



SAMVIT

[Knowledge that leads to enlightenment]



Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700 076
No. 15, March, 1987

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No. 15
MARCH
1987

The semi-annual journal
of
Sri Sarada Math
Dakshineswar, Calcutta - 700 076

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Editorial & Publication Office

C-8A Hauz Khas
New Delhi - 110 016

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| | <i>Rates inclusive of postage</i> | |
| India, Nepal & Bangladesh | single issue | Rs. 5.00 |
| | two issues | 10.00 |
| Sri Lanka | annual | Rs. 16.00 |
| | | |
| U.S.A. & other countries | SURFACE MAIL | AIR MAIL |
| | annual \$ 4.00 £ 2.00 | \$ 6.00 £ 3.00 |

information for contributors subscribers and advertisers on p. 55



SAMVIT

स नो बुद्ध्या शुभया मयुतवतु ।

May He endow us with good thoughts.

Shvetashvatara Upanishad III. 4.

Universal Prayers

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतोऽदब्धासो अपरीतास उद्भिदः ।
देवा नो यथा सदमिद्वृधे असन्नप्रायुवो रक्षितारो दिवे दिवे ॥

May blessed thoughts come to us from all directions, uninhibited and unmolested by contrary forces. May the gods never forsake those who need protection, remain with us ever for our felicity and glory, this day and every day.

* * *

देवानां भद्रा सुमतिर्ऋजूयतां देवानां रातिरभि नो नि वर्तताम् ।
देवानां सख्यमुप सेदिमा वयं देवा न आयुः प्र तिरंतु जीवसे ॥

May the sincere and just gods be of benevolent mind towards us; may their gifts flow to us unceasingly. May we always be worthy of acts of friendship towards them, may they grant us long life.

Rig Veda I. lxxxix. 1-2.

REFLECTIONS

A Grand Renunciation

IT WAS Sunday, March 14, 1886. The place was the Cossipore garden house. Sri Ramakrishna was ill, his suffering was unbearable, both for himself and for the devotees. He told the devotees surrounding his bedside, 'I have gone on suffering so much for fear of making you all weep. But if you all say, "Oh! there is so much suffering! Let the body die," then I may give up the body.' These words pierced the hearts of the devotees who sat grim and silent. The next day, Monday, he felt a little better, and forgotten was the suffering of the previous night. He spoke to them about God's incarnations on earth, the nature of Brahman and Maya. The conversation drifted to the necessity of renunciation.

Narendra: Some people get angry with me when I speak of renunciation.

Master: Renunciation is necessary. If one thing is placed upon another, you must remove the one to get the other. Can you get the second thing, without the first?

Narendra: True, Sir.

Master: When one sees everything filled with God alone, does one see anything else?

Narendra: Must one renounce the world?

Master: Did I not say now, 'When one sees everything filled with God alone, does one see any such thing as the world?' I mean mental renunciation. Not one of those who have come here is a worldly person.

Sri Ramakrishna then looked tenderly at Narendra and became filled with love. Looking at the devotees sitting all around, he said: 'Grand!'

Narendra, with a smile: What is grand?

Master, smiling: I see that preparations are going on for a grand renunciation.

* * *

This grand vision of renunciation that Sri Ramakrishna first saw in the chief of his disciples, Narendra, and, through him, saw gradually unfolded to the whole world, was a great gift to posterity. Sri Ramakrishna left his mortal body, but his

vision was given shape by Narendra—Swami Vivekananda—and he established an Order which would show the world wherein lies the strength of renunciation.

In the Vedic Age

Since time immemorial, this theme of renunciation has captured the hearts and minds of Indians. The profound utterance of a Vedic Sage in the earliest of the Upanishads, the *Isha Upanishad*, set the tone to the whole gamut of spiritual music:

ईशा वास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ॥

'Whatever there is changeful in this ephemeral world, all that must be covered by the Lord. By this renunciation (of the world), support yourself. Do not covet the wealth of anyone.'¹

It is not for the casual reader to understand the meaning of this *mantra*; only an earnest seeker can penetrate into its innermost meaning. The above-quoted words of Sri Ramakrishna reveal the inner meaning. The world is by nature changeful, therefore it would not have had any stability if it were not covered by the Lord. 'Covering' would also mean sustaining it, upholding it. An ignorant person does not see the power that envelops it, but the one who sees it, sees that Reality alone. Sri Ramakrishna put it as a query, 'When one sees everything filled with God alone, does one see anything else?' To have a wide view of Reality, one has to remove the superimposition of the unreal over it. For, as Sri Ramakrishna explains, 'If one thing is placed upon another, you must remove the one to get the other. Can you get the second thing without removing the first?' This 'removal' is renunciation. In other words it means 'letting go'. But 'letting go' of what? Surely not the Lord; it must mean the gross physical forms.

The One Universal Being is referred to as 'the Lord.' It is that Being that has projected itself through these physical forms which are temporary. True renunciation is to see only the One and nothing else. It implies that all the pairs of opposites (द्वंद्व) have to go. This is the Grand Renunciation, for *everything* has to be renounced: not merely joy, but sorrow; not merely pleasure but suffering; not merely love but hatred and resentment; not merely achievement, but pride in achievement,

and all motives; not merely the good and beneficent, but evil and destruction and all that is terrible. Finally, renunciation itself has to be renounced, for it also implies dual existence. When that is removed, the One alone remains. Everything that then exists is He, the Lord, the One, there is no other. The world is the same, only it is seen with new eyes, for it has been 'covered with the Lord'.

To the Vedic sages who were path-finders in man's spiritual quest, the path of renunciation was not mere theory, they put it into practice. Hence even after enjoying all good things on earth, like the power of doing good deeds, possessing wealth, having children, and so forth, they declared without a tremor:

न कर्मणा न प्रजया धनेन त्यागेनैके अमृतत्वमानशुः ।

'Not by action, not by progeny, not by wealth, but by renunciation alone immortality is reached.' (*Kaivalya Upanishad*, 3) This was the challenge that in the Vedic Age the wise sages threw to the world. Following the same lofty strain, Swami Vivekananda said:

'Race after race has taken the challenge up, and tried their utmost to solve the world-riddle on the plane of desires. They have all failed in the past—the old ones have become extinct under the weight of wickedness and misery, which lust for power and gold brings in its train, and the new ones are tottering to their fall. The question has yet to be decided whether peace will survive or war; whether patience will survive or non-forbearance; whether goodness will survive or wickedness; whether muscle will survive or brain; whether worldliness will survive or spirituality. We have solved our problem ages ago, and held on to it through good or evil fortune, and mean to hold on to it till the end of time. Our solution is unworldliness—renunciation.'¹

Buddha and Shankara

In this country a procession of great spiritual giants has come down to us from the time of the Upanishads without a break. Four of these extraordinary men showed that there is no way, none whatsoever, to the solution of the profound mystery of life, except through renunciation. They are the Buddha, Shankara, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. In the

period when the Buddha ruled supreme, the world heard once more the clarion call of renunciation. He conquered the world not with the blasts of war trumpets or the march of armies, but with love and sacrifice.

... all my soul is full
Of pity for the sickness of the world;
Which I will heal, if healing may be found
By uttermost renouncing and strong strife.

The Light of Asia

With the Aryan mind tuned to spirituality, in the post-Vedic period the Buddha's call to 'renounce' received immediate and eager support. But while the Vedic sages were individual seers of Truth, the Buddha founded an organization to spread his teachings. High and low, learned and ignorant, men and women were all allowed to enter his Order, the Sangha, and it was a tremendous spectacle of renunciation.

Twelve hundred years later, the third period of revitalizing the ideal of renunciation was ushered in with the advent of Acharya Shankara. Complete demoralization had set in in post-Buddhist India. The rigorous logic of Buddhistic teachings could not be absorbed by the masses. They lapsed into superstition and dubious practices. Religious sects multiplied, warring with each other they strangled the mind and spirit of the people. Shankara's teachings, which were grounded in scriptural authority and guaranteed by realization, came as a saving grace. He founded a Sangha of *sannyasins*. Swami Vivekananda rightly remarked that, 'Then arose the great reformer Shankaracharya and his followers, and during these hundreds of years, since his time to the present day, there has been the slow bringing back of the Indian masses to the pristine purity of the Vedic religion.'²

Buddha had opened the gates of renunciation for all, but Shankara's Order was not open to all. He brought into prominence Adhikara-Vada, the theory of qualifying oneself to attain the Highest. Shankara's teachings made a deep impression on the mental and moral make-up of the people. But to the common people the strict disciplines of his monastic Order

seemed impractical, and so they pushed aside his teachings. His Advaita philosophy remained, therefore, a treasure in the hands of a few hermits and recluses.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda

Then, in the nineteenth century, came the Master and his disciple—Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda—whose names are always bracketed together. For if Sri Ramakrishna's words were like *sūtras*, aphorisms, Swamiji's teachings were like a *bhashya*, a commentary on them. Sri Ramakrishna said that for a *bhakta* God-realization is the highest goal of life; for the *jnani* the knowledge of Brahman, the One Absolute, is the supreme goal of life. Sri Ramakrishna practised what he professed, that is why even after God-realization, he underwent the disciplines of *sannyasa* to demonstrate to his disciples—especially Narendra—that renunciation is the need of the Age. In aphoristic style he said, 'renunciation is renouncing lust and greed,' and this he repeated again and again. *Prima facie* it seemed impractical. A well-known professor in America was given *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* to read. At first he did not understand the significance of this teaching. But after finishing the book, he said in words that the new world would understand:

'I think Ramakrishna is the answer to our society. I love this book very much. Our society is guided by two things: Dollar-king and Sex-queen. The teaching of Ramakrishna is a nice solution to those crucial problems.'³

Gradually, and especially during his last illness in 1886, Sri Ramakrishna built up in the minds of the young disciples the need for renunciation, and living an organized life. Under Swamiji's leadership they formed an informal Sangha, and the leader declared that, 'There is no way, none whatsoever, to the solution of the profound mystery of this life except through renunciation. Renunciation, renunciation and renunciation—let this be the one motto of your lives—सर्वं वस्तु भयान्वितं भुवि नृणां वैराग्यमेवाभयं—"For men, all things on earth are infected with fear, renunciation alone constitutes fearlessness."⁴ The young disciple Narendra, who had once asked his Master, 'Must one renounce the world?' himself answered later, 'Without renunciation, without burning dispassion for sense-objects,

without turning away from wealth and lust as from filthy abominations—न सिध्यति ब्रह्मशतान्तरेऽपि—'Never can one attain salvation even in hundreds of Brahma's cycles.'⁵

A hundred years ago, for the fulfilment of his vision of a grand renunciation, Sri Ramakrishna laid the foundation of an Order of *sannyasins* by training a band of young boys. He said, 'I want to offer at the altar of the Lord only those flowers that have not even been smelled, fruits that have not been touched with the fingers.' His great and noble-hearted disciple, Swami Vivekananda called and even now calls 'the earth's bravest and best' to come forward and continue Sri Ramakrishna's vision.

As the 'World Teacher', (विश्वाचार्य), however, Vivekananda went a step further. He prepared the way for the establishment of an Order of women. He pointed out that, 'In the highest truth of the Parabrahman, there is no distinction of sex. We only notice this in the relative plane.'⁶ He further said, "Hinduism indicates one duty, only one, for the human soul. It is to seek to realize the permanent amidst the evanescent. No one presumes to point out any one way in which this may be done.'⁷ He reiterated that *sannyasa*, the path of knowledge and renunciation, is recognized without making any distinction between men and women. That is why in the Rules of the Ramakrishna Order, he clearly and emphatically stated that: 'This Math is established to work out one's own liberation, and to train oneself to do good to the world in every way, along the lines laid down by Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. For the women, too, there will be started a similar Math'. Moreover, knowing that women in those days needed more help, encouragement, and training, he said, 'Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world. . . . Hence it is her Math that I want first. . . . Hence we must first build a Math for Mother. First Mother and Mother's daughters, then Father and Father's sons. . . . In this terrible Winter I am lecturing from place to place and fighting against odds, so that funds may be collected for Mother's Math. . . . As soon as you have secured the land for Mother, I go to India straight. It must be a big plot; let there be a mud-house to begin with, in due course I shall erect a decent building, don't be afraid.'⁸

Unfortunately, due to lack of education and severe social restrictions on women in Swamiji's days, the Women's Math could not be started then. It was started, however, in 1954. A new and very significant chapter was added to the cultural and religious history of India by the establishment of the Women's Math. Although it started later, it cannot be said to be divergent in any way from the perennial source of inspiration that has moulded the Ramakrishna Order, namely, the life and work of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda. Socially, Sri Sarada Math is part of women's rise to strength; historically, it is a part of the tidal wave of spirituality set in motion by these three. Hence the *sannyasinis*, *brahmacharinis*, novices and lady devotees the world over all joined together to celebrate the centenary of the Order in 1986.

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati 1972), IV.314.
2. *Ibid.*, (1973) III.217.
3. Quoted from Swami Chetanananda, *Sri Ramakrishna Sannidhye* (Shillong 1982), 136.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1972) VI.488.
5. *Ibid.*, (1973), V.395.
6. *Ibid.*, (1972), VII.219.
7. *Ibid.*, V.232.
8. *Ibid.*, VII.484.

Service which is rendered without joy, helps neither the servant nor the served. But all other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy.

Mahatma Gandhi

The Man in the Water

GARGI

A FEW years ago, one stormy winter day near the capital city of America, a large passenger plane slammed into a bridge over the Potomac and plummeted into the ice-jammed waters of the river. There were only six survivors, who clung to the wreckage of the plane, waiting in that freezing water to be rescued. After what must have seemed like fifty years to them, a helicopter flew over and let down a rope to haul each person, one by one, to safety. At least twice that rope was lowered into the hands of one of the men, and this is what he did: each time he got that lifeline in his benumbed hand, he passed it on to one of the others, rather than using it to save himself. At last the helicopter flew off with its load of rescued people, and when it came back for that man, he was gone; he had slipped beyond rescue into the dark, icy water. His was an act of undeniable heroism and self-sacrifice, and learning of it, we all glimpsed for a moment the greatness of the human spirit.

I think that man was someone on whom Swami Vivekananda would have bestowed his most choice blessings; for in that desperate situation was he not practising, whether he knew it or not, the religion of man-making—the religion Swamiji felt should be practised by us all?

As I have understood it, the man-making religion that Swami Vivekananda taught was not so much man-making as man-uncovering. Generally, he taught it in connection with Jnana Yoga, the Yoga of Knowledge—the path that leads through discrimination and renunciation to the discovery of the ultimate Reality, not as an object of knowledge, but as the inmost essence of one's being. In this Yoga one comes upon the true subject, the Knower, divested of all accretions, conditions, and limitations. Becoming established in that discovery, one thereafter acts, lives, and breathes like a Man, that is, *like a true human being, man or woman*. But while Swami Vivekananda seemed to feel that Jnana Yoga was a direct, head-on method of man-making, I believe that he would also

Gargi (Marie Louise Burke) is already known to the readers of *Samvit*. She is well known for her four-volume work, *Swami Vivekananda in America, New Discoveries*.

say that whatever religion or path—whatever action—brings about this knowledge, or this uncovering, of the real Person is a man-making religion.

Uncovering is the operative word here, for there is a vast difference between the qualities of manliness—such as truthfulness, fearlessness, self-sacrifice, forbearance—that spring or, rather, radiate from a clear, unobstructed, *uncovered* knowledge of oneself as an eternal and infinite being, and the same qualities that are acquired by training or by dogged determination. The first are spontaneous expressions of the Self, of the real Person; the second, however laudable they may be, are imitations, and by comparison are as pale and unstable as ghosts. Those who have ever come across a Knower of Brahman—one who has known, indeed who continuously knows, the indestructible essence of his being—must have noticed that the difference between him (or her) and an ordinary man or woman, however brilliant, however good, however moral the latter may be, is the difference between day and night. We cannot even imagine the true meanings of such words as *selflessness, courage, reliability, endurance* until we have known a person in whom those qualities are consistent and endlessly varied expressions of the Self. We could not have imagined their meaning at all. I remember that when I first came upon such a person I let out an audible 'Oh!' And it is this shining kind of person—one who acts and reacts on all levels and at all times from the infinite centre of his being—whom, I believe, Swami Vivekananda meant by the word Man.

Does this mean that those of us who have not attained to Self-knowledge, who are still floundering about under the spell of finitude and limitation, in fear of death, or—what may be a worse fear—that of losing our individualities, our egos—does it mean that whatever qualities of manliness we can muster up are, at best, inconsistent and unreliable? Yes, that is what it means. But would not Swami Vivekananda have quickly added that even to make a stab at being manly, even to emulate the qualities of the great, is by no means a wasted or an unmanly effort? On the contrary, it is primarily through this practice (whatever name we may give it) that we ourselves can eventually become a Man. We have to begin somewhere, and that somewhere is wherever we happen to be, and our path is whatever lies one step ahead.

Our present less-than-illuminated state is one fact of our existence; but there is another much more solid fact, which is that we are even now the true Man, the pure Self. That second, far more stable fact keeps shining through our everyday lives, otherwise we would not even recognize the great when we see them; nor would it ever occur to us to emulate them. Now and then, even at the most unlikely times and places, our delusion breaks, and for a moment even the least of us knows for certain that death can hold no terrors for him—and the world no pleasures. When we stand on that moment, on that solid rock of knowledge, we can easily practise discrimination, comparing the radiance of the Self with the tinselly glitter of the world, and, on the basis of that comparison, we can also easily practise renunciation' effortlessly discarding what is worthless. Moreover, one who has known himself even for a split second to be invincible and imperishable, can, in the remembrance of that incomparable moment, act like a Man, like one who knows that nothing whatsoever in this world or in any world can cause him to tremble, to back away, or to play the knave or fool. He will acquire the qualities of manliness and self-confidence—qualities that transcend the sense of limitation. This practice of discrimination and renunciation and of the moral virtues, which are in effect manly virtues, is a large part of any spiritual practice. And it has been said that as one practises in this way, another glimpse of the Self—perhaps a brighter and wider glimpse—will come to give us further strength and further inspiration. And so on and on we go, spiralling upward to true Manhood.

There are perhaps other ways to get that spiral started, short of an actual glimpse of one's own Reality. Earlier I mentioned the awakening contact with a man of God. Through that brush with greatness it first dawns upon us what it means to be a man. But men of God are not found on every street corner, and I think there is still another way open to us all, which is based on the very simple fact that manliness keeps cropping up everywhere among the human race. Naturally so. If in essence we all are Spirit, then that awesome fact cannot remain hidden. Innumerable human beings have moments of true manliness such as thrill us to the depths of our being. When we hear of those incidents or witness them something within us responds, wakes up.

Such was the effect of the story of the man who became known, for lack of positive identification, as 'The Man in the Water'. Perhaps that man was an ordinary human being—not a yogi nor a sage—but for those brief moments (for him no doubt an eternity) it was given to him to transcend ordinariness. Without hesitation, and in the face of every instinct of self-preservation, he repeatedly passed the lifeline over to his fellow casualties. That quiet act of supreme selflessness stirred the whole nation. It was in a way like having a sudden vision of our true nature, and when we catch even an inferential glimpse of it, we are ready to bow down before it. True, such actions are rare—rare in our individual lives and rare in the larger life of humanity as a whole. Yet they do keep popping up, like small lights in an expanse of dark ocean. And we can thank God for them—or, rather, we can thank the human Spirit (with a capital S) for them—for they urge us, almost force us, to move, to begin.

To sum up: We cannot realize our true manhood—the Self—without first being manly, without being, that is, strong, fearless, and courageous, for we cannot practise discrimination and renunciation without those qualities, and without discrimination and renunciation we cannot realize the Self, not in any path. But until we *do* realize the Self, until we are established in that realization, our manliness and our practice of discrimination and renunciation will be precisely as limited as is our current idea of ourselves; they will be changing, unreliable sort of things. So what to do? Well, as I said earlier, we have to start, and I would say that on every level and in every circumstance of our lives, we can try to be the Man in the Water, doing our best to hang on, but passing the rope to the other fellow when he needs it, knowing, at least intellectually, that, we *are* the eternal Self; we are not going to drown, not ever. I think if we do that we will start on the upward spiral, perhaps in unspectacular ways—there is no need to make headlines—but we *will* start, and some day, sooner or later, we will reach the goal, and then—and only then—true manliness in every aspect of our lives will be as natural to us as breathing. That, it seems to me, would be one way to practise Swami Vivekananda's religion of man-making—or perhaps one should say his religion of man-revealing.

Swamiji's Small Treasures

IN NEW YORK, Swami Vivekananda held classes on Karma Yoga, illustrating them with many stories which he had heard when he was a boy. They had made such a tremendous impression on his mind that he carried them as small treasures through his life and shared them with his students half-way around the earth. Here is one of these stories:

The only way to rise is to do the duty next to us, and thus gathering strength go on until we reach the highest state. A young *sannyasin* went to a forest; there he meditated, worshipped, and practised yoga for a long time. After years of hard work and practice, he was one day sitting under a tree, when some dry leaves fell upon his head. He looked up and saw a crow and a crane fighting at the top of the tree, which made him very angry. He said, 'What! Dare you throw these dry leaves upon my head!' As with these words he angrily glanced at them a flash of fire went out of his head—such was the yogi's power—and burnt the birds to ashes. He was very glad, almost overjoyed, at this development of power—he could burn the crow and the crane by a look! After a time he had to go to the town to beg his bread. He went, stood at a door and said: 'Mother, give me food.' A voice came from inside the house, 'Wait a little, my son.' The young man thought, 'You wretched woman, how dare you make me wait! You do not know my power yet.' While he was thinking thus the voice came again, 'Boy, don't be thinking too much of yourself. Here is neither crow nor crane.' He was astonished; still he had to wait. At last the woman came, and he fell at her feet and said, 'Mother, how did you know that?' She said, 'My boy, I do not know your yoga or your practices. I am a common everyday woman. I made you wait because my husband is ill, and I was nursing him. All my life I have struggled to do my duty. When I was unmarried, I did my duty to my parents; now that I am married, I do my duty to my husband; that is all the yoga I practise. But by doing my duty I have become illumined; thus I could read your thoughts and know what you had done in the forest. If you want to know something higher than this, go to the market of such and such a town where you will find a Vyadha (a butcher) who will tell you something that you will be very glad

to learn.' The *sannyasin* thought: 'Why should I go to that town and to a Vyadha!' But after what he had seen and heard, his mind opened a little, so he went. When he came near the town he found the market and there saw at a distance a big, fat Vyadha cutting meat with big knives, talking and bargaining with different people. The young man said, 'Lord help me! Is this the man from whom I am going to learn? He is the incarnation of a demon, if he is anything.' In the meantime this man looked up and said, 'O Swami, did that lady send you here? Take a seat until I have done my business.' The *sannyasin* thought, 'What comes to me here?' He took his seat; the man went on with his work, and after he had finished he took his money and said to the *sannyasin*, 'Come, sir, come to my home.' On reaching home the Vyadha gave him a seat, saying, 'Wait here', and went into the house. He then washed his old father and mother, fed them and did all he could to please them, after which he came to the *sannyasin* and said, 'Now, sir, you have come here to see me; what can I do for you?'

The *sannyasin* asked him a few questions about the soul and about God, and the Vyadha gave him a lecture which forms a part of the *Mahabharata*, called the 'Vyadha-Gita'. It contains one of the highest flights of the Vedanta. When the Vyadha finished his teaching the *sannyasin* felt astonished. He said, 'Why are you in that body? With such knowledge as yours why are you in a Vyadha's body, and doing such filthy, ugly work?' 'My son,' replied the Vyadha, 'no duty is ugly, no duty is impure. My birth placed me in these circumstances and environments. In my boyhood I learnt the trade; I am unattached, and I try to do my duty well. I try to do all I can to make my father and mother happy. I neither know your yoga nor have I become a *sannyasin* nor did I go out of the world into a forest; nevertheless, all that you have heard and seen has come to me through the unattached doing of the duty which belongs to my position.'

From Death to Immortality

R. DAS

A YOUNG man of twenty-eight, highly educated, holding the responsible post of the Headmaster of a renowned high school in Calcutta, was involved in a family squabble. The trouble was not with his wife but with members of his large joint family. It reached such a climax that he decided to leave home for good and commit suicide. He left his house at dead of night on 25 February 1882. His wife, who knew everything, would not let her husband go alone and insisted upon accompanying him.

The dejected couple hired a carriage and started for an unknown destination, but directed the cabman to go towards Shyambazar. Strangely, a wheel of the carriage broke down and they had to abandon it. They entered a friend's house. As they did not receive a warm reception, they hired another carriage and went to one of their relatives at Baranagar. As the young man's mind was greatly disturbed he could not rest or relax.

This young man was no other than Mahendra Nath Gupta, better known by his pseudonym, 'M', the famous recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The original Bengali version of this book is called *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. According to Aldous Huxley, it is 'unique in the literature of hagiography'.

Mahendra Nath Gupta was born in Calcutta in 1854. He had been a brilliant student throughout his school and college career. He was well-read in Indian and western philosophies and in Sanskrit literature. He studied law, astronomy, and Ayurveda and became a school-teacher and lecturer in different schools and colleges, and held the post of Headmaster of a school. Being a popular teacher he was known in his circle, and later, among the devotees, as 'Master Mahashaya', respected teacher.

The next day M's nephew Siddheswar at Baranagar, finding his uncle Mahendra Nath in great mental agony, suggested that they should go for a walk together in the beautiful garden of the

R. Das is deeply devoted to the ideals taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Readers of *Samvit* are familiar with his writings.

Dakshineswar Temple nearby, where, he had heard, a holy man was residing.

It was evening when Mahendra Nath and his nephew reached the Dakshineswar Temple. The moon was up in the sky and the sacred Ganga was flowing by silently. The temple of Bhavatarini stood majestically in the compound. There were also other temples, those of Shiva and Radhakanta. All this made the place calm, pure, and peaceful. Mahendra Nath, who had a spiritual bent of mind from his very childhood, liked that holy and serene atmosphere. His ruffled mind became calm.

After a while, M. and Siddheswar came to the room where the holy man lived. He was known as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. M. had a wonderful experience. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on a wooden cot. He was speaking of God, and the devotees sitting on the floor, listened to his nectar-like words. M. stood speechless. In his own words: 'It was as if Shukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, as if all the holy places met and as if Sri Chaitanya was singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri, with Ramananda, Swarup and other devotees.'

'Ah! What a beautiful place! What a charming man!,' M. thought to himself. He saw a new light, as if that wonderful holy man penetrated his very soul. Faith and hope awakened in him. After a brief conversation, M. saluted him and took his leave. Sri Ramakrishna affectionately said, 'Come again'.

* * *

Sri Ramakrishna's loving words 'come again' touched M.'s love-starved heart. These words brought a subtle and imperceptible but lasting joy in his mind. He said to himself, 'How wonderful it is! I should like to see him again.' M. felt an invisible force of attraction towards that blissful person.

A couple of days later M. went alone to Sri Ramakrishna in the morning. On seeing M., Sri Ramakrishna was very glad and asked him to sit down. Sri Ramakrishna had the unique power of judging a person's character by simply looking at his face or observing certain bodily marks. He peeped, as it were, into the innermost recess of M's heart. He understood that M's mind was full of agony and suffering, but these were only on the surface. At heart he was simple and sincere, and was deeply spiritually inclined. Sri Ramakrishna was *jiva-dukhaasahishnu*,

one with a compassionate heart who could not bear human sufferings; he was *bhanjana-dukhaganjana*, the destroyer of human sorrows, and he was *bhava-valdya*, a physician *par excellence*, able to remove the malady of worldliness. But his technique was to root out the disease through the positive method of spiritual awakening.

'You see, you have certain good signs', said Sri Ramakrishna to M., lovingly, 'I know them by looking at a person's forehead, his eyes, and so on. It seems to me that a yogi has just left his seat of meditation and has come to me.'*

M. was thrilled, and suddenly he regained his self confidence which he had lost due to the family conflict and the struggle for worldly existence. He was overwhelmed by Sri Ramakrishna's infinite love and compassion; all his miseries were temporarily removed. Sri Ramakrishna knew perfectly well that human sufferings were the consequence of living a life at a lower level of existence. The only permanent remedy lay in transcending the sufferings by a struggle for spiritual consciousness, that is, in pursuing the spiritual life in right earnest. Because, when one's heart is immersed in the ocean of divine love, how can worldly sufferings persist?

The first thing necessary for M. to learn was discrimination between worldly and spiritual values. Sri Ramakrishna put a question to M. 'Tell me, now, what kind of person is your wife?' M. said, 'She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant.' With evident displeasure Sri Ramakrishna said, 'And you are a man of knowledge!' Sri Ramakrishna then explained to M. that knowledge acquired through books was not real knowledge. To know one's Self or God is knowledge, all else is ignorance. God could be realized both with form as well as without form, and there was nothing wrong in image worship. 'Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image,' said he in his inimitable way, 'doesn't God know that through it He alone is being invoked? He will be pleased with that very worship.' He added that one should not think that his own method of worship was true and all else was false. One should not have any trace of fanaticism.

* The last sentence is not found in the *Kathamrita*. Instead there are dots signifying deliberate omission on the part of the author, out of humility. Swami Prabhananda has filled in the gap after looking into the original diary of M. vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, August 1973, page 334.

Being moved by the words of Sri Ramakrishna, M. opened his mind to him and put four questions. The first question was, 'Sir, how may we fix our mind on God?' With great compassion Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'Repeat God's name and sing His glories, and keep holy company; and now and then visit God's devotees and holy men. The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities; it is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God.'

The second question was: 'How ought we to live in the world?'

Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all—with wife and children, father and mother—and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart that they do not belong to you.'

When answering this question Sri Ramakrishna cited several examples, some of which are:

A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all her household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village.

The tortoise moves about in the water. But can you guess where her thoughts are? There on the bank, where her eggs are lying.

First rub your hands with oil and then break open the jackfruit; otherwise they will be smeared with the sticky milk. First secure the oil of divine love, and then set your hands to the duties of the world.

The third question was: 'Is it possible to see God? The answer came, 'Yes, certainly. Living in solitude now and then, repeating God's name and singing His glories, and discriminating between the Real and the unreal—these are the means to employ to see Him.'

The fourth question was: 'Under what conditions does one see God?'

Sri Ramakrishna answered, 'Cry to the Lord with an intensely yearning heart and you will certainly see Him. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. They swim in

tears for money. But who weeps for God? Cry to Him with a real cry. ... Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn, out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.'

* * *

M.'s sensitive heart melted with the illuminating words of Sri Ramakrishna. He felt real joy and relief. Feeling great attraction towards him, M. went to Dakshineswar frequently. Deep acquaintance grew gradually but he could not fully overcome his mental depression and melancholy. Opening his heart to Sri Ramakrishna one day, M. told him all that had happened. 'Well,' M. said, 'the body alone is the cause of all this mischief, isn't it? . . . Since there is no unbroken happiness in the world, why should one assume a body at all? I know that the body is meant only to reap the results of past actions. But who knows what sort of action it is performing now? The unfortunate part is that we are being crushed.' At once came the divine assurance from the smiling Sri Ramakrishna, 'Haven't you seen the magician's feat? He takes a string with many knots, and ties one end to something, keeping the other in his hand. Then he shakes the string once or twice, and immediately all the knots come undone. But another man cannot untie the knots, however he may try. All the knots of ignorance come undone in the twinkling of an eye, through the guru's grace.'

From that day, the dark clouds of depression that had obscured M.'s mind vanished for ever. He had found his Guru in Sri Ramakrishna. He found a new meaning and purpose in life, a life lived for God-realization. In later life, M. would often say: 'Look at the miracle! From a resolve to end life itself, I discovered God! That is why sorrow comes, to take one to His lap.'

Later M. sang in praise of his Guru:

संसारार्णवधोरे यः कर्णधारस्वरूपकः ।
नमस्ते रामकृष्णाय तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

'Salutation to Sri Ramakrishna, the Guru, who stands firm as the helmsman while ferrying people across the dangerous ocean of worldliness.'

Sri Ramakrishna—the Sadhaka

SHIV DHAWAN

To revive eternal values in kaliyuga, and make them
acceptable to the age,
came an avatar in the form of Ramakrishna, the Dakshineswar
sage.

In the mystical tradition of Meera, Kabir and Chaitanya, he,
re-energizing the souls of mankind, restored the latent wealth
of spirituality.

Through his life and actions the Master blazed a new trail,
to obtain a vision of the divine, only true devotion prevails.
With childlike innocence and dedication, he considered
ritualism auxiliary to his goal,
of seeing the true form of Kali, becoming one with the Whole.

This is evidenced by the fact that he even removed the sacred
thread,
holding that before approaching the Mother, all corporeal
impurities ought to be similarly shed.
In order to ensure he was enslaved by *ahamkara* no more,
he washed the Ganga's bank with his own hands, and performed
other menial chores.

The Master contends Bhoga and Yoga are as incompatible as
water and fire,
one must renounce the first and then for the latter aspire.
Thakur through the aforementioned *sadhana* wished to show,
that only through a synthesis of mental and physical
renunciation does an aspirant spiritually grow.

Mentally and physically cleansed, he set about his arduous task
which was none other
than seeing the Goddess Kali, the Universal Divine Mother.
The Master's worship will be unparalleled in the annals of time,
with childlike sincerity, faith and dependence, he longed to
merge into the Sublime.

Like a happy child with his Mother he would sing, laugh, dance,
and play,
certain that She would appear to him in her true form one day.
Losing all consciousness of worldliness, in his heart pray he
would,
'Mother, my only refuge, kindly make me Thy boy, say and do
what I should'.

Finding that, despite his total dedication, the Mother remained
distant and cold,
he wept in despair, and on the floor like an agonized child
rolled.
Between sobs he declared, 'I seek no enjoyments nor wish to be
wealthy,
You showed yourself to Ramprasad, why should You not reveal
Yourself to me?

Day and night he knew no sleep, in floods of tears his eyes did
swim,
was he such a sinner that the Mother did not appear to him?
So burning was his desire, and the Mother did not answer his
cry,
that he lifted up a sword and was preparing to die.

Suddenly he was filled with a conscious sea of light and a most
intense bliss,
the vision of the Divine Mother; he had longed for this.
The external world of multiplicity was now only a dream
for Thakur the entire sentient creation the Mother did seem.

Ramakrishna the *sadhaka* showed that one who gives up all,
will never suffer the lack of anything, if he listens to the
divine call.

He literally fulfilled the *Gita's* promise; if seeking the
Absolute be one's sole desire,
the Lord will provide, even unasked, all that one requires.

The Grace of the Unseen

SAVITRI NANDA

GOD'S GRACE descends on us in various ways. We go along in life making plans which are now fulfilled and now thwarted, sometimes forgetting that His hand is in all we can or cannot do. Now and then some events make us aware that He is the most important factor in our lives, that by His will things happen which no efforts or planning could possibly have achieved.

I am reminded of a wonderful experience we had back in 1979. We were a group of nineteen ladies and we went to attend the temple dedication ceremony at the Ramakrishna Math in Rajkot. Long before, we had planned to visit the Holy Dwaraka and Somnath after the Rajkot function. At the last moment we included another place, Palitana, in our itinerary. We were informed it was a place worth visiting and only three hours' drive from Somnath. Accommodation for our stay at all the three places was to be arranged through the Ramakrishna Math. No confirmation, however, came from Palitana, a small town in the interior of Gujarat.

From Rajkot we hired a luxury bus and were assured of smooth roads and an efficient driver familiar with the route. We moved according to schedule. The visit to holy Dwaraka was simply thrilling. The atmosphere was surcharged with the devotion of both visitors and the local people. Besides the worship in the temples, we witnessed many *lilas* of Lord Krishna enacted by different parties, including his wedding with Sri Rukmani, and we became a part of the wedding procession!

The Somnath temple was magnificent, grander than what we had imagined. Even the ruins around seemed articulate; the sea was awe-inspiring. The next day, at about 3 p.m., we set out for Palitana, hoping to reach there well before dark. Our calculation, however, was not right. The bus went on and on, and after about four hours we realized that we were nowhere near a town. In fact, we were driving through a jungle and on a rather rough and rugged road. It was now getting dark and the driver admitted, but without panic, that he had never driven to Palitana on this route. He kept stopping now

Savitri Nanda is President of Sri Sarada Mahila Samiti, New Delhi. She is deeply devoted to the ideals and philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

and then to consult a hand-drawn map that the travel agency had given him.

As the bus chugged along, some members of our party felt a little nervous. Anything could be expected at such an hour of the night. The jungle was known to be the favourite haunt of dacoits, and even of wild animals. If by any chance the vehicle had broken down, we would have been in real trouble. Expecting to reach the town in time we had not even carried enough drinking water, nor much to eat. But, surprisingly, the atmosphere on the whole remained calm. All the members of the party seemed indrawn. Our minds were full of the spiritual thoughts and peace imbibed from the inspiring ceremony at Rajkot and the visit to Dwaraka and Somnath. Even the usual singing inside the bus stopped. All was quiet outside and pitch dark, except for the lights of the bus and occasional voices of unfamiliar animals far away.

Around 11 p.m. we saw faint lights in small mud houses on both sides of the so-called road, and a villager happened to be standing on the path. The driver took some instructions from him and we moved on. After another couple of hours, at about one a.m., on partly rough and partly proper road we reached our destination.

Palitana is at the foot of a long range of low hills almost all full of beautiful Jain temples. It is one of the most important places of pilgrimage for the devotees of Lord Mahavira. The exquisite architecture of the temples as well as the religious importance of the place draws thousands of Jain pilgrims to Palitana every year. At that time of the night we could just see the lights glimmering up on the hill. The sight was beautiful and looked more so because of the route we had covered to get there.

We wondered if any rooms had been booked for us in one of the two inns we had been referred to. We stopped there and at a number of other places too, but neither was any accommodation available nor had any message reached there from Rajkot. We were now driving through the small market, dark and quiet at that time except for a small restaurant which had its lights on. Two of us got down to inquire inside if a good hotel or rest house was nearby where we could spend the night. Seeing us on the steps a young man came running out.

'What can I do for you, *behn* (sister)?' he asked spontaneously. We told him.

'Have you come from Rajkot? Oh! Only this morning I was reading about the Ramakrishna temple ceremony there. Don't worry. There are no hotels, but we will certainly arrange something.'

'But,' we said, 'please do not take too much trouble. We are very tired and if it is safe we could park the bus right here and spend the night in the bus. This being a market, there should be no danger.'

'Oh, no,' he said, 'you don't have to do that. What am I here for? I usually go home at about ten but today, by chance, I stayed back to have tea with my friends.'

It seemed to us that we had to leave the decision to him. No one in our party made any counter suggestion.

He sat in the bus and directed the driver. After trying a couple of places, we stopped outside a big building. The attendant recognized his voice and got up. When our guardian, known as Bachubhai, explained the whole thing to him, he opened the office and took out the register to enter our names there.

Bachubhai protested. 'But it is too late to go into these formalities. They had a long rough drive and are very tired. Please open the ten rooms in my name. Here is the deposit.' 'Ten rooms?' the perplexed attendant asked, but he did not pursue the matter. Slowly the rooms were opened and fresh sheets and blankets were brought in due to the authoritative tone of Bachubhai. He not only went into every room to check if fresh water and glasses and so on were there, but even made sure that the bathrooms were clean. Then he instructed the attendant to get tea for us very early in the morning so that we could start for the temples uphill by sunbreak.

Seeing the group of elderly ladies, he spoke to us like a long-known friend or a relative. 'By my estimate,' he said, 'you will not be back before 12.30 or so. Please don't hesitate to hire palanquins. I will order lunch for you at a canteen. My telephone number is Give me a call as soon as you return. I will be waiting for you.'

Trying to sleep in our comfortable beds after a tiring day we kept wondering how and why this young man met us and took upon himself the burden of our stay in this holy town, the only place in our itinerary where no definite arrangement had been made for us. It seemed as if he had a late-night tea session just waiting for us.

The following day happened to be a special day of *puja* and *darshan* at the Jain temples. The walk uphill was strenuous but the beauty of the place and the devotion and joyous mood of the devotees soothed us. The architecture of the temples and the statues of the Tirthankaras were simply exquisite. There was much to see and admire and we felt compensated and happy, completely forgetful of time. On our return to the town, we found Bachubhai waiting for us anxiously. He was worried that the walk uphill might have been too arduous for some of us.

The food at the canteen was delicious, especially after having almost fasted the previous day. We took many extra helpings. As we finished we went to the counter to pay. 'Pay?' the manager asked, 'Bachubhai has paid already. He says you are his special guests.' We did not know what to say. Could we deny what he had told them? We were just overwhelmed. He was waiting for us at the gate. We tried our best, but he just would not listen about payment. 'I'm not going to take a *paisa* from you. Now please don't *bore* me.' We had a good laugh. Perhaps he meant we should not embarrass him. To say 'thank you' at this stage seemed unimportant. We did, however, whisper it and then got into the bus for our return journey to Rajkot. As the driver was about to start, one of the group, who had been feeling unwell since the morning, said she needed a couple of medicines for cold and headache. Bachubhai promptly got into the bus and directed it to a chemist's shop. Right from inside the bus he beckoned to a salesman and told him to bring Crocin and Vitamin C tablets. The lady opened her purse to pay for the medicines, but Bachubhai said shyly, 'This store belongs to Bachubhai's family. It is full of all kinds of medicines. Do you think it proper to offer money for these small items?'—as if he had not done enough already.

We did not know how to protest. Even thanking him again seemed out of place, especially after he added in a low tone,

'It's a rare opportunity. When again can I be of service to you all?' We kept wondering at this loving hospitality. But was it mere hospitality? We were not his guests! Of all the places we visited during that trip the stay at Palitana turned out to be the most memorable.

The Lord alone knows how to reach us; when we are not even aware of it, His grace descends on us imperceptibly; He is ever ready, waiting for us to unfurl our sails. Only, in our small way, we think it is our efforts that make us secure and comfortable. He gave us an experience which has become a life-long memory. To strengthen our faith He made us drive through disolate unfamiliar roads, and then out of the blue Bachubhai came and took over.

Fénelon: A Rishi in the Court of the Sun-King

BRAHMACHARINI UMA

AN OXYMORON is a figure of speech in which two contradictory ideas are combined: a cool fire, sweet bitterness, and so on. A *rishi* in the court of the Sun-King, Louis XIV, seems to be another such oxymoron. We think of *rishis* as away in the Himalayan caves, shunning the company of men as an infectious disease, and sustaining themselves primarily on air. The court of Louis XIV has come to epitomize the excesses of the gilded age; gold, glitter, and pomp were the garments that clothed pride, deceit, and moral decay. Survival was equivalent to fawning subservience. Truthfulness was hazardous to one's health; earning the displeasure of the king was a ticket to banishment or to the Bastille. Into this milieu came Fénelon—as simple a man as the court was guileful. Utterly refusing to compromise, he was truthful even when the result meant certain disgrace and ruin. Humility and renunciation were his ornaments amidst the rubies, satins, and velvets.

Nothing in this world is accidental. The appearance of a great saint in the midst of the worst worldly environment should not be seen as an arbitrary accident of history, for Fénelon's life has a wonderful lesson that we all can gain by. No matter what

Brahmacharini Uma is a member of the Sarada Convent, Santa Barbara, California.

our environment may be, as long as we remain sincere and earnest, we can live a spiritual life. Like Sri Ramakrishna's allusion to the lotus that remains untouched by the mud, so did Fénelon live in the court of Louis XIV. His life remains an inspiration to all spiritual aspirants; given the grace of our own mind, we also can turn our surroundings into an advantage and make our lives blessed.

Fénelon was not a born saint, but rather became one by years of practice. Although temperamentally a *bhakta*, he nevertheless possessed a sweet balance between the loving adoration of his chosen Ideal Jesus, and a constant discrimination between the eternal and the ephemeral. His life was an exemplary blend of all the four yogas, for in addition to *bhakti* and *jnana*, he also combined *karma* and *raja* yogas by hard work in service to his flock and by the assiduous control of his senses.

François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon was born in Périgord in the south-west of France on 6 August 1651. His family was ancient and noble, yet impoverished. The child was of a delicate constitution and received his education at home until he was fourteen. At that time he left for Paris and studied in a Jesuit seminary. Ordained at twenty-four, his first assignment was as the Superior of the Convent of New Catholics. With the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the religious freedom which Henry IV had guaranteed was thrown by the wayside. Protestants who would not convert to Catholicism were persecuted. It was Fénelon's duty to ensure that the forced converts were secure in their new-found faith. The assignment was not to Fénelon's taste, yet he succeeded in his efforts primarily by his inspiring example and tender attention. He refused to use force. Once, in fact, he was called upon to give final rites to a Protestant heretic who refused to convert. The heretic and Fénelon (now a bishop), prayed side by side on their knees together the following prayer that Fénelon composed: 'Thou knowest, my Saviour, that I desire to live and die in the Truth; forgive me if I was mistaken.'

The young bishop's fame grew even more when he published a treatise on 'The Education of Young Women'. Fénelon was centuries ahead of his time in his belief in the necessity of the education of women. Emphasizing the natural dignity of women, Fénelon scorned the idea of raising women merely to

be objects of vanity and pleasure. According to Fénelon one should teach girls that the honour which comes from good conduct is more to be prized than that which is derived from their hair and garments. In seventeenth-century France, this was a revolutionary thought.

The Influence of Two Women

Fénelon's star was rising, and it was not long before he was introduced to Madame de Maintenon, the second wife of Louis XIV, and to Madame Guyon, a mystic and author of several religious tracts. These two women would figure prominently in the rise and fall of Fénelon's fortunes. Madame de Maintenon soon came to regard Fénelon as her spiritual mentor, and it was because of her influence that Fénelon was appointed tutor to Louis XIV's grandson and heir to the French throne, the Duke of Burgundy. In such an atmosphere one could hardly expect spirituality to flourish, yet it did. While Fénelon's eyes remained fixedly set on God as the goal of his life, he was yet an exceedingly practical man who knew well not only the machinations of the royal court, but more importantly, the machinations of the human mind. Fénelon's work was apparently cut out for him when he was given charge of the young duke. By all accounts the child was a terror: wilful, hysterical, proud—he frequently threw violent tantrums if his slightest whim was not immediately gratified. Nothing could be done with him although he apparently possessed a keen intelligence. The quiet, humble prelate ordered the entire court to greet the child's outbursts with silence and to treat the boy with the removed compassion that one would accord a madman. The tantrum having subsided, the instruction would begin again. With the child, as well as with the new converts, Fénelon refused to resort to force or fear. As he remarked, 'Fear is like those violent remedies which are used in the cases of extreme illness: they purge but they impair the constitution and destroy the organs; a soul dominated by fear is always weakened thereby.'

Through loving patience the once irascible child grew into the ideal prince. It was Fénelon's great hope to transform France by giving her the model ruler. For although Fénelon was a great saint and a man of the Church, he was still a



François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon
(1651-1715)



**Students collecting on the grounds of Sri Sarada Math.
(See page 52)**



**The procession returning to Sri Sarada Math.
(See page 52)**

French patriot. It is one of the era's greatest tragedies that the prince upon whom Fénelon had pinned his hopes died before he could ascend the throne. Indeed, it has been asserted that had Fénelon's reforms been realized, the French revolution would never have taken place. Fénelon despised tyranny and he had become increasingly disturbed over the developments of Louis XIV's reign. In a blistering letter to Louis XIV he wrote, 'Your subjects are dying of hunger; the cultivation of the soil is practically abandoned, all business is at a standstill . . . you alone have brought all this trouble upon yourself; for, the whole Kingdom having been ruined, you now hold everything in your own hands, and no one can so much as live, save by your bounty . . . (the people) are filled with bitterness and despair. Sedition is being kindled little by little on all sides . . . You do not love God; even your fear of Him is a slavish fear. It is Hell you dread. Your religion consists only of superstitions and little superficial practices. You make everything centre round your own person, as if you were God of the whole earth.' Only a man who was utterly fearless and indifferent to his fate could have dared to send the Sun-King such a letter.

While trying to educate the young duke, Fénelon discovered a dearth of books written in French for the education of youth. He therefore proceeded to write his own. His book *Fables* was written for children; *Dialogue of Death* was written for young adults. It was during this time that he also wrote *Telemaque*, still considered one of the great works of French literature. In the fable 'The Bee and the Fly' Fénelon contrasts pride and simplicity—a contradiction he must have endured every day of his residence at court. In an unusual twist, the bee is seen as the embodiment of worldly qualities: anger, pride and cruelty. The fly is lowly but sweet. 'We live as best we can,' says the fly. 'poverty is not a vice, but your anger is . . . you make honey . . . but your heart is always bitter . . . you are wise in your laws, but hasty in your actions. Your anger . . . causes your death and your stupid cruelty is more harmful to yourself than anyone else.'

Fénelon's favour in the court was a result of the influence of the two women already mentioned: Madame de Maintenon and Madame Guyon. His worldly fortunes came to pivot on their relationship with one another. It would be difficult to find two more dissimilar women: Guyon was a mystic, indifferent to

the world; Madame de Maintenon was a queen and lived in unthinkable luxury. Their relationship was doomed to be short-lived because Madame Guyon was as eccentric as Madame de Maintenon was practical. Yet for a time they remained friends, for despite her lavish surroundings, the Queen was interested in spiritual life. Madame Guyon had written a book on interior prayer entitled *The Short Way to Perfection*. The method of prayer enjoined was a simple act by which the soul yields itself up to God. There are no words or conceptions; the ideal was to attain pure, motiveless love for God and total self-abandonment. The book and its method of contemplation soon became popular in court circles and in the convent sponsored by Madame de Maintenon.

Fénelon's meeting with the Madame Guyon came at a crucial time in his life. Nurtured in an atmosphere of rationalism, religion for him had become a dry, intellectual activity and his mind replayed again and again the catalogue of his faults. He suffered horribly from scruples, and as Thomas Merton remarked, 'because of his intellectualism and his excessive self-examination, he had arrived at a kind of spiritual paralysis in which sensibility and emotion were almost pathologically inhibited.' Just at the point when his inherent love for God was nearly snuffed out, he found refuge in Madame Guyon's teachings of pure love and childlike surrender to God. It is interesting to see that later in his life he was able to write, 'It is not by painful reflection and by continual struggle that we renounce ourselves. It is only in refraining from introspection and from wanting to control ourselves in our own way, that we become lost in God.' Although he was not drawn to Madame Guyon's flagrant emotionalism, he soon recognized her as his teacher, and their relationship was established.

With the clarity of afterthought it is easy to puzzle over the character of Madame Guyon. Without doubt, she was hysterical and probably neurotic. Also without doubt, she possessed genuine spiritual depth and insight. The counsel that she offered Fénelon was balanced and sage. When he complained of dryness she responded, 'Your soul was never less dry than it is at this moment... everything must be the same to one who, seeking nothing for himself, wants only God for God's sake... Even if you end up in Hell, what do you care, as long as you continue to love God for his own sake alone?'

Madame Guyon's guidance gave Fénelon the breakthrough his spiritual life so sorely needed; her influence on him was immeasurable, and it is a debt that he never forgot.

Thy Will Be Done

As was inevitable, Madame Guyon's influence in court soon faded. Madame de Maintenon was both jealous and concerned over the mystic's influence in her convent, for she was an exceedingly practical woman. She was not willing to lose her reputation over charges of Quietism—a heresy that the Church had already condemned—a charge that the great court prelate Bossuet had levelled at Madame Guyon. No one but a fool would tangle with Bossuet; he was the most powerful churchman in France, and was an intimate of the King. Religion for him was inseparable from politics, and it consisted in a series of formal observances. He despised mysticism as dangerous and irrational; and in particular he loathed Madame Guyon. As Merton remarked, 'mysticism had been under suspicion since the heresies of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. St. Theresa and St. John of the Cross and even St. Ignatius Loyola had been examined as suspect of Illuminism . . . from that time the accusation of "mystical passivity" could, strange as it seems to us, be used as a political weapon.' Needless to say, when it was asserted that the entire convent sponsored by Madame de Maintenon had become Quietist, Madame de Guyon was dropped like the proverbial hot potato. The powerful Bossuet had Guyon's writings sent to the Pope; in short order her writings were condemned as heretical and she was on the way to the Bastille. Although Fénelon was naturally implicated in the Quietist affair, he had every opportunity to escape censure. The Pope was anxious to make him Cardinal; he was still in favour in the court. All he had to do was denounce Madame Guyon, something he steadfastly refused to do. Although he felt there were errors in her writing, he would not condemn her personally. He knew the woman and her intentions well. Certainly she was highly strung and erratic, but she was not a heretic. He refused to repudiate his friendship with her. He sealed his own fate by refusing to sign a document condemning her, 'They value at nothing my conscience, or justice . . . what they hold up before me is my

reputation,' he wrote. *'It is therefore to restore my reputation that I am supposed to sign . . .'* Fénelon stood by the queer mystic and was dismissed from his post as tutor to the duke. He was banished to his archdiocese in Cambrai.

The dread machines of the court were still not finished with Fénelon. Bossuet was infuriated by Fénelon's refusal to buckle under his authority. He therefore sent Fénelon's writings to the Pope with the understanding that they be condemned. The Pope was loath to do this for he dearly loved Fénelon; on the other hand, he was utterly cowed by Louis XIV. The matter rested on the Pope's desk for several years and was presented before committees. Bossuet and Louis XIV were unrelenting, however, and finally the Pope announced that some of the propositions in Fénelon's writings were reprehensible, though he did not condemn Fénelon himself. On the day of the Feast of the Annunciation Fénelon received word that the verdict had gone against him. He was mounting the steps up to the pulpit when the news was given. With unaltered expression he paused, accepted the news, and gave his sermon entitled, *'Thy Will Be Done'*. He immediately recanted the views that the Church had condemned.

The remainder of Fénelon's life was devoted to the tending of his flock in Cambrai and to his correspondence. The majority of the letters, which were the bulk of Fénelon's writing, were composed during this period. The end came unexpectedly. Six years after his banishment, Fénelon met with a carriage accident. He developed fever and died a week later. Although in a great deal of pain, he remained calm and tranquil. Well aware of his impending death, Fénelon seemed to those around him almost indifferent to his fate. As an eyewitness of the time reported, at the time of his death he raised his eyes and communed with God in perfect peace. No honours were accorded Fénelon at his funeral for fear of offending the King. The Pope wept. It was recorded that Fénelon left behind him neither money nor debts.

Fénelon's Teachings

It is of course impossible to cover adequately the spiritual and philosophical concepts of Fénelon in such a brief space. One can never encompass either the heart or the mind of a

saint, and certainly Fénelon is no exception. But an attempt can be made to discuss several of the threads that form a common bond in his writing.

It has already been mentioned that Fénelon had suffered from excessive self-examination. It is probably this trait, however, that gave him such insight into the intricacies of the mind; in reading his letters we become aware of a man who has thoroughly inspected the nooks and crannies of his own heart. Fénelon made an acute study of human psychology and he anticipated the universal problems of all spiritual aspirants. To give an example: 'Often sadness comes because, seeking God, we do not feel his presence enough to satisfy ourselves. To want to feel it is not to want to possess it, but it is to want to assure ourselves, for love of ourselves, that we do possess it, in order to console ourselves . . . at the sight of (our) faults, (our) pride is offended . . . we should like, because of love of self, to have the pleasure of seeing ourselves perfect. We scold ourselves for not being so. We are impatient, haughty, and in an ill humour against ourselves and against others. Deplorable error! As if the work of God could be accomplished by our chagrin!'

Fénelon was described by his contemporaries as a man dead to vanity. Humility and simplicity were the hallmarks of his character, and he exhorted those who sought his counsel to behave always in a normal and natural manner. 'A person full of defects, who does not attempt to hide them, who does not seek to dazzle, who does not affect either talents or virtue, who does not appear to think of himself more than of others, but to have lost sight of this self . . . pleases greatly in spite of his defects. On the contrary, a person full of acquired virtues, talents and outward graces, if he appear artificial, if he seem to be always thinking of himself, if he affect even the best of things, becomes repulsive, wearisome and distasteful to all.'

In the following passage, Fénelon discusses the pitfalls of renunciation, ' . . . although we renounce our body, there remains great difficulty in renouncing the soul. The more we scorn this body of clay . . . the more we are tempted to over-estimate the quality within us that enables us to scorn the body . . . we are glad to know ourselves wise, moderate, saved from the idleness of others . . . we renounce by a brave moderation the enjoyment of all which the world has which is most tempting, but we want

to enjoy our moderation. . . . O, how you would fail God if you should give up your heart to this refinement of self-love! You must renounce all enjoyment and all . . . self-satisfaction in your wisdom and goodness.'

What is genuine renunciation then? We seem to hear Sri Ramakrishna's voice when Fénelon tells us: ' . . . live as a borrower. All that is yours and all that is yourself is only a loan. Use it according to the intention of Him who is loaning it, but never dispose of it as goods which belong to you . . . never appropriate, not only the outer things like favour or your talents, but also the inner gifts.' According to Fénelon, the most important thing is to develop an utter dependence and unceasing recollectedness of God. For then, 'God himself will lead the soul, as though by the hand, to train it in renunciation in every happening of the day.'

The day to day existence, the *tapasya* by daily grind, is the path that Fénelon believes can bring us closest to perfection. To look outside ourselves for austerities, to wait to perform our *sadhana* somewhere else, is to Fénelon the greatest foolishness and the greatest loss of opportunity. He remarked, 'Most people, when they wish to be converted or reformed expect to fill their lives with especially difficult and unusual acts. . . . It would be much more valuable for them to change their actions less, and to change more the disposition which makes them act. . . . God is not satisfied by the sound of our lips, nor by the position of our bodies, nor external ceremonies. What He asks is a will . . . pliant in His hands, which neither desires anything nor refuses anything, which wants without reservation everything which He wants and which never, under any pretext, wants anything which He does not want.'

The rock of Fénelon's faith was based on his conviction that God has placed each of us in our particular environment for our own greatest spiritual growth. God gives, 'within and without, precisely what the soul needs for its advancement in a life of faith and self-renunciation. For whatever happens to me each day is my daily bread, provided that I do not refuse to take it from (God's) hand, and to feed upon it.' In another letter he writes, 'We cannot always be doing a great work, but we can always be doing something that belongs to our condition . . . a disappointment, a contradiction, a harsh word, an annoyance, a

wrong received and endured in His presence is worth more than a long prayer.'

To a woman at court who complained of not enough time for practising her devotions he answered, 'You must learn . . . to make good use of chance moments—when waiting for someone, when going from place to place or, when in society, where to be a good listener, is all that is required. One raises one's heart for an instant to God, and renews one's strength for further duties. The less time one has, the more important it is to husband it . . . in a moment you can recall the presence of God, love Him, adore Him, offer Him what you do . . . and calm before Him all the agitation of your heart.'

The same woman wrote to Fénelon complaining of the unending interruptions and intrusions of the court in her spiritual life. He answered, 'Whatever comes from God's hand bears good fruit. Often those things which make you sigh after solitude are more profitable . . . than the most utter solitude would be. . . . The intruder whom God sends us serves to thwart our will, upset our plans, to make us crave more earnestly for silence and recollection . . . to bend our will to that of others, to humble ourselves when impatience overcomes us under these annoyances These things kindle in our hearts a greater thirst for God.' We derive greater benefit by performing these small austerities than by pushing others away so that we may live in glorious solitude.

We like to think of ourselves, if not as necessarily heroic, then at least as capable of heroic action. Fénelon tells us, however, that it is the small gesture that truly matters. Perhaps we are capable of giving our lives for our fellow man, but the more telling gesture is whether we will offer him the last piece of toast in the basket, or whether we can spare him one half-hour of our precious time. 'Whoever knows how to put the small things to good use, spiritual as well as temporal,' he states, 'accumulates great wealth. . . . Sometimes we hold tighter to a trifle than to a great interest. We are more reluctant to give up an amusement than to give away a very large sum. We deceive ourselves the more readily over little things which we think innocent, and to which we think we are less attached. . . . However, when God takes them away, we can easily recognize by the pain of the deprivation, how excessive . . . our devotion to them was. . . . How can we make others

believe that we should unhesitatingly make the greatest sacrifices, while we fail when it is a question of the smallest ones? The most dangerous thing is the neglect of the little things (because one) . . . becomes accustomed to unfaithfulness . . . true love sees nothing as little. Everything which can please or displease God always seems great to it.'

The question of balance is important in any endeavour; in spiritual life, however, it is vital. The 'razor's edge' ceases to be an exaggeration or a hyperbole. Perhaps it is an ingredient of human nature to lose balance, to have one *guna* predominate over another. Yet maintaining an equilibrium is a tremendous and fruitful austerity that Fénelon emphasizes repeatedly. Distractions come, dryness comes; growth comes when we ignore it and again fix our attention on loving the Lord. 'If the imagination wanders, if the thoughts are carried away, let us not be troubled. . . . A tender father does not always think distinctly of his son. A thousand objects take away his imagination and his mind. But these distractions never interrupt the paternal love. Whenever his son returns to his mind, he loves him, and he feels in the depths of his heart that he has not stopped loving him for a single moment, although he has stopped thinking of him. Such should be our love . . . a simple love, without suspicion and without uneasiness.' To another woman he writes, 'Do not be disquieted about your faults. Love without ceasing . . . vexation at a fault is generally more of a fault than the fault itself. . . . I judge of your fidelity by your peace, and by the freedom of your heart. The more peaceful and free your heart is, the more you will become one with God.'

From the quotations given so far, one could easily conclude that Fénelon was little more than a sentimental *bhakta*, awaiting the mercy of God. He was by nature devotional, yet his concept of God was far beyond simple duality. 'There are,' he says, 'two kinds of reason in me: one is myself, the other is above me; the one that is me (meaning the ego) is very imperfect, defective, unreliable, biased, hasty, changeable and stubborn . . . the other is common to all men, perfect, eternal, immutable . . . incapable of ever being exhausted or divided. Where is this perfect reason which is so close to me, yet so different from me? Where does this supreme reason dwell? *Is it not the God that I am seeking?* In another treatise he describes God as the Being above all others, essential Being. . . . Being

without qualification. Still again in another writing he seems incapable of expressing the fullness of his experience of God, 'O manifold creation, how poor thou art in thy seeming abundance! Numbers are soon exhausted. Only unity abides. . . . O God! Thou alone art! As for me, I am not. . . . It is this multitude of nonentities that I call *me*; it contemplates Being; it divides it into parts, in order to contemplate it, and, in so doing, it acknowledges that the many cannot contemplate the indivisible One.'

The depth and breadth of Fénelon are well beyond our grasp. We conclude, therefore, not with a quotation that comprises the essential Fénelon, but with one that shows only one facet of the many sides of this saintly jewel: 'If you find that boredom is getting you down, or that joy is vanishing, you will come back quietly and easily to the breast of the heavenly Father, who holds you constantly in his arms. You will look for joy and freedom of spirit in sadness; for moderation and recollection in joy; and you will see that He will let you lack nothing. A look of confidence, a simple turning of your heart to Him will renew you, and, although you often feel dull and discouraged, yet every moment during which God asks you to do something, He will give you the ability and the courage according to your need. . . . For our Father, far from abandoning us, seeks only to find our hearts open in order to overflow them with floods of grace.'

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Brahma-Sutra-Bhashya of Sri Shankaracharya

M. R. YARDI

— 9 —

The Order of Creation

IN THE last article we established that Brahman is the material cause of the universe. We now proceed to examine the Upanishadic passages which deal with creation and the manner in which the *sutrakara* has tried to reconcile them. We come across divergent and apparently contradictory statements about creation in the Upanishads. These have been admirably summed up by Sri Shankara in his commentary on *sutra* I.iv.14. For instance, he says that in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (II.1) creation is described as starting with *akasha*: 'From the Self emerged *akasha*.' Then the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (VI.ii.3) says creation starts with light: 'That Existence (Brahman) created light.' In the *Prashna Upanishad* (VI.4.) it is mentioned that creation commenced with the vital force: 'He created the vital force.' In the *Aitareya Upanishad* (I.i.2) the emergence of the worlds is recounted without mentioning any order: 'He created these worlds—heaven, the interspace, the earth, the nether world.' In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (III.xix.1) we read of creation starting from nonexistence: 'This was but nonexistence in the beginning; that became existence.' At a later stage, however, the same Upanishad asks pertinently, 'How can existence emerge out of nonexistence? This was but existence, to be sure, in the beginning.' (VI.ii.1-2). In the *Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* (I.iv.7) the evolution of the universe is stated to be spontaneous: 'In the beginning this was undifferentiated. That became differentiated in name and form only.' In his introductory *bhashya* on section II.iii of the *Brahmasutra*, Sri Shankara states that the ground for ignoring the opponents' points of view was shown to be their self-contradiction. In order to avoid the risk of being ignored on the same ground, it is essential to examine and clarify the

M.R. Yardi, a Sanskrit scholar, is the author of *The Yoga of Patanjali*, a critical text. This article is the ninth of a serial which has continued from the March, 1983, issue of *Samvit*.

purport of all the Upanishadic texts dealing with creation. This the *sutrakara* attempts to do beginning with *sutra* II.iii.1.

He first considers the *prima facie* view in *sutra* II.iii.1 that *akasha* is not created since there is no statement to that effect in the Shruti (न विद्यदश्रुतेः). In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (VI.11.3) only light, water and earth are mentioned as produced, and not *akasha*. The *sutrakara* argues in *sutra* II.iii.2 (अस्ति तु) that 'there is' such a mention in another text. After describing Brahman as 'Truth, Knowledge, and Infinity', the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (II.1) states, 'From that Self originated *akasha*.' There is, therefore, an apparent conflict between the two texts, inasmuch as creation starts with light in one and with *akasha* in the other. The opponent replies in the next *sutra* that the *Taittiriya* text has to be taken 'in a secondary sense on account of impossibility' (गौण्यसम्भवात्). He argues that the creation of *akasha* is impossible since it has no parts. Sri Shankara here refers to the Vaisheshika view that whatever has origination springs from inherent, non-inherent and operative causes. We cannot conceive of any such causes for *akasha*, which is all-pervading. Elements like light which have an origin can exist in different conditions at different periods. No such different conditions can be conceived of in regard to *akasha*. Hence just as we say in common parlance 'make space for me' and 'space in a jar' in a secondary sense, so the Vedic text is to be understood not in its literal sense, but in a figurative sense.

The opponent adduces further arguments why the *Taittiriya Upanishad* text should be taken in a secondary sense. He says that 'this follows from the Vedic text' (शब्दाच्च, *sutra* II.iii.4). It is stated in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* II.iii.3 that air and *akasha* are eternal, *amritam*, and so that which is said to be immortal cannot have an origin. The statement in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* III.xiv. 3 that Brahman is all-pervasive and eternal like space indicates that the attributes of omnipresence and eternality are also the characteristics of *akasha*. He further adds in *sutra* II.iii.5 that 'the same word can have (two different meanings) like the word Brahman' (स्याच्चैकस्य ब्रह्मशब्दवत्). The word Brahman is used in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* III.2-6 in the primary sense with regard to bliss and in the secondary sense with regard to food. Again

it is said there, 'Try to know Brahman through austerity, austerity is Brahman.' Here austerity is the means of knowing Brahman, which is the object of knowledge. The word is used for the object of knowledge, which is its primary sense and also for austerity, which is its secondary sense.

The *sutrakara* rebuts the *prime facie* view in *sutra* II.iii.6 (प्रतिज्ञाज्ञानिरव्यतिरेकाच्छब्देभ्यः). The *sutra* means 'The original declaration would remain unaffected (अहानिः) only if all the effects are non-different from Brahman according to scriptural texts.' The original declaration referred to is that 'through the knowledge of one, everything else becomes known', and it occurs in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, the *Brihadaranyaka* and the *Mundaka Upanishads*. There are also scriptural passages, which declare that all this is Brahman, and since *akasha* is included in the world, it is non-different from Brahman and so is a created product. The two contradictory statements about the origin of *akasha* can be reconciled by the principle of harmonious construction. This is possible if we say that after creating first *akasha* and air, (*Taittiriya*, II.1) Brahman created light (*Chhandogya*, VI.ii.3). He further explains in *sutra* II.iii.7 'wherever there is an effect, separation persists as in ordinary life' (यावद्विकारं तु विभागो लोकवत्). *Akasha* is separated from the earth and thus is an effect. The Self, however, although separate from *akasha*, is the basis of all empirical knowledge and precedes the means of knowledge, whose validity depends upon the Self. So the Self cannot be regarded as an effect. The statements regarding the eternity and infinity of *akasha* have to be taken in a secondary sense as diurnality and vastness.

In the next few *sutras* the *sutrakara* proceeds to determine the order of creation. He states in II.iii.8, 'Hereby the origination of air is explained.' (एतेन मातरिश्वा व्याख्यातः). The *Chhandogya* passage which deals with the origination of things does not mention air. But air is mentioned in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* as having sprung from space. The same arguments which applied to the origination of space would apply *mutatis mutandis* to air. Since air is capable of division, it is an effect. In *sutra* II.iii.10, he states that light originates from this one (i.e. air), as the *Upanishad* says so (तेजोऽस्तस्या ह्याह). In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* light is said to have originated from Brahman, while the *Taittiriya Upanishad* says that light

sprang from air. Those two statements can be reconciled by assuming that light springs from Brahman not directly but through intermediate links. The next *sutra* says that from light sprang water (आपः). This is followed by a *sutra* which says that earth originated from water (पृथिवी), but this is not mentioned by Sri Shankara and Sri Bhaskara. In the next *sutra* he says that 'the word *anna* means earth on the strength of the subject matter, colour, and the Vedic texts' (पृथिव्यधिकाररूपशब्दान्तरेभ्यः). As the word *anna* occurs in the description of elements, so this is a reference to the element earth. Earth also has predominantly a black colour and many scriptural texts support the view that *anna* denotes earth.

The elements *akasha*, air, fire, water and earth thus originate in that order from Brahman. From this one may be led to think that Brahman too must have some source of origin. The *sutrakara* denies this in *sutra* II.iii.9 (असम्भवस्तु-सतोऽनुपपत्तेः), which means, 'Origination is not possible for Brahman, because of its inapplicability.' Brahman being Existence, pure and simple, cannot originate from another Existence. There can be no causal connection between two things in the absence of any distinguishing feature. Nor can Brahman originate from a particular form of Existence, as that is contrary to common experience. Particulars spring from what is general and not vice versa. Nor can Brahman come from what is not, as this is negated in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* VI.ii.2. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* VI.9 also states emphatically that 'He has no progenitor, nor any ordainer'. Since products are seen to come from things which are themselves products, it may be argued that Brahman also could be a product. This, however, is not possible, as we have to admit an ultimate material cause to avoid infinite regress. This ultimate cause is itself Brahman.

Next, the question arises whether the elements produce the effects on their own or by the will of God. This is explained in *sutra* II.iii.13 (तदाभिध्यानादेव तु तल्लिङ्गात्सः), which means, 'But through His will, He (produces the effects) because of the Indicatory mark.' Even when the elements are said to produce the effects in the process of evolution, it is the Supreme residing in the elements who produces the effects. For example, it is stated in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* III.vii.3, 'He who dwells in the earth, yet is within the earth, but whom the earth

does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within, he is the Inner Controller, your immortal Self.' This Vedic text suggests that the elements become causes only through the will of the Supreme who dwells within them.

After determining the order of creation, the *sutrakara* proceeds to determine the order of dissolution of the world in *sutra* II.III.14 (विपर्ययेण तु क्रमोत् उपपद्यते च). This *sutra* means, 'The order (of dissolution) proceeds in a reverse way as compared with this (order of creation), as is logical.' In the Upanishads we are told that creation, continuance and the dissolution of the universe are dependent on Brahman. The *sutrakara* says that dissolution takes place in the reverse order of creation. This is also common experience. He who climbs the stairs has to come down by taking steps in the reverse order. It is proper that a product should merge in its cause and not, by skipping a step merge into the cause of its cause. Thus creation starts from the Self in a certain order and dissolution ends in the Self in the reverse order.

We also find in some Upanishads the existence of mind mentioned together with the senses and intellect (*Katha* I.III.3). As these things are also said to have originated from Brahman, it is necessary to place them at some intermediate stage in the order of creation. The *sutrakara* gives his view in *sutra* II.III.15 (अन्तरा विज्ञानमनसी क्रमेण तल्लिङ्गादिति चेन्नाविशेषात्). This *sutra* means, 'If it be said that in between (Brahman and the elements) mind and intellect (find a mention) because of indicatory marks, then (we say) not so, because of their non-difference (from the elements).' The organs themselves are products of the elements, and so are non-different from them. For instance, it is stated in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* VI.v.4, 'Thus, my dear, mind consists of food, breath consists of water and speech consists of heat', and so on. If the organs are sometimes mentioned separately from them, it is only as the *pravrajakas* (mendicant brahmins) are mentioned separately from other brahmins. If some Upanishads mention mind and so on first and then the elements, they do not necessarily indicate the order of their creation.

Sri Ramanuja, however, thinks that the *sutra* II.III.14 is not concerned with the order of dissolution, but is in continuation of the topic of the order of evolution. According to him the *sutra* means, 'The order (of creation) is the reverse (of the

true order), and this is possible (since the origination of all effects) is from Him (i.e. Brahman).’ He cites the *Mundaka Upanishad* which mentions breath, mind, etc. as arising directly from Brahman as opposed to the real order of evolution, viz. *prakriti*, the great principle and so on. According to him, the gist of this and the next *sutra* is to declare that all entities spring directly from Brahman, not to teach the sequence in which they are produced. It cannot have the purport of teaching a certain order of succession, as the order stated is contradicted by other scriptural passages. This is tantamount to saying that the *sutrakara* had not formed a view regarding the order of creation. In fact the order of creation as given by him is in accord with the scientific evolution of life in the universe. Life in any form would have been impossible without atmosphere, light, water and earth, and the history of evolution also tells us that mind and intelligence evolved from them millions of years after the origination of life on this planet.

Avadhuta Gita of Dattatreya

The Song of the Ever-free

(A Review Article)

[*Avadhuta Gita of Dattatreya: The Song of the Ever-Free*. Translated by Swami Chetanananda. Published by the Advaita Ashram, Calcutta. First Edition 1984, pp. xxiv + 137, Price Rs. 8.00.]

THIS BOOK is a rare gift to those who seek Atmabodha, the knowledge of the Self. There are so many Gitas, such as the *Ribhu Gita*, the *Uddhava Gita*, the *Rama Gita*, the *Ashtavakra Gita*, all of them taking after the great Song Divine, the *Bhagavad Gita*, which gives the essence of the Upanishads. Each of the Gitas that followed the *Bhagavad Gita* has in its own way attempted to help the seeker to have a glimpse of the Transcendental Reality. Of all the Gitas throwing light on the Supreme Reality, the *Avadhuta Gita* of Dattatreya stands unique.

The *Avadhuta Gita* is an independent treatise on Advaita and explains that doctrine in the most uncompromising terms:

'Truly the Atman alone is all, and in it there is neither division nor nondivision. It appears to me perplexing to say, "The Atman exists" or "The Atman does not exist".' (I.4)

'Some prefer to be nondualists, while others prefer to be dualists; but none of them truly knows the selfsame Brahman, which is devoid of duality and nonduality.' (I.36)

This book is attributed to the great sage Dattatreya who was also known as Avadhuta Dattatreya. In Swami Harshananda's Foreword and the translator's Introduction an account of his life is given. The *Mahabharata*, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the *Vishnu Purana*, and the *Markandeya Purana* give several anecdotes about him. A widely accepted version of his birth is that he was born as the son of the great sage Atri and his chaste wife Anasuya. Very often he is described as an incarnation of the Hindu Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, but in many legends he is spoken of as an avatar of Vishnu. He is also stated to be one of the seven sages. It was he who taught the knowledge of the Self to Prahlada, Alarka, Yadu, and Kartavirya. He is mentioned in the *Jabala Upanishad*, the *Narada-Parivrajaka Upanishad*, the *Yajnavalkya Upanishad* and the *Bhikshu Upanishad*. The *Shandilya Upanishad* gives an explanation of the term Dattatreya and also gives a story about the sage. From all accounts it is clear that the sage Dattatreya is a very ancient spiritual personality, an avatar, venerated through the ages. In pictures Dattatreya is usually shown as having three heads and six hands, surrounded by four dogs and a cow. The three heads are those of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. The six hands signify six supernatural qualities, the four dogs are the four Vedas, and the cow represents the earth.

The essence of Dattatreya's teachings is that a man who seeks to obtain bliss must remove all attachments from his heart. Viveka and Vairagya are the two important qualities which a seeker must cultivate. This will enable him to distinguish between Atman and Anatman. He will then realize that he is not the body and he is always the same, peaceful, full of joy, untouched by externalities. He is not the mind and, therefore, enjoyment and misery, which are the beginning and end of the mind, do not touch him. Pleasure and pain, enjoyment and misery, all relate to body and mind. It matters nothing to

him for he himself is Sat-Chit-Ananda, Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute.

The *Avadhuta Gita* consists of two hundred and seventy-one verses, divided into eight chapters. The first chapter deals with the nature of the Atman; the second with the proofs for the same; the third and fourth with the inner nature of Brahman, and the fifth advises the seeker to avoid all lamentations, as the Atman is the same under all conditions. The sixth chapter deals with distinctions arising from the senses and their contact with objects, and negates them. The seventh describes the state of the Avadhuta, and the eighth gives a definition of the word Avadhuta by interpreting each of its syllables. The whole treatise is the essence of Advaita.

What is Advaita? It is not equal to one, but it is not two. The great scientist Dr. Raja Ramanna says:

'The term Advaita is of great significance as it is a result of considering the totality of all knowledge and not merely a single state of consciousness. The best way to figure this out is by analogy to the term "limit" in calculus. Through a point on a curve many lines can be drawn but only one of the lines is of significance i.e. the tangent at the point because it is determined by another point or set of points infinitesimally close to it. The position of supreme symmetry or absolute truth is determined by all knowledge that goes behind it. It leads to the Supreme One, ... but it is not two, "Advaita". It is not an independent unit, it is a pinnacle of all that has gone behind it'*

In this treatise Dattatreya expounds this doctrine with precise logic and with exuberance of joy. In describing the nature of the Atman, he says:

'I am one and in everything, I am unbounded and beyond space. How can I see my own Self appearing or disappearing?' (I.10)

'Be aware of the Atman always. It is continuous and everywhere the same. You say, "I am he who meditates", and "The Supreme One is the object of meditation". Why do you thus divide the indivisible?' (I.12)

* 'Logic, Shankara & Subramania Iyer', the *Bhavan's Journal*, (Bombay 1986) No. 19.24

'For you and me there can be neither union nor separation. In reality, neither you nor I nor this world exists. The Atman alone abides.' (I.15)

'How can I speak of or worship that Supreme Beatitude, which I do not know as an object of knowledge? For I myself am that Supreme Beatitude—the Ultimate Reality, which is full by nature and all-pervading like space.' (I.27)

Dattatreya goes to the extent of even transcending the Advaita principle in his flight into the Supreme Reality, for he says that 'even those who talk of Advaita do not really know Brahman'. The word 'Brahman' is derived from the word root *brh*, to burst forth or to grow,—it was probably meant at first to be a prayer. Atman, though originally it might have meant breath, was eventually equated with the soul or Self of a living being, particularly a human being. The Upanishads declare that the two, namely, Atman and Brahman are the same, and therefore both words are used as synonyms. Through the enquiry into the source of the universe, and through the quest after the true Self, the Upanishads declare that it is a nondual Reality that appears as the manifest world with its plurality of existence.

According to Dattatreya, Atman is all-pervasive and cannot be perceived by the senses, nor by mind, nor by speech, but once seers are able to experience, through the subtle intellect, the true nature of Brahman, then they realize that the entire universe is nothing but Brahman. 'The Avadhuta lives happily alone in a secluded place, purified by the uninterrupted bliss of Brahman. Renouncing the ego, the mendicant Avadhuta moves about and finds everything within his own Self.' (I.73)

Knowledge of Brahman cannot be obtained through the repetition of a *mantra* or the recitation of the Vedas or the practice of Tantric rites. Everyone cannot attain the stage of an Avadhuta spontaneously. The first stage is to gain *jnana* for which the grace of a guru is essential.

Explaining how a Yogi attains the Supreme Atman, Dattatreya in ten verses states that the eternal Supreme Atman is pure, unparalleled, formless, supportless, incorporeal, desireless, beyond the pairs of opposites, devoid of delusion and of undiminished power, and when the Yogi after purifying himself through meditation attains that Supreme Atman, he is free from the injunctions and prohibitions of the Shastras.

There is no purity or impurity, nor any ill thought attributable to his mind. As he has transcended all the rules and abides for ever in the Supreme Reality, there is no prohibition for him.

Chapter III is a further revelation of the nature of Brahman. Dattatreya says: 'How can I say whether Brahman is dual or nondual in nature? How can I say It is eternal or noneternal? I am Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss, and boundless as space.' (III.5)

The nature of Brahman is further declared as, 'I am by nature blissful and free.' (IV.3)

It is here that the essence of the *Bhagavad Gita* is brought in through drops of nectar by saying that the Self is neither a perceiver nor the object of perception. It has no cause or effect; It neither destroys anything nor is It destroyed by anything. Neither is It a knower nor is It knowable. Neither it has attachment nor detachment, nor waking nor dreaming; nor any posture of yoga; nor is there any day or night.

The all-pervading Brahman is expressed by the syllable OM. Its essence cannot be ascertained by either higher or lower knowledge. In the *Katha Upanishad* OM is stated to be Brahman itself. And Brahman is bereft of form, free from creation and destruction, free from emotion or excitement. It pervades equally all living beings, the home and the family; It pervades equally movable and immovable things, freed from cause and effect, unity and diversity. It shines by Itself, pure and tranquil.

The Avadhuta, after describing the nature of Brahman as supreme bliss, asks: how can there be objects, senses, mind and intellect, and how can there be a distinction between spirit (Purusha) and matter (Prakriti)? And if I am really Brahman, how can I make salutations to my own Self?

And who is an Avadhuta? Is he a Yogi? Is he a Jnani? What are his characteristics? How does one identify an Avadhuta? In the *Avadhuta Upanishad (Yajurveda Taittiriya)*, an Avadhuta is described as one who in the world transcends dualism (like virtue and vice) and has cast away every belonging. Dattatreya himself says that one can learn the characteristics of an Avadhuta from the syllables of the word 'Avadhuta'. The syllable A indicates that he is free from hope and expectation, that his life is pure from beginning to end, and

that he always dwells in Bliss. The syllable *va* indicates that he has given up all desires and lives in the omnipresent Brahman. The syllable *dhu* signifies that though his body is besmeared with grey dust, his mind is pure and healthy, and that he does not require to practise concentration or meditation. The syllable *ta* indicates that he has absorbed the thought of Brahman and that he does not suffer from anxiety or feel obliged to exert himself. He is completely free from both egoism and ignorance.

We are thankful to the Advaita Ashram of Mayavati for having brought out this beautiful book with an excellent translation by Swami Chetanananda. It is very difficult to translate some of the passages and our gratitude goes to Swami Chetanananda for having given us a fine and lucid translation with proper notes. This is a book not only for spiritual aspirants but for everyone who desires to know the essence of Vedantic doctrines. Is there any significance in the fact that the doctrine of Advaita is preached by Shiva by taking an avatar as Shankara, and by Vishnu taking an avatar as Dattatreya?

DR. V. GAURI SHANKER

SRI SARADA MATH & RAMAKRISHNA SARADA MISSION

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE WORKING OF SRI SARADA MATH
AND THE RAMAKRISHNA SARADA MISSION—1985-86.

SRI SARADA Math, with its Headquarters in Dakshineswar, has five centres in India: one each in Madras, Pune, and Bangalore and two in Kerala, namely, one in Trichur and one in Ernakulam.

Including the centre at the Headquarters, the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission runs eleven centres: eight in West Bengal, and one each in New Delhi, Khonsa (Arunachal Pradesh), and Trivandrum. The Math and Mission public activities may be classified under seven heads: (1) Educational Work, (2) Medical Service, (3) Rural Uplift Work, (4) Help to the Needy, (5) Spread of Cultural and Spiritual Ideas, (6) Foreign Work, and (7) Retreats.

The following activities were conducted by the Mission at the Headquarters: a school for poor children, a free homeopathy