



THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

“SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA”

By Mahendranath Gupta (“M”), His Disciple

Translated from the Bengali by Swami Nikhilananda

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FOREWORD

by *Aldous Huxley*

IN THE HISTORY of the arts, genius is a thing of very rare occurrence. Rarer still, however, are the competent reporters and recorders of that genius. The world has had many hundreds of admirable poets and philosophers; but of these hundreds only a very few have had the fortune to attract a Boswell or an Eckermann.

When we leave the field of art for that of spiritual religion, the scarcity of competent reporters becomes even more strongly marked. Of the day-to-day life of the great theocentric saints and contemplatives we know, in the great majority of cases, nothing whatever. Many, it is true, have recorded their doctrines in writing, and a few, such as St. Augustine, Suso and St. Teresa, have left us autobiographies of the greatest value. But, all doctrinal writing is in some measure formal and impersonal, while the autobiographer tends to omit what he regards as trifling matters and suffers from the further disadvantage of being unable to say how he strikes other people and in what way he affects their lives. Moreover, most saints have left neither writings nor self-portraits, and for knowledge of their lives, their characters and their teachings, we are forced to rely upon the records made by their disciples who, in most cases, have proved themselves singularly incompetent as reporters and biographers. Hence the special interest attaching to this enormously detailed account of the daily life and conversations of Sri Ramakrishna.

"M", as the author modestly styles himself, was peculiarly qualified for his task. To a reverent love for his master, to a deep and experiential knowledge of that master's teaching, he added a prodigious memory for the small happenings of each day and a happy gift for recording them in an interesting and realistic way. Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, "M" produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. No other saint has had so able and indefatigable a Boswell. Never have the small events of a contemplative's daily life been described with such a wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity. To Western readers, it is true, this fidelity and this wealth of detail are sometimes a trifle disconcerting; for the social, religious and intellectual frames of reference within which Sri Ramakrishna did his thinking and expressed his feelings were entirely Indian. But after the first few surprises and bewilderments, we begin to find something peculiarly stimulating and instructive about the very strangeness and, to our eyes, the eccentricity of the man revealed to us in "M's" narrative. What a scholastic philosopher would call the "accidents" of Ramakrishna's life were intensely Hindu and therefore, so far as we in the West are concerned, unfamiliar and hard to understand; its "essence", however, was intensely mystical and therefore universal. To read through these conversations in which mystical doctrine alternates with an unfamiliar kind of humour, and where discussions of the oddest aspects of Hindu mythology give place to the most profound and subtle utterances about the nature of Ultimate Reality, is in itself a liberal, education in humility, tolerance and suspense of

judgment. We must be grateful to the translator for his excellent version of a book so curious and delightful as a biographical document, so precious, at the same time, for what it teaches us of the life of the spirit.

PREFACE

by Swāmi Nikhilānanda

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is the English translation of the *Sri Sri Rāmakrishna Kathāmrīta*, the conversations of Sri Ramakrishna with his disciples, devotees, and visitors, recorded by Mahendranāth Gupta, who wrote the book under the pseudonym of "M." The conversations in Bengali fill five volumes, the first of which was published in 1897 and the last shortly after M.'s death in 1932. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, has published in two volumes an English translation of selected chapters from the monumental Bengali work. I have consulted these while preparing my translation.

M., one of the intimate disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, was present during all the conversations recorded in the main body of the book and noted them down in his diary. They therefore have the value of almost stenographic records. In Appendix A are given several conversations which took place in the absence of M., but of which he received a first-hand record from persons concerned. The conversations will bring before the reader's mind an intimate picture of the Master's eventful life from March 1882 to April 24, 1886, only a few months before his passing away. During this period he came in contact chiefly with English-educated Bengālis; from among them he selected his disciples and the bearers of his message, and with them he shared his rich spiritual experiences.

I have made a literal translation, omitting only a few pages of no particular interest to English-speaking readers. Often literary grace has been sacrificed for the sake of literal translation. No translation can do full justice to the original. This difficulty is all the more felt in the present work, whose contents are of a deep mystical nature and describe the inner experiences of a great seer. Human language is an altogether inadequate vehicle to express supersensuous perception. Sri Ramakrishna was almost illiterate. He never clothed his thoughts in formal language. His words sought to convey his direct realization of Truth. His conversation was in a village patois. Therein lies its charm. In order to explain to his listeners an abstruse philosophy, he, like Christ before him, used with telling effect homely parables and illustrations, culled from his observation of the daily life around him.

The reader will find mentioned in this work many visions and experiences that fall outside the ken of physical science and even psychology. With the development of modern knowledge the border line between the natural and the supernatural is ever shifting its position. Genuine mystical experiences are not as suspect now as they were half a century ago. The words of Sri Ramakrishna have already exerted a tremendous influence in the land of his birth. Savants of Europe have found in his words the ring of universal truth.

But these words were not the product of intellectual cogitation; they were rooted in direct experience. Hence, to students of religion, psychology, and physical science, these experiences of the Master are of immense value for the understanding of religious

phenomena in general. No doubt Sri Ramakrishna was a Hindu of the Hindus; yet his experiences transcended the limits of the dogmas and creeds of Hinduism. Mystics of religions other than Hinduism will find in Sri Ramakrishna's experiences a corroboration of the experiences of their own prophets and seers. And this is very important today for the resuscitation of religious values. The sceptical reader may pass by the supernatural experiences; he will yet find in the book enough material to provoke his serious thought and solve many of his spiritual problems.

There are repetitions of teachings and parables in the book. I have kept them purposely. They have their charm and usefulness, repeated as they were in different settings. Repetition is unavoidable in a work of this kind. In the first place, different seekers come to a religious teacher with questions of more or less identical nature; hence the answers will be of more or less identical pattern. Besides, religious teachers of all times and climes have tried, by means of repetition, to hammer truths into the stony soil of the recalcitrant human mind. Finally, repetition does not seem tedious if the ideas repeated are dear to a man's heart.

I have thought it necessary to write a rather lengthy Introduction to the book. In it I have given the biography of the Master, descriptions of people who came in contact with him, short explanations of several systems of Indian religious thought intimately connected with Sri Ramakrishna's life, and other relevant matters which, I hope, will enable the reader better to understand and appreciate the unusual contents of this book. It is particularly important that the Western reader, unacquainted with Hindu religious thought, should first read carefully the introductory chapter, in order that he may fully enjoy these conversations. Many Indian terms and names have been retained in the book for want of suitable English equivalents. Their meaning is given either in the Glossary or in the foot-notes. The Glossary also gives explanations of a number of expressions unfamiliar to Western readers. The diacritical marks are explained under Notes on Pronunciation.

In the Introduction I have drawn much material from the Life of Sri Ramakrishna, published by the Advaita Ashrama, Māyāvati, India. I have also consulted the excellent article on Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Nirvedānanda, in the second volume of the Cultural Heritage of India.

The book contains many songs sung either by the Master or by the devotees. These form an important feature of the spiritual tradition of Bengal and were for the most part written by men of mystical experience. For giving the songs their present form I am grateful to Mr. John Moffitt, Jr.

In the preparation of this manuscript I have received ungrudging help from several friends. Miss Margaret Woodrow Wilson and Mr. Joseph Campbell have worked hard in editing my translation. Mrs. Elizabeth Davidson has typed, more than once, the entire manuscript and rendered other valuable help. Mr. Aldous Huxley has laid me under a debt of gratitude by writing the Foreword. I sincerely thank them all.

In the spiritual firmament Sri Ramakrishna is a waxing crescent. Within one hundred years of his birth and fifty years of his death his message has spread across land and sea. Romain Rolland has described him as the fulfilment of the spiritual aspirations of the three hundred millions of Hindus for the last two thousand years. Mahatma Gandhi has written: "His life enables us to see God face to face. . . . Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness." He is being recognized as a compeer of Krishna, Buddha, and Christ.

The life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna have redirected the thoughts of the denationalized Hindus to the spiritual ideals of their forefathers. During the latter part of the nineteenth century his was the time-honoured role of the Saviour of the Eternal Religion of the Hindus. His teachings played an important part in liberalizing the minds of orthodox pundits and hermits. Even now he is the silent force that is moulding the spiritual destiny of India. His great disciple, Swami Vivekananda, was the first Hindu missionary to preach the message of Indian culture to the enlightened minds of Europe and America. The full consequence of Swami Vivekānandā work is still in the womb of the future.

May this translation of the first book of its kind in the religious history of the world, being the record of the direct words of a prophet, help stricken humanity to come nearer to the Eternal Verity of life and remove dissension and quarrel from among the different faiths! May it enable seekers of Truth to grasp the subtle laws of the supersensuous realm, and unfold before man's restricted vision the spiritual foundation of the universe, the unity of existence, and the divinity of the soul!

- *Swāmi Nikhilānanda*

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MAHENDRANĀTH GUPTA

In the life of the great Saviours and Prophets of the world it is often found that they are accompanied by souls of high spiritual potency who play a conspicuous part in the furtherance of their Master's mission. They become so integral a part of the life and work of these great ones that posterity can think of them only in mutual association. Such is the case with Sri Ramakrishna and M., whose diary has come to be known to the world as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in English and as *Sri Rāmakrishna Kathāmrita* in the original Bengali version.

Sri Mahendra Nath Gupta, familiarly known to the readers of the Gospel by his pen name M., and to the devotees as Master Mahashay, was born on the 14th of July, 1854 as the son of Madhusudan Gupta, an officer of the Calcutta High Court, and his wife, Swarnamayi Devi. He had a brilliant scholastic career at Hare School and the Presidency College at Calcutta. The range of his studies included the best that both occidental and oriental learning had to offer. English literature, history, economics, western philosophy and law on the one hand, and Sanskrit literature and grammar, Darsanas, Puranas, Smritis, Jainism, Buddhism, astrology and Ayurveda on the other were the subjects in which he attained considerable proficiency.

He was an educationist all his life both in a spiritual and in a secular sense. After he passed out of College, he took up work as headmaster in a number of schools in succession Narail High School, City School, Ripon College School, Metropolitan School, Aryan School, Oriental School, Oriental Seminary and Model School. The causes of his migration from school to school were that he could not get on with some of the managements on grounds of principles and that often his spiritual mood drew him away to places of pilgrimage for long periods. He worked with some of the most noted public men of the time like Iswar Chandra Vidyāsāgar and Surendranath Banerjee. The latter appointed him as a professor in the City and Ripon Colleges where he taught subjects like English, philosophy, history and economics. In his later days he took over the Morton School, and he spent his time in the staircase room of the third floor of it, administering the school and preaching the message of the Master. He was much respected in educational circles where he was usually referred to as Rector Mahashay. A teacher who had worked under him writes thus in warm appreciation of his teaching methods: "Only when I worked with him in school could I appreciate what a great educationist he was. He would come down to the level of his students when teaching, though he himself was so learned, so talented. Ordinarily teachers confine their instruction to what is given in books without much thought as to whether the student can accept it or not. But M., would first of all gauge how much the student could take in and by what means. He would employ aids to teaching like maps, pictures and diagrams, so that his students could learn by seeing. Thirty years ago (from 1953) when the question of imparting education through the medium of the mother tongue was being

discussed, M. had already employed Bengali as the medium of instruction in the Morton School." (M *The Apostle and the Evangelist* by Swami Nityatmananda Part I. P. 15.)

Imparting secular education was, however, only his profession ; his main concern was with the spiritual regeneration of man a calling for which Destiny seems to have chosen him. From his childhood he was deeply pious, and he used to be moved very much by Sādhus, temples and Durga Puja celebrations. The piety and eloquence of the great Brahma leader of the times, Keshab Chander Sen, elicited a powerful response from the impressionable mind of Mahendra Nath, as it did in the case of many an idealistic young man of Calcutta, and prepared him to receive the great Light that was to dawn on him with the coming of Sri Ramakrishna into his life.

This epoch-making event of his life came about in a very strange way. M. belonged to a joint family with several collateral members. Some ten years after he began his career as an educationist, bitter quarrels broke out among the members of the family, driving the sensitive M. to despair and utter despondency. He lost all interest in life and left home one night to go into the wide world with the idea of ending his life. At dead of night he took rest in his sister's house at Baranagar, and in the morning, accompanied by a nephew Siddheswar, he wandered from one garden to another in Calcutta until Siddheswar brought him to the Temple Garden of Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna was then living. After spending some time in the beautiful rose gardens there, he was directed to the room of the Paramahansa, where the eventful meeting of the Master and the disciple took place on a blessed evening (the exact date is not on record) on a Sunday in March 1882. As regards what took place on the occasion, the reader is referred to the opening section of the first chapter of the *Gospel*.

The Master, who divined the mood of desperation in M, his resolve to take leave of this 'play-field of deception', put new faith and hope into him by his gracious words of assurance: "God forbid! Why should you take leave of this world? Do you not feel blessed by discovering your Guru? By His grace, what is beyond all imagination or dreams can be easily achieved!" At these words the clouds of despair moved away from the horizon of M.'s mind, and the sunshine of a new hope revealed to him fresh vistas of meaning in life. Referring to this phase of his life, M. used to say, "Behold! where is the resolve to end life, and where, the discovery of God! That is, sorrow should be looked upon as a friend of man. God is all good." (*Ibid* P.33.)

After this re-settlement, M's life revolved around the Master, though he continued his professional work as an educationist. During all holidays, including Sundays, he spent his time at Dakshineswar in the Master's company, and at times extended his stay to several days.

It did not take much time for M. to become very intimate with the Master, or for the Master to recognise in this disciple a divinely commissioned partner in the fulfilment of his spiritual mission. When M. was reading out the Chaitanya Bhagavata, the Master discovered that he had been, in a previous birth, a disciple and companion of the great Vaishnava Teacher, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and the Master even saw him 'with his naked eye' participating in the ecstatic mass-singing of the Lord's name under the leadership of that Divine personality. So the Master told M, "You are my own, of the same substance as the father and the son," indicating thereby that M. was one of the chosen few and a part and parcel of his Divine mission.

There was an urge in M. to abandon the household life and become a Sannyāsin. When he communicated this idea to the Master, he forbade him saying, "Mother has told me that you have to do a little of Her work you will have to teach Bhagavata, the word of God to humanity. The Mother keeps a Bhagavata Pandit with a bondage in the world!" (*Ibid* P.36.)

An appropriate allusion indeed! Bhagavata, the great scripture that has given the word of Sri Krishna to mankind, was composed by the Sage Vyāsa under similar circumstances. When caught up in a mood of depression like that of M, Vyāsa was advised by the sage Nārada that he would gain peace of mind only on composing a work exclusively devoted to the depiction of the Lord's glorious attributes and His teachings on Knowledge and Devotion, and the result was that the world got from Vyāsa the invaluable gift of the Bhagavata Purana depicting the life and teachings of Sri Krishna. From the mental depression of the modern Vyāsa, the world has obtained the *Kathāmrita* (Bengali Edition) the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in English.

Sri Ramakrishna was a teacher for both the Orders of mankind, Sannyāsins and householders. His own life offered an ideal example for both, and he left behind disciples who followed the highest traditions he had set in respect of both these ways of life. M., along with Nag Mahashay, exemplified how a householder can rise to the highest level of sagehood. M. was married to Nikunja Devi, a distant relative of Keshab Chander Sen, even when he was reading at College, and he had four children, two sons and two daughters. The responsibility of the family, no doubt, made him dependent on his professional income, but the great devotee that he was, he never compromised with ideals and principles for this reason. Once when he was working as the headmaster in a school managed by the great Vidyāsāgar, the results of the school at the public examination happened to be rather poor, and Vidyāsāgar attributed it to M's pre-occupation with the Master and his consequent failure to attend adequately to the school work. M. at once resigned his post without any thought of the morrow. Within a fortnight the family was in poverty, and M. was one day pacing up and down the verandah of his house, musing how he would feed his children the next day. Just then a man came with a letter addressed to 'Mahendra Babu', and on opening it, M. found that it was a letter

from his friend Sri Surendra Nath Banerjee, asking whether he would like to take up a professorship in the Ripon College. In this way three or four times he gave up the job that gave him the wherewithal to support the family, either for upholding principles or for practising spiritual Sadhanas in holy places, without any consideration of the possible dire worldly consequences; but he was always able to get over these difficulties somehow, and the interests of his family never suffered. In spite of his disregard for worldly goods, he was, towards the latter part of his life, in a fairly flourishing condition as the proprietor of the Morton School which he developed into a noted educational institution in the city. The Lord has said in the Bhagavad Gitā that in the case of those who think of nothing except Him, He Himself would take up all their material and spiritual responsibilities. M. was an example of the truth of the Lord's promise.

Though his children received proper attention from him, his real family, both during the Master's life-time and after, consisted of saints, devotees, Sannyāsins and spiritual aspirants. His life exemplifies the Master's teaching that an ideal householder must be like a good maid-servant of a family, loving and caring properly for the children of the house, but knowing always that her real home and children are elsewhere. During the Master's life-time he spent all his Sundays and other holidays with him and his devotees, and besides listening to the holy talks and devotional music, practised meditation both on the Personal and the Impersonal aspects of God under the direct guidance of the Master. In the pages of the Gospel the reader gets a picture of M.'s spiritual relationship with the Master how from a hazy belief in the Impersonal God of the Brahmos, he was step by step brought to accept both Personality and Impersonality as the two aspects of the same Non-dual Being, how he was convinced of the manifestation of that Being as Gods, Goddesses and as Incarnations, and how he was established in a life that was both of a Jnāni and of a Bhakta. This Jnāni-Bhakta outlook and way of living became so dominant a feature of his life that Swami Raghavananda, who was very closely associated with him during his last six years, remarks: "Among those who lived with M. in latter days, some felt that he always lived in this constant and conscious union with God even with open eyes (i.e., even in waking consciousness)." (Swami Raghavananda's article on M. in *Prabuddha Bharata* vol. XXXVII. P. 442.)

Besides undergoing spiritual disciplines at the feet of the Master, M. used to go to holy places during the Master's life-time itself and afterwards too as a part of his *Sādhanā*. He was one of the earliest of the disciples to visit Kamarpukur, the birthplace of the Master, in the latter's life-time itself; for he wished to practise contemplation on the Master's early life in its true original setting. His experience there is described as follows by Swami Nityatmananda: "By the grace of the Master, he saw the entire Kamarpukur as a holy place bathed in an effulgent Light. Trees and creepers, beasts and birds and men all were made of effulgence. So he prostrated to all on the road. He saw a torn cat, which appeared to him luminous with the Light of Consciousness. Immediately he fell to the ground and saluted it" (*M The Apostle and the Evangelist* by Swami Nityatmananda vol. I. P. 40.) He had similar experience in Dakshineswar also. At the instance of the Master he also visited Puri, and in the words of Swami Nityatmananda, "with indomitable courage, M. embraced the image of Jagannath out of season."

The life of *Sāadhanā* and holy association that he started on at the feet of the Master, he continued all through his life. He has for this reason been most appropriately described as a Grihastha-Sannyāsi (householder-Sannyāsin). Though he was forbidden by the Master to become a Sannyāsin, his reverence for the Sannyāsa ideal was whole-hearted and was without any reservation. So after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, while several of the Master's householder devotees considered the young Sannyāsin disciples of the Master as inexperienced and inconsequential, M. stood by them with the firm faith that the Master's life and message were going to be perpetuated only through them. Swami Vivekananda wrote from America in a letter to the inmates of the Math: "When Sri Thākur (Master) left the body, every one gave us up as a few unripe urchins. But M. and a few others did not leave us in the lurch. We cannot repay our debt to them." (Swami Raghavananda's article on M. in *Prabuddha Bharata* vol. XXX P. 442.)

M. spent his weekends and holidays with the monastic brethren who, after the Master's demise, had formed themselves into an Order with a Math at Baranagore, and participated in the intense life of devotion and meditation that they followed. At other times he would retire to Dakshineswar or some garden in the city and spend several days in spiritual practice taking simple self-cooked food. In order to feel that he was one with all mankind he often used to go out of his home at dead of night, and like a wandering Sannyāsin, sleep with the waifs on some open verandah or footpath on the road.

After the Master's demise, M. went on pilgrimage several times. He visited Banāras, Vrindāvan, Ayodhyā and other places. At Banāras he visited the famous Trilinga Swāmi and fed him with sweets, and he had long conversations with Swami Bhaskarananda, one of the noted saintly and scholarly Sannyāsins of the time. In 1912 he went with the Holy Mother to Banāras, and spent about a year in the company of Sannyāsins at Banāras, Vrindāvan, Hardwar, Hrishikesh and Swargashram. But he returned to Calcutta, as that city offered him the unique opportunity of associating himself with the places hallowed by the Master in his life-time. Afterwards he does not seem to have gone to any far-off place, but stayed on in his room in the Morton School carrying on his spiritual ministry, speaking on the Master and his teachings to the large number of people who flocked to him after having read his famous *Kathāmrita* known to English readers as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

This brings us to the circumstances that led to the writing and publication of this monumental work, which has made M. one of the immortals in hagiographic literature. While many educated people heard Sri Ramakrishna's talks, it was given to this illustrious personage alone to leave a graphic and exact account of them for posterity, with details like date, hour, place, names and particulars about participants. Humanity owes this great book to the ingrained habit of diary-keeping with which M. was endowed. Even as a boy of about thirteen, while he was a student in the 3rd class of the Hare School, he was in the habit of keeping a diary. "Today on rising," he wrote in his diary, "I

greeted my father and mother, prostrating on the ground before them" (Swami Nityatmananda's 'M The Apostle and the Evangelist' Part I. P 29.) At another place he wrote, "Today, while on my way to school, I visited, as usual, the temples of Kāli, the Mother at Tharitharia, and of Mother Sitala, and paid my obeisance to them." About twenty-five years after, when he met the Great Master in the spring of 1882, it was the same instinct of a born diary-writer that made him begin his book, 'unique in the literature of hagiography', with the memorable words: "When hearing the name of Hari or Rāma once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform devotions such as Sandhya any more."

In addition to this instinct for diary-keeping, M. had great endowments contributing to success in this line. Writes Swami Nityatmananda who lived in close association with M., in his book entitled *M - The Apostle and Evangelist*: "M.'s prodigious memory combined with his extraordinary power of imagination completely annihilated the distance of time and place for him. Even after the lapse of half a century he could always visualise vividly, scenes from the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Superb too was his power to portray pictures by words."

Besides the prompting of his inherent instinct, the main inducement for M. to keep this diary of his experiences at Dakshineswar was his desire to provide himself with a means for living in holy company at all times. Being a school teacher, he could be with the Master only on Sundays and other holidays, and it was on his diary that he depended for 'holy company' on other days. The devotional scriptures like the Bhagavata say that holy company is the first and most important means for the generation and growth of devotion. For, in such company man could hear talks on spiritual matters and listen to the glorification of Divine attributes, charged with the fervour and conviction emanating from the hearts of great lovers of God. Such company is therefore the one certain means through which Sraddha (Faith), Rati (attachment to God) and Bhakti (loving devotion) are generated. The diary of his visits to Dakshineswar provided M. with material for re-living, through reading and contemplation, the holy company he had had earlier, even on days when he was not able to visit Dakshineswar. The wealth of details and the vivid description of men and things in the midst of which the sublime conversations are set, provide excellent material to re-live those experiences for any one with imaginative powers. It was observed by M.'s disciples and admirers that in later life also whenever he was free or alone, he would be pouring over his diary, transporting himself on the wings of imagination to the glorious days he spent at the feet of the Master.

During the Master's life-time M. does not seem to have revealed the contents of his diary to any one. There is an unconfirmed tradition that when the Master saw him taking notes, he expressed apprehension at the possibility of his utilising these to publicise him like Keshab Sen; for the Great Master was so full of the spirit of renunciation and humility that he disliked being lionised. It must be for this reason that no one knew about this precious diary of M. for a decade until he brought out selections from it as a pamphlet in English in 1897 with the Holy Mother's blessings and permission. The Holy Mother, being very much pleased to hear parts of the diary read to her in Bengali, wrote

to M.: "When I heard the *Kathāmrita*, (Bengali name of the book) I felt as if it was he, the Master, who was saying all that." (*Ibid* Part I. P 37.)

The two pamphlets in English entitled the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* appeared in October and November 1897. They drew the spontaneous acclamation of Swami Vivekananda, who wrote on 24th November of that year from Dehra Dun to M.: "Many many thanks for your second leaflet. It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original, and never was the life of a Great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind, as you are doing. The language also is beyond all praise, so fresh, so pointed, and withal so plain and easy. I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them. I am really in a transport when I read them. Strange, isn't it? Our Teacher and Lord was so original, and each one of us will have to be original or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted His life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently." (*Vedānta Kesari* Vol. XIX P. 141. Also given in the first edition of the *Gospel* published from Ramakrishna Math, Madras in 1911.)

And Swamiji added a post script to the letter: "Socratic dialogues are Plato all over you are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it here or in the West." Indeed, in order to be unknown, Mahendranath had used the pen-name M., under which the book has been appearing till now. But so great a book cannot remain obscure for long, nor can its author remain unrecognised by the large public in these modern times. M. and his book came to be widely known very soon and to meet the growing demand, a full-sized book, Vol. I of the *Gospel*, translated by the author himself, was published in 1907 by the Brahmavadin Office, Madras. A second edition of it, revised by the author, was brought out by the Ramakrishna Math, Madras in December 1911, and subsequently a second part, containing new chapters from the original Bengali, was published by the same Math in 1922. The full English translation of the *Gospel* by Swami Nikhilananda appeared first in 1942.

In Bengali the book is published in five volumes, the first part having appeared in 1902 and the others in 1905, 1907, 1910 and 1932 respectively.

It looks as if M. was brought to the world by the Great Master to record his words and transmit them to posterity. Swami Sivananda, a direct disciple of the Master and the second President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, says on this topic: "Whenever there was an interesting talk, the Master would call Master Mahashay if he was not in the room, and then draw his attention to the holy words spoken. We did not know then why the Master did so. Now we can realise that this action of the Master had an important significance, for it was reserved for Master Mahashay to give to the world at large the sayings of the Master." (*Vedānta Kesari* Vol. XIX P 141.) Thanks to M., we get, unlike in the case of the great teachers of the past, a faithful record with date, time, exact report of conversations, description of concerned men and places, references to contemporary

events and personalities and a hundred other details for the last four years of the Master's life (1882-'86), so that no one can doubt the historicity of the Master and his teachings at any time in the future.

M. was, in every respect, a true missionary of Sri Ramakrishna right from his first acquaintance with him in 1882. As a school teacher, it was a practice with him to direct to the Master such of his students as had a true spiritual disposition. Though himself prohibited by the Master to take to monastic life, he encouraged all spiritually inclined young men he came across in his later life to join the monastic Order. Swami Vijnanananda, a direct Sannyāsin disciple of the Master and a President of the Ramakrishna Order, once remarked to M.: "By enquiry, I have come to the conclusion that eighty percent and more of the Sannyāsins have embraced the monastic life after reading the *Kathāmrita* (Bengali name of the book) and coming in contact with you." (*M The Apostle and the Evangelist* by Swami Nityatmananda Part I, P 37.)

In 1905 he retired from the active life of a Professor and devoted his remaining twenty-seven years exclusively to the preaching of the life and message of the Great Master. He bought the Morton Institution from its original proprietors and shifted it to a commodious four-storeyed house at 50 Amherst Street, where it flourished under his management as one of the most efficient educational institutions in Calcutta. He generally occupied a staircase room at the top of it, cooking his own meal which consisted only of milk and rice without variation, and attended to all his personal needs himself. His dress also was the simplest possible. It was his conviction that limitation of personal wants to the minimum is an important aid to holy living. About one hour in the morning he would spend in inspecting the classes of the school, and then retire to his staircase room to pour over his diary and live in the divine atmosphere of the earthly days of the Great Master, unless devotees and admirers had already gathered in his room seeking his holy company.

In appearance, M. looked a Vedic Rishi. Tall and stately in bearing, he had a strong and well-built body, an unusually broad chest, high forehead and arms extending to the knees. His complexion was fair and his prominent eyes were always tinged with the expression of the divine love that filled his heart. Adorned with a silvery beard that flowed luxuriantly down his chest, and a shining face radiating the serenity and gravity of holiness, M. was as imposing and majestic as he was handsome and engaging in appearance. Humorous, sweet-tongued and eloquent when situations required, this great Maharishi of our age lived only to sing the glory of Sri Ramakrishna day and night. Though a very well versed scholar in the Upanishads, *Gītā* and the philosophies of the East and the West, all his discussions and teachings found their culmination in the life and the message of Sri Ramakrishna, in which he found the real explanation and illustration of all the scriptures. Both consciously and unconsciously, he was the teacher of the *Kathāmrita* the nectarine words of the Great Master.

Though a much-sought-after spiritual guide, an educationist of repute, and a contemporary and close associate of illustrious personages like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Keshab Chander Sen and Iswar Chander Vidyāsāgar, he was always moved by the noble humanity of a lover of God, which consists in respecting the personalities of all as receptacles of the Divine Spirit. So he taught without the consciousness of a teacher, and no bar of superiority stood in the way of his doing the humblest service to his students and devotees. "He was a commission of love," writes his close devotee, Swami Raghavananda, "and yet his soft and sweet words would pierce the stoniest heart, make the worldly-minded weep and repent and turn Godwards." (*Prabuddha Bharata* Vol. XXXVII P 499.)

As time went on and the number of devotees increased, the staircase room and terrace of the 3rd floor of the Morton Institution became a veritable Naimisaranya of modern times, resounding during all hours of the day, and sometimes of night, too, with the word of God coming from the Rishi-like face of M. addressed to the eager God-seekers sitting around. To the devotees who helped him in preparing the text of the *Gospel*, he would dictate the conversations of the Master in a meditative mood, referring now and then to his diary. At times in the stillness of midnight he would awaken a nearby devotee and tell him: "Let us listen to the words of the Master in the depths of the night as he explains the truth of the Pranava." (*Vedānta Kesari* XIX P. 142.) Swami Raghavananda, an intimate devotee of M., writes as follows about these devotional sittings: "In the sweet and warm months of April and May, sitting under the canopy of heaven on the roof-garden of 50 Amherst Street, surrounded by shrubs and plants, himself sitting in their midst like a Rishi of old, the stars and planets in their courses beckoning us to things infinite and sublime, he would speak to us of the mysteries of God and His love and of the yearning that would rise in the human heart to solve the Eternal Riddle, as exemplified in the life of his Master. The mind, melting under the influence of his soft sweet words of light, would almost transcend the frontiers of limited existence and dare to peep into the infinite. He himself would take the influence of the setting and say, 'What a blessed privilege it is to sit in such a setting (pointing to the starry heavens), in the company of the devotees discoursing on God and His love!' These unforgettable scenes will long remain imprinted on the minds of his hearers." (*Prabuddha Bharata* Vol XXXVII P 497.)

About twenty-seven years of his life he spent in this way in the heart of the great city of Calcutta, radiating the Master's thoughts and ideals to countless devotees who flocked to him, and to still larger numbers who read his *Kathāmrita* (English Edition : *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*), the last part of which he had completed before June 1932 and given to the press. And miraculously, as it were, his end also came immediately after he had completed his life's mission. About three months earlier he had come to stay at his home at 13/2 Gurdasprasad Chaudhuary Lane at Thakur Bari, where the Holy Mother had herself installed the Master and where His regular worship was being conducted for the previous 40 years. The night of 3rd June being the *Phalahārini Kālī Pooja* day, M.

had sent his devotees who used to keep company with him, to attend the special worship at Belur Math at night. After attending the service at the home shrine, he went through the proof of the *Kathāmrita* for an hour. Suddenly he got a severe attack of neuralgic pain, from which he had been suffering now and then, of late. Before 6 a.m. in the early hours of 4th June 1932 he passed away, fully conscious and chanting: '*Gurudeva-Ma, Kole tule na-o* (Take me in your arms! O Master! O Mother!!)'

SWĀMI TAPASYĀNANDA
Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras
March 1974.

INTRODUCTION

by Swāmi Nikhilānanda

Sri Ramakrishna, the God-man of modern India, was born at Kāmārpukur. This village in the Hooghly District preserved during the last century the idyllic simplicity of the rural areas of Bengāl. Situated far from the railway, it was untouched by the glamour of the city. It contained rice-fields, tall palms, royal banyans, a few lakes, and two cremation grounds. South of the village a stream took its leisurely course. A mango orchard dedicated by a neighbouring zamindār to the public use was frequented by the boys for their noonday sports. A highway passed through the village to the great temple of Jagannāth at Puri, and the villagers, most of whom were farmers and craftsmen, entertained many passing holy men and pilgrims. The dull round of the rural life was broken by lively festivals, the observance of sacred days, religious singing, and other innocent pleasures.

About his parents Sri Ramakrishna once said: "My mother was the personification of rectitude and gentleness. She did not know much about the ways of the world; innocent of the art of concealment, she would say what was in her mind. People loved her for open-heartedness. My father, an orthodox brāhmin, never accepted gifts from the Śudrās. He spent much of his time in worship and meditation, and in repeating God's name and chanting His glories. Whenever in his daily prayers he invoked the Goddess Gāyatri, his chest flushed and tears rolled down his cheeks. He spent his leisure hours making garlands for the Family Deity, Raghuvir."

Khudirām Chattopādhyāya and Chandra Devi, the parents of Sri Ramakrishna, were married in 1799. At that time Khudirām was living in his ancestral village of Derapore, not far from Kāmārpukur. Their first son, Rāmikumār, was born in 1805, and their first daughter, Kātyāyani, in 1810. In 1814 Khudirām was ordered by his landlord to bear false witness in court against a neighbour. When he refused to do so, the landlord brought a false case against him and deprived him of his ancestral property. Thus dispossessed, he arrived, at the invitation of another landlord, in the quiet village of Kāmārpukur, where he was given a dwelling and about an acre of fertile land. The crops from this little property were enough to meet his family's simple needs. Here he lived in simplicity, dignity, and contentment.

Ten years after his coming to Kāmārpukur, Khudirām made a pilgrimage on foot to Rāmeswar, at the southern extremity of India. Two years later was born his second son, whom he named Rāmeśwar. Again in 1835, at the age of sixty, he made a pilgrimage, this time to Gayā. Here, from ancient times, Hindus have come from the four corners of India to discharge their duties to their departed ancestors by offering them food and drink at the sacred footprint of the Lord Vishnu. At this holy place Khudirām had a dream in which the Lord Vishnu promised to be born as his son. And Chandrā Devi, too, in front of the Śiva temple at Kāmārpukur, had a vision indicating the birth of a divine child. Upon his return the husband found that she had conceived.

It was on February 18, 1836, that the child, to be known afterwards as Ramakrishna, was born. In memory of the dream at Gayā he was given the name of Gadādhara, the "Bearer of the Mace", an epithet of Vishnu. Three years later a little sister was born.

Boyhood

Gadādhara grew up into a healthy and restless boy, full of fun and sweet mischief. He was intelligent and precocious and endowed with a prodigious memory. On his father's lap he learnt by heart the names of his ancestors and the hymns to the gods and goddesses, and at the village school he was taught to read and write. But his greatest delight was to listen to recitations of stories from Hindu mythology and the epics. These he would afterwards recount from memory, to the great joy of the villagers. Painting he enjoyed; the art of moulding images of the gods and goddesses he learnt from the potters. But arithmetic was his great aversion.

At the age of six or seven Gadādhara had his first experience of spiritual ecstasy. One day in June or July, when he was walking along a narrow path between paddy-fields, eating the puffed rice that he carried in a basket, he looked up at the sky and saw a beautiful, dark thunder-cloud. As it spread, rapidly enveloping the whole sky, a flight of snow-white cranes passed in front of it. The beauty of the contrast overwhelmed the boy. He fell to the ground, unconscious, and the puffed rice went in all directions. Some villagers found him and carried him home in their arms. Gadādhara said later that in that state he had experienced an indescribable joy.

Gadādhara was seven years old when his father died. This incident profoundly affected him. For the first time the boy realized that life on earth was impermanent. Unobserved by others, he began to slip into the mango orchard or into one of the cremation grounds, and he spent hours absorbed in his own thoughts. He also became more helpful to his mother in the discharge of her household duties. He gave more attention to reading and hearing the religious stories recorded in the Purānās. And he became interested in the wandering monks and pious pilgrims who would stop at Kāmārupur on their way to Puri. These holy men, the custodians of India's spiritual heritage and the living witnesses of the ideal of renunciation of the world and all-absorbing love of God, entertained the little boy with stories from the Hindu epics, stories of saints and prophets, and also stories of their own adventures. He, on his part, fetched their water and fuel and served them in various ways. Meanwhile, he was observing their meditation and worship.

At the age of nine, Gadādhara was invested with the *Sacred Thread*. This ceremony conferred upon him the privileges of his brāhmin lineage, including the worship of the Family Deity, Raghuvira, and imposed upon him the many strict disciplines of a brāhmin's life. During the ceremony of investiture he shocked his relatives by accepting a meal cooked by his nurse, a Śudrā woman. His father would never have dreamt of doing such a thing. But in a playful mood Gadādhara had once promised this woman that he would eat her food, and now he fulfilled his plighted word. The woman had piety and religious sincerity, and these were more important to the boy than the conventions of society.

Gadādhara was now permitted to worship Raghuvira. Thus began his first training in meditation. He so gave his heart and soul to the worship that the stone image very soon appeared to him as the living Lord of the Universe. His tendency to lose himself in contemplation was first noticed at this time. Behind his boyish light-heartedness was seen a deepening of his spiritual nature.

About this time, on the Śivarātri night, consecrated to the worship of Śiva, a dramatic performance was arranged. The principal actor, who was to play the part of Śiva, suddenly fell ill, and Gadādhara was persuaded to act in his place. While friends were dressing him for the role of Śiva - smearing his body with ashes, matting his locks, placing a trident in his hand and a string of rudrākaśa beads around his neck - the boy appeared to become absent-minded. He approached the stage with slow and measured step, supported by his friends. He looked the living image of Śiva. The audience loudly applauded what it took to be his skill as an actor, but it was soon discovered that he was really lost in meditation. His countenance was radiant and tears flowed from his eyes. He was lost to the outer world. The effect of this scene on the audience was tremendous. The people felt blessed as by a vision of Śiva Himself. The performance had to be stopped, and the boy's mood lasted till the following morning.

Gadādhara himself now organized a dramatic company with his young friends. The stage was set in the mango orchard. The themes were selected from the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Gadādhara knew by heart almost all the roles, having heard them from professional actors. His favourite theme was the Vrindāvan episode of Krishna's life, depicting those exquisite love-stories of Krishna and the milkmaids and the cowherd boys. Gadādhara would play the parts of Rādhā or Krishna and would often lose himself in the character he was portraying. His natural feminine grace heightened the dramatic effect. The mango orchard would ring with the loud kirtan of the boys. Lost in song and merry-making, Gadādhara became indifferent to the routine of school.

In 1849 Rāmkumār, the eldest son, went to Calcutta to improve the financial condition of the family.

Gadādhara was on the threshold of youth. He had become the pet of the women of the village. They loved to hear him talk, sing, or recite from the holy books. They enjoyed his knack of imitating voices. Their woman's instinct recognized the innate purity and guilelessness of this boy of clear skin, flowing hair, beaming eyes, smiling face, and inexhaustible fun. The pious elderly women looked upon him as Gopālā, the Baby Krishna, and the younger ones saw in him the youthful Krishna of Vrindāvan. He himself so idealised the love of the gopis for Krishna that he sometimes yearned to be born as a woman, if he must be born again, in order to be able to love Sri Krishna with all his heart and soul.

Coming to Calcutta

At the age of sixteen Gadādhara was summoned to Calcutta by his elder brother Rāmkumār, who wished assistance in his priestly duties. Rāmkumār had opened a Sanskrit academy to supplement his income, and it was his intention gradually to turn

his younger brother's mind to education. Gadādhara applied himself heart and soul to his new duty as family priest to a number of Calcutta families. His worship was very different from that of the professional priests. He spent hours decorating the images and singing hymns and devotional songs; he performed with love the other duties of his office. People were impressed with his ardour. But to his studies he paid scant attention.

Rāmkumār did not at first oppose the ways of his temperamental brother. He wanted Gadādhara to become used to the conditions of city life. But one day he decided to warn the boy about his indifference to the world. After all, in the near future Gadādhara must, as a householder, earn his livelihood through the performance of his brāhminical duties; and these required a thorough knowledge of Hindu law, astrology, and kindred subjects. He gently admonished Gadādhara and asked him to pay more attention to his studies. But the boy replied spiritedly: "Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education? I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart and give me satisfaction for ever."

Bread-winning Education

The anguish of the inner soul of India found expression through these passionate words of the young Gadādhara. For what did his unsophisticated eyes see around him in Calcutta, at that time the metropolis of India and the centre of modern culture and learning? Greed and lust held sway in the higher levels of society, and the occasional religious practices were merely outer forms from which the soul had long ago departed. Gadādhara had never seen anything like this at Kāmārpukur among the simple and pious villagers. The *sādhus* and wandering monks whom he had served in his boyhood had revealed to him an altogether different India. He had been impressed by their devotion and purity, their self-control and renunciation. He had learnt from them and from his own intuition that the ideal of life as taught by the ancient sages of India was the realization of God.

When Rāmkumār reprimanded Gadādhara for neglecting a "bread-winning education", the inner voice of the boy reminded him that the legacy of his ancestors - the legacy of Rāmā, Krishna, Buddha, Sankara, Rāmānuja, Chaitanya - was not worldly security but the Knowledge of God. And these noble sages were the true representatives of Hindu society. Each of them was seated, as it were, on the crest of the wave that followed each successive trough in the tumultuous course of Indian national life. All demonstrated that the life current of India is spirituality. This truth was revealed to Gadādhara through that inner vision which scans past and future in one sweep, unobstructed by the barriers of time and space. But he was unaware of the history of the profound change that had taken place in the land of his birth during the previous one hundred years.

Hindu society during the eighteenth century had been passing through a period of decadence. It was the twilight of the Mussalman rule. There were anarchy and confusion in all spheres. Superstitious practices dominated the religious life of the people. Rites and rituals passed for the essence of spirituality. Greedy priests became the custodians of heaven. True philosophy was supplanted by dogmatic opinions. The pundits took delight in vain polemics.

In 1757 English traders laid the foundation of British rule in India. Gradually the Government was systematized and lawlessness suppressed. The Hindus were much impressed by the military power and political acumen of the new rulers. In the wake of the merchants came the English educators, and social reformers, and Christian missionaries - all bearing a culture completely alien to the Hindu mind. In different parts of the country educational institutions were set up and Christian churches established. Hindu young men were offered the heady wine of the Western culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and they drank it to the very dregs.

The first effect of the draught on the educated Hindus was a complete effacement from their minds of the time-honoured beliefs and traditions of Hindu society. They came to believe that there was no transcendental Truth. The world perceived by the senses was all that existed. God and religion were illusions of the untutored mind. True knowledge could be derived only from the analysis of nature. So atheism and agnosticism became the fashion of the day. The youth of India, taught in English schools, took malicious delight in openly breaking the customs and traditions of their society. They would do away with the caste-system and remove the discriminatory laws about food. Social reform, the spread of secular education, widow remarriage, abolition of early marriage - they considered these the panacea for the degenerate condition of Hindu society.

The Christian missionaries gave the finishing touch to the process of transformation. They ridiculed as relics of a barbarous age the images and rituals of the Hindu religion. They tried to persuade India that the teachings of her saints and seers were the cause of her downfall, that her Vedas, Purānās, and other scriptures were filled with superstition. Christianity, they maintained, had given the white races position and power in this world and assurance of happiness in the next; therefore Christianity was the best of all religions. Many intelligent young Hindus became converted. The man in the street was confused. The majority of the educated grew materialistic in their mental outlook. Everyone living near Calcutta or the other strongholds of Western culture, even those who attempted to cling to the orthodox traditions of Hindu society, became infected by the new uncertainties and the new beliefs.

But the soul of India was to be resuscitated through a spiritual awakening. We hear the first call of this renaissance in the spirited retort of the young Gadādhara: "Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education?"

Rāmkumār could hardly understand the import of his young brother's reply. He described in bright colours the happy and easy life of scholars in Calcutta society. But Gadādhara intuitively felt that the scholars, to use one of his own vivid illustrations, were like so many vultures, soaring high on the wings of their uninspired intellect, with their eyes fixed on the charnel-pit of greed and lust. So he stood firm and Rāmkumār had to give way.

Kāli Temple at Dakshineśwar

At that time there lived in Calcutta a rich widow named Rāni Rāsmani, belonging to the Śudrā caste, and known far and wide not only for her business ability, courage, and

intelligence, but also for her largeness of heart, piety, and devotion to God. She was assisted in the management of her vast property by her son-in-law Mathur Mohan.

In 1847 the Rāni purchased twenty acres of land at Dakshineśwar, a village about four miles north of Calcutta. Here she created a temple garden and constructed several temples. Her Ishta, or Chosen Ideal, was the Divine Mother, Kāli.

The temple garden stands directly on the east bank of the Ganges. The northern section of the land and a portion to the east contain an orchard, flower gardens, and two small reservoirs. The southern section is paved with brick and mortar. The visitor arriving by boat ascends the steps of an imposing bathing-Ghāt, which leads to the *Chāndni*, a roofed terrace, on either side of which stand in a row six temples of Śiva. East of the terrace and the Śiva temples is a large court, paved, rectangular in shape, and running north and south. Two temples stand in the centre of this court, the larger one, to the south and facing south, being dedicated to Kāli, and the smaller one, facing the Ganges, to Radhākānta, that is, Krishna, the Consort of Rādhā. Nine domes with spires surmount the temple of Kāli, and before it stands the spacious Natmandir, or music hall, the terrace of which is supported by stately pillars. At the northwest and southwest corners of the temple compound are two *Nahabats*, or music towers, from which music flows at different times of day, especially at sunup, noon, and sundown, when the worship is performed in the temples. Three sides of the paved courtyard -all except the west - are lined with rooms set apart for kitchens, store-rooms, dining-rooms, and quarters for the temple staff and guests. The chamber in the northwest angle, just beyond the last of the Śiva temples, is of special interest to us; for here Sri Ramakrishna was to spend a considerable part of his life. To the west of this chamber is a semicircular porch overlooking the river. In front of the porch runs a foot-path, north and south, and beyond the path is a large garden and, below the garden, the Ganges. The orchard to the north of the buildings contains the Panchavati, the banyan, and the bel-tree, associated with Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices. Outside and to the north of the temple compound proper is the *Kuthi*, or bungalow, used by members of Rāni Rāsmani's family visiting the garden. And north of the temple garden, separated from it by a high wall, is a powder-magazine belonging to the British Government.

Śiva

In the twelve Śiva temples are installed the emblems of the Great God of renunciation in His various aspects, worshipped daily with proper rites. Śiva requires few articles of worship. White flowers and bel-leaves and a little Ganges water offered with devotion are enough to satisfy the benign Deity and win from Him the boon of liberation.

Radhākānta

The temple of Radhākānta, also known as the temple of Vishnu, contains the images of Rādhā and Krishna, the symbol of union with God through ecstatic love. The two images stand on a pedestal facing the west. The floor is paved with marble. From the ceiling of the porch hang chandeliers protected from dust by coverings of red cloth. Canvas screens shield the images from the rays of the setting sun. Close to the threshold of the

inner shrine is a small brass cup containing holy water. Devoted visitors reverently drink a few drops from the vessel.

Kāli

The main temple is dedicated to Kāli, the Divine Mother, here worshipped as *Bhavatārini*, the Saviour of the Universe. The floor of this temple also is paved with marble. The basalt image of the Mother, dressed in gorgeous gold brocade, stands on a white marble image of the prostrate body of Her Divine Consort, Śiva, the symbol of the Absolute. On the feet of the Goddess are, among other ornaments, anklets of gold. Her arms are decked with jeweled ornaments of gold. She wears necklaces of gold and pearls, a golden garland of human heads, and a girdle of human arms. She wears a golden crown, golden ear-rings, and a golden nose-ring with a pearl-drop. She has four arms. The lower left hand holds a severed human head and the upper grips a blood-stained *sabre*. One right hand offers boons to Her children; the other allays their fear. The majesty of Her posture can hardly be described. It combines the terror of destruction with the reassurance of motherly tenderness. For She is the Cosmic Power, the totality of the universe, a glorious harmony of the pairs of opposites. She deals out death, as She creates and preserves. She has three eyes, the third being the symbol of Divine Wisdom; they strike dismay into the wicked, yet pour out affection for Her devotees.

The whole symbolic world is represented in the temple garden - the Trinity of the Nature Mother (Kāli), the Absolute (Śiva), and Love (Radhākānta), the Arch spanning heaven and earth. The terrific Goddess of the Tantra, the soul-enthraling Flute-Player of the Bhāgavata, and the Self-absorbed Absolute of the Vedas live together, creating the greatest synthesis of religions. All aspects of Reality are represented there. But of this divine household, Kāli is the pivot, the sovereign Mistress. She is *Prakriti*, the Procreatrix, Nature, the Destroyer, the Creator. Nay, She is something greater and deeper still for those who have eyes to see. She is the Universal Mother, "my Mother" as Ramakrishna would say, the All-powerful, who reveals Herself to Her children under different aspects and Divine Incarnations, the Visible God, who leads the elect to the Invisible Reality; and if it so pleases Her, She takes away the last trace of ego from created beings and merges it in the consciousness of the Absolute, the undifferentiated God. Through Her grace "the finite ego loses itself in the illimitable Ego-Ātman-Brahman".

Rāni Rāsmani spent a fortune for the construction of the temple garden and another fortune for its dedication ceremony, which took place on May 31, 1855.

Sri Ramakrishna - henceforth we shall call Gadādhara by this familiar name - came to the temple garden with his elder brother Rāmkumār, who was appointed priest of the Kāli temple. Sri Ramakrishna did not at first approve of Rāmkumār's working for the Śudrā Rāsmani. The example of their orthodox father was still fresh in Sri Ramakrishna's mind. He objected also to the eating of the cooked offerings of the temple, since, according to orthodox Hindu custom, such food can be offered to the Deity only in the house of a brāhmin. But the holy atmosphere of the temple grounds, the solitude of the surrounding wood, the loving care of his brother, the respect shown him by Rāni Rāsmani and Mathur

Bābu, the living presence of the Goddess Kāli in the temple, and, above all, the proximity of the sacred Ganges, which Sri Ramakrishna always held in the highest respect, gradually overcame his disapproval, and he began to feel at home.

Within a very short time Sri Ramakrishna attracted the notice of Mathur Bābu, who was impressed by the young man's religious fervour and wanted him to participate in the worship in the Kāli temple. But Sri Ramakrishna loved his freedom and was indifferent to any worldly career. The profession of the priesthood in a temple founded by a rich woman did not appeal to his mind. Further, he hesitated to take upon himself the responsibility for the ornaments and jewellery of the temple. Mathur had to wait for a suitable occasion.

At this time there came to Dakshineśwar a youth of sixteen, destined to play an important role in Sri Ramakrishna's life. Hriday, a distant nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, hailed from Sihore, a village not far from Kāmārpukur, and had been his boyhood friend. Clever, exceptionally energetic, and endowed with great presence of mind, he moved, as will be seen later, like a shadow about his uncle and was always ready to help him, even at the sacrifice of his personal comfort. He was destined to be a mute witness of many of the spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna and the caretaker of his body during the stormy days of his spiritual practice. Hriday came to Dakshineśwar in search of a job, and Sri Ramakrishna was glad to see him.

Unable to resist the persuasion of Mathur Bābu, Sri Ramakrishna at last entered the temple service, on condition that Hriday should be asked to assist him. His first duty was to dress and decorate the image of Kāli.

One day the priest of the Radhākānta temple accidentally dropped the image of Krishna on the floor, breaking one of its legs. The pundits advised the Rāni to install a new image, since the worship of an image with a broken limb was against the scriptural injunctions. But the Rāni was fond of the image, and she asked Sri Ramakrishna's opinion. In an abstracted mood, he said: "This solution is ridiculous. If a son-in-law of the Rāni broke his leg, would she discard him and put another in his place? Wouldn't she rather arrange for his treatment? Why should she not do the same thing in this case too? Let the image be repaired and worshipped as before." It was a simple, straightforward solution and was accepted by the Rāni. Sri Ramakrishna himself mended the break. The priest was dismissed for his carelessness, and at Mathur Bābu's earnest request, Sri Ramakrishna accepted the Office of priest in the Radhākānta temple.

Sri Ramakrishna as a priest

Born in an orthodox brāhmin family, Sri Ramakrishna knew the formalities of worship, its rites and rituals. The innumerable gods and goddesses of the Hindu religion are the human aspects of the indescribable and incomprehensible Spirit, as conceived by the finite human mind. They understand and appreciate human love and emotion, help men to realize their secular and spiritual ideals, and ultimately enable men to attain liberation from the miseries of phenomenal life. The Source of light, intelligence, wisdom, and strength is the One alone from whom comes the fulfilment of desire. Yet, as long as a

man is bound by his human limitations, he cannot but worship God through human forms. He must use human symbols. Therefore Hinduism asks the devotees to look on God as the ideal father, the ideal mother, the ideal husband, the ideal son, or the ideal friend. But the name ultimately leads to the Nameless, the form to the Formless, the word to the Silence, the emotion to the serene realization of Peace in Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. The gods gradually merge in the one God. But until that realization is achieved, the devotee cannot dissociate human factors from his worship. Therefore the Deity is bathed and clothed and decked with ornaments. He is fed and put to sleep. He is propitiated with hymns, songs, and prayers. And there are appropriate rites connected with all these functions. For instance, to secure for himself external purity, the priest bathes himself in holy water and puts on a holy cloth. He purifies the mind and the sense organs by appropriate meditations. He fortifies the place of worship against evil forces by drawing around it circles of fire and water. He awakens the different spiritual centres of the body and invokes the Supreme Spirit in his heart. Then he transfers the Supreme Spirit to the image before him and worships the image, regarding it no longer as clay or stone, but as the embodiment of Spirit, throbbing with Life and Consciousness. After the worship the Supreme Spirit is recalled from the image to Its true sanctuary, the heart of the priest. The real devotee knows the absurdity of worshipping the Transcendental Reality with material articles - clothing That which pervades the whole universe and the beyond, putting on a pedestal That which cannot be limited by space, feeding That which is disembodied and incorporeal, singing before That whose glory the music of the spheres tries vainly to proclaim. But through these rites the devotee aspires to go ultimately beyond rites and rituals, forms and names, words and praise, and to realize God as the All-pervading Consciousness.

Hindu priests are thoroughly acquainted with the rites of worship, but few of them are aware of their underlying significance. They move their hands and limbs mechanically, in obedience to the letter of the scriptures, and repeat the holy mantras like parrots. But from the very beginning the inner meaning of these rites was revealed to Sri Ramakrishna. As he sat facing the image, a strange transformation came over his mind. While going through the prescribed ceremonies, he would actually find himself encircled by a wall of fire protecting him and the place of worship from unspiritual vibrations, or he would feel the rising of the mystic Kundalini through the different centres of the body. The glow on his face, his deep absorption, and the intense atmosphere of the temple impressed everyone who saw him worship the Deity.

Rāmkumār wanted Sri Ramakrishna to learn the intricate rituals of the worship of Kāli. To become a priest of Kāli one must undergo a special form of initiation from a qualified guru, and for Sri Ramakrishna a suitable brāhmin was found. But no sooner did the brāhmin speak the holy word in his ear than Sri Ramakrishna, overwhelmed with emotion, uttered a loud cry and plunged into deep concentration.

Mathur begged Sri Ramakrishna to take charge of the worship in the Kāli temple. The young priest pleaded his incompetence and his ignorance of the scriptures. Mathur insisted that devotion and sincerity would more than compensate for any lack of formal

knowledge and make the Divine Mother manifest Herself through the image. In the end, Sri Ramakrishna had to yield to Mathur's request. He became the priest of Kāli.

In 1856 Rāmkumār breathed his last. Sri Ramakrishna had already witnessed more than one death in the family. He had come to realize how impermanent is life on earth. The more he was convinced of the transitory nature of worldly things, the more eager he became to realize God, the Fountain of Immortality.

The First Vision of Kāli

And, indeed, he soon discovered what a strange Goddess he had chosen to serve. He became gradually enmeshed in the web of Her all-pervading presence. To the ignorant She is to be sure, the image of destruction: but he found in Her the benign, all-loving Mother. Her neck is encircled with a garland of heads, and Her waist with a girdle of human arms and two of Her hands hold weapons of death, and Her eyes dart a glance of fire; but, strangely enough, Ramakrishna felt in Her breath the soothing touch of tender love and saw in Her the Seed of Immortality. She stands on the bosom of Her Consort, Śiva; it is because She is the Śakti, the Power, inseparable from the Absolute. She is surrounded by jackals and other unholy creatures, the denizens of the cremation ground. But is not the Ultimate Reality above holiness and unholiness? She appears to be reeling under the spell of wine. But who would create this mad world unless under the influence of a divine drunkenness? She is the highest symbol of all the forces of nature, the synthesis of their antinomies, the Ultimate Divine in the form of woman. She now became to Sri Ramakrishna the only Reality, and the world became an unsubstantial shadow. Into Her worship he poured his soul. Before him She stood as the transparent portal to the shrine of Ineffable Reality.

The worship in the temple intensified Sri Ramakrishna's yearning for a living vision of the Mother of the Universe. He began to spend in meditation the time not actually employed in the temple service; and for this purpose he selected an extremely solitary place. A deep jungle, thick with underbrush and prickly plants, lay to the north of the temples. Used at one time as a burial ground, it was shunned by people even during the day-time for fear of ghosts. There Sri Ramakrishna began to spend the whole night in meditation, returning to his room only in the morning with eyes swollen as though from much weeping. While meditating, he would lay aside his cloth and his brāhminical thread. Explaining this strange conduct, he once said to Hriday: "Don't you know that when one thinks of God one should be freed from all ties? From our very birth we have the eight fetters of hatred, shame, lineage, pride of good conduct, fear, secretiveness, caste, and grief. The sacred thread reminds me that I am a brāhmin and therefore superior to all. When calling on the Mother one has to set aside all such ideas." Hriday thought his uncle was becoming insane.

As his love for God deepened, he began either to forget or to drop the formalities of worship. Sitting before the image, he would spend hours singing the devotional songs of great devotees of the Mother, such as Kamalākānta and Rāmprasād. Those rhapsodical songs, describing the direct vision of God, only intensified Sri Ramakrishna's longing. He felt the pangs of a child separated from its mother. Sometimes, in agony, he would rub

his face against the ground and weep so bitterly that people, thinking he had lost his earthly mother, would sympathize with him in his grief. Sometimes, in moments of scepticism, he would cry: "Art Thou true, Mother, or is it all fiction - mere poetry without any reality? If Thou dost exist, why do I not see Thee? Is religion a mere fantasy and art Thou only a figment of man's imagination?" Sometimes he would sit on the prayer carpet for two hours like an inert object. He began to behave in an abnormal manner, most of the time unconscious of the world. He almost gave up food; and sleep left him altogether.

But he did not have to wait very long. He has thus described his first vision of the Mother: "I felt as if my heart were being squeezed like a wet towel. I was overpowered with a great restlessness and a fear that it might not be my lot to realize Her in this life. I could not bear the separation from Her any longer. Life seemed to be not worth living. Suddenly my glance fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. I determined to put an end to my life. When I jumped up like a madman and seized it, suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself. The buildings with their different parts, the temple, and everything else vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead I saw a limitless, infinite, effulgent Ocean of Consciousness. As far as the eye could see, the shining billows were madly rushing at me from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up! I was panting for breath. I was caught in the rush and collapsed, unconscious. What was happening in the outside world I did not know; but within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss, altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother." On his lips when he regained consciousness of the world was the word "Mother".

God-Intoxicated State

Yet this was only a foretaste of the intense experiences to come. The first glimpse of the Divine Mother made him the more eager for Her uninterrupted vision. He wanted to see Her both in meditation and with eyes open. But the Mother began to play a teasing game of hide-and-seek with him, intensifying both his joy and his suffering. Weeping bitterly during the moments of separation from Her, he would pass into a trance and then find Her standing before him, smiling, talking, consoling, bidding him be of good cheer, and instructing him. During this period of spiritual practice he had many uncommon experiences. When he sat to meditate, he would hear strange clicking sounds in the joints of his legs, as if someone were locking them up, one after the other, to keep him motionless; and at the conclusion of his meditation he would again hear the same sounds, this time unlocking them and leaving him free to move about. He would see flashes like a swarm of fire-flies floating before his eyes, or a sea of deep mist around him, with luminous waves of molten silver. Again, from a sea of translucent mist he would behold the Mother rising, first Her feet, then Her waist, body, face, and head, finally Her whole person; he would feel Her breath and hear Her voice. Worshipping in the temple, sometimes he would become exalted, sometimes he would remain motionless as stone, sometimes he would almost collapse from excessive emotion. Many of his actions, contrary to all tradition, seemed sacrilegious to the people. He would take a flower and touch it to his own head, body, and feet, and then offer it to the Goddess. Or, like a drunkard, he would reel to the throne of the Mother, touch Her chin by way of

showing his affection for Her, and sing, talk, joke, laugh, and dance. Or he would take a morsel of food from the plate and hold it to Her mouth, begging Her to eat it, and would not be satisfied till he was convinced that She had really eaten. After the Mother had been put to sleep at night, from his own room he would hear Her ascending to the upper storey of the temple with the light steps of a happy girl, Her anklets jingling. Then he would discover Her standing with flowing hair, Her black form silhouetted against the sky of the night looking at the Ganges or at the distant lights of Calcutta.

Naturally the temple officials took him for an insane person. His worldly well-wishers brought him to skilled physicians; but no medicine could cure his malady. Many a time he doubted his sanity himself. For he had been sailing across an uncharted sea, with no earthly guide to direct him. His only haven of security was the Divine Mother Herself. To Her he would pray: "I do not know what these things are. I am ignorant of mantras and the scriptures. Teach me, Mother, how to realize Thee. Who else can help me? Art Thou not my only refuge and guide?" And the sustaining presence of the Mother never failed him in his distress or doubt. Even those who criticized his conduct were greatly impressed with his purity, guilelessness, truthfulness, integrity, and holiness. They felt an uplifting influence in his presence.

It is said that Samādhi, or trance, no more than opens the portal of the spiritual realm. Sri Ramakrishna felt an unquenchable desire to enjoy God in various ways. For his meditation he built a place in the northern wooded section of the temple garden. With Hriday's help he planted there five sacred trees. The spot, known as the Panchavati, became the scene of many of his visions.

As his spiritual mood deepened he more and more felt himself to be a child of the Divine Mother. He learnt to surrender himself completely to Her will and let Her direct him.

"O Mother," he would constantly pray, "I have taken refuge in Thee. Teach me what to do and what to say. Thy will is paramount everywhere and is for the good of Thy children. Merge my will in Thy will and make me Thy instrument."

His visions became deeper and more intimate. He no longer had to meditate to behold the Divine Mother. Even while retaining consciousness of the outer world, he would see Her as tangibly as the temples, the trees, the river, and the men around him.

On a certain occasion Mathur Bābu stealthily entered the temple to watch the worship. He was profoundly moved by the young priest's devotion and sincerity. He realized that Sri Ramakrishna had transformed the stone image into the living Goddess.

Sri Ramakrishna one day fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to Kāli. This was too much for the manager of the temple garden, who considered himself responsible for the proper conduct of the worship. He reported Sri Ramakrishna's insane behaviour to Mathur Bābu.

Sri Ramakrishna has described the incident: "The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kāli temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything

was full of Consciousness. The image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness - all was Consciousness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss - the Bliss of God. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kāli temple; but in him also I saw the power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that all this was the Divine Mother - even the cat. The manager of the temple garden wrote to Mathur Bābu saying that I was feeding the cat with the offering intended for the Divine Mother. But Mathur Bābu had insight into the state of my mind. He wrote back to the manager: 'Let him do whatever he likes. You must not say anything to him.' "

One of the painful ailments from which Sri Ramakrishna suffered at this time was a burning sensation in his body, and he was cured by a strange vision. During worship in the temple, following the scriptural injunctions, he would imagine the presence of the "sinner" in himself and the destruction of this "sinner". One day he was meditating in the Panchavati, when he saw come out of him a red-eyed man of black complexion, reeling like a drunkard. Soon there emerged from him another person, of serene countenance, wearing the ochre cloth of a sannyāsi and carrying in his hand a trident. The second person attacked the first and killed him with the trident. Thereafter Sri Ramakrishna was free of his pain.

About this time he began to worship God by assuming the attitude of a servant toward his master. He imitated the mood of Hanuman, the monkey chieftain of the Ramayana, the ideal servant of Rāmā and traditional model for this self-effacing form of devotion. When he meditated on Hanuman his movements and his way of life began to resemble those of a monkey. His eyes became restless. He lived on fruits and roots. With his cloth tied around his waist, a portion of it hanging in the form of a tail, he jumped from place to place instead of walking. And after a short while he was blessed with a vision of Sitā, the divine consort of Rāmā, who entered his body and disappeared there with the words, "I bequeath to you my smile."

Mathur had faith in the sincerity of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual zeal, but began now to doubt his sanity. He had watched him jumping about like a monkey. One day, when Rāni Rāsmani was listening to Sri Ramakrishna's singing in the temple, the young priest abruptly turned and slapped her. Apparently listening to his song, she had actually been thinking of a lawsuit. She accepted the punishment as though the Divine Mother Herself had imposed it; but Mathur was distressed. He begged Sri Ramakrishna to keep his feelings under control and to heed the conventions of society. God Himself, he argued, follows laws. God never permitted, for instance, flowers of two colours to grow on the same stalk. The following day Sri Ramakrishna presented Mathur Bābu with two hibiscus flowers growing on the same stalk, one red and one white.

Mathur and Rāni Rāsmani began to ascribe the mental ailment of Sri Ramakrishna in part, at least, to his observance of rigid continence. Thinking that a natural life would relax the tension of his nerves, they engineered a plan with two women of ill fame. But as soon as the women entered his room, Sri Ramakrishna beheld in them the

manifestation of the Divine Mother of the Universe and went into Samādhi uttering Her name.

Haladhāri

In 1858 there came to Dakshineśwar a cousin of Sri Ramakrishna, Haladhāri by name, who was to remain there about eight years. On account of Sri Ramakrishna's indifferent health, Mathur appointed this man to the office of priest in the Kāli temple. He was a complex character, versed in the letter of the scriptures, but hardly aware of their spirit. He loved to participate in hair-splitting theological discussions and, by the measure of his own erudition, he proceeded to gauge Sri Ramakrishna. An orthodox brāhmin, he thoroughly disapproved of his cousin's unorthodox actions, but he was not unimpressed by Sri Ramakrishna's purity of life, ecstatic love of God, and yearning for realization.

One day Haladhāri upset Sri Ramakrishna with the statement that God is incomprehensible to the human mind. Sri Ramakrishna has described the great moment of doubt when he wondered whether his visions had really misled him: "With sobs I prayed to the Mother, 'Canst Thou have the heart to deceive me like this because I am a fool?' A stream of tears flowed from my eyes. Shortly afterwards I saw a volume of mist rising from the floor and filling the space before me. In the midst of it there appeared a face with flowing beard, calm, highly expressive, and fair. Fixing its gaze steadily upon me, it said solemnly, 'Remain in *Bhāva-mukha*, on the threshold of relative consciousness.' This it repeated three times and then it gently disappeared in the mist, which itself dissolved. This vision reassured me."

A garbled report of Sri Ramakrishna's failing health, indifference to worldly life, and various abnormal activities reached Kāmārpukur and filled the heart of his poor mother with anguish. At her repeated request he returned to his village for a change of air. But his boyhood friends did not interest him any more. A divine fever was consuming him. He spent a great part of the day and night in one of the cremation grounds, in meditation. The place reminded him of the impermanence of the human body, of human hopes and achievements. It also reminded him of Kāli, the Goddess of destruction.

Marriage and After

But in a few months his health showed improvement, and he recovered to some extent his natural buoyancy of spirit. His happy mother was encouraged to think it might be a good time to arrange his marriage. The boy was now twenty-three years old. A wife would bring him back to earth. And she was delighted when her son welcomed her suggestion. Perhaps he saw in it the finger of God.

Saradāmani, a little girl of five, lived in the neighbouring village called Jayrāmbāti. Even at this age she had been praying to God to make her character as stainless and fragrant as the white tuberoses. Looking at the full moon, she would say: "O God, there are dark spots even on the moon. But make my character spotless." It was she who was selected as the bride for Sri Ramakrishna.

The marriage ceremony was duly performed. Such early marriage in India is in the nature of a betrothal, the marriage being consummated when the girl attains puberty. But in this case the marriage remained for ever unconsummated. Sri Ramakrishna lived at Kāmārpukur about a year and a half and then returned to Dakshineśwar.

Hardly had he crossed the threshold of the Kāli temple when he found himself again in the whirlwind. His madness reappeared tenfold. The same meditation and prayer, the same ecstatic moods, the same burning sensation, the same weeping, the same sleeplessness, the same indifference to the body and the outside world, the same divine delirium. He subjected himself to fresh disciplines in order to eradicate greed and lust, the two great impediments to spiritual progress. With a rupee in one hand and some earth in the other, he would reflect on the comparative value of these two for the realization of God, and finding them equally worthless he would toss them, with equal indifference, into the Ganges. Women he regarded as the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Never even in a dream did he feel the impulses of lust. And to root out of his mind the idea of caste superiority, he cleaned a pariah's house with his long and neglected hair. When he would sit in meditation, birds would perch on his head and peck in his hair for grains of food. Snakes would crawl over his body, and neither would he aware of the other. Sleep left him altogether. Day and night, visions flitted before him. He saw the sannyāsi who had previously killed the "sinner" in him again coming out of his body, threatening him with the trident, and ordering him to concentrate on God. Or the same sannyāsi would visit distant places, following a luminous path, and bring him reports of what was happening there. Sri Ramakrishna used to say later that in the case of an advanced devotee the mind itself becomes the guru, living and moving like an embodied being.

Rāni Rāsmani, the foundress of the temple garden, passed away in 1861. After her death her son-in-law Mathur became the sole executor of the estate. He placed himself and his resources at the disposal of Sri Ramakrishna and began to look after his physical comfort. Sri Ramakrishna later spoke of him as one of his five "suppliers of stores" appointed by the Divine Mother. Whenever a desire arose in his mind, Mathur fulfilled it without hesitation.

The Brāhmani

There came to Dakshineśwar at this time a brāhmin woman who was to play an important part in Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual unfoldment. Born in East Bengāl, she was an adept in the Tāntrik and Vaishnava methods of worship. She was slightly over fifty years of age, handsome, and garbed in the orange robe of a nun. Her sole possessions were a few books and two pieces of wearing-cloth.

Sri Ramakrishna welcomed the visitor with great respect, described to her his experiences and visions, and told her of people's belief that these were symptoms of madness. She listened to him attentively and said: "My son, everyone in this world is mad. Some are mad for money, some for creature comforts, some for name and fame; and you are mad for God." She assured him that he was passing through the almost unknown spiritual experience described in the scriptures as *Mahā-bhāva*, the most

exalted rapture of divine love. She told him that this extreme exaltation had been described as manifesting itself through nineteen physical symptoms, including the shedding of tears, a tremor of the body, horripilation, perspiration, and a burning sensation. The Bhakti scriptures, she declared, had recorded only two instances of the experience, namely, those of Sri Rādhā and Sri Chaitanya.

Very soon a tender relationship sprang up between Sri Ramakrishna and the Brāhmani, she looking upon him as the Baby Krishna, and he upon her as mother. Day after day, she watched his ecstasy during the kirtan and meditation, his Samādhi, his mad yearning; and she recognized in him a power to transmit spirituality to others. She came to the conclusion that such things were not possible for an ordinary devotee, not even for a highly developed soul. Only an Incarnation of God was capable of such spiritual manifestations. She proclaimed openly that Sri Ramakrishna, like Sri Chaitanya, was an Incarnation of God.

When Sri Ramakrishna told Mathur what the Brāhmani had said about him, Mathur shook his head in doubt. He was reluctant to accept him as an Incarnation of God, an Avatar comparable to Rāmā, Krishna, Buddha, and Chaitanya, though he admitted Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary spirituality. Whereupon the Brāhmani asked Mathur to arrange a conference of scholars who should discuss the matter with her. He agreed to the proposal and the meeting was arranged. It was to be held in the Natmandir in front of the Kāli temple.

Two famous pundits of the time were invited: Vaishnavcharan, the leader of the Vaishnava society, and Gauri. The first to arrive was Vaishnavcharan, with a distinguished company of scholars and devotees. The Brāhmani, like a proud mother, proclaimed her view before him and supported it with quotations from the scriptures. As the pundits discussed the deep theological question, Sri Ramakrishna, perfectly indifferent to everything happening around him, sat in their midst like a child, immersed in his own thoughts, sometimes smiling, sometimes chewing a pinch of spices from a pouch, or again saying to Vaishnavcharan with a nudge: "Look here. Sometimes I feel like this, too." Presently Vaishnavcharan arose to declare himself in total agreement with the view of the Brāhmani. He declared that Sri Ramakrishna had undoubtedly experienced *Mahā-bhāva* and that this was the certain sign of the rare manifestation of God in a man. The people assembled there, especially the officers of the temple garden, were struck dumb. Sri Ramakrishna said to Mathur, like a boy: "Just fancy, he too says so! Well, I am glad to learn that, after all, it is not a disease."

When, a few days later, Pundit Gauri arrived, another meeting was held, and he agreed with the view of the Brāhmani and Vaishnavcharan. To Sri Ramakrishna's remark that Vaishnavcharan had declared him to be an *Avatar*, Gauri replied: "Is that all he has to say about you? Then he has said very little. I am fully convinced that you are that Mine of Spiritual Power, only a small fraction of which descends on earth, from time to time, in the form of an Incarnation."

"Ah!" said Sri Ramakrishna with a smile, "You seem to have quite outbid Vaishnavcharan in this matter. What have you found in me that makes you entertain such an idea?"

Gauri said: "I feel it in my heart and I have the scriptures on my side. I am ready to prove it to anyone who challenges me."

"Well," Sri Ramakrishna said, "it is you who say so; but, believe me, I know nothing about it."

Thus, the insane priest was, by verdict of the great scholars of the day, proclaimed a Divine Incarnation. His visions were not the result of an over heated brain; they had precedent in spiritual history. And how did the proclamation affect Sri Ramakrishna himself? He remained the simple child of the Mother that he had been since the first day of his life. Years later, when two of his householder disciples openly spoke of him as a Divine Incarnation and the matter was reported to him, he said with a touch of sarcasm: "Do they think they will enhance my glory that way? One of them is an actor on the stage and the other a physician. What do they know about Incarnations? Why years ago pundits like Gauri and Vaishnavcharan declared me to be an Avatar. They were great scholars and knew what they said. But that did not make any change in my mind."

Sri Ramakrishna was a learner all his life. He often used to quote a proverb to his disciples: "Friend, the more I live the more I learn." When the excitement created by the Brāhmani's declaration was over, he set himself to the task of practising spiritual disciplines according to the traditional methods laid down in the Tantra and Vaishnava scriptures. Hitherto he had pursued his spiritual ideal according to the promptings of his own mind and heart. Now he accepted the Brāhmani as his guru and set foot on the traditional highways.

Tantra

According to the Tantra, the Ultimate Reality is *Chit*, or Consciousness, which is identical with *Sat*, or Being, and with *Ānanda*, or Bliss. This Ultimate Reality, *Satchidānanda*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, is identical with the Reality preached in the Vedas. And man is identical with this Reality; but under the influence of *Māyā*, or illusion, he has forgotten his true nature. He takes to be real a merely apparent world of subject and object, and this error is the cause of his bondage and suffering. The goal of spiritual discipline is the rediscovery of his true identity with the divine Reality.

For the achievement of this goal the Vedānta prescribes an austere negative method of discrimination and renunciation, which can be followed by only a few individuals endowed with sharp intelligence and unshakeable will-power. But Tantra takes into consideration the natural weakness of human beings, their lower appetites, and their love for the concrete. It combines philosophy with rituals, meditation with ceremonies, renunciation with enjoyment. The underlying purpose is gradually to train the aspirant to meditate on his identity with the Ultimate.

The average man wishes to enjoy the material objects of the world. Tantra bids him enjoy these, but at the same time, discover in them the presence of God. Mystical rites

are prescribed by which, slowly, the sense objects become spiritualized and sense attraction is transformed into a love of God. So the very "bonds" of man are turned into "releasers". The very poison that kills is transmuted into the elixir of life. Outward renunciation is not necessary. Thus, the aim of Tantra is to sublimate *Bhoga*, or enjoyment, into *Yoga*, or union with Consciousness. For, according to this philosophy, the world with all its manifestations is nothing but the sport of Śiva and Śakti, the Absolute and Its inscrutable Power.

The disciplines of Tantra are graded to suit aspirants of all degrees. Exercises are prescribed for people with "animal", "heroic", and "divine" outlooks. Certain of the rites require the presence of members of the opposite sex. Here the aspirant learns to look on woman as the embodiment of the Goddess Kāli, the Mother of the Universe. The very basis of Tantra is the Motherhood of God and the glorification of woman. Every part of a woman's body is to be regarded as incarnate Divinity. But the rites are extremely dangerous. The help of a qualified guru is absolutely necessary. An unwary devotee may lose his foothold and fall into a pit of depravity.

According to the Tantra, Śakti is the active creative force in the universe. Śiva, the Absolute, is a more or less passive principle. Further, Śakti is as inseparable from Śiva as fire's power to burn is from fire itself. Śakti, the Creative Power, contains in Its womb the universe, and therefore is the Divine Mother. All women are Her symbols. Kāli is one of Her several forms. The meditation on Kāli, the Creative Power, is the central discipline of the Tantra. While meditating, the aspirant at first regards himself as one with the Absolute and then thinks that out of that Impersonal Consciousness emerge two entities, namely, his own self and the living form of the Goddess. He then projects the Goddess into the tangible image before him and worships it as the Divine Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna set himself to the task of practising the disciplines of Tantra; and at the bidding of the Divine Mother Herself he accepted the Brāhmani as his guru. He performed profound and delicate ceremonies in the Panchavati and under the bel-tree at the northern extremity of the temple compound. He practised all the disciplines of the sixty-four principal Tantra books, and it took him never more than three days to achieve the result promised in any one of them. After the observance of a few preliminary rites, he would be overwhelmed with a strange divine fervour and would go into Samādhi, where his mind would dwell in exaltation. Evil ceased to exist for him. The word "carnal" lost its meaning. The whole world and everything in it appeared as the Lila, the sport, of Śiva and Śakti. He beheld everywhere manifest the power and beauty of the Mother, the whole world, animate and inanimate, appeared to him as pervaded with Chit, Consciousness, and with Ānanda, Bliss.

He saw in a vision the Ultimate Cause of the universe as a huge luminous triangle giving birth every moment to an infinite number of worlds. He heard the *Anāhata Śabda*, the great sound **Om**, of which the innumerable sounds of the universe are only so many echoes. He acquired the eight supernatural powers of Yoga, which make a man almost omnipotent, and these he spurned as of no value whatsoever to the Spirit. He had a vision of the divine Māyā, the inscrutable Power of God, by which the universe is created

and sustained, and into which it is finally absorbed. In this vision he saw a woman of exquisite beauty, about to become a mother, emerging from the Ganges and slowly approaching the Panchavati. Presently she gave birth to a child and began to nurse it tenderly. A moment later she assumed a terrible aspect, seized the child with her grim jaws and crushed it. Swallowing it, she re-entered the waters of the Ganges.

But the most remarkable experience during this period was the awakening of the *Kundalini Śakti*, the "Serpent Power". He actually saw the Power, at first lying asleep at the bottom of the spinal column, then waking up and ascending along the mystic *Sushumna* canal and through its six centres, or lotuses, to the *Sahasrāra*, the thousand-petalled lotus in the top of the head. He further saw that as the Kundalini went upward the different lotuses bloomed. And this phenomenon was accompanied by visions and trances. Later on he described to his disciples and devotees the various movements of the Kundalini: the fishlike, birdlike, monkey like, and so on. The awakening of the Kundalini is the beginning of spiritual consciousness, and its union with Śiva in the *Sahasrāra*, ending in Samādhi, is the consummation of the Tāntrik disciplines.

About this time it was revealed to him that in a short while many devotees would seek his guidance.

Vaishnava Disciplines

After completing the Tāntrik sādhana Sri Ramakrishna followed the Brāhmani in the disciplines of Vaishnavism. The Vaishnavas are worshippers of Vishnu, the "All-pervading", the Supreme God, who is also known as Hari and Nārāyana. Of Vishnu's various Incarnations the two with the largest number of followers are Rāmā and Krishna.

Vaishnavism is exclusively a religion of bhakti. Bhakti is intense love of God, attachment to Him alone; it is of the nature of bliss and bestows upon the lover immortality and liberation. God, according to Vaishnavism, cannot be realized through logic or reason; and, without bhakti, all penances, austerities, and rites are futile. Man cannot realize God by self-exertion alone. For the vision of God His grace is absolutely necessary, and this grace is felt by the pure of heart. The mind is to be purified through bhakti. The pure mind then remains for ever immersed in the ecstasy of God-vision. It is the cultivation of this divine love that is the chief concern of the Vaishnava religion.

There are three kinds of formal devotion: tāmasic, rājasic, and sāttvic. If a person, while showing devotion to God, is actuated by malevolence, arrogance, jealousy, or anger, then his devotion is tāmasic, since it is influenced by tamas, the quality of inertia. If he worships God from a desire for fame or wealth, or from any other worldly ambition, then his devotion is rājasic, since it is influenced by rajas, the quality of activity. But if a person loves God without any thought of material gain, if he performs his duties to please God alone and maintains toward all created beings the attitude of friendship, then his devotion is called sāttvic, since it is influenced by sattva, the quality of harmony. But the highest devotion transcends the three *gunās*, or qualities, being a spontaneous, uninterrupted inclination of the mind toward God, the Inner Soul of all beings; and it wells up in the heart of a true devotee as soon as he hears the name of God or mention

of God's attributes. A devotee possessed of this love would not accept the happiness of heaven if it were offered him. His one desire is to love God under all conditions - in pleasure and pain, life and death, honour and dishonour, prosperity and adversity.

There are two stages of bhakti. The first is known as *Vaidhi-Bhakti*, or love of God qualified by scriptural injunctions. For the devotees of this stage are prescribed regular and methodical worship, hymns, prayers, the repetition of God's name, and the chanting of His glories. This lower bhakti in course of time matures into *Parā-Bhakti*, or supreme devotion, known also as *Prema*, the most intense form of divine love. Divine love is an end in itself. It exists potentially in all human hearts, but in the case of bound creatures it is misdirected to earthly objects.

To develop the devotee's love for God, Vaishnavism humanises God. God is to be regarded as the devotee's Parent, Master, Friend, Child, Husband, or Sweetheart, each succeeding relationship representing an intensification of love. These *Bhāvās*, or attitudes toward God, are known as *Śānta*, *Dāsyā*, *Sakhya*, *Vātsalya*, and *Madhur*. The rishis of the Vedās, Hanumān, the cowherd boys of Vrindāvan, Rāmā's mother Kausalya, and Rādhika, Krishna's sweetheart, exhibited, respectively, the most perfect examples of these forms. In the ascending scale the glories of God are gradually forgotten and the devotee realizes more and more the intimacy of divine communion. Finally he regards himself as the mistress of his Beloved, and no artificial barrier remains to separate him from his Ideal. No social or moral obligation can bind to the earth his soaring spirit. He experiences perfect union with the Godhead. Unlike the Vedantist, who strives to transcend all varieties of the subject-object relationship, a devotee of the Vaishnava path wishes to retain both his own individuality and the personality of God. To him God is not an intangible Absolute, but the *Purushottama*, the Supreme Person.

While practising the discipline of the Madhur Bhāva, the male devotee often regards himself as a woman, in order to develop the most intense form of love for Sri Krishna, the only *Purusha*, or man, in the universe. This assumption of the attitude of the opposite sex has a deep psychological significance. It is a matter of common experience that an idea may be cultivated to such an intense degree that every idea alien to it is driven from the mind. This peculiarity of the mind may be utilised for the subjugation of the lower desires and the development of the spiritual nature. Now, the idea which is the basis of all desires and passions in a man is the conviction of his indissoluble association with a male body. If he can inoculate himself thoroughly with the idea that he is a woman, he can get rid of the desires peculiar to his male body. Again, the idea that he is a woman may in turn be made to give way to another higher idea, namely, that he is neither man nor woman, but the Impersonal Spirit. The Impersonal Spirit alone can enjoy real communion with the Impersonal God. Hence the highest realization of the Vaishnava draws close to the transcendental experience of the Vedantist.

A beautiful expression of the Vaishnava worship of God through love is to be found in the Vrindāvan episode of the Bhāgavata. The gopis, or milk-maids, of Vrindāvan regarded the six-year-old Krishna as their Beloved. They sought no personal gain or happiness from this love. They surrendered to Krishna their bodies, minds, and souls. Of all the

gopis, Rādhika, or Rādhā, because of her intense love for Him, was the closest to Krishna. She manifested Mahā-bhāva and was united with her Beloved. This union represents, through sensuous language, a supersensuous experience.

Sri Chaitanya, also known as Gaurāṅga, Gorā, or Nimāi, born in Bengāl in 1485 and regarded as an Incarnation of God, is a great prophet of the Vaishnava religion. Chaitanya declared the chanting of God's name to be the most efficacious spiritual discipline for the Kali-Yuga.

Sri Ramakrishna, as the monkey Hanumān, had already worshipped God as his Master. Through his devotion to Kālī he had worshipped God as his Mother. He was now to take up the other relationships prescribed by the Vaishnava scriptures.

Ramlālā

About the year 1864 there came to Dakshineśwar a wandering Vaishnava monk, Jatādhāri, whose Ideal Deity was Rāmā. He always carried with him a small metal image of the Deity, which he called by the endearing name of Ramlālā, the Boy Rāmā. Toward this little image he displayed the tender affection of Kausalya for her divine Son, Rāmā. As a result of lifelong spiritual practice he had actually found in the metal image the presence of his Ideal. Ramlālā was no longer for him a metal image, but the living God. He devoted himself to nursing Rāmā, feeding Rāmā, playing with Rāmā, taking Rāmā for a walk, and bathing Rāmā. And he found that the image responded to his love.

Sri Ramakrishna, much impressed with his devotion, requested Jatādhāri to spend a few days at Dakshineśwar. Soon Ramlālā became the favourite companion of Sri Ramakrishna too. Later on he described to the devotees how the little image would dance gracefully before him, jump on his back, insist on being taken in his arms, run to the fields in the sun, pluck flowers from the bushes, and play pranks like a naughty boy. A very sweet relationship sprang up between him and Ramlālā, for whom he felt the love of a mother.

One day Jatādhāri requested Sri Ramakrishna to keep the image and bade him adieu with tearful eyes. He declared that Ramlālā had fulfilled his innermost prayer and that he now had no more need of formal worship. A few days later Sri Ramakrishna was blessed through Ramlālā with a vision of Rāmachandra, whereby he realized that the Rāmā of the Ramayana, the son of Daśaratha, pervades the whole universe as Spirit and Consciousness; that He is its Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer; that, in still another aspect, He is the transcendental Brahman, without form, attribute, or name.

While worshipping Ramlālā as the Divine Child, Sri Ramakrishna's heart became filled with motherly tenderness, and he began to regard himself as a woman. His speech and gestures changed. He began to move freely with the ladies of Mathur's family, who now looked upon him as one of their own sex. During this time he worshipped the Divine Mother as Her companion or handmaid.

In Communion with the Divine Beloved

Sri Ramakrishna now devoted himself to scaling the most inaccessible and dizzy heights of dualistic worship, namely, the complete union with Sri Krishna as the Beloved of the heart. He regarded himself as one of the gopis of Vrindāvan, mad with longing for her divine Sweetheart. At his request Mathur provided him with woman's dress and jewellery. In this love pursuit, food and drink were forgotten. Day and night he wept bitterly. The yearning turned into a mad frenzy; for the divine Krishna began to play with him the old tricks He had played with the gopis. He would tease and taunt, now and then revealing Himself, but always keeping at a distance. Sri Ramakrishna's anguish brought on a return of the old physical symptoms: the burning sensation, an oozing of blood through the pores, a loosening of the joints, and the stopping of physiological functions.

The Vaishnava scriptures advise one to propitiate Rādhā and obtain her grace in order to realize Sri Krishna. So the tortured devotee now turned his prayer to her. Within a short time he enjoyed her blessed vision. He saw and felt the figure of Rādhā disappearing into his own body.

He said later on: "It is impossible to describe the heavenly beauty and sweetness of Rādhā. Her very appearance showed that she had completely forgotten herself in her passionate attachment to Krishna. Her complexion was a light yellow."

Now one with Rādhā, he manifested the great ecstatic love, the Mahā-bhāva which had found in her its fullest expression. Later Sri Ramakrishna said: "The manifestation in the same individual of the nineteen different kinds of emotion for God is called, in the books on bhakti, Mahā-bhāva. An ordinary man takes a whole lifetime to express even a single one of these. But in this body [meaning himself] there has been a complete manifestation of all nineteen."

The love of Rādhā is the precursor of the resplendent vision of Sri Krishna, and Sri Ramakrishna soon experienced that vision. The enchanting form of Krishna appeared to him and merged in his person. He became Krishna; he totally forgot his own individuality and the world; he saw Krishna in himself and in the universe. Thus he attained to the fulfilment of the worship of the Personal God. He drank from the fountain of Immortal Bliss. The agony of his heart vanished forever. He realized Amrita, Immortality, beyond the shadow of death.

One day, listening to a recitation of the Bhāgavata on the verandah of the Radhākānta temple he fell into a divine mood and saw the enchanting form of Krishna. He perceived the luminous rays issuing from Krishna's Lotus Feet in the form of a stout rope, which touched first the Bhāgavata and then his own chest, connecting all three - God, the scripture, and the devotee. "After this vision," he used to say, "I came to realize that *Bhagavān-Bhakta-and-Bhāgavata* -- God-Devotee-and-Scripture -- are in reality, one and the same."

Vedānta

The Brāhmani was the enthusiastic teacher and astonished beholder of Sri Ramakrishna in his spiritual progress. She became proud of the achievements of her unique pupil. But

the pupil himself was not permitted to rest; his destiny beckoned him forward. His Divine Mother would allow him no respite till he had left behind the entire realm of duality with its visions, experiences, and ecstatic dreams. But for the new ascent the old tender guides would not suffice. The Brāhmani, on whom he had depended for three years saw her son escape from her to follow the command of a teacher with masculine strength, a sterner mien, a gnarled physique, and a virile voice. The new guru was a wandering monk, the sturdy Totāpuri, whom Sri Ramakrishna learnt to address affectionately as *Nangta*, the "Naked One", because of his total renunciation of all earthly objects and attachments, including even a piece of wearing-cloth.

Totāpuri was the bearer of a philosophy new to Sri Ramakrishna, the non-dualistic Vedānta philosophy, whose conclusions Totāpuri had experienced in his own life. This ancient Hindu system designates the Ultimate Reality as Brahman, also described as *Satchidānanda*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Brahman is the only Real Existence. In It there is no time, no space, no causality, no multiplicity. But through Māyā, Its inscrutable Power, time, space, and causality are created and the One appears to break into the many. The eternal Spirit appears as a manifold of individuals endowed with form and subject to the conditions of time. The Immortal becomes a victim of birth and death. The Changeless undergoes change. The sinless Pure Soul, hypnotised by Its own Māyā, experiences the joys of heaven and the pains of hell. But these experiences based on the duality of the subject-object relationship are unreal. Even the vision of a Personal God is, ultimately speaking, as illusory as the experience of any other object. Man attains his liberation, therefore, by piercing the veil of Māyā and rediscovering his total identity with Brahman. Knowing himself to be one with the Universal Spirit, he realizes ineffable Peace. Only then does he go beyond the fiction of birth and death; only then does he become immortal. And this is the ultimate goal of all religions - to dehypnotize the soul now hypnotized by its own ignorance.

The path of the Vedāntic discipline is the path of negation, "*Neti*", in which, by stern determination, all that is unreal is both negated and renounced. It is the path of jñāna, knowledge, the direct method of realizing the Absolute. After the negation of everything relative, including the discriminating ego itself, the aspirant merges in the One without a Second, in the bliss of nirvikalpa Samādhi, where subject and object are alike dissolved. The soul goes beyond the realm of thought. The domain of duality is transcended. Māyā is left behind with all its changes and modifications. The Real Man towers above the delusions of creation, preservation, and destruction. An avalanche of indescribable Bliss sweeps away all relative ideas of pain and pleasure, good and evil. There shines in the heart the glory of the Eternal Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Knower, knowledge, and known are dissolved in the Ocean of one eternal Consciousness; love, lover, and beloved merge in the unbounded Sea of supreme Felicity; birth, growth, and death vanish in infinite Existence. All doubts and misgivings are quelled for ever; the oscillations of the mind are stopped; the momentum of past actions is exhausted. Breaking down the ridge-pole of the tabernacle in which the soul has made its abode for untold ages, stilling the body, calming the mind, drowning the ego, the sweet joy of Brahman wells up in that superconscious state. Space disappears into nothingness, time

is swallowed in eternity, and causation becomes a dream of the past. Only Existence is. Ah! Who can describe what the soul then feels in its communion with the Self?

Even when man descends from this dizzy height, he is devoid of ideas of "I" and "mine"; he looks on the body as a mere shadow, an outer sheath encasing the soul. He does not dwell on the past, takes no thought for the future, and looks with indifference on the present. He surveys everything in the world with an eye of equality; he is no longer touched by the infinite variety of phenomena; he no longer reacts to pleasure and pain. He remains unmoved whether he - that is to say, his body - is worshipped by the good or tormented by the wicked; for he realizes that it is the one Brahman that manifests Itself through everything. The impact of such an experience devastates the body and mind. Consciousness becomes blasted, as it were, with an excess of Light. In the Vedānta books it is said that after the experience of nirvikalpa Samādhi the body drops off like a dry leaf. Only those who are born with a special mission for the world can return from this height to the valleys of normal life. They live and move in the world for the welfare of mankind. They are invested with a supreme spiritual power. A divine glory shines through them.

Totāpuri

Totāpuri arrived at the Dakshineśwar temple garden toward the end of 1864. Perhaps born in the Punjab, he was the head of a monastery in that province of India and claimed leadership of seven hundred sannyāsis. Trained from early youth in the disciplines of the Advaita Vedānta, he looked upon the world as an illusion. The gods and goddesses of the dualistic worship were to him mere fantasies of the deluded mind. Prayers, ceremonies, rites, and rituals had nothing to do with true religion, and about these he was utterly indifferent. Exercising self-exertion and unshakable will-power, he had liberated himself from attachment to the sense-objects of the relative universe. For forty years he had practised austere discipline on the bank of the sacred Narmada and had finally realized his identity with the Absolute. Thenceforward he roamed in the world as an unfettered soul, a lion free from the cage. Clad in a loin-cloth, he spent his days under the canopy of the sky alike in storm and sunshine, feeding his body on the slender pittance of alms. He had been visiting the estuary of the Ganges. On his return journey along the bank of the sacred river, led by the inscrutable Divine Will, he stopped at Dakshineśwar.

Totāpuri, discovering at once that Sri Ramakrishna was prepared to be a student of Vedānta, asked to initiate him into its mysteries. With the permission of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna agreed to the proposal. But Totāpuri explained that only a sannyāsi could receive the teaching of Vedānta. Sri Ramakrishna agreed to renounce the world, but with the stipulation that the ceremony of his initiation into the monastic order be performed in secret, to spare the feelings of his old mother, who had been living with him at Dakshineśwar.

On the appointed day, in the small hours of the morning, a fire was lighted in the Panchavati. Totāpuri and Sri Ramakrishna sat before it. The flame played on their faces. "Ramakrishna was a small brown man with a short beard and beautiful eyes, long dark

eyes, full of light, obliquely set and slightly veiled, never very wide open, but seeing half-closed a great distance both outwardly and inwardly. His mouth was open over his white teeth in a bewitching smile, at once affectionate and mischievous. Of medium height, he was thin to emaciation and extremely delicate. His temperament was high-strung, for he was supersensitive to all the winds of joy and sorrow, both moral and physical. He was indeed a living reflection of all that happened before the mirror of his eyes, a two-sided mirror, turned both out and in." Facing him, the other rose like a rock. He was very tall and robust, a sturdy and tough oak. His constitution and mind were of iron. He was the strong leader of men.

In the burning flame before him Sri Ramakrishna performed the rituals of destroying his attachment to relatives, friends, body, mind, sense-organs, ego, and the world. The leaping flame swallowed it all, making the initiate free and pure. The sacred thread and the tuft of hair were consigned to the fire, completing his severance from caste, sex, and society. Last of all he burnt in that fire, with all that is holy as his witness, his desire for enjoyment here and hereafter. He uttered the sacred mantras giving assurance of safety and fearlessness to all beings, who were only manifestations of his own Self. The rites completed, the disciple received from the guru the loincloth and ochre robe, the emblems of his new life.

The teacher and the disciple repaired to the meditation room near by. Totāpuri began to impart to Sri Ramakrishna the great truths of Vedānta. "Brahman", he said, "is the only Reality, ever pure, ever illumined, ever free, beyond the limits of time, space, and causation. Though apparently divided by names and forms through the inscrutable power of Māyā, that enchantress who makes the impossible possible, Brahman is really One and undivided. When a seeker merges in the beatitude of Samādhi, he does not perceive time and space or name and form, the offspring of Māyā. Whatever is within the domain of Māyā is unreal. Give it up. Destroy the prison-house of name and form and rush out of it with the strength of a lion. Dive deep in search of the Self and realize It through Samādhi. You will find the world of name and form vanishing into void, and the puny ego dissolving in Brahman-Consciousness. You will realize your identity with Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute." Quoting the Upanishad, Totāpuri said "That knowledge is shallow by which one sees or hears or knows another. What is shallow is worthless and can never give real felicity. But the Knowledge by which one does not see another or hear another or know another, which is beyond duality, is great, and through such Knowledge one attains the Infinite Bliss. How can the mind and senses grasp That which shines in the heart of all as the Eternal Subject?"

Totāpuri asked the disciple to withdraw his mind from all objects of relative world, including the gods and goddesses, and to concentrate on the Absolute. But the task was not easy even for Sri Ramakrishna. He found it impossible to take his mind beyond Kālī, the Divine Mother of the Universe. "After the initiation", Sri Ramakrishna once said, describing the event, "Nangta began to teach me the various conclusions of the Advaita Vedānta and asked me to withdraw the mind completely from all objects and dive deep into the Ātman. But in spite of all my attempts I could not altogether cross the realm of name and form and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in

taking the mind from all the objects of the world. But the radiant and too familiar figure of the Blissful Mother, the Embodiment of the essence of Pure Consciousness, appeared before me as a living reality. Her bewitching smile prevented me from passing into the Great Beyond. Again and again I tried, but She stood in my way every time. In despair I said to Nangta: 'It is hopeless. I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and come face to face with Ātman.' He grew excited and sharply said: 'What? You can't do it? But you have to.' He cast his eyes around. Finding a piece of glass he took it up and stuck it between my eyebrows. 'Concentrate the mind on this point!' he thundered. Then with stern determination I again sat to meditate. As soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword and with it clove Her in two. The last barrier fell. My spirit at once soared beyond the relative plane and I lost myself in Samādhi."

Sri Ramakrishna remained completely absorbed in Samādhi for three days. "Is it really true?" Totāpuri cried out in astonishment. "Is it possible that he has attained in a single day what it took me forty years of strenuous practice to achieve? Great God! It is nothing short of a miracle!" With the help of Totāpuri, Sri Ramakrishna's mind finally came down to the relative Plane.

Totāpuri, a monk of the most orthodox type, never stayed at a place more than three days. But he remained at Dakshineśwar eleven months. He too had something to learn.

Totāpuri had no idea of the struggles of ordinary men in the toils of passion and desire. Having maintained all through life the guilelessness of a child, he laughed at the idea of a man's being led astray by the senses. He was convinced that the world, was Māyā and had only to be denounced to vanish for ever. A born non-dualist, he had no faith in a Personal God. He did not believe in the terrible aspect of Kāli, much less in Her benign aspect. Music and the chanting of God's holy name were to him only so much nonsense. He ridiculed the spending of emotion on the worship of a Personal God.

Kāli and Māyā

Sri Ramakrishna, on the other hand, though fully aware, like his guru, that the world is an illusory appearance, instead of slighting Māyā, like an orthodox monist, acknowledged its power in the relative life. He was all love and reverence for Māyā, perceiving in it a mysterious and majestic expression of Divinity. To him Māyā itself was God, for everything was God. It was one of the faces of Brahman. What he had realized on the heights of the transcendental plane, he also found here below, everywhere about him, under the mysterious garb of names and forms. And this garb was a perfectly transparent sheath, through which he recognized the glory of the Divine Immanence. Māyā, the mighty weaver of the garb, is none other than Kāli, the Divine Mother. She is the primordial Divine Energy, Śakti, and She can no more be distinguished from the Supreme Brahman than can the power of burning be distinguished from fire. She projects the world and again withdraws it. She spins it as the spider spins its web. She is the Mother of the Universe, identical with the Brahman of Vedānta, and with the Ātman of Yoga. As eternal Lawgiver, She makes and unmakes laws; it is by Her imperious will that karma yields its fruit. She ensnares men with illusion and again releases them from

bondage with a look of Her benign eyes. She is the supreme Mistress of the cosmic play, and all objects, animate and inanimate, dance by Her will. Even those who realize the Absolute in nirvikalpa Samādhi are under Her jurisdiction as long as they still live on the relative plane.

Thus, after Nirvikalpa Samādhi, Sri Ramakrishna realized Māyā in an altogether new role. The binding aspect of Kālī vanished from before his vision. She no longer obscured his understanding. The world became the glorious manifestation of the Divine Mother. Māyā became Brahman. The Transcendental Itself broke through the Immanent. Sri Ramakrishna discovered that Māyā operates in the relative world in two ways, and he termed these "Avidyā-Māyā" and "Vidyā-Māyā". Avidyā-Māyā represents the dark forces of creation: sensuous desires, evil passions, greed, lust, cruelty, and so on. It sustains the world system on the lower planes. It is responsible for the round of man's birth and death. It must be fought and vanquished. But Vidyā-Māyā is the higher force of creation: the spiritual virtues, the enlightening qualities, kindness, purity, love, devotion. Vidyā-Māyā elevates man to the higher planes of consciousness. With the help of Vidyā-Māyā the devotee rids himself of Avidyā-Māyā; he then becomes *Māyātita*, free of Māyā. The two aspects of Māyā are the two forces of creation, the two powers of Kālī; and She stands beyond them both. She is like the effulgent sun, bringing into existence and shining through and standing behind the clouds of different colours and shapes, conjuring up wonderful forms in the blue autumn heaven.

The Divine Mother asked Sri Ramakrishna not to be lost in the featureless Absolute but to remain in *Bhāva-mukha*, on the threshold of relative consciousness, the border line between the Absolute and the Relative. He was to keep himself at the "sixth centre" of Tantra, from which he could see not only the glory of the seventh, but also the divine manifestations of the Kundalini in the lower centres. He gently oscillated back and forth across the dividing line. Ecstatic devotion to the Divine Mother alternated with serene absorption in the Ocean of Absolute Unity. He thus bridged the gulf between the Personal and the Impersonal, the immanent and the transcendent aspects of Reality. This is a unique experience in the recorded spiritual history of the world.

Totāpuri's Lesson

From Sri Ramakrishna Totāpuri had to learn the significance of Kālī, the Great Fact of the relative world, and of Māyā, Her indescribable Power.

One day, when guru and disciple were engaged in an animated discussion about Vedānta, a servant of the temple garden came there and took a coal from the sacred fire that had been lighted by the great ascetic. He wanted it to light his tobacco. Totāpuri flew into a rage and was about to beat the man. Sri Ramakrishna rocked with laughter. "What a shame!" he cried. "You are explaining to me the reality of Brahman and the illusoriness of the world; yet now you have so far forgotten yourself as to be about to beat a man in a fit of passion. The power of Māyā is indeed inscrutable!" Totāpuri was embarrassed.

About this time Totāpuri was suddenly laid up with a severe attack of dysentery. On account of this miserable illness he found it impossible to meditate. One night the pain became excruciating. He could no longer concentrate on Brahman. The body stood in the way. He became incensed with its demands. A free soul, he did not at all care for the body. So he determined to drown it in the Ganges. Thereupon he walked into the river. But, lo! He walks to the other bank. Is there not enough water in the Ganges? Standing dumbfounded on the other bank he looks back across the water. The trees, the temples, the houses, are silhouetted against the sky. Suddenly, in one dazzling moment, he sees on all sides the presence of the Divine Mother. She is in everything; She is everything. She is in the water; She is on land. She is the body; She is the mind. She is pain; She is comfort. She is knowledge; She is ignorance. She is life; She is death. She is everything that one sees, hears, or imagines. She turns "yea" into "nay", and "nay" into "yea". Without Her grace no embodied being can go beyond Her realm. Man has no free will. He is not even free to die. Yet, again, beyond the body and mind She resides in Her Transcendental Absolute aspect. She is the Brahman that Totāpuri had been worshipping all his life.

Totāpuri returned to Dakshineśwar and spent the remaining hours of the night meditating on the Divine Mother. In the morning he went to the Kāli temple with Sri Ramakrishna and prostrated himself before the image of the Mother. He now realized why he had spent eleven months at Dakshineśwar. Bidding farewell to the disciple, he continued on his way, enlightened.

Sri Ramakrishna later described the significance of Totāpuri's lessons: "When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive - neither creating nor preserving nor destroying -, I call Him Brahman or *Purusha*, the Impersonal God. When I think of Him as active - creating, preserving, and destroying -, I call Him Śakti or Māyā or *Prakriti*, the Personal God. But the distinction between them does not mean a difference. The Personal and the Impersonal are the same thing, like milk and its whiteness, the diamond and its lustre, the snake and its wriggling motion. It is impossible to conceive of the one without the other. The Divine Mother and Brahman are one."

After the departure of Totāpuri, Sri Ramakrishna remained for six months in a state of absolute identity with Brahman. "For six months at a stretch", he said, "I remained in that state from which ordinary men can never return; generally the body falls off, after three weeks, like a sere leaf. I was not conscious of day and night. Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do a dead body's, but I did not feel them. My hair became matted with dust."

His body would not have survived but for the kindly attention of a monk who happened to be at Dakshineśwar at that time and who somehow realized that for the good of humanity Sri Ramakrishna's body must be preserved. He tried various means, even physical violence, to recall the fleeing soul to the prison-house of the body, and during the resultant fleeting moments of consciousness he would push a few morsels of food down Sri Ramakrishna's throat. Presently Sri Ramakrishna received the command of the Divine Mother to remain on the threshold of relative consciousness. Soon thereafter he

was afflicted with a serious attack of dysentery. Day and night the pain tortured him, and his mind gradually came down to the physical plane.

Company of Holy Men and Devotees

From now on Sri Ramakrishna began to seek the company of devotees and holy men. He had gone through the storm and stress of spiritual disciplines and visions. Now he realized an inner calmness and appeared to others as a normal person. But he could not bear the company of worldly people or listen to their talk. Fortunately the holy atmosphere of Dakshineśwar and the liberality of Mathur attracted monks and holy men from all parts of the country. *Sādhus* of all denominations - monists and dualists, Vaishnavas and Vedāntists, Śāktās and worshippers of Rāmā - flocked there in ever increasing numbers. Ascetics and visionaries came to seek Sri Ramakrishna's advice. Vaishnavas had come during the period of his Vaishnava sādhana, and Tāntriks when he practised the disciplines of Tantra. Vedāntists began to arrive after the departure of Totāpuri. In the room of Sri Ramakrishna, who was then in bed with dysentery, the Vedāntists engaged in scriptural discussions, and, forgetting his own physical suffering, he solved their doubts by referring directly to his own experiences. Many of the visitors were genuine spiritual souls, the unseen pillars of Hinduism, and their spiritual lives were quickened in no small measure by the sage of Dakshineśwar. Sri Ramakrishna in turn learnt from them anecdotes concerning the ways and the conduct of holy men, which he subsequently narrated to his devotees and disciples. At his request Mathur provided him with large stores of foodstuffs, clothes, and so forth, for distribution among the wandering monks.

Sri Ramakrishna had not read books, yet he possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of religions and religious philosophies. This he acquired from his contacts with innumerable holy men and scholars. He had a unique power of assimilation; through meditation he made this knowledge a part of his being. Once, when he was asked by a disciple about the source of his seemingly inexhaustible knowledge, he replied: "I have not read; but I have heard the learned. I have made a garland of their knowledge, wearing it round my neck, and I have given it as an offering at the feet of the Mother."

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when the flower blooms the bees come to it for honey of their own accord. Now many souls began to visit Dakshineśwar to satisfy their spiritual hunger. He, the devotee and aspirant, became the Master. Gauri, the great scholar who had been one of the first to proclaim Sri Ramakrishna an Incarnation of God, paid the Master a visit in 1870 and with the Master's blessings renounced the world. Nārāyan Śāstri, another great pundit, who had mastered the six systems of Hindu philosophy and had been offered a lucrative post by the Maharaja of Jaipur, met the Master and recognized in him one who had realized in life those ideals which he himself had encountered merely in books. Sri Ramakrishna initiated Nārāyan Śāstri, at his earnest request, into the life of sannyās. Pundit Padmalochan, the court pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan, well known for his scholarship in both the Vedānta and the *Nyāya* systems of philosophy, accepted the Master as an Incarnation of God. Krishnakishore, a Vedantist scholar, became devoted to the Master. And there arrived Viśwanāth Upādhyāya, who was to become a favourite devotee; Sri Ramakrishna always addressed

him as "Captain". He was a high officer of the King of Nepal and had received the title of Colonel in recognition of his merit. A scholar of the Gita, the Bhāgavata, and the Vedānta philosophy, he daily performed the worship of his Chosen Deity with great devotion. "I have read the Vedas and the other scriptures", he said. "I have also met a good many monks and devotees in different places. But it is in Sri Ramakrishna's presence that my spiritual yearnings have been fulfilled. To me he seems to be the embodiment of the truths of the scriptures."

The Knowledge of Brahman in nirvikalpa Samādhi had convinced Sri Ramakrishna that the gods of the different religions are but so many readings of the Absolute, and that the Ultimate Reality could never be expressed by human tongue. He understood that all religions lead their devotees by differing paths to one and the same goal. Now he became eager to explore some of the alien religions; for with him understanding meant actual experience.

Islām

Toward the end of 1866 he began to practise the disciplines of Islām. Under the direction of his Mussalman guru he abandoned himself to his new sādhana. He dressed as a Mussalman and repeated the name of Allah.

His prayers took the form of the Islamic devotions. He forgot the Hindu gods and goddesses - even Kāli - and gave up visiting the temples. He took up his residence outside the temple precincts. After three days he saw the vision of a radiant figure, perhaps Mohammed. This figure gently approached him and finally lost himself in Sri Ramakrishna. Thus he realized the Mussalman God. Thence he passed into communion with Brahman. The mighty river of Islam also led him back to the Ocean of the Absolute.

Christianity

Eight years later, some time in November 1874, Sri Ramakrishna was seized with an irresistible desire to learn the truth of the Christian religion. He began to listen to readings from the Bible, by Śambhu Charan Mallick, a gentleman of Calcutta and a devotee of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna became fascinated by the life and teachings of Jesus. One day he was seated in the parlour of Jadu Mallick's garden house at Dakshineśwar, when his eyes became fixed on a painting of the Madonna and Child. Intently watching it, he became gradually overwhelmed with divine emotion. The figures in the picture took on life, and the rays of light emanating from them entered his soul. The effect of this experience was stronger than that of the vision of Mohammed. In dismay he cried out, "O Mother! What are You doing to me?" And, breaking through the barriers of creed and religion, he entered a new realm of ecstasy. Christ possessed his soul. For three days he did not set foot in the Kāli temple. On the fourth day, in the afternoon, as he was walking in the Panchavati, he saw coming toward him a person with beautiful large eyes, serene countenance, and fair skin. As the two faced each other, a voice rang out in the depths of Sri Ramakrishna's soul: "Behold the Christ who shed His heart's blood for the redemption of the world, who suffered a sea of anguish for love of men. It is He, the Master Yogi, who is in eternal union with God. It is Jesus, Love Incarnate." The Son of Man embraced the Son of the Divine Mother and merged in him.

Sri Ramakrishna realized his identity with Christ, as he had already realized his identity with Kālī, Rāmā, Hanuman, Rādhā, Krishna, Brahman, and Mohammed. The Master went into Samādhi and communed with the Brahman with attributes. Thus he experienced the truth that Christianity, too, was a path leading to God-Consciousness. Till the last moment of his life he believed that Christ was an Incarnation of God. But Christ, for him, was not the only Incarnation; there were others - Buddha, for instance, and Krishna.

Attitude toward Different Religions

Sri Ramakrishna accepted the divinity of Buddha and used to point out the similarity of his teachings to those of the Upanishads. He also showed great respect for the Tirthankarās, who founded Jainism, and for the ten Gurus of Sikhism. But he did not speak of them as Divine Incarnations. He was heard to say that the Gurus of Sikhism were the reincarnations of King Janaka of ancient India. He kept in his room at Dakshineśwar a small statue of Tirthankara Mahāvira and a picture of Christ, before which incense was burnt morning and evening.

Without being formally initiated into their doctrines, Sri Ramakrishna thus realized the ideals of religions other than Hinduism. He did not need to follow any doctrine. All barriers were removed by his overwhelming love of God. So he became a Master who could speak with authority regarding the ideas and ideals of the various religions of the world. "I have practised", said he, "all religions - Hinduism, Islam, Christianity - and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. You must try all beliefs and traverse all the different ways once. Wherever I look, I see men quarrelling in the name of religion - Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmos, Vaishnavās, and the rest. But they never reflect that He who is called Krishna is also called Śiva, and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus, and Allah as well - the same Rāmā with a thousand names. A lake has several *Ghāts*. At one, the Hindus take water in pitchers and call it '*Jal*'; at another the Mussalmans take water in leather bags and call it '*pāni*'. At a third the Christians call it '*water*'. Can we imagine that it is not '*jal*', but only '*pāni*' or '*water*'? How ridiculous! The substance is One under different names, and everyone is seeking the same substance; only climate, temperament, and name create differences. Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God, peace be unto him! He will surely realize Him."

In 1867, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Kāmārpukur to recuperate from the effect of his austerities. The peaceful countryside, the simple and artless companions of his boyhood, and the pure air did him much good. The villagers were happy to get back their playful, frank, witty, kind-hearted, and truthful Gadādhara, though they did not fail to notice the great change that had come over him during his years in Calcutta. His wife, Sārādā Devi, now fourteen years old, soon arrived at Kāmārpukur. Her spiritual development was much beyond her age and she was able to understand immediately her husband's state of mind. She became eager to learn from him about God and to live with him as his attendant. The Master accepted her cheerfully both as his disciple and as his spiritual companion. Referring to the experiences of these few days, she once said: "I used to

feel always as if a pitcher full of bliss were placed in my heart. The joy was indescribable."

Pilgrimage

On January 27, 1868, Mathur Bābu with a party of some one hundred and twenty-five persons set out on a pilgrimage to the sacred places of northern India. At Vaidyanāth in Behar, when the Master saw the inhabitants of a village reduced by poverty and starvation to mere skeletons, he requested his rich patron to feed the people and give each a piece of cloth. Mathur demurred at the added expense. The Master declared bitterly that he would not go on to Banāras, but would live with the poor and share their miseries. He actually left Mathur and sat down with the villagers.

Whereupon Mathur had to yield. On another occasion, two years later, Sri Ramakrishna showed a similar sentiment for the poor and needy. He accompanied Mathur on a tour to one of the latter's estates at the time of the collection of rents. For two years the harvests had failed and the tenants were in a state of extreme poverty. The Master asked Mathur to remit their rents, distribute help to them, and in addition give the hungry people a sumptuous feast. When Mathur grumbled, the Master said: "You are only the steward of the Divine Mother. They are the Mother's tenants. You must spend the Mother's money. When they are suffering, how can you refuse to help them? You must help them." Again Mathur had to give in. Sri Ramakrishna's sympathy for the poor sprang from his perception of God in all created beings. His sentiment was not that of the humanist or philanthropist. To him the service of man was the same as the worship of God.

The party entered holy Banāras by boat along the Ganges. When Sri Ramakrishna's eyes fell on this city of Śiva, where had accumulated for ages the devotion and piety of countless worshippers, he saw it to be made of gold, as the scriptures declare. He was visibly moved. During his stay in the city he treated every particle of its earth with utmost respect. At the Manikarnikā Ghāt, the great cremation ground of the city, he actually saw Śiva, with ash-covered body and tawny matted hair, serenely approaching each funeral pyre and breathing into the ears of the corpses the mantra of liberation; and then the Divine Mother removing from the dead their bonds. Thus he realized the significance of the scriptural statement that anyone dying in Banāras attains salvation through the grace of Śiva. He paid a visit to Trailanga Swāmi, the celebrated monk, whom he later declared to be a real paramahansa, a veritable image of Śiva.

Sri Ramakrishna visited Allahābad, at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jamuna, and then proceeded to Vrindāvan and Mathura, hallowed by the legends, songs, and dramas about Krishna and the gopis. Here he had numerous visions and his heart overflowed with divine emotion. He wept and said: "O Krishna! Everything here is as it was in the olden days. You alone are absent." He visited the great woman saint Gangāmāyi, regarded by Vaishnava devotees as the reincarnation of an intimate attendant of Rādhā. She was sixty years old and had frequent trances. She spoke of Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation of Rādhā. With great difficulty he was persuaded to leave her.

On the return journey Mathur wanted to visit Gayā, but Sri Ramakrishna declined to go. He recalled his father's vision at Gayā before his own birth and felt that in the temple of Vishnu he would become permanently absorbed in God. Mathur, honouring the Master's wish, returned with his party to Calcutta.

From Vrindāvan the Master had brought a handful of dust. Part of this he scattered in the Panchavati; the rest he buried in the little hut where he had practised meditation. "Now this place", he said, "is as sacred as Vrindāvan."

In 1870 the Master went on a pilgrimage to Nadia, the birth-place of Sri Chaitanya. As the boat by which he travelled approached the sand-bank close to Nadia, Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of the "two brothers", Sri Chaitanya and his companion Nityānanda, "bright as molten gold" and with haloes, rushing to greet him with uplifted hands. "There they come! There they come!" he cried. They entered his body and he went into a deep trance.

Relation with His Wife

In 1872, Sāradā Devi paid her first visit to her husband at Dakshineśwar. Four years earlier she had seen him at Kāmārpukur and had tasted the bliss of his divine company. Since then she had become even more gentle, tender, introspective, serious, and unselfish. She had heard many rumours about her husband's insanity. People had shown her pity in her misfortune. The more she thought, the more she felt that her duty was to be with him, giving him, in whatever measure she could, a wife's devoted service. She was now eighteen years old. Accompanied by her father, she arrived at Dakshineśwar, having come on foot the distance of eighty miles. She had had an attack of fever on the way. When she arrived at the temple garden the Master said sorrowfully: "Ah! You have come too late. My Mathur is no longer here to look after you." Mathur had passed away the previous year.

The Master took up the duty of instructing his young wife, and this included everything from housekeeping to the Knowledge of Brahman. He taught her how to trim a lamp, how to behave toward people according to their differing temperaments, and how to conduct herself before visitors. He instructed her in the mysteries of spiritual life - prayer, meditation, japa, deep contemplation, and Samādhi. The first lesson that Sāradā Devi received was: "God is everybody's Beloved, just as the moon is dear to every child. Everyone has the same right to pray to Him. Out of His grace He reveals Himself to all who call upon Him. You too will see Him if you but pray to Him."

Totāpuri, coming to know of the Master's marriage, had once remarked: "What does it matter? He alone is firmly established in the Knowledge of Brahman who can adhere to his spirit of discrimination and renunciation even while living with his wife. He alone has attained the supreme illumination who can look on man and woman alike as Brahman. A man with the idea of sex may be a good aspirant, but he is still far from the goal." Sri Ramakrishna and his wife lived together at Dakshineśwar, but their minds always soared above the worldly plane. A few months after Sāradā Devi's arrival Sri Ramakrishna arranged, on an auspicious day, a special worship of Kāli, the Divine Mother. Instead of

an image of the Deity, he placed on the seat the living image, Sāradā Devi herself. The worshipper and the worshipped went into deep Samādhi and in the transcendental plane their souls were united. After several hours Sri Ramakrishna came down again to the relative plane, sang a hymn to the Great Goddess, and surrendered, at the feet of the living image, himself, his rosary, and the fruit of his life-long sādhanā. This is known in Tantra as the *Shodasi Puja*, the "Adoration of Woman". Sri Ramakrishna realized the significance of the great statement of the Upanishad: "O Lord, Thou art the woman, Thou art the man; Thou art the boy, Thou art the girl; Thou art the old, tottering on their crutches. Thou pervadest the universe in its multiple forms."

By his marriage Sri Ramakrishna admitted the great value of marriage in man's spiritual evolution, and by adhering to his monastic vows he demonstrated the imperative necessity of self-control, purity, and continence, in the realization of God. By his unique spiritual relationship with his wife he proved that husband and wife can live together as spiritual companions. Thus his life is a synthesis of the ways of life of the householder and the monk.

The "Ego" of the Master

In the nirvikalpa Samādhi Sri Ramakrishna had realized that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. By keeping his mind six months on the plane of the non-dual Brahman, he had attained to the state of the *Vijnani*, the Knower of Truth in a special and very rich sense, who sees Brahman not only in himself and in the transcendental Absolute, but in everything of the world. In this state of *Vijnāna*, sometimes, bereft of body-consciousness, he would regard himself as one with Brahman; sometimes, conscious of the dual world, he would regard himself as God's devotee, servant, or child. In order to enable the Master to work for the welfare of humanity, the Divine Mother had kept in him a trace of ego, which he described - according to his mood - as the "ego of Knowledge", the "ego of Devotion", the "ego of a child", or the "ego of a servant". In any case this ego of the Master, consumed by the fire of the Knowledge of Brahman, was an appearance only, like a burnt string. He often referred to this ego as the "ripe ego" in contrast with the ego of the bound soul, which he described as the "unripe" or "green" ego. The ego of the bound soul identifies itself with the body, relatives, possessions, and the world; but the "ripe ego", illumined by Divine Knowledge, knows the body, relatives, possessions, and the world to be unreal and establishes a relationship of love with God alone. Through this "ripe ego" Sri Ramakrishna dealt with the world and his wife. One day, while stroking his feet, Sāradā Devi asked the Master, "What do you think of me?" Quick came the answer: "The Mother who is worshipped in the temple is the mother who has given birth to my body and is now living in the Nahabat, and it is She again who is stroking my feet at this moment. Indeed, I always look on you as the personification of the Blissful Mother Kāli."

Sāradā Devi, in the company of her husband, had rare spiritual experiences. She said: "I have no words to describe my wonderful exaltation of spirit as I watched him in his different moods. Under the influence of divine emotion he would sometimes talk on abstruse subjects, sometimes laugh, sometimes weep, and sometimes become perfectly motionless in Samādhi. This would continue throughout the night. There was such an

extraordinary divine presence in him that now and then I would shake with fear and wonder how the night would pass. Months went by in this way. Then one day he discovered that I had to keep awake the whole night lest, during my sleep, he should go into Samādhi - for it might happen at any moment -, and so he asked me to sleep in the Nahabat."

Summary of the Master's Spiritual Experiences

We have now come to the end of Sri Ramakrishna's sādhana, the period of his spiritual discipline. As a result of his supersensuous experiences he reached certain conclusions regarding himself and spirituality in general. His conclusions about himself may be summarised as follows:

First, he was an Incarnation of God, a specially commissioned person, whose spiritual experiences were for the benefit of humanity. Whereas it takes an ordinary man a whole life's struggle to realize one or two phases of God, he had in a few years realized God in all His phases.

Second, he knew that he had always been a free soul, that the various disciplines through which he had passed were really not necessary for his own liberation but were solely for the benefit of others. Thus the terms liberation and bondage were not applicable to him. As long as there are beings who consider themselves bound, God must come down to earth as an Incarnation to free them from bondage, just as a magistrate must visit any part of his district in which there is trouble.

Third, he came to foresee the time of his death. His words with respect to this matter were literally fulfilled.

About spirituality in general the following were his conclusions :

First, he was firmly convinced that all religions are true, that every doctrinal system represents a path to God. He had followed all the main paths and all had led him to the same goal. He was the first religious prophet recorded in history to preach the harmony of religions.

Second, the three great systems of thought known as Dualism, Qualified Non-dualism, and Absolute Non-dualism - *Dvaita*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, and *Advaita* - he perceived to represent three stages in man's progress toward the Ultimate Reality. They were not contradictory but complementary and suited to different temperaments. For the ordinary man with strong attachment to the senses, a dualistic form of religion, prescribing a certain amount of material support, such as music and other symbols, is useful. A man of God-realization transcends the idea of worldly duties, but the ordinary mortal must perform his duties, striving to be unattached and to surrender the results to God. The mind can comprehend and describe the range of thought and experience up to the *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, and no further. The *Advaita*, the last word in spiritual experience, is something to be felt in Samādhi, for it transcends mind and speech. From the highest standpoint, the Absolute and Its manifestation are equally real - the Lord's Name, His

Abode, and the Lord Himself are of the same spiritual Essence. Everything is Spirit, the difference being only in form.

Third, Sri Ramakrishna realized the wish of the Divine Mother that through him She should found a new Order, consisting of those who would uphold the universal doctrines illustrated in his life.

Fourth, his spiritual insight told him that those who were having their last birth on the mortal plane of existence and those who had sincerely called on the Lord even once in their lives must come to him.

During this period Sri Ramakrishna suffered several bereavements. The first was the death of a nephew named, Akshay. After the young man's death Sri Ramakrishna said: "Akshay died before my very eyes. But it did not affect me in the least. I stood by and watched a man die. It was like a sword being drawn from its scabbard. I enjoyed the scene, and laughed and sang and danced over it. They removed the body and cremated it. But the next day as I stood there (pointing to the southeast verandah of his room), I felt a racking pain for the loss of Akshay, as if somebody were squeezing my heart like a wet towel. I wondered at it and thought that the Mother was teaching me a lesson. I was not much concerned even with my own body - much less with a relative. But if such was my pain at the loss of a nephew, how much more must be the grief of the householders at the loss of their near and dear ones!" In 1871 Mathur died, and some five years later Śambhu Mallick - who, after Mathur's passing away, had taken care of the Master's comfort. In 1873 died his elder brother Rāmeśwar, and in 1876, his beloved mother. These bereavements left their imprint on the tender human heart of Sri Ramakrishna albeit he had realized the immortality of the soul and the illusoriness of birth and death.

In March 1875, about a year before the death of his mother, the Master met Keshab Chandra Sen. The meeting was a momentous event for both Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab. Here the Master for the first time came into actual contact with a worthy representative of modern India.

Brāhmo Samāj

Keshab was the leader of the Brāhmo Samāj, one of the two great movements that, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, played an important part in shaping the course of the renascence of India. The founder of the Brāhmo movement had been the great Rājā Rāmmohan Roy (1774-1833). Though born in an orthodox brāhmin family, Rāmmohan Roy had shown great sympathy for Islam and Christianity. He had gone to Tibet in search of the Buddhist mysteries. He had extracted from Christianity its ethical system, but had rejected the divinity of Christ as he had denied the Hindu Incarnations. The religion of Islam influenced him, to a great extent, in the formulation of his monotheistic doctrines. But he always went back to the Vedas for his spiritual inspiration. The Brāhmo Samāj, which he founded in 1828, was dedicated to the "worship and adoration of the Eternal, the Unsearchable, the Immutable Being, who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe". The Samāj was open to all without distinction of colour, creed, caste, nation, or religion.

The real organizer of the Samāj was Devendranāth Tāgore (1817-1905), the father of the poet Rabindranāth. His physical and spiritual beauty, aristocratic aloofness, penetrating intellect, and poetic sensibility made him the foremost leader of the educated Bengālis. These addressed him by the respectful epithet of *Maharshi*, the "Great Seer". The Maharshi was a Sanskrit scholar and, unlike Rājā Rāmmohan Roy, drew his inspiration entirely from the Upanishads. He was an implacable enemy of image worship and also fought to stop the infiltration of Christian ideas into the Samāj. He gave the movement its faith and ritual. Under his influence the Brāhmo Samāj professed One Self-existent Supreme Being who had created the universe out of nothing, the God of Truth, Infinite Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, the Eternal and Omnipotent, the One without a Second. Man should love Him and do His will, believe in Him and worship Him, and thus merit salvation in the world to come.

By far the ablest leader of the Brāhmo movement was Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884). Unlike Rājā Rāmmohan Roy and Devendranāth Tāgore, Keshab was born of a middle-class Bengāli family and had been brought up in an English school. He did not know Sanskrit and very soon broke away from the popular Hindu religion. Even at an early age he came under the spell of Christ and professed to have experienced the special favour of John the Baptist, Christ, and St. Paul. When he strove to introduce Christ to the Brāhmo Samāj, a rupture became inevitable with Devendranāth. In 1868 Keshab broke with the older leader and founded the Brāhmo Samāj of India, Devendra retaining leadership of the first Brāhmo Samāj, now called the Ādi Samāj.

Keshab possessed a complex nature. When passing through a great moral crisis, he spent much of his time in solitude and felt that he heard the voice of God. When a devotional form of worship was introduced into the Brāhmo Samāj, he spent hours in singing kirtan with his followers. He visited England in 1870 and impressed the English people with his musical voice, his simple English, and his spiritual fervour. He was entertained by Queen Victoria. Returning to India, he founded centres of the Brāhmo Samāj in various parts of the country. Not unlike a professor of comparative religion in a European university, he began to discover, about the time of his first contact with Sri Ramakrishna, the harmony of religions. He became sympathetic toward the Hindu gods and goddesses, explaining them in a liberal fashion. Further, he believed that he was called by God to dictate to the world God's newly revealed law, the New Dispensation, the **Nava-vidhān**.

In 1878 a schism divided Keshab's Samāj. Some of his influential followers accused him of infringing the Brāhmo principles by marrying his daughter to a wealthy man before she had attained the marriageable age approved by the Samāj. This group seceded and established the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj, Keshab remaining the leader of the Navavidhān. Keshab now began to be drawn more and more toward the Christ ideal, though under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna his devotion to the Divine Mother also deepened. His mental oscillation between Christ and the Divine Mother of Hinduism found no position of rest. In Bengāl and some other parts of India the Brāhmo movement took the form of Unitarian Christianity, scoffed at Hindu rituals, and preached a crusade against image worship. Influenced by Western culture, it declared the

supremacy of reason, advocated the ideals of the French Revolution, abolished the caste-system among, its own members, stood for the emancipation of women, agitate for the abolition of early marriage, sanctioned the remarriage of widows, and encouraged various educational and social-reform movements. The immediate effect of the Brāhmo movement in Bengāl was the checking of the proselytising activities of the Christian missionaries. It also raised Indian culture in the estimation of its English masters. But it was an intellectual and eclectic religious ferment born of the necessity of the time. Unlike Hinduism, it was not founded on the deep inner experiences of sages and prophets. Its influence was confined to a comparatively few educated men and women of the country, and the vast masses of the Hindus remained outside it. It sounded monotonously only one of the notes in the rich gamut of the Eternal Religion of the Hindus.

Ārya Samāj

The other movement playing an important part in the nineteenth-century religious revival of India was the Ārya Samāj. The Brāhmo Samāj, essentially a movement of compromise with European culture, tacitly admitted the superiority of the West. But the founder of the Ārya Samāj was a pugnacious Hindu sannyāsi who accepted the challenge of Islam and Christianity and was resolved to combat all foreign influence in India. Swāmi Dayānanda (1824-1883) launched this movement in Bombay in 1875, and soon its influence was felt throughout western India. The Swāmi was a great scholar of the Vedas, which he explained as being strictly mono-theistic. He preached against the worship of images and re-established the ancient Vedic sacrificial rites. According to him the Vedas were the ultimate authority on religion, and he accepted every word of them as literally true. The Ārya Samāj became a bulwark against the encroachments of Islam and Christianity, and its orthodox flavour appealed to many Hindu minds. It also assumed leadership in many movements of social reform. The caste-system became a target of its attack. Women it liberated from many of their social disabilities. The cause of education received from it a great impetus. It started agitation against early marriage and advocated the remarriage of Hindu widows. Its influence was strongest in the Punjab, the battle-ground of the Hindu and Islamic cultures. A new fighting attitude was introduced into the slumbering Hindu society. Unlike the Brāhmo Samāj, the influence of the Ārya Samāj was not confined to the intellectuals. It was a force that spread to the masses. It was a dogmatic movement intolerant of those disagreed with its views, and it emphasized only one way, the Ārya Samāj way, to the realization of Truth. Sri Ramakrishna met Swāmi Dayānanda when the latter visited Bengāl.

Keshab Chandra Sen

Keshab Chandra Sen and Sri Ramakrishna met for the first time in the garden house of Jaygopāl Sen at Belgharia, a few miles from Dakshinēśwar, where the great Brāhmo leader was staying with some of his disciples. In many respects the two were poles apart, though an irresistible inner attraction was to make them intimate friends. The Master had realized God as Pure Spirit and Consciousness, but he believed in the various forms of God as well. Keshab, on the other hand, regarded image worship as idolatry and gave allegorical explanations of the Hindu deities. Keshab was an orator and a writer of books and magazine articles; Sri Ramakrishna had a horror of lecturing and hardly

knew how to write his own name. Keshab's fame spread far and wide, even reaching the distant shores of England; the Master still led a secluded life in the village of Dakshineśwar. Keshab emphasized social reforms for India's regeneration; to Sri Ramakrishna God-realization was the only goal of life. Keshab considered himself a disciple of Christ and accepted in a diluted form the Christian sacraments and Trinity; Sri Ramakrishna was the simple child of Kāli, the Divine Mother, though he too, in a different way, acknowledged Christ's divinity. Keshab was a house-holder and took a real interest in the welfare of his children, whereas Sri Ramakrishna was a paramahansa and completely indifferent to the life of the world. Yet, as their acquaintance ripened into friendship, Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab held each other in great love and respect. Years later, at the news of Keshab's death, the Master felt as if half his body had become paralysed. Keshab's concepts of the harmony of religions and the Motherhood of God were deepened and enriched by his contact with Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna, dressed in a red-bordered dhoti, one end of which was carelessly thrown over his left shoulder, came to Jaygopal's garden house accompanied by Hriday. No one took notice of the unostentatious visitor. Finally the Master said to Keshab, "People tell me you have seen God; so I have come to hear from you about God." A magnificent conversation followed. The Master sang a thrilling song about Kāli and forthwith went into Samādhi. When Hriday uttered the sacred "Om" in his ears, he gradually came back to consciousness of the world, his face still radiating a divine brilliance. Keshab and his followers were amazed. The contrast between Sri Ramakrishna and the Brāhmo devotees was very interesting. There sat this small man, thin and extremely delicate. His eyes were illumined with an inner light. Good humour gleamed in his eyes and lurked in the corners of his mouth. His speech was Bengāli of a homely kind with a slight, delightful stammer, and his words held men enthralled by their wealth of spiritual experience, their inexhaustible store of simile and metaphor, their power of observation, their bright and subtle humour, their wonderful catholicity, their ceaseless flow of wisdom. And around him now were the sophisticated men of Bengāl, the best products of Western education, with Keshab, the idol of young Bengāl, as their leader.

Keshab's sincerity was enough for Sri Ramakrishna. Henceforth the two saw each other frequently, either at Dakshineśwar or at the temple of the Brāhmo Samāj. Whenever the Master was in the temple at the time of divine service, Keshab would request him to speak to the congregation. And Keshab would visit the saint, in his turn, with offerings of flowers and fruits.

Other Brāhmo Leaders

Gradually other Brāhmo leaders began to feel Sri Ramakrishna's influence. But they were by no means uncritical admirers of the Master. They particularly disapproved of his ascetic renunciation and condemnation of, "woman and gold".⁷ They measured him according to their own ideals of the householder's life. Some could not understand his Samādhi and described it as a nervous malady. Yet they could not resist his magnetic personality.

Among the Brāhmo leaders who knew the Master closely were Pratāp Chandra Mazumdār, Vijay Krishna Goswāmi, Trailokyanāth Sannyāl and Śivanāth Śāstri.

Śivanāth, one day, was greatly impressed by the Master's utter simplicity and abhorrence of praise. He was seated with Sri Ramakrishna in the latter's room when several rich men of Calcutta arrived. The Master left the room for a few minutes. In the mean time Hriday, his nephew, began to describe his Samādhi to the visitors. The last few words caught the Master's ear as he entered the room. He said to Hriday: "What a mean-spirited fellow you must be to extol me thus before these rich men! You have seen their costly apparel and their gold watches and chains, and your object is to get from them as much money as you can. What do I care about what they think of me? (Turning to the gentlemen) No, my friends, what he has told you about me is not true. It was not love of God that made me absorbed in God and indifferent to external life. I became positively insane for some time. The *sādhus* who frequented this temple told me to practise many things. I tried to follow them, and the consequence was that my austerities drove me to insanity." This is a quotation from one of Śivanāth's books. He took the Master's words literally and failed to see their real import.

Śivanāth vehemently criticized the Master for his other-worldly attitude toward his wife. He writes: "Ramakrishna was practically separated from his wife, who lived in her village home. One day when I was complaining to some friends about the virtual widowhood of his wife, he drew me to one side and whispered in my ear: 'Why do you complain? It is no longer possible; it is all dead and gone.' Another day as I was inveighing against this part of his teaching, and also declaring that our program of work in the Brāhmo Samāj includes women, that ours is a social and domestic religion, and that we want to give education and social liberty to women, the saint became very much excited, as was his way when anything against his settled conviction was asserted - a trait we so much liked in him - and exclaimed, 'Go, thou fool, go and perish in the pit that your women will dig for you.' Then he glared at me and said: 'What does a gardener do with a young plant? Does he not surround it with a fence, to protect it from goats and cattle? And when the young plant has grown up into a tree and it can no longer be injured by cattle, does he not remove the fence and let the tree grow freely?' I replied, 'Yes, that is the custom with gardeners.' Then he remarked, 'Do the same in your spiritual life; become strong, be full-grown; then you may seek them.' To which I replied, 'I don't agree with you in thinking that women's work is like that of cattle, destructive; they are our associates and helpers in our spiritual struggles and social progress' - a view with which he could not agree, and he marked his dissent by shaking his head. Then referring to the lateness of the hour he jocularly remarked, 'It is time for you to depart; take care, do not be late; otherwise your woman will not admit you into her room.' This evoked hearty laughter."

Pratāp Chandra Mazumdār, the right-hand man of Keshab and an accomplished Brāhmo preacher in Europe and America, bitterly criticized Sri Ramakrishna's use of uncultured language and also his austere attitude toward his wife. But he could not escape the spell of the Master's personality. In the course of an article about Sri Ramakrishna, Pratāp wrote in the "Theistic Quarterly Review": "What is there in common between him and me? I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centered, semi-sceptical, so-called educated

reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I, who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines? ... And it is not I only, but dozens like me, who do the same. ... He worships Śiva, he worships Kāli, he worships Rāmā, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedāntic doctrines. ... He is an idolater, yet is a faithful and most devoted Meditator on the perfections of the One Formless, Absolute, Infinite Deity. ... His religion is ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night with a permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling. ... So long as he is spared to us, gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity, unworldliness, spirituality, and inebriation in the love of God. ... He, by his childlike bhakti, by his strong conceptions of an ever-ready Motherhood, helped to unfold it [God as our Mother] in our minds wonderfully. ... By associating with him we learnt to realize better the divine attributes as scattered over the three hundred and thirty millions of deities of mythological India, the gods of the Purānās."

The Brāhmo leaders received much inspiration from their contact with Sri Ramakrishna. It broadened their religious views and kindled in their hearts the yearning for God-realization; it made them understand and appreciate the rituals and symbols of Hindu religion, convinced them of the manifestation of God in diverse forms, and deepened their thoughts about the harmony of religions. The Master, too, was impressed by the sincerity of many of the, Brāhmo devotees. He told them about his own realizations and explained to them the essence of his teachings, such as the necessity of renunciation, sincerity in the pursuit of one's own course of discipline, faith in God, the performance of one's duties without thought of results, and discrimination between the Real and the unreal.

This contact with the educated and progressive Bengālis opened Sri Ramakrishna's eyes to a new realm of thought. Born and brought up in a simple village, without any formal education, and taught by the orthodox holy men of India in religious life, he had had no opportunity to study the influence of modernism on the thoughts and lives of the Hindus. He could not properly estimate the result of the impact of Western education on Indian culture. He was a Hindu of the Hindus, renunciation being to him the only means to the realization of God in life. From the Brahmos he learnt that the new generation of India made a compromise between God and the world. Educated young men were influenced more by the Western philosophers than by their own prophets. But Sri Ramakrishna was not dismayed, for he saw in this, too, the hand of God. And though he expounded to the Brahmos all his ideas about God and austere religious disciplines, yet he bade them accept from his teachings only as much as suited their tastes and temperaments.

The Master's Yearning for His Own Devotees

Contact with the Brahmos increased Sri Ramakrishna's longing to encounter aspirants who would be able to follow his teachings in their purest form. "There was no limit", he once declared, "to the longing I felt at that time. During the day-time I somehow managed to control it. The secular talk of the worldly-minded was galling to me, and I would look wistfully to the day when my own beloved companions would come. I hoped

to find solace in conversing with them and relating to them my own realizations. Every little incident would remind me of them, and thoughts of them wholly engrossed me. I was already arranging in my mind what I should say to one and give to another, and so on. But when the day would come to a close I would not be able to curb my feelings. The thought that another day had gone by, and they had not come, oppressed me. When, during the evening service, the temples rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells, I would climb to the roof of the *Kuthi* in the garden and, writhing in anguish of heart, cry at the top of my voice: 'Come, my children! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you.' A mother never longed so intensely for the sight of her child, nor a friend for his companions, nor a lover for his sweetheart, as I longed for them. Oh, it was indescribable! Shortly after this period of yearning the devotees began to come."

In the year 1879 occasional writings about Sri Ramakrishna by the Brahmos, in the Brāhmo magazines, began to attract his future disciples from the educated middle-class Bengālis, and they continued to come till 1884. But others, too, came, feeling the subtle power of his attraction. They were an ever shifting crowd of people of all castes and creeds: Hindus and Brahmos, Vaishnavas and Śāktās, the educated with university degrees and the illiterate, old and young, maharajas and beggars, journalists and artists, pundits and devotees, philosophers and the worldly-minded, jnānis and yogis, men of action and men of faith, virtuous women and prostitutes, office-holders and vagabonds, philanthropists and self-seekers, dramatists and drunkards, builders-up and pullers-down. He gave to them all, without stint, from his illimitable store of realization. No one went away empty-handed. He taught them the lofty knowledge of the Vedānta and the soul-melting love of the Purānā. Twenty hours out of twenty-four he would speak without rest or respite. He gave to all his sympathy and enlightenment, and he touched them with that strange power of the soul which could not but melt even the most hardened. And people understood him according to their powers of comprehension.

The Master's Method of Teaching

But he remained as ever the willing instrument in the hand of God, the child of the Divine Mother, totally untouched by the idea of being a teacher. He used to say that three ideas - that he was a guru, a father, and a master - pricked his flesh like thorns. Yet he was an extraordinary teacher. He stirred his disciples' hearts more by a subtle influence than by actions or words. He never claimed to be the founder of a religion or the organizer of a sect. Yet he was a religious dynamo. He was the verifier of all religions and creeds. He was like an expert gardener, who prepares the soil and removes the weeds, knowing that the plants will grow because of the inherent power of the seeds, producing each its appropriate flowers and fruits. He never thrust his ideas on anybody. He understood people's limitations and worked on the principle that what is good for one may be bad for another. He had the unusual power of knowing the devotees' minds, even their inmost souls, at the first sight. He accepted disciples with the full knowledge of their past tendencies and future possibilities. The life of evil did not frighten him, nor did religious squeamishness raise anybody in his estimation. He saw in everything the unerring finger of the Divine Mother. Even the light that leads astray was to him the light from God.

To those who became his intimate disciples the Master was a friend, companion, and playmate. Even the chores of religious discipline would be lightened in his presence. The devotees would be so inebriated with pure joy in his company that they would have no time to ask themselves whether he was an Incarnation, a perfect soul, or a yogi. His very presence was a great teaching; words were superfluous. In later years his disciples remarked that while they were with him they would regard him as a comrade, but afterwards would tremble to think of their frivolities in the presence of such a great person. They had convincing proof that the Master could, by his mere wish, kindle in their hearts the love of God and give them His vision.

Through all this fun and frolic, this merriment and frivolity, he always kept before them the shining ideal of God-Consciousness and the path of renunciation. He prescribed ascents steep or graded according to the powers of the climber. He permitted no compromise with the basic principles of purity. An aspirant had to keep his body, mind, senses, and soul unspotted; had to have a sincere love for God and an ever mounting spirit of yearning. The rest would be done by the Mother.

His disciples were of two kinds: the householders, and the young men, some of whom were later to become monks. There was also a small group of women devotees.

House Holder Devotees

For the householders Sri Ramakrishna did not prescribe the hard path of total renunciation. He wanted them to discharge their obligations to their families. Their renunciation was to be mental. Spiritual life could not be acquired by flying away from responsibilities. A married couple should live like brother and sister after the birth of one or two children, devoting their time to spiritual talk and contemplation. He encouraged the householders, saying that their life was, in a way, easier than that of the monk, since it was more advantageous to fight the enemy from inside a fortress than in an open field. He insisted, however, on their repairing into solitude every now and then to strengthen their devotion and faith in God through prayer, japa, and meditation. He prescribed for them the companionship of *sādhus*. He asked them to perform their worldly duties with one hand, while holding to God with the other, and to pray to God to make their duties fewer and fewer so that in the end they might cling to Him with both hands. He would discourage in both the householders and the celibate youths any lukewarmness in their spiritual struggles. He would not ask them to follow indiscriminately the ideal of non-resistance, which ultimately makes a coward of the unwary.

Future Monks

But to the young men destined to be monks he pointed out the steep path of renunciation, both external and internal. They must take the vow of absolute continence and eschew all thought of greed and lust. By the practice of continence, aspirants develop a subtle nerve through which they understand the deeper mysteries of God. For them self-control is final, imperative, and absolute. The sannyāsīs are teachers of men, and their lives should be totally free from blemish. They must not even look at a picture which may awaken their animal passions. The Master selected his future monks from

young men untouched by "woman and gold" and plastic enough to be cast in his spiritual mould. When teaching them the path of renunciation and discrimination, he would not allow the householders to be any where near them.

Rām and Manomohan

The first two householder devotees to come to Dakshineśwar were Rām Chandra Dutta and Manomohan Mitra. A medical practitioner and chemist, Rām was sceptical about God and religion and never enjoyed peace of soul. He wanted tangible proof of God's existence. The Master said to him: "God really exists. You don't see the stars in the day-time, but that doesn't mean that the stars do not exist. There is butter in milk. But can anybody see it by merely looking at the milk? To get butter you must churn milk in a quiet and cool place. You cannot realize God by a mere wish; you must go through some mental disciplines." By degrees the Master awakened Rām's spirituality and the latter became one of his foremost lay disciples. It was Rām who introduced Narendranāth to Sri Ramakrishna. Narendra was a relative of Rām.

Manomohan at first met with considerable opposition from his wife and other relatives, who resented his visits to Dakshineśwar. But in the end the unselfish love of the Master triumphed over worldly affection. It was Manomohan who brought Rākhāl to the Master.

Surendra

Suresh Mitra, a beloved disciple whom the Master often addressed as Surendra, had received an English education and held an important post in an English firm. Like many other educated young men of the time, he prided himself on his atheism and led a Bohemian life. He was addicted to drinking. He cherished an exaggerated notion about man's free will. A victim of mental depression, he was brought to Sri Ramakrishna by Rāmchandra Dutta. When he heard the Master asking a disciple to practise the virtue of self-surrender to God, he was impressed. But though he tried thenceforth to do so, he was unable to give up his old associates and his drinking. One day the Master said in his presence, "Well, when a man goes to an undesirable place, why doesn't he take the Divine Mother with him?" And to Surendra himself Sri Ramakrishna said: "Why should you drink wine as wine? Offer it to Kāli, and then take it as Her *Prasād*, as consecrated drink. But see that you don't, become intoxicated; you must not reel and your thoughts must not wander. At first you will feel ordinary excitement, but soon you will experience spiritual exaltation." Gradually Surendra's entire life was changed. The Master designated him as one of those commissioned by the Divine Mother to defray a great part of his expenses. Surendra's purse was always open for the Master's comfort.

Kedār

Kedarnāth Chatterji was endowed with a spiritual temperament and had tried various paths of religion, some not very commendable. When he met the Master at Dakshineśwar he understood the true meaning of religion. It is said that the Master, weary of instructing devotees who were coming to him in great numbers for guidance, once prayed to the Goddess Kāli: "Mother, I am tired of speaking to people. Please give power to Kedār, Girish, Rām, Vijay, and Mahendra to give them the preliminary instruction, so that just a little teaching from me will be enough." He was aware,

however, of Kedār's lingering attachment to worldly things and often warned him about it.

Harish

Harish, a young man in affluent circumstances, renounced his family and took shelter with the Master, who loved him for his sincerity, singleness of purpose, and quiet nature. He spent his leisure time in prayer and meditation, turning a deaf ear to the entreaties and threats of his relatives. Referring to his undisturbed peace of mind, the Master would say: "Real men are dead to the world though, living. Look at Harish. He is an example." When one day the Master asked him to be a little kind to his wife, Harish said: "You must excuse me on this point. This is not the place to show kindness. If I try to be sympathetic to her, there is a possibility of my forgetting the ideal and becoming entangled in the world."

Bhavanāth

Bhavanāth Chatterji visited the Master while he was still in his teens. His parents and relatives regarded Sri Ramakrishna as an insane person and tried their utmost to prevent him from becoming intimate with the Master. But the young boy was very stubborn and often spent nights at Dakshineśwar. He was greatly attached to Narendra, and the Master encouraged their friendship. The very sight of him often awakened Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual emotion.

Balarām Bose

Balarām Bose came of a wealthy Vaishnava family. From his youth he had shown a deep religious temperament and had devoted his time to meditation, prayer, and the study of the Vaishnava scriptures. He was very much impressed by Sri Ramakrishna even at their first meeting. He asked Sri Ramakrishna whether God really existed and, if so, whether a man could realize Him. The Master said: "God reveals Himself to the devotee who thinks of Him as his nearest and dearest. Because you do not draw response by praying to Him once, you must not conclude that He does not exist. Pray to God, thinking of Him as dearer than your very self. He is much attached to His devotees. He comes to a man even before He is sought. There is none more intimate and affectionate than God." Balarām had never before heard God spoken of in such forceful words; every one of the words seemed true to him. Under the Master's influence he outgrew the conventions of the Vaishnava worship and became one of the most beloved of the disciples. It was at his home that the Master slept whenever he spent a night in Calcutta.

Mahendra or M.

Mahendranāth Gupta, known as "M.", arrived at Dakshineśwar in February 1882. He belonged to the Brāhmo Samāj and was headmaster of the Vidyāsāgar High School at Śyāmbazār, Calcutta. At the very first sight the Master recognized him as one of his "marked" disciples. Mahendra recorded in his diary Sri Ramakrishna's conversations with his devotees. These are the first directly recorded words, in the spiritual history of the world, of a man recognized as belonging in the class of Buddha and Christ. The present volume is a translation of this diary. Mahendra was instrumental, through his personal contacts, in spreading the Master's message among many young and aspiring souls.

Nāg Mahāshay

Durgācharan Nāg, also known as Nāg Mahāshay, was the ideal householder among the lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He was the embodiment of the Master's ideal of life in the world, unstained by worldliness. In spite of his intense desire to become a sannyāsi, Sri Ramakrishna asked him to live in the world in the spirit of a monk, and the disciple truly carried out this injunction. He was born of a poor family and even during his boyhood often sacrificed everything to lessen the sufferings of the needy. He had married at an early age and after his wife's death had married a second time to obey his father's command. But he once said to his wife: "Love on the physical level never lasts. He is indeed blessed who can give his love to God with his whole heart. Even a little attachment to the body endures for several births. So do not be attached to this cage of bone and flesh. Take shelter at the feet of the Mother and think of Her alone. Thus your life here and hereafter will be ennobled." The Master spoke of him as a "blazing light". He received every word of Sri Ramakrishna in dead earnest. One day he heard the Master saying that it was difficult for doctors, lawyers, and brokers to make much progress in spirituality. Of doctors he said, "If the mind clings to the tiny drops of medicine, how can it conceive of the Infinite?" That was the end of Durgācharan's medical practice and he threw his chest of medicines into the Ganges. Sri Ramakrishna assured him that he would not lack simple food and clothing. He bade him serve holy men. On being asked where he would find real holy men, the Master said that the *sādhus* themselves would seek his company. No sannyāsi could have lived a more austere life than Durgācharan.

Girish Ghosh

Girish Chandra Ghosh was a born rebel against God, a sceptic, a Bohemian, a drunkard. He was the greatest Bengāli dramatist of his time, the father of the modern Bengāli stage. Like other young men he had imbibed all the vices of the West. He had plunged into a life of dissipation and had become convinced that religion was only a fraud. Materialistic philosophy he justified as enabling one to get at least a little fun out of life. But a series of reverses shocked him and he became eager to solve the riddle of life. He had heard people say that in spiritual life the help of a guru was imperative and that the guru was to be regarded as God Himself. But Girish was too well acquainted with human nature to see perfection in a man. His first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna did not impress him at all. He returned home feeling as if he had seen a freak at a circus; for the Master, in a semi-conscious mood, had inquired whether it was evening, though the lamps were burning in the room. But their paths often crossed, and Girish could not avoid further encounters. The Master attended a performance in Girish's Star Theatre. On this occasion, too, Girish found nothing impressive about him. One day, however, Girish happened to see the Master dancing and singing with the devotees. He felt the contagion and wanted to join them, but restrained himself for fear of ridicule. Another day Sri Ramakrishna was about to give him spiritual instruction, when Girish said: "I don't want to listen to instructions. I have myself written many instructions. They are of no use to me. Please help me in a more tangible way if you can." This pleased the Master and he asked Girish to cultivate faith.

As time passed, Girish began to learn that the guru is the one who silently unfolds the disciple's inner life. He became a steadfast devotee of the Master.

He often loaded the Master with insults, drank in his presence, and took liberties which astounded the other devotees. But the Master knew that at heart Girish was tender, faithful, and sincere. He would not allow Girish to give up the theatre. And when a devotee asked him to tell Girish to give up drinking, he sternly replied: "That is none of your business. He who has taken charge of him will look after him. Girish is a devotee of heroic type. I tell you, drinking will not affect him." The Master knew that mere words could not induce a man to break deep-rooted habits, but that the silent influence of love worked miracles. Therefore he never asked him to give up alcohol, with the result that Girish himself eventually broke the habit. Sri Ramakrishna had strengthened Girish's resolution by allowing him to feel that he was absolutely free.

One day Girish felt depressed because he was unable to submit to any routine of spiritual discipline. In an exalted mood the Master said to him: "All right, give me your power of attorney. Henceforth I assume responsibility for you. You need not do anything." Girish heaved a sigh of relief. He felt happy to think that Sri Ramakrishna had assumed his spiritual responsibilities. But poor Girish could not then realize that he also, on his part, had to give up his freedom and make of himself a puppet in Sri Ramakrishna's hands. The Master began to discipline him according to this new attitude. One day Girish said about a trifling matter, "Yes, I shall do this." "No, no!" the Master corrected him. "You must not speak in that egotistic manner. You should say, 'God willing, I shall do it'." Girish understood. Thenceforth he tried to give up all idea of personal responsibility and surrender himself to the Divine Will. His mind began to dwell constantly on Sri Ramakrishna. This unconscious meditation in time chastened his turbulent spirit.

The householder devotees generally visited Sri Ramakrishna on Sunday afternoons and other holidays. Thus a brotherhood was gradually formed, and the Master encouraged their fraternal feeling. Now and then he would accept an invitation to a devotee's home, where other devotees would also be invited. Kirtan would be arranged and they would spend hours in dance and devotional music. The Master would go into trances or open his heart in religious discourses and in the narration of his own spiritual experiences. Many people who could not go to Dakshineśwar participated in these meetings and felt blessed. Such an occasion would be concluded with a sumptuous feast.

But it was in the company of his younger devotees, pure souls yet unstained by the touch of worldliness, that Sri Ramakrishna took greatest joy. Among the young men who later embraced the householder's life were Nārāyan, Paltu, the younger Naren, Tejchandra and Purna. These visited the Master sometimes against strong opposition from home.

Purna

Purna was a lad of thirteen, whom Sri Ramakrishna described as an *Īśvarakoti*, a soul born with special spiritual qualities. The Master said that Purna was the last of the group

of brilliant devotees who, as he once had seen in a trance, would come to him for spiritual illumination. Purna said to Sri Ramakrishna during their second meeting, "You are God Himself incarnated in flesh and blood." Such words coming from a mere youngster proved of what stuff the boy was made.

Mahimācharan and Pratāp Hazra

Mahimācharan and Pratāp Hazra were two devotees outstanding for their pretentiousness and idiosyncrasies. But the Master showed them his unfailing love and kindness, though he was aware of their shortcomings. Mahimācharan Chakravarty had met the Master long before the arrival of the other disciples. He had had the intention of leading a spiritual life, but a strong desire to acquire name and fame was his weakness. He claimed to have been initiated by Totāpuri and used to say that he had been following the path of knowledge according to his guru's instructions. He possessed a large library of English and Sanskrit books. But though he pretended to have read them, most of the leaves were uncut. The Master knew all his limitations, yet enjoyed listening to him recite from the Vedas and other scriptures. He would always exhort Mahimā to meditate on the meaning of the scriptural texts and to practise spiritual discipline.

Pratāp Hazra, a middle-aged man, hailed from a village near Kāmārpukur. He was not altogether unresponsive to religious feelings. On a moment's impulse he had left his home, aged mother, wife, and children, and had found shelter in the temple garden at Dakshineśwar, where he intended to lead a spiritual life. He loved to argue, and the Master often pointed him out as an example of barren argumentation. He was hypercritical of others and cherished an exaggerated notion of his own spiritual advancement. He was mischievous and often tried to upset the minds of the Master's young disciples, criticizing them for their happy and joyous life and asking them to devote their time to meditation. The Master teasingly compared Hazra to Jatila and Kutila, the two women who always created obstructions in Krishna's sport with the gopis, and said that Hazra lived at Dakshineśwar to "thicken the plot" by adding complications.

Some noted Men

Sri Ramakrishna also became acquainted with a number of people whose scholarship or wealth entitled them everywhere to respect. He had met, a few years before, **Devendranāth Tāgore**, famous all over Bengāl for his wealth, scholarship, saintly character, and social position. But the Master found him disappointing; for, whereas Sri Ramakrishna expected of a saint complete renunciation of the world, Devendranāth combined with his saintliness a life of enjoyment. Sri Ramakrishna met the great poet **Michael Madhusudan**, who had embraced Christianity "for the sake of his stomach". To him the Master could not impart instruction, for the Divine Mother "pressed his tongue". In addition he met **Mahārāja Jatindra Mohan Tāgore**, a titled aristocrat of Bengāl; **Kristodās Pāl**, the editor, social reformer, and patriot; **Iswar Chandra Vidyāsāgar**, the noted philanthropist and educator; **Pundit Śāśadhar**, a great champion of Hindu orthodoxy; **Aświni Kumār Dutta**, a headmaster, moralist, and leader of Indian Nationalism; and **Bankim Chatterji**, a deputy magistrate, novelist, and essayist, and one of the fashioners of modern Bengālī prose. Sri Ramakrishna was not the man to be dazzled by outward show, glory, or eloquence. A pundit without discrimination he

regarded as a mere straw. He would search people's hearts for the light of God, and if that was missing, he would have nothing to do with them.

Kristodās Pāl

The Europeanized Kristodās Pāl did not approve of the Master's emphasis on renunciation and said: "Sir, this cant of renunciation has almost ruined the country. It is for this reason that the Indians are a subject nation today. Doing good to others, bringing education to the door of the ignorant, and above all, improving the material conditions of the country - these should be our duty now. The cry of religion and renunciation would, on the contrary, only weaken us. You should advise the young men of Bengāl to resort only to such acts as will uplift the country." Sri Ramakrishna gave him a searching look and found no divine light within. "You man of poor understanding!" Sri Ramakrishna said sharply. "You dare to slight in these terms renunciation and piety, which our scriptures describe as the greatest of all virtues! After reading two pages of English you think you have come to know the world! You appear to think you are omniscient. Well, have you seen those tiny crabs that are born in the Ganges just when the rains set in? In this big universe you are even less significant than one of those small creatures. How dare you talk of helping the world? The Lord will look to that. You haven't the power in you to do it." After a pause the Master continued: "Can you explain to me how you can work for others? I know what you mean by helping them. To feed a number of persons, to treat them when they are sick, to construct a road or dig a well - Isn't that all? These are good deeds, no doubt, but how trifling in comparison with the vastness of the universe! How far can a man advance in this line? How many people can you save from famine? Malaria has ruined a whole province; what could you do to stop its onslaught? God alone looks after the world. Let a man first realize Him. Let a man get the authority from God and be endowed with His power; then, and then alone, may he think of doing good to others. A man should first be purged of all egotism. Then alone will the Blissful Mother ask him to work for the world." Sri Ramakrishna mistrusted philanthropy that presumed to pose as charity. He warned people against it. He saw in most acts of philanthropy nothing but egotism, vanity, a desire for glory, a barren excitement to kill the boredom of life, or an attempt to soothe a guilty conscience. True charity, he taught, is the result of love of God - service to man in a spirit of worship.

Monastic Disciples

The disciples whom the Master trained for monastic life were the following:

1. Narendranāth Dutta (Swāmi Vivekānanda)
2. Nitya Niranjana Sen (Swāmi Niranjānānanda)
3. Rākhāl Chandra Ghosh (Swāmi Brahmānanda)
4. Kāliprasād Chandra (Swāmi Abhedānanda)
5. Gopāl Chandra Ghosh (Swāmi Advaitānanda)
6. Harināth Chattopādhyāya (Swāmi Turīyānanda)
7. Bāburām Ghosh (Swāmi Premānanda)
8. Sāradā Prasanna (Swāmi Trigunātītānanda)
9. Tāraknāth Ghoshāl (Swāmi Shivānanda)
10. Gangādhara Ghatak (Swāmi Akhandānanda)
11. Jogindranāth Choudhury (Swāmi Yogānanda)

12. Subodh Ghosh (Swāmi Subodhānanda)
13. Śashibhushan Chakravarty (Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda)
14. Śaratchandra Chakravarty (Swāmi Sāradānanda)
15. Hariprasanna Chatterji (Swāmi Vijnānānanda)
16. Lātu (Swāmi Adhhutānanda)

Lātu

The first of these young men to come to the Master was Lātu. Born of obscure parents, in Behar, he came to Calcutta in search of work and was engaged by Rāmchandra Dutta as house-boy. Learning of the saintly Sri Ramakrishna, he visited the Master at Dakshineśwar and was deeply touched by his cordiality. When he was about to leave, the Master asked him to take some money and return home in a boat or carriage. But Lātu declared he had a few pennies and jingled the coins in his pocket. Sri Ramakrishna later requested Rām to allow Lātu to stay with him permanently. Under Sri Ramakrishna's guidance Lātu made great progress in meditation and was blessed with ecstatic visions, but all the efforts of the Master to give him a smattering of education failed. Lātu was very fond of kirtan and other devotional songs but remained all his life illiterate.

Rākhāl

Even before Rākhāl's coming to Dakshineśwar, the Master had had visions of him as his spiritual son and as a playmate of Krishna at Vrindāvan. Rākhāl was born of wealthy parents. During his childhood he developed wonderful spiritual traits and used to play at worshipping gods and goddesses. In his teens he was married to a sister of Manomohan Mitra, from whom he first heard of the Master. His father objected to his association with Sri Ramakrishna but afterwards was reassured to find that many celebrated people were visitors at Dakshineśwar. The relationship between the Master and this beloved disciple was that of mother and child. Sri Ramakrishna allowed Rākhāl many liberties denied to others. But he would not hesitate to chastise the boy for improper actions. At one time Rākhāl felt a childlike jealousy because he found that other boys were receiving the Master's affection. He soon got over it and realized his guru as the Guru of the whole universe. The Master was worried to hear of his marriage, but was relieved to find that his wife was a spiritual soul who would not be a hindrance to his progress.

The Elder Gopāl

Gopāl Chandra Ghosh came to Dakshineśwar at a rather advanced age and was called the elder Gopāl. He had lost his wife, and the Master assuaged his grief. Soon he renounced the world and devoted himself fully to meditation and prayer. Some years later Gopāl gave the Master the ochre cloths with which the latter initiated several of his disciples into monastic life.

Narendra

To spread his message to the four corners of the earth Sri Ramakrishna needed a strong instrument. With his frail body and delicate limbs he could not make great journeys across wide spaces. And such an instrument was found in Narendranāth Dutta, his beloved Naren, later known to the world as Swāmi Vivekānanda. Even before meeting Narendranāth, the Master had seen him in a vision as a sage, immersed in the

meditation of the Absolute, who at Sri Ramakrishna's request had agreed to take human birth to assist him in his work.

Narendra was born in Calcutta on January 12, 1863, of an aristocratic *Kāyastha* family. His mother was steeped in the great Hindu epics, and his father, a distinguished attorney of the Calcutta High Court, was an agnostic about religion, a friend of the poor, and a mocker at social conventions. Even in his boyhood and youth Narendra possessed great physical courage and presence of mind, a vivid imagination, deep power of thought, keen intelligence, an extraordinary memory, a love of truth, a passion for purity, a spirit of independence, and a tender heart. An expert musician, he also acquired proficiency in physics, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, history, and literature. He grew up into an extremely handsome young man. Even as a child he practised meditation and showed great power of concentration. Though free and passionate in word and action, he took the vow of austere religious chastity and never allowed the fire of purity to be extinguished by the slightest defilement of body or soul.

As he read in college the rationalistic Western philosophers of the nineteenth century, his boyhood faith in God and religion was unsettled. He would not accept religion on mere faith; he wanted demonstration of God. But very soon his passionate nature discovered that mere Universal Reason was cold and bloodless. His emotional nature, dissatisfied with a mere abstraction, required a concrete support to help him in the hours of temptation. He wanted an external power, a guru, who by embodying perfection in the flesh would still the commotion of his soul. Attracted by the magnetic personality of Keshab, he joined the Brāhmo Samāj and became a singer in its choir. But in the Samāj he did not find the guru who could say that he had seen God.

In a state of mental conflict and torture of soul, Narendra came to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineśwar. He was then eighteen years of age and had been in college two years. He entered the Master's room accompanied by some light-hearted friends. At Sri Ramakrishna's request he sang a few songs, pouring his whole soul into them, and the Master went into Samādhi. A few minutes later Sri Ramakrishna suddenly left his seat, took Narendra by the hand, and led him to the screened verandah north of his room. They were alone. Addressing Narendra most tenderly, as if he were a friend of long acquaintance, the Master said: "Ah! You have come very late. Why have you been so unkind as to make me wait all these days? My ears are tired of hearing the futile words of worldly men. Oh, how I have longed to pour my spirit into the heart of someone fitted to receive my message!" He talked thus, sobbing all the time. Then, standing before Narendra with folded hands, he addressed him as **Nārāyana**, born on earth to remove the misery of humanity. Grasping Narendra's hand, he asked him to come again, alone, and very soon. Narendra was startled. "What is this I have come to see?" he said to himself. "He must be stark mad. Why, I am the son of Viswanāth Dutta. How dare he speak this way to me?"

When they returned to the room and Narendra heard the Master speaking to others, he was surprised to find in his words an inner logic, a striking sincerity, and a convincing proof of his spiritual nature. In answer to Narendra's question, "Sir, have you seen

God?" the Master said: "Yes, I have seen God. I have seen Him more tangibly than I see you. I have talked to Him more intimately than I am talking to you." Continuing, the Master said: "But, my child, who wants to see God? People shed jugs of tears for money, wife, and children. But if they would weep for God for only one day they would surely see Him." Narendra was amazed. These words he could not doubt. This was the first time he had ever heard a man saying that he had seen God. But he could not reconcile these words of the Master with the scene that had taken place on the verandah only a few minutes before. He concluded that Sri Ramakrishna was a monomaniac, and returned home rather puzzled in mind.

During his second visit, about a month later, suddenly, at the touch of the Master, Narendra felt overwhelmed and saw the walls of the room and everything around him whirling and vanishing. "What are you doing to me?" he cried in terror. "I have my father and mother at home." He saw his own ego and the whole universe almost swallowed in a nameless void. With a laugh the Master easily restored him. Narendra thought he might have been hypnotized, but he could not understand how a monomaniac could cast a spell over the mind of a strong person like himself. He returned home more confused than ever, resolved to be henceforth on his guard before this strange man.

But during his third visit Narendra fared no better. This time, at the Master's touch, he lost consciousness entirely. While he was still in that state, Sri Ramakrishna questioned him concerning his spiritual antecedents and whereabouts, his mission in this world, and the duration of his mortal life. The answers confirmed what the Master himself had known and inferred. Among other things, he came to know that Narendra was a sage who had already attained perfection, and that the day he learnt his real nature he would give up his body in yoga, by an act of will.

A few more meetings completely removed from Narendra's mind the last traces of the notion that Sri Ramakrishna might be a monomaniac or wily hypnotist. His integrity, purity, renunciation, and unselfishness were beyond question. But Narendra could not accept a man, an imperfect mortal, as his guru. As a member of the Brāhmo Samāj, he could not believe that a human intermediary was necessary between man and God. Moreover, he openly laughed at Sri Ramakrishna's visions as hallucinations. Yet in the secret chamber of his heart he bore a great love for the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna was grateful to the Divine Mother for sending him one who doubted his own realizations. Often he asked Narendra to test him as the money-changers test their coins. He laughed at Narendra's biting criticism of his spiritual experiences and Samādhi. When at times Narendra's sharp words distressed him, the Divine Mother Herself would console him, saying: "Why do you listen to him? In a few days he will believe your every word." He could hardly bear Narendra's absences. Often he would weep bitterly for the sight of him. Sometimes Narendra would find the Master's love embarrassing; and one day he sharply scolded him, warning him that such infatuation would soon draw him down to the level of its object. The Master was distressed and prayed to the Divine Mother. Then he said to Narendra: "You rogue, I won't listen to you any more. Mother

says that I love you because I see God in you, and the day I no longer see God in you I shall not be able to bear even the sight of you."

The Master wanted to train Narendra in the teachings of the non-dualistic Vedānta philosophy. But Narendra, because of his Brāhmo upbringing, considered it wholly blasphemous to look on man as one with his Creator. One day at the temple garden he laughingly said to a friend: "How silly! This jug is God! This cup is God! Whatever we see is God! And we too are God! Nothing could be more absurd." Sri Ramakrishna came out of his room and gently touched him. Spellbound, he immediately perceived that everything in the world was indeed God. A new universe opened around him. Returning home in a dazed state, he found there too that the food, the plate, the eater himself, the people around him, were all God. When he walked in the street, he saw that the cabs, the horses, the streams of people, the buildings, were all Brahman. He could hardly go about his day's business. His parents became anxious about him and thought him ill. And when the intensity of the experience abated a little, he saw the world as a dream. Walking in the public square, he would strike his head against the iron railings to know whether they were real. It took him a number of days to recover his normal self. He had a foretaste of the great experiences yet to come and realized that the words of the Vedānta were true.

At the beginning of 1884 Narendra's father suddenly died of heart-failure, leaving the family in a state of utmost poverty. There were six or seven mouths to feed at home. Creditors were knocking at the door. Relatives who had accepted his father's unstinted kindness now became enemies, some even bringing suit to deprive Narendra of his ancestral home. Actually starving and barefoot, Narendra searched for a job, but without success. He began to doubt whether anywhere in the world there was such a thing as unselfish sympathy. Two rich women made evil proposals to him and promised to put an end to his distress; but he refused them with contempt.

Narendra began to talk of his doubt of the very existence of God. His friends thought he had become an atheist and piously circulated gossip adducing unmentionable motives for his unbelief. His moral character was maligned. Even some of the Master's disciples partly believed the gossip, and Narendra told these to their faces that only a coward believed in God through fear of suffering or hell. But he was distressed to think that Sri Ramakrishna, too, might believe these false reports. His pride revolted. He said to himself: "What does it matter? If a man's good name rests on such slender foundations, I don't care." But later on he was amazed to learn that the Master had never lost faith in him. To a disciple who complained about Narendra's degradation, Sri Ramakrishna replied: "Hush, you fool! The Mother has told me it can never be so. I won't look at you if you speak that way again."

The moment came when Narendra's distress reached its climax. He had gone the whole day without food. As he was returning home in the evening he could hardly lift his tired limbs. He sat down in front of a house in sheer exhaustion, too weak even to think. His mind began to wander. Then, suddenly, a divine power lifted the veil over his soul. He found the solution of the problem of the coexistence of divine justice and misery, the

presence of suffering in the creation of a blissful Providence. He felt bodily refreshed, his soul was bathed in peace, and he slept serenely.

Narendra now realized that he had a spiritual mission to fulfil. He resolved to renounce the world, as his grandfather had renounced it, and he came to Sri Ramakrishna for his blessing. But even before he had opened his mouth, the Master knew what was in his mind and wept bitterly at the thought of separation. "I know you cannot lead a worldly life," he said, "but for my sake live in the world as long as I live."

One day, soon after, Narendra requested Sri Ramakrishna to pray to the Divine Mother to remove his poverty. Sri Ramakrishna bade him pray to Her himself, for She would certainly listen to his prayer. Narendra entered the shrine of Kāli. As he stood before the image of the Mother, he beheld Her as a living Goddess, ready to give wisdom and liberation. Unable to ask Her for petty worldly things, he prayed only for knowledge and renunciation, love and liberation. The Master rebuked him for his failure to ask the Divine Mother to remove his poverty and sent him back to the temple. But Narendra, standing in Her presence, again forgot the purpose of his coming. Thrice he went to the temple at the bidding of the Master, and thrice he returned, having forgotten in Her presence why he had come. He was wondering about it when it suddenly flashed in his mind that this was all the work of Sri Ramakrishna; so now he asked the Master himself to remove his poverty, and was assured that his family would not lack simple food and clothing.

This was a very rich and significant experience for Narendra. It taught him that Śakti, the Divine Power, cannot be ignored in the world and that in the relative plane the need of worshipping a Personal God is imperative. Sri Ramakrishna was overjoyed with the conversion. The next day, sitting almost on Narendra's lap, he said to a devotee, pointing first to himself, then to Narendra: "I see I am this, and again that. Really I feel no difference. A stick floating in the Ganges seems to divide the water; but in reality the water is one. Do you see my point? Well, whatever is, is the Mother - isn't that so?" In later years Narendra would say: "Sri Ramakrishna was the only person who, from the time he met me, believed in me uniformly throughout. Even my mother and brothers did not. It was his unwavering trust and love for me that bound me to him for ever. He alone knew how to love. Worldly people only make a show of love for selfish ends."

Tārak

Others destined to be monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna came to Dakshineśwar. Tāraknāth Ghoshāl had felt from his boyhood the noble desire to realize God. Keshab and the Brāhmo Samāj had attracted him but proved inadequate. In 1882 he first met the Master at Rāmchandra's house and was astonished to hear him talk about Samādhi, a subject which always fascinated his mind. And that evening he actually saw a manifestation of that superconscious state in the Master. Tārak became a frequent visitor at Dakshineśwar and received the Master's grace in abundance. The young boy often felt ecstatic fervour in meditation. He also wept profusely while meditating on God. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "God favours those who can weep for Him. Tears shed for God wash away the sins of former births."

Bāburām

Bāburām Ghosh came to Dakshineśwar accompanied by Rākhāl, his classmate. The Master, as was often his custom, examined the boy's physiognomy and was satisfied about his latent spirituality. At the age of eight Bāburām had thought of leading a life of renunciation, in the company of a monk, in a hut shut out from the public view by a thick wall of trees. The very sight of the Panchavati awakened in his heart that dream of boyhood. Bāburām was tender in body and soul. The Master used to say that he was pure to his very bones. One day Hazra in his usual mischievous fashion advised Bāburām and some of the other young boys to ask Sri Ramakrishna for some spiritual powers and not waste their life in mere gaiety and merriment. The Master, scenting mischief, called Bāburām to his side, and said: "What can you ask of me? Isn't everything that I have already yours? Yes, everything I have earned in the shape of realizations is for the sake of you all. So get rid of the idea of begging, which alienates by creating a distance. Rather realize your kinship with me and gain the key to all the treasures."

Niranjan

Nitya Niranjan Sen was a disciple of heroic type. He came to the Master when he was eighteen years old. He was a medium for a group of spiritualists. During his first visit the Master said to him: "My boy, if you think always of ghosts you will become a ghost, and if you think of God you will become God. Now, which do you prefer?" Niranjan severed all connections with the spiritualists. During his second visit the Master embraced him and said warmly: "Niranjan, my boy, the days are flitting away. When will you realize God? This life will be in vain if you do not realize Him. When will You devote your mind wholly to God?" Niranjan was surprised to see the Master's great anxiety for his spiritual welfare. He was a young man endowed with unusual spiritual parts. He felt disdain for worldly pleasures and was totally guileless, like a child. But he had a violent temper. One day, as he was coming in a country boat to Dakshineśwar, some of his fellow passengers began to speak ill of the Master. Finding his protest futile, Niranjan began to rock the boat, threatening to sink it in midstream. That silenced the offenders. When he reported the incident to the Master, he was rebuked for his inability to curb his anger.

Jogindra

Jogindranāth, on the other hand, was gentle to a fault. One day, under circumstances very like those that had evoked Niranjan's anger, he curbed his temper and held his peace instead of threatening Sri Ramakrishna's abusers. The Master, learning of his conduct, scolded him roundly. Thus to each the fault of the other was recommended as a virtue. The guru was striving to develop, in the first instance, composure, and in the second, mettle. The secret of his training was to build up, by a tactful recognition of the requirements of each given case, the character of the devotee.

Jogindranāth came of an aristocratic brāhmin family of Dakshineśwar. His father and relatives shared the popular mistrust of Sri Ramakrishna's sanity. At a very early age the boy developed religious tendencies, spending two or three hours daily in meditation, and his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna deepened his desire for the realization of God. He had a perfect horror of marriage. But at the earnest request of his mother he had had to

yield, and he now believed that his spiritual future was doomed. So he kept himself away from the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna employed a ruse to bring Jogindra to him. As soon as the disciple entered the room, the Master rushed forward to meet the young man. Catching hold of the disciple's hand, he said: "What if you have married, Haven't I too married? What is there to be afraid of in that?" Touching his own chest he said: "If this [meaning himself] is propitious, then even a hundred thousand marriages cannot injure you. If you desire to lead a householder's life, then bring your wife here one day, and I shall see that she becomes a real companion in your spiritual progress. But if you want to lead a monastic life, then I shall eat up your attachment to the world." Jogin was dumbfounded at these words. He received new strength, and his spirit of renunciation was re-established.

Śashi and Śarat

Śashi and Śarat were two cousins who came from a pious brāhmin family of Calcutta. At an early age they had joined the Brāhmo Samāj and had come under the influence of Keshab Sen. The Master said to them at their first meeting: "If bricks and tiles are burnt after the trade-mark has been stamped on them, they retain the mark for ever. Similarly, man should be stamped with God before entering the world. Then he will not become attached to worldliness." Fully aware of the future course of their life, he asked them not to marry. The Master asked Śashi whether he believed in God with form or in God without form. Śashi replied that he was not even sure about the existence of God; so he could not speak one way or the other. This frank answer very much pleased the Master.

Śarat's soul longed for the all-embracing realization of the Godhead. When the Master inquired whether there was any particular form of God he wished to see, the boy replied that he would like to see God in all the living beings of the world. "But", the Master demurred, "that is the last word in realization. One cannot have it at the very outset." Śarat stated calmly: "I won't be satisfied with anything short of that. I shall trudge on along the path till I attain that blessed state." Sri Ramakrishna was very much pleased.

Harināth

Harināth had led the austere life of a *brahmachāri* even from his early boyhood -bathing in the Ganges every day, cooking his own meals, waking before sunrise, and reciting the Gita from memory before leaving bed. He found in the Master the embodiment of the Vedānta scriptures. Aspiring to be a follower of the ascetic Śankara, he cherished a great hatred for women. One day he said to the Master that he could not allow even small girls to come near him. The Master scolded him and said: "You are talking like a fool. Why should you hate women? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Regard them as your own mother and you will never feel their evil influence. The more you hate them, the more you will fall into their snares." Hari said later that these words completely changed his attitude toward women.

The Master knew Hari's passion for Vedānta. But he did not wish any of his disciples to become a dry ascetic or a mere bookworm. So he asked Hari to practise Vedānta in life

by giving up the unreal and following the Real. "But it is not so easy", Sri Ramakrishna said, "to realize the illusoriness of the world. Study alone does not help one very much. The grace of God is required. Mere personal effort is futile. A man is a tiny creature after all, with very limited powers. But he can achieve the impossible if he prays to God for His grace." Whereupon the Master sang a song in praise of grace. Hari was profoundly moved and shed tears. Later in life Hari achieved a wonderful synthesis of the ideals of the Personal God and the Impersonal Truth.

Gangādhār

Gangādhār, Harināth's friend, also led the life of a strict *brahmachari*, eating vegetarian food cooked by his own hands and devoting himself to the study of the scriptures. He met the Master in 1884 and soon became a member of his inner circle. The Master praised his ascetic habit and attributed it to the spiritual disciplines of his past life. Gangādhār became a close companion of Narendā.

Hariprasanna

Hariprasanna, a college student, visited the Master in the company of his friends Śāshi and Śārat. Sri Ramakrishna showed him great favour by initiating him into spiritual life. As long as he lived, Hariprasanna remembered and observed the following drastic advice of the Master: "Even if a woman is pure as gold and rolls on the ground for love of God, it is dangerous for a monk ever to look at her."

Kāli

Kāliprasād visited the Master toward the end of 1883. Given to the practice of meditation and the study of the scriptures, Kāli was particularly interested in yoga. Feeling the need of a guru in spiritual life, he came to the Master and was accepted as a disciple. The young boy possessed a rational mind and often felt sceptical about the Personal God. The Master said to him: "Your doubts will soon disappear. Others, too, have passed through such a state of mind. Look at Naren. He now weeps at the names of Rādhā and Krishna." Kāli began to see visions of gods and goddesses. Very soon these disappeared and in meditation he experienced vastness, infinity, and the other attributes of the Impersonal Brahman.

Subodh

Subodh visited the Master in 1885. At the very first meeting Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "You will succeed. Mother says so. Those whom She sends here will certainly attain spirituality." During the second meeting the Master wrote something on Subodh's tongue, stroked his body from the navel to the throat, and said, "Awake, Mother! Awake." He asked the boy to meditate. At once Subodh's latent spirituality was awakened. He felt a current rushing along the spinal column to the brain. Joy filled his soul.

Sāradā and Tulasi

Two more young men, Sāradā Prasanna and Tulasi, complete the small band of the Master's disciples later to embrace the life of the wandering monk. With the exception of the elder Gopāl, all of them were in their teens or slightly over. They came from middle-

class Bengāli families, and most of them were students in school or college. Their parents and relatives had envisaged for them bright worldly careers. They came to Sri Ramakrishna with pure bodies, vigorous minds, and uncontaminated souls. All were born with unusual spiritual attributes. Sri Ramakrishna accepted them, even at first sight, as his children, relatives, friends, and companions. His magic touch unfolded them. And later each according to his measure reflected the life of the Master, becoming a torch-bearer of his message across land and sea.

Woman Devotees

With his woman devotees Sri Ramakrishna established a very sweet relationship. He himself embodied the tender traits of a woman; he had dwelt on the highest plane of Truth, where there is not even the slightest trace of sex; and his innate purity evoked only the noblest emotion in men and women alike. His woman devotees often said: "We seldom looked on Sri Ramakrishna as a member of the male sex. We regarded him as one of us. We never felt any constraint before him, He was our best confidant." They loved him as their child, their friend, and their teacher. In spiritual discipline he advised them to renounce lust and greed and especially warned them not to fall into the snares of men.

Gopāl Mā

Unsurpassed among the woman devotees of the Master in the richness of her devotion and spiritual experiences was Aghoramani Devi, an orthodox brāhmin woman. Widowed at an early age, she had dedicated herself completely to spiritual pursuits. Gopālā, the Baby Krishna, was her Ideal Deity, whom she worshipped following the *Vātsalya* attitude of the Vaishnava religion, regarding Him as her own child. Through Him she satisfied her unassuaged maternal love, cooking for Him, feeding Him, bathing Him, and putting Him to bed. This sweet intimacy with Gopālā won her the sobriquet of Gopāl Mā, or Gopālā's Mother. For forty years she had lived on the bank of the Ganges in a small bare room, her only companions being a threadbare copy of the Ramayana and a bag containing her rosary. At the age of sixty, in 1884, she visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineśwar. During the second visit, as soon as the Master saw her, he said: "Oh, you have come! Give me something to eat." With great hesitation she gave him some ordinary sweets that she had purchased for him on the way. The Master ate them with relish and asked her to bring him simple curries or sweets prepared by her own hands. Gopāl Mā thought him a queer kind of monk, for, instead of talking of God, he always asked for food. She did not want to visit him again, but an irresistible attraction brought her back to the temple garden. She carried with her some simple curries that she had cooked herself.

One early morning at three o'clock, about a year later, Gopāl Mā was about to finish her daily devotions, when she was startled to find Sri Ramakrishna sitting on her left, with his right hand clenched, like the hand of the image of Gopālā. She was amazed and caught hold of the hand, whereupon the figure vanished and in its place appeared the real Gopālā, her Ideal Deity. She cried aloud with joy. Gopālā begged her for butter. She pleaded her poverty and gave Him some dry coconut candies. Gopālā sat on her lap, snatched away her rosary, jumped on her shoulders, and moved all about the room. As soon as the day broke she hastened to Dakshineśwar like an insane woman. Of course

Gopālā accompanied her, resting His head on her shoulder. She clearly saw His tiny ruddy feet hanging over her breast. She entered Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master had fallen into Samādhi. Like a child, he sat on her lap, and she began to feed him with butter, cream, and other delicacies. After some time he regained consciousness and returned to his bed. But the mind of Gopālā's Mother was still roaming in another plane. She was steeped in bliss. She saw Gopālā frequently entering the Master's body and again coming out of it. When she returned to her hut, still in a dazed condition, Gopālā accompanied her.

She spent about two months in uninterrupted communion with God, the Baby Gopālā never leaving her for a moment. Then the intensity of her vision was lessened; had it not been, her body would have perished. The Master spoke highly of her exalted spiritual condition and said that such vision of God was a rare thing for ordinary mortals. The fun-loving Master one day confronted the critical Narendranāth with this simple-minded woman. No two could have presented a more striking contrast. The Master knew of Narendra's lofty contempt for all visions, and he asked the old lady to narrate her experiences to Narendra. With great hesitation she told him her story. Now and then she interrupted her maternal chatter to ask Narendra: "My son, I am a poor ignorant woman. I don't understand anything. You are so learned. Now tell me if these visions of Gopālā are true." As Narendra listened to the story he was profoundly moved. He said, "Yes, mother, they are quite true." Behind his cynicism Narendra, too, possessed a heart full of love and tenderness.

The March of Events

In 1882 Hriday was, dismissed from service in the Kālī temple, for an act of indiscretion, and was ordered by the authorities never again to enter the garden. In a way the hand of the Divine Mother may be seen even in this. Having taken care of Sri Ramakrishna during the stormy days of his spiritual discipline, Hriday had come naturally to consider himself the sole guardian of his uncle. None could approach the Master without his knowledge. And he would be extremely jealous if Sri Ramakrishna paid attention to anyone else. Hriday's removal made it possible for the real devotees of the Master to approach him freely and live with him in the temple garden.

During the week-ends the householders, enjoying a respite from their office duties, visited the Master. The meetings on Sunday afternoons were of the nature of little festivals. Refreshments were often served. Professional musicians now and then sang devotional songs. The Master and the devotees sang and danced, Sri Ramakrishna frequently going into ecstatic moods. The happy memory of such a Sunday would linger long in the minds of the devotees. Those whom the Master wanted for special instruction he would ask to visit him on Tuesdays and Saturdays. These days were particularly auspicious for the worship of Kālī.

The young disciples destined to be monks, Sri Ramakrishna invited on week-days, when the householders were not present. The training of the householders and of the future monks had to proceed along entirely different lines. Since M. generally visited the Master

on week-ends, the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna does not contain much mention of the future monastic disciples.

Finally, there was a handful of fortunate disciples, householders as well as youngsters, who were privileged to spend nights with the Master in his room. They would see him get up early in the morning and walk up and down the room, singing in his sweet voice and tenderly communing with the Mother.

Injury to the Master's Arm

One day, in January 1884, the Master was going toward the pine-grove when he went into a trance. He was alone. There was no one to support him or guide his footsteps. He fell to the ground and dislocated a bone in his left arm. This accident had a significant influence on his mind, the natural inclination of which was to soar above the consciousness of the body. The acute pain in the arm forced his mind to dwell on the body and on the world outside. But he saw even in this a divine purpose; for, with his mind compelled to dwell on the physical plane, he realized more than ever that he was an instrument in the hand of the Divine Mother, who had a mission to fulfil through his human body and mind. He also distinctly found that in the phenomenal world God manifests Himself, in an inscrutable way, through diverse human beings, both good and evil. Thus he would speak of God in the guise of the wicked, God in the guise of the pious, God in the guise of the hypocrite, God in the guise of the lewd. He began to take a special delight in watching the divine play in the relative world. Sometimes the sweet human relationship with God would appear to him more appealing than the all-effacing Knowledge of Brahman. Many a time he would pray: "Mother, don't make me unconscious through the Knowledge of Brahman. Don't give me *Brahmajnāna*, Mother. Am I not Your child, and naturally timid? I must have my Mother. A million salutations to the Knowledge of Brahman! Give it to those who want it." Again he prayed: "O Mother, let me remain in contact with men! Don't make me a dried-up ascetic. I want to enjoy Your sport in the world." He was able to taste this very rich divine experience and enjoy the love of God and the company of His devotees because his mind, on account of the injury to his arm, was forced to come down to the consciousness of the body. Again, he would make fun of people who proclaimed him as a Divine Incarnation, by pointing to his broken arm. He would say, "Have you ever heard of God breaking His arm?" It took the arm about five months to heal.

Beginning of His Illness

In April 1885 the Master's throat became inflamed. Prolonged conversation or absorption in Samādhi, making the blood flow into the throat, would aggravate the pain. Yet when the annual Vaishnava festival was celebrated at Pānihāti, Sri Ramakrishna attended it against the doctor's advice. With a group of disciples he spent himself in music, dance, and ecstasy. The illness took a turn for the worse and was diagnosed as "clergyman's sore throat". The patient was cautioned against conversation and ecstasies. Though he followed the physician's directions regarding medicine and diet, he could neither control his trances nor withhold from seekers the solace of his advice. Sometimes, like a sulky child, he would complain to the Mother about the crowds, who gave him no rest day or night. He was overheard to say to Her: "Why do You bring here all these worthless

people, who are like milk diluted with five times its own quantity of water? My eyes are almost destroyed with blowing the fire to dry up the water. My health is gone. It is beyond my strength. Do it Yourself, if You want it done. This (pointing to his own body) is but a perforated drum, and if you go on beating it day in and day out, how long will it last?"

But his large heart never turned anyone away. He said, "Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if I can be of help to a single soul." And he bore the pain, singing cheerfully, "Let the body be preoccupied with illness, but, O mind, dwell for ever in God's Bliss!"

One night he had a haemorrhage of the throat. The doctor now diagnosed the illness as cancer. Narendra was the first to break this heart-rending news to the disciples. Within three days the Master was removed to Calcutta for better treatment. At Balarām's house he remained a week until a suitable place could be found at Śyāmpukur, in the northern section of Calcutta. During this week he dedicated himself practically without respite to the instruction of those beloved devotees who had been unable to visit him oftener at Dakshineśwar. Discourses incessantly flowed from his tongue, and he often went into Samādhi. Dr. Mahendra Sarkār, the celebrated homeopath of Calcutta, was invited to undertake his treatment.

Śyāmpukur

In the beginning of September 1885 Sri Ramakrishna was moved to Śyāmpukur. Here Narendra organized the young disciples to attend the Master day and night. At first they concealed the Master's illness from their guardians; but when it became more serious they remained with him almost constantly, sweeping aside the objections of their relatives and devoting themselves whole-heartedly to the nursing of their beloved guru. These young men, under the watchful eyes of the Master and the leadership of Narendra, became the *Antaranga* Bhaktās, the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna's inner circle. They were privileged to witness many manifestations of the Master's divine powers. Narendra received instructions regarding the propagation of his message after his death.

The Holy Mother - so Sāradā Devi had come to be affectionately known by Sri Ramakrishna's devotees - was brought from Dakshineśwar to look after the general cooking and to prepare the special diet of the patient. The dwelling space being extremely limited, she had to adapt herself to cramped conditions. At three o'clock in the morning she would finish her bath in the Ganges and then enter a small covered place on the roof, where she spent the whole day cooking and praying. After eleven at night, when the visitors went away, she would come down to her small bedroom on the first floor to enjoy a few hours' sleep. Thus she spent three months, working hard, sleeping little, and praying constantly for the Master's recovery.

At Śyāmpukur the devotees led an intense life. Their attendance on the Master was in itself a form of spiritual discipline. His mind was constantly soaring to an exalted plane of consciousness. Now and then they would catch the contagion of his spiritual fervour.

They sought to divine the meaning of this illness of the Master, whom most of them had accepted as an Incarnation of God. One group, headed by Girish with his robust optimism and great power of imagination, believed that the illness was a mere pretext to serve a deeper purpose. The Master had willed his illness in order to bring the devotees together and promote solidarity among them. As soon as this purpose was served, he would himself get rid of the disease. A second group thought that the Divine Mother, in whose hand the Master was an instrument, had brought about this illness to serve Her own mysterious ends. But the young rationalists, led by Narendra, refused to ascribe a supernatural cause to a natural phenomenon. They believed that the Master's body, a material thing, was subject, like all other material things, to physical laws. Growth, development, decay, and death were laws of nature to which the Master's body could not but respond. But though holding differing views, they all believed that it was to him alone that they must look for the attainment of their spiritual goal.

In spite of the physician's efforts and the prayers and nursing of the devotees, the illness rapidly progressed. The pain sometimes appeared to be unbearable. The Master lived only on liquid food, and his frail body was becoming a mere skeleton. Yet his face always radiated joy, and he continued to welcome the visitors pouring in to receive his blessing. When certain zealous devotees tried to keep the visitors away, they were told by Girish, "You cannot succeed in it; he has been born for this very purpose - to sacrifice himself for the redemption of others."

The more the body was devastated by illness, the more it became the habitation of the Divine Spirit. Through its transparency the gods and goddesses began to shine with ever increasing luminosity. On the day of the Kāli Puja the devotees clearly saw in him the manifestation of the Divine Mother.

It was noticed at this time that some of the devotees were making an unbridled display of their emotions. A number of them, particularly among the householders, began to cultivate, though at first unconsciously, the art of shedding tears, shaking the body, contorting the face, and going into trances, attempting thereby to imitate the Master. They began openly to declare Sri Ramakrishna a Divine Incarnation and to regard themselves as his chosen people, who could neglect religious disciplines with impunity. Narendra's penetrating eye soon sized up the situation. He found out that some of these external manifestations were being carefully practised at home, while some were the outcome of malnutrition, mental weakness, or nervous debility. He mercilessly exposed the devotees who were pretending to have visions, and asked all to develop a healthy religious spirit. Narendra sang inspiring songs for the younger devotees, read with them the Imitation of Christ and the Gita, and held before them the positive ideals of spirituality.

Last Days at Cossipore

When Sri Ramakrishna's illness showed signs of aggravation, the devotees, following the advice of Dr. Sarkār, rented a spacious garden house at Cossipore, in the northern suburbs of Calcutta. The Master was removed to this place on December 11, 1885.

It was at Cossipore that the curtain fell on the varied activities of the Master's life on the physical plane. His soul lingered in the body eight months more. It was the period of his great Passion, a constant crucifixion of the body and the triumphant revelation of the Soul. Here one sees the humanity and divinity of the Master passing and repassing across a thin border line. Every minute of those eight months was suffused with touching tenderness of heart and breath-taking elevation of spirit. Every word he uttered was full of pathos and sublimity.

It took the group only a few days to become adjusted to the new environment. The Holy Mother, assisted by Sri Ramakrishna's niece, Lakshmi Devi, and a few woman devotees, took charge of the cooking for the Master and his attendants. Surendra willingly bore the major portion of the expenses, other householders contributing according to their means. Twelve disciples were constant attendants of the Master: Narendra, Rākhāl, Bāburām, Niranjan, Jogin, Lātu, Tārak, the elder Gopāl, Kāli, Śashi, Śarat, and the younger Gopāl. Sāradā, Harish, Hari, Gangādhār, and Tulasi visited the Master from time to time and practised sādhanā at home. Narendra, preparing for his law examination, brought his books to the garden house in order to continue his studies during the infrequent spare moments. He encouraged his brother disciples to intensify their meditation, scriptural studies, and other spiritual disciplines. They all forgot their relatives and their worldly duties.

Among the attendants Śashi was the embodiment of service. He did not practise meditation, japa, or any of the other disciplines followed by his brother devotees. He was convinced that service to the guru was the only religion for him. He forgot food and rest and was ever ready at the Master's bedside.

Pundit Śaśādhār one day suggested to the Master that the latter could remove the illness by concentrating his mind on the throat, the scriptures having declared that yogis had power to cure themselves in that way. The Master rebuked the pundit. "For a scholar like you to make such a proposal!" he said. "How can I withdraw the mind from the Lotus Feet of God and turn it to this worthless cage of flesh and blood?" "For our sake at least", begged Narendra and the other disciples. "But", replied Sri Ramakrishna, "do you think I enjoy this suffering? I wish to recover, but that depends on the Mother."

NARENDRA: "Then please pray to Her. She must listen to you."

MASTER: "But I cannot pray for my body."

NARENDRA: "You must do it, for our sake at least."

MASTER: "Very well, I shall try."

A few hours later the Master said to Narendra: "I said to Her: 'Mother, I cannot swallow food because of my pain. Make it possible for me to eat a little.' She pointed you all out to me and said: 'What? You are eating enough through all these mouths. Isn't that so?' I was ashamed and could not utter another word." This dashed all the hopes of the devotees for the Master's recovery.

"I shall make the whole thing public before I go", the Master had said some time before. On January 1, 1886, he felt better and came down to the garden for a little stroll. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Some thirty lay disciples were in the hall or sitting about under the trees. Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish, "Well, Girish, what have you seen in me, that you proclaim me before everybody as an Incarnation of God?" Girish was not the man to be taken by surprise. He knelt before the Master and said with folded hands, "What can an insignificant person like myself say about the One whose glory even sages like Vyāsa and Vālmiki could not adequately measure?" The Master was profoundly moved. He said: "What more shall I say? I bless you all. Be illumined!" He fell into a spiritual mood. Hearing these words the devotees, one and all, became overwhelmed with emotion. They rushed to him and fell at his feet. He touched them all, and each received an appropriate benediction. Each of them, at the touch of the Master, experienced ineffable bliss. Some laughed, some wept, some sat down to meditate, some began to pray. Some saw light, some had visions of their Chosen Ideals, and some felt within their bodies the rush of spiritual power.

Narendra, consumed with a terrific fever for realization, complained to the Master that all the others had attained peace and that he alone was dissatisfied. The Master asked what he wanted. Narendra begged for Samādhi, so that he might altogether forget the world for three or four days at a time. "You are a fool", the Master rebuked him. "There is a state even higher than that. Isn't it you who sing, 'All that exists art Thou'? First of all settle your family affairs and then come to me. You will experience a state even higher than Samādhi."

The Master did not hide the fact that he wished to make Narendra his spiritual heir. Narendra was to continue the work after Sri Ramakrishna's passing. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "I leave these young men in your charge. See that they develop their spirituality and do not return home." One day he asked the boys, in preparation for a monastic life, to beg their food from door to door without thought of caste. They hailed the Master's order and went out with begging-bowls. A few days later he gave the ochre cloth of the sannyāsi to each of them, including Girish, who was now second to none in his spirit of renunciation. Thus the Master himself laid the foundation of the future Ramakrishna Order of monks.

Sri Ramakrishna was sinking day by day. His diet was reduced to a minimum and he found it almost impossible to swallow. He whispered to M.: "I am bearing all this cheerfully, for otherwise you would be weeping. If you all say that it is better that the body should go rather than suffer this torture, I am willing." The next morning he said to his depressed disciples seated near the bed: "Do you know what I see? I see that God alone has become everything. Men and animals are only frameworks covered with skin, and it is He who is moving through their heads and limbs. I see that it is God Himself who has become the block, the executioner, and the victim for the sacrifice." He fainted with emotion. Regaining partial consciousness, he said: "Now I have no pain. I am very well." Looking at Lātu he said: "There sits Lātu resting his head on the palm of his hand. To me it is the Lord who is seated in that posture."

The words were tender and touching. Like a mother he caressed Narendra and Rākhāl, gently stroking their faces. He said in a half whisper to M., "Had this body been allowed to last a little longer, many more souls would have been illumined." He paused a moment and then said: "But Mother has ordained otherwise. She will take me away lest, finding me guileless and foolish, people should take advantage of me and persuade me to bestow on them the rare gifts of spirituality." A few minutes later he touched his chest and said: "Here are two beings. One is She and the other is Her devotee. It is the latter who broke his arm, and it is he again who is now ill. Do you understand me?" After a pause he added: "Alas! To whom shall I tell all this? Who will understand me?" "Pain", he consoled them again, "is unavoidable as long as there is a body. The Lord takes on the body for the sake of His devotees."

Yet one is not sure whether the Master's soul actually was tortured by this agonizing disease. At least during his moments of spiritual exaltation - which became almost constant during the closing days of his life on earth - he lost all consciousness of the body, of illness and suffering. One of his attendants said later on: "While Sri Ramakrishna lay sick he never actually suffered pain. He would often say: 'O mind! Forget the body, forget the sickness, and remain merged in Bliss.' No, he did not really suffer. At times, he would be in a state when the thrill of joy was clearly manifested in his body. Even when he could not speak he would let us know in some way that there was no suffering, and this fact was clearly evident to all who watched him. People who did not understand him thought that his suffering was very great. What spiritual joy he transmitted to us at that time! Could such a thing have been possible if he had been suffering physically? It was during this period that he taught us again these truths. 'Brahman is always unattached. The three *gunās* are in It, but It is unaffected by them, just as the wind carries odour yet remains odourless.' 'Brahman is Infinite Being, In finite Wisdom, Infinite Bliss. In It there exist no delusion, no misery, no disease, no death, no growth, no decay.' 'The Transcendental Being and the being within are one and the same. There is one indivisible Absolute Existence.' "

The Holy Mother secretly went to a Śiva temple across the Ganges to intercede with the Deity for the Master's recovery. In a revelation she was told to prepare herself for the inevitable end.

One day when Narendra was on the ground floor, meditating, the Master was lying awake in his bed upstairs. In the depths of his meditation Narendra felt as though a lamp were burning at the back of his head. Suddenly he lost consciousness. It was the yearned-for, all-effacing experience of nirvikalpa Samādhi, when the embodied soul realizes its unity with the Absolute. After a very long time he regained partial consciousness but was unable to find his body. He could see only his head. "Where is my body?" he cried. The elder Gopāl entered the room and said, "Why, it is here, Naren!" But Narendra could not find it. Gopāl, frightened, ran upstairs to the Master. Sri Ramakrishna only said: "Let him stay that way for a time. He has worried me long enough."

After another long period Narendra regained full consciousness. Bathed in peace, he went to the Master, who said: "Now the Mother has shown you everything. But this revelation will remain under lock and key, and I shall keep the key. When you have accomplished the Mother's work you will find the treasure again."

Some days later, Narendra being alone with the Master, Sri Ramakrishna looked at him and went into Samādhi. Narendra felt the penetration of a subtle force and lost all outer consciousness. Regaining presently the normal mood, he found the Master weeping.

Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "Today I have given you my all and I am now only a poor fakir, possessing nothing. By this power you will do immense good in the world, and not until it is accomplished will you return." Henceforth the Master lived in the disciple.

Doubt, however, dies hard. After one or two days Narendra said to himself, "If in the midst of this racking physical pain he declares his Godhead, then only shall I accept him as an Incarnation of God." He was alone by the bedside of the Master. It was a passing thought, but the Master smiled. Gathering his remaining strength, he distinctly said, "He who was Rāmā and Krishna is now, in this body, Ramakrishna - but not in your Vedāntic sense." Narendra was stricken with shame.

Mahā-samādhi

Sunday, August 15, 1886. The Master's pulse became irregular. The devotees stood by the bedside. Toward dusk Sri Ramakrishna had difficulty in breathing. A short time afterwards he complained of hunger. A little liquid food was put into his mouth; some of it he swallowed, and the rest ran over his chin. Two attendants began to fan him. All at once he went into Samādhi of a rather unusual type. The body became stiff. Śaśi burst into tears. But after midnight the Master revived. He was now very hungry and helped himself to a bowl of porridge. He said he was strong again. He sat up against five or six pillows, which were supported by the body of Śaśhi, who was fanning him. Narendra took his feet on his lap and began to rub them. Again and again, the Master repeated to him, "Take care of these boys." Then, he asked to lie down. Three times in ringing tones he cried the name of **Kāli**, his life's Beloved, and lay back. At two minutes past one there was a low sound in his throat and he fell a little to one side. A thrill passed over his body. His hair stood on end. His eyes became fixed on the tip of his nose. His face was lighted with a smile. The final ecstasy began. It was *Mahā-samādhi*, total absorption, from which his mind never returned. Narendra, unable to bear it, ran downstairs.

Dr. Sarkār arrived the following noon and pronounced that life had departed not more than half an hour before. At five o'clock the Master's body was brought downstairs, laid on a cot, dressed in ochre clothes, and decorated with sandal-past and flowers. A procession was formed. The passers-by wept as the body was taken to the cremation ground at the Bārānagore Ghāt on the Ganges.

While the devotees were returning to the garden house, carrying the urn with the sacred ashes, a calm resignation came to their souls and they cried, "Victory unto the Guru!"

The Holy Mother was weeping in her room, not for her husband, but because she felt that Mother Kāli had left her. As she was about to put off the marks of a Hindu widow, in a moment of revelation she heard the words of faith "I have only passed from one room to another."

Chapter 1

MASTER AND DISCIPLE

February 1882

M.'s first visit to the Master

IT WAS ON A SUNDAY in spring, a few days after Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, that M. met him the first time. Sri Ramakrishna lived at the Kailibari, the temple garden of Mother Kali, on the bank of the Ganges at Dakshineswar.

M., being at leisure on Sundays, had gone with his friend Sidhu to visit several gardens at Baranagore. As they were walking in Prasanna Bannerji's garden, Sidhu said: "There is a charming place on the bank of the Ganges where a paramahansa lives. Should you like to go there?" M. assented and they started immediately for the Dakshineswar temple garden. They arrived at the main gate at dusk and went straight to Sri Ramakrishna's room. And there they found him seated on a wooden couch, facing the east. With a smile on his face he was talking of God. The room was full of people, all seated on the floor, drinking in his words in deep silence.

M. stood there speechless and looked on. It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Sukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as if Sri Chaitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri with Ramananda, Swarup, and the other devotees.

Formalities and essentials of religion

Sri Ramakrishna said: "When, hearing the name of Hari or Rāma once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the sandhya any more. Then only will you have a right to renounce rituals; or rather, rituals will drop away of themselves. Then it will be enough if you repeat only the name of Rāma or Hari, or even simply Om." Continuing, he said, "The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, and the Gayatri merges in Om."

M. looked around him with wonder and said to himself: "What a beautiful place! What a charming man! How beautiful his words are! I have no wish to move from this spot." After a few minutes he thought, "Let me see the place first; then I'll come back here and sit down."

As he left the room with Sidhu, he heard the sweet music of the evening service arising in the temple from gong, bell, drum, and cymbal. He could hear music from the nahabat, too, at the south end of the garden. The sounds travelled over the Ganges, floating away and losing themselves in the distance. A soft spring wind was blowing, laden with the fragrance of flowers; the moon had just appeared. It was as if nature and man together were preparing for the evening worship. M. and Sidhu visited the twelve

Siva temples, the Radhakanta temple, and the temple of Bhavatarini. And as M. watched the services before the images his heart was filled with joy.

On the way back to Sri Ramakrishna's room the two friends talked. Sidhu told M. that the temple garden had been founded by Rani Rasmani. He said that God was worshipped there daily as Kali, Krishna, and Siva, and that within the gates sadhus and beggars were fed. When they reached Sri Ramakrishna's door again, they found it shut, and Brinde, the Maid, standing outside. M., who had been trained in English manners and would not enter a room without permission, asked her, "Is the holy man in?" Brinde replied, "Yes he's in the room."

M: "How long has he lived here?"

BRINDE: "Oh, he has been here a long time."

M: "Does he read many books?"

BRINDE: "Books? Oh, dear no! They're all on his tongue."

M. had just finished his studies in college. It amazed him to hear that Sri Ramakrishna read no books.

M: "Perhaps it is time for his evening worship. May we go into the room? Will you tell him we are anxious to see him?"

BRINDE: "Go right in, children. Go in and sit down."

Entering the room, they found Sri Ramakrishna alone, seated on the wooden couch. Incense had just been burnt and all the doors were shut. As he entered, M. with folded hands saluted the Master. Then, at the Master's bidding, he and Sidhu sat on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna asked them: "Where do you live? What is your occupation? Why have you come to Baranagore?" M. answered the questions, but he noticed that now and then the Master seemed to become absent-minded. Later he learnt that this mood is called bhava, ecstasy. It is like the state of the angler who has been sitting with his rod: the fish comes and swallows the bait, and the float begins to tremble; the angler is on the alert; he grips the rod and watches the float steadily and eagerly; he will not speak to anyone. Such was the state of Sri Ramakrishna's mind. Later M. heard, and himself noticed, that Sri Ramakrishna would often go into this mood after dusk, sometimes becoming totally unconscious of the outer world.

M: "Perhaps you want to perform your evening worship. In that case may we take our leave?"

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (still in ecstasy): "No-evening worship? No, it is not exactly that."

After a little conversation M. saluted the Master and took his leave. "Come again", Sri Ramakrishna said.

On his way home M. began to wonder: "Who is this serene-looking man who is drawing me back to him? Is it possible for a man to be great without being a scholar? How wonderful it is! I should like to see him again. He himself said, 'Come again.' I shall go tomorrow or the day after."

Second visit

M.'s second visit to Sri Ramakrishna took place on the southeast verandah at eight o'clock in the morning. The Master was about to be shaved, the barber having just arrived. As the cold season still lingered he had put on a moleskin shawl bordered with red. Seeing M., the Master said: "So you have come. That's good. Sit down here." He was smiling. He stammered a little when he spoke.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (to M.): "Where do you live?"

M: "In Calcutta, sir."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: "Where are you staying here?"

M: "I am at Baranagore at my older sister's-Ishan Kaviraj's house."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: "Oh, at Ishan's? Well, how is Keshab now? He was very ill."

M: "Indeed, I have heard so too, but I believe he is well now."

Master's love for Keshab

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: "I made a vow to worship the Mother with green coconut and sugar on Keshab's recovery. Sometimes, in the early hours of the morning, I would wake up and cry before Her: 'Mother, please make Keshab well again. If Keshab doesn't live, whom shall I talk with when I go to Calcutta?' And so it was that I resolved to offer Her the green coconut and sugar.

"Tell me, do you know of a certain Mr. Cook who has come to Calcutta? Is it true that he is giving lectures? Once Keshab took me on a steamer, and this Mr. Cook, too was in the party."

M: "Yes, sir, I have heard something like that; but I have never been to his lectures. I don't know much about him."

Sri Ramakrishna on M.'s marriage

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: "Pratap's brother came here. He stayed a few days. He had nothing to do and said he wanted to live here. I came to know that he had left his wife and children with his father-in-law. He has a whole brood of them! So I took him to task. Just fancy! He is the father of so many children! Will people from the neighbourhood feed them and bring them up? He isn't even ashamed that someone else

is feeding his wife and children, and that they have been left at his father-in-law's house. I scolded him very hard and asked him to look for a job. Then he was willing to leave here.

"Are you married?"

M: "Yes, sir."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (with a shudder): "Oh, Ramlal! Alas, he is married!"

Like one guilty of a terrible offence, M. sat motionless, his eyes fixed on the ground. He thought, "Is it such a wicked thing to get married?"

The Master continued, "Have you any children?"

M. this time could hear the beating of his own heart. He whispered in a trembling voice, "Yes, sir, I have children."

Very sadly Sri Ramakrishna said, "Ah me! He even has children!"

Thus rebuked M. sat speechless. His pride had received a blow. After a few minutes Sri Ramakrishna looked at him kindly and said affectionately: "You see, you have certain good signs. I know them by looking at a person's forehead, his eyes, and so on. Tell me, now, what kind of person is your wife? Has she spiritual attributes, or is she under the power of avidya?"

M: "She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant."

MASTER (with evident displeasure): "And you are a man of knowledge!"

M. had yet to learn the distinction between knowledge and ignorance. Up to this time his conception had been that one got knowledge from books and schools. Later on he gave up this false conception. He was taught that to know God is knowledge, and not to know Him, ignorance. When Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed, "And you are a man of knowledge!", M.'s ego was again badly shocked.

God with and without form

MASTER: "Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?"

M., rather surprised, said to himself: "How can one believe in God without form when one believes in God with form? And if one believes in God without form, how can one believe that God has a form? Can these two contradictory ideas be true at the same time? Can a white liquid like milk be black?"

M: "Sir, I like to think of God as formless."

MASTER: "Very good. It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction."

The assertion that both are equally true amazed M.; he had never learnt this from his books. Thus his ego received a third blow; but since it was not yet completely crushed, he came forward to argue with the Master a little more.

God and the clay image

M: "Sir, suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!"

MASTER (interrupting): "But why clay? It is an image of Spirit."

M. could not quite understand the significance of this "image of Spirit". "But, sir," he said to the Master, "one should explain to those who worship the clay image that it is not God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay."

God the only real teacher

MASTER (sharply): "That's the one hobby of you Calcutta people - giving lectures and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others?"

"He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone. He alone teaches us, who has created this universe; who has made the sun and moon, men and beasts, and all other beings; who has provided means for their sustenance; who has given children parents and endowed them with love to bring them up. The Lord has done so many things - will He not show people the way to worship Him? If they need teaching, then He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide.

"Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image; doesn't God know that through it He alone is being invoked? He will be pleased with that very worship. Why should you get a headache over it? You had better try for knowledge and devotion yourself."

This time M. felt that his ego was completely crushed. He now said to himself: "Yes, he has spoken the truth. What need is there for me to teach others? Have I known God? Do I really love Him? 'I haven't room enough for myself in my bed, and I am inviting my friend to share it with me!' I know nothing about God, yet I am trying to teach others. What a shame! How foolish I am! This is not mathematics or history or literature, that one can teach it to others. No, this is the deep mystery of God. What he says appeals to me."

This was M.'s first argument with the Master, and happily his last.

MASTER: "You were talking of worshipping the clay image. Even if the image is made of clay, there is need for that sort of worship. God Himself has provided different forms of worship. He who is the Lord of the Universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.

"The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children. Suppose she has five children. If there is a fish to cook, she prepares various dishes from it - pilau, pickled fish, fried fish, and so on - to suit their different tastes and powers of digestion.

"Do you understand me?"

Need of holy company & Meditation in solitude

M. (humbly): "Yes, sir. How, sir, may we fix our minds on God?"

MASTER: "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. To fix the mind on God is very difficult, in the beginning, unless one practises meditation in solitude. When a tree is young it should be fenced all around; otherwise it may be destroyed by cattle.

"To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest. And you should always discriminate between the Real and the unreal. God alone is real, the Eternal Substance; all else is unreal, that is, impermanent. By discriminating thus, one should shake off impermanent objects from the mind."

God and worldly duties

M. (humbly): "How ought we to live in the world?"

MASTER: "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 of hearts that they do not belong to you.

"A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her Master's children as if they were her own. She even speaks of them as 'my Rāma' or 'my Hari'. But in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all.

"The tortoise moves about in the water. But can you guess where her thoughts are? There on the bank, where her eggs are lying. Do all your duties in the world, but keep your mind on God.

"If you enter the world without first cultivating love for God, you will be entangled more and more. You will be overwhelmed with its danger, its grief, its sorrows. And the more you think of worldly things, the more you will be attached to them.

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

"But one must go into solitude to attain this divine love. To get butter from milk you must let it set into curd in a secluded spot; if it is too much disturbed, milk won't turn into curd. Next, you must put aside all other duties, sit in a quiet spot, and churn the curd. Only then do you get butter.

"Further, by meditating on God in solitude the mind acquires knowledge, dispassion, and devotion. But the very same mind goes downward if it dwells in the world. In the world there is only one thought: 'woman and gold'.²

"The world is water and the mind milk. If you pour milk into water they become one; you cannot find the pure milk any more. But turn the milk into curd and churn it into butter. Then, when that butter is placed in water, it will float. So, practise spiritual discipline in solitude and obtain the butter of knowledge and love. Even if you keep that butter in the water of the world the two will not mix. The butter will float.

Practice of discrimination

"Together with this, you must practise discrimination. 'Woman and gold' is impermanent. God is the only Eternal Substance. What does a man get with money? Food, clothes, and a dwelling-place - nothing more. You cannot realize God with its help. Therefore money can never be the goal of life. That is the process of discrimination. Do you understand?"

M: "Yes, sir. I recently read a Sanskrit play called Prabodha Chandrodaya. It deals with discrimination."

MASTER: "Yes, discrimination about objects. Consider - what is there in money or in a beautiful body? Discriminate and you will find that even the body of a beautiful woman consists of bones, flesh, fat, and other disagreeable things. Why should a man give up God and direct his attention to such things? Why should a man forget God for their sake?"

How to see God

M: "Is it possible to see God?"

MASTER: "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."

Longing and yearning

M: "Under what conditions does one see God?"

MASTER: "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."

The Master sang:

*Cry to your Mother Syama , with a real cry, O mind!
And how can She hold Herself from you?
How can Syama stay away?
How can your Mother Kali hold Herself away?*

*O mind, if you are in earnest, bring Her an offering
Of bel-leaves and hibiscus flowers;
Lay at Her feet your offering
And with it mingle the fragrant sandal-paste of Love.*

Continuing, he said: "Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.

"God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife. If one feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions, then through it one can attain Him.

"The point is, to love God even as the mother loves her child, the chaste wife her husband, and the worldly man his wealth. Add together these three forces of love, these three powers of attraction, and give it all to God. Then you will certainly see Him.

"It is necessary to pray to Him with a longing heart. The kitten knows only how to call its mother, crying, 'Mew, mew!' It remains satisfied wherever its mother puts it. And the mother cat puts the kitten sometimes in the kitchen, sometimes on the floor, and sometimes on the bed. When it suffers it cries only, 'Mew, mew!' That's all it knows. But as soon as the mother hears this cry, wherever she may be; she comes to the kitten."

Third visit

It was Sunday afternoon when M. came on his third visit to the Master. He had been profoundly impressed by his first two visits to this wonderful man. He had been thinking of the Master constantly, and of the utterly simple way he explained the deep truths of the spiritual life. Never before had he met such a man.

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch. The room was filled with devotees,³ who had taken advantage of the holiday to come to see the Master. M. had not yet become acquainted with any of them; so he took his seat in a corner. The Master smiled as he talked with the devotees.

Narendra

He addressed his words particularly to a young man of nineteen, named Narendranath, who was a college student and frequented the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. His eyes were bright, his words were full of spirit, and he had the look of a lover of God.

How the spiritually minded should look upon the worldly

M. guessed that the conversation was about worldly men, who look down on those who aspire to spiritual things. The Master was talking about the great number of such people in the world, and about how to deal with them.

MASTER (to Narendra): "How do you feel about it? Worldly people say all kinds of things about the spiritually minded. But look here! When an elephant moves along the street, any number of curs and other small animals may bark and cry after it; but the elephant doesn't even look back at them. If people speak ill of you, what will you think of them?"

NARENDRA: "I shall think that dogs are barking at me."

God in every being

MASTER (Smiling): "Oh, no! You mustn't go that far, my child! (Laughter). God dwells in all beings. But you may be intimate only with good people; you must keep away from the evil-minded. God is even in the tiger; but you cannot embrace the tiger on that account. (Laughter). You may say, 'Why run away from a tiger, which is also a manifestation of God?' The answer to that is: 'Those who tell you to run away are also manifestations of God - and why shouldn't you listen to them?'"

Parable of the "elephant God"

"Let me tell you a story. In a forest there lived a holy man who had many disciples. One day he taught them to see God in all beings and, knowing this, to bow low before them all. A disciple went to the forest to gather wood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he heard an outcry: 'Get out of the way! A mad elephant is coming!' All but the disciple of the holy man took to their heels. He reasoned that the elephant was also God in another form. Then why should he run away from it? He stood still, bowed before the animal, and began to sing its praises. The mahut of the elephant was shouting: 'Run away! Run away!' But the disciple didn't move. The animal seized him with its trunk, cast him to one side, and went on its way. Hurt and bruised, the disciple lay unconscious on the ground. Hearing what had happened, his teacher and his brother disciples came to him and carried him to the hermitage. With the help of some medicine he soon regained consciousness. Someone asked him, 'You knew the elephant was

coming - why didn't you leave the place?' 'But', he said, 'our teacher has told us that God Himself has taken all these forms, of animals as well as men. Therefore, thinking it was only the elephant God that was coming, I didn't run away.' At this the teacher said: 'Yes, my child, it is true that the elephant God was coming; but the mahut God forbade you to stay there. Since all are manifestations of God, why didn't you trust the mahut's words? You should have heeded the words of the mahut God.' (Laughter)

"It is said in the scriptures that water is a form of God. But some water is fit to be used for worship, some water for washing the face, and some only for washing plates or dirty linen. This last sort cannot be used for drinking or for a holy purpose. In like manner, God undoubtedly dwells in the hearts of all - holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous; but a man should not have dealings with the unholy, the wicked, the impure. He must not be intimate with them. With some of them he may exchange words, but with others he shouldn't go even that far. He should keep aloof from such people."

How to deal with the wicked

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, if a wicked man is about to do harm, or actually does so, should we keep quiet then?"

MASTER: "A man living in society should make a show of *tamas* to protect himself from evil-minded people. But he should not harm anybody in anticipation of harm likely to be done him.

Parable of the snake

"Listen to a story. Some cowherd boys used to tend their cows in a meadow where a terrible poisonous snake lived. Everyone was on the alert for fear of it. One day a brahmachari was going along the meadow. The boys ran to him and said: 'Revered sir, please don't go that way. A venomous snake lives over there.' 'What of it, my good children?' said the brahmachari. 'I am not afraid of the snake. I know some mantras.' So saying, he continued on his way along the meadow. But the cowherd boys, being afraid, did not accompany him. In the mean time the snake moved swiftly toward him with upraised hood. As soon as it came near, he recited a mantra, and the snake lay at his feet like an earthworm. The brahmachari said: 'Look here. Why do you go about doing harm? Come, I will give you a holy word. By repeating it you will learn to love God. Ultimately you will realize Him and so get rid of your violent nature.' Saying this, he taught the snake a holy word and initiated him into spiritual life. The snake bowed before the teacher and said, 'Revered sir, how shall I practise spiritual discipline?' 'Repeat that sacred word', said the teacher, 'and do no harm to anybody'. As he was about to depart, the brahmachari said, 'I shall see you again.'

"Some days passed and the cowherd boys noticed that the snake would not bite. They threw stones at it. Still it showed no anger; it behaved as if it were an earthworm. One day one of the boys came close to it, caught it by the tail, and, whirling it round and round, dashed it again and again on the ground and threw it away. The snake vomited

blood and became unconscious. It was stunned. It could not move. So, thinking it dead, the boys went their way.

"Late at night the snake regained consciousness. Slowly and with great difficulty it dragged itself into its hole; its bones were broken and it could scarcely move. Many days passed. The snake became a mere skeleton covered with a skin. Now and then, at night, it would come out in search of food. For fear of the boys it would not leave its hole during the day-time. Since receiving the sacred word from the teacher, it had given up doing harm to others. It maintained its life on dirt, leaves, or the fruit that dropped from the trees.

"About a year later the brahmachari came that way again and asked after the snake. The cowherd boys told him that it was dead. But he couldn't believe them. He knew that the snake would not die before attaining the fruit of the holy word with which it had been initiated. He found his way to the place and, searching here and there, called it by the name he had given it. Hearing the teacher's voice, it came out of its hole and bowed before him with great reverence. 'How are you?' asked the brahmachari. 'I am well, sir', replied the snake. 'But', the teacher asked, 'why are you so thin?' The snake replied: 'Revered sir, you ordered me not to harm any body. So I have been living only on leaves and fruit. Perhaps that has made me thinner.'

"The snake had developed the quality of sattva; it could not be angry with anyone. It had totally forgotten that the cowherd boys had almost killed it.

"The brahmachari said: 'It can't be mere want of food that has reduced you to this state. There must be some other reason. Think a little.' Then the snake remembered that the boys had dashed it against the ground. It said: 'Yes, revered sir, now I remember. The boys one day dashed me violently against the ground. They are ignorant, after all. They didn't realize what a great change had come over my mind. How could they know I wouldn't bite or harm anyone?' The brahmachari exclaimed: 'What a shame! You are such a fool! You don't know how to protect yourself. I asked you not to bite, but I didn't forbid you to hiss. Why didn't you scare them by hissing?'

"So you must hiss at wicked people. You must frighten them lest they should do you harm. But never inject your venom into them. One must not injure others.

"In this creation of God there is a variety of things: men, animals, trees, plants. Among the animals some are good, some bad. There are ferocious animals like the tiger. Some trees bear fruit sweet as nectar, and others bear fruit that is poisonous. Likewise, among human beings, there are the good and the wicked, the holy and the unholy. There are some who are devoted to God, and others who are attached to the world.

Four classes of men

"Men may be divided into four classes: those bound by the fetters of the world, the seekers after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-free.

"Among the ever-free we may count sages like Narada. They live in the world for the good of others, to teach men spiritual truth.

"Those in bondage are sunk in worldliness and forgetful of God. Not even by mistake do they think of God.

"The seekers after liberation want to free themselves from attachment to the world. Some of them succeed and others do not.

"The liberated souls, such as the sadhus and mahatmas, are not entangled in the world, in 'woman and gold'. Their minds are free from worldliness. Besides, they always meditate on the Lotus Feet of God.

"Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net. Some of them try to free themselves from it, and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that struggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, 'Look! There goes a big one!' But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into the mud with the net in their mouths and lie there quietly, thinking, 'We need not fear any more; we are quite safe here.' But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.

"The bound souls are tied to the world by the fetters of 'woman and gold'. They are bound hand and foot. Thinking that 'woman and gold' will make them happy and give them security, they do not realize that it will lead them to annihilation. When a man thus bound to the world is about to die, his wife asks, 'You are about to go; but what have you done for me?' Again, such is his attachment to the things of the world that, when he sees the lamp burning brightly, he says: 'Dim the light. Too much oil is being used.' And he is on his death-bed!

"The bound souls never think of God. If they get any leisure they indulge in idle gossip and foolish talk, or they engage in fruitless work. If you ask one of them the reason, he answers, 'Oh, I cannot keep still; so I am making a hedge.' When time hangs heavy on their hands they perhaps start playing cards."

There was deep silence in the room.

Redeeming power of faith

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, is there no help, then, for such a worldly person?"

MASTER: "Certainly there is. From time to time he should live in the company of holy men, and from time to time go into solitude to meditate on God. Furthermore, he should practise discrimination and pray to God, 'Give me faith and devotion.' Once a person has faith he has achieved everything. There is nothing greater than faith.

(To Kedar) "You must have heard about the tremendous power of faith. It is said in the purana that Rāma, who was God Himself - the embodiment of Absolute Brahman - had to build a bridge to cross the sea to Ceylon. But Hanuman, trusting in Rama's name, cleared the sea in one jump and reached the other side. He had no need of a bridge. (All laugh)

"Once a man was about to cross the sea. Bibhishana wrote Rama's name on a leaf, tied it in a corner of the man's wearing-cloth, and said to him: 'Don't be afraid. Have faith and walk on the water. But look here - the moment you lose faith you will be drowned.' The man was walking easily on the water. Suddenly he had an intense desire to see what was tied in his cloth. He opened it and found only a leaf with the name of Rāma written on it. 'What is this?' he thought. 'Just the name of Rāma!' As soon as doubt entered his mind he sank under the water.

"If a man has faith in God, then even if he has committed the most heinous sins - such as killing a cow, a brahmin, or a woman - he will certainly be saved through his faith. Let him only say to God, 'O Lord, I Will not repeat such an action', and he need not be afraid of anything."

When he had said this, the Master sang:

*If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be?
I may have stolen a drink of wine, or killed a child unborn,
Or slain a woman or a cow,
Or even caused a brahmin's death;
But, though it all be true,
Nothing of this can make me feel the least uneasiness;
For through the power of Thy sweet name
My wretched soul may still aspire
Even to Brahmanhood.*

Parable of the homa bird

Pointing to Narendra, the Master said: "You all see this boy. He behaves that way here. A naughty boy seems very gentle when with his father. But he is quite another person when he plays in the chandni. Narendra and people of his type belong to the class of the ever-free. They are never entangled in the world. When they grow a little older they feel the awakening of inner consciousness and go directly toward God. They come to the world only to teach others. They never care for anything of the world. They are never attached to 'woman and gold'.

"The Vedas speak of the homa bird. It lives high up in the sky and there it lays its egg. As soon as the egg is laid it begins to fall; but it is so high up that it continues to fall for many days. As it falls it hatches, and the chick falls. As the chick falls its eyes open; it grows wings. As soon as its eyes open, it realizes that it is falling and will be dashed to

pieces on touching the earth. Then it at once shoots up toward the mother bird high in the sky."

At this point Narendra left the room. Kedar, Prankrishna, M., and many others remained.

Master praises Narendra

MASTER: "You see, Narendra excels in singing, playing on instruments, study, and everything. The other day he had a discussion with Kedar and tore his arguments to shreds. (All laugh.)

(To M.) "Is there any book in English on reasoning?"

M: "Yes, sir, there is. It is called Logic."

MASTER: "Tell me what it says."

M. was a little embarrassed. He said: "One part of the book deals with deduction from the general to the particular. For example: All men are mortal. Scholars are men. Therefore scholars are mortal. Another part deals with the method of reasoning from the particular to the general. For example: This crow is black. That crow is black. The crows we see everywhere are black. Therefore all crows are black. But there may be a fallacy in a conclusion arrived at in this way; for on inquiry one may find a white crow in some country. There is another illustration: If there is rain, there is, or has been, a cloud. Therefore rain comes from a cloud. Still another example: This man has thirty-two teeth. That man has thirty-two teeth. All the men we see have thirty-two teeth. Therefore men have thirty-two teeth. English logic deals with such inductions and deductions."

Sri Ramakrishna barely heard these words. While listening he became absent-minded. So the conversation did not proceed far.

When the meeting broke up, the devotees sauntered in the temple garden. M. went in the direction of the Panchavati. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. After a while he returned to the Master's room. There, on the small north verandah, he witnessed an amazing sight.

Sri Ramakrishna was standing still, surrounded by a few devotees, and Narendra was singing. M. had never heard anyone except the Master sing so sweetly. When he looked at Sri Ramakrishna he was struck with wonder; for the Master stood motionless, with eyes transfixed. He seemed not even to breathe. A devotee told M. that the Master was in samadhi. M. had never before seen or heard of such a thing. Silent with wonder, he thought: "Is it possible for a man to be so oblivious of the outer world in the consciousness of God? How deep his faith and devotion must be to bring about such a state!"

Narendra was singing:

*Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The Stainless One, Pure Spirit through and through.
How peerless is the Light that in Him shines!
How soul-bewitching is His wondrous form!
How dear is He to all His devotees!*

*Ever more beautiful in fresh-blossoming love
That shames the splendour of a million moons,
Like lightning gleams the glory of His form,
Raising erect the hair for very joy.*

The Master shuddered when this last line was sung. His hair stood on end, and tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. Now and then his lips parted in a smile. Was he seeing the peerless beauty of God, "that shames the splendour of a million moons"? Was this the vision of God, the Essence of Spirit? How much austerity and discipline, how much faith and devotion, must be necessary for such a vision!

The song went on:

*Worship His feet in the lotus of your heart;
With mind serene and eyes made radiant
With heavenly love, behold that matchless sight.*

Again that bewitching smile. The body motionless as before, the eyes half shut, as if beholding a strange inner vision.

The song drew to a close. Narendra sang the last lines:

*Caught in the spell of His love's ecstasy,
Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind"
In Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss.*

The sight of the samadhi, and the divine bliss he had witnessed, left an indelible impression on M.'s mind. He returned home deeply moved. Now and then he could hear within himself the echo of those soul-intoxicating lines:

*Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind,
In Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss.*

Fourth visit

The next day, too, was a holiday for M. He arrived at Dakshineswar at three o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was in his room; Narendra, Bhavanath, and a few other devotees were sitting on a mat spread on the floor. They were all young men of nineteen or twenty. Seated on the small couch, Sri Ramakrishna was talking with them and smiling.

No sooner had M. entered the room than the Master laughed aloud and said to the boys, "There! He has come again." They all joined in the laughter. M. bowed low before him and took a seat. Before this he had saluted the Master with folded hands, like one with an English education. But that day he learnt to fall down at his feet in orthodox Hindu fashion.

The peacock and the opium

Presently the Master explained the cause of his laughter to the devotees, He said: "A man once fed a peacock with a pill of opium at four o'clock in the afternoon. The next day, exactly at that time, the peacock came back. It had felt the intoxication of the drug and returned just in time to have another dose."(All laugh.)

M. thought this a very apt illustration. Even at home he had been unable to banish the thought of Sri Ramakrishna for a moment. His mind was constantly at Dakshineswar and he had counted the minutes until he should go again.

In the mean time the Master was having great fun with the boys, treating them as if they were his most intimate friends. Peals of side-splitting laughter filled the room, as if it were a mart of joy. The whole thing was a revelation to M. He thought: "Didn't I see him only yesterday intoxicated with God? Wasn't he swimming then in the Ocean of Divine Love - a sight I had never seen before? And today the same person is behaving like an ordinary man! Wasn't it he who scolded me on the first day of my coming here? Didn't he admonish me, saying, 'And you are a man of knowledge!?' Wasn't it he who said to me that God with form is as true as God without form? Didn't he tell me that God alone is real and all else illusory? Wasn't it he who advised me to live in the world unattached, like a maidservant in a rich man's house?"

Sri Ramakrishna was having great fun with the young devotees; now and then he glanced at M. He noticed that M. sat in silence. The Master said to Ramlal: "You see, he is a little advanced in years, and therefore somewhat serious. He sits quiet while the youngsters are making merry." M. was then about twenty-eight years old.

Hanuman's devotion to Rāma

The conversation drifted to Hanuman, whose picture hung on the wall in the Master's room.

Sri Ramakrishna said: "Just imagine Hanuman's state of mind. He didn't care for money, honour, creature comforts, or anything else. He longed only for God. When he was running away with the heavenly weapon that had been secreted in the crystal pillar, Mandodari began to tempt him with various fruits so that he might come down and drop the weapon.⁵ But he couldn't be tricked so easily. In reply to her persuasions he sang this song:

*Am I in need of fruit?
I have the Fruit that makes this life
Fruitful indeed. Within my heart*

*The Tree of Rāma grows,
Bearing salvation for its fruit.*

*Under the Wish-fulfilling Tree
Of Rāma do I sit at ease,
Plucking whatever fruit I will.
But if you speak of fruit -
No beggar, I, for common fruit.
Behold, I go,
Leaving a bitter fruit for you."*

As Sri Ramakrishna was singing the song he went into samadhi. Again the half-closed eyes and motionless body that one sees in his photograph. Just a minute before, the devotees had been making merry in his company. Now all eyes were riveted on him. Thus for the second time M. saw the Master in samadhi.

After a long time the Master came back to ordinary consciousness. His face lighted up with a smile, and his body relaxed; his senses began to function in a normal way. He shed tears of joy as he repeated the holy name of Rāma. M. wondered whether this very saint was the person who a few minutes earlier had been behaving like a child of five.

The Master said to Narendra and M., "I should like to hear you speak and argue in English." They both laughed. But they continued to talk in their mother tongue. It was impossible for M. to argue any more before the Master. Though Ramakrishna insisted, they did not talk in English.

At five o'clock in the afternoon all the devotees except Narendra and M. took leave of the Master. As M. was walking in the temple garden, he suddenly came upon the Master talking to Narendra on the bank of the goose-pond. Sri Ramakrishna said to Narendra: "Look here. Come a little more often. You are a new-comer. On first acquaintance people visit each other quite often, as is the case with a lover and his sweetheart. (Narendra and M. laugh.) So please come, won't you?"

Narendra, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, was very particular about his promises. He said with a smile, "Yes, sir, I shall try."

As they were returning to the Master's room, Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "When peasants go to market to buy bullocks for their ploughs, they can easily tell the good from the bad by touching their tails. On being touched there, some meekly lie down on the ground. The peasants recognize that these are without mettle and so reject them. They select only those bullocks that frisk about and show spirit when their tails are touched. Narendra is like a bullock of this latter class. He is full of spirit within."

The Master smiled as he said this, and continued: "There are some people who have no grit whatever. They are like flattened rice soaked in milk - soft and mushy. No inner strength!"