to meditate and many forms of meditation. For the jnana yogi, for example, there is the meditation on the identity of Atman and Brahman; he tries to live in that identity. There are many means to achieve this end, the one best for a particular aspirant depending on his temperament.

For the bhakti yogi there is meditation on a chosen ideal of God, which may be with or without form. To those who preferred to meditate on God with form, Sri Ramakrishna said:

Wash away all the impurities of your mind; then let the Lord be seated within the lotus of your heart. Meditate on him as a living presence. Tie your mind to the feet of your Chosen Ideal with a silken thread, but remember not merely to think of him while you are formally meditating: keep recollectedness at other times. Don't you know that in the shrine of Mother Durga a light burns continually before the image, and the housewife sees to it that the light never goes out? Keep the light of awareness always burning within your heart. Keep your thoughts awake. While engaged in your daily activities, occasionally gaze inward and see if the light is burning.

To those who preferred to meditate on God in his formless aspect, he said:

Think of him as an infinite, shoreless ocean. You are like a fish swimming in that ocean of existence, knowledge, and bliss absolute, or like a vessel dipped in it with that Presence inside, outside, and everywhere.

Some devotees approach God by going from the aspect without form to that with form; others by going from the aspect with form to that without form. To realize that he is both with form and without form—that is best.

Two watchwords Sri Ramakrishna set before mankind were renunciation and service.

Spiritual aspirants can follow either the way of the monk or the way of the householder, but renunciation is an ideal which the two ways have in common. The monk's renunciation must be external, however, as well as mental. The householder renounces mentally.

But what, really, does renunciation mean? It is deification—which means seeing God everywhere and in everything, knowing for oneself the truth expressed in the Isha Upanishad: "In the heart of all things, of whatever there is in the universe, dwells the Lord. He alone is the reality. Wherefore, renouncing vain appearances, rejoice in him."

Sri Ramakrishna used to tell his householder disciples to live in the world in a spirit of detachment, keeping their minds on God. Gradually they would begin to realize that all objects and persons are parts of him. The aspirant, he said, must serve his parents, his wife, and his children as manifestations of God. He who lives in the world in this manner, renouncing all sense of possession, is the ideal householder. He overcomes all fear of death. But in order to reach this ideal the aspirant must occasionally go into solitude, practice contemplation, and yearn to realize God.

In connection with the ideal of service taught by Sri

Ramakrishna, I shall mention a very interesting incident from his life. One day, in a state of ecstasy, he was recalling the precepts of another great saint. One of these preached compassion for mankind. Sri Ramakrishna repeated several times the word compassion. Then he exclaimed: "Compassion! Who am I to be compassionate! Isn't everyone God? How can I be compassionate towards God? Serve him, serve him, serve him!" In this way Sri Ramakrishna elevated the ideal of philanthropy to the worship of God in every being.

He considered the attainment of liberation for oneself to be a low ideal. Swami Turiyananda, one of his disciples, used to say that nirvana was the highest state of realization and was rebuked for what his master called a "mean conception." Naren, later known as Swami Vivekananda, one day was asked by Sri Ramakrishna what his ideal was. When Naren answered that he wanted to remain immersed in samadhi and return to normal consciousness only in order to keep his body alive, Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed: "Shame on you! I thought you were greater than that!" And he taught him the twin ideal on which Vivekananda later founded the monastic Order of Ramakrishna: liberation for oneself and service to God in man.

Concerning this same Swami Vivekananda a story is told which illustrates the extraordinary means to which Sri Ramakrishna sometimes resorted in order to advance the spiritual welfare of his disciples. When young Naren first came to Sri Ramakrishna, he was a member of the Brahmo Samaj, an Indian reform movement which believed in the ideal of theism. Recognizing in his new disciple an aspirant with the capacity to follow the difficult path of jnana yoga, Sri Ramakrishna asked him to read treatises on advaita Vedanta and made him sing a song expressing the nondual conception. Naren complied with his master's wishes, but he

could not accept the doctrine of nondualism, for to him it seemed blasphemous to look on man as one with his Creator. One day he laughingly remarked to a friend: "How impossible! This vessel is God! This cup is God! Whatever we see is God! And we ourselves are God!" At this moment Sri Ramakrishna came out of his room, smiling, and touched Naren. The effect of this touch Naren described as follows:

That strange touch immediately caused a complete revolution in my mind. Wherever I looked I saw Brahman and Brahman alone. I lived in that consciousness the whole day. I returned home, and that same experience continued. When I sat down to eat I saw that the food, the plate, the server, and I myself—all were Brahman. I took one or two morsels of food and again was absorbed in that consciousness. . . . All the time, whether eating or lying down, or going to college, I had the same experience. While walking in the streets I noticed cabs plying but did not feel inclined to move out of the way. I felt that the cabs and myself were made of the same substance. . . . When this state changed a little, the world began to appear to me as a dream. While walking in Cornwallis Square I struck my head against the iron railings to see if they were real or only a dream. After several days, when I returned to the normal plane, I realized that I had had a glimpse of nondual consciousness. Since then I have never doubted the truth of nondualism.

To sum up Sri Ramakrishna's message, especially in its relation to spiritual practice, we perhaps could do no better than quote the following words of the distinguished swami to whom we have just listened:

Do not depend on doctrines, do not depend on dogmas, or religious denominations, or churches, or temples; they

count for little compared with the essence of existence in man, which is divine; and the more this divinity is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that spirituality first, acquire that, and criticize no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or organization, but that it means spiritual realization. Only those can understand who have perceived the Reality. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light.

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## **TURIYANANDA IN ALMORA AND PURI**

**SWAMI RITAJANANDA**

ALMORA is a charming spot in the Himalayas, noted for its scenic beauty and healthful atmosphere. Situated at an altitude of nearly six thousand feet, it has a cool and temperate climate. It was thought that Swami Turiyananda, suffering from diabetes and insomnia, might improve in health there and at the same time be able to continue a meditative life. This visit also resulted in Swami Turiyananda's being co-founder, with Swami Shivananda, of the Almora ashrama, the Ramakrishna Kutir. When Vivekananda and Turiyananda had gone to Almora in September, 1898, Swamiji had expressed the wish that an ashrama be established there some day. So when Swami Turiyananda returned to Almora in 1915, he remembered Swamiji's hope and felt that a retreat should be built in that mountain town in memory of his brother monk's visit.

Besides its other interesting features, Almora is an important pilgrim center in that people on the way to Kailas and Manasarovar pass through there. On the slope of the Chilkapit Road was the home of Lala Badridas, a once well-to-do devotee, who had met Vivekananda. In 1915, Badridas experienced some financial difficulties, yet he asked Swamis Shivananda and Turiyananda to occupy a big bungalow he owned. The Swamis preferred to stay in a cottage on the property, and this they did. But very soon they thought

about the ashrama undertaking and in due course bought some land. Badridas' brother, Mohanlal, gave advice and volunteered to help supervise the construction of the building. Also of help was a Dr. de Mello, a health officer in Rangoon. Originally a Christian, he had come from Goa. When he met Turiyananda, he was so impressed by the Swami's purity and spirituality that he became interested in Hinduism. De Mello gave a sum of money toward the construction of the ashrama building. Later, incidentally, he renounced the world.

Shortly after the work started, Swami Shivananda had to leave for the plains and Turiyananda had to oversee the construction. Funds, however, were collected only by Swami Shivananda, since it was impossible for Turiyananda to ask for money. But in physical work he did not spare himself. Little by little, funds were obtained, and the building was finally completed. Turiyananda was very happy and wrote to Swami Premananda: "Mohanlal [and others]—all worked very hard, and if they had not shown so much interest we could not have finished the job."

Swami Turiyananda's time was also given to correspondence during this period. He was always ready and willing to help those who sought advice in spiritual matters, and the volume of his published letters, in Bengali, contains ninety that he wrote from Almora! To read them gives an insight into his thoughts and his varied activities.

The new building was dedicated on May 22, 1916, with a ritual worship of Sri Ramakrishna. Later, Swami Turiyananda wrote to a devotee: "There was no center for our Master here. . . . A branch of the Mission was needed. By the Lord's grace it has materialized. I think many will be benefited by it." Turiyananda also observed Navaratri (the nine-day worship of Durga) that year, by reading the

Chandi and performing ritual worship on a small scale in the Kutir.

The substantial work completed at Almora was done at the expense of Turiyananda's health. Many Swamis noted this and wrote of their concern to Belur Math. Swami Premananda especially grew very worried about his brother monk. He sent a letter to Turiyananda, asking him to come to Belur Math at the end of 1916. The Swami agreed. Prajnananda, who was contemplating a visit to Calcutta at that time, went from Mayavati to Almora so as to accompany Turiyananda to Belur Math. Turiyananda and Prajnananda started on December 5, reaching Lucknow and then Banaras.

Shivananda and Premananda were in Banaras when the two Swamis arrived there. They found Turiyananda suffering from a very sore throat, dysentery, and rheumatism in the legs. Swami Premananda was shocked at his brother-disciple's pitiable condition. "Why did you come with all these troubles?" he asked. "You should have got well first!"

"How could I disobey your orders?" Turiyananda replied, smiling. "I just did what you wanted."

Despite his poor health, Swami Turiyananda continued to go about barefoot. Swami Shivananda had recently presented Premananda with a pair of Nepalese slippers made of red cloth, for indoor use; but the latter had not worn them. Because of Turiyananda's illness, Premananda asked the Swami to put them on. Turiyananda promptly lifted them up, placing them on his head.

"What are you doing?" Premananda exclaimed in surprise.

Swami Turiyananda smiled. "Brother Baburam! Your slippers should not be put on the feet; they deserve to go on the head."

Thus, although they were all equal as brother-disciples,

the Swamis always regarded each other with the greatest respect as well as love. We are told that upon reaching Banaras, Turiyananda saluted Premananda by taking the dust of his feet. Immediately the latter prostrated before Swami Turiyananda, manifesting the most reverential form of salutation. Turiyananda began to laugh and said: "None can surpass you in humility!"

On January 25, 1917, Swamis Shivananda and Turiyananda went to Mihijam and then to Jamtara, where they stayed awhile at the request of a devotee. These places are quiet and sparsely populated. Situated in a beautiful section of North India, in Bihar, the undulating country is very attractive and healthful.

Eventually Swami Turiyananda reached Belur Math, arriving there in the middle of February, 1917, around the time of Shivaratri—the annual celebration devoted to Shiva. Many Swamis and brahmacharis observe Shivaratri by fasting for the whole day and keeping vigil during the night. About fifty people undertook the fast and there was worship, the singing of devotional songs, and the chanting of hymns throughout the night. The Swami enjoyed the celebration very much and described it in letters to devotees. "If one has not seen it, one cannot imagine its grandeur," Turiyananda wrote.

The Swami's health did not improve in any way at Belur Math either, and so the devotees advised him to leave Bengal as soon as he could. He stayed on, however, until June 3, and then left for Puri, where he joined Swami Brahmananda.

Turiyananda had always had a special fondness for Maharaj, and after their reunion in Puri wrote as follows: "I cannot describe how happy I felt seeing Maharaj in fine health and free from responsibilities. He also was happy to

have me near him after such a long time." It was a period when there were many important celebrations in the Jagannath temple, and Turiyananda attended all the functions in the company of Maharaj.

But in Orissa as in Bengal, there was no end to the Swami's suffering. He started bathing daily in the sea, but he developed a swelling in one ear and had to discontinue it. Then a number of other complaints followed one after another. In spite of all this, his mind was never tainted by physical suffering.

In one of his earlier letters Turiyananda had written: "This is just the way the body is—all right today and bad the next day. After all, it can only move toward its destruction. One's body is not eternal; one day or another it has to go. So why all the fuss?" This summed up the Swami's attitude toward his body and his health.

The letters Turiyananda sent from Puri are filled with inspiring ideas, but with very little about himself. On July 7, 1917, he wrote:

... The Lord is the Inner Ruler. You have to lay bare before him your heart's aspirations. When he sees that you are sincere, he will fulfill them. There is no doubt about it. Try to keep your mind in the Lord. He will surely come to your aid, there is no question about it. When the mind becomes impure, doubts immediately make their appearance. Watch that your mind does not give room to selfishness. Surrender your mind to the Lord. Then there is no need to search for him. ...

Swami Turiyananda's frequent illnesses and the appearance of what seemed to be boils on his body caused the doctors to suspect some deeper infection. They found that his diabetic condition was leading to blood poisoning and

they diagnosed the swellings as carbuncles. They suggested surgery. To perform the operation, a doctor was sent to Puri. Swami Saradananda, Gurudas, and Dr. de Mello also went to be near Turiyananda. It was then the latter part of October.

The doctor wanted to administer chloroform before surgery. But Turiyananda refused the anesthetic and underwent the operation in full consciousness by voluntarily detaching his mind from the body.

THE RELIGIOUS MAN, whose mind is purified, has many visions and other spiritual experiences which do not come to those whose thoughts dwell on worldly matters. Sri Ramakrishna and many of his disciples, as well as mystics throughout the world, have had such experiences, which are described in their biographies. Spiritual manifestations, it should be noted, must not be analyzed too far, else guesswork and opinion lead the interpreter far afield. But they are significant in that they show the depth and intensity of the mystic's life.

The incidents that we relate here have been vouched for by reliable sources. Swami Turiyananda did not speak much of his mystic experiences during the early part of his life, but in his later years he confided some of his realizations to attendants and some intimate devotees. It would seem that the highly charged atmosphere of the holy city of Puri may have been conducive to producing the spiritual manifestations mentioned below.

One day, we are told, Turiyananda went to the Jagannath temple to worship. As he was going up the entrance steps, he suddenly saw Sri Ramakrishna, with a garland of flowers around his neck, coming down the steps toward him. Turiyananda rushed forward and prostrated. But when he

stretched out his hands to touch Sri Ramakrishna's feet, he could not see him any more. Then only did the Swami remember that the Master was no longer living in the body. Turiyananda concluded that Sri Ramakrishna, who, he believed, had been Lord Jagannath in a physical body, had graciously appeared before him in vision.

On another occasion, in the middle of the night, Turiyananda had a vision of Swamiji which indicated to him that he could not yet join Vivekananda "on the other side."

There was another experience which made a deep impression on Turiyananda. Later he referred to it often in his conversations.

It was again at night, and the Swami was in bed. It might have been two or three o'clock in the morning. Turiyananda had the feeling that someone was trying to enter his body. Immediately the one who had always previously inhabited his body got up, and a terrible fight ensued between him and the newcomer who was trying to enter without permission. After fighting for a long time, the original inhabitant defeated and ejected the stranger. Swami Turiyananda, half awake through all this, was able to watch the arrival of the intruder, the struggle, the intruder's ejection, and his flight. The Swami called his attendant and said: "Look here! He is leaving!" The attendant could not make any sense out of this remark and asked: "Sir, what is it? Who is leaving?"

Then Turiyananda told him all he had seen, adding: "This body will not be dropped this time. Through the grace of the Master, the disease, which was trying to take possession of my body, has been driven out. The body will last for some more years."

These latter two experiences convinced the Swami that the time of his departure from the world had not yet come.

In later days, when referring to the last experience, he explained that it symbolized a fight between the vital force of prana and some evil power which wanted to eject prana from the body but could not succeed. He said: "The prana did not want to go. If it had been defeated, of course it would have had to leave, and the body would have been lying dead. I stood at a great distance and watched the whole fight, amazed. When it was over, I called the attendant and said: 'I shall not die now.' At the time of death, there is a battle between the prana and an outer force. But do not imagine that they are two different forces. They are like two concentric circles, the inner one trying to break the outer one. I, as a separate object, could witness the whole fun."

One day in the Puri temple, the Swami said, he heard the Anahata—the cosmic sound Om. This sound has been described as resembling the long peal of a bell. Turiyananda added that the experience was extremely thrilling and made him feel as if he were floating on air. He realized that he had heard the sound-Brahman referred to in the scriptures.

From Puri, Turiyananda wrote many appealing letters to the devotees. In his counsel he tried to impress on them the surpassing importance of spiritual life. His correspondence was voluminous and full of religious fervor, revealing the intense faith in God and spirit of renunciation which were so characteristic of him. We shall include one of these letters in order to give a more complete picture of the Swami.

Puri, 21-7-17

My dear D. . . .

I was very glad to receive your letter. The Lord has blessed you with good intentions. Your heart is becoming purified. One can see clearly that this is happening, and I

am very glad of it. May he continue to bless you; this is my sincere prayer.

It is true that one cannot give up all desires; but if the mind becomes discriminating, desires cannot exert their previous power. You read in the Yoga Vasishtha, "If one moves about with discrimination as one's friend, one does not fall prey even to great temptations." And that is actually true. If one maintains discrimination steady and strong, no illusion can ever overpower a man. If you constantly remember that the world is unreal, what can desires do? There is no harm in fulfilling small desires, but those which make one forget the Lord are dangerous. It does not matter that you have to live in the world; if you but keep remembrance of the Lord, desires cannot lead you astray. Constantly pray to him; tell him your wishes; he will set everything right.

In the Yoga Vasishtha there is the following story. A certain brahmachari, considering himself to be a man of renunciation, gave up all material possessions, retaining only a few clothes, a meditation rug, and a waterpot. In order to make the disciple understand the meaning of real renunciation, his teacher told him: "What have you renounced? You have not renounced anything!" The disciple was surprised and thought: "I have, after all, but a few clothes, a rug, and a waterpot. Does my teacher want me to give up these few possessions also?" He built a fire and threw clothing, waterpot, and rug into the flames, one by one. Then he told his teacher: "Sir, I have now renounced everything." The teacher said: "Do you think you have renounced everything? If you mean the pieces of cloth, what are they made of? A few strands of cotton. Likewise the other items are but forms of matter. By giving them up, what renunciation have you achieved?" The disciple began to think, "What else do I have?" Yes! I have my body. All right—I shall offer up my body in the fire." He was about to throw himself on the blaze when the teacher called out: "Stop! Stop! Think a moment about what you are doing. Is the body

yours? It came into existence through your mother and father. Food made it grow. What right have you to it?" On hearing these words, the disciple suddenly saw the light. By the blessing of his teacher, he realized it is the ego that one has to get rid of. If you can give up pride, then you really renounce. Otherwise, the giving up of material objects, and even of your body, does not constitute real renunciation.

Hence remember that so-called receiving and giving up are perplexing and unreal. The only refuge is the Lord. To have constant devotion to him and to have a taste for repeating God's name—these only are real prayer.

With my best wishes,

Yours,  
Turiyananda

Such counsel would come from the Swami's inmost heart. He always spoke and wrote according to the dictates of his vast spiritual experience. Once he made the following illuminating remark concerning himself to Swami Achalananda: "Kedar Baba, do you think the Divine Mother is sleeping? No, she is ever awake here [pointing to his heart]! So what I say is not just a matter of words; it comes from my personal experience."

Swami Turiyananda's direct knowledge of God imbued his words and actions with a spiritual power and authority of which the monastics who attended on him were always aware. He kept these young men on a high level of consciousness by talking to them on religious subjects and by constantly encouraging them to read the scriptures and to meditate for substantial periods. There were occasions when he would scold them in very harsh language. These occasions provided tests to discover how much renunciation and forbearance they had developed.

Brahmacharis were given the opportunity to wait on Swami Turiyananda, as he needed care because of his ill health. Once a brahmachari, appointed to attend on Turiyananda, felt a bit reluctant to take up this work, having heard that the Swami had a short temper. Before Swami Brahmananda sent this young man to serve Turiyananda, he advised him as follows: "Serve Hari Maharaj with perfect sincerity and attention. There may be occasions when he will be displeased with you. Then you must immediately fold your hands and say: 'Sir, I made a mistake. Pardon me!'" A few days later, Turiyananda scolded this novice, who immediately followed the advice he had received from Maharaj, begging forgiveness. Swami Turiyananda, seeing his humility, was touched; his mood changed; he became tender and affectionate. Later, when the Swami found out that Maharaj's advice had dictated the young man's behavior, he was extremely pleased with his brother monk's way of training the novices.

Although Swami Turiyananda occasionally manifested bursts of anger, he was also known to show extraordinary self-control. He never found fault with anyone the moment that person himself became aware of his mistakes. This suggests that his anger was to a large extent assumed for the good of those who came in contact with him: to correct quickly and effectively a flaw of character, and to reduce egotism. Many great spiritual teachers have employed this manner of removing obstacles from the path of religious aspirants, and the devotees who understand this feel that being disciplined by holy men, though painful at the time, must be regarded as a blessing.

Once, while Swami Turiyananda was at Puri, he had some trouble with his eyes. The doctor prescribed eye-lotion. Every day a few drops of the medicine were administered.

One morning, after the drops were put in his eyes, the Swami cried out: "I think you have given me the wrong medicine. See what you have used!" The attendant was shocked: he discovered that instead of eye-drops he had used diluted nitric acid! Filled with remorse and fear, he began to tremble and cry, while someone else washed the acid out of the Swami's eyes. Turiyananda showed no annoyance or anger, saying not a single word of rebuke about the attendant's carelessness. After a little while, in order to console the brahmachari and explain to him the sadhu's ideal attitude of self-surrender, he said: "You see, as soon as you put the drops in my eyes I felt a terrible burning sensation covering my whole body. I thought, 'O Mother, what can I do if you want to take away my eyes? May your will be done!' But the eyes have been saved, without any damage. Many people are devoted to the Lord under favorable conditions, but blessed is he who even under stress and in suffering can remain on a higher plane where the mind delights in the thought of the Lord. Having dedicated himself completely to God, he has no attachment to the body."

The Swami's diabetic condition became worse, and sometimes grave symptoms appeared. At one time he was in a coma; the doctors gave up all hope. The attendants were expecting his last breath any minute when the Swami suddenly opened his eyes, looked at Amulya Maharaj, who was sitting next to him, and said: "I am not going this time."

From that moment, Swami Turiyananda's condition started to improve, and he regained much of his health. He did not discuss the matter further, for many years. But one day, at Banaras, he recalled the Puri incident, saying: "I had a very strange experience at the moment it seemed I must die. First many sages appeared to me, and also the forms of different gods and goddesses. Then suddenly I felt that my

prana was going out. At the same time, however, I saw another power rising up within, which endeavored to retain the prana. There was an actual 'tug of war' between these two powers. My vital breath was on the point of leaving the body when Swamiji appeared and said in his usual endearing manner: 'Haribhai! Where do you think you are going? Your time has not yet come.' At once some energy rose in me. It violently drew the prana back and made it take its accustomed seat within. Shortly after this I opened my eyes and I told Amulya that I was not to die this time."

Thus Swami Turiyananda's health was often in a critical state. But he never gave up his routine of religious observances. He not only went to the Jagannath temple during the daytime but sometimes paid a visit at two o'clock in the morning, regardless of his physical condition. Going to the temple was a religious duty, and his mind was so attuned that he would rarely miss a visit. One day Amulya Maharaj, who almost always accompanied him, set out for Jagannath alone. Turiyananda was sleeping at the time, and Amulya Maharaj did not want to disturb him. No sooner was he outside, however, than he heard the Swami calling: "Amulya! Are you going?" And within a few minutes Turiyananda was ready to join him.

On a special festival day Amulya Maharaj went alone three times to pay his respects to Jagannath, and was very happy about his visits to the sacred shrine. Forthwith he went to Swami Turiyananda and said: "I have been to the temple three times today. How often, sir, did you go?" The Swami, showing five fingers, answered: "Five times." Although such external observances were not necessary for a man of realization, he kept them faithfully—as if to encourage the young aspirants.

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# LETTERS OF SWAMI TURIYANANDA

TRANSLATED BY  
SWAMI PAVITRANANDA

EDITED BY  
HENRY JAMES FORMAN

## *SELF-EFFORT*

126. I see that men are generally very selfish. They ask that everything be done for them; they are loath to exert themselves. Especially with regard to spiritual matters everyone wishes to get the result immediately, but who is ready to work for it? People never stop to think that behind them many evils from past lives have accumulated which, like a veil, cover the knowledge of the Self. If these evils can be removed by hard labor, then knowledge or devotion awakens.

127. Are you engaged in regular work, or do you simply while away your time? Don't live an aimless life. God has given you many, many opportunities; don't neglect to take advantage of them. You are intelligent enough to understand, so what more shall I say?

128. He is constantly with us. We don't have to go anywhere to seek Him. "By searching for Him, He is not attained. Only he realizes Him to whom He reveals Himself."

In a moment's seeking He comes and appears before us. But who really wants Him? We say we do, but we are just playing with words. Only when we are sincere and long for Him with our inmost being shall we succeed. He dwells in our hearts. We read this in the scriptures, but we don't really believe it. The Gita says: "I reside in the heart of every creature." "A fraction of My Eternal Existence has become all living beings." These statements are true, but we don't accept them. What is the reason? We only read these things. We have no faith; nor do we exert ourselves. That is the cause of our troubles. The Master used to say, "The guru, the Lord, and the scriptures are propitious, but for the grace of one a man may be ruined. What is that one? It is the grace of his own mind." Even if everything else is favorable, one must apply oneself. "You are your own friend, you are your own enemy." "He who has not conquered himself is his own enemy." As long as a man doesn't exert himself, outside help is of little avail. You are concerned about your spiritual welfare. The Lord will surely help you. Increase your spiritual thirst. May the Lord fulfill your desire for him—this is my prayer.

**129.** Perhaps your mind doesn't remain in a good state because your health is poor. Mind and health are closely related. But that should not keep you from constantly trying to think of the Lord. Nothing but recollectedness of him will be of benefit to you. The Gita says: "Raise yourself by yourself. Don't yield to depression. You are your own friend; you are your own enemy."

**130.** Banaras does not appeal to you, so you are thinking of going somewhere else. Where will you go? Restlessness is the very nature of the mind. Your mind won't become calm

simply because you go to another place. You must become quiet within, you must rise above circumstances. If you are a slave to circumstances, wherever you may go they will follow you. But if you can rise above them they won't be able to create any more trouble.

**131.** I am very happy to learn that you are now feeling more peaceful. I wrote to you as I did so that you would be compelled to think for yourself. Unless one thinks for oneself, nothing makes a deep impression on the mind. It is good that my plan has succeeded; you had to reason out before you could understand the meaning of my letter. I could have written more simply, but I deliberately tried to make you more independent. That has been achieved. In future you will first try to solve any question by yourself before you refer it to me.

**132.** Worship of the Divine Mother will bring nothing but good. When she installs herself in our hearts we become free from all troubles. It is very difficult to achieve anything by one's personal efforts alone. But how will her grace come if you don't offer your heart and mind to her? Once you have realized her, the world and worldly objects cannot harm you. Then even in the world you will see nothing but her presence. You will clearly perceive, "Thou art action, Thou art righteousness, Thou art also unrighteousness." You will realize perfectly that she is everything, that nothing exists but she. All troubles will disappear.

Always pray to the Mother and remember her in the midst of all your activities and daily duties. Practice with diligence. Later you will find that everything has become very easy. Whether your health is good or bad, never cease remembering her. You should say, "Let the body suffer the

body's ailments, but you, O my mind, remain in the bliss of the Divine." Only by practicing these things will one get results.

### *STRENGTH*

**133.** Don't consider yourself weak. You may be weak, but the One you have taken refuge in is all-powerful. Therefore, deem yourself strong in His strength. When the conviction dawns on a person that God is the only refuge, he feels a rush of supreme strength in his heart.

**134.** Don't yield to despair. Instead, try to cultivate the attitude: "I am repeating the name of the Lord; why should I be afraid? Through his grace all difficulties will vanish." Clap your hands and say, "Glory to the Divine Mother!" and engage yourself in thinking of her. Thus will you become strong. If you lie down, the tendency will be to continue lying down. But if by sheer will power you jump out of bed, you won't want to stay in bed any more. . . . One should have great enthusiasm. The Master didn't like a faint-hearted spirit. He encouraged the attitude of going out to storm a citadel, as it were. Swami Vivekananda therefore has freely preached, "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached!"

**135.** Why did you write the way you did? Why should you consider yourself so worthless? You have so much devotion in your heart; you are fortunate, and far superior to many. One should not think so disparagingly of oneself! Know that you have the Lord's protection and consider him as your very own—thus you will make progress. The Mas-

ter used to say that if one thinks of oneself as good-for-nothing, good-for-nothing one becomes. Swami Vivekananda would speak in the same vein and forbid one to think lowly of oneself. The Master taught us to think that we belonged to him. Try intensely to offer your body and mind to the Lord, and you will find that great results will follow.

**136.** Why are you fearful? "I eat, drink, and make merry; for the Mother has taken all my responsibilities on herself."

"Without God's will not even a leaf falls from a tree"—this is very true. We may or may not understand these realizations of the saints, but that will not alter the facts.

**137.** Our Master could not bear the word *sin*. He told people not to consider themselves sinners, and taught them to think, "I am taking the name of God, why should I worry? Of whom shall a child of the Mother of the Universe be afraid?"

You have made a very important point: "If She wishes, in an instant She can dissolve everything and create anew." She not only can, She has done it and is doing it. . . . This is not the fancy of a madman; this is the truth. There is no "what" or "why" with Her. She is beyond all "whys." She, the Wish-fulfilling Tree of the devotees, is our past, present, and future. Why should we accept anything but Herself as our future?

"I am the Self within the heart of every being. I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all." These words of the Lord in the Gita are our support, shelter, and only hope. So why should we not say: "Thou art all good, O Lord. Every moment we find proof of it. Give us joy, give us sorrow—whatever you please. But Thou art all good. Whatever Thou mayest do, Thou wilt not forsake us—that we know. Come,

Lord, come, reveal Thyself within our hearts; and surely all will be well."

**138.** "Uncle Moon is everyone's uncle," as the saying goes. Is there any doubt of this? Why should you consider yourself weak? You are a child of the Divine Mother, and as such have inherited infinite power. "Of whom will he be afraid who has as his mother the Divine Mother of the Universe?" How can a child of the Divine Mother lack strength? Through her grace, infinite power is at your call. The Master used to say, "She is no stepmother; she is the real mother." "The Divine Mother is everywhere. Gaya, Banaras, and the Ganges lie at her feet." "Thou art the Divine Power—infinite in strength. Thou art the First Cause, and Thou representest cosmic delusion. All are deluded by Thee, and only when it pleases Thee one becomes free."

You are the Mother's son. You have infinite power. With her grace, nothing is impossible for you. It won't take any time for your ego-sense to vanish. If she pleases, she can give you divine realization in an instant—and she will give it.

**139.** I am happy and sad on reading your letter. Happy, because I find you have so much dispassion for worldly pleasures and are so earnest in fulfilling your duties. Sad, because I find you are so depressed and in despair for no valid reason. Conceit is not desirable, but neither is it good always to be saying, "My life is a failure; nothing has been achieved," and so on. The Master disapproved of egotism, but neither could he bear self-pity and self-abasement. He would advise us to assert our relationship with God, to call up courage by repeating, "I am his child; what can happen to me? Through the Lord's grace I shall easily get my liberation." We find the same idea expressed in the songs of Ramprasad, as for in-

stance in this one: "Whom shall he fear who has the Divine Power as his Mother?"

Ramprasad would not even hesitate to quarrel with the Divine Mother. In songs like "I shall no longer call Her Mother," he behaves like a petulant child. Our Master also emphasized this idea. Therefore you should give up your attitude of dejection. You are not insignificant! Although you are engaged in so many activities, you make time for spiritual pursuits, devoting all your leisure hours to that purpose. You need not distinguish between noon and evening. All time belongs to the Lord, all of life is his. Besides, one should have the faith that if one prays to him wholeheartedly, even for a moment, one's life will be pure and blessed and all one's imperfections will disappear.

It is very true that one can't enter the realm of spiritual life if one hasn't developed devotion to God and to the guru. But whether we believe it or not, God dwells in our hearts. If you don't find him in your heart, you won't find him anywhere. God is also the guru. "My teacher is the Teacher of the universe; my master is the Master of the universe," says the scripture. If this weren't true, what would be the use of God or teacher? The Divine Teacher is always in one's heart. If he were not, how could we live? Whose grace is it that keeps us alive? He befriends one and all. He who seeks him can see him.

A domestic cat becomes a powerful wildcat when it goes into the forest. These eyes, hands, and skin become transformed when one realizes Him. There is no need to acquire more learning. Words are important only because He is the origin, middle, and end of all words. They have value because they try to express Him. "All saints speak the same truth just as all jackals cry in the same way," the Master used to say.

“Those who have conquered attachment, know God, and always remember him, will have their imperfections washed away through meditation; and they will not be born again.”

We are under the protection of His feet. Whom shall we worship but Him? He is “the breath of our breath, the eye of our eyes.” We may or may not know it, but there is not the least doubt that He is our all-in-all. Therefore my prayer is that we may dedicate mind and heart completely to Him and abide in Him. May we see Him everywhere and in everything!

### *PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE*

140. There will always be happiness and misery. Have you ever seen anyone completely free from them? It can't be. The world is full of conflict. One escapes conflict only by worshipping the Supreme Self. This doesn't mean that one won't have to face pleasure and pain, but through the Lord's grace one won't be upset by them. Therefore the Lord said in the Gita, “Bear them.” Observe, he didn't say that pleasure and pain won't exist. On the contrary, he said that they are bound to appear when the senses come into contact with sense objects. But these dualities of life aren't everlasting. They come and they go. Therefore bear them. If there had been any method to cope with happiness and misery other than to accept them, the Lord would surely have taught it to his very dear disciple and devotee, Arjuna.

Sri Ramakrishna also said, “Bear, bear, and bear”—as if he were pleading that there was no other way. Again he said, “He who endures, lives. He who doesn't endure is destroyed.” Therefore we must endure.

Troubles and difficulties will certainly come, but what good will it do to grieve over them? If one can bear them,

one will be freed from misery. The great saint Tulsidas said, "Every embodied being has to suffer. But a wise man accepts suffering in his mature wisdom, whereas the foolish man groans and weeps over it." That is to say, all, without any distinction between the wise and the ignorant, have to suffer because they are embodied beings. The only difference is that the wise man faces his problems calmly because he knows that they are inevitable, whereas the ignorant man makes himself miserable by constantly complaining and weeping.

Always remember the words of the Master, "Let the body endure its ailments, but you, O my mind, engage yourself in the thought of God and thus enjoy bliss." This attitude will save you from being overwhelmed by suffering.

**141.** Some difficulties pertain to every place, thing, or person. The Gita says, "Every undertaking is involved in imperfections just as fire is involved in smoke." Therefore the Lord says, "Don't give up the duties to which you are born, although you may be performing them imperfectly." He also says, "Remember Me always with a steady mind." Then only will all troubles end.

The state of continual God-consciousness has to be acquired through constant practice. Patanjali says, "One becomes established in God-consciousness when practice has been cultivated for a long time, uninterruptedly, with faith and devotion." Success doesn't come immediately. Steadfastness in practice is the secret. One should try to keep one's mind in God. When this practice becomes second nature, one is freed from all troubles. Then one sees the presence of the Lord within and without, and consequently is unmoved by changing circumstances. It is not that difficulties won't arise. They will; but, like passing shadows, they won't harm you.

**142.** You are doing well. Continue this way. "If no one else goes with you, never mind, go alone!" Remember this saying of Swami Vivekananda's. To whom else should you look for help? The Master used to say, "I am, and the Mother is. That is all." Whom else should you want? The most important thing is perseverance. If you persevere, slowly opportunities will open up. Continue to depend only on the Lord; you will be surprised at the result that will follow.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "If you see an artificial fruit, you are reminded of the real fruit." In the same way, if you see a photograph of the Lord, you are reminded of him. Considering him directly present in the photograph, know him to be real and serve him. He will fill you with inspiration.

Just make up your mind and engage yourself in this work. Let others go wherever they please; you, for your part, remain in your place—you alone with your Lord. Flood your mind completely with thoughts of him. What can you gain by wandering about? Days are passing by, never to return. Don't forget your real task: Make the Lord your own! Then everything will follow automatically.

Keep those (devoted to the Master) with you who will come to practice spiritual disciplines. They will live on alms in their own way. What inconvenience can they cause you? It is rightly said that in the beginning of religious life one needs a place where one can devote oneself to spiritual exercises. . . . It may happen that so many persons will come that it will be hard to accommodate them all. Every undertaking passes through different stages. Great patience is needed. If one perseveres, then, after a while, everything becomes favorable. One can't accomplish anything without patience. Impatience is the only reason for failure. With patience, success is bound to come.

I am not sure whether I shall go there now, but that doesn't mean that I have no sympathy. I have the greatest sympathy. Without the least anxiety, be up and doing in your spiritual practices. If anything is said to you, just listen: but don't deviate in the slightest from your chosen path. You will succeed, I am confident of it. Glory to the Lord! Gird your loins and plunge into the task.

**143.** Why do you think so much about results? Go on working. Even a man in the world pays the person who has done some work for him. Is it possible that the Lord won't give anything? Do your duties. What good will it do always to complain that "nothing has been achieved" or "no result is visible." Will that benefit you in any way? On the other hand, if you continue to perform your work in silence, the result is sure to come. Ramprasad has sung:

Do your work with the steadfastness  
Of a hereditary farmer.  
Do your work with the utmost devotion;  
Then you will reap a golden harvest.

What more need I say? One should know how to wait patiently. Does a seed bear fruit as soon as it has been sown? Have patience; protect the seed—watering the ground, weeding out intruding plants, guarding against birds and insects, keeping off cattle by raising a fence. So much has to be done before one can expect to have any harvest!

**144.** I am very glad to see your enthusiasm and earnestness. This is very laudable. Thus one progresses in spiritual life. On the other hand, discouragement and despair make one more and more depressed. If one takes refuge in the Lord,

one has no cause for worry or fear—for the Lord will help, and draw one to himself more and more.

There are bound to be ups and downs in one's state of mind. At one time one finds great joy in spiritual practices; the mind goes spontaneously toward God. At another time one finds joy in nothing; the mind doesn't feel inclined to do spiritual practices, and the heart is overcast with great gloom. He who in either condition perseveres in his religious disciplines will gradually transcend these states and experience one continuous current of joy. Then his mind will go spontaneously toward God, and he will be undisturbed by the fluctuations of his mental condition. Such a person never neglects his worship, and he finds great bliss within his heart.

### *HUMILITY*

145. If conceit is to increase, it increases even without any reason. Don't you find that even a person who has nothing to be proud of doesn't hesitate to be proud?

146. Let me quote a line from Longfellow: "Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!" If you want happiness in life, always keep this invaluable advice in mind. You are still young, and you will have to learn many things through experience. Never consider that you know enough and have nothing to learn from those who are your well-wishers, and who disinterestedly think about your good.

### *UNSELFISHNESS*

147. Expand yourself! Don't confine your interest to a single human being. Don't think only of your own welfare. There has been enough of that. Now think of the good of

others—that will bring better results. Can anyone manufacture an ideal character for himself? Character builds up unconsciously; the Divine Mother builds it up.

148. Only through love and genuine sympathy can a person's character be reformed. You may be certain that scholarship and cleverness don't help much in this respect. If you really feel for others, and if your life is pure, unsullied, and selfless, the Divine Mother will perform miracles through you. Otherwise, however sage and high-sounding your words may be, they won't have the slightest effect.

149. "For the liberation of oneself and for the welfare of humanity"—let this message of Swami Vivekananda's be fruitful. I am so glad to know that you are now very happy, and firm in determination. This is what is needed. To dedicate one's life to some noble ideal—what could be better than this? "When death is certain, sacrifice yourself to some good cause"—should this precept merely be read? Shouldn't it be practiced? If you, who know so much, don't practice this teaching, all your book learning will be useless. Don't allow weakness to come near you.

150. What is the matter with you? Why are you weeping so much? What has happened? Why do you want to sleep so much? The scriptures say, "Who sleeps in happiness? He who has attained the superconscious state." "Real repose is in the experience of samadhi." How can you rest if you think so much in terms of "me" and "mine"? Let the mind run as it will. Eventually it will get tired, and then rest.

It is best to pay no heed to the vagaries of the mind. How do you know whether you are unworthy? Why should you be so busy about yourself? There are many people here who are

spiritually very thirsty. If you agree to come, I will make arrangements. What silly nonsense this is, thinking only of yourself! It is no joke. There are many things to be accomplished in this country. When a man doesn't keep himself busy, all his thoughts concentrate on himself and all his brooding doesn't help him in the least. How long will you go on worrying about yourself? Enough of that! Now think a little about others.

**151.** . . . One can't kill one's egotism by merely sitting idle. The road to self-effacement is only through work. . . . If you want to refine sugar, you have to remove a large quantity of scum. If you want to purify the mind, you have to get rid of the craving for the fruits of action. This is not achieved by drawing in one's hands and feet like a tortoise. "I won't work because work may cause pride"—such an attitude results from sheer selfishness. The mind is steeped in inertia. It should be made active through work. Then gradually one grows in spirituality, and one's egoism is driven out.

He who has no sense of ego is not the doer, though he may be engaged in work. He who harbors a feeling of pride will be very proud even when he is idle. And he who is humble and serene doesn't feel that he is doing anything, though he does many things.

### *SELF-SURRENDER*

**152.** Self-surrender is the practice of feeling happy in the thought that wherever God places you, under whatever circumstances, it is for your good; it means merging one's will in the will of God, and remaining unmoved by good or evil, gain or loss. What else can self-surrender be? Real resignation comes only when one attains liberation. Real resigna-

tion to God means, in fact, liberation. Until then one should follow the "yoga of continual practice."

153. Only the Lord knows what his will is. His will is beyond the reach of the human intellect. But what we understand from the scriptures and the great saints is this: The Lord is all good. He brings out the good even in what seems terrible and incongruous to us. If one has firm faith in this idea, one will have peace; otherwise one will experience great unhappiness and inevitable suffering. "He who knows Me as the end of all sacrificial offerings and spiritual practices, as the Lord of the Universe and the Friend of all beings—he attains peace." [Gita]

154. God is extremely compassionate. If we take a single step toward him, he comes a hundred steps, a thousand steps, toward us. This is really true. But we should try to experience it; it can't be conveyed in words. If a person can say with all his heart, mind and soul, with all the earnestness of his being, "Lord, I take refuge in Thee; there is no one else to help me," the Lord will surely accept him. One should say, one should realize:

Thou art my Mother and Father;  
Friend and Companion art Thou;  
Thou art my wealth and treasure;  
Thou art my all-in-all, O Lord.

Can the Lord help accepting a person who prays like this? But who prays this way, and who thinks this way? That is the question. It was for this reason that Sri Chaitanya said:

So vast is Thy mercy, O Lord!  
How huge, then, is my wretchedness

Who find, in this empty life and heart,  
No devotion to Thy Name!

155. I quite understand that you feel sad and unhappy because you can't fully practice the teaching: "Seek the supreme goal by cutting through the tough root of worldliness with the sword of discrimination." We learn from the songs of great souls like Ramprasad and Kamalakanta that in past ages many devotees felt like this. But it is also true that they said repeatedly, "Wherever the Divine Mother keeps you, it is for your good."

The Master used to sing:

In whatever state Thou keepest me,  
O Mother, it is for my own good,  
Provided I do not forget Thee.  
It makes no difference to me  
Whether ashes are my only clothes  
Or whether I am rolling in wealth;  
Whether I'm living under a tree  
Or sitting on a royal throne.

And he would say: "The cat keeps her kitten sometimes in dirt and ashes, sometimes on soft cushions, but the kitten always mews for its mother." Further he would say, "The mother cat knows what is best for the kitten."

Whatever God does is for our good. A true devotee doesn't ask anything for himself. He doesn't pray for any kind of spiritual realization. On the contrary, he prays only for the privilege of serving the Lord. You know this very well.

156. Where the Lord will lead me, he only knows. Where-

ever he may lead me, may I always have devotion to his blessed feet—that is my earnest prayer. Whatever the Lord wills, happens; and it is for our good. There is not the slightest doubt about it. But the difficulty is that we have no patience and we don't want to understand. Indeed, there is no better way to peace, if we will only believe it! Whatever the Lord does is truly for our good—without this conviction one can have no peace. Happiness, unhappiness, disease, and bereavement—these things are inevitable as long as one lives in the body. But it isn't desirable to feel that what gives one happiness is good and what gives one pain is bad. This is great selfishness. May the Lord keep us undisturbed under all conditions—in happiness and misery, in disease and death! May we have right understanding in any situation! That is my sincere prayer. . . .

What kind of a monk are you? Why do you worry about your body? It is the nature of the body to grow, decline, and, one day, to fall away. But in this body there dwells One who neither grows old nor decays; you should concentrate your mind on Him.

You have dedicated yourself to the Lord; therefore all responsibility is now his. He will get everything done through you. Make yourself an instrument in his hand; follow his lead—you will be saved from all worries and anxieties. He who has taken refuge in the Lord is free from all fear.

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## ON THE VALUE OF PILGRIMAGES

BRAHMACHARI PREMA CHAITANYA

IN AUGUST, 1961, a new book was published entitled *A Yankee and the Swamis*. I am its author. Finally holding the neatly printed volume in my hand, leafing through its pages and seeing in black type the familiar sentences, I have much to think about. I am encouraged to reflect upon all the work that went into the book and upon the religious journey which inspired it. I am motivated, too, to dwell upon the value of pilgrimages to spiritual aspirants.

*A Yankee and the Swamis* grew out of a trip I made in 1952-53 to India. Several years earlier I had left the "world" to come to the Hollywood branch of the Ramakrishna Order as a monastic probationer. Now I felt I should see the country of Vedanta's origin. Since life in the Hollywood ashrama was an extension of the practices of the Ramakrishna Order of India, I reasoned that it should be useful to go to India and see the organization on its home grounds. Before adjusting my life forever to a strange new career, it might be wise to see fully what I was getting into. I hoped also, through visiting places associated with the life of Sri Ramakrishna, to draw near the Order's nineteenth-century founder.

Traveling five thousand miles in India, I stopped at thirty-eight of the Order's centers. I went to places associated with the life of Sri Ramakrishna and the first apostles of the Ramakrishna movement. I sought out the major holy places of the country, entering the most famous and most closely

guarded shrines of Hinduism as a worshiper. I attempted to live as an Indian monastic.

An idea of where I went can be gained from the map on the next pages. I visited most of the places whose names appear on it. I passed considerable time in West Bengal. The Order's headquarters are near Calcutta, and Ramakrishna's life was spent in this area and at his homestead in the country some seventy miles to the northwest. I also went to the south—to the Madras area—and across to the Arabian Sea; thence to the north, through Benares, Brindaban, Delhi, and into the Himalayas.

Upon my return to California I began to set down impressions of the journey for publication in the Hollywood center's magazine *Vedanta and the West*. Altogether, perhaps two-thirds of the material comprising *A Yankee and the Swamis* was published originally therein in serialized form. These articles contained some imperfections in fact and emphasis. Readers of *Vedanta and the West* proved to be generous with their criticisms, so that it was possible to make corrections when refashioning the material into the book. Also for the book an entire new chapter, some sections of other chapters, and many illustrations were added.

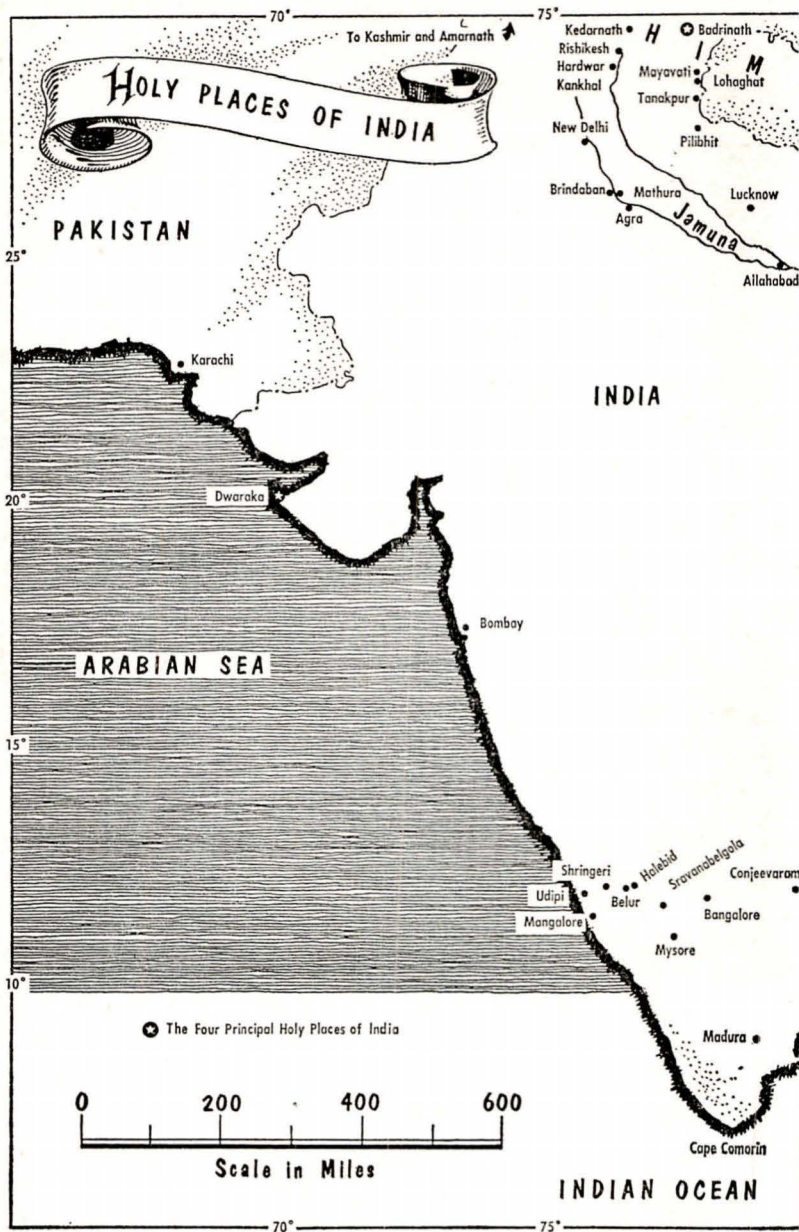
There are numerous "I's" in the articles, which remain in *A Yankee and the Swamis*. I have always felt, and feel, uneasy about this. But I do not know how this usage could have been avoided. I could think of no other way to tell what I had to say except in terms of personal experiences. My purpose was to describe candidly to the alert Westerner the things he would like to know about the home base of an important and growing new religious movement. He would want to see it inside and out—its heroes, its present personalities, its problems and hopes and accomplishments. It seemed that this could be done best by placing before the

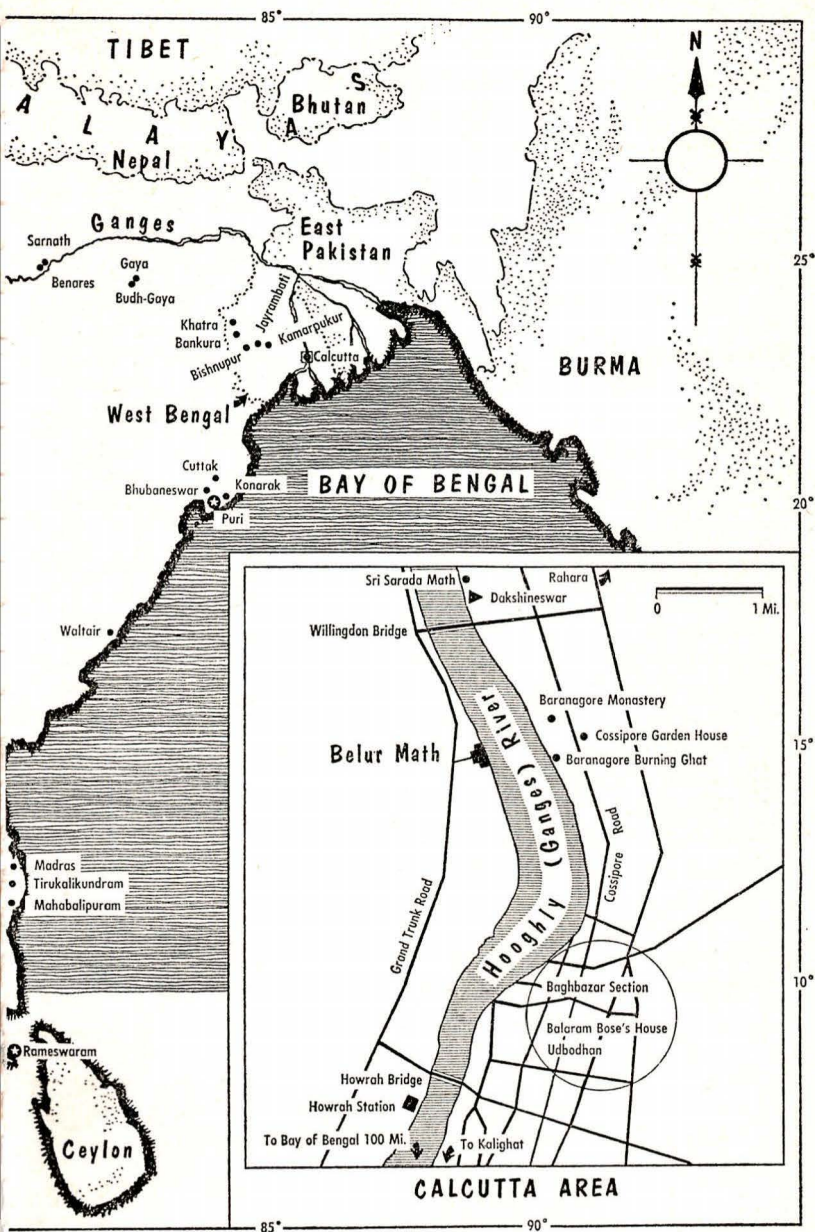
reader an informant with whom he could identify, through whose eyes he could see and through whose emotional system he could feel.

AS I HAVE SAID, my particular journey and the publication now of *A Yankee and the Swamis* motivate me to reflect upon the religious pilgrimage and its value. My questions about the Order and my possible future in it were answered to my satisfaction. But what did this experience do for me as an aspirant; and how can this kind of effort help other devotees who might attempt it?

There is, of course, nothing peculiar to Vedanta in going on pilgrimages. People of all faiths find such journeys helpful and always have. Chaucer's fourteenth-century *Canterbury Tales* concern themselves with a group of English pilgrims on their way to a shrine. Touring the Holy Land, still popular, at various times during the past thousand years has gained the attention almost of a craze. Streams of pilgrims in Mexico daily make their way to Our Lady's church at Guadalupe. In Italy thousands go every year to St. Francis' Assisi. To the Muslim it is highly satisfying to make his way across Arabia, to stand before the black stone of Kaaba in the great mosque at Mecca. Devotees from all the lands and islands of the Far East aspire to reach the shrines of Buddhism's founder at Budh-Gaya and Sarnath in central India and at Kandy in Ceylon.

The first value of the religious pilgrimage is that it assists one in helping to establish a living relationship with God. What is the religious aspirant doing—what is the purpose of contemplation—but this: to get to know, to become intimately acquainted with, the Divine in one of his manifestations? The main technique of meditation consists in





learning to visualize him vividly and steadily. The pilgrimage, through supplying mental pictures, helps with this. Suppose I worship Buddha. I go to Budh-Gaya. As I stand beneath the Bodhi Tree I know I am where he once was. Looking at the scene with my own eyes, I can then fit Buddha into it. Forever afterwards I can easily bring the place and person back to my mind. I go to Dakshineswar, to Ramakrishna's room. The couch on which Ramakrishna sat when speaking forth his revelation is still there. Whenever in the future I read Ramakrishna's Gospel or try to pray to Ramakrishna, I can recall that room easily and see Ramakrishna occupying that couch. As a result of the religious pilgrimage thought and memory, usually so distracting, usually so limiting, can be modified to serve a spiritual purpose.

This occurs at the mental, rational level. In addition, something deeper transpires. The Indian word is darshan—getting good vibrations by being in the presence of good vibrations provided by a holy personality. What happens can perhaps be compared to becoming magnetized. A holy place is like a powerful magnetic field; an aspirant is like susceptible material. As he enters the field he becomes magnetized. The disposition of his molecules shifts. The composition of that bundle of habits known as character is modified. There is a chemical alteration in the personality. A recipient of darshan can never thereafter be quite the same.

THESE are two values of the religious pilgrimage. At least, such are two effects mine had on me. I believe most pilgrims would testify to something similar.

But there was another outcome, of a less personal nature. I dare hope in the book which resulted from my Indian pilgrimage to have made a souvenir which will add something

to the contemporary knowledge of an important work and trend. Suppose someone present in the area of the Mediterranean in A.D. 100 had noted down impressions concerning the disciples of the disciples of Christ—what they were like, their memories of the old times, the concerns that moved them. Such information would now be invaluable. My position is that these are comparable times and that I have met and written in *A Yankee and the Swamis* of equally significant men. Do I grant them too much, and in doing so, do I aim too high? In all realism, I think not. Anything we may know about these early days of the Ramakrishna Order and movement is presently of interest and potentially of extreme importance.

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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

SWAMI SATPRAKASHANANDA, head of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, is one of nine Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order in whose presence five women monastics of the Vedanta Society of Southern California took their final vows of renunciation according to ancient Hindu rites on August 26, 1959. Four days after this private ceremony took place, the Swamis spoke to a public audience on various aspects of the spiritual life in the Society's temple at Santa Barbara. Swami Satprakashananda's lecture is printed in the present issue, beginning on page 7.

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA's volume on the philosophy and religion of India, written with the assistance of Frederick Manchester, was in press at George Allen & Unwin's of London, in July, 1961. The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna quoted in the September-October number of *Vedanta and the West* from a chapter of the Swami's book were newly translated for this history from the Bengali *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, recorded by M., and *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, by Swami Saradananda.

SWAMI RITAJANANDA is assistant minister at the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

SWAMI PAVITRANANDA, head of the Vedanta Society of New York, is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Ramakrishna Order. His translation of the published Bengali

correspondence addressed by Swami Turiyananda to lay and monastic devotees is being serialized in this magazine. The eleventh installment begins on page 38.

BRAHMACHARI PREMA CHAITANYA's book, *A Yankee and the Swamis*, was published by Allen & Unwin and Vedanta Press. The map of Indian places of pilgrimage was drawn for the book by John Markovich.

be; and, second, that the only workable way to make other people "do better" is to regard them as the good people they too are aspiring to become.

The principal characteristic of an ignorant man is that he does not know he is ignorant. He thinks he is wise. This is why ignorance can be so dangerous. It is his false assurance that gives him power to act. Action—even good action—stems from blindness and lack. So we may be sure that the world's great doers are also the world's great fools. The doings of "men of action" are what make the world go on, remaining the messy affair it is and always has been.

But once you become an aspirant you grow provisional. Aware of your own struggles to meet the standard of excellence you would attain, you in turn become slow to condemn others, and certainly to manipulate people and events. "Who am I to criticize or reform anybody?" becomes your attitude.

And this provisional viewpoint applies to others, in an opposite way. One is less quick to evaluate them negatively. "In the eye of the lover there is no ugliness." You forbear; you withhold judgment; you try to understand and indeed admire. This is a kind of love, and it is amazing how practicing it toward other people helps them to become what you would have them be. They start to grow "beautiful" just for you.

As you follow these two attitudes—humility toward yourself and positive acceptance of others—a double result occurs: you become better than you think you are; and you make others better, too. You rise by evaluating yourself too modestly, and others are lifted up by being evaluated perhaps too highly.

"If love is right, everything is right." And that right love is to love myself a good deal less and my neighbor a good deal more.

# 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.*

## STUDENT'S NOTEBOOK

No. 18

At one stage of my life I was a business executive. On the anniversary of his hiring, I used to give a yearly "personnel evaluation interview" to each employee. Throughout the previous twelve months I had accumulated impressions concerning the worker's strong and weak points. On the occasion of the annual conference I would inform him of these judgments, listing his weaknesses in specific detail and urging him to correct them during the coming period.

Now, having been a spiritual aspirant for some time, I look back on these activities of mine in disbelief. How could I have been so sure? What enormous insolence! I feel now as though I would be hesitant about even trying to manage a dog or cat. And does pointing out another's faults ever result in his correcting them?

For my years of discipline have taught me, first, that I am less perfect than I should like to

*Concluded on page 64*