

The
Eternal Companion

BRAHMANANDA

RECORDS OF HIS TEACHING

with a biography by

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA



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INTRODUCTION

TO WRITE the biography of an illumined soul is very difficult, if not impossible; for his is pre eminently an inner life. True, he may engage in certain external activities; he may achieve the kind of success which impresses the outer world, but all these activities and achievements—including, even, his spoken and written teachings—will fall far short of, and fail to express the real man.

An ordinary professor or scholar teaches out of his accumulated learning. Such a man's scholarship is far greater than the man himself. That is to say, he may teach the loftiest truths, theoretically, without having made them a part of his own life and experience. A man of spiritual wisdom also teaches these truths, not theoretically, but out of his own experience. Nevertheless, the expression of these truths in words cannot possibly correspond to the vastness of his inner knowledge, which is inexpressible because it is transcendental. We know a man with our mind and senses, but our mind and senses cannot reveal to us the nature of an illumined soul. In order to be able fully to understand such a soul, a man must himself be illumined.

When you go into the presence of one of these

great beings, something very wonderful happens. His mere presence gives you, as it were, a super sense which enables you to recognize the greatness which is in him Maharaj (as Swami Brahmananda was called) used to give us that supersense when ever we were with him. Our minds were lifted up and caught glimpses of his inner nature; but these glimpses were only partial. We were aware that the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who were themselves illumined souls, could see more in Maharaj than we, his disciples, ever saw. Swami Ramakrishnananda, founder and head of the Ramakrishna Monastery in Madras, once introduced Maharaj to his disciples there, saying "None of you have seen Sri Ramakrishna himself, but now you see Maharaj, and that is the same thing." On another occasion a devotee brought fruit which he wanted to offer to Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine. Swami Ramakrishnananda told him to offer it to Maharaj, and said "To offer this fruit to Maharaj is as good as offering it to Sri Ramakrishna."

One day I hesitated to accept something that Maharaj told me. Swami Shivananda was present at the time, and he agreed with Maharaj immediately. I did not like this. Later I talked to Swami Shivananda alone and more or less accused him of being a 'yes-man' to Maharaj. Swami Shivananda laughed and said "My boy, you see in Maharaj only Maharaj but we see the external form of Maharaj with

nothing inside it but God Whatever Maharaj tells you comes directly from God”

It should be remembered that this statement was not made by a mere ignorant enthusiast, but by one who was himself an illumined soul Its truth was not clear to me at the time, but later I began to understand and believe it, because of a talk which I had with Maharaj himself One day he asked me to look at the almanac and find an auspicious date for his departure from Madras As I did so, I could not help smiling Maharaj noticed this and asked me why I was amused I replied “Well, Maharaj, you always go through this routine whenever you plan to go anywhere, but then you suddenly make up your mind to leave on some other day”

At this Maharaj said ‘Do you think I do anything according to my own will? The devotees insist upon fixing some date for my going, so to avoid constant pestering I fix a tentative date But I do not move, or do anything until I know the will of the Lord”

“Do you mean to say,” I asked, ‘that you are always guided by the will of God?’

Maharaj “Yes”

Myself “Well, Maharaj, I too may think or feel that I am doing the will of God, when actually I am only following my own inclinations, and attributing them to God’s will Isn’t that what you do?”

Maharaj No my child, it is not the same”

Myself “Then do you mean to say that you actu

ally see God and talk to him directly and know his will?'

Maharaj "Yes, I wait until I know his will directly and he tells me what I should do"

Myself "For everything you do?"

Maharaj "Yes, for everything I do I have the direct guidance of God"

Myself "And do you accept only those disciples he wants you to accept?"

Maharaj "Yes"

After this talk with him I began to find some meaning in his peculiar way of acting For example, whenever any of us would ask his advice, he would say "Wait My brain is not working today," or "My stomach is upset, I'll answer tomorrow" Sometimes many tomorrows would pass before the disciple got any definite answer But when Maharaj did finally speak there was always a special power behind his words

"How does he know the will of God? Does he go into samadhi every time before he knows it?' This was the thought that continually crossed my mind But, not daring to ask him, I waited, hoping somehow to get an answer Then, one day, I was discussing with another disciple the spiritual visions of "Gopal's Mother," a woman disciple of Sri Rama Krishna She had been given this name because she used to see Gopal, the boy Krishna, playing with her, walking beside her, and calling her mother

Many other of her visions are recorded by Swami Saradanda in his life of Sri Ramakrishna I expressed my opinion that these visions of 'Gopal's Mother' belonged to the transcendental plane, and that I did not believe she had actually seen Sri Krishna with her bodily eyes Maharaj, who was sitting in his room, overheard me He came out and said rather sarcastically "Ah! So you are omniscient!"

"But Maharaj," I asked, "how can one see God in the external world, with bodily eyes?"

Maharaj then explained that a man who has attained samadhi and reached the transcendental plane, receives divine sight He then can see God with closed eyes in the superconsciousness of samadhi, and also with open eyes while fully conscious of the external world He added that, to an enlightened man, there is no longer any line of division between matter and spirit "What you see as matter is really Brahman"

In the Upanishads we read that "a knower of Brahman becomes Brahman" What is it that attracts people to a man of God? Young and old, boys and girls, men, women and children, saints and sinners—all felt an undefinable attraction to Maharaj even if they did not in the least understand what was meant by "a knower of Brahman"

When I first met Maharaj I was a boy of eighteen I did not know anything about God or the realiza-

tion of God, yet I felt drawn to him as to a long lost friend who was very near and dear to me. I had never felt such a love before in my life it was the love of parents and the love of a friend, all in one. Everyone had the same experience. Once I asked Swami Subodhananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the reason for this all-satisfying love which emanated from Maharaj. The Swami replied 'God is love. Maharaj has realized God. Therefore he is full of love.'

You did not have to be pure hearted or spiritually minded to love Maharaj. Even the most depraved natures felt this love when they came into his presence, and many of them were transformed into saints. Maharaj did not talk to everybody about God or spiritual matters or philosophical truths, he would come down, as it were, to the level of each individual, he became that person. He had the power to uplift a man without his even knowing it, and when that person left his presence he was bathed in love and punty. When you were in the presence of Maharaj you completely forgot yourself. You felt you were in another world where there was no worry or grief, and where man was not man but divine. You were filled with a peculiar joy which you could neither explain nor understand.

Maharaj's bearing was stately, and regal. He was tall and well built, and his face was serene and joyful. His eyes were deep, and seemed always to be gazing

into the infinite Whenever he looked at you, you felt that he was probing the depths of your innermost nature, and that he knew all your weaknesses and failings But somehow you did not mind this being known through and through, because those eyes were so full of mercy and love We never feared to be known by him Then there were other times when, though his eyes were wide open, it seemed as if the universe no longer existed for him, he seemed to be living in a different world altogether

His hands and feet were beautifully formed, and they possessed a peculiar attraction His back strikingly resembled the back of Sri Ramakrishna Swami Turiyananda once told me how, many years after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, he saw Maharaj from behind, walking in the grounds of the Belur Monastery, and mistook him for Sri Ramakrishna himself

Once in a crowded railway station I overheard a man who had been observing Maharaj, exclaim to a friend "Look at that man! What part of India does he come from? He isn't like a Madrasí, or a Parsí, or a Bengali, or a Punjabi Can you guess his nationality?"

And the other answered 'No I can't But you can see very well that he is a man of God'

CHILDHOOD AND LIFE WITH THE MASTER

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA was born on January 21, 1863,¹ at Sikra, a village near Calcutta, Bengal His parents were Ananda Mohan Ghosh and Kailas Kamini Kailas Kamini, his mother, was devoted to Krishna and she spent most of her time in prayer, worship and meditation Maharaj was her only son Being a devotee of Krishna, she named him Rakhai, "the shepherd boy" She passed away when Rakhai was five years old

Rakhai liked being with other children and played all kinds of games with them He was especially fond of "playing church" He would mould a clay image of Divine Mother and worship her with his playmates During religious festivals, he would take his seat behind the priest, and sometimes while watching the worship, he would be filled with a fervour of devotion and become absorbed in the thought of Divine Mother

Ananda Mohan loved gardening As a child, Rakhai would work with his father, and learned gardening from him at an early age He was also fond of fishing, and would sit patiently with his fishing rod for hours by the pond Even in later life, we

saw that he had never lost these two early enthusiasms of childhood—gardening and fishing

From boyhood, he was a lover of music. He learned songs about Divine Mother and Krishna. He and his friends would go into a mango grove and sing these songs together in chorus. In later years, he encouraged his disciples to sing devotional songs, and he would always keep in his company a few who were expert musicians. Wherever he went, praises of the Lord would be sung.

When Rakhai had finished his studies at the village primary school, he went to Calcutta to begin grammar school. He was then twelve years old. Attached to this school was an athletic club, which interested Rakhai very much. The members of the club were young boys and Naren (later known as Vivekananda) was their leader. This was how Rakhai and Naren met. They were of the same age and became very fond of each other. Later both boys became pupils at a gymnasium directed by a Mr. Guha.

At this period Keshab Chandra Sen was exercising a great influence over the youth of Bengal by his powerful oratory, his fervent devotion and his vast knowledge of Eastern and Western religions. He was the leader of the Brahma Samaj. He preached the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. In his talks, he would quote the Upanishads and the Christian Bible; his new line of approach revived an interest in religion amongst the educated classes

of Bengal The creed of the Brahmno Samaj was that theistic conception of the Godhead which is the only creed of Christianity and which is also to be found, among many other conceptions, in the Hindu scriptures Keshab denounced as polytheism the Hindu cult of many gods and goddesses, although these are, in reality, merely aspects of the one Brahman He was opposed to the worship of images in the temples Naren and Rakhal joined the movement and subscribed to its creed

Rakhal used to spend most of his time in prayer and contemplation, neglecting his studies "God is our Father, our very own How shall I reach him?" This was the only thought that occupied his mind Sri Ramakrishna later used to say of him "Rakhal was born with an intense love for God Such a love is usually acquired only after a man has practiced spiritual disciplines for many years, or many lives" Rakhal regularly attended the services of the Brahmno Samaj His prayer that God might be revealed to him continued incessantly, like the act of breathing

Rakhal was not doing very well at school, so that, by the time he reached his sixteenth birthday, his father was worried about the boy's future He attributed the neglect of his studies to the emotionalism of adolescence which had turned his son's mind toward God If Rakhal were married the father thought to himself, his mind would be brought down to earth He would have to consider taking up a

career and providing for his wife, and therefore he would study harder. So he arranged for Rakkhal's marriage to a young girl named Visweswari.

Keshab Chandra Sen was the first to preach publicly the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna. Devotees began to flock to the temple of Dakshineswar to visit the Master. Among them were Manomohan Mitra and Shyama Sundari, the brother and mother of Visweswari. At the time of Rakkhal's marriage, these two were already ardent devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, whom they regarded as an incarnation of Sri Chaitanya. Thus it came about that the worldly influence of marriage combined with the spiritual influence of Keshab brought Rakkhal to the feet of his future beloved Master.

It was natural that Manomohan should introduce Rakkhal, his new brother in law, to Sri Ramakrishna. For some time before their visit, the Master had spiritual visions concerning his future disciple. Once, Sri Ramakrishna prayed to Divine Mother 'Mother, I want someone to be my constant companion. Bring me a boy who is pure hearted and intensely devoted to you.' A few days later he saw in mystic vision a boy standing under the banyan tree in the temple grounds. On another occasion, this same boy appeared to him in a different manner. To quote the Master's own words 'A few days before Rakkhal came to me, Mother placed a little boy on my lap and said "This is your son." At first I was startled

'My son?' Mother smiled at this and made me understand that I was not to have a son in the ordinary sense, but that this boy would be my spiritual son, one who would live up to the highest ideal of renunciation."

From this hour onward, Sri Ramakrishna waited eagerly for the coming of his spiritual son. A few moments before Rakkhal actually arrived, he had another vision. Suddenly he saw a hundred petalled lotus blooming on the bosom of the Ganges each of its petals shining with exquisite loveliness. On the lotus, two boys were dancing with anklets on their feet. One of them was Sri Krishna himself, the other was the same boy he had seen in his earlier vision. Their dance was indescribably beautiful, every movement they made seemed to splash foam, as it were, from an ocean of sweetness. Sri Ramakrishna was lost in ecstasy.

Just then a boat arrived carrying Manomohan and Rakkhal. Sri Ramakrishna looked at Rakkhal in bewilderment. "What is this?" he thought to himself. "Here is the boy I saw standing under the banyan tree; here is the boy Mother placed on my lap, here is the boy I saw just now dancing on the lotus with Sri Krishna. This is the pure-hearted companion I prayed for to Mother."

Sri Ramakrishna regarded Rakkhal for a few moments in silence. Then he smilingly remarked to Manomohan, "There are wonderful possibilities in

this boy” After this, the Master talked to Rakhal for some time, as though he were an old friend

“What is your name?” he asked

Rakhal answered ‘Rakhal Chandra Ghosh’”

Hearing the name ‘Rakhal,” Sri Ramakrishna was deeply excited, and muttered to himself ‘Rakhal’ The shepherd boy of Brindaban—the playmate of Sri Krishna!”

Then, in a sweet affectionate voice, he said “Come and see me again”

In the presence of the Master Rakhal had experienced a peculiar feeling of joy, love, and intense attraction As he left the temple grounds, that voice in all its sweetness kept echoing within his heart “Come and see me again” He knew that at last he had met a man who had seen and known God

Rakhal went back to his home and to school, but he could not forget his visit to the Master Sri Ramakrishna filled all his thoughts, and he was impatient to see him again A few days later, after school hours, he went alone to Dakshineswar The Master welcomed him eagerly and said with great affection “Why didn’t you come back to me sooner? I have been waiting for you” Rakhal did not know what to answer He looked at the Master and felt that same ecstatic joy He felt like a little child, sitting at the feet of God the Father of all From that day onward the relationship between these two was established Rakhal saw in Rama

krishna father, mother, and God Sn Ramakrishna saw in Rakhai the Divine Child

Rakhai's visits to the Master became more and more frequent Sometimes he lived at the temple for days together While he was there, his mind entirely forgot the everyday world, and became absorbed in the consciousness of God and his presence He felt himself to be the eternal companion of his Divine Master

Recalling these early days with Rakhai, Sn Ramakrishna used to tell his intimate disciples. "No words can describe Rakhai's spiritual mood at that time He was living in a trance, as it were He was like a little child, helpless in its mother's arms and surrendering itself completely to her—always conscious of the divine relationship And when he was near me, I also was transported into a higher spiritual consciousness I used to play with him, just as Yasoda, the Divine Mother, played with her Divine Child, Krishna"

Rakhai's father tried in many ways to bring his son's mind back to the interests of worldly life He gave him strict orders not to go to the temple at Dakshineswar When his advice and threats proved of no avail, he had Rakhai locked in the house. Rakhai longed to go to his Master, and Sn Rama Krishna prayed earnestly to the Divine Mother that all the obstacles in Rakhai's spiritual path might be removed

One day, Ananda Mohan made Rakhai sit beside him in his study while he looked over some legal documents. As soon as Rakhai noticed that his father was deeply absorbed in the work, he seized the opportunity to slip out of the room and hurried off to his Master.

Ananda Mohan knew that Rakhai must have gone to Sri Ramakrishna but for some days he could do nothing, because he had to attend to a law suit in the courts. As soon as he had time, however, he went to Dikshinagar, intending to take his son home. When Rakhai saw his father coming, he was frightened and wanted to hide, but Sri Ramakrishna would not let him. So Rakhai following his Master's advice, went to meet his father and greeted him with unusual affection and reverence. It was then that Ananda Mohan had a change of heart. Instead of insisting on Rakhai's returning home, he simply requested Sri Ramakrishna to send the boy occasionally to see him.

So Rakhai began living with the Master at Dakshinagar. One day his young wife came to the temple with her mother. Looking at her Sri Ramakrishna said "She is born with a divine nature. She will never be an obstacle to Rakhai's spiritual progress." The Master then sent word to Holy Mother, (wife of Sri Ramakrishna), who was also living at the temple that she should bless the young girl and welcome her as her daughter in law. After receiving

the blessings, the mother and daughter returned home

Rakhal, with a care-free mind, devoted himself to a contemplative life and the service of his beloved guru

One day, Rakhal told Sri Ramakrishna that he felt very hungry, but there was no food in the place, and Sri Ramakrishna became greatly concerned. Leaving his room, he went to the bank of the Ganges and shouted "O Gourdasi, come soon! My Rakhal is hungry!" Shortly after this, Gourdasi, a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, arrived by boat with a few other disciples, bringing food. Sri Ramakrishna was as happy as a child, and called Rakhal, saying "Here's food, now go and eat. You are very hungry."

Rakhal felt embarrassed and said in a low voice "Yes, I am hungry—but do you have to advertise it?"

Sri Ramakrishna innocently replied "If you are hungry, what is wrong in saying so? Go and eat now."

Once, while Rakhal was massaging Sri Ramakrishna with oil he begged the Master to grant him the power of transcendental vision. At first, Sri Ramakrishna took no notice of his request, and remained silent. When Rakhal persisted, the Master suddenly turned and spoke to him very harshly. Rakhal felt hurt and angry. He smashed the bottle

of oil on the ground and ran away, but, as he reached the gate of the temple, his feet suddenly seemed paralyzed. He could not move another step Helplessly, he sat down on the road, not knowing what to do. Meanwhile, Sri Ramakrishna sent his nephew, Ramlal, to find Rakhhal and calm his anger. Ramlal fetched Rakhhal, who slowly returned to the Master's presence. Sri Ramakrishna looked at him smilingly. "You see! You could not go outside that circle I drew around you!" Rakhhal felt ashamed and remained silent. A few moments later, Sri Ramakrishna went into ecstasy and began to speak to the Divine Mother. "O Mother," he murmured, "I know you have given him one sixteenth part of your power, and that power in him will benefit all mankind."

Then, in the same ecstatic mood, he addressed Rakhhal, saying "You were angry with me. Do you know why I made you angry? There was a purpose in it. Medicine acts only after the sore has been opened." He continued "Have faith that God is also with form, and can be seen in that way. God is revealed to the man who has controlled his mind."

A few days later, while massaging his Master's feet, Rakhhal suddenly lost his external senses and was transported into that supersensuous realm which he had longed to experience. In later years, Sri Ramakrishna used to point out the exact spot in the room where Rakhhal went into ecstasy for the first time.

wife. A neighbor once said to her: "It seems your son in law is turning into a monk. Why don't you try to bring his mind back to the world, for your daughter's sake?"

"What can I do?" Shyama Sundari answered. "Everything depends on the will of the Lord. If my son in law becomes a monk, I shall regard it as a great blessing."

Soon after this, Shyama Sundari came with her daughter to visit Rakkhal and asked him to return home. The meeting took place in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, who remained silent throughout. Later, the Master described it to his other disciples and said "Rakkhal has now reached true spiritual discrimination. I know he will no longer be attached to the world. He has realized the emptiness of earthly pleasures."

The Master felt, however, that Rakkhal had a duty to his wife, and told him to visit her from time to time. Rakkhal obeyed. Gradually, his visits to his wife became longer; he felt concerned about her and her future. Finally he came to Sri Ramakrishna and asked his advice. The Master listened to everything he had to say, but refused to tell him definitely which path of life he should follow. With a heavy heart, Rakkhal went back to his wife and silently prayed to Sri Ramakrishna to show him the way. Three days passed. Rakkhal prayed unceasingly. Suddenly, a veil was removed from his sight and he saw

the Divine Maya—the play of Divine Mother He knew now which path to choose He and his wife were not to be bound by the ties of marriage He had a great mission to fulfill He was certain, now, that his wife would be taken care of, and, strangely enough, she also felt full of peace So, taking leave of her, he went straight back to Dakshineswar The Master knew exactly what had happened Silently smiling, he welcomed home his beloved spiritual son

Sri Ramakrishna had known that Rakhal could not be bound by any earthly attachment Yet there remained in him a subtle, lingering desire, a desire which could not be completely removed from his heart until it had had some satisfaction That was why Sri Ramakrishna had sent Rakhal back to his wife Now he knew that, henceforward, Rakhal would be completely free from desire in any form

Sri Ramakrishna used to say “The virtue of truthfulness is most important If a man always speaks the truth and holds to the truth tenaciously, he will realize God, for God is Truth I prayed to the Divine Mother, saying Mother, here is knowledge, here is ignorance—take them both and give me pure love for you Here is purity, here is impurity—take them both and give me pure love for you Here is good, here is evil—take them both and give me pure love for you’ But I could not say, ‘Here is truth, here is untruth—take them both’

One day, Sri Ramakrishna said to Rakhai "I can't look at you I see a veil of ignorance over your face Tell me, have you done anything wrong?"

Rakhai was greatly troubled No matter how hard he tried, he could not remember living done anything wrong "Try to recall," Sri Ramakrishna said to his disciple, "if you have told any untruth" Rakhai at once remembered and admitted that he had recently told a lie in a joking way to a friend Sri Ramakrishna forgave him, but said "Never do it again To speak the exact truth always is a most important spiritual discipline"

Rakhai's enthusiasm for the spiritual life did not weaken, but after a while he ceased to meditate regularly Sri Ramakrishna noticed this and asked him the reason Rakhai answered "I do not always get the inspiration My heart seems dry, and I feel an emptiness"

"You must never neglect your meditation on that account," Sri Ramakrishna told him "Make up your mind to practice spiritual disciplines, then the enthusiasm will come naturally Those who are farmers by birth and occupation do not and cannot give up farming just because the crops fail So you must not give up meditation even though you may not get any apparent results You must be regular in your practice"

That same day Sri Ramakrishna went as usual to worship in the temple Rakhai followed him, and sat

down to meditate in the hall facing the shrine. Suddenly he saw the shrine glow strangely luminous. The illumination increased in strength until it was as bright as the sun itself, but mellow, not dazzling. *This light began to pour through the door of the shrine and seemed about to engulf Rakhai.* He was on the verge of losing consciousness. The sensation frightened him. He got up and went out.

Later, Sri Ramakrishna found him sitting silently in his room. "Why did you run away?" the Master asked. "You complain that your heart is dry and you don't have any more spiritual visions, yet you are afraid to experience anything. That's not right."

A few days after this, Rakhai was sitting absorbed in meditation in the hall of the temple, and experiencing an ecstatic joy. Sri Ramakrishna approached him in ecstasy and gave him a special mantram for his own use. "Look," said the Master, "there is your Chosen Ideal!" Rakhai in ecstatic vision saw his chosen aspect of the Godhead standing before him—living and luminous, with a smile playing on his lips. When Rakhai regained his eternal consciousness and saw Sri Ramakrishna he prostrated at his feet with loving devotion. He had known and experienced the divine power and grace of his guru. Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room, and Rakhai became once more absorbed in meditation.

On another occasion, while Rakhai was meditat

ing his mind became very dry and restless. All his struggles to calm it were of no avail. Discouraged, and disappointed at his own failure, he rose from his seat. Then Sri Ramakrishna came to him and said, "I see an obstacle on your path. Put out your tongue." Rakkhal obeyed. The Master drew some lines on his disciple's tongue with his finger and said, "Now go and meditate." At once Rakkhal found himself freed from his distractions.

During this period, Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciple many kinds of spiritual disciplines, and Rakkhal used to practice them with great earnestness—but always in privacy and solitude. Often, when Sri Ramakrishna and his devotees were together, a mood of spiritual fervor would come over the whole group. Then Rakkhal would go into ecstasy. Once, at the house of Balaram, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the devotees were chanting the name of God, and the Master was in samadhi. Rakkhal was in ecstasy, apparently unconscious. When Sri Ramakrishna came out of samadhi he touched Rakkhal on the heart and thus brought him back to normal consciousness.

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, "VI" (a close disciple) records some remarks the Master made about Rakkhal's spiritual condition at this time:

'Rakkhal has grown into a very sweet character now. He practices japam unceasingly—that is the reason you see his lips moving sometimes. When I

look at him and notice his mental condition, I often feel inspired and lose myself in ecstasy

“Naren, Rakhal and a few others belong to the class of the ‘Ever perfect’ They are born with God knowledge As they begin to grow up, they realize the emptiness of earthly pleasures The Vedas tell us of a bird called the homa This bird lives high in the sky it never comes down to earth It lays its eggs in mid air, but at such a great height that the eggs hatch while still falling The little bird comes out and finds itself dashing down toward the earth When it sees the ground rushing to meet it, it soars up and rejoins its mother in the sky

“Boys like Rakhal resemble the homa From their earliest childhood they see the emptiness of the world and their one thought is how to reach God”

Sri Ramakrishna also remarked “Rakhal at one time became very sensitive to people He could not bear the sight of those who were worldly minded I, too, went through the same mood at one time Rakhal had another mood in which he loved to be alone and taste the divine bliss in complete absorption At such times, he told me he could not bear even my company He came here to look after me, but while he was passing through this stage, I had to look after him”

During this period, Rakhal had many visions, and developed various occult powers But, following his

Master's advice, he learned to pay no attention to them

To quote his own words: "While I was with the Master, a man who was living in the temple fell sick. He had no one to look after him, so I nursed him for a few days. One night, when I was sitting beside him, his suffering became intense. I did not know how to help him, so I thought I would repeat the Lord's name and pray for his relief. After I had practiced japam for some time, a kind of slumber overcame me. In that state I saw a beautiful young girl, about twelve years old, standing before me. She had the look of a goddess. I asked her 'Mother, will this man be cured?' She nodded and answered 'Yes.' The vision disappeared instantly. Next day, the patient recovered."

Just as the inside of a cupboard can be seen through its glass doors, so Rakhal could see into any man's heart. He was aware of the character and motives of everybody who visited the temple, and would refuse to allow any but sincere, earnest people to enter the Master's presence. Sri Ramakrishna learned that Rakhal possessed this power, and that he was using it. He scolded him severely, saying "It is mean to use your power this way. He who pays heed to occult powers cannot live in God knowledge. Take no notice of such powers when they come to you."

In later years, a man once complained to Swami:

Sharvananda, a disciple of Maharaj, that they were not real holy men, because they did not possess occult powers. When this was reported to Maharaj he said "It is easy to acquire occult powers but hard indeed to attain purity of heart. To find purity of heart is to know the real truth of religion."

There now arose a new obstacle to Rakhal's continuous stay with the Master. He became sick, and was sent to Calcutta to live in the house of Balaram Sri Ramakrishna, who wanted Balaram to take particular care of his disciple and told him 'Boys like Naren and Rakhal are born for a divine mission. To serve them is to serve God.' Balaram felt very happy to serve his Master's spiritual child. But the climate of Calcutta did not agree with Rakhal, so, with the permission of Sri Ramakrishna, Balaram took him to Brindaban for a change of air. At first, Rakhal felt better. He found Brindaban very inspiring and wrote highly of it to 'M'. 'What a wonderfully holy place is Brindaban! The wild peacocks are dancing all around. The air is full of singing and dancing and the praises of the Lord. Here you feel an unending joy in the Holy Name!' Then he became seriously ill. This troubled the Master. To quote Sri Rama Krishna's own words: "I was extremely worried when I learned of Rakhal's illness at Brindaban. Brindaban is the holy place where Sri Krishna spent his youth. Since Mother revealed to me that Rakhal is the playmate of Sri Krishna and one of the shepherd boys

of Brindaban, I was afraid lest he should be reminded of his past incarnation. If he remembered his association with Sri Krishna while at Brindaban, he might give up his body there. Therefore I prayed fervently to Divine Mother, and she assured me that I had no cause for anxiety."

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna contains this reference to Rakhal's illness.

'Sri Ramakrishna speaks of Rakhal "While massaging my feet, Rakhal had his first ecstasy here. A scholar was with me, expounding the Bhagavatam. As Rakhal listened to the words of the scripture, he began to feel ecstatic joy. Then he lost consciousness and became still."

"His second ecstasy was at Balam's house. He fell on the ground, apparently unconscious. Rakhal is a devotee of a very high order—he dwells in the realm of the personal aspect of God. If he hears people talking about the impersonal, he goes out of the room."

"I prayed to Divine Mother for his recovery. He has renounced everything and he depends entirely on me."

"When he first went to Brindaban he wrote to M., saying how wonderful the place is and how the peacocks are dancing around, but now those peacocks seem to hold no charm for him."

"Why do I love these boys so much? Because their hearts are so pure."

When Rakhai returned from Brindaban, he found that many new disciples had gathered round the Master, among them he saw many of his old school friends. Soon after this, Sri Ramakrishna fell ill and was finally removed to the Cossipore garden house. Rakhai accompanied him. One after another, several of the young disciples went to live there and look after the Master. It was during this last illness that Sri Ramakrishna established his monastic order, and *fired his young disciples with the ideal of renunciation*. He began to train each one individually, according to his character and temperament. To some he gave the ganna cloth, which symbolizes the life of renunciation. Naren and Rakhai were among these chosen few.

The Master was undoubtedly a very sick man but he still remained the source and center of a strong spiritual current which transformed the lives and characters of those around him. The Cossipore garden house became a place of bliss and the disciples' hearts overflowed with joy in God.

It was during this period that Sri Ramakrishna prepared Naren to deliver his message to mankind. He taught him how to train the young disciples and organize the monastic order. Every day he would talk to Naren for hours together. In the course of one conversation he told him "Rakhai has the keen intelligence of a king. If he chose, he could rule a kingdom." Taking the hint and understanding that

AFTER THE PASSING AWAY OF THE MASTER

WHILE THE MASTER was still with them, the young disciples had lived in an atmosphere of continual joy and festivity They were walking the path of God, who is Infinite Being, Infinite Wisdom, and Infinite Bliss They tasted the delight of their Master's presence, and neither the anxieties of the world nor its pleasures and excitement could touch their hearts 'Live in union with Brahman and spread the joy of Brahman all around you " That was the truth that the disciples had learned

In the Gospel according to St Matthew (IX 15) we read "And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast "

Sri Ramakrishna was taken away from them and they felt a void, an emptiness The Master had, as it were, lighted the candles within their hearts with a torch of blazing fire Now that the torch had gone, they were conscious of darkness Their own candles still burned, but they were not enough They wanted

the blazing torch. They wanted to be merged in that blissful consciousness once and forevermore.

Guided by an invisible hand, thirsting for God and fired with the ideal of renunciation, the young disciples gathered together and formed the Rama-knshna Monastic Order at Baranagore.

Naren was the center and heart of this group. Under his guidance the young disciples engaged themselves in study, discussion and religious practices. Rakhal was put in charge of the monastery and made responsible for its general welfare Naren and Rakhal loved and respected each other deeply. Once, a young member of the group felt discouraged and wished to leave. Rakhal said to him: "Why do you want to run away? There is such a wonderful atmosphere here. Where else would you find a holy man like Naren? And where else would you find such love as Naren has for us?"

The disciples now devoted themselves wholeheartedly to spiritual practices. Some days they had nothing to eat, and always their meals were scanty. Their only thought was of God, and in this thought they would remain absorbed almost continuously for days and nights on end.

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, "M" records the following conversation with Rakhal in the gardens of the Baranagore Monastery.

Rakhal Don't waste any more time. Plunge deep into spiritual practices.

Why have we renounced the world? Some people say if you have failed to realize God why not go back to the world? But Naren gives the right answer: 'Because we could not find Ram, must we live with

Baburam	Swami Premananda
Yogin	Swami Yogananda
Tarak	Swami Shivananda
Sarat	Swami Saradananda
Sashu	Swami Ramakrishnananda
Han	Swami Turyananda
Niranjan	Swami Niranjanananda
Latu	Swami Adbbutananda
Gangadhar	Swami Akhandananda
Sarada Prasanna	Swami Tringunatita
Kali	Swami Abhedananda
Gopal Sr	Swami Advaitananda
Subodh	Swami Subodhananda

Another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Han Prasanna joined the monastic order some years later and became known as Swami Vijnanananda.

Shivam and beget children?' Ah, Naren speaks wise words!

M.—What you say is true I can see that you are filled with a great spiritual longing.

Rakhal How can I describe the state of my mind? This noon I felt a yearning to go to Narmada and practice austerity. Nothing can be achieved without diving deep into meditation. The outside world is full of distractions. Even Sukadeva, the pure and ever free one, was afraid of the distractions of the world.

M.—Yes, the Yogopanishad describes how Sukadeva renounced the world—the realm of maya. It also relates a conversation between Sukadeva and his father, Vyasa. Vyasa advises him to find God while living his life in the world. Sukadeva answers: The only truth is God! He saw the emptiness of life in the world, the vanity of lust and greed.

Rakhal Many people mistakenly imagine that it is enough if one avoids the company of women, but Naren expressed the truth beautifully last night. He said: 'Woman exists for man as long as he has lust. When you are free from lust, you do not see any difference between the sexes.'

M.—That is true. Children do not see the difference in sex.

Rakhal That is why I believe we must plunge deep within. To reach enlightenment, a man must transcend maya, the domain of lust and greed.

Most of the young disciples wanted to retire into complete solitude and live absorbed in God. The divine touch of their Master had already enabled them to experience the transcendental state. What they had momentarily achieved through his grace, they now wished to win as a permanent possession by their own efforts. They wanted to live utterly in that consciousness. We find Swami Brahmananda eager to go into solitude, live on alms, and dwell constantly in union with Brahman.

Maharaj talked to Swami (as Vivekananda was usually called) about his intention of living for some time as a wandering monk, surrendering himself completely to God. Swami agreed, but suggested that Swami Subodhananda go with him and look after him. Because of his deep love for Maharaj, Swami was always concerned for his welfare, and wished him to have someone who would minister to his comforts. Maharaj could not refuse his brother's wish, so he and Swami Subodhananda left together for Benares. They stayed there a month. From Benares they went on to the temple of Omkarnath, by the river Narmada. Here, amidst charming natural surroundings, Maharaj lived continuously in nirvikalpa samadhi for six days and six nights, completely unconscious of the outside world. When at last he came back to normal consciousness, his face shone with a heavenly joy. He had experienced God

in the impersonal, absolute aspect, and had realized the identity of the Atman with Brahman

The two Swamis continued their journey and reached Panchavati by the river Godavan where Sita and Rama are traditionally supposed to have lived during their exile. There is a temple dedicated to them. Here, Brahmananda felt and saw the living presence of these two divine incarnations, while chanting the Holy Name, he became absorbed in samadhi for three days and three nights.

During these periods, Swami Subodhananda used to watch over Maharaj with mingled joy and anxiety. He realized the danger that Maharaj might pass out of the body while in samadhi and not return to earthly life, and he was always careful to prevent this.

From Panchavati, they went on to Dwaraka, the well known place of pilgrimage, situated on the bank of the sacred river Gomati. In this river pilgrims bathe in order to acquire merit paying a dollar tax for the privilege. But neither Maharaj nor Subodh ananda had any money. A rich merchant noticed this, and recognizing them as holy men, offered to pay their tax, but Maharaj refused. He did not wish to buy religious merit, and preferred to take his bath in the nearby ocean. This impressed the merchant so much that he also refused to pay the tax and went to bathe with the two Swamis. He invited them to his residence and entertained them for three days,

but when he offered them money for their further travels, Maharaj refused to accept it. The merchant then offered to give them letters of introduction to his agents in different parts of the country, so that their comfort would be assured wherever they went. But Maharaj refused this offer also. "I need nothing from anybody," he said. "The Lord is my only refuge! He will look after us." The merchant then gave him a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, which was gladly accepted.

From Dwaraka they visited various places of pilgrimage and finally reached Brundaban. During this second visit to the holy city, Maharaj wrote Balam the following letter.

"Who can fathom the workings of God? Who can know his divine play? Man remains subject to happiness and misery as long as he is bound by karma. This is the lot of every man—no matter whether he is learned or ignorant, good or wicked. Rare indeed is he who has attained unalloyed bliss! Only that man who is free from all cravings can find unending joy.

"There is more misery than happiness in this world. Most people live in misery. God the father is loving and kind. Who can explain why his children suffer?

"Man suffers because of his ignorance. This ignorance is his sense of ego. When a man is free from this egoism, surrendering his life, his mind, and

his intellect at the blessed feet of the Lord of all, renouncing all that he calls his own—then is he blessed indeed. That man alone is truly happy.

‘Of himself, man can accomplish nothing. There is only one thing to be done. Pray to God and pray unceasingly. Thus we may forget the ego altogether and continually remember that God alone is real, that God alone is the Truth. Then only can we be freed from ignorance.’

‘Su Ramakrishna used to say ‘How many love God as they love their own kith and kin? How many even want to love him?’

‘The mind is created out of those three gunas which also make up the outer world. Because of this the mind finds delight in dwelling on worldly thoughts. This is the very nature and stuff of the mind. It is only through divine grace that a man can withdraw his mind from the external world and keep it fixed on God’s holy feet.

‘I pray to the Lord that I may be completely freed from consciousness of the physical world. Bless me, that I may remain absorbed in the Lotus Feet of the guru—that is the one desire of my heart.’

Here in Brindaban, Brahmananda lived in a state of continuous ecstasy, almost entirely losing his consciousness of the physical world. His brother-disciple lovingly watched over him, but Brahmananda rarely spoke to him; his mind dwelt constantly in another realm. Subodhananda would beg food for him

have to sit like a beggar, begging for the Lord's grace?'

"What you say is true," Maharaj answered "The Master did do everything for us But still I find a lack within This proves that we need repeated practice in order to make the state of samadhi natural and habitual to us You know Uddhava was a devoted disciple and friend of Sri Krishna, through his grace he realized God And yet Sri Krishna sent him, to the Himalayas to live in solitude and contemplation"

Bijoy Krishna Goswami, a well known saint, who was living in Brindaban at this time, asked Brahma-
mananda the same question He replied simply 'I am only trying to become established in that vision of God which I received through my Master's grace'
Bijoy Krishna and Maharaj would often meet and talk together about God

In time, Subodhananda himself became eager to live in solitude and practice austerities So with the blessings and permission of Maharaj, he went to Hardwar at the foot of the Himalayas

Left alone in Brindaban, Maharaj had no time to feel lonely for again he plunged into the consciousness of God Suddenly one day he saw in a vision the shining form of his devoted brother-disciple Balaram standing before him On his face was a heavenly smile Gradually his form merged into the light of the divine realm Next day, Maharaj re-

ceived the news that Balaram had passed away. At first he felt a pang of grief, for he loved Balaram dearly; then he realized that this sorrow also was a form of attachment. More strongly than ever he felt a desire to forget the things of the world and plunge deeper into the inner kingdom of God. He left Brindaban and began to walk toward Hardwar.

At Hardwar, Maharaj was overwhelmed by the grandeur and beauty of the Himalayas, and of the Ganges running its course at their feet. Two miles from Hardwar is the quiet little village of Kankhal, sanctified by the presence of many monks belonging to various orders, who go there to lead contemplative lives. There Maharaj settled in a little hut not far from the Ganges. The present Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service is now situated on that very spot.

Swamis Vivekananda, Turyananda, Saradananda, Subodhananda and other monastic disciples of the Master were then leading contemplative lives at Hrishikesh, in the same neighborhood. It was not long before they learned that Brahmananda was at Kankhal and they all went to visit him. Vivekananda wanted to go to Delhi and asked Maharaj and the rest of his brother-disciples to accompany him. Maharaj could not refuse any wish of Swami's, but first he wanted to visit Swami Akhandananda, another brother-disciple, who was living in Meerut. To Meerut, therefore, they all went and spent some memorable days in meditation and study, happy to be in

one another's company Then Swamiji left for Delhi alone, the rest of them followed later

The lives of holy men, and especially their travels, must often appear curiously aimless to the ordinary observer Ever obedient to the voice of God within them, they make no fixed plans, as worldly people do All their intentions are subject to unexpected change No sooner were the Swamis gathered in Delhi, than Vivekananda told them that he must go on alone The inner voice commanded him to seek solitude "We shall meet again when the Lord will," he told his brothers as he said goodbye

Maharaj now asked Swami Turiyananda to accompany him on his pilgrimage The Swami readily agreed, which pleased Maharaj very much, for Sri Ramakrishna had once told him to 'keep company with brother Hari'

In Hari (Turiyananda), devotion and knowledge were harmoniously developed Deeply learned in the scriptures, he lived a life of great austerity and immaculate purity Sri Ramakrishna used to speak of him as a man of renunciation, strictly embodying the ideal of the Gita

The two Swamis now traveled together, mostly on foot, and visited many sacred temples in the northern part of India Turiyananda has told us that whenever Maharaj entered any shrine he would be filled with ecstatic devotion for that particular aspect of God to which the temple was dedicated, and that,

ultimately he would have direct vision of the living deity within that temple In later years, when Maharaj was asked by a disciple if the gods and goddesses are real, he answered "The one Godhead has many spiritual forms All these forms are real A seer can see them and talk to them"

After nearly two years of pilgrimage, the Swamis arrived in Bombay There they met Kalpada Ghosh, a devoted disciple of the Master who lived in that city A joyful surprise awaited them, for, at Kalpada's house, was Swamiji himself Since the parting at Delhi, they had known nothing of his whereabouts Swamiji was now preparing for his first journey to the United States of America Before embarking he was requested to go and bless the new born prince of Khetri Brahmananda and Turyananda went with him on the train as far as the Abu Road station While Vivekananda was with the prince, they visited Mt Abu, where there is a beautiful Jaina temple A few days later they returned to the station in time to exchange a few words with Swamiji as his train passed through This meeting was very short Swamiji hastily told Turyananda "Please go back to the Baranagore Monastery You are wanted there Let Raja live alone"

Turyananda had no time to explain to Swamiji that he could not leave Maharaj alone just then Brahmananda's spiritual consciousness was tuned so high that he had no regard for his body, and could

not look after it. So they remained together and the two of them returned to Mt. Abu, where they lived a life of contemplation. Turiyananda begged food for his brother and watched over him just as Subodh ananda had done.

After some time, Maharaj felt that they should return to Brindaban. Here Turiyananda experienced a mood of ecstatic joy. "I am not going to beg any food today," he told Maharaj. "Let us see if Radha (the Holy Mother of Brindaban) will feed us." They sat down to meditate. Day and night passed for both in blissful absorption without any consciousness of hunger or thirst. Next morning as they arose from their meditation, they saw a devotee approaching them with quantities of food. By this time they were both hungry and ate with relish.

After a few days in Brindaban they went to Lake Kusum, a solitary place near the Holy City. On the lake shore there are huts where monks can pass their days in solitude and contemplation. There the Swamis lived for some months, completely forgetting the outer world.

Swami Turiyananda told me of an interesting experience Maharaj had at Lake Kusum. For several nights in succession as he sat down to meditate he was disturbed by peculiar noises and by the falling of pebbles and dust around him. At length Maharaj saw the spirit of a dead man standing before him. "Why are you disturbing me like this?" he asked

The spirit admitted that he had been trying to attract the Swami's attention, and begged Maharaj to liberate him from his pitiful condition Maharaj replied that he did not know how to do this "You are a holy man," the spirit told him "If you will just pray for my release, I shall be liberated" Maharaj did as he was asked

During his stay at Lake Kusum, Maharaj had the habit of rising at midnight and spending the rest of the night in meditation One night, however, he felt tired and overslept After a while, some one gave him a push and aroused him At first he thought that this must be Swami Turiyananda, then he saw a luminous figure, in the dress of a Vaishnava saint, standing beside him and counting his beads After this, the figure appeared almost every night, at mid night, and joined him in his meditation Later, in describing this incident to his disciples, Maharaj remarked "Many holy men, after leaving the physical body, live in subtle, spiritual bodies, and help earnest religious aspirants in different ways"

Toward the end of the year 1893, Turiyananda received a letter from a brother-disciple, describing Swami's success in America and requesting him to come back to the monastery, which had now been moved from Baranagore to Alambazar Turiyananda read the contents of the letter to Maharaj and asked for his advice Maharaj agreed that he ought to return "Don't trouble about me," he said, "Go back

to the monastery. You are needed there to do the work of the Lord.”

So Turyananda unwillingly took his departure, and Maharaj remained alone a year in Brindaban. During this period, he sometimes took a vow not to ask for food or other necessities of life from any one. Generally an unknown devotee brought food to his door, but sometimes there would be days when he had nothing. Once, while he was sitting in silence, a stranger laid a warm new blanket beside him. A few moments later another stranger came by and took the blanket away. Maharaj sat still, smiling to himself, as he watched the strange play of the Divine Mother.

During the special festivities in memory of Sri Krishna, Brahmananda joined the devotees at a nearby temple. The crowd was chanting the name of God and singing Krishna's praises before the shrine. An aged holy man of the Vaishnava sect was sitting in one corner, counting his beads. Suddenly he turned toward Maharaj and beckoned him to approach, indicating with affectionate gestures that he should sit down beside him. The two began to meditate, as Maharaj became absorbed he felt the Vaishnava touch: his head with his beads. He did this repeatedly, and each time, as Brahmananda received the saint's touch his hair stood on end and he experienced an ecstatic joy.

By constant practice throughout these years of pil

grimage, Maharaj had at last achieved his aim. The state of samadhi was now his own possession. He had won it for himself and he dwelt in it continually. Even in the periods of his normal consciousness, there was, as he said, 'a fullness of God' in his heart. All around him, wherever he went, nature seemed to vibrate with joy. Established at last and forever in the consciousness of God, he felt ready to answer the call of worldly duty. One day, quite suddenly, he left for Calcutta, carrying that heavenly joy within his heart.

MAHARAJ AS HEAD OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

THE RETURN OF MAHARAJ to Calcutta created a stir amongst his brother-disciples. His presence brought to them a new upsurge of spiritual joy. One day he told Swami Premamanda 'I was very happy in Brindaban, but I left the Holy City to come and live in the monastery here. I want to serve my brothers and mankind. Our Master, Sri Rama Krishna, was the embodiment of supreme love and devotion, so that our own lives must be such that people all over the world, burdened by earthly sufferings and miseries, may learn to take his holy name and in him find rest and peace.'

When Swamiji, who was still in America heard of Brahmananda's return to Calcutta he felt relieved of any further anxiety regarding the conduct of the Ramakrishna Order in India. His letters to Maharaj were full of the spirit of universal service, and Maharaj in his turn would inspire his brother-disciples with the same ideal. All felt an unbounded confidence in Swamiji and Maharaj but the love of these two for each other was so deep and so spiritual that no one else could fully understand it. Two

years after Brahmaṇanda's return from Brindaban, Swamiji came back from America. A public reception was prepared for him at a house in Calcutta, and Maharaj himself was the first to welcome his brother, placing a garland of flowers around his neck. Swamiji, in his turn, touched the feet of Maharaj, quoting a saying from the scriptures: "The son of a guru is to be regarded as the guru himself," (meaning that Brahmaṇanda was the spiritual son of Sri Ramaṅśhna). Smiling sweetly, Maharaj touched his feet and returned the compliment with another quotation: "One's elder brother is to be respected like one's father."

Swamiji was then taken to the Alambazar Monastery. Here he placed in Brahmaṇanda's hands all the money which American devotees had subscribed toward the Indian Mission. "All this time," he said, "I have been acting as a trustee. It is a relief to give this back to its real owner—our Raja."

The natures of the two friends were widely dissimilar, and yet, in a sense, complementary. In the words of Sri Ramaṅśhna "Naren dwells in the realm of the absolute, the impersonal. He is like a sharp, drawn sword of discrimination. Rakhai dwells in the realm of God, the Sweet One, the repository of all blessed qualities. He is like a child on the lap of his mother, completely surrendering himself to her in every way."

Vivekaṇanda was like the flaming fire, the mid-day

sun—burning up all evil and impurity Brahma nanda was like a soft, cool light, soothing the aching heart Vivekananda was like the deep and restless ocean—always eager to do the work of the spirit, always fighting against ignorance and superstition Brahma nanda was like the blue sky, vast and patient in spirit The manner of his working was inward and silent

Vivekananda laid the foundation for the spiritual undertaking entrusted to him by his Master Brahma nanda built the edifice Vivekananda, with his dynamic, aggressive personality, could wake a man from the sleep of ignorance Brahma nanda with his characteristic serenity could show him the way to mould his life in God

Each paid memorable tribute to the other “Through Swamiji,” said Brahma nanda, “the world has come to know of Sri Ramakrishna But for him, very few could have understood our Master’s genius” And in the words of Swamiji ‘Raja is the greatest treasure house of spirituality” Once a European devotee came to visit Swamiji in the monastery, wishing to have his spiritual problems solved Swamiji sent him to Maharaj saying “There you will find a dynamo working and we are all under him” After talking to Maharaj the devotee expressed his gratitude and told Swamiji that all his doubts had been removed

Swami Saradananda rightly remarks ‘If Swami

Vivekananda was loved and cherished by the Master as the means by which his spiritual mission was to be proclaimed to the world, Swami Brahmananda was no less valued by him as the future head of his organization."

We have already described how, before visiting America, Swamiji had spent more than two years as a wandering monk, traveling the length and breadth of India. It was at this time that he came to understand the inner source of his country's strength, for he saw how the masses, in spite of their miserable poverty and lack of education, with all their evils accompanying still held fast to the ancient ideals of religious life. Swamiji's heart thrilled with pride in his country's spiritual greatness, and bled for its material distress. When he came to the West, he found the picture exactly reversed. On the one hand, physical comfort, material prosperity, high standards of education, all the achievements of the human intellect on the other hand, spiritual poverty, and a failure to understand life's only purpose,—the unfoldment of the God within man. He saw, in short, that the West had failed to accept wholeheartedly the ideals of Jesus Christ. The perfect civilization, Swamiji realized, consists in blending and harmonizing the genius of the East with that of the West. Expressed philosophically, it is the blending of the active with the contemplative life.

When Swamiji returned to India, he talked to his

brother-disciples, giving a new expression to the ideals for which Sri Ramakrishna had stood. It is not enough, he said, to devote your entire life to the realization of God for yourself alone. You must also live "for the good of all, for the happiness of all." Swamiji wished his brothers to combine the contemplative life with the life of service to man and Brahmananda was the first to recognize the depth and scope of Swamiji's ideals, and he gave them his full support.

On the first day of May, 1897, Swamiji called a representative meeting of the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. At this meeting, the organization known as the Ramakrishna Mission was formed. Maharaj was elected president of the Calcutta Center. Later, early in 1902, before the passing away of Swamiji, he was made head of the Order, and he held that office for more than twenty years, until his own death. The phenomenal growth of the Mission during his lifetime is too well known to need recording here. Whenever India has suffered any great flood or famine or other calamity, the monks of the Ramakrishna Order have come forward to relieve the distress of the people. Besides its innumerable emergency relief stations, opened temporarily, it has established permanent charitable and religious institutions all over the country. Preaching centers and monasteries have also been opened in Europe and in North and South America. At the

beginning of 1899 the permanent headquarters of the mission were established at Belur on the Ganges, now well known as the Belur Math

Foreign visitors to India have spoken highly in appreciation of the Mission's success in social service To the monks of the Order, however, such success can be only of secondary importance Maharaj always insisted on this "The one purpose of life is to know God Plunge deep into the sea of bliss and become immortals Attain knowledge and devotion, then serve God in mankind Work is not the end of life Disinterested work is a means of attaining devotion Meditate, meditate, and dive deep within Know that God alone is real Keep at least three fourths of your mind in God It is enough if you give one fourth to service Work and worship"

A young disciple of Swamiji, inspired by his ideals of renunciation and service, devoted himself to nursing the sick and helping the poor From a very humble beginning his work grew into a huge organization For many years this disciple was the head of one of the largest homes of service in India under the Ramakrishna Mission But when Maharaj saw that his work was becoming more important to him than his spiritual life, he relieved him of his post, inspired him with the ideal of realizing God and sent him away to live a life of exclusive meditation

To quote Maharaj again "Yes, you must work But I insist that you devote yourselves to spiritual

practices and meditation Even though I may not ask you to work, your nature will force you to work It is difficult to engage the mind in contemplation of God, but you are monks, therefore, work must not be the sole purpose of your lives”

At one time, a millionaire who had lost his wife came to the monastery and said he wished to renounce the world and give all his wealth to the Ramakrishna Mission Swami Premananda reported this to Maharaj, who folded his hands and said gently ‘ Brother, a worldly man who associates with a holy man like yourself naturally becomes inspired by the ideal of renunciation Shall we in our turn become worldly, because we have met a worldly man? ’ Maharaj refused to accept the money, because he knew very well that the millionaire would later regret his offer, being, as he was, very much attached to his wealth

In the same way he refused to accept a gift of real estate, knowing that the emotion which prompted the offer was merely temporary He realized that the work of the Mission could not prosper unless it was founded on a firm spiritual basis

Maharaj was more interested in the spiritual growth of his disciples than in their efficiency He once reprimanded a senior disciple who had been put in charge of a younger brother saying Did I send this young boy to you to make a good clerk out of him? On another occasion when a senior

disciple of Swamiji was taking one of the younger disciples to task for negligence in some duty, Maharaj overheard the conversation and told him 'Of course, it is wrong if this young man neglects his allotted duty. You have the right to scold him for that. But tell me, do you ever inquire if he is doing his duty to himself? Do you ask him if he is meditating regularly or if he has any difficulties in his progress towards God? Is the work of the Mission more important to you than this boy's spiritual growth?'

While it is true that Maharaj held the ideal of selfless service, of serving God in man, to be a form of worship, he also pointed out that, without the practice of meditation, it is hard to do work as worship, and that it is utterly impossible to annihilate the ego simply by actions, however selfless they may be. We must act but we must also try by our meditation to merge the ego in God.

Jesus said 'Love thy neighbor as thyself' But to really love mankind an aspirant must also learn to love God with all his heart, his soul and his mind. Maharaj once told me 'My boy devote yourself to spiritual practices. Attain knowledge and devotion. Then you will see how your heart will overflow with love and sympathy for mankind. You will also find out how unnecessary is man's suffering, carrying as he does this mine of bliss within him self.'

Maharaj kept a watchful eye on the progress of each member of the Order. He turned our hearts continually toward God and directed our actions and the activities of the Mission toward the interesting of that inner strength which alone can benefit man and physically, morally and spiritually.

When young men of varied temperaments live together, it is only natural that misunderstandings will arise from time to time no matter how high their common ideal may be. In one of the monasteries connected with a home of service, there were a number of young untrained members, newly arrived from school and college. When they had been together a while their old tendencies began to reassert themselves. They formed rival groups and started to quarrel. A senior Swami of the Order went to investigate. After questioning everybody he soon found out who were the ringleaders. He then wrote to Swami Brahmañanda telling him that some of those boys were unfit for monastic life and should be expelled. Maharaj replied: "Don't do anything. I am coming to see for myself."

When Maharaj arrived he asked no question. He lived quietly in the monastery, insisting only on one thing: that all the boys should meditate regularly in his presence. Then he began to instruct them, making no distinction between the good and the bad. Gradually the whole atmosphere of the place improved. The boys forgot their quarrels because

became deeply absorbed, and his right hand was raised in benediction

Seeing this, Swami Premnanda asked Swami Shuddhananda a senior disciple of Swami to prostrate before Maharaj and receive his blessing. There upon every monk and every initiate followed his example and Maharaj touched the head of each with his uplifted hand. Speaking from my own experience, I can only say that that touch was like a cooling spring to a fevered body. It gave one an inner exaltation which could be felt but not described. All our troubles were forgotten and our hearts were full of love.

Keep your mind as high as the mountains. Maharaj told a disciple whom he was sending to a monastery in the Himalayas. He himself lived always in an exalted state of consciousness which subtly transformed the lives and characters of those around him. If the spiritual life is intensified the outer life will adjust itself automatically. This principle applies equally to the life of an organization. Maharaj was once asked to make some new rules for the guidance of the young monks. He replied. Swami has already made our rules for us. We do not need to add any new ones. Add more love. Attain more devotion and help others to move toward the ideal of God.

As the network of monasteries and homes of service spread over India Maharaj began to visit them

I even know what . . . is doing in America" Many possessed this knowledge not through the ordinary means of communication, but through extrordinary powers. Moreover, he was not satisfied with merely knowing he sent spiritual aid to everyone in need.

If a member of the Order should be guilty of some serious offense and there would be talk of his expulsion, Mahatma would forgive his misdeeds and transform him by his touch. He used to say "The sins of many births can be wiped out in a moment by one glance from the gracious eye of God." Once he said to me "What is morality? If one acquires devotion to God, morality and purity will follow, without one even trying to be moral or pure."

'Practice practice,' he would tell us "Through practice of the spiritual disciplines, the heart will be purified and a new realm will open. You will realize that God alone is real and that everything else is unreal. But when through *isipam*,³ and meditation a little awakening comes do not imagine you have achieved the end. Light! More Light! Onward! Onward! Attain God! Gain his vision! Talk to him!

'The success of a religious body depends not on its external achievements its efficient organization, its buildings, the size of its membership or its philanthropic activities—but upon the inner life of each

³ See Appendix.

of its members and the measure of their progress toward devotion and knowledge of God. This is the truth that Maharaj, as head of the Order, impressed indelibly upon our minds.

MAHARAJ AS GURU

SRI RAMAKRISHNA ONCE SAID: "When the lotus blooms, bees come of their own accord to gather the honey. When the lotus of a man's heart blossoms in the joy of God, spiritual aspirants will swarm to him." Many times we have watched Maharaj sitting amongst a crowd of devotees. One moment, he would be as happy and playful as a child, then suddenly his mind would become indrawn and the whole atmosphere would vibrate with the presence of God. At such times, those who had come to visit him would find that all their doubts and problems had been solved. They would rise and leave his presence, exalted and comforted, though not a single word had been spoken.

The monastic Order included many disciples of Holy Mother and Swamiji. But most of these had little opportunity of associating with their gurus. Swamiji passed away in 1902, and because Holy Mother did not live at the monastery, she instructed her disciples to follow the disciplines prescribed by Maharaj. Maharaj himself also accepted disciples, but at first he was very particular. Often he would

of its members and the measure of their progress toward devotion and knowledge of God. This is the truth that Maharaj, as head of the Order, impressed indelibly upon our minds.

a deep impression upon Maharaj. After this, he initiated many more disciples.

Once, while Maharaj and Swami Turyananda were in Brindaban, a young boy (later Swami Ambikananda) came to visit them. The boy knew Turyananda already and would talk to him for hours, but he was shy of Maharaj, whom he regarded as very serious and austere. Turyananda knew this, and one day told him: "Go and prostrate before Maharaj. Touch his feet, and sit beside him a while." The boy did so. Maharaj blessed him, touching his head and his back. At once, the boy began to feel differently: all his shyness disappeared. He knew now that Maharaj loved him, and his own heart was filled with love. From that day onward, he was devoted to Maharaj. Maharaj said jokingly to Turyananda "You see, I have stolen your disciple!" Turyananda laughed and said: "Splendid! Now, the boy is blessed indeed."

Maharaj recognized his future disciples at first sight, and bound them to him at once with an indescribable love. Even as he met them, he knew which spiritual path each should follow. Two young college boys came to visit him. To one of them, he said jokingly: "Let me see your palm." As he looked at it, he remarked: "You have a tendency toward worldly enjoyments. But, by the Lord's grace, you may be able to overcome it." Swami Premananda, who was present, asked Maharaj to look at the other

initiate them only after many years of probation. During the ceremony of initiation he would be filled with an ecstasy of love, and the disciple would feel an extraordinary sense of the divine presence.

Holy Mother once complained that Maharaj did not accept enough disciples. It so happened that just then Maharaj was invited to see a play about the life of Ramanuja, which had been written by one of his own devotees. In this drama there is a scene which expresses Ramanuja's great love for mankind. The action is as follows:

Ramanuja's guru initiates him with a sacred mantram and warns him never to reveal it to anyone. "What will happen if I do?" Ramanuja asks. And his guru replies: "Whoever hears this mantram will be liberated from the bondage of his ignorance, but you yourself will suffer damnation. Ramanuja goes at once into the temple, gathers a crowd around him and utters the sacred mantram in the hearing of all. His guru pretends to be very angry and rebukes him for his disobedience. Ramanuja answers: "If my damnation can liberate so many people, then my supreme desire is to be damned." The guru is delighted. "You are great indeed!" he exclaims. "I give you my blessing. And he declares that the philosophy of qualified monism is to be known in future as the Ramanuja philosophy."

This drama and Holy Mother's remark both made

a deep impression upon Maharaj After this, he initiated many more disciples

Once, while Maharaj and Swami Turiyananda were in Brundaban, a young boy (later Swami Ananda) came to visit them The boy knew Turiyananda already and would talk to him for hours, but he was shy of Maharaj whom he regarded as very serious and austere Turiyananda knew this, and one day told him 'Go and prostrate before Maharaj Touch his feet, and sit beside him a while" The boy did so Maharaj blessed him touching his head and his back At once, the boy began to feel differently all his shyness disappeared He knew now that Maharaj loved him, and his own heart was filled with love From that day onward he was devoted to Maharaj Maharaj said jokingly to Turiyananda 'You see, I have stolen your disciple!" Turiyananda laughed and said 'Splendid! Now, the boy is blessed indeed"

Maharaj recognized his future disciples at first sight, and bound them to him at once with an indescribable love Even as he met them he knew which spiritual path each should follow Two young college boys came to visit him To one of them he said jokingly 'Let me see your palm' As he looked at it, he remarked 'You have a tendency toward worldly enjoyments But by the Lord's grace you may be able to overcome it' Swami Premananda, who was present, asked Maharaj to look at the other

boy's hand also. He replied, smiling "I don't need to." Hearing this, the other boy (who was later to be known as Swami Yatiswarananda) felt sad. He thought "My friend has some chance of becoming a monk, but I have none." A few days later, he came alone to visit Maharaj at the Belur Monastery. He met Swami Brahmananda's personal attendant, who told him "Maharaj said that you would become a monk." And indeed, he did, a few years later he became a monk, while the other boy married but remained a devotee.

Before Yatiswarananda became a monk, Maharaj told him "Give your body and mind to worldly enjoyments, and the world will destroy them both. Devote them to God and his service, and you will enjoy bodily health, peace of mind, and spiritual joy.

The following is Yatiswarananda's own description of his initiation. "The day Maharaj was to initiate me, I felt a spiritual power tangibly emanating from him. After the initiation, I bowed down to him. He raised his hand in benediction above my head, giving me instantly a vivid consciousness of an Immanent Presence. I realized that the whole universe was merged in that Presence. That day, also I got a glimpse of the divine nature and power of the guru. I was literally transported into a new life and the power that he transmitted to me that day is still working within me."

'There are some instances of persons receiving

atist who became a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna tells the following story about Brahmananda's extraordinary power. Compared to myself Rakkhal is only a young lad. I know that Sri Ramakrishna regarded him as his spiritual son but that is not the only reason why I feel such a deep reverence for him. Once while I was seriously ill I found that I had lost my faith in Sri Ramakrishna. My heart felt dry. Many of the brother-disciples came to see me and I told them about the unhappy state of my mind but they only kept silent. Then one day, Rakkhal came. He asked me how I felt, and I described the dryness and lack of devotion from which I was suffering. Rakkhal listened attentively then he laughed aloud. "Why worry about it?" he asked me. "The waves of the ocean rise high then they go down again and again they rise. The mind is like that. But please do not be troubled. Your present mood is due to the fact that you are about to rise to a much higher level of spirituality. The wave of the mind is gathering strength. When he left me all the dryness in my heart had gone. My faith had returned and my mind rose to a higher level than ever before."

Although Maharaj initiated me while I was still a college student I had no intention of entering the Order. However during one Christmas vacation, I went to live for a few days at the monastery. Swami Shuddhananda a disciple of Swamiji used to urge

me to become a monk. But I would argue with him. I thought the monastic life was lazy. I wanted to devote myself to political activities, believing that India must be freed from the domination of the British. An old man, who was also a guest at the monastery, used to be present during these arguments. Swami Shuddhananda could never convince me. One morning as usual, I went to prostrate before Maharaj. This old man was also in the room. Suddenly he asked Maharaj, "When is this boy going to become a monk?" Maharaj looked me up and down, and his eyes had an unforgettable sweetness as he answered quietly, "When the Lord wills." That was the end of my political plans and ambitions. I remained at the monastery.

My own case was not exceptional. Many politically minded young men who came into contact with Maharaj were inspired by the spiritual ideals of renunciation, service and of realizing God. They began to realize that the awakening of India would never come through political action, but only through an intensification of the nation's spiritual life—and that this awakening would benefit not India merely but all mankind.

Maharaj had wonderful insight into the character and spiritual growth of individuals. A friend of mine, whom he knew, renounced the world and went to Hrishikesh to practice austerity. He would not accept the guidance of any guru. After a few months'

practice, he wrote me, saying that he had attained samadhi. At that time I was with Maharaj at Kan Khal, and I told him the substance of my friend's letter.

"Why!" exclaimed Maharaj. "I saw him about ten days ago. I looked into his eyes. He has not had samadhi. No doubt, he has had some kind of mystic vision—the vision of a light, perhaps—and he mistakes that for samadhi. An aspirant is often led astray like that, when he has no guru to advise him. 'Samadhi! Is it an easy matter to attain samadhi? We saw Swamiji in samadhi only a few times. Sri Ramakrishna alone was able to live in samadhi almost continuously, day and night.'"

Then he quoted a verse from the Upanishads: "When a man sees the Supreme Lord, the knots of the heart are cut asunder and all doubts cease to exist."

"Is it ever possible," I asked, "to attain samadhi after a short time?"

"Yes, if a man has lived an absolutely continent life."

Maharaj with his deep insight, knew the strength and weakness of each of his disciples. He was always ready to help but he insisted that the disciples should also make some effort. Once, I asked him to free my mind from lust. "I could do that for you," he replied, "but then, my child, you would lose all the joy of struggle. Life would seem insipid.")

Sri Ramakrishna himself often rebuked his most intimate disciples, and Maharaj also used this method to train those who were near and dear to him. The chastening of a disciple never began, however, until after he had enjoyed several years of love and kind words. These experiences were painful at the time, but they were later treasured among the disciples' sweetest memories. It often happened that even while the disciple was being reproached by Maharaj, he would feel a strange undercurrent of joy. The indifference of Maharaj was the only thing we could not have borne, but Maharaj was never in different. The harsher his words, the more intensely we felt his interest in our welfare. The very fact that he could speak to us in this way proved that we were his children, his own. Sometimes, a disciple would be reproved for quite insignificant reasons, or on grounds that seemed to him utterly unjust. But, as time passed, he would realize that there had been certain tendencies and karmas stored in his subconscious mind, and that Maharaj had seen them and was working to annihilate them before they could appear and become harmful. Thus, at the cost of a little unpleasantness, the disciple would be spared years of painful struggle and self-discipline.

There was only one occasion when I felt that I had perhaps lost my Master's love, and because I could not endure the thought, that very night I decided to run away from the monastery and hide

myself forever. Thus resolved, I went next morning to prostrate before Maharaj, and silently take my leave of him. I was about to go, when he told me to sit down. For a while, he continued to scold me, reminding me of all my faults. Then with a sudden change of manner and great earnestness, he asked: "Do you think you can run away from me? The mother holds the child on her lap and spans him; and the child cries: 'Mother, mother!'" Never before had I been so deeply aware of his love and protection. All thought of running away was forgotten. His words soothed my burning heart. Then he said "Our love is so deep that we do not let you know how much we love you."

The truth of this statement was proved to me, as I watched how Maharaj dealt with Hanharananda, another disciple who had been for many years his personal attendant. Hanharananda had begun to depend too much upon the Master; he needed to learn to stand on his own feet. So, with a show of displeasure, Maharaj sent him away to practice austerities in the solitude of a temple in Southern India. Some years later, Maharaj was in Madras and arranged for Hanharananda to visit him. I was alone with Maharaj throughout the entire evening on which he was to arrive. Watching Maharaj I saw that he was as restless as a loving mother who was expecting her son after a long absence. In due time, Hanharananda arrived, but, fearing that Maharaj

was still angry with him, he felt shy and wanted to postpone their meeting until the morning. Knowing the real state of affairs, I insisted that he should see Maharaj at once. However, when Hanharananda came into the room, Maharaj no longer showed any sign of his loving anxiety. He merely greeted his disciple quietly and asked if he had been keeping well.

On another occasion, while I was being reproved in the presence of Ramlal Dada, the nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, another young disciple entered the room. Maharaj turned to him and said jokingly: "With those glasses on, you look like Keshab Sen." The disciple did not answer, for he saw that I was being scolded. Then Ramlal Dada turned to him and said: "Do you know why Maharaj is rebuking this boy in your presence? There is a saying that the mother scolds her daughter in order to teach the daughter in law."

I remember the first time Maharaj ever reproved me. I had failed to do a certain errand for him, because I had not understood exactly what it was he wanted. For this neglect, he scolded me throughout the afternoon. At supper time, Swami Tunyananda was seated with Maharaj and I was fanning them. The scolding continued. I remained silent. Swami Tunyananda turned to me and asked "Do you know why Maharaj is so hard on you?"

“No,” I replied, ‘frankly, I don’t I do not see how I am to blame”

Then Swami Turyananda said “There are three classes of disciples The third-class disciple merely does the guru’s bidding The second class disciple does not have to be told He acts as soon as the thought arises in the guru’s mind But the first-class disciple acts even before the guru has had time to think Maharaj wants you all to become first-class disciples”

To this Maharaj added simply “You see, brother Han, I am getting old, they do not obey me any more Please knock a little sense into their heads” There was another time when I did not write to Maharaj because my vanity had been wounded When he came to Madras from Bangalore and asked me why I had not written, I answered carelessly ‘Oh, you got all news of me from Swami Shiva nanda”

At a glance, he understood my mood, and asked sarcastically ‘I suppose you have the key to the treasure house inside you, and don’t need me any more?’ My ill humor vanished immediately ‘How can you say that?’ I exclaimed “You know that you hold the key!”

There is a saying that, in order to get honey from a honeycomb, you must poke it Maharaj once told me how Sri Ramakrishna, by his mere touch removed the spiritual obstacles that stood in his disci

ple's path. To this I answered "Yes—Sri Rama Krishna did all that for you. But when our turn comes you can only scold us."

Maharaj shook his head, and said with great sweetness "No, my boy. You have no need to worry." Then he repeated three times "I can see how Sri Ramkrishna is doing everything for you."

After this he began to speak of high spiritual matters. Swami Shivananda and many other monks of the Order were present. He continued to talk in this way for three hours, stopping only when he was told that a householder devotee wanted to see him. He remarked "Now I can't continue. My mind has come down to a lower level." Later, Swami Shivananda said to me "Today I learned many things I had not known before—just because you poked the honeycomb of Maharaj."

Sometimes the harsh behavior of Maharaj toward a disciple amounted to apparent cruelty. Three of us were to be initiated into the monastic Order at the same time. One was a boy who had been greatly praised because he had steadfastly practiced spiritual disciplines. We had all noticed his growth. Just as the formal rites were about to begin, Maharaj suddenly turned to this boy and said "Why are you here? I shall not initiate you. Go away."

My brother-disciple and I were both shocked and felt that Maharaj had been cruel. But the boy himself later admitted that the praise he had received

Suddenly, he came over and whispered into my ear 'It makes me feel so bad, having to leave you I shall miss you very much.' Later, at the end of a letter, he repeated those same loving words 'I miss you very much.'

'M' once told Vishwananda, a disciple of Maharaj 'Observe how Maharaj acts and you will have some idea of what Sri Ramakrishna was like. When his mind came down to the finite plane, his sense of humor was very keen.' This was also true of Maharaj. One of his favorite jokes was to have some fruits or sweets placed beside a disciple who was meditating. When the disciple had finished his meditation he would find his favorite dishes laid out before him. Later Maharaj would ask 'Well, did you get the fruits of your austerities?'

Often, he would make us all roar with laughter. I remember once, while we were laughing he nudged me and said, pointing to Vishwananda 'Look! He giggles like a girl! Maharaj would sometimes remark 'It is good to laugh every day. It relaxes the body and the mind.'

The following stories will give a glimpse of Maharaj's sense of fun, and also of the deep love he bore toward his brother disciples. One story is told by Swami Satprakashananda

One afternoon Maharaj was seated on the large bench on the ground floor verandah of the Math

building facing the Ganges The old Math building provided the only residential quarters of the Belur monastery at that time

I was standing very close to Maharaj Presently, a young man who had come to the monastery to spend a vacation in the company of holy men approached Maharaj to take leave of him His holiday was over, and he was about to return to his own home

Maharaj had noticed that, during his stay, the young man had been particularly devoted to Swami Premananda who was the center of attraction to many ardent visitors in those days

With his characteristic sense of humor, Maharaj took the opportunity to have a little fun at the expense of his brother-disciple, Swami Premananda

'Have you taken leave of Swami Premananda?' he asked as the young man bowed down before him "No Maharaj not yet he replied I am going to take leave of him now'

'Well when you bow down to him you should say the pranama mantra (salutation mantra) Perhaps you do not know this mantram but I shall teach you!

So saying Maharaj began to recite a Bengali couplet which he quite probably improvised as he went along Freely translated it ran something like this "My mind is reluctant to go back home it is my

heart's desire to lie down for ever at those blessed feet”

Then Maharaj instructed him how to act while saying the mantram. He told him to first stand before Swami Premananda with hands folded in great veneration, and repeat the couplet until he came to the line “to lie down forever at those blessed feet,” when he was to direct his still folded hands towards the Swami's feet, and then dive down.

The young man turned to go, and as he left, Maharaj told me to go and watch. I followed the youth and saw him standing before Swami Premananda with folded hands as Maharaj had instructed him. But he was silent. However, as he bowed down, the Swami noticed that he was mumbling something, and asked “What is this? What are you saying? Speak out, my boy!” But the boy remained silent. And then I laughed. Hearing me laugh, Swami Premananda turned to me and said ‘Ah! You know what he is saying surely! Please tell me!’ And then I told him the whole story of the pranama mantra, and when I had finished there was a roar of laughter.

The other story tells of an affectionate trick Maharaj played on his brother-disciple Swami Akhandananda. The Swami had been staying with Maharaj for some considerable time, when he decided he would like to return to his own ashrama. Maharaj

begged him to stay a little while longer, but the Swami persisted.

Seeing his evident determination to go, Maharaj engaged a palanquin (a portable chair) to take the Swami to the railway station, which was several miles away. The train was due in the early morning which meant that the Swami had to leave late at night.

Before the bearers set out with Swami Akhanda nanda, Maharaj whispered something to them. It was dark when they left, so the Swami settled down behind the curtains of the palanquin. Every once in a while the bearers would stop, and the Swami would anxiously inquire what they were stopping for. Each time, they assured him that they were stopping merely to rest and to have a smoke, but that there was no need for anxiety; he would arrive at his destination in plenty of time.

After several hours of arduous travel the bearers finally stopped for the last time and asked Swami Akhandananda to alight. Just as he was about to get out of the palanquin he saw Maharaj standing before him greeting him as though he had just arrived after a long absence. When the Swami realized that he had been carried around the compound all night he roared with laughter. Maharaj embraced him and they both laughed like two children.

The relationship between guru and disciple according to the Hindu scriptures is a very sacred

one. Maharaj used to say that an enlightened soul must help his disciple until he also becomes enlightened. This he cannot be broken by the death of the body. After the teacher has passed away, he still continues to watch over his disciples in spirit. He will not accept his own final liberation until all are liberated.

Maharaj was the embodiment of the protective power of the guru. At one time, he was walking with another disciple and myself. He was slightly ahead of us. Suddenly we heard a shout: 'Out of the way! There's a mad bull!' An instant later, we saw the bull itself, rushing toward us. There was no time to run. My brother-disciple and I tried to get in front of Maharaj, to protect him, but he raised his arms and pushed us back. Although he was now an elderly man, he was still extraordinarily strong. As the bull approached with lowered head, there was a moment's pause; Maharaj stood still, confronting it. Then the bull stopped, shook its head from side to side, lifted it, and walked quietly away.

Swami Akhulananda relates a similar incident which took place at Bhubaneswar. Maharaj had gone for an evening walk in the woods with Akhulananda and another devotee. By the time they turned homeward, it was dark. All at once they saw a tiger coming toward them. Maharaj stood still. The tiger also stopped, about a hundred feet away, and looked at them for some moments. Then it turned and ran

off Neither of the devotees felt frightened There could never be any fear in the presence of Maharaj

Maharaj prescribed various disciplines and diverse forms of worship to suit the different temperaments of his disciples He knew our needs far better than we did When I first joined the Order I was inclined toward the path of devotion, but Maharaj decided to send me to a monastery in the Himalayas where the ideal of non-dualism is practiced and no ritual is allowed Before I left, he made me read aloud to him a book on extreme non-dualism Two years later, he sent me to the monastery in Madras where ritual is regarded as very important By this time I had lost all my devotional inclination and no longer believed in ritualistic worship Some time later, Maharaj came to visit this monastery One day, a devotee brought a large basket of *naga lingam* flowers to be offered in the worship Knowing that they were the favorite flowers of Maharaj, I arranged them in his room Maharaj came in, saw what I was doing, and asked 'Have you saved some of those flowers for the worship of the Lord?'

'No, Maharaj' I replied For I had thought to myself "After all, the Lord in the shrine room is only a picture, but the guru is the living God' Maharaj, as usual, read my thoughts and asked 'Do you think it is merely a picture that is worshipped in the shrine?'

Yes I replied somewhat nervously

"Have you ever performed the ritualistic worship?"
 "No, Maharaj."
 "Why not?"

"I am not yet a Swami, and I am not a Brahmin by caste. So I am not allowed to do the external worship in the shrine."

Maharaj became quite excited. "What is all this?" he exclaimed. "Call Shivananda."

Swami Shivananda was a disciple of Maharaj and the head of the Madras monastery. When he appeared, Maharaj asked him, "How is it that a Brahman of this Order is not allowed to do the worship, just because he is not a Brahmin?"

Shivananda answered, "Swami Ramakrishna nanda was the first head of this monastery. He was very particular that the worship should be performed only by a Swami or a Brahmin."

"It should not be that way," Maharaj replied. "Anyone who has been initiated and who has entered the Order is purified in his body and birth, therefore, he should be allowed to do the worship." Then, turning to me, he said, "You will do the worship."

"But Maharaj" I replied, "I do not believe in ritualistic worship. I do not see the living Presence in the picture."

"I am asking you to do the worship now," Maharaj said quietly. "Will you?"

I obediently followed his instructions and, within

a few days, became convinced of the great efficacy of external worship

Almost his last advice to me was 'Be ritualistic' And he added 'Look at Ambikananda (one of his senior disciples), see how wonderfully he is progressing through the practice of ritualism"

This does not mean, however, that Maharaj asked everybody to practice ritualism In fact, there are many of his disciples who have never learned the rites of formal worship Hinduism teaches the value of ritual, but does not say that it is essential to everyone's spiritual progress

In conclusion, I must mention two quotations which Maharaj never tired of repeating to his disciples The first was "Tell the truth but never a harsh truth' The second was from the teachings of Sri Chaitanya 'Be humbler than a blade of grass, be patient and forbearing like the tree Give honor to all take no honor to thyself Chant the name of the Lord unceasingly

HIS MYSTIC VISIONS

MAHARAJ once told me "There are times when it becomes impossible for me to teach anyone. No matter where I look, I see only God, wearing many masks. Who am I, the teacher? Who is to be taught? But when my mind comes down again, to a lower level, I see the ignorance in man and I try to re-move it"

Maharaj spent most of his later life in a state of high spiritual consciousness, coming down only in order to teach and help us. His awareness of God had become so habitual that he would experience mystical visions even while conscious of the external world around him. He rarely spoke of these external and when he did so, it was only to his brother swamis or disciples. I shall record a few of them in this chapter.

It was the year 1901, a few days before the annual worship of Durga—God the Mother in her aspect as protectress of the universe. Maharaj was sitting on the bank of the Ganges at the Belur Math. Suddenly he saw Mother Durga walking on the surface of the Ganges toward the monastery grounds. She passed under the sacred vilwa tree in the moras-

tery garden and then disappeared. A moment later Swamiji arrived by boat, came to Maharaj and said 'Rajaji, make arrangements at once for the worship of Mother Durga.' Then he told Maharaj that he had had a vision, and had seen Mother Durga being worshipped at the monastery Maharaj, in turn, described his own vision to Swamiji, and they began at once to prepare for the worship. Since that date the special worship of Mother Durga has been held every year at the Belur Monastery. Maharaj also performed this worship at the monasteries in Kankhal, Benares, and Madras. He once told Akhilananda that he performed this worship in obedience to the Mother's direct command. Akhilananda records that, during the Durga festival in Madras, the power of Maharaj was specially felt by his disciples, and their minds were raised to higher levels of spirituality.

Maharaj used to observe Christmas every year by offering special worship to Jesus. The story of the nativity was read aloud from the Bible and followed by meditation. Fruit, bread, cake and wine were offered in the worship.

Sister Devamata, an American devotee who happened to be present on one such occasion, records the scene as follows:

"When I had finished reading the intense stillness in the air led me to look towards Swami Brahmananda. His eyes were open and fixed on the altar, there was a smile on his lips, but it was evident that

his consciousness had gone to a higher plane. No one moved or spoke. At the end of twenty minutes or more, the look of immediate seeing returned to his eyes and he motioned to us to continue the service."

After the service, as Maharaj was partaking of the sacramental food, he remarked to Sister Devamata: "While you were reading, Christ suddenly stood before the altar, dressed in a long blue cloak. He talked to me for some time. It was a very blessed moment."

There is a saying in Sanskrit "Places of pilgrimage are made holy by the visits of the seers of God." The enlightened soul does not need to visit holy places or temples, for he has realized the living God everywhere. Wherever he lives, that place becomes holy. Nevertheless, we know that enlightened men often journey to shrines and temples. They do so because they find there a greater manifestation of God—a more concentrated revelation, as it were.

This spiritual concentration has been caused by the visits of many holy men and women and by the devotion of pilgrims throughout the ages. When a saint goes to a holy place, he contributes his own revelation to the spiritual treasure house, for the benefit of the generations that will follow.

The temples of India are dedicated to deities, of many forms and aspects, as well as to the impersonal, formless Godhead. This one Godhead, whose

name is Silence, comprises all divine forms and aspects, yet is beyond form and definition Sri Rama Krishna used to say "Never set a limit to the Infinite by trying to define it" And indeed, it is evident that Infinite God must have infinite forms of expression "Truth is one, sages call it by various names," says the Rig Veda, the ancient scripture of the Hindus

In an orchestra, different instruments play different notes, but when these notes are harmonized the combined effect is of one beautiful unity Maharaj reached this unity through his realization of Brahman An ordinary mystic may be aware of only one instrument and hear only one note—one part or aspect of the divine whole The illumined soul, however, hears all the instruments, the entire orchestra Thus it was that Maharaj, while ever conscious of the one Brahman was able to see the many divine aspects when he visited the temples dedicated to them

At Madura, in Southern India, there is a famous temple of Divine Mother When Maharaj entered it and stood before the deity he exclaimed 'Mother, Mother!' and lost his external consciousness Swami Ramakrishnananda who was with him, saw his condition and held him by the arms to prevent him from falling Seeing Maharaj standing unconscious in ecstasy the priests and devotees who were present gazed at him in silence An intense stillness pervaded the temple and lasted for more than an hour When

Maharaj regained his normal consciousness he went silently away. Later he described his vision of the luminous form of Divine Mother. At the temple of Rameswar, which is dedicated to Shiva, the formless aspect of God, Maharaj was again absorbed in samadhi. Even after he returned to normal consciousness, he remained for some time in a state of ecstatic joy.

The temple at Cape Comorin is dedicated to Divine Mother in the form of a little girl Maharaj lived there for several days. For a while he would stand silent and motionless before the deity; then he would become ecstatic and begin to talk to her. Whenever he entered this temple, he lost all external consciousness. In the temple of Vishnu at Tirupati in Southern India, Maharaj had a strange experience. The vision he beheld there was not of Vishnu, but of Divine Mother. On inquiry it was found that the temple had once been dedicated to Mother, and later had been changed into a Vishnu temple through the influence of Ramanuja.

In the temple of Jagnnath at Puri, there are three images. Sri Krishna stands on one side, his brother, Balaram, on the other, and Subhadra, his sister, stands in the center. Here Maharaj once saw the living Krishna on the altar; the three images had disappeared. Maharaj visited this temple many times, and each time he went there, he seemed to dwell

in another realm, and his face shone with a radiant smile

Of the many places of pilgrimage that Maharaj visited, he loved Brindaban and Benares most of all. He used to tell us that in these two cities, a spiritual current is always flowing, and that this current grows particularly strong at certain times of the day and night. He said that if a man meditates and practices japam in Brindaban at midnight he is greatly helped by the spiritual current, and if he meditates in Benares at 4 a.m., he may easily become absorbed into the higher consciousness. In later years when Maharaj visited the temples at Brindaban and Benares, he would ask his disciples to sing and chant and he himself would pass into ecstasy.

Speaking of Benares, he said 'Many have found enlightenment there. If the aspirant struggles a little to reach union with God, he may get it very easily.' Only once did Maharaj initiate a disciple in Benares. After that he refused to do so, because, as he said, 'Lord Shiva gives liberation to all those who live and die there.' The disciple, who later became Swami Akhilananda, was once in Benares with Maharaj and wanted initiation. 'Holy Mother does not initiate any disciple in Benares,' Maharaj told him. 'I have made the same rule.' Then in a sweet affectionate voice he added 'I will initiate you when I go back to the monastery at Belur. Don't be impatient. In

my mind I have already accepted you as my disciple, and have made myself responsible for you”

Once, during the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday at Belur, while the disciples were singing and chanting, Maharaj went into samadhi. He was carried to his room, completely unconscious of the outer world, his face shining with a heavenly radiance. He remained in this condition so long that his brother-disciples became anxious. They told Holy Mother, who was present at the time, but she showed no anxiety; indeed she seemed well pleased, and said “Do not worry about him” Then she went to Maharaj, touched his arm lightly and said in an affectionate voice “Rakhal, I have brought sacramental food for you. Eat, my child” Maharaj immediately returned to normal consciousness and, seeing Holy Mother, prostrated himself at her feet.

He used to say ‘It is very hard to understand Mother's greatness, unless she herself reveals it. Through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, one may recognize the Divine Mother in her”

Once, while Maharaj was visiting Holy Mother, a female disciple of Sri Ramakrishna said to him ‘Rakhal, Mother wanted to know from you why a spiritual aspirant must worship the Divine Mother first” Maharaj answered ‘Mother has the key to knowledge of Brahman. Unless she shows her grace and opens the door, no one can enter into the realm of Brahman”

As he left the house where Holy Mother was staying, Maharaj began to sing and dance, clapping his hands, like a little boy. Whenever he was with Holy Mother, he always acted in this childlike manner, which expressed the relationship between them.

Vijnanananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, said of Maharaj and his visions: "The gods and goddesses are not myths, they are real. They are the many aspects of the one Godhead. I know this because Maharaj used to see and talk to them."

Once Akhilananda, who was then a very young boy, was told by Swami Vijnanananda to say to Maharaj when he met him: "There is something within me that needs awakening—please give me your help." Akhilananda repeated these words to Maharaj, who replied: "Why didn't you ask Vijnanananda to do this awakening for you?" Akhilananda answered that he had, but that Swami Vijnanananda had said: "I have very little spiritual power within me but Maharaj lives in the powerhouse. He can easily do what you ask." Maharaj looked very serious and said: "Yes, the awakening will come. Don't be impatient. For this awakening one needs initiation."

"Then please initiate me."

"That will be done," Maharaj promised.

To quote Akhilananda's own words: "Maharaj made us feel that spiritual awakening and God realization are not difficult to achieve. He made us understand that if only we will struggle a little, tre-

mendous help will be given us, and that we shall easily reach the goal”

In his later years Maharaj had the vision of Sri Ramakrishna every day. He used to tell me “I see Sri Ramakrishna every day and talk to him” To another disciple he said ‘I see Sri Ramakrishna whenever he chooses to reveal himself to me. By his grace, you also will see him and talk to him”

Although Maharaj lived almost continuously in a high state of consciousness, he was very natural and human in his behavior. Even when he was quite a young man, Sri Ramakrishna said of him ‘Rakhal is like the kind of mango which still looks green outside when it is ripe and sweet within” And this was true throughout his life. Whenever he could, he would lude his ecstatic mood and act in the most normal way. I have already mentioned his keen sense of humor. Balam’s wife once dreamt that she was feeding Maharaj. Taking this for an omen, she invited him to a sumptuous feast which she herself cooked. When Maharaj had enjoyed the dinner, he turned to her grandson and said ‘Tell your grand mother to dream more often”

On another occasion, a devotee came to take Maharaj to his home in a Rolls Royce car. Maharaj enjoyed the ride very much and when it was over, he remarked ‘In the future my motto will be—‘Rolls Royce or walk”

His love of gardening has been referred to in an

earlier chapter At every monastery he visited, he gave valuable advice as to the laying out of gardens Often he would gaze at the blossoming flowers and remark Look! There you see the worship of God, in his universal form going on unceasingly”

Many of his householder disciples came to Maharaj with their worldly troubles and problems Not only did he listen to them sympathetically, but he also gave them constructive advice Many successful professional men, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, found it very easy to discuss the problems of their work with Maharaj He would listen with intelligent interest and understanding and was often able to offer a new suggestion, or another angle of approach to the problem

Even though he was interested in everything and in all the events of his time, his intimate disciples could see, that beneath this apparent interest, Maharaj always remained completely detached The things of this world rolled off him like drops of water off a lotus leaf

HIIS PASSING AWAY

I HAVT already described how Sri Ramakrishna saw Ramlal dancing with Sri Krishna on a mystic lotus, shortly before the boy's first visit to Dakshineswar. Only a few intimate disciples knew of this vision, and Sri Ramakrishna had warned them never to reveal it to Maharaj, explaining that if he realized his true nature as the Eternal Companion of Krishna, he would leave his mortal body. The secret had therefore been very carefully guarded.

In March, 1922, Maharaj went to Calcutta to stay for a while at the home of Balaram Balaram himself had already passed away, but his whole family were sincere devotees of Ramakrishna, and his beautiful guest house was always at the disposal of all the Swamis and disciples of the Order.

It is now regarded as a place of pilgrimage, sanctified by the presence of so many holy men.

While Maharaj was staying at the guest house, Ramlal Dada came to visit him. Ramlal Dada was a pure soul and a devotee of a very high order. During Ramakrishna's lifetime, he had been one of the Master's personal attendants and had served him with great devotion. Whenever he and Maharaj were

together, their talk naturally turned to the early days. They would laugh and joke together, for they stimulated each other's sense of fun. One day Maharaj asked Ramlal Dada to sing for him the songs he used to sing to Ramakrishna. It was arranged that many disciples and devotees should be present to hear the singing.

Ramlal Dada began to sing songs about Krishna and the shepherds and shepherdesses of Brindaban. At first, everyone was very gay as Ramlal mimicked the gestures of the shepherdesses, making his audience laugh. Suddenly, Maharaj, who had also been enjoying the fun, became serious. Ramlal Dada was singing, "Come back, O Krishna, come back to Brindaban. Come and reign in the hearts of your beloved shepherds and shepherdesses. Do not forget that you are a shepherd yourself." At that moment Maharaj seemed transported to a realm beyond this earth. The joking and laughter stopped. The atmosphere became calm and serene. It may be, that at this moment, Maharaj got a partial glimpse of his true nature and knew himself to be God's Eternal Companion. The events that followed seem to point to some such revelation.

A few days later, at midnight, Nirvanananda, a disciple and personal attendant of Maharaj saw his Master sitting on his bed in a very earnest mood. The disciple stood silently before him, waiting for him to speak. Maharaj looked at him, and said "I

woke suddenly and saw Sri Ramakrishna standing just there” He pointed to a spot in front of a couch, adding ‘He didn’t speak to me He stood there silently for a while and then disappeared I don’t understand it”

After a few moments Maharaj continued in a low, earnest voice ‘I can’t give my mind to the things of this world any longer It wants to take complete refuge in him and him alone”

Shortly after this, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated Maharaj stayed at the Belur Math for the occasion, then he returned to Balam’s house in Calcutta Two days later he had a slight attack of cholera, but recovered within a week This illness which left him feeble was followed by diabetes, which took a serious turn Many doctors came to treat him, one of whom wore the religious mark on his forehead

‘Doctor,” said Maharaj ‘the Lord Shiva, whose symbol you wear on your forehead, is the only Reality Everything else is unreal”

A devotee asked ‘Maharaj, are you suffering very greatly?’

“Please try to realize,” Maharaj answered, ‘that in my condition I have to bear all physical suffering patiently and without complaint”

But as he said this, his face lighted up with a divine radiance The pain seemed to have melted

While speaking of his divine experiences, his throat became dry. A disciple offered him a drink, saying "Maharaj, please drink this water. It has lemon in it."

"The mind doesn't want to come down from Brahman," said Maharaj slowly, "Pour Brahman into Brahman" and like a child he opened his mouth for the water to be poured into it.

Then he turned to Swami Saradananda and said "Brother, Sri Ramakrishna is real. His divine incarnation is real."

After this Maharaj was silent for a while. He was deeply absorbed in meditation, and his face wore an expression of great sweetness. The minds of those who were present were so uplifted that they felt no grief—only joy and silent calm. All sense of the world and of death was lost.

Suddenly, out of the silence, the voice of Maharaj was heard "Ah, that inexpressible light! Rama krishna the Krishna of my Ramakrishna. I am the shepherd boy. Put anklets on my feet, I want to dance with Krishna. I want to hold his hand—the little boy Krishna. Ah, Krishna my Krishna, you have come! Krishna Krishna. Can't you see him? Haven't you eyes to see? Oh, how beautiful! My Krishna on the lotus eter-
nal the Sweet One!

' My play is over now. Look! The child Krishna

is caressing me He is calling me to come away with him! I am coming

The tenderness and heavenly compassion that filled his heart were expressed in every word he uttered

The whole atmosphere of the large hall where he was lying seemed to vibrate with this emotion No one can describe the extraordinary sense of holiness which was created by his presence Everyone knew that the fateful hour was approaching and that Maharaj was taking his final leave

During the early hours of the morning he remained silent for some time and fell into a slumber At seven o'clock he awoke and was again possessed by this high spiritual mood He called the few disciples who had just arrived but who had not been present the previous night To each he gave his blessing bestowing comfort and fearlessness

Two more days passed and another night came on By this time his life was despaired of, and gloom fell upon all His physical condition grew worse and worse and the doctors were amazed that he had not passed into coma days before as is usual with this kind of illness But so great was the power and spirituality of his mind so completely was it freed from the meshes of physical matter that it remained completely unaffected by the condition of his suffering body He maintained perfect consciousness right up to the last moment of his life

As that last evening faded into night, his chest suddenly heaved. It was as if a great wave of breath passed up the body to the throat. His half-closed eyes opened, and he gazed into the distance, his eyes shining with a brilliance and unspeakable beauty.

Thus it was that, on April 10th, 1922, the life left his body.

"Do not grieve. I shall be with you always." Those were his last words to his disciples. After his passing away, we all had the feeling that Maharaj was intensely present within us. He was closer to us than ever before.

More than twenty years have passed since that day, and every disciple can bear witness to the fact that Maharaj still lives, protects, and guides him on ward toward the goal.

When I was about to leave India and take up my duties in the United States, Swami Shivananda said to me "Never forget that you have seen the Son of God. You have seen God."

*Spiritual Teachings of
Maharaj*

SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF MAHARAJ

I

IT WAS THE AFTERNOON of a beautiful spring day in March, 1916, when a young Indian girl came to the monastery to see Swami Brahmañanda, the president of the Ramakrishna Mission. Forced into marriage by her parents, she had run away from her husband to the monastery, and as soon as she was brought into the presence of Maharaj she fell at his feet saying "O father, I have no desire to live a worldly life. I wish only to spend my days here at the monastery under your guidance. My one desire is to worship God and realize him. To him alone I would surrender myself, body, mind, and soul." Deeply touched by her evident earnestness and guilelessness of character, Maharaj replied "My child, this is a monastery! How can you stay here? Go back to your parents, they are worried about you. Stay with them, study the scriptures and read the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Pray to Sri Ramakrishna. He knows the yearnings of your heart and will answer your prayers. Later on you may go to the Nivedita school for girls, or to the Ashrama of Gouri Ma. You have the true understanding. Vain indeed is this human birth unless one has love for God!" But the young girl refused to return to her



Maharaj

Sri Ramakrishna saw God in all beings. Seeing his great love for his disciples, Swami Vivekananda once said to him, 'You love us all so much. Is it not possible that, because of this love, you, too, may meet the same fate that Jada Bharat met?'¹ The Master replied, "True, by thinking of matter, one becomes like matter. But you must understand that it is the God within you that I love. If my mind should ever become attached to any one of you as man or woman, I would at once dismiss all thought of you from my mind." Because Sri Ramakrishna taught the ideal of renunciation to his young disciples, he was often criticized by the worldly minded, and to such criticism he would answer, "I have no objection to anyone living in the world. Neither do I teach that every man and woman should renounce lust and greed. I teach renunciation only to those in whom there is already some spiritual awakening. I want these young men to attain first knowledge and discrimination, and then, if they wish, they may enter into worldly life." Indeed, to many who came to him he would say, 'First go out into the world

¹ Referring to the story in the Bhagavatam (Wisdom of God), which tells of the king who loved his pet deer so intensely, that after his death he himself was reborn as a deer. The moral of the story is: As you think, so you become. Therefore one should not become attached to any object in the world.

parents' home, so Maharaj blessed her and sent her to the Ashrama

After she had left, Maharaj walked slowly into the library where he found Swami Premananda writing a letter. He sat down beside him, and almost immediately went into a mood of ecstasy. Those who watched him could catch only a glimpse of the ecstatic joy which shone through his radiant face. His expression and behavior were indescribable. Swami Premananda watched him for a while, then, turning to the young monk who was also present, said 'Watch Maharaj! That mood in which you see him is known as the Paramahansa state!

In a little while Maharaj returned to normal consciousness, and said to Swami Premananda "Who can understand the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna? Swami Vivekananda wanted to see a convent established for young women, and now I see that some day soon his desire will be fulfilled. Young women are becoming imbued with the ideal of renunciation as taught by our Master. That girl who came today was like a goddess in her beauty, her purity, her earnestness and her guilelessness."

II

Disciple

Maharaj how did Sri Ramakrishna look upon mankind? Please tell us something about him

Maharaj

Sn Ramakrishna saw God in all beings Seeing his great love for his disciples, Swami Vivekananda once said to him ‘ You love us all so much Is it not possible that, because of this love, you, too, may meet the same fate that Jada Bharat met? ’¹ The Master replied ‘ True by thinking of matter, one becomes like matter But you must understand that it is the God within you that I love If my mind should ever become attached to any one of you as man or woman, I would at once dismiss all thought of you from my mind ” Because Sn Ramakrishna taught the ideal of renunciation to his young disciples, he was often criticized by the worldly minded, and to such criticism he would answer ‘ I have no objection to anyone living in the world Neither do I teach that every man and woman should renounce lust and greed I teach renunciation only to those in whom there is already some spiritual awakening I want these young men to attain first knowledge and discrimination, and then if they wish they may enter into worldly life ” Indeed, to many who came to him he would say, “ First go out into the world

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Gather your experiences, and then, when you have become sick of the world, come to me for the cure." His teachings varied to suit all temperaments.

When Swami Turijananda was quite a young lad, he asked Sri Ramakrishna how he could give up thoughts of lust. The Master said: "Give up lust? Why should you give up lust? Instead of trying to give up, you should increase your lust!" This advice amazed the young disciple, but he said nothing, and the Master continued: "Direct all your thoughts of lust and all your passions toward God." Often he would point to himself and say, "Everything will be achieved if you will love *this*. The more intensely you yearn for God, the greater will be your revelation of him."

Sri Ramakrishna was many-sided. Whenever he talked about the intuitive knowledge of the God-head, he would talk as one who was a pure *jnani*, knower of God. And whenever he talked about love and devotion, he talked as a pure lover and devotee of God. He impressed upon us very clearly that mere secular knowledge is nothing but vanity, and that one should struggle hard to attain spiritual knowledge, and love, and devotion to God alone.

Disciple

Please tell us something about the Master's samadhi.

Maharaj

The Master used to experience many different kinds of samadhi. In some states his body would become stiff and motionless, like a log. It was easy for him to regain his normal consciousness from such a state, but at other times, when the samadhi was deeper, it would take him much longer to return to normal consciousness. At such times he would first draw a deep breath like a drowning man coming up out of deep water. Then, for a while, he would reel and act like a drunken man, even his speech would be thick and incoherent. Gradually, however, he would regain his natural state.

Whenever you teach and give lectures quote the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. His words throw a clearer light on the scriptures, and help to bring home the true import of their meaning.

Insincerity was the one thing Sri Ramakrishna could not stand. He loved those who loved God sincerely. He used to say, "If a man prays to God with a sincere heart, he is quickly freed from all impurities."

Most of the Master's nights were spent in samadhi or in chanting the Lord's name or in singing his praise. He seldom slept for more than an hour any night. Often I have seen him completely absorbed in samadhi for more than an hour at a time. Some-

times he would try to speak to us, but no words would come. Later he would say, 'You see, I want to talk to you while I am in samadhi, but whenever I try to do so, it seems as if the doors of my speech are locked.' Many times as he was coming down to the normal plane he would be muttering, as though talking to an unseen being.

He used to say, "To find God you must yearn for him," and he would tell this story. "An aspirant approached his teacher and asked to be shown the way to the attainment of God. The teacher took the disciple by the hand and led him to the river. There, without a word, he held the disciple's head under the water for some time. After a while he let go, and the disciple came up, choking and gasping for breath. He looked at his teacher in astonishment, and the teacher smiled at him and said 'Well, how did it feel?' The disciple answered 'I felt an intense longing for air!' 'Well,' said the teacher, 'when you can long for God with the same intensity as you longed for that breath of air, you will surely attain him!'"

When Swami Vivekananda first came to Sri Ramakrishna as a young man, he would often argue with him. At that time Swami believed only in the formless aspect of God and even told Sri Ramakrishna that he considered his visions of God as mere hallucinations of the brain. He would also scold the devotees when they went to bow down to the deities in the temple. This attitude annoyed

many of the Master's disciples, but the Master himself was not disturbed. He could never be angry with Naren. He would say, 'Naren is unique. There is none to equal him.' Later on he gave Swamiji the vision of God in all his aspects, so that he, too, came to say, 'Devote yourself to God—whether with form or without form—and you will reach him!

Disciple

Maharaj many people are of the opinion that those who met Sri Ramakrishna did not need to struggle to find God. To know him was quite sufficient. Even the great devotee Ram Dutta held this view.

Maharaj

Ram Dutta was unique. He had true faith, a faith which grew in intensity and which lasted all his life. Few have such faith. With the majority it is merely lip faith.

Disciple

Maharaj many devotees who have seen the Holy Mother and have served holy men think it is not necessary for them to continue their spiritual struggles.

Maharaj

Merely to see the Holy Mother and to serve holy men is not enough. It is most necessary to practice

renunciation and discrimination, and to live a contemplative life

III

Maharaj

The one purpose of human life is to attain devotion to God and spiritual illumination, otherwise, life is vain and meaningless. Eating, drinking, sleeping, and procreating are not the sole ends of human birth, these belong to the brutes. God is greatly manifest in the human body. Try to understand this truth.

Ah! Swamiji gave his heart's blood to build this monastery so that you young men might have the opportunity to devote your lives to God and practice spiritual disciplines. In fact, in his effort to make your life easier, he over-exerted himself and shortened his own life. What intense love he had toward all mankind!

Sri Ramakrishna was revealed to the world at large through Swamiji. Know that their words and teachings are not different. Sri Ramakrishna was too great for the average mind to grasp, it was Swami Vivekananda who made his life and teachings understandable to all.

Study Swamiji's works carefully, for unless you understand his teachings, it is useless to try to under

stand Sri Ramakrishna Read and study the teachings of both, and at the same time, devote yourself to the practice of japam and meditation You are young now, and these are the best years of your life Mould your minds now, when once the mind is moulded there is nothing to fear When you can bring the mind under control you will have achieved much Whip it whenever it tries to run astray

IV

Maharaj

Hold fast to the Lotus feet of the Lord Remember him constantly, do not waste any more time in worldly thoughts Struggle! Struggle hard to control the outgoing mind and fix it on God When you can do this, you will realize what joy there is in spiritual life, what fun¹ it is! Ignorance must be overcome in this very life This will not be easy unless you can devote yourself wholeheartedly to the work of the spirit Faith is the one thing needed, in tense faith! Let not doubts get hold of your mind

¹ The word 'fun' as applied to spiritual joy was characteristic of Swami Brahmananda who wished by its use to do away with the chasm which exists in many minds between the high satisfactions of religion and the moods of simple happiness experienced in everyday life Everyone likes fun Why then should everyone not like God? For God when all is said is the real and only fun

Disciple

But if doubts should come?

Maharaj

Doubts will come until you have realized God, therefore you must hold fast to God and pray Think to yourself "God is! but because of the impurities of my mind I cannot see him When my heart and mind have become purified, then, through his grace, I shall surely see him!"

God cannot be known by the finite mind He is beyond the mind and far beyond the intellect This apparent universe is a creation of the mind The mind has conquered it up, it is its author, and the mind cannot go beyond its own domain

Behind this mind of ours there is a subtle, spiritual mind, existing in seed form Through the practice of contemplation, prayer, and japam, this mind is developed, and with this development a new vision opens up, and the aspirant realizes many spiritual truths This, however, is not the final experience The subtle mind leads the aspirant nearer to God, but it cannot reach God, the supreme Atman Having reached this stage, the world no longer holds any charm for the aspirant, he becomes absorbed in the consciousness of God This absorption leads to samadhi, an experience which cannot be de-

scribed It is beyond is and is not There there is neither happiness nor misery neither light nor darkness All is Infinite Being—inexpressible

Disciple

Maharaj how should we perform our worldly duties?

Maharaj

Do your duties conscientiously and without attachment Always remember that you are only an instrument in the hands of God and that God himself is the only doer Keep your mind fixed in God It is not always easy to keep the mind steady in God while working the ego creeps in But never be discouraged by your failures Repeated failure is inevitable in the beginning but keep your faith and redouble your efforts Try hard to live up to your ideal

Let your watchword be I must realize God in this very life! After all what is the use of this body and this mind if they do not help you to realize God? Do or die! What does it matter even if you die in the attempt!

V

Disciple

Maharaj, what is the significance of all these gods and goddesses? Do they really exist? And what is the meaning and purpose of ritualistic worship?

Maharaj

The many gods and goddesses represent but so many different aspects of the one Godhead. Men differ in their temperaments, and so are inclined to different ways of worship. To meet the needs of all, the scriptures prescribe four distinct methods of worship.

One method is the ritualistic worship of God embodied in an image or symbol. Higher than this is the worship of God with prayer and japam. By this means the aspirant prays and chants and meditates upon the shining form of his Chosen Ideal within his own heart.

Higher still is meditation. When a man practices this form of worship he keeps up a constant flow of thought toward God, and becomes absorbed in the living presence of his Chosen Ideal. He goes beyond prayer and japam, but the sense of duality remains.

The highest method of worship is meditation on the unity of the Atman and Brahman. This leads

directly and immediately to God. The aspirant experiences Brahman, he knows that God is. It is an actual realization of the omnipresent Reality.

These are the different stages through which the aspirant progresses. It is of vital importance that a man begin his spiritual journey from where he is. If an average man is instructed to meditate on his union with the Absolute Brahman, he will not understand. He will neither grasp the truth of it, nor be able to follow the instructions. For a while he may try, but sooner or later, he will tire of the struggle and give up.

However, if that same man is asked to worship God with flowers, incense, and other accessories of the ritualistic worship, his mind will gradually become concentrated on God, and he will find joy in his worship. Through such worship, devotion to the performance of japam grows. The finer the mind becomes, the greater is its capacity for the higher forms of worship. Through japam the mind inclines toward meditation, thus the aspirant gradually and naturally moves toward his Ideal.

Take the illustration of a man standing in the courtyard of a house. He wants to reach the roof, but, instead of climbing the staircase step by step, he permits himself to be thrown up bodily. What happens? He is seriously hurt. So it is with the spiritual life. One should follow the gradual path, for, just as there are laws governing the physical

world so are there laws governing the spiritual world also

Disciple

How may I check a distracting thought that persistently arises in my mind?

Maharaj

Think to yourself 'This thought is immensely harmful to me It will be my ruin! Impress the idea again and again upon your mind The mind is extremely susceptible to suggestions, and will learn whatever you teach it Therefore, if through discrimination you can impress upon it the joy and fullness of the spiritual life and the folly of worldly attachments, it will devote itself more and more to God, and you will find yourself freed from all distracting thoughts

The supreme ideal of the human life is to know God Everyone must have an ideal firmly established in his life, and that ideal must never be lowered He "who is smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest," shines forth always and everywhere He dwells within all beings, great and small he dwells in the plants and herbs He dwells everywhere in greater or lesser manifestation Make that one, supreme, all pervading Spirit your ideal Even after a little effort to realize him, you will see what fun it is! You will find in him an inexhaustible fountain

of joy. You have seen enough of one side of life—now see the other side, the real side. 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you.' A veil is hiding the Reality. Remove that veil and you will find him. If you will apply yourself to the attainment of this ideal, the whole world will be transformed for you.

Disciple

Maharaj, what rules of diet should one follow?

Maharaj

That is a difficult question to answer. Men differ so widely in their constitutions that it is hardly possible to lay down any hard and fast rule about food. One kind of food may be agreeable to your constitution, and yet do me harm. For this reason the scriptures do not specifically advise any diet but only warn against rich foods.

Disciple

Should we avoid eating meat, since it entails killing?

Maharaj

Nonsense! The Buddhists say, "Harmlessness is the highest virtue." What does this mean? You can understand the significance of this only when you have attained samadhi, when you have reached enlightenment and have seen God in all creatures

Until then mere talk is useless. When you can see the same God in the ant as in yourself, then you can practice this virtue. You may talk of not killing, but can you possibly avoid killing? What would you eat? Potatoes? Plant a potato underground, it shoots forth young sprouts. Has the potato no life? Would you eat rice? Plant the paddy grain in the earth, it grows into a rice plant. You want to drink water? Examine a drop of water under a microscope and see how many millions of tiny lives are there. You must breathe to live. Yet with every breath you kill millions of creatures. Do you see any harm in that? You think you lose your religion if you take a little fish. Such arguments are foolish. The ancient Hindus held no such ideas. These are later Buddhist and Vaishnavite interpolations.

VI

Maharaj

Samadhi is generally classified as of two kinds. In the first, the savikalpa samadhi, one experiences the mystic vision of the spiritual form of God, while the consciousness of individuality remains. In the second, the nirvikalpa samadhi, a man loses his individuality and goes beyond the vision of the form of God. The whole universe disappears. Besides

these two there is yet another kind of samadhi called Ananda (blissful) samadhi. If an ordinary man attains this experience, his body and brain cannot stand the intense ecstatic joy, he cannot live more than twenty one days.

One day, in the course of his teaching, Sri Ramakrishna spoke about the manifestation of Brahman as sound—the Logos. Later, when I sat for meditation I took this as my subject, and it was not long before the sound Brahman was revealed to me.

Sri Ramakrishna one day told me "Once, while I was meditating in the temple, screen after screen of maya (ignorance) was removed from my consciousness, and I saw a light more brilliant than a million suns. From that light there came forth a spiritual form, which again melted away into the formless."

The body is the temple of God, and one should practice worship and meditation within it. When the consciousness merges into the Sahasrara (the thousand petalled lotus in the brain), the mind does not feel inclined to come back. There you realize that what is outside is also within yourself.

There is a saying "He who sees God in the temple will not return," which means that a man attains liberation as he realizes God within the shrine of his own heart.

Though temples may serve as aids to the beginner, they are but symbols of God's greatest of all temples, the human heart.

Between the eyebrows there is a third eye, the eye of wisdom. When this eye is opened a fountain of joy is released, and the whole universe seems merged in bliss.

VII

Maharaj

Within the palace of seven gates there dwells a king with whom a poor man begs an audience. The king's minister grants his request, and leads him through the gates to the royal presence. At each gate there stands a richly dressed officer, and each time, the poor man asks the minister, if that is the king. The minister answers, "No," each time, until they have passed the seventh gate, and the king stands before them in all his splendor and beauty. Then no question is asked, the man recognizes his king. So it is with the guru. Like the king's minister, he leads the disciple through the different stages of spiritual unfoldment, until he leaves him with the Lord.

But know this! There is no greater guru than your own mind. When the mind has been purified by prayer and contemplation it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties, this inner guru will guide you and will continue to help you until the goal is reached. Have intense love for God and the mind will remain always tranquil and pure.

The easiest way to purify and steady the mind is to retire into solitude, control all cravings, and engage yourself in contemplation and meditation. The more you occupy the mind with holy thoughts, the greater will be your spiritual unfoldment. Just as a cow yields much milk when it is well fed, so when the mind is fed spiritual food, it will yield greater tranquillity. Spiritual food consists of meditation, prayer, contemplation and japam.

Another way to steady the mind is to let it wander, but to keep a steady watch over its wanderings. After a while the mind itself becomes tired and comes back to find peace in God. If you watch your mind, your mind will in turn watch over you.

It is good to rise early in the morning. The time best suited for contemplation is when night passes into day, and when day passes into night. It is then that the Sushumna (the central nerve within the spinal column) becomes active, and one breathes through both nostrils. As a general rule, we breathe through only one nostril at a time. This causes restlessness of the mind. Spiritual aspirants should observe when they are breathing through both nostrils, the Sushumna is active then and those times are the most helpful to contemplation, and we should take advantage of them.

Free your mind from cravings and attachments. Practice spiritual disciplines, and your mind will become pure and steady. If a man does not struggle

hard to realize God, he remains steeped in ignorance. Therefore struggle, struggle, and God will be revealed. Accept all struggles boldly. Welcome them, for through them you shall surely find peace.

The easiest method of realization is to remember God constantly. Even as a man welcomes his friend, and entertains him with food, drink and conversation, so must you entertain God in your thoughts. Converse freely with him. Know him as your very own, and you will find peace in him.

Who can fathom the mystery of God? He is infinite and formless, and yet he is also with form. He incarnates himself as man. Verily, it is beyond the power of the mind to understand the devious ways through which God leads man to himself. Sometimes the path is smooth, sometimes it is thorny, and sometimes it is like an impassable mountain, but still he leads man safely to himself, if he will only take refuge in him.

It is maya which prevents the mind and senses from desiring to experience God, but a man who has realized him has risen above all the charms and attractions of maya. Maya reveals her mysteries only to him who has gone beyond maya.

Being chained to maya, man does not realize how great is his suffering as he whirls around on the wheel of birth and death. The body decays day by day, while man still sleeps in maya, forgetting the sacred mission for which he was born. The one

unique advantage of this human birth over all other forms of life is that it is by man alone that God can be realized. Therefore, forget the body and its comforts; shake off the delusion of birth and death. Shake off the illusory peace of maya and find the real peace—the everlasting peace of God.

VIII

Maharaj

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a man will surely attain God if he possesses in an intense degree the three kinds of love—the love a devoted wife feels toward her husband, the attraction the worldly man feels toward the world, and the attachment the miser feels toward his hoarded wealth. This means that the mind must be one-pointed, and completely free of all desires but the desire to know and love God. Sri Krishna says in the Gita: "Give up all formalities of religion, and take refuge in me alone." Surrender yourself wholeheartedly to God. Pray constantly with a pure, sincere heart. "O Lord, I do not know what is good and what is bad for me. I am entirely dependent on you. Grant me what I most need for the spiritual life. Take me along the path which will lead me to the greatest good. Give me the faith and strength constantly to remember you and meditate on you."

constantly 'O Lord, make me able to understand and receive that grace which I know you are ready to give me" Know that your time on earth is but short, and that your real home is at the lotus feet of the Lord

In his folly man will deny the very existence of God because of his own lack of comprehension He prefers to rely upon his own intellect, little realizing how unstable that intellect is Even though what he accepts as true today, he rejects as false tomorrow, yet he thinks that what appears as true to himself today is the final truth and must be accepted by all The Lord alone knows all the subtle ways by which a man may be deluded

One who has known God, does not limit him To him, God is not a matter of opinion God is He is boundless love, and infinite mercy He is beyond the grasp of the intellect He who has realized God understands his mysteries For him there is nothing hidden The gates of knowledge are open, and he knows that he belongs to God even as God belongs to him

Intelligence is but another name for ignorance, because its area is limited Therefore, if a man wants to attain all knowledge and understand all mysteries, let him devote himself to the knowledge of God

As children swing around a pillar in their play, holding tightly to it for their support, so must you hold fast to God—the Pillar of Life Whichever

path you follow, whether it be the path of work, or of devotion, or of knowledge, you will reach him. Hold fast to the Pillar, and your life will be blessed, and you in turn will become a blessing to mankind.

IX

Disciple

Maharaj, is initiation really necessary?

Maharaj

Yes! Initiation is very important. With the aid of a mantram it is easier to practice concentration of the mind on one Chosen Ideal of God. Without the mantram the mind wanders from one conception of God to another, and never succeeds in concentrating upon any. And without achieving perfect concentration nothing can be accomplished in the spiritual life. Therefore the aid of a guru is very necessary. He helps the disciple to choose his own particular Ideal, according to his temperament, and then gives the mantram best suited to the attainment of concentration on that Ideal.

With unwavering faith in the words of the guru, the disciple must regularly practice repetition of the mantram, and meditation on its meaning. Thus will he find peace of heart.

The path of spirituality is hard to follow. No mat

ter how clever or how intelligent a man may be, without the aid of an illumined guide, he is sure to stumble on the way

Disciple

Maharaj I have been practicing spiritual disciplines, but as yet I have acquired no taste for them. What shall I do?

Maharaj

The taste for spiritual life cannot be had all at once. No! one has to struggle hard for it. All our energies must be concentrated toward that one achievement, they must not be wasted in any other direction. Onward, onward! Never be satisfied with your present state of growth. Try to create a burning dissatisfaction within yourself. Ask yourself, "What progress am I making? None!", and apply yourself ever more diligently to the task. Sri Ramakrishna used to cry out at the close of each day: O Mother, another day has gone, and I have not seen you!

Every night before you go to sleep think for a while how much time you have spent in doing good deeds and how much time you have wasted. How much time you have spent in meditation and how much you have wasted in idleness. Make your mind strong through the observance of continence, and the practice of meditation.

A rich man employs a porter whose duty it is to

pose Strive hard to reach him and be free in this very life

The mind is to be raised, step by step, from the gross state to the subtle, then to the causal state, then higher still, to the Great Cause (Mahakarana) and finally to samadhi (highest illumination) Recognise yourself utterly to the Lord He is everything There is nothing besides "Verily all this is Brahman" Everything is his and his alone

Never be calculating Is self-surrender possible in a day? When that is achieved everything is achieved One must struggle hard for it Existence is eternal The span of man's life is at most a hundred years Give up the pleasures of these hundred years, if you want to enjoy eternal life and, with it, eternal bliss

X

Maharaj

In the beginning of spiritual life it is very good to plan a definite routine A certain length of time should be given to the practices of meditation, japam, and study Whether you like it or not, follow your routine regularly By so doing you will gradually create a permanent habit Perhaps now you do not enjoy meditating, but as you form the habit, you will come to the point where you will actually feel unhappy if you do not meditate When

you reach this stage, you will know that you have advanced along the spiritual path.

When a man is hungry or cannot sleep at night, he is restless and unhappy. When you can feel this same restlessness and unhappiness because you have not seen God, then know that God is very near.

Reach the Immortal and find immortality. Then it will not matter where you are or what you are doing. Turn the iron into gold by the touch of the philosopher's stone, then, whether you bury it or keep it in a neat box, it will not matter. It will always remain gold.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Realize that you are one with Brahman, then do as you please." By this he meant, first attain love and knowledge, realize God, then it does not matter how you live or what you do. One who has reached this state can never take a false step.

Many are the obstacles to a godly life. Therefore it is necessary to pray earnestly to the Lord to remove these obstacles. Yearn for his grace.

Many are the worldly impressions already accumulated in your mind, and many are the impressions created in this life also. As you struggle against them, they will seem to grow stronger, so that he alone truly conquers them who never loses sight of the ideal and never gives up the struggle.

Within each one of us there are two currents flowing. One carries us toward God and the other car-

see that neither thieves, nor cows, nor sheep, nor any other intruder enter the compound. Man's mind is his porter, and the stronger the mind becomes, the better. The mind has also been likened to a restive horse. Such a horse may carry its rider along the wrong path, and only he who can hold the reins and check the horse can keep to the right path.

Struggle on! Do you think that everything is achieved merely by wearing the genna cloth (ochre-coloured cloth of the Sannyasin), or by the renunciation of hearth and home? What spiritual experiences have you had? Time is flying. Waste no more time, for, at most you have only another three or four years in which to struggle intensively. After that your body and mind will grow weak and infirm and your efforts will be limited. What can be achieved without diligence?

You may think "Let us have yearning, faith and devotion first, then we shall begin our spiritual practices." But is that possible? Can we see the day before the break of dawn? When the Lord comes, love, devotion, and faith follow him as his retinue.

Nothing can be achieved without spiritual discipline. Have you not seen what severe disciplines even the Avataras (Incarnations of God) underwent? Has anything been gained without labour? What tremendous austerities were practiced by Buddha, Shankara, and others! What burning renunciation!

Real faith cannot be had at the beginning. First realization, then faith. At first the spiritual aspirant must pin his faith—blind faith, it may be—in the words of his guru or some great soul, only then can he advance toward the goal.

Do you know Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the oyster? The oyster floats about on the surface of the water with its shell wide open, waiting for a little drop of the Swati rain (the rain which falls when the star Swati or Arcturus is in the ascendant). As soon as it gets the raindrop it dives down to the bottom of the sea and there forms a fine pearl. You, like the oyster, have received the raindrop, you have the grace of your guru, now dive deep into the ocean of bliss and form the pearl—let God be revealed.

ries us toward the world. One current takes you along the path of renunciation to God, the other tries to pull you toward worldly enjoyments. We must choose between them. As a result of this choice we become either gods or brutes.

The tempting objects of the world lie before man's eyes in all their glittering and delusive splendor, so that he feels no need even to consider the probability of anything higher or grander. He may hear about the higher ideal of life, but he rationalizes by asking himself what guarantee there is that God can be known, or that a greater joy can be reached. He sees no reason why he should give up today's pleasure for tomorrow's promise. Thinking thus, he jumps farther into the fire, until, burned and frustrated, he realizes his folly. Then he longs for peace, but often the longing comes too late. So enslaved has his mind become, that, even though he may earnestly desire to change his ways, he is helpless to do so in this life.

XI

Disciple

Maharaj, you spoke of the practices of puja, meditation, continence, and study of the scriptures. What do you mean by puja?

Maharaj

Puja means both external ritualistic worship and mental worship. In ritualistic worship certain accessories are necessary. These are sometimes difficult to procure; therefore, the mental worship is more convenient for you. First worship the Chosen Ideal mentally with flowers, incense, etc., and then practice meditation and mental japam. In purely mental japam the mantram (name of God) is repeated without moving the lips, but in ordinary japam the mantram is repeated silently with the movement of the lips.

As you meditate on your Chosen Ideal, think of him as light and effulgence, and that everything shines because of his light. Think of him as living and conscious. As you continue thus, the form of your Chosen Ideal will gradually melt into the formless, into the Infinite. Then will follow a vivid sense of the Living Presence, until, finally, the eye of wisdom will open and the Infinite will be directly perceived. Ah! that is another realm, far beyond this universe! After this experience the universe appears as nothing, the mind is dissolved and you experience savikalpa samadhi. This leads gradually to the realization of the nirvikalpa samadhi—absolute union with God. This experience is beyond all thought and speech, there is nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard. All is infinite silence! It is "beyond dual-

ity and non-duality." There are some who, having reached this state, look upon the body as an obstacle in the way of an unbroken spiritual experience, and cast it off, even while in samadhi. It is like breaking an earthen vessel.

Sri Ramakrishna used to give the following illustration to explain this highest state of spiritual realization, imagine several vessels filled with water, with the sun reflected in each one. Break each vessel until only one remains, with the sun fully reflected in that one. Finally you break even the last of the vessels, and what remains? The sun itself. Similarly, the self-luminous Brahman is reflected in the vessels of mind, senses, ego, etc. Break these vessels, one after another and go beyond the physical consciousness, the subtle body and the causal body, until you reach the savikalpa samadhi, when you will see God. But here, even in this stage, the sense of ego still remains, the last vessel is still to be broken. Break it, and what remains? Brahman and Brahman alone. Who is there left to see whom? Who to describe whom?

Disciple

Maharaj, some think of the Chosen Ideal as the all-pervading spirit. Is this also a form of meditation?

Maharaj

Yes, certainly. Everyone should practice this meditation, but not at the beginning. This should be done only after some progress in spiritual life has been made. The presence of God must be realized everywhere. He who is personal and has form is also impersonal and without form. He dwells in all beings. He pervades land and water, hills and valleys, sky and stars—he pervades all things.

Disciple

The scriptures speak of service to the guru as a necessary means to spiritual realization. How far is this true?

Maharaj

Service to the guru is necessary at the preliminary stage, but later the mind itself plays the part of the guru. The guru must not be looked upon as an ordinary human being. His physical body is the temple of God, if one can serve the guru with this idea always in mind, one acquires an intense love for him, which later develops into an intense love for God.

Meditate upon the guru in the Sahasrara (thousand petalled lotus in the brain), and then merge the form into that of the Chosen Ideal. Sri Ramakrishna said very explicitly: "At the time of medita-

tion the guru appears before the disciple in vision, he points to the disciple's Chosen Ideal and says 'Look, there is your Chosen Ideal.' Then he himself merges into the form of the Chosen Ideal." Thus there is really no difference between the guru and God

There are so many divine experiences How can I tell you of them all? Follow the spiritual path earnestly and sincerely Through religious practices the mind will become pure, and you will understand many truths There is no limit to them Lose yourself in God Try to meditate within the shrine of your own heart. What that shrine is will be revealed to you as you continue the practice

Disciple

If the aspirant finds even a little joy in meditation, he is at once encouraged to proceed, isn't that so, Maharaj?

Maharaj

True But in the higher spiritual state there is neither joy nor sorrow, pain nor pleasure, existence nor non-existence The joy that you speak of is only a help during the period of spiritual practices The boat needs a favorable wind to reach its destination But when it once arrives, it no longer matters whether the wind is favorable or not. Joy is like that

favorable wind; it helps the aspirant along the spiritual path.

Knowledge, the knower, and the object known—these three lose themselves in the Absolute; that is all the scriptures can tell us. What takes place after this, no one is able to describe. It is directly experienced only by one who practices meditation. Only God can know himself. Be a god, that you may know the infinite God. In that knowledge there is neither want nor fear. The very thought of such knowledge is uplifting.

To live in God is pure joy. Some enlightened souls experience the one undivided Existence. Then they know that the seeming multiplicity of the universe is God's divine play. They know that the Infinite God is born as an Avatara for his own divine sport. Once when Sri Krishna was dancing in ecstasy, one shepherdess said to another, "Look, my friend, the Truth of Vedanta is dancing!" Sri Krishna is the supreme Brahman. He is the infinite, changeless Spirit playing as man. Beyond this there is yet another deeper and fathomless spiritual experience.

XII

Maharaj

Well, how are you getting along with your spiritual practices?

Disciple

Not very well, Maharaj I am very unhappy; my mind is so restless I must have been born with some very evil tendencies which are now standing in the way of my spiritual practices

Maharaj

My boy, you must not talk like that Try to practice japam at dead of night, if that is not possible, do it during the early hours of the morning Perform purascharana ² Waste no more of your valuable time Lose yourself in prayer and meditation, otherwise, how can the door to spiritual truth be opened?

The spiritual aspirant should eat very little food after sunset Began by taking three fourths of your usual amount, then reduce the quantity to one half In the beginning you may notice it, but the body will soon adjust itself, and remain healthy and active.

(Maharaj then referred to the days when he practiced spiritual disciplines in the company of his brother-disciples, when they took only one meal during the twenty four hours)

Maharaj

The aspirant should first learn about the spiritual path from some great soul and then follow it methodically If he proceeds haphazardly he cannot

² See Appendix

make much progress, and if he gives up entirely, the effort to begin again will be twice as difficult. But no effort is wasted. Lust, greed, anger, all gradually leave a man who practices spiritual disciplines.

Your mind at present is covered over by rajas (restlessness) and tamas (inertia). It must be made pure and subtle and raised to the state of sattva (tranquility), then you will find joy in your practices, and will want to devote more and more time to them. Later, when the mind has attained perfect purity, you will have but one desire—to devote yourself to contemplation always. Because the mind is gross it runs after gross things, but as it becomes pure and subtle it will run after God—the pure consciousness. When the mind grows subtle, its power increases and the aspirant is immediately able to grasp the truth of God.

When you sit for meditation first think of a divine, blissful form. This will bring a soothing effect upon your nerves otherwise meditation will be dry and tedious. Think of the form of your Chosen Ideal, smiling and full of bliss.

Be up and doing! Waste no more time. The senses now are strong and must be kept under control. This is a difficult task no doubt but if you practice meditation continuously for seven or eight years you will find peace and bliss, and enjoy the fruits of your practices. Even after one year of steady practice you will find some result. Many women disciples

are making rapid progress Should not you also strive for that? Women generally have greater results in less time because their faith is greater

Believe me, the Lord is always with you Practice even a little, and he will extend his hand to help you He will protect you from all miseries and unhappiness How unbounded is his grace! How can I make you understand?

So far you have merely heard about these spiritual truths Now realize them You have done enough studying and reasoning now do some spiritual exercises Choose that aspect of God which most appeals to you, and when you feel a growing devotion toward that one aspect, when you feel a steadfast love toward your Chosen Ideal, you will love God in all his aspects

While practicing j̄apam one should meditate on the form of the Chosen Ideal, otherwise it is not effective If you cannot think of the whole form, think of a part Begin by meditating on the lotus feet of the Lord Even if you fail many times try again Success is certain Practice will make all things easy

Is meditation an easy thing? Remember, it is next only to samadhi Try to leave everything to the Lord Resign yourself entirely to him Devotion, self-surrender, and all other virtues will grow from within as you practice meditation

XIII

Disciple

Maharaj, how can the kundalini¹ be awakened?

Maharaj

According to some there are special exercises by which the kundalini can be awakened, but I believe it can best be awakened by the practice of japam and meditation. The practice of japam is specially suited to this present age, and there is no spiritual practice easier than this, but meditation must accompany the repetition of the mantram.

Disciple

Does meditation mean thinking of the form of the Deity?

Maharaj

Meditation means thinking of the Divine both with form and without form.

Disciple

Maharaj, does the guru decide whether one should meditate on God with form or without form?

¹ According to the yoga philosophy there is a store of latent spiritual energy at the base of the spine. This is known as the kundalini (meaning coiled up) and is pictured as a serpent. When this spiritual energy is roused it rises up through the spinal column, and man's spiritual awakening begins.

Maharaj

Yes, he does But in time the mind itself becomes the guru Sometimes the mind is inclined to think of God with form, and again, at another time it prefers to think of the formless aspect The human guru is not always available but as the aspirant goes on with his spiritual practices, his power of comprehension increases, so that his mind is able to act as his guide

The mind is bound down by its attachment to the body, the senses, and the objects of sense Thus its energies run out through various channels and are wasted Snap the bonds of attachment! Collect the scattered forces of the mind, and direct them toward the one Reality This is the great task of the spiritual aspirant

Concentrate the whole mind and direct it toward God until he becomes revealed Now is the time for spiritual practices You are young now When you grow older the mind loses its vigour Therefore, be up and doing! Begin your spiritual life this moment, direct your mind toward God either through japam or through meditation or through discrimination Know that each of these means is equally effective Take any one of them and drown yourself in the ocean of bliss Ask no more questions First do something and then ask questions!

Disciple

Maharaj, is the kundalini awakened by the grace of the guru?

Maharaj

Through the grace of the guru everything can be had, even the knowledge of Brahman, but this grace is not easily obtained. You must work hard for it. Begin now. Devote yourself to spiritual disciplines, plunge into the very depth of your soul. To do this it is advisable to establish a definite routine for the practice of japa and meditation, and to follow it with unwavering tenacity, whether you like it or not.

XIV

Maharaj

How are you progressing with your spiritual practices?

Disciple

Not very well, Maharaj! I find so little time for them. There is so much work to be done.

Maharaj

Nonsense! It is a mistake to think that you cannot meditate for lack of time. The real cause is restlessness of mind.

Work and worship must go hand in hand. It is a very good thing if one can devote oneself entirely to spiritual practices, but how many can do that? There are two types of men who can sit still without working. One is the idiot, who is too dull to be active, and the other is the saint who has gone beyond all activity. As the Gita says: "Without performing work, no one can attain worklessness." Work is a means to reach the stage of meditation. Even those who give up work and lead an ascetic life have to devote some time to the necessary requirements of living. None can live without work. As Sri Krishna, says, "Your very nature will force you to work."

Learn to work for the Lord instead of working for yourself. Know that you are worshipping the Lord through your work. If you can work with this attitude, work will not bind you; on the contrary, it will improve you in every way, physically, mentally, intellectually, morally and spiritually. Offer yourself, body and soul, to the Lord. Give yourself entirely to him. Say to him, "I give myself, body and soul, to you, O Lord. Do with me what you will, I am your servant, ready to serve you to the best of my ability." If you can really do this, the responsibility for your spiritual well being rests with him. But this resignation should be inspired by the right spirit and complete faith. No doubt must enter your heart; it is no use "taking the name of God to cross the river

and at the same time rising your cloth to keep it dry.¹

For five or six years, after the passing away of our Master, we led a wandering life. Then, one day Swami (Swami Vivekananda) called me aside and said "There is nothing in this wandering life. Work for the sake of the Lord." We worked hard in those days, but it did us no harm, rather, it did us good. We had great faith in Swami's words. I tell you, you must have infinite faith in these two great souls, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami and work for them. Work and worship must be harmonized. This at first may seem difficult, but one must try again and

¹ This reference is made to Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the milkmaid and the Brahmin priest. A milkmaid used to supply milk to a Brahmin priest on the other side of the river. Owing to the irregularities of the boat service the woman was sometimes late. One day the priest rebuked her for the delay and she explained that sometimes she had to wait a long time for the boatman to ferry her across. The priest said, "But my good woman! people cross the ocean of life by uttering the name of God. Cannot you cross even this little river?" From that day forward she was never late with the milk. One day the priest asked her why it was that she was never late any more and she said simply, "I take the name of God and cross the river just as you told me!" The priest was astonished and wanted to see for himself, so he went to the river with the woman and watched her as she uttered the name of God and started to walk across the water. Halfway across the woman turned and saw the priest following her timidly holding his skirt up out of the water and she said, "Why is it, Sir, that you are repeating the name of the Lord and at the same time holding up your skirt to keep it dry? Have you no faith?"

again Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The new born calf tries to stand up, but it falls down many times. Still it never gives up, finally, after repeated efforts, it is not only able to stand, but it learns to run also."

It is excellent training for the mind to take up some form of work at the beginning of the spiritual life. When the mind is trained it can be applied to meditation and other spiritual practices. The mind that is allowed to drift at one time will drift at the time of meditation also.

There comes a time when the spiritually advanced man wants to devote himself solely to meditation and prayer. When that time comes, work drops away from him of itself. However, this happens only when the mind is spiritually awakened. If one who is not thus awakened should attempt to lead a life of exclusive spiritual practice by sheer effort of the will, it can last only for a few days, then comes monotony, sometimes followed by madness. Again there are others, who follow the spiritual path in a haphazard way, and at the same time keep their minds busy with worldly things. That is not good.

Great strength can be acquired through the practice of continence. A true celibate can do the work of twenty-five men. Practice continence, *japam*, and meditation, and seek the company of the holy.

Not all men know what is best for them, therefore they should seek the society of holy men. Unless a man spends some time in solitude or in the

company of the holy, he cannot understand his own mind. It is very difficult to grow spiritually in the midst of tumult and confusion.

I give freedom to all. I want everyone to advance along his own way, but when I find a devotee who is unable to do this, I come to his aid.

Life, eternal life, is before you! What matters it, if you devote a few lives to the service of God, even supposing they are spent in vain? But I tell you, this cannot be. You will see for yourself to what great spiritual heights you will soar, through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna.

Give up this easy going life, otherwise it will be impossible for you to perform your spiritual practices properly. No matter what work you do, do it with your whole heart. That is the secret of work, as Swamiji used to say.

Set yourself to work for the Lord, and before you begin any task, remember the Lord and offer your salutations to him. Do this from time to time while you are working and also when you have finished. Spend all your time thinking of the life, teachings and commandments of Sri Ramakrishna. Know in your heart that the work you are doing you are doing for him.

Strive to attain tranquillity. Do not give way to inertia, but struggle to gain spiritual calmness. If you allow your mind to wander, and lead a purposeless life, a bad reaction is bound to follow. Passions

will overcome you Through the practice of japam and meditation the senses are controlled of them selves But in the beginning they must be kept in check.

Practice japam and meditation Gradually after continued practice you will enjoy sitting for long periods of time absorbed in God The beginner, however, should start with short periods at a time, four or five times a day Practice japam, whether you like it or not As you persist, the mind is certain to become absorbed in contemplation To attain spiritual tranquility you must keep up a regular practice, even against your inclinations Spiritual awakening is bound to come, and when it does, all the passions that ever existed in you will be forgotten

XV

Maharaj

Why do I insist that you devote yourselves heart and soul to the Lord? When we were your age, Sri Ramakrishna kept careful watch over our spiritual practices In youth the mind is like unbaked clay, and can be moulded into any shape Your minds are still young and pure, they have not been baked in the fire of worldliness, therefore, they can be easily directed toward God If the mind is moulded now,

you will achieve your purpose, you will not be troubled by distractions

The mind is like a package of mustard seeds. If the seeds are once scattered, it is difficult to gather them up again. Likewise, when the energies of the mind have been scattered, as one grows older, it is very difficult to collect them, and turn the mind toward God.

Make God the be all and end all of your life. Devote yourself sincerely to realizing him, and you will be free from all sorrow and pain. You will inherit eternal happiness.

Man seeks happiness in the world, but does he find it? In his mad pursuit he toils hard, and runs hither and thither after many objects, only to find shadows after all. His life ebbs, he dies in vain. Leave these fleeting pleasures of the world behind you, give your mind to God, be devoted to him and you will find real happiness. Devote your mind to the world and to the pleasures of the world and great will be your suffering; devote your mind to God, and great will be your joy. No matter what riches you may possess, no matter what prospects you may have for living a happy and prosperous life, you still will not find lasting happiness. Pain follows pleasure, and every action brings its own reaction. Nothing lasts but the one true happiness which is to be found in God.

You are boys—young boys. Your minds have not

yet received any worldly impressions. If you can struggle now, you will be able to escape life's sorrows and miseries.

Never forget the ideal of human life. We have not inherited this human birth to waste it in eating, drinking, and sleeping like animals. Since you have been born as a human being, spurn all worldly enjoyments, and resolve to realize God. Never waver in your purpose, even if it means to die in the attempt. Enjoy the ecstasy of devotion and spiritual practice now, and then enter the doors of infinite bliss forever.

The most important aim in spiritual life is the attainment of God's grace. The breeze of grace is always blowing; unfurl your sails. Give up worldly enjoyments and completely resign yourself to the Lord. You cannot love God and the world at the same time. If you want God, shun temporal pleasures. Ask yourself, "What is it I want? Do I want this fleeting life of transient pleasures, or do I want the eternal bliss of everlasting life?"

When a man has renounced all worldly cravings, and regards God as his own, God is very near. Such a man binds God to him with the fetters of love.

Think of him as your very own. Pray to him, "Lord, reveal yourself to me!" God cannot remain unmoved by the pleas of such a devotee. He hastens to him and takes him in his arms. Oh, how inexpressible is that joy! How boundless that bliss! Only

he can know who has had that experience, compared to which all worldly pleasures seem insipid and worthless

Sri Ramakrishna used to say 'He who has given up sense-enjoyments for God's sake has already covered three parts of the journey" Is it easy to renounce bodily cravings? Only if one has God's grace, and has practiced severe spiritual disciplines in past lives, can he have the strength to renounce the world in this life Purify your mind so that no worldly desire can arise in it

You have renounced everything and pledged your life to God But remember, it is very difficult to lead a pure and unsullied life You may think it is easy, but let me tell you, it is like walking on the sharp edge of a razor

Perfect continence is the sole condition of success in spiritual life, but it is difficult even impossible, to practice absolute purity without love, and faith in God The world is full of passions and pleasures, every day you will see ninety nine per cent of the people rushing in mad pursuit after sensual pleasures Your mind is in constant danger of becoming contaminated, therefore, you must engage your mind in thinking good thoughts studying good books, and discussing uplifting subjects You must spend your time in worship of God, in service to holy men, and in contemplation This is the only way to mould your character

First of all, be firm in your vow of chastity. Everything else will follow. You cannot live a continent life unless you devote yourself to God, and without continence realization of God is impossible. Unless you realize God you will not find happiness, and without happiness life is vain. Therefore I beg you, my dear children, struggle, make an effort, and soon you will find faith and devotion awakening within you. You will be blessed by the vision of God, and you will become the heirs of immortal bliss.

XVI

Disciple

Maharaj, we have all come here to the monastery with the same ideal and purpose, renouncing our own hearth and home. Why is it then that we cannot live in harmony with one another?

Maharaj

My child, you must all learn to bear and forbear. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "He who forbears, lives!" Even people living in the world have to bear many things. The greatest strength of character is to live in harmony with all. No one can find peace if he hurts another. Never utter one word that would hurt another. "Tell the truth, but never tell a harsh truth."

long as you think 'God is there,' you will find no peace When you know and can feel that he is here, here (pointing to his heart), you will find peace

What is the use of wandering about from place to place? Have not you seen hundreds of such wandering monks? And what have they achieved? Are you to become like them? Swami Vivekananda founded this monastery toward one great end Consider that, and try to live your life and mould your character accordingly The spiritual practices of one single man are enough to make a monastery vibrate with holiness

Oh, what a wonderful spiritual atmosphere there was at the Dakshineswar temple when Sri Rama Krishna was living there! The moment our boat touched the steps of the landing stage we felt as if we had reached heaven itself! And what a wonderful love existed between us brother disciples Between you, there is no such sweet relationship A holy man should be sweet in temperament, and should never speak harshly to anyone Ah! I remember a holy man I once met at Brindavan He was a regular visitor at the temple For a few days he did not come, and I missed him When he came again I asked him the reason for his absence He explained that he had had a sore foot One day in the crowd the foot of another devotee had touched his and temporarily disabled him I was deeply touched by the way that holy man explained the incident He

did not complain that he had been trampled upon by some careless person. To him every foot was the Lord's foot, and the Lord had placed his foot upon him!

If only you could all be sweet and have love in your hearts, then there would be great harmony. You have to make the Lord the center of all your affections.

In this monastery you have so many opportunities to do Swami's work, you cannot always meditate.

You are young, this is the time to practice spiritual disciplines. What can you do when you are old? Develop love in your heart and you will achieve everything. You have become dry! Where is your early enthusiasm? You seem to be quite satisfied with your present condition, but I tell you, do not remain satisfied with yourself as you are now. Become dissatisfied. Try to move ever onward in your search. Do not stop until you have found the diamond mine!¹

You have taken refuge in Sri Ramakrishna. You

¹ Referring to a parable of Sri Ramakrishna. A woodcutter, going into the forest to gather wood, met a monk who said, "Go deeper into the wood." The woodcutter did as he was told and soon came to a large group of sandalwood trees. He stayed there for a while and then he began to think, "The monk told me to go deeper into the wood. He did not tell me to stop here. So he continued his journey and as he went farther and farther into the wood he discovered first a silver mine, then a gold mine, until at last he came upon a mine filled with diamonds and other precious stones."

are young and pure What infinite possibilities are before you Why do you not try hard to follow our advice and learn to love and do the things we ask you to do? Learn to make your heart and your lips one, and let not your mind deceive you Swami's ideal was, 'Liberation for one's self and service to mankind!' With one hand hold on to the feet of the Lord, and with the other do his work.

XVIII

Maharaj

First of all, the mind which is the ruler of the senses, must be controlled After that the mind and the intellect must be merged in the Atman When you are in the society of holy men, you may think that your passions are dead, but do not be deceived You are free of passions only after you have attained samadhi Therefore be always vigilant until you have transcended the mind

God is Religion is true These truths are not preached merely to make men moral or to keep an orderly society God truly is, he is the reality and he can be realized He is true There is no greater truth than he Be calm, tranquil and self-controlled

Meditate four times regularly each day The best times are early in the morning at mid-day, at sunset,

and at midnight Be steadfast in your ideal even when the mind is restless Keep up the regularity of your practices under all conditions Study the Gita every day By such study the mind can be cleansed of all unnecessary thoughts and anxieties This I know from personal experience

Devote some time every day to self-analysis Ask yourself 'Why have I come here? How am I passing my time? Do I really want God? Am I really struggling to find him?' A man's mind tries to deceive him, but he must not allow himself to be swayed by *his mind*, he must curb and rule it Hold fast to the truth Be pure hearted The purer you become the more will your mind be absorbed in God You will be able to see the subtle deceptions of the mind, and you will be able to root them out Who are your enemies? Your own senses But if you can control them they will become your friends Your mind is your only enemy, and your mind is your only friend The man who analyses himself thus can wipe out the subtle deceptions of the mind, and by so doing move rapidly along the path of spirituality

Plunge yourself into the practice of japam and meditation The mind is gross and feeds on gross objects, but as you practice japam and meditation, the mind will become subtle and learn to grasp subtle truths

Practice, practice, practice Find out for yourself

whether there is really a God A little physical austerity also is good sometimes For instance, on the day of the new moon, or on the eleventh day after the new or the full moon, eat only one meal Never waste your time in unnecessary talk Remember God constantly Remember him when you eat, when you sit, when you lie down, remember him whatever you do By such repeated practice you will find that, when you go to meditate, it will be easy to remember God and become absorbed in him As your mind becomes absorbed in meditation, a fountain of joy will spring up within you

Give no time to idle cares or idle talk Idle talk wastes much energy In the Upanishads it is written "Give up all vain talk" Devote all your time to meditation upon the Atman In the Gita it is said 'Give your mind to me, be my devotee, worship me, and bow down to me" And Sri Ramakrishna used to say Never squander the energies of your mind" This means, remember God constantly The worldly man is very careful not to squander his money, but he gives little heed to how he squanders his mind There is nothing greater nor easier than the constant remembrance of God Such a practice awakens the kundalini, the veils of maya are removed one after another, and a new vision opens up Then you will see the wonderful treasure that lies hidden within you You will unfold your own divinity

As a general rule a man's mind runs downward like a river—toward lust and gold, name and fame. Change the current, and make the mind flow upward toward God. The mind of Sri Ramakrishna lived always on the transcendental plane. Only with much difficulty could he bring his mind down to normal consciousness and to the things of the world.

Japam japam japam! Even while you work, practice japam. Keep the name of the Lord spinning in the midst of all your activities. If you can do this, all the burning of the heart will be soothed. Many sinners have become pure and free and divine by taking refuge in the name of God. Have intense faith in God and in his name. Know that they are not different. He dwells in the hearts of his devotees. Call on him earnestly. Pray to him. "Reveal your grace to me. Give me faith and devotion." Pray earnestly. Make your mind and your lips one.

Cover everything with God. And, as you learn to see him everywhere, you will become 'humbler than a blade of grass.' See him in all creatures. Hear only of God and talk only of him. Shun that place where his name is not uttered as you would a graveyard.

Repeat his name and call upon him. He is very near, and he is dear to all. Why should he not reveal himself? Open your heart to him. He will guide you along the right path. There is nothing more purifying than his name and meditation upon him. He

is our very own He easily becomes revealed to us.

There is the path of devotion and there is the path of knowledge A devotee likes the form of God He calls upon him, he sings his praise, he chants his name and sees his shining form Sometimes he weeps and sometimes he laughs The followers of the path of knowledge seek for the Light, and they become illumined However, one is not different from the other In the end, the devotee and the man of knowledge become one Ignorance is destroyed by following the path of devotion as well as by following the path of knowledge The light of knowledge alone shines What lies beyond the light of knowledge? He alone knows who goes beyond, none else And no one can reveal that

Have patience, infinite patience until you reach the Reality In the primary stage meditation is tiresome—it is like learning the alphabet Gradually, peace comes There are boys who after they have been initiated complain to me that they are not getting anywhere I do not listen to them for two or three years Then later they come and tell me Yes Maharaj I am getting somewhere now Do not be impatient Struggle intensely for two or three years, and your heart will be flooded with joy

XIX

Devotee

Maharaj, we are university students, and have come to you for spiritual advice

Maharaj

Learn to speak the truth always, and observe continence

Devotee

We have been practicing breathing exercises. Should we continue these practices?

Maharaj

Not Breathing exercises in themselves can be extremely dangerous. It is sufficient if you will repeat the name of the Lord. Through the practice of japam and meditation you will reach the stage of kumbhaka (suspension of breath, essential to a concentrated mind), without risking the dangers which may easily come from the practice of breathing exercises. Practice japam, and your breathing will become finer and finer, and you will gain control of the vital energy in a natural way.

XX

Maharaj

It is not an easy task to wholly surrender oneself, body, mind, and soul, to God "How can I surrender myself to God? I have not known him nor seen him, therefore, how can I love him?" These are the doubts that arise in the mind

Once a man admitted to Sri Ramakrishna that he felt *no inclination to meditate on God* 'The Master asked him whom or what he loved most in the world, and the man told him that he had a pet lamb which he loved very dearly "All right!" said the Master, "That is very good! everytime you feed your lamb, every time you pet him or do anything for him, think that you are serving the Lord If you can do this with whole-hearted sincerity, you will reach the highest!'

Blessed are those who have received the grace of an illumined guru The guru shows the way to the other shore, and removes all the obstacles Have in tense faith in the words of the guru, and follow his precepts faithfully Thus will the impurities of the mind be washed away, and the light of knowledge dawn Enlightenment comes quickly to one who has faith in the guru But one must learn to see God in the guru The guru must never be regarded as man By worshipping him and serving him as God the

body and mind are purified Through the help of the guru, God is first revealed, and then guru and God become one Unless the heart and mind are pure the vision of God does not come

Sri Ramakrishna used to say "When a man finds an illumined guru, he is soon freed from the sense of ego, and he himself becomes illumined" But no man can free himself from the bonds of worldliness if he follows an ignorant teacher There is suffering for both the disciple and the teacher For how can he who is not illumined give illumination to another? How can he who has not found God and received his command, who has not been strengthened by the strength of God, give strength and help to another? How can the blind lead the blind? Only a free soul can give freedom to another

If a man truly longs for God, if he sincerely desires to practice spiritual disciplines he is bound to find an illumined guru That disciple who has the grace of the guru knows the path Let him follow it diligently

My boys, you have the grace of the guru You have the desire for spiritual knowledge By receiving the Lord's name, you have received his grace, and you also have the society of the holy Now you must strive to get the grace of your own mind By gaining mastery over your own mind, you will by its grace, realize the grace of God and the grace of the guru

The tendency of the lower mind is downward,

toward worldliness. This tendency must somehow be controlled. *Hold the reins tightly.* As the expert trainer controls and trains the elephant, so must you learn to train and control your mind. Be its master. Let it not control you. Teach it to give up all craving for fleshly enjoyments. When the mind is once freed from craving it becomes your slave. That is why the ideal of renunciation is so highly extolled in the Gita and other scriptures.

God and the lust for worldly enjoyments cannot go together. To have one you have to let go the other. At the same time it is not possible to entirely give up the lower pleasures unless you have tasted the joy of the higher. That is why I insist that you give your whole heart to God now, while you are young *Make him your own.* "*God is my all in all.*" Fix this truth firmly in your hearts, and the path will be easy. When once you taste the joy of the Lord, all other pleasures will become insipid. Dedicate your lives to him. Take refuge in him only, and then let him do with you what he wills.

XXI

Maharaj

Within each one of us there is free will. This freedom of the will is in reality the freedom of the Atman within. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Awaken the power of that Self which is within

you" After all, what is the meaning and purpose of spiritual practices and disciplines? It is to strengthen this will, the will to attain God in this very life As the mind becomes purer, the will becomes stronger It is downright laziness to relax this will and think that in some future time you will realize God Think of Buddha What determination he had! After years of searching he finally sat himself down under a tree, determined to realize God then and there, or die in the attempt That is what is needed

I will tell you a secret You may not fully understand its meaning now, but in time its truth will dawn upon you And this truth is, that every man's will and mind lead him progressively toward good Some are led along thorny paths and some are led along smooth paths, but all reach the same goal Knowing this, there are some illumined teachers who advocate the following spiritual discipline Let go the mind and will, let them wander at random But always keep vigilant watch Be the witness Thus if the aspirant really lets go, and still keeps constant watch even though for a time the mind may run after filth and vanity in time it is bound to turn progressively toward Good

Ah! Who can fathom the infinite moods of the infinite God? Whenever we try to express him through our mind and speech, we limit him

XXII

Maharaj

It is easy to do great deeds, the deeds that bring name and fame. But it is by his small, everyday actions, that a man's character is known. The true karma yogi does not work to gain publicity. No matter how insignificant his work may be, he throws himself wholeheartedly into the task, because, for him, his work has become worship of God.

Everyone wants to do the work he best likes to do, but that is not the secret of work. Whatever work you do, whether you like it or not, know that it is the Lord's work, and adjust yourself accordingly. Remember this, all work must be done as worship of God. Give three parts of your mind to God, and apply the rest to your work. If you can do this your work will indeed be worship, and your heart will be filled with joy.

In no circumstances, whatever you do never give up your spiritual practices. If you give up the practices of japam and meditation and engage yourself solely in work, egoism is bound to arise in you, and you will become the source of quarrels and disharmony.

(Someone broke a bottle.) Maharaj continued
Ahi how careless you are! Where is your mind?
With such a restless mind nothing can be accom

plished Learn to perform all duties, great or small, with a concentrated mind He who can concentrate his mind in action can also concentrate when practicing meditation

This is the true secret of work First learn to like your work, but do not look to the results If you can perform every action as worship of the Lord, then only will you like to work and feel no attachment to the fruits of your actions

In the Gita Sri Krishna says that it is possible to attain liberation through work only, but in order to achieve this one must have intense renunciation You must also know that one can become a true karma yogi only after the attainment of liberation All mental, physical, and spiritual energies must be concentrated Then only can you reach God

Be active, but keep the constant recollection of God Faith! Without faith none can attain God He who has true faith has certainly reached God If you have faith in one penny it has value, but if you have no faith even in a gold piece it has no value for you He who has faith in God is freed from doubts Without renunciation there can be no faith nor devotion Renunciation is of the first importance, it destroys all ego

XXIII

Maharaj

Pray to Sri Ramakrishna. He still lives. Pray to him: "You are mine and I am yours." Merge yourself in his consciousness; he will show you the path.

Disciple

But Maharaj, do you mean to say that Sri Ramakrishna is still living?

Maharaj

Of course he is living! Are you mad? If he were not living, why should we lead such a life, giving up our homes and all our possessions? He is. Ask to see and know him. Pour out your whole heart in prayer to him, he will remove all your doubts and show you his true nature.

Disciple

Do you see him, Maharaj?

Maharaj

Yes! Through his grace I see him. Anyone can see him if he have his grace. But how many are there who love him? How many yearn to see him?

It is not an easy matter to see God. Without a harmonious development of the mental, physical,

and spiritual powers, religion is not possible. Faith, intense faith, is what is needed. He who has faith has seen God. He who has no faith in God, doubts everything. He who has faith in God overcomes all doubts.

Without dispassion toward the world, faith and love do not grow. You must have dispassion. To lose the ego in God is dispassion.

Disciple

Maharaj, when I sit down to meditate, I find that my mind wanders, and I think of many things. How am I to stop this restlessness?

Maharaj

Just as the Ganges has its ebb and flow, so is there an ebb and flow in spiritual moods at the beginning. But later, as you continue, there will come an even flow of the mind toward God.

Try diligently to check this mad outward rush of your mind. You can do this successfully if you do not try to meditate as soon as you sit down. First draw the mind back from its external pursuits by means of discrimination, and lock it up inside, at the sacred feet of your Chosen Ideal. Then make japam and meditate. If you try diligently to follow this course for sometime, the mind will naturally cease to wander.

The way of japam is the easiest path to follow.

By constantly performing japam the mind can easily be made calm and steady, and finally it will lose itself in God. Therefore I ask you to perform japam regularly and often, and at the same time meditate on the Chosen Ideal. This combined practice brings quick success.

Always practice your disciplines with unswerving steadfastness and let not a single day pass without them. Whether you like it or not, sit down at the appointed hour every day. If you can continue your practices for three years with unerring regularity, I assure you, that love for God will grow in you and you will feel yourself nearer to him. Then you will be prompted from within to call upon him and him only. Then you will not be able to turn your mind in any other direction. It is at this stage that the aspirant feels the joy of spiritual life within his heart.

Without intense love for God it is very difficult to practice spiritual disciplines in the right way, even after retiring into solitude. When you are alone, there is always a possibility of serious consequences. Therefore, two of a similar type and temperament should live together, so that mutual help and guidance may be given, should any spiritual crisis befall one or the other at any time. But on the other hand, if there are more than two, confusion may arise. They may indulge in worldly talk. Such idle talk not only causes the mind to lose its higher tendencies and nobler aspirations but makes it forget God.

While undergoing intense disciplines it is good to cut down the quantity of food to a minimum. Japan and meditation are not possible on a full stomach, because the greater part of your energy will be squandered in digesting the food, and the mind will remain disturbed. That is why moderation in habits, in food, in recreation, in everything, has been so strongly enjoined by the Gita. "Yoga is not for the man who overeats," the Lord says, "or for him who fasts excessively. It is not for him who sleeps too much, or for the keeper of exaggerated vigils."

In this sacred monastery, how great are the facilities for spiritual practices! You do not have to concern yourself about food, or clothes, or anything else. All is ready at hand. Live here and apply yourself whole heartedly to a life of constant prayer and meditation. No good comes of living like a vagabond, my child.

If you think that you can become a mahatma or a great seer by wandering here and there, let me tell you, you are mistaken. You cannot become a saint that way. Without unceasing practice you cannot have any religious experience; it cannot be had by trickery. If you sincerely long for God, you must plunge into meditation and become completely lost in God.

XXIV

Disciple

Maharaj, how may one control the mind?

Maharaj

Through gradual practice, the mind has to be concentrated upon God. Keep a sharp eye on the mind and see that no undesirable thoughts or distractions enter in. Whenever they try to crowd in, turn the mind toward God and pray earnestly. Through such practice the mind is brought under control and becomes purified.

When you can feel and know that you are helpless and alone, that you have no other refuge but God, when you feel that you have nothing in life to look forward to, then only will devotion to God arise in you.

Practice japam unceasingly. Practice it with every breath. Practice it until it becomes your second nature, then you will find yourself chanting the name of God as you fall asleep, and again as you awaken.

Know for certain that God can be reached—that his spiritual form can be seen, and that it is possible to talk to him.

Practice these spiritual disciplines and as you practice, new visions will open up—wonderful beautiful visions. You may see many aspects of God, and

many spiritual forms Or you may see an ocean of light, or a steady flame There is no end to this God unfoldment, this knowledge of infinite Existence, infinite Bliss Light, light, more light! There fore, engage yourself in these practices With great earnestness chant his name and dive deep

Learn to acquire love and sympathy toward all Overlook the faults of others If you cannot help an evil man to become good, of what use is your spiritual life?

Learn patience Anger is controlled through patience Be patient, forbearing and humble Humility is a great aid in the building of character Sri Rama Krishna used to say, 'He who can forbear, lives He who cannot, is lost' Again he would say 'Water accumulates on low ground, when the ground is high, it runs off' In a humble man sweetness of character and other good qualities develop naturally

Try to remember God constantly—even while you are working In the beginning it is a little difficult, but through practice it becomes easy Never give up struggling Too many rules and regulations for spiritual life are no good The main thing is sincerity and earnestness If these qualities are in your prayer it will surely reach the Lord God looks into the heart and not into the words of a man

People talk of enjoying this world, but what do they know of enjoyment? First become a god and

then enjoy Before that, all so-called enjoyments are the enjoyments of a brute

If your mind has become pure and you live with pure thoughts, no evil can touch you

Disciple

Maharaj, there is the song, "I want to taste sugar but not to become sugar" Should that be the attitude of a devotee?

Maharaj

"I want to taste sugar but not become sugar," is for the man who has not yet tasted sugar When a devotee begins to taste the sweetness of God, he will desire to achieve oneness with him

Disciple

Are dreams about enlightened men or Divine Incarnations real?

Maharaj

Yes, they are real Dreams about enlightened souls, gods and goddesses, and Divine Incarnations, are real experiences They are actual visitations Many spiritual truths are revealed to one in dreams The effect and impression of such dreams remain But one must not speak of them to anybody

XXV

Maharaj

If you wish to do good to the world you must be perfectly selfless. Worldly people are such that often if you do them good they in turn will try to harm you. You have heard of the great soul Vidyasagar. He lived for the good of the world, and those who were benefited by him were the very ones who spoke ill of him and tried to harm him. If he learned that someone had spoken ill of him, he would say, "Have I done him any good that he does me this harm?" That is the nature of the world. But the truth of the matter is, those who are good will do good by their very nature, and those who are wicked will do harm by their very nature.

Once a holy man, seated on the bank of a river, was meditating. Suddenly he saw a scorpion floating on the water. He took pity on it and with the palm of his hand scooped it out of the water. But as he did so the scorpion stung him. The holy man suffered great pain. A few moments later the scorpion again fell into the water. The holy man again helped it out. Again the scorpion stung him. This happened a third time. Presently, a man who had been watching the whole thing asked, "Why do you help the scorpion when it stings you again and again?" The holy man replied, "It is the nature of the scorpion

to sting and it is my nature to help 'The scorpion does not give up its nature, why should I give up mine?

The mind moves upwards or downwards Jealousy, selfishness desire for enjoyment laziness etc determine its downward motion faith devotion to God, love, sympathy, etc , determine its upward motion

XXXVI

Maharaj

The chanting of the name of the Lord purifies both the body and the mind Have intense faith in the power of God's name and meditate on him If you chant his name all your bonds will be broken and you will become fearless You will find immortality

The one object of spiritual disciplines is to know God—to obtain his grace The mud of Just and gold that stains the mind must be washed away Unless the heart is purified God's grace is not revealed

Sri Ramakrishna used to say So long as the needle is covered with mud it is not attracted to the magnet But when the mud has been washed away the needle is naturally drawn toward the magnet The mud of the mind is washed away if one thinks of the Lord and meditates on him and prays to him with a yearning heart At once the magnet

of God attracts the needle of man's mind to him, and the moment the mind becomes pure, divine grace begins to flow. Through this divine grace God is revealed.

Sri Ramakrishna used to use the illustration of the policeman's bull's eye lantern *With its aid the policeman can see everyone, yet himself remains hidden* If anyone wants to see the policeman, he must ask him to turn the light upon himself. So it is with God's grace. *God is the Light of Knowledge, and in order to obtain his grace and see him, you must pray earnestly to him to turn that light upon himself. Then only can you see him.*

As long as a man desires the things of the world, it is not possible for him to have any earnest desire to know God. As long as a child is absorbed in his toys he forgets his mother, but as soon as he tires of them he cries for her, and is not happy till he sees her. Similarly, when a man tires of the playthings of the world his heart yearns for God, and he struggles with all his mind and will to find him.

The desire to live a pure and holy life does not come easily. But know this for a certainty The grace of God is upon all those in whom this desire is awakened. In the world man receives repeated blows. He suffers much, and yet the desire to walk the path of God does not enter into his heart He knows full well that every time he puts his hand in the

fire it will burn, yet still he does it. Not only so, he uses every inducement to encourage others to do the same, and regards that man crazy who desists

Whenever a young boy decides to live a pure life, dedicated to God, it is almost certain that his parents and friends will do everything in their power to obstruct his path. If he should stray, no one cares, but if he tries to find God, everything is done to discourage him. Such is maya.

Can man know God by himself? Can the intellect grasp him? Surrender yourself to him, love him, yearn for him, seek refuge in him, be mad for him!

The one purpose of life is to know God. Learn to be absorbed in him. Activity is not the goal. Work without attachment is only a means to absorption in God. Meditate and dive deep. As you dive deep, you will know that God alone is real, and that every thing else is unreal.

When through spiritual practices a little awakening comes do not mistake that for the goal. Do not stop! Move onward! Light! more light! Go deeper and deeper. You must see him face to face, and talk to him.

Enough of study and argument! Now gather the forces of your mind and direct them toward God and God only. Plunge into the Ocean of Bliss.

Do not sacrifice eternal joy for the sake of ephemeral pleasure. Worldly pleasures will seem insipid when once you taste the divine bliss.

You see many attractive sense-objects before your eyes now, but where will they be when your eyes close in death? These objects of enjoyment lead a man from darkness to greater darkness. Which path will you take? The path that leads to darkness, or the path that leads to light?

Ah, my children, you have glimpsed that path of light. Do not turn back to the path of darkness. Sense-attraction is strong indeed and if you yield to it, it will create indelible impressions of evil in your mind, and before you are aware of it the mind will drag you down and down. The only way to remain safe from sense-objects is to give yourselves up whole-heartedly to God. Be strong in his strength and this very strength will free you from the net of maya. He alone has known God's grace who has overcome this world.

XXXVII

Maharaj

The same instructions for spiritual disciplines do not apply to all. The guru studies the temperament and tendencies of the individual and instructs him accordingly.

Beyond a few general rules no individual can be told in the presence of another what particular path he should follow. I have seen in the case of Sri Ramakrishna how he would take each disciple aside,

and privately instruct him according to his needs and temperament If you should want to ask your guru any question regarding your spiritual practices, you should do so in private

However, I will give you a few instructions which can be followed by all

First, have faith in God, know that he is Be firmly convinced that to realize him is the only purpose of life By knowing him man reaches eternal life and infinite happiness, and all the problems of his life are solved

Next, practice continence Without perfect chastity no one can hold fast to high spiritual ideals To nourish the body, mind, and brain, and to secure their fullest development, continence is essential In a chaste man a special spiritual nerve is developed With its aid his memory, his capacity for spiritual understanding and his faith in God increase He is able to experience spiritual truths which lie beyond the reach of the senses That is the reason why religious teachers stress the ideal of chastity

Thirdly, control the appetite Take only that food which is nourishing and easily digested Avoid food that excites or produces lethargy Eat very little after sunset The brain must be kept cool in order to meditate Eat only to keep the body healthy, health is essential in the practice of spiritual disciplines

Do not make a show of your spiritual practices When you meditate, meditate in secret

The most suitable hours for prayer and contemplation are those at the junction of day and night, and at midnight. Daytime has many distractions. At night, nature takes on a quiet aspect, so that, nighttime is best for the practice of contemplation. At dead of night the mind becomes absorbed in God with very little effort.

Sri Ramakrishna never spent the night in sleep, nor would he allow his disciples to sleep long. When others had gone to bed, and all was quiet, he would awaken them, give them definite instructions and send them to the Panchavati or the temple to meditate. There they would spend the whole night in prayer as directed, and during the day they would rest. In this way Sri Ramakrishna took them through their various spiritual exercises. He would often say: "There are three classes of people who keep awake at night—yogis, bhogis (seekers of enjoyment) and rogis (people who are sick). You are all yogis. You should never sleep at night."

You are young. Strive hard to taste the divine bliss. When once you have enjoyed happiness in God, where else will you go?

XXXVIII

Maharaj

The moment you become absorbed in the contemplation of God, you will experience unbounded

joy Days and nights will pass away in the blissful consciousness of God

Do not speak of your spiritual moods and experiences to anyone, least of all to those of a worldly nature It may hinder your growth However, if you exchange your experiences with one of a like mind, whose temperament is in harmony with your own, you may be helped in your progress Both of you are travellers along the same path It may be that your companion has already walked your path, and is already aware of its pitfalls Benefited by his experiences, you may be able to avoid those dangers and difficulties

Do you know why you should seek the society of holy men? Their experiences are a great help to a spiritual aspirant When you visit a strange place, if you have the help of a reliable guide, you will quickly see all that is worth seeing there; also he will save you from the dangers and difficulties into which a stranger is likely to fall Similarly, from the company of advanced souls, you will gather many valuable hints, and your efforts will be simplified

This life may end at any moment No one knows when Equip yourself for the journey with spiritual treasures To arrive empty handed at an unknown place involves much suffering and sorrow Birth is inevitably followed by death At death you go to an unknown place, so you must prepare yourself for the journey Always be ready for the great call

Here you have every opportunity to grow spiritually. Struggle now to reach Reality. Hold on to the Pillar. Have tremendous faith in yourself. Say to yourself, 'I can know God'—with this faith forge ahead and you will reach him. Then your life will be blessed. Free yourself from the wheel of birth and death. Be his eternal companion.

Banish all fear and weakness. Never weaken your mind by thinking of past mistakes. Sin? Sin exists only in man's eye. In God's eye there is no sin. One glance of his and the sins of many, many births are wiped away.

You have come to Sri Ramakrishna. Hold on to him. You will have nothing to fear. Make a regular routine for your spiritual practices. You must have certain fixed hours for meditation and study. Under all circumstances follow this routine devotedly. Steadfastness is very important, without it no success is possible.

By steadfastness alone the mind becomes absorbed in God. Unless absorption is achieved, freedom from the temptations of the world is not possible. Lust, anger, delusion—these are strong foes. Be strong in the strength of God and escape from this net of maya.

Follow your routine. The mind may rebel at first, but do not yield! Then gradually you will find your selves masters of your own minds. When you have gained control over yourselves, and your minds have

become naturally absorbed in God, then you need follow no rule or routine.

Life, like a stream, is ebbing fast away. The day that is once gone can never be recalled. Make the best use of your time. If you leave it till the last moment, it will be too late then to cry, "Alas, alas!"

XXIX

Maharaj

Keep up a constant communion with God, then all the depravities of the mind will vanish. Set apart a room or some place for daily worship, retire there every morning and evening. Perform japam and meditation and prayer regularly for as long as you can. The more you devote yourself to the contemplation of God, the more fruitful your life will become, the more attached you are to the vanities of the world, the more restless will your mind become. I pray to the Almighty that by his endless grace he may lead you in the right path!

Know this without worshipping God you can never have peace of mind. Therefore, spend some time every day in the worship of God, in japam and meditation, and in singing God's glory. True devotion, faith, and knowledge, are the results of long persistence in spiritual practices. Many people turn to agnosticism when, after a lukewarm attempt at

spiritual practices, they cannot realize God or attain divine bliss. The reason is not far to seek. These people do not feel sincere attachment to God, therefore they find it difficult to persevere in their spiritual practices. The disciplines prove too arduous an undertaking for them.

Without divine attachment and divine love the mind becomes dry and restless. The more you suffer for God's sake, the more peaceful will you become at last. 'Persist cheerfully in your efforts,' said Sri Ramakrishna, "then you will succeed against all odds." So plunge headlong into spiritual disciplines and persevere in them, do not shirk them, even at the risk of your life.

It is hard indeed to kindle any thought of God within the human heart without the fire of renunciation. I am certain that the more a man possesses this fire within himself, the greater is the peace he enjoys. We saw a true and living representation of discrimination and renunciation in Sri Ramakrishna. As time passed we learned to know him more and more. We read of discrimination and renunciation in the scriptures, but we saw them personified in him.

You must not divulge the secret of your spiritual practices to everyone.

There is nothing real outside, everything real is within.

God should be imagined as vast and infinite. To

gain an idea of the vastness within, one should look at the Himalayas, or the ocean, or the sky

True character cannot be formed unless a man becomes God fearing, that is, unless he believes in God, in the life hereafter, and in other such principles

It is as impossible to conquer lust or control the mind by the mere study of books, as it is to walk on air

So long as the kundalini moves in a downward direction, the mind of man is filled with lustful thoughts. But as it rises, the mind also rises, and then moves toward things spiritual

With the growth of tranquility, a man becomes eager to behold the vision of God, he then delights in singing his glory and meditating upon him more and more

Like the Buddha one should be bold. See what a mighty renunciation he had! To realize God he gave up all his royal comforts without a thought. What a severe course of discipline he underwent! Then, when in spite of everything he could not realize God, he took his bath in the sacred Nirajana (a river let at Buddha Gaya), and sat down with this resolve 'Let this body go, but until I have attained illumination, I will not rise.' And the illumination came!

XXX

Maharaj

God is the wish granting tree. Whatever a man asks of him, he grants. But, such is the play of maya, man does not want to find the blissful ocean of God, instead he drowns himself in the quagmire of worldliness, and thinks he is happy. Then as he meets with the sufferings of the world he feels that his life has been lived in vain. You are sitting under this wish granting tree. Ask to become divine and you will become divine. Ask to become a brute and a brute you will become.

In the domain of maya there is both vidya (that which leads a man to God) and avidya (that which leads a man away from God). Vidya is spiritual discrimination and renunciation. By taking refuge in vidya, you take refuge in God. While avidya, which consists of lust, anger, greed, egotism, attachment, and envy, drags a man down to the level of a brute. If you cultivate discrimination and renunciation, avidya will be destroyed. If you yield to avidya, God remains far away and suffering will be your lot. There are both vidya and avidya. Man has the power to choose the one or the other and on the nature of his choice will depend his success or failure in life, and he will reap the fruits of his choosing. Why blame God for your sufferings? Man falls in love

with the pleasures of the moment, never stopping to discriminate, and the suffering which follows is of his own making Put your hand into the fire and it will get burned Is that the fault of the fire? Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The lamp gives light to all By its light one may read the scriptures and another may forge a cheque Is that the fault of the lamp?"

My Master used to say "There is a peculiar breeze called the malaya breeze When this breeze blows, it touches all trees By its touch some trees having a certain substance in them, are transformed into sandal trees while the others, lacking that substance, remain the same So also there are two classes of men As soon as those of the one class come into the presence of holy men, and hear their teachings they are awakened They realize the evanescence of the world and become eager to find God and to solve the mysteries of life and death They at once devote themselves to the practice of spiritual disciplines Such men are sure to reach enlightenment

'Then there is the other class Even though you may hold high spiritual ideals before them they do not respond They think they will live for ever and that the world cannot get along without them They also imagine it is sheer foolishness to give up the pleasures of the world for the sake of the unknown Thus they remain sunken in darkness

'There is the path of the good and the path of the

pleasant one leads to everlasting peace and the other leads to suffering Choose therefore the path of the good Time waits for no man Choose now! Waste not another moment! Try to mould your mind in such a way that it will not think of anything but God

Pray earnestly to him with all your heart and soul,
 "O Lord, give me understanding Free me from all sense of ego Teach me to submit to your will Make me your own"

Yearn for him Since you have taken refuge in Sri Ramakrishna, be certain that you have his grace Unfortunate indeed is he who, having this grace, fails to recognize it Do not miss the supreme joy Solve the mysteries of life and death, and become the eternal companion of the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna is the avatar of this age, and he is helping every sincere and earnest aspirant He is waiting for you Make a little effort, spread the sails of devotion and the spiritual breeze that is for ever blowing will carry you to your goal Look not back Go forward Make your life blessed by the vision of the Lord

XXXI

Maharaj

Everyone is seeking happiness No one wants misery, yet the deluded man ignores God, the source

of all happiness, and runs after the worthless toys of life. If you really want happiness, throw away these toys and yearn for God. He will run to you and take you in his arms. Seek the toys of life and you will find them, seek God, and you will find him.

“Eat the mangoes, do not count the leaves” The sole purpose of life is to reach God. Reach him first. Pray to him unceasingly. Wake up, plunge into the ocean of nectar. Solve the mystery of life and death, and become immortal.

God has many names and many forms. He is also without form. It makes no difference by what name or in what form you worship him, but worship him. Lose yourself in contemplation of him. If you are sincere in your worship of him you will be blessed with his vision. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, Sweet bread will taste sweet whatever way you eat it.”

Have faith and dive deep into the fathomless ocean and you are sure to find the eternal treasure, the pearl beyond price. Do not lose heart if after a little struggle you fail to find it. The ocean is full of precious pearls but you may not find them at the first dive. Try patiently to dive deep into meditation, in due course you are certain to receive God's grace. If you wish to meet an important man you must seek him through his ministers, similarly to obtain the Lord's grace you must seek the help of godly men and undergo many spiritual disciplines.

Know that he is dearer than the dearest, and then

pray to him with a yearning heart for his grace and vision Cry to him like a child, he cannot resist your tears

Make the mind one pointed like the mariner's compass In whatever direction the ship may sail, the compass always points to the north, and keeps the ship on its course Keep your mind pointed towards God and your boat will sail smoothly A man who does this never loses his faith and devotion even if he is thrown into an evil environment The moment such a man hears of God, he becomes intoxicated with joy A piece of flint may be under water for a thousand years, but it will still emit sparks if it is taken out and struck

Like a fallen leaf tossed to and fro by the wind, the one-pointed man is content to remain wherever the Lord places him He has no will or desire of his own He can live in the world and at the same time dive into the ocean of knowledge and bliss

A pure mind is like a dry match stick It ignites the moment you strike it, but, try as you will, you cannot light a match that is wet Similarly if the mind becomes soiled by worldliness, you will find it extremely difficult to restore it to its former purity

XXXII

Disciple

Maharaj in spite of all my efforts, my mind is still restless How can I curb it?

Maharaj

Practice japam and meditation regularly Do not miss even one day The mind is like a spoiled child --always restless Try repeatedly to steady it by fixing it on the Chosen Ideal, and at last you will become absorbed in him If you continue your practice for two or three years, you will begin to feel an unspeakable joy and the mind will become steady In the beginning the practice of japam and meditation seems dry It is like taking bitter medicine You must forcibly pour the thought of God into your mind, then as you persist, you will be flooded with joy What a tremendous ordeal a student goes through in order to pass his examination To realize God is a far easier task! Call on him sincerely with a tranquil heart

Disciple

That is very encouraging Maharaj but at times I feel that in spite of all my efforts I am making no progress It all seems so unreal Despair takes hold of me

Maharaj

No, no There is no cause for despair The effect of meditation is inevitable You are bound to get results if you practice japam with devotion or even without it for devotion will follow Continue your

practice regularly for a little longer You will find peace One's health also improves if one meditates

Meditation, in the primary stage, is like waging a war with the mind With effort the restless mind has to be brought under control and placed at the feet of the Lord But in the beginning take care that you do not overtax your brain Go slowly, then gradually intensify your effort Through regular practice, the mind will become steady, and meditation will be easier You will no longer feel any strain even while sitting for long hours in contemplation

Just as after deep sleep a man feels refreshed in body and mind, so will you feel refreshed after meditation, and there will follow an intense experience of happiness

The body and mind are closely related When the body is disturbed, the mind also becomes disturbed Therefore, particular care must be given to the diet in order to keep the body healthy

Under no circumstances should an aspirant fill more than one half of his stomach with food

Meditation is not such an easy matter When you have eaten too much, the mind becomes restless Also unless you keep lust, anger, greed, and such other passions under control, the mind will remain unsteady How can you meditate with an unsteady mind?

You must practice severe austerities, but, by this I do not mean physical austerities, or the torture of

the body Real austerity consists in the control of the passions Passion must never be allowed to raise its head But remember, religion is not for the eunuch, nor for the one who maims his body

Unless you meditate, you cannot control the mind, and unless the mind is controlled, you can not meditate But if you think, "First let me control the mind and then I shall meditate," you will never succeed You must steady your mind and meditate at the same time

As you sit down to meditate, think of the cravings of the mind as mere dreams See them as unreal They can never attach themselves to the mind Feel that you are pure In this way purity will gradually fill your mind

As you continue in your meditation you may experience a divine light or you may hear the ringing of a bell or the sound of Om Many such spiritual experiences may come, but pay no attention to them They are of little value, except to indicate that you are on the right path

If you wish to realize God practice the spiritual disciplines with patience and perseverance In due course you will be enlightened When the time comes, the Lord will reveal his grace to you Sri Ramakrishna used to say Until the time is ripe the mother bird does not break open the egg Do not be impatient Impatience avails nothing Work and wait Thus period of waiting is no doubt very

wearisome One moment you feel hope, then again despair; joy is followed by sorrow So the struggle continues for some time until God, at long last, is revealed

XXXIII

Disciple

Maharaj, how does devotion to God grow?

Maharaj

Keep the company of the holy, listen to their teachings and mould your life after their pattern But, without continence and the practice of meditation, you cannot grasp the spirit of the enlightened ones, nor can you understand the scriptures Read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and meditate on its teachings The more you meditate on God the better will be your understanding of holy books To hear about knowledge of God is one thing to live in God is another But the knowledge acquired through realization is different from both

If you have the craving for fleshly enjoyments or the slightest desire for name and fame you cannot reach God As Nag Mahasaya used to say, 'It is like trying to row an anchored boat' He also used to say, 'It is easy to get name and fame But holy is he who can renounce them'

Blessed is he who finds association with an en

lightened soul Vain is this life if one does not struggle to realize God

Disciple

Maharaj there are some who believe that merely keeping company with the holy is enough. One need do no more

Maharaj

Not Merely to keep the company of the holy is not enough. You must open your heart and ask them to solve your doubts. You must carefully observe their lives and imitate their example. It is a lazy man's attitude to think that all one need do is to associate with the holy. Needless to say association is also very important. For in their company doubts are removed and pure thoughts are awakened. No scriptures or books can create such pure impressions or transform a man's life as much as contact with an enlightened soul.

Disciple

Maharaj Sri Ramakrishna has said that solitude is an aid to spiritual growth

Maharaj

Yes that is true but you should retire into solitude only when you have attained some growth in the spiritual life. To retire from human society be-

fore one is ready is unwise. In this world of time, space, and causation, it is impossible to find true solitude. True solitude lies beyond the mind and intellect. It is identical with the Most Tranquil. Therefore, it is better for a beginner to live in the company of holy men

Disciple

The other day you said that impatience was of no avail, that we should be content to work and wait. Does that mean that we must not yearn to realize God immediately?

Maharaj

I must have said that in another connection. Yes, you must yearn to realize him, but do not be carried away by temporary emotions, nor give expression to them

To intensify your spiritual emotions, you must hold them within. If you give vent to them, they will exhaust themselves. Then dryness may follow

The man of true devotion yearns for God without becoming impatient. Even if he sees no light he will not give up his devotions. Only those who love God like shopkeepers looking for profit will give up if their prayers are not answered immediately

XXXIV

Disciple

Maharaj, how can we develop yearning for God?

Maharaj

When your mind becomes purified by the influence of holy men and when you practice spiritual disciplines, yearning will grow.

Disciple

Maharaj, how does one attain peace?

Maharaj

Peace dwells in the heart of one who loves God. Realize that your life without him is barren. Yearn for him, and peace will follow. When a man finds no peace in the world, dispassion grows within him and he is drawn to God. The more a man realizes that the world is barren, the more intense becomes his devotion to God and the greater is his peace. The greater the thirst, the sweeter the water. First create the thirst and then you will find peace in God.

Disciple

How can love grow?

Maharaj

By prayer, meditation, and the practice of spiritual disciplines

Disciple

Can a man realize God while living in the world?

Maharaj

Is there anyone outside the world?

Disciple

No, Maharaj, what I mean is this can a man realize God if he lives the life of a householder?

Maharaj

Yes, he also can realize God but he has a greater struggle

Disciple

Should a man renounce the world if dispassionances?

Maharaj

Yes, he should Once true dispassion is awakened it will spread like a forest fire As Sri Ramakrishna used to say When once a man of renunciation is released from the bondage of the world he never

wants to be caught again. He is like a fish that has escaped from the net.

Disciple

Is it possible to realize God without a guru?

Maharaj

It is, but it is not so easy without a guru. The guru is one who shows the path to God through a mantram (holy name). He gives the secret of spiritual practices. He watches over his disciple and protects him. A guru must be a knower of Brahman.

Disciple

How can one make the mind one-pointed?

Maharaj

By practice. Pray, worship, meditate regularly. Meditation for one or two hours a day is not sufficient. The longer you practice, the more your mind will become one-pointed towards God. Follow a routine with regularity.

The aspirant must begin his spiritual practice by offering mental worship to his Chosen Ideal—God with form. Then he must meditate on his shining form and then gradually let this form melt into the Formless. God is with form, he is without form, and he is beyond both. Practice meditation in solitude

and silence Seek God and God alone Renounce
lust and greed and make him your sole treasure
First renounce mentally Outward renunciation will
follow, if you detach your mind from the transi-
tory, unreal objects of the world and attach it to
God

Disciple

Maharaj, what is the meaning of the Vedantic
saying 'Brahman is real, the universe is unreal?'

Maharaj

It means that the universe of appearance is unreal
In samadhi the universe disappears If you ask a
seer about his experiences he will say, 'All is infi-
nite bliss there! There is no 'I nor you'—there is
only Existence—Knowledge—Bliss Absolute The joy
of that experience is unspeakable'

Disciple

Maharaj, what is the proof of God's existence?

Maharaj

The seer says, 'I have seen him You also can see
him' Sri Ramakrishna used to say 'Merely utter-
ing the word hemp does not bring intoxication
Procure hemp, mix it with the right ingredients, and
then drink it, and after a while you will become
intoxicated" Watch and wait Practice spiritual dis-

cipline, and you will be blessed with the vision of God.

Disciple

Sometimes as I continue practicing japa, my mind becomes blank. What causes that, Maharaj?

Maharaj

That is one of the obstacles in the way to spiritual growth. Meditation must be practiced along with the practice of japa. Meditation means a continuous flow of thought towards God. When meditation opens, there comes absorption, and samadhi is experienced. The joy that is realized in samadhi remains forever.

XXXV

Disciple

How should I meditate? Please instruct me.

Maharaj

Hold the mind fast to the lotus feet of your Chosen Ideal.

Disciple

In which center shall I meditate upon him—the center in the brain, or, the center in the heart?

Maharaj

Meditation can be practiced in both centers. I would advise you at first, however, to meditate in the heart.

Disciple

But how, Maharaj?

Maharaj

Meditate upon him in the center of the lotus in your heart. (Maharaj then gave the disciple more detailed instruction concerning meditation. These details can only be learned personally from a guru.)

Disciple

But, Maharaj, the heart is made of flesh and blood. How can one think of God there?

Maharaj

By heart I do not mean the anatomical heart. Think of the spiritual center situated near the heart. In the beginning, as you think of him inside the body, you will think of your flesh and blood. But soon you will forget the body and there will only remain the blissful form of the Chosen Ideal.

Disciple

Shall I think of him exactly as he is portrayed in pictures or images?

Maharaj

Let the picture or image be merely an aid in bringing to your mind the living, conscious, and shining form of your Chosen Ideal.

Disciple

Maharaj, what is really meant by "meditating on the meaning of the mantram?"

Maharaj

What is the meaning of the mantram? It is the name of God You have a name If I call you, your form also comes to my mind Call on the Lord in this same way Repeat the mantram and at the same time meditate on the image of the Chosen Ideal

Disciple

How does one perform japam? By repeating the mantram mentally or audibly?

Maharaj

When you are alone, you may repeat it audibly to yourself, otherwise repeat it mentally

Disciple

Maharaj, for the last few days during my meditation, the mantram has appeared in shining letters

before my closed eyes When this happens the form
of the Chosen Ideal disappears

Maharaj

You must not let the Chosen Ideal leave your
mind—meditation and mantram must go together
However your experience of the mantram shows
that you are proceeding along the right path That
was an auspicious sign The mantram is the sound
Brahman

Disciple

How should I begin to meditate on the Chosen
Ideal?

Maharaj

First make your salutations at his feet and then
proceed But as I have already told you you must
perform japam at the same time The mantram is
charged with spiritual power The truth of this will
be directly revealed to you as you practice

Disciple

How can one get the mind absorbed in God Ma
haraj?

Maharaj

Practice meditation regularly The early morning
is a good time for meditation Before you begin your

meditation, read devotional scriptures. This will help you to concentrate the mind on God. After meditation sit quietly for at least half an hour, for during meditation itself the desired effect may not be produced, it may come later. The mind often grows calm while you are relaxing after meditation and then spiritual experiences come. For this reason an aspirant should not occupy himself with worldly thoughts or engage himself in secular affairs immediately after meditation. It may do him great harm.

Practice, practice! Even though you may not like it, keep up the regularity of your practice. Even mechanical practice is a great help. Devote at least two hours every day to the performance of japam. Sometimes it is beneficial just to sit quietly in a solitary place amid beautiful scenery.

Disciple

Maharaj, what should I do if, while meditating on the form of the Chosen Ideal, other forms of gods and goddesses appear before me?

Maharaj

Recognize this as an auspicious sign. Know that your Chosen Ideal is appearing to you in various aspects. He is one and he is many. Meditate on your Chosen Ideal, but if he appears before you in another form, enjoy that divine vision. Gradually

You will find that all aspects are dissolved into your Chosen Ideal

There are particularly auspicious days favorable for spiritual practice—new moon full moon the eighth day after the new or full moon and days on which special celebrations are held On these days devote more time to japam and meditation

Disciple

Maharaj the scriptures declare that one should worship the guru before one meditates How shall I worship the guru?

Maharaj

First meditate on him within the heart knowing that guru and God are one and the same Then let the form of the guru be dissolved into the Chosen Ideal and then proceed with japam and meditation

Disciple

Maharaj you always insist that I must serve my father Isn't it better to become a monk and serve you?

Maharaj

Indeed it is But will the mere wearing of the gerrua cloth make you a monk? You have a duty to perform in serving your sick father I am asking you to serve your father my child and at the same

time to continue your regular spiritual practices. Such service will help you in your spiritual growth

XXXVI

Maharaj

While Swami Tunyananda and I were living on Mt Abu, we received a letter from Swami Vivekananda just before his departure for America He wrote, "To devote your life to the good of all and to the happiness of all is religion Whatever you do for your own sake is not religion" How wonderful is this truth! His words are engraved on my heart

It has come to my notice that some of you think that the part you take in the activities of the Rama-krishna Mission is a hindrance to your meditation and spiritual progress, and that Swami Premananda and I do not approve of such activities This belief has no foundation You do not understand our spirit No matter how busy you may be in carrying out your duties, you must practice regular japam and meditation This point I shall emphasize again and again Remember the Lord always—before you begin to work, while you are working, and after you have finished

We have heard Swami often say, "Work and worship" Can anyone in the primary stage live absorbed day and night in meditation? Therefore, you

must work, but work without attachment, and for the good of mankind If you do not work, evil thoughts and unnecessary cares will occupy your mind.

The Gita and other scriptures emphasize the ideal of worship and meditation in the midst of the activities of life I can confirm *this from my own experience* "Work and worship" is the surest way to spiritual progress

You see this disastrous war which is now going on! Out of futile patriotism, men give up their wives and children and all their pleasures, and sacrifice their lives for a worldly cause Yet you, who have given up hearth and home, renounced all sense-pleasures, and surrendered yourselves at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, for the sake of a noble ideal—the good of mankind and the realization of God—you want to avoid a little work! Swamiji used to say to us, 'If you think you are wasting your life in doing good to others, let it be wasted You have wasted many lives before in vain things Why not waste one more life for the good of mankind?' But I am telling you that your life will not be wasted You will realize God through work

In performing japam and meditation, sufficient time and favorable conditions are important, certainly But those who are inclined to practice spiritual exercises will do so under all circumstances

¹ Refers to World War I

Those who complain of lack of time or suitable place, can never make any progress in this life. Cultivate the habit of constantly remembering God whether you are idle or engaged in work.

This constant flow of thought toward God is meditation. Neither time, nor place, nor circumstances need be taken into account in this practice. Plunge in! Oh, the joy of it! If you once taste that joy, everything else will lose its savour for you.

Why are you afraid of work? Work for the Lord, but do so with a steady mind. Whether it be a great undertaking or a simple one, it must be done with the utmost care and attention. Those who are steady in secular work are also steady in their spiritual exercises. To work in the proper manner you must have a profound regard for your work and at the same time an indifference to its fruits. All disinclination for work can be overcome if it is dedicated to God.

It is when this secret is forgotten that the mind becomes disturbed. With a disturbed mind, you will not succeed either in spiritual life or in secular work.

Certainly, it is easier to do a noble deed for the sake of name and fame. But, by such deeds, a man's real value cannot be measured.

To know the real man examine his daily actions, for it is his everyday actions which reveal his true character. A true *karmayogin* (selfless worker) will lose himself heart and soul in any undertaking even

though it is of a most inferior kind. He is never motivated by the least desire for popular approval.

If you work and forget God, egotism and pride will overpower you. Therefore I tell you: never forget God, no matter whether you are working or sitting idle. To maintain this attitude, you must keep up your spiritual practices no matter what happens.

XXXVII

Disciple

Maharaj, I have tried in various ways to control my senses but I have not succeeded. How can I do this?

Maharaj

If you merely say, "I will conquer lust, I will conquer anger and greed," you can never conquer them; but if you can fix your mind on God, the passions will leave you of themselves. Sri Rama-krishna used to say, "The more you move eastward, the further you are from the west." Call on God, and pray to him. Then the objects of sense will no longer attract you.

Your way of practicing japam and meditation is very superficial.

If you practice casually, devoting only one or two hours a day to meditation, you cannot find God.

Lose yourself day and night in his contemplation, in singing his praises and glory—only then will you be blessed with his vision. Dive deep my children dive deep. Do not waste your time.

In the primary stage the aspirant should slowly but steadily increase his hours of meditation. Other wise if because of a momentary enthusiasm he suddenly tries to increase his hours of meditation he will find the reaction difficult to bear. He will become depressed and then he will lose the power to meditate. It is a difficult task to lift a depressed mind and turn it back to spiritual practices.

God's grace is supreme—without it nothing is achieved. Pray to him unceasingly for his grace. Prayer is efficacious. He lovingly hears your prayers.

Hold on for a little while. Do not give your mind up to objects of desire. You must exercise great self control in everything. Objects of desire! They will follow you like slaves. Then through his grace you will find you have no desire for them—nor will you feel any attachment to them.

You have embraced the monastic life renouncing everything. It does not become you to try to exercise authority over others. That brings great bondage. Whatever you do know that it is the Lord's work you are doing. Look upon everything and everybody as belonging to Sri Ramakrishna. Being deluded by egotism man thinks himself to be the doer.

To tell a lie is the greatest sin. A drunkard or a

man who frequents houses of ill fame may be trusted, but never a liar! It is the blackest of sins.

Never find fault or criticise others Such a habit is harmful to yourself By thinking continually of the evil in others, *the evil will impress itself upon your own mind and the good that is in you will be overshadowed*

Play with God, sing his glory, enjoy the fun! Why should you criticise others? Associate with every body freely Be happy with them Do not indulge in gossip Only a wicked hearted man busies himself finding fault with others

Keep yourself pure and go forward, following your own ideal

Learn to see the good in others If a man has some goodness, exaggerate his goodness in your mind Give honor to all, praise all Do this and sympathy for others will grow He himself is honored who honors all beings

Never run down a fellow man or slight him Everyone sees the fault in others Give him your love, make him your own and help him to overcome his weaknesses A man is composed of both good and evil It is easy to see the evil in others but a holy man is he who can overlook their evil qualities and help them to become pure and holy

Remember, my children you are holy men You must always be calm gentle, modest, and kindly of speech Goodness and purity must flow through

every word you utter, every action you perform, through all your behaviour and movements

I bless you, my children, that whosoever associates with you will find peace of heart The sleeping God will awaken within them

What is chastity? Always be truthful Be self controlled Watch your speech Envy no one Hate no one Be jealous of no one If one practices chastity for twelve years, he attains the highest. You must practice continence

It is wise to go occasionally to places of pilgrimage and live there for some time The holy atmosphere and change of scenery are aids to the health of the body and mind These places are also conducive to meditation

The heart must be purified This world is full of pitfalls Effort must be your motto if you want to grow spiritually Keep watch over every small desire which arises and control it Strengthen the will and everything else will be simple

Disciple

Maharaj some days when I sit to meditate my mind naturally becomes tranquil Again on other days it becomes so restless that I cannot calm it, no matter how I try

Maharaj

That is the play of the gunas The mind is subject to all three gunas When the sattwa becomes estab-

lished through practice, the mind will always remain tranquil. You see there is an ebb and a flow in the tude of the Ganges. In the same way there are ups and downs in everything. Meditation also has its ebb and flow. This is only in the early stage however. Do not trouble about it. Stick to your practices. When you have practiced regularly for some time there will be no longer any ebb and flow in the mind. There will be a smooth unobstructed current flowing toward God.

Whenever you feel a predominance of sattwa, and your mind is tranquil, leave your work and engage yourself in the practice of japam and meditation.

At each place of pilgrimage there is a special time when the spiritual current flows. If at those times an aspirant meditates, his mind easily becomes absorbed and he finds increased joy in his meditation.

Disciple

But Maharaj, how does one know that time?

Maharaj

It is not difficult. A man who practices meditation can very easily recognize it. Benares! It seems to be apart from the world. It is a place of mighty spiritual consciousness. If a man lives there and practices spiritual disciplines, he quickly gets results. The mantram, the seed word unfolds there with little effort on the part of the aspirant. Here, Viswanath,

(the Lord of the Universe), gives liberation to everyone, whether he be saint or sinner, rich or poor, great or small.

XXXVIII

Maharaj

Do you pray or meditate?

Devotee

No, Maharaj

Maharaj

It is good to devote a little time each day to God. The only way to control the mind and find peace is to chant the name of God and meditate on him.

Devotee

Please tell me how to meditate.

Maharaj

shined within your heart Do not waste any more time Begin this very day Practice japam and meditation once in the morning and once in the evening for at least two years You will find great joy, spiritual emotions will arise, a new vision will open up You are sure to find some result in two years Some succeed even in a year Stick to it! After a while you will find such joy that you will have no inclination to leave your meditation Get yourself a new seat and use it only for your meditation Sit straight, keep the right hand over the left, with the palms up Hold your hands near the center of your body in the region of the heart

Read sacred scriptures When you sit down to meditate, do not begin the practice immediately For a few minutes, banish all alien thoughts and make the mind blank Then start your meditation For the first two years, the struggle is hard, afterwards it becomes easy

If a day comes when you have a lot of work to do, you may meditate only once, or you may finish in ten or fifteen minutes If the pressure of work is very great, fix your mind on God for a moment, then bow down to him and close your meditation You can do this in exceptional cases but not always

Before meditation wash your hands and face Observe the two following rules of moral conduct I speak the truth and look upon all women as incarnations of the Divine Mother If you do these two

things, you will find all other moral rules easy to follow

Devote yourself to God God is Do not doubt his existence I am telling you, my child, God is Know for certain that he is

XXXIX

Disciple

Maharaj there are some who meditate in the shrine of the heart, and others who meditate on the thousand petalled lotus in the brain but I like to meditate externally I try to see my Chosen Ideal just as I am seeing you Which is the proper way?

Maharaj

Meditation differs according to the individual temperament of the aspirant As a general rule the best way is to meditate in the shrine of the heart Consider the body as the temple and see the Lord installed therein However when once the mind becomes steady through meditation then the aspirant can think of God anywhere either at his side or behind him or in his heart or anywhere else When the mind becomes absorbed a shining light is first experienced in the mystic vision With this vision there comes a kind of higher and nobler joy and the mind is reluctant to give up this joy and move on

ward But if the aspirant goes further, the vision of the light will be concentrated into the form of the Chosen Ideal, and the mind becomes merged in his consciousness

Sometimes again in his mystic experience, the aspirant may hear the long-drawn-out, sacred word Om, and his mind becomes absorbed in that There is no end to mystic visions and experiences The more you advance, the more you realize that the realm of spiritual experience is unbounded, infinite

There are some who think that they have already attained God if they see a radiant light Do not be deluded in this way You must attain nirvikalpa samadhi, where all consciousness of duality is obliterated Some say that that state is the end of spiritual experiences, but I believe it is the beginning

Disciple

It often happens that the mind, after making some progress, cannot advance further Why is this so?

Maharaj

That is the weakness of the mind The mind is limited by its capacity All do not have the same mental power, but it can be developed Sri Rama Krishna used to say that the power of the mind becomes strengthened by the practice of continence

A mind so strengthened is not overcome by lust and anger. Passions seem trivial to it.

In the path of spiritual progress many obstacles may arise. Evil, subtle influences may hinder your growth. Hence the Mudra (position of fingers) and Bhuta Shuddhi (the purification of the elementals) and similar practices are prescribed in the ritualistic worship.

Disciple

You call each one of us to you and inquire about our spiritual progress and our difficulties. You always give us new courage and enthusiasm, Maharaj.

Maharaj

But you see, I am not always in the same mood. Sometimes I feel like entreating and imploring you to go on with your spiritual practices. Again, at other times, I see that the Lord is everything, the Lord is the cause, the Lord is the doer, the Lord is the instrument, and the Lord is the deed. He is all and everything. I see the Lord playing in so many forms. Then who am I to give instruction? Why should people accept my words? But, you know, my child, that when the inspiration comes from the Lord, they do accept my words and follow them.

Disciple

Is grace conditional?

Maharaj

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the breeze of grace is always blowing, but you have to unfurl your sails. He would also say "When it is hot one needs a fan, but the moment a cool breeze comes, you stop fanning."

Disciple

How does one know whether a man is having true mystic experiences or hallucinations?

Maharaj

The true spiritual vision brings a lasting bliss, and the mind is aware of the truth of the vision

Disciple

What is the real function of Mudra and other rituals in formal worship?

Maharaj

Rituals are great aids in the beginning of spiritual life. They help to remove many bad external influences which hinder an aspirant's progress. You will notice sometimes that, as you go to meditate, your mind is tranquil. Within a few minutes, however, the mind is made restless by evil thoughts. I had to suffer at one time from such influences. Sri Ramakrishna watched me from a distance and knew

my condition He approached me and said 'I see that something is disturbing you He wrote something on my tongue and uttered some words in audibly After that I was immediately free from the disturbing state If, however, the aspirant has advanced, these influences cannot touch him

Disciple

Isn't it difficult to live a purely contemplative life?

Maharaj

Do not give up because it seems hard Try again and again Through practice it becomes easy

XL

Disciple

Maharaj what is austerity?

Maharaj

Austerities are of many kinds Once I saw a man who had taken a vow not to sit or lie down for twelve years When I met him only five or six months remained of this period Continuous standing for so many years had made his legs swell as they do in elephantiasis When he slept he held himself up by a rope

Some practice the austerity of standing all night

in deep water in the winter and at the same time performing japam. Again there is the austerity of sitting in the blazing summer sun in the center of four fires.

•

Disciple

Maharaj, is that what austerity means?

Maharaj

Good gracious, no! Generally men practice such austerities with the hope that, in their next lives, they may be born rich and find greater worldly enjoyments.

Disciple

Do they gain their wishes?

Maharaj

God only knows!

Disciple

What then is real austerity?

Maharaj

Those are not real austerities. Anyone can practice them. The body is easily controlled, but it is another matter to control the mind. It is very difficult to renounce lust and gold, to give up the desire for name and fame.

Real austerity is based upon these three principles First, take refuge in the truth Truth is the pillar to which you must always hold, while performing any action Second, conquer lust Third, renounce all cravings Observe these three principles That is real austerity, and the greatest of these is to conquer lust. It has been declared in our scriptures that he who practices continence for twelve years can easily attain God This is the most difficult task. I can tell you from my own experience that it is not possible to meditate properly unless you keep continent The craving of lust is very subtle, and extremely difficult to control That is why a spiritual aspirant must always be careful in associating with the opposite sex. Through continence a special power is stored up in the brain If a man becomes established in continence, he will begin to see the expression of God everywhere

But remember, it is not possible to practice continence without devoting yourself to the practice of japa.

XLI

Maharaj

Nowadays many feel that they should devote their lives to the service of their country and mankind I believe this idea has taken hold of the minds of our people because of the influence of modern edu

ation It is impossible to do any good to others unless one has already built up his own character Those who have taken refuge in God and have received his grace can never make a false step By their very living they do good to mankind Their every word and action, the very way they behave, become a source of good to all Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "First hold on to the pillar!" That is, first realize God, who is the goal of human life Know him first Have intense faith in him, then go and serve others When a man realizes God and works as his instrument, he finds peace in himself and gives peace to others

My Master used to say, "God is manifest in the hearts of his devotees, his children" Therefore we must be pure in heart, his home is in the heart of the pure He stays far away from an impure heart When our hearts become pure and transparent, when all impressions of the past have been wiped out, then only will he enshrine himself in our hearts, then only will he become manifest there

The pure mind receives a clear reflection of God If the mirror is covered with dirt it does not reflect, for the Lord's reflection does not fall upon an unclean mind You are all young now Your minds are free from stain Keep the shrine ready for him within your heart Take care that nothing else finds room there Be pure and tranquil Realize him in this very life

Read only the sacred books Those books which do not evoke love and faith in God are useless They only make a man vain of his learning My child if you wish to make your life blessed, if you desire your own good, then dive deep into meditation Do not float on the surface but repeat the name of the Lord and dive deep

Sri Ramakrishna was born in this age to teach mankind that dispassion is the ideal of human life Man runs after objects of enjoyment and degrades himself to the level of the brute If you want to make this human life worth living take refuge in God Give up the false happiness, and seek eternal happiness

Renounce Give up this world Give up everything for the Lord Make him your own "You are our Father, you are our Mother, you are our Friend, you are our everything"

When we shall give up worldly enjoyments and pass our days thinking of God and contemplating him then only shall we make our human lives blessed and inherit true happiness

Three conditions are essential for the realization of God human birth longing for liberation and discipleship to an enlightened man Through the grace of God, you have been blessed with all three Make the best use of them and build your character in such a way that your life is not spent in vain Do not seek temporary pleasures find the eternal

happiness Remember this one thing it may be that in another human birth you will have the longing for liberation but you may not find the society of such enlightened souls as you now enjoy It is a rare privilege, the result of great merit accumulated through many births Through rare good fortune you have come within the orbit of Sri Ramakrishna See that you do not waste your life in vain activities

Faith! Have intense faith in the words of the guru and you will achieve everything Without faith in the words of the guru spiritual life is fruitless Give yourself up to him as a kitten gives itself up to its mother Then he will look after you, help you and guide you

How far can your intellect go? Take refuge in the guru He with his greater enlightenment and sense of responsibility understands more than you and will protect you from all pitfalls No harm can befall a disciple who is under the protecting wings of a guru

Man makes many mistakes in life until he finds God But if he takes refuge in his guru there is less possibility of mistakes Sri Ramakrishna used to say that if the father takes hold of the child's hand there is no fear of its falling Even so if you make mistakes the guru in whom you have taken refuge will wipe away all your impurities

Without renunciation there is no peace Be dispassionate To find goodness and attain peace give up

everything for God. If he has the will, man can be dispassionate and realize God. Therefore, renounce all cravings and hold on tightly to him.

Renunciation has nothing to do with the wearing of the religious habits. It is not for show. He alone is a real monk who has given himself up completely to God, keeping nothing for himself. "This body, this mind, this understanding—I offer everything to you. They are yours. Make them your instruments." Pray to him unceasingly. "Lord, I do not know what is good or what is bad, I am yours, do with me as you please." Pray! Pray unceasingly. Let him be your only refuge.

Another thing I want you to remember through the grace of the Lord you have come to understand that the goal of human life is to realize God. If people praise or blame you, if they honor or insult you, if you find any place in the world or not, if your body stands or falls—never move an inch from your principles or from your ideals. Say to yourself, "I must realize God in this life at all costs. If you can mould your life in this way, then I shall know that you are a worthy child of Sri Ramakrishna. Then I shall know that you have made your life blessed by coming in contact with holy men.

One other point I wish to make clear in this connection. Who is the real guru? He must be an enlightened man. If a man does not know the path himself, how can he possibly show it to others?

Mantrams, of course, are always potent, but when they are received from so-called gurus who trade in religion and are themselves blind, they cannot bring real peace or illumination. You have come to the children of Sri Ramakrishna, you are blessed indeed! He who is honest, faithful, and devoted will have to come within the orbit of Sri Ramakrishna, where alone in this age real peace is to be found. He who follows the ideal which Sri Ramakrishna embodies will become heir to eternal happiness. The disciples of Sri Ramakrishna know all the paths which lead to God. Proceed along the path into which you have been led and pray to your guru with a sincere heart. He will guide you, wherever he is. After leaving the body the true guru lives on in the invisible realm, sometimes he reveals himself to his disciples, but at all times he helps and guides them, until they, too, attain illumination.

Struggle! Struggle, my boy. Shake off all doubts. Plunge into your spiritual practices as taught by your guru. Never make a show of your spirituality but always practice in secret. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "When you meditate, retire into a solitary corner, or a forest, and meditate within the secret chamber of your heart." Make a little effort for a time, and you will discover what fun it is to live a contemplative life. You will be transformed. You have the protection of an enlightened soul. There is nothing to fear. You are sure to succeed.

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in real meditation. The practice of japam and meditation brings the aspirant to this stage. Spiritual disciplines are practiced to bring purity and tranquillity to the mind. If you practice japam and meditation and the mind still does not become tranquil, or you do not taste joy in God, then you may know you are not practicing properly.

Disciple

Sometimes the mind does not like to practice meditation. What should I do then? Should I occupy myself in the study of sacred books, or should I force myself to meditate?

Maharaj

The mind rebels against effort. It always seeks ease and comfort, but if you wish to attain anything, you must force it to struggle. That is the only way to make your mind steady. If you find it difficult to sit for long hours, lie down on your bed and practice japam. If you feel sleepy, walk and make japam. Only thus can you steady your mind and make meditation your second nature. Should you give up meditation because the mind does not like it? If you go on in that way you can never learn to meditate. Regular war must be waged against the mind. To force the mind to obey you is the ideal of spiritual discipline.

XLII

Disciple

How many hours should one who is living a purely contemplative life devote to study, worship and meditation?

Maharaj

Devote as much time as possible. Those who lead a purely meditative life should spend at least sixteen hours every day in japam and meditation. With practice you will be able to prolong this period. The more the mind is absorbed within, the greater will be the joy of meditation; and when once you taste joy in your spiritual practices, the desire to continue in them will grow. Then you will no longer have to ask how long you should meditate. Your own mind will tell you.

Before you reach this stage, you must see that you spend two-thirds of your day in the practice of japam and meditation, and the rest of the time in the study of sacred books and in self-analysis. The more intensely you analyze yourself the more you will understand the condition of your own mind, and you will be able to eliminate the subtler cravings. When you are able to free yourself from these deep-seated, subtle desires, when the mind becomes tranquil, then only can you become deeply absorbed

upon all Strive a little and your eyes will open to his grace.

XLIII¹

It was the evening of March 14, 1916, the day following the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday Swami Premananda and Swami Akhanda nanda, disciples of the Master, were seated on a bench on the eastern verandah of the Belur Monastery, overlooking the Ganges Several other Swamis and young Brahmachans were seated on a bench nearby Presently Swami Achalananda, who was one of the group, addressed Swami Premananda

'Revered Sir, please tell us something about Sri Ramakrishna To hear of him directly from you is far more inspiring and uplifting than to read of him and his teachings in the Gospel'

"Very little of the Master's teachings is recorded in the Gospel," replied the Swami There is too much repetition M used to visit the Master occasionally and would note down his teachings as he heard them But Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciples differently, according to their different temperaments and their capacity of understanding His teachings to the monastic disciples were given in private As soon as the householder disciples would leave the room he would get up and lock the door and then speak to us living words of renunciation

¹As recorded by Swami Omkareswarananda

Disciple

Should one observe the vow of silence during this period of intense contemplation?

Maharaj

Both forced silence and wild indulgence in talk are equally harmful. What is the use of checking your speech merely? Check the wanderings of the mind, that's the important thing. Avoid unnecessary talk and keep your mind on God who is Silence itself. That is the real meaning of the vow of silence. Forceful restraint of speech brings evil effects.

Disciple

Maharaj, I cannot do anything by myself. Bless me, that I may have faith in you and in the Lord. Bless me, that I may understand your grace and have it always.

Maharaj

Never lose faith in yourself. The Lord will do everything for you. Have faith in him. Repeat his name. He will reveal the truth to you. Do not be restless. Have patience, and go on struggling. Struggle, and you will surely reach the Reality. Waste no more precious time in unnecessary thoughts or metaphysical speculations. Pray to the Lord that cravings may never arise in you. The Lord's grace shines

him To each he was able to show the way to further progress along his own particular path, so that each thought that the Master was a perfected soul of his own particular sect They could not know that Sri Ramakrishna was as broad as the sky and as deep as the ocean, and thoroughly acquainted with all the different sects and paths For he had followed them each in turn, and by each path he had reached the one and the same goal

“Never forget that the ideal of life is to realize God, to see God You have renounced the world to reach that goal Struggle hard to grow in love for him Attain him He is the very life of our life, the soul of our soul He is the Lord of our heart, he is our very own Yearn for him with a longing heart How blessed you are that you have the privilege of serving and associating with such ever free souls as Swami Brahmananda and others who are the associates of God incarnate! Do not neglect this opportunity You are men! Be gods! Teach others by the examples of your own lives”

Swami Premananda remained silent for a while, then continued

“I see very clearly that, after we are gone, multitudes will come to learn from you young men”

A young Swami “But, revered Sir, how can that be? If multitudes are to come, they should come while you are still living”

Swami Premananda replied “Do not think that

We would try to impress upon our young minds the emptiness and vanity of worldly enjoyments. In his great mercy he would point out to us how dry and hot the world is—like a desert; and how, like a mirage, it burns the heart but never slakes the thirst. He taught us how to discriminate and analyze the body of man, made up as it is of flesh, blood and bones, etc., so that our minds would not run after the enjoyments of the flesh. He would tell us of the great power of the all-bewitching maya, and how man, forgetting his divine heritage, fell over and again unto her clutches. Deep down within his heart man knows full well that there is no lasting happiness to be found in the mad pursuit of worldly enjoyments, and yet, like the camel who chews thorny bushes even while his mouth bleeds, so man still stirs up his lust for enjoyment even while he suffers. To satisfy his lust man needs gold. Lust and gold! These are the chains that drag a man down to the pit of worldliness. He alone soars high who shakes himself free of these chains. He who renounces sexual appetites—not in conduct only, but also in thought—he it is who has renounced all worldly pleasures. He alone is a man of true renunciation. Renunciation is not in the garb of a monk, nor is it in the renunciation of fish and meat.

“Spiritual aspirants of many different sects would come to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, and all of them found great satisfaction in talking to

you are any less great than we! You have received the grace of the Holy Mother. Do you think we have become great just because people have come to take the dust of our feet? No! We first saw Sri Ramakrishna and then renounced the world, you are great indeed because you have renounced the world without seeing him!

Young Swami 'But revered Sir, Sri Ramakrishna made you great'

Swami Premananda 'Not Sri Ramakrishna did not make us great, he made us 'nobodies' You also have to become 'nobodies' Wipe out all vanity and all sense of ego. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'When the ego dies, all troubles cease' 'Not I, not I, but thou, O Lord' Look at the life of Nag Mahasaya! There was not the least trace of ego in him. G. C. Ghosh used to say, 'Maya tried to bind Nag Mahasaya and Vivekananda in her net, but Nag Mahasaya became smaller than the smallest, so that maya's net could not hold him, and Vivekananda grew bigger and bigger; he became one with the infinite, and the net was too small to bind him.'

'Do you know of what this net of maya is composed? Sense objects, lust, gold, name, fame, ego, vanity, selfishness and so on. With all these maya binds the mind of man. Come out of this net, and the mind will run straight to God. All bondage is in the mind. All freedom is in the mind.'

"The worldly man is drunk with the objects of

with our Master Bijoy Goswami was another great spiritual leader in the Brahma Samaj, and it was a great loss to the Samaj when he left it”

Swami Shivananda ‘One day Swamiji, Swami Akhandananda and I were travelling on the river Ganges Swamiji was speaking very highly of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore, when all at once we noticed the Maharshi’s yacht at some distance from us. We approached nearer to pay our respects to the Maharshi, who, when he learned that we were disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, seemed very happy to meet us, and repeatedly remarked ‘Ahl how great is the love of Sri Ramakrishna! How great is his devotion!’ The Maharshi then asked Swamiji to recite some passages from the Upanishads, which he did. After listening for some time he said, ‘I understand and appreciate the devotional passages in the Upanishads, I do not care for the non dualistic ideas.’”

After listening to the discussions for some time, Swami Premananda remarked “When Shivanath Shastri or some other of the learned members of the Brahma Samaj would visit Sri Ramakrishna, he would sometimes become just like a little child and ask them ‘Is my condition really like that of one who is mad? Tell me, have I gone crazy, thinking of God?’ And indeed, there were some who really did think that our Master was a mad man!”

Swami Brahmaṇḍa: “Only a jeweler can know the value of a jewel. There was once a poor man who

and with that I mixed the medicine which the Swami took as sacramental food”

In the course of conversation a well known writer and preacher was mentioned

Swami Shivananda “But what can he know about religion? He is steeped in worldliness He who does not live the life of renunciation cannot be a teacher Dispassion is the first principle of spiritual life A man of learning may write books or give lectures, but if he has no dispassion in his heart, and if he does not practice what he teaches, his words cannot be effective, for they have no power behind them They merely create a momentary sensation

“The other day I learned that a certain preacher of the Brahmo Samaj was complaining that more people were coming to the Belur Math and fewer to the Brahmo Samaj and that someone had suggested that they introduce a girls’ choir to attract the people When the revered Shivanath Shastri heard this he remarked that, if the Brahmos would incorporate into their lives more of the dispassion and renunciation of the monks of Belur Math, they too would attract people”

Swami Brahmananda ‘Shivanath Shastri is a sincere soul and has a great regard for truth He is earnest in his desire to realize God He is living now at Bhubaneswar and is practicing spiritual disciplines He already has some inner awakening After all, he had the blessed good fortune to associate

with our Master Bijoy Goswami was another great spiritual leader in the Brahma Samaj and it was a great loss to the Samaj when he left it

Swami Shivananda One day Swamiji Swami Akhandananda and I were travelling on the river Ganges Swamiji was speaking very highly of Maharshi Devendra Nath Jagore when all at once we noticed the Maharshi's yacht at some distance from us We approached nearer to pay our respects to the Maharshi who when he learned that we were disciples of Sri Ramakrishna seemed very happy to meet us and repeatedly remarked *Ah! how great is the love of Sri Ramakrishna! How great is his devotion!* The Maharshi then asked Swamiji to recite some passages from the Upanishads which he did After listening for some time he said *I understand and appreciate the devotional passages in the Upanishads I do not care for the non-dualistic ideas*

After listening to the discussions for some time Swami Premananda remarked *When Shivanath Shastri or some other of the learned members of the Brahma Samaj would visit Sri Ramakrishna he would sometimes become just like a little child and ask them Is my condition really like that of one who is mad? Tell me have I gone crazy thinking of God? And indeed there were some who really did think that our Master was a mad man!*

Swami Brahma-nanda Only a jeweler can know the value of a jewel There was once a poor man who

found a diamond. He had no idea of its value, so he took it to the vegetable market to have it appraised. The vegetable man looked at it, and then offered him five cents worth of vegetables for it, but the poor man thought it was worth twenty cents worth of vegetables. Upon being refused, he took it to a rice merchant who offered him one bag of rice, but he wanted four bags. Next he went to a goldsmith, and he was offered one hundred rupees. This offer aroused the greed in the man, and he began to realize that the diamond was really valuable, so he took it to a jeweler who offered him twenty thousand rupees. Even this did not satisfy him, so he took it to the finest jeweler in the city. As soon as the jeweler saw it he realized its real worth and immediately offered him a million rupees. And that is how it goes. A holy man is judged according to the worth and capacity of the appraiser. By some Sri Ramakrishna was regarded as a holy man, by others as a mad man. But those who knew saw in him the manifest incarnation of God.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

JAPAM

When a disciple is initiated by his guru, the guru gives him a special mantram for his own use in prayer and meditation. A mantram is a Holy Name of God. The practice of repeating one's mantram is called japam.

The Hindu devotee recognizes that all the names of God have an equal power. Calling God by many names may seem to divide him, but God is present in each. Through each name, his power can reach his devotees.

"Truth is one, sages call It by various names." The One Infinite Being, who is Infinite Wisdom, Infinite Love, can never be divided. He is One without a second. Yet he has many aspects and many modes of expression. Each of these aspects symbolizes the Infinite God. Each aspect has its own sound symbol, its name. These sound symbols have been evolved out of the deepest spiritual perceptions of the seers and sages.

The Hindus believe that when such a sound symbol, a mantram, is received from a guru, it is charged with the living power of God. The latent

exposed too early to change of ideas and ideals. Devotion to one Ideal is absolutely necessary for the beginner, in his practice of religious discipline. While meditating on the Chosen Ideal, one must repeat the mantram

Japam may appear monotonous and mechanical when not accompanied by meditation. Nevertheless, it has a good effect. If one persists, the monotony will break, and the presence of God will be felt. Through japam, an inner joy and sweetness will arise which will help the aspirant to devote himself more and more to the perception of the Presence of God.

In his teachings, Maharaj lays great stress on the value of japam. These teachings were given to initiated disciples, who had received mantrams from their gurus. Those who have not yet received a mantram from a guru may repeat the sacred word Om,¹ or any Holy Name of God which appeals to them.

PURASCILARAN

Purascilaran is the vow to perform japam a certain number of times every day, methodically increasing and decreasing the amount. For instance, the aspirant may begin on the first day after the new moon by repeating the mantram one thousand times. Next day, he repeats it two thousand times, next day three thousand thus increasing the amount every day until the day of the full moon when he reaches fifteen thousand. Next day, the japam is reduced to four