

Introduction

A Brief Life Sketch of Thakur Sri Ramakrishna

Birth of Sri Ramakrishna – father Khudiram and mother Chandramani – primary school – worship of Raghuvir – company of sadhus and listening to the Puranas – beholds a miraculous light – comes to Calcutta, and company of sadhus at Kali Temple in Dakshineswar – sees a miraculous divine form – Thakur like one mad – company of sadhus, Bhairavi Brahmani, Totapuri and Thakur's listening to Vedanta at the Kali Temple – practices spiritual disciplines according to the Tantra and the Puranas – Thakur's talk with the Mother of the Universe – goes on pilgrimage – Thakur's inner circle – Thakur and his devotees – Thakur and the Brahmo Samaj – reconciliation of all religions: Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and so on – Thakur's women devotees – his family of devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna was born to a pious brahmin family in the inland village of Kamarpukur on the second lunar day of the bright fortnight of Phalgun. The village is in the Hooghly district, about eight miles west of Jehanabad (Aram Bag) and about twenty-six miles south of Burdwan.

There is a difference of opinion on the date of his birth.

During Sri Ramakrishna's illness, Ambika Acharya read his horoscope and dated his birth on the third of Kartik, 1286 B.Y., A.D. 1879. This gives a date of 1756 Shaka, the 10th of Phalgun, Wednesday, the second day of the bright fortnight,

Purva Bhadrapada Nakshatra. His calculation is: 1756/109/59/12. On the other hand Kshetra Nath Bhatt's calculation in 1300 B.Y. is 1754/10/9/0/12. According to this calculation it is 1754 Shaka, the 10th of Phalgun, Wednesday, the second day of the bright fortnight, Purva Bhadrapada, 1239 B.Y., 20 February 1833. All tally. At this time there is a conjunction of the sun, the moon, and Mercury. It is the sign of Aquarius. Because of the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus, he would be the chief of a religious sect.

Narayana Jyotirbhusan made a new horoscope (at Belur Math). According to his calculation, 1242 B.Y., 6th of Phalgun, Wednesday; 17 February 1836, 4 a.m., the second day of the bright fortnight of Phalgun, when there is a conjunction of the three planets, all the points tally except the 10th of Phalgun given by Ambika Acharya: 1757/10/5/59/28/21. Sri Ramakrishna lived for fifty years. Thakur's father, Sri Khudiram Chatterji, was a man of firm faith and great devotion. His mother, Chandramani Devi, was the personification of simplicity and kindness. They had lived in a village called Dere about three miles from Kamarpukur, but because of problems relating to Khudiram's refusal to give evidence in a lawsuit in favour of the landlord at Dere, he moved to Kamarpukur with his family.

Sri Ramakrishna's childhood name was Gadadhar. He learned elementary reading in primary school but the arithmetic book by Shuvankara confused him, so he left school to stay at home and attend to the household deity,

Raghuvir. He himself plucked flowers for worship and performed the daily puja.

His voice was exquisitely sweet, and he could sing almost all the songs he heard in theatrical performances.¹ He was cheerful from childhood. Everyone in the neighbourhood – men and women and children – loved him dearly and felt the attraction of his cheerful nature.

Holy men frequently visited a guesthouse at the garden of the Lahas, near Gadadhar's home. He would visit them there and serve them. And when the storytellers read from the Puranas, he would listen with rapt attention. In this way he learned all the stories of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Srimad Bhagavata.

One day when he was eleven years old, Thakur crossed a field to Anur, a nearby village. He later narrated how he had suddenly lost all sense-consciousness when he saw a miraculous light. People thought he had fainted, but he had attained the superconscious state of bhava samadhi.

After the death of his father, Khudiram, Thakur came to Calcutta with his elder brother. He was then seventeen or eighteen years old. In Calcutta he spent some days at Nathair Bagan and a few days at the house of Govinda Chatterji in Jhamapukur. He performed puja there, as well as at the house of the Mittra family in Jhamapukur.

Rani Rasmani dedicated the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, which is about five miles from Calcutta, on the 18th of Jaishtha, 1262 B.Y., on the

1. Yatras.

Snana Yatra¹ day, Thursday, 31 May 1855.² Sri Ramakrishna's elder brother, Pundit Ramkumar, was appointed the first priest of the Kali Temple. Thakur used to go there often from Calcutta. Intime he also was engaged for the puja work. He was at that time twenty-one or twenty-two years old. His second brother, Rameswar, also sometimes performed puja in the Kali Temple. He had two sons, Ramlal and Shivaram, and a daughter, Lakshmi Devi.

After Sri Ramakrishna had performed the worship for some time, a change came over him. He would remain sitting before the image of the Mother, completely absorbed.

Soon after this, his family arranged his marriage. They thought that marriage might change his state of mind. He was married in 1859 to Saradamani Devi, the daughter of Ramchandra Mukherji of Jayrambati, a village about four miles from Kamarpukur. Thakur was twenty-two or twenty-three years old; Saradamani was six.

After his marriage, Sri Ramakrishna returned to the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Within a few days, his state of mind suddenly changed. When worshipping Mother Kali, he began to have wonderful divine visions. He would perform arati but not bring the arati to a close. He would sit down to perform puja but the puja would not end.

1. Ceremonial procession when Lord Jagannath goes out for a bath.
 2. Information is taken from the deed of sale of Rani Rasamani's Kali Temple: Deed of conveyance, date of purchase of the temple grounds: 6 September 1847; date of registration: 27 August 1861; price: 2 lakhs, 26,000 rupees.

At times he offered flowers on his own head. Sometimes he could not carry on the puja, but would wander around like a madman.

Rani Rasmani's son-in-law, Mathur, began to revere him as a great man and to serve him. He arranged for another priest to perform Mother Kali's worship and for Hriday Mukherji, Thakur's sister's son, to be his attendant.

After this, Thakur neither attended to the duties of a priest, nor did he enter into the life of a householder. His marriage was in name only. Day and night "Mother, Mother" was on his lips. First he would be like a wooden figure, then he would move around like a mad person. Sometimes he would appear like a child; sometimes he would hide himself at the sight of worldly people attached to 'lust and greed.' He liked nothing but divine talk and continually murmured, "Mother! Mother!"

In the Kali Temple compound there was (and still is) a free kitchen. Holy men and sannyasins would frequently visit it. Totapuri stayed there for eleven months and expounded the philosophy of Vedanta to Thakur. Within only a few days, Totapuri observed that Thakur went into nirvikalpa samadhi. About the year 1866 the Bhairavi Brahmani (who had come in 1859) led Thakur through several Tantric practices. Looking upon him as Sri Chaitanya, she read him Sri Charitamrita and other Vaishnava holy books. When she saw him listening to Vedanta from Totapuri, the Brahmani warned him, "Baba, don't listen to Vedanta. It will dilute your ecstasy and love for God."

Vaishnavcharan, a pundit of the Vaishnava sect, often visited Sri Ramakrishna. It was he who took Thakur to an assembly of Chaitanya's devotees in Calcutta. He was president of the group. In this assembly, Sri Ramakrishna experienced the state of God-consciousness and stepped up to occupy the seat of Sri Chaitanya.

Vaishnavcharan had said to Mathur, "This madness is not ordinary; it is the madness of love. He is mad for God." Vaishnavcharan and the Brahmani had seen Thakur's state of divine ecstasy.¹ Like Chaitanya Deva he sometimes passed into samadhi, the state of superconscious awareness, appearing like a piece of wood, unmindful of the world around him. Then he passed through semi-consciousness and returned again to normal consciousness.

Thakur always talked to the Divine Mother and took instructions from Her. He would also weep, calling out, "Mother, Mother." He would say, "O Mother, I shall hear You and You alone. I don't know the sacred books, nor do I know scholars. If You explain to me, only then will I believe." Thakur knew, and he would say, that He who is the Supreme Being, indivisible Sat-chit-ananda, is the Mother.

The Divine Mother told him, "You and I are one. Live in love and devotion² to God for the good of mankind. Many devotees will come to you. Then you won't have to see only worldly-minded people.

1. Mahabhava.

2. Bhakti.

There are many devotees who are pure and free from worldly desires. They will come.”

In the temple at the time of arati, when bells and cymbals rang, Sri Ramakrishna would go to the roof of the kuthi and cry out in a loud voice, “O you devotees, who are you? Where are you? Come soon!”

Thakur looked upon his mother, Chandramani Devi, as another form of the Mother of the Universe and served her with this same spirit. When his elder brother, Ramkumar, passed away, the bereaved mother was stricken with grief. Within three or four years, Thakur asked her to come and stay with him at the Kali Temple. He would go to see her every day, take the dust of her feet, and ask about her welfare.

Thakur went on pilgrimage twice. The first time he took his mother with him. Ram Chatterji and some of Mathur’s sons accompanied them on the first railway line laid to Kashi. This was in 1863, within the period of five or six years of the change in his spiritual state. At that time he was either in samadhi day and night, or he remained overwhelmed and intoxicated in ecstasy. During the pilgrimage, after visiting Vaidyanath, he visited Kashi and Prayag.

His second pilgrimage took place five years later, in January 1868, with Mathur Babu and his wife, Jagadamba Dasi. This time Thakur’s sister’s son, Hriday, was with him. During the journey he visited Kashi, Prayag, and Vrindavan. In Kashi he went into samadhi at the Manikarnika ghat and had a divine vision of Lord Vishvanath whispering

the name of Tarak Brahman into the ears of the dying. He also met and spoke to Trailanga Swami, who had taken a vow of silence. In Mathura at the Dhruva ghat, he saw Sri Krishna on the lap of Vasudeva; in holy Vrindavan he saw Sri Krishna with his cows returning in the evening from across the Jamuna. Such sport he saw with his spiritual eye. In Nidhuvan he was overjoyed to meet and talk with Mother Ganga, who was immersed in love for Radha.

One day in 1875 Sri Ramakrishna went with his nephew, Hriday, to see Keshab Sen at Belgharia. Keshab was meditating in his garden house with his disciples. By this time Vishwanath Upadhyaya, the Captain from Nepal, had begun to visit him. Gopal of Sinti (the Elder Gopal¹), Mahendra Kaviraj, Kishori of Krishnanagar, and Mahimacharan had also met Thakur by this time.

The devotees of Sri Ramakrishna's inner circle began coming to him in 1879-80. When they met him, he had almost passed the state of "divine madness." He was like a child then, calm and always cheerful. But he was almost always in the state of samadhi, sometimes in jada samadhi (appearing inert, like a piece of wood, unmindful of the world around), at other times in bhava samadhi (immersed in God). Even when not in samadhi, he remained in a state of ecstasy. He seemed like a five-year-old child, always saying, "Mother! Mother!"

1. Later Swami Advaitananda.

Ram and Manmohan met Thakur toward the end of 1879. Kedar and Surendra came next, as well as Chuni, Latu, Nityagopal, and Tarak. During the end of 1881 and the beginning of 1882, Narendra, Rakhhal, Bhavanath, Baburam, Balaram, Nirranjan, M., and Yogen came. Kishori, Adhar, Nitai, the younger Gopal, Tarak of Belgharia, Sarat, and Sashi came in 1883 and 1884. In the middle of 1884 Sanyal, Gangadhar, Kali, Girish, Devendra, Sarada, Kalipada, Upendra, Dwija, and Hari came. Subodh, the Younger Narendra, Paltu, Purna, Narayan, Tejchandra, and Haripada came in the middle of 1885. Likewise came Hara Mohan, Yajneshwar, Hazra, Kshirode, Yogen of Krishnanagar, Manindra, Bhupati, Akshay, Navagopal, Govinda of Belgharia, Ashu, Girendra, Atul, Durgacharan, Suresh, Prankrishna, Nabai Chaitanya, Hari Prasanna, Mahendra (Mukherji), Priya Mukherji, Sadhu Priyanath (Manmath), Vinod, Tulasi, Harish Mustafi, Basakh, Kathak Thakur, Sashi of Bali (Brahmachari), Nityagopal (Goswami), Vipin of Konnagar, Bihari, Dhiren, and Rakhhal (Haldar) came – one after another.

Ishwar Vidyasagar, Shashadhar Pundit, Dr. Rajendra, Dr. Sarkar, Bankim (Chatterji), Mr. Cook from the United States, devotee Williams, Mr. Missir, Michael Madhusudan, Krishnadas (Pal), Pundit Dina Bandhu, Pundit Shyamapada, Dr. Ramnarayan, Dr. Durgacharan, Radhika Goswami, Shishir (Ghosh), Navin (a clerk), and Nilkantha had all met Thakur by 1885. He had visited Trailanga Swami in holy Kashi and Mother Ganga in Vrindavan. Taking him as (the incarnation of)

Radha (divine love), Mother Ganga had not wanted Thakur to leave Vrindavan.

Before the devotees of the inner circle came, Krishnakishore, Madhura, Sambhu Mallick, Narayan Shastri, Gauri Pundit of Indesh, Chandra, and Achalananda were frequent visitors to Thakur. The court pundit of the King of Burdwan, Padmalochan, and Dayananda (the founder) of the Arya Samaj also met Thakur. Many devotees of Thakur's native village, Kamarpukur, and of Sihore and Shyambazar had been drawn to him.

Many members of the Brahma Samaj met Thakur. Keshab, Vijay, Kali (Bose), Pratap, Shivanath, Amrit, Trailokya, Krishna Bihari, Manilal, Umesh, Hirananda, Bhavani, Nanda Lal, and many other Brahma devotees often visited him. Thakur also visited them. During Mathur's lifetime, he and Thakur went to Devendranath Tagore's house and paid a visit to the Adi Brahma Samaj during service hours. Later he went to see Keshab's Brahma temple and the Sadharan Samaj during the time of worship. He would frequently visit Keshab's house. How much he would rejoice in the company of Brahma devotees! Keshab visited him frequently, sometimes with devotees, sometimes alone.

At Kalna he met Bhagavan Das Babaji. Seeing Thakur's state of samadhi, Babaji said, "You are indeed a great spiritual soul. Only you are fit to take the seat of Chaitanya Deva."

Thakur practiced the disciplines of the Vaishnavas, the Shaktas, the Shaivas; he also recited the name of Allah and meditated upon

Christ. He realized that they all led to the same goal. In his room there were pictures of gods and goddesses and an image of the Buddha. There was also a picture showing Jesus Christ saving Peter from drowning. These pictures can still be seen if you go to that room. English and American devotees can now be seen meditating upon Thakur in the room.

One day he implored the Divine Mother, "O Mother, I would like to see how your Christian devotees pray to You. Please take me to a place where they worship You." In a few days, he went to Calcutta and watched a Christian service, standing at the entrance to the church. When he returned, Thakur said to the devotees, "I didn't enter the church to sit for fear of the steward [of the Kali Temple]. I said to myself, 'Maybe he wouldn't allow me to enter the temple.'"

Thakur had many women devotees. He called Gopal's Mother "Mother" and referred to her as "Gopal's Mother." He looked upon and worshiped all women as incarnations of Bhagavati (the Divine Mother). He said, "As long as a man cannot see a woman as Mother Herself, he cannot have pure love for God." He warned men to guard themselves against women till that stage is reached. He went so far as to forbid young men to keep the company of even the most devout woman. He once said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, I will run a knife across my throat if any lustful thought arises in my mind."

Thakur's devotees are countless. Some are known, others unknown. It is impossible to name all of them. The names of many of them will be

found in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. Those who visited him during their boyhood are: Ramakrishna, Paltu, Tulasi, Shanti, Sashi, Vipin, Hiralal, Nagendra Mitra, Upendra, Surendra, and Suren. A number of little girls also saw Thakur. Now they, too, are his devotees.

Many became his devotees after he ended his divine play and others are still coming. In Madras, Sri Lanka, Uttar Pradesh, Rajputana, Kumaon, Nepal, Bombay, Punjab, Japan, and also in America and England – at all these places the family of devotees continues to grow.

Janmashtami
1310 B.Y., A.D. 1903

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar

Chapter One

The Kali Temple and garden

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Kali Temple – chandni (portal) and the twelve Shiva temples – brick courtyard and the Vishnu temple – Sri Sri Bhavatarini Mother Kali – natmandir (the music pavilion) – the store, the pantry, the guest house and the place of sacrifice – the office rooms – Sri Ramakrishna’s room – nahabat, bakultala and panchavati – jhautala, beltala and kuthi – ghat for washing utensils, Gazitala, the main gate and the back gate – Hanspukur, stable, cowshed, and flower garden – the verandah of Sri Ramakrishna’s room, the “Abode of Joy.”

It is Sunday. The devotees have a day off from work, so they are coming in great numbers to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar to see the Paramahansa Deva, Sri Ramakrishna. His door is open to all. Thakur talks freely with all the visitors: sadhus,¹ paramahansas,² Hindus, Christians, Brahmos,³ Shaktas,⁴ Vaishnavas,⁵ men and women – they all visit him. Blessed you are, Rani Rasmani! It is because of your virtue that such a beautiful temple

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1. Wandering monks.
 2. One belonging to the highest order of knowers of Brahman.
 3. Member of the Brahmo Samaj.
 4. Hindus who worship God as the Primal Divine Energy.
 5. Hindus who follow the path of devotion and worship God as the Preserver (Vishnu), or divine incarnation such as Rama and Krishna.

has come into being. Besides, there is a living image!
People are able to come here to meet and worship a
great spiritual personality.

The chandni and the twelve Shiva temples

The Kali Temple is located about five miles north of Calcutta on the bank of the Ganges. Arriving by boat and climbing toward the east up a broad staircase, one enters the Kali Temple. It is at this very ghat that Sri Ramakrishna takes his bath. Just up from the staircase is the chandni. Watchmen of the temple live there. Their cots, mango-wood chests, and one or two jugs and such things are lying around. When the gentlemen of the neighbourhood come to the temple garden to take their bath in the Ganges, some of them sit here and gossip while they have an oil massage. Some of the sadhus, fakirs, and Vaishnavas who come to have prasad¹ from the guest house wait here for the bell announcing the food offerings.² At times a bhairavi (woman worshiper of the Mother), dressed in ochre cloth and holding a trident in her hand, is seated here. She, too, will go to the guest house for food when the bell rings. The chandni is situated in the center of the twelve Shiva temples – six temples to the north and six to the south. People passing by in boats, seeing the twelve temples from a distance, exclaim, “That is the temple garden of Rani Rasmani!”

1. Offered food.

2. Bhoga.

The brick courtyard and the Vishnu temple

There is a cemented brick courtyard to the east of the chandni, and then the twelve Shiva temples. In the center of the courtyard are two temples facing each other. To the north is the temple of Radhakanta. Directly south of it is the temple of Mother Kali. In the Radhakanta Temple, the images of Radha and Krishna face west. One enters up a flight of stairs. The floor of this temple is paved with marble, and a chandelier hangs in its vestibule. Not in use now, it is protected by a red linen cloth. A watchman keeps vigil in the temple, and canvas screens protect the deities from the midday sun in the western sky. Passages left open between the rows of columns in the vestibule are covered by screens. Toward the southeast corner is a pitcher of Ganges water, and near the threshold of the door is a vessel containing holy water.¹ Devotees bow down before the deities and then take a few drops of the water. Inside the temple the statues of Radha and Krishna sit on a raised seat. Sri Ramakrishna's first duties as priest in 1857 and 1858 were at this temple.

Sri Sri Bhavatarini Mother Kali

In the southern temple is the beautiful stone image of Kali, the Divine Mother. She is called the Saviour of the World.² The floor of the temple is paved in black and white marble. Steps ascend to a raised platform on which there is a silver lotus of a thousand petals. On this lotus Shiva lies on His

1. Charanamrita.

2. Bhavatarini.

back, His head to the south and feet to the north. The image of Shiva is made of white marble. On His breast stands the stone image of the very beautiful three-eyed Shyama Kali. She is dressed in a Benares sari and decorated with jewels of many kinds. On Her lotus feet are tinkling anklets,¹ ornaments,² red china roses, and bel leaves. One of the anklets is called panjeb and is worn by women of the west (Punjab and Uttar Pradesh). This ornament was procured by Mathur Babu at the special desire of Sri Ramakrishna. The Mother's arms are adorned with broad bangles³ and armlets made of gold. Her lower arm wears the bracelets known as "coconut flowers," paincha, bauti, and bala. On Her upper arms She wears armlets called tarr, tabiz, and baju. The last one has a pendant attached to it.

Around Her neck the Divine Mother wears a golden cheke, a pearl necklace of seven strings, a golden necklace of thirty-two strings, a "chain of stars," and a golden garland made of human skulls. On Her head She wears a crown. Her ears are adorned with kanbala and kanpash, golden earrings that look like flowers, and also round golden earrings⁴ and the "golden fish." She wears a pearl nose ring. The three-eyed Goddess holds a decapitated human head and a sword in Her upper and lower left hands. Her upper right hand makes the sign of fearlessness and the lower offers boons. Around Her waist She wears a garland of human

1. Nupur.

2. Gujai, panchem, panjeb, and chutaki.

3. Bauti.

4. Chaundani.

arms, as well as golden waist-chains called neem fruit and komarpata.

In the northeast corner of the temple is a beautiful bed where the Mother rests. On a side wall hangs a chamara¹ with which Sri Ramakrishna fanned Her. On a lotus stand on the altar is water in a silver water glass. Rows of vessels that hold water for Mother to drink are on the steps. On a silver lotus seat to the northwest is a lion made of eight metals. Images of an iguana and a trident are to the east. Toward the southwest of the platform is a vixen, to the south is a black stone bull, and to the northeast is a swan. On one of the steps leading to the platform is an image of Narayana² on a small silver throne. On one side of him is an image of Ramlala, the boy Ramachandra, made of eight metals, which the Paramahansa Deva obtained from a holy man. There is also an emblem of Shiva, as well as some other gods.

The Divine Mother faces south. Directly in front of Her, to the south of the platform, is a pitcher. After puja this pitcher³ is dabbed with vermilion, covered with various kinds of flowers, and decorated with flower garlands. On another wall is a copper pitcher filled with water to wash the Mother's face. Above, in the temple canopy behind the image, a beautiful piece of Benares silk hangs. Adding to the beauty of the image are silver

1. A fan made of the white hair from the tail of the yak called Chamari.

2. God the Preserver.

3. Mangal-ghat.

columns on the four sides of the platform with a costly canopy spread over them.

The temple is of medium size. Some of the gates of the vestibule are protected by strong doors. A guard sits near one of the doors. Nearby is a small vessel containing holy water. The top of the temple is adorned with nine pinnacles. Four of the pinnacles rise from the lower corners of the roof, four from the middle, and above them one pinnacle rises from the center peak. It is now broken. The Paramahansa Deva performed puja in this shrine as well as in the shrine of Radhakanta.

The natmandir (the theatrical hall)

In front of Kali's shrine – that is, to the south – is a beautiful and spacious natmandir on which Shiva¹ and his attendants, Nandi and Bhringi, are depicted.

Before entering the Mother's temple, Sri Ramakrishna would fold his hands and bow to Shiva, as though entering the temple after taking His permission. Two rows of high columns stand north-south of the natmandir with a roof over them. To the east and west of the row of columns are two portions of the natmandir. During festivals, especially on Kali Puja day, theatrical performances are performed in the natmandir. It was there that Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of Rasmani, at the request of Sri Ramakrishna, carried out a donation to the poor called "the

1. Mahadeva.

ceremony of the mound of grain.”¹ It was here that Sri Ramakrishna worshiped Bhairavi.

Store, pantry, guest house, and place of sacrifice

To the west of the courtyard are the twelve Shiva temples, and on the three other sides are single-storied rooms. The rooms to the east include the storeroom, a room for keeping luchis (fried bread), a room for the food offerings for Vishnu, a room for preparing fruit and other offerings, and a room for cooking the offerings for the Divine Mother, as well as the guest house for feeding guests. If guests and visiting sadhus do not eat here, they must go to the office of the steward of the temple for permission to take rations from the store. To the south of the natmandir is the place of sacrifice.

Food prepared for Vishnu’s shrine is vegetarian, but not so for Kali. There is a separate kitchen for preparing food for Her. In front of the kitchen of the Divine Mother, maidservants cut fish with big knives. On the dark night of the month² a goat is sacrificed. The food offering is over before noon. In the meantime beggars, sadhus, and guests take plates made of sal leaves from the guest house and sit down in rows. Brahmins are allotted a separate corner and the brahmins working here have different seats as well. Prasad for the steward is sent to his room. The descendents of the founder of the temple, Rani Rasmani, stay in the kuthi when

1. Dhanyameru.

2. Amavasya.

they visit the temple; their prasad is taken to them there.

Office rooms

In the row of rooms on the south side of the courtyard are offices and the residences of officials. The steward and clerks stay here, and the storekeeper, maidservants, men servants, priests, cooks, brahmin cooks, and gate keepers are generally found walking in and out. Some of these rooms, which contain property of the temple, such as carpets and tents, are locked. Some of the rooms are used as storerooms on the birthday celebrations of the Paramahamsadeva. The cooking for this great celebration is done on the ground to the south.

There is another row of single-storied rooms to the north of the courtyard. In its center is the main gate. As in the chandni, here, too, gatekeepers keep watch. Shoes must be taken off before entering both places.

Sri Ramakrishna's room

In the northwest corner of the courtyard, just north of the twelve Shiva temples, is Sri Ramakrishna's room. Due west of his room is a semicircular verandah. It was from here, facing west, that Sri Ramakrishna often watched the Ganges. Next to this verandah is a path, and to its west, a flower garden and terrace, alongside which flows the pure, sweet, melodious waters of the Ganges, the symbol of all pilgrimages.

**Nahabat (the music pavilion), bakultala and
panchavati**

Just north of the Paramahansa Deva's room is a rectangular verandah. To its north is a garden path and flower garden. And beyond that is the nahabat (the music pavilion). The revered mother of Sri Ramakrishna and later the Holy Mother lived in the lower room. Next to the nahabat are the grove of bakul trees and river ghat where the women of the neighborhood take their bath. It was at this ghat that the venerable mother of the Paramahansa Deva breathed her last, with the lower half of her body immersed in the holy waters of the Ganges.

A little north of the bakultala is the panchavati (a grove of five trees). It was in the panchavati that the Paramahansa Deva practiced many religious austerities. He would often stroll around the area with his devotees. At times, deep at night, he would rise and go there. This grove consists of five trees: the bata (Indian fig), peepal, neem, amalaki, and bel trees which Thakur himself planted. On returning from Vrindavan, Sri Ramakrishna scattered the dust of that holy place at the panchavati. Directly east of it, Sri Ramakrishna had a thatched hut built. It was here that he meditated and practiced many austerities. This hut has since been replaced by a room made of brick.

In the center of the panchavati are a banyan tree and a peepal tree which have grown together and now appear as one. Being very old, the tree has many holes in it, which have become the living places of many birds and animals. Below it is a

brick-built circular platform with steps. Seated on the northwestern side of the platform, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna carried out many devotional exercises. With great yearning he called upon God like a cow cries for its calf. Now, across the hallowed seat, a branch of the peepal tree has fallen, though it has not completely broken away from the parent bata tree. It seems to say that no great man worthy to sit on that platform has yet been born again.

Jhautala, beltala, and kuthi

A little north of the panchavati is a railing made of iron wire. On the other side of it is the jhautala, where rows and rows of willow trees stand. A short distance east from the jhautala is the beltala. Here, too, the Paramahansa Deva practiced many difficult austerities. Beyond the jhautala and the beltala is a high wall and just north of it is the government magazine.

Going north from the main gate of the courtyard, one comes to the two-storied kuthi. Whenever Rani Rasmani and her son-in-law, Mathur Babu, and other members of the family visited the temple, they would stay at the kuthi. During their lifetime, the Paramahansa Deva lived in a western room on the ground floor. A path from this room leads to the bakultala ghat, from where there is a splendid view of the Ganges.

Ghat for washing utensils, gazitala, and gates

Going east on the path between the main gate of the courtyard and the kuthi is a fine reservoir with a specially built, paved ghat. This ghat, which

borders the east side of Mother Kali's temple, is used for washing utensils. A short distance north from the main gate path is another ghat, to the side of which is a tree called gazitala. A little further east on this path is another gate. It is the main exit from the garden. People from Alambazar or Calcutta visit the temple through this gate. People from Dakshineswar come in through the back gate. There, too, a watchman is stationed. When the Paramahansa Deva used to return to the Kali Temple from Calcutta at midnight, the watchman at this gate would unlock it. The Paramahansa Deva would call him to his room and give him luchi, sweets, and other items of prasad.

Hanspukur, stable, cow sheds, and lower garden

To the east of the panchavati is another reservoir called the Hanspukur (Goose Tank). At its northeast corner are a stable and a cow shed. East of the cow shed is the back gate. It leads to the village of Dakshineswar. It is used by priests and temple officials and their families who live in Dakshineswar.

There is a flower-bordered path along the Ganges running north from the southern extremity of the garden to the bakultala and the panchavati. An east-west path from the south of the kuthi is also flanked by flowers. From the gazitala to the cow barn, the stretch of land to the east of the kuthi and the Hanspukur also has flowering plants of different species, fruit trees, and another reservoir.

Very early in the morning when the eastern sky is turning red, one can hear the sweet sounds of the

morning arati and morning music played on the sanai. At this time flowers from Mother Kali's flower garden are plucked for worship. On the bank of the Ganges in front of the panchavati are vilva trees and fragrant beds of pagoda flowers. Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of tulips, madhavi (myrtle), and gulachi flowers. He brought a madhavi creeper from Vrindavan and planted it here. On the eastern bank of the Hanspukur and the kuthi are champak plants and at a little distance are plants of jhumka, hibiscus, roses, and kanchan (gold flower). Aparajita grows on hedges, and close by are jasmine and shafalika flowers. Along the western wall beside the twelve Shiva temples are red and white oleander, roses, and both large and small jasmine. Interspersed are datura, which provide large and fragrant white blossoms used in the worship of Shiva. At intervals there are basil plants growing on high brick-built platforms. To the south of the nahabat are larger jasmine, gardenia, and roses. Not far from the brick-built ghat are lotus oleander¹ and the cuckoo-eyed. Near the Paramahansa Deva's room are a couple of coxcomb, and close by are double jasmine, gardenia, roses, tulips, white and red oleanders, double hibiscus, and Chinese hibiscus.

Sri Ramakrishna used to gather flowers for worship himself. One day when he was plucking the leaves of a bel tree in front of the panchavati, a small portion of the bark of the tree came off. He felt as if the one who lives within all things had received a severe pain. Thenceforth, he could no

1. Padmakarvi.

longer pluck bel leaves. Another day when he was walking around picking flowers, he was suddenly aware that the various flowering plants were but so many bouquets adoring the great image of Shiva. Shiva was thus being worshiped day and night. Henceforth, he ceased to pick flowers.

Verandah of Thakur Sri Ramakrishna's room

Two adjoining verandahs extend east and south from Sri Ramakrishna's room. It was in the south wing of these verandahs which faced the courtyard that Sri Ramakrishna often sat with the devotees. There he would talk to them about God and sing devotional songs with them. In the northern wing, devotees also gathered to celebrate his birthday and to sing hymns with him. At times he would take prasad with them there. It was also on this verandah that Keshab Chandra Sen visited him and would talk for long hours like a disciple. They would enjoy themselves with puffed rice, coconut, luchis, and sweets. It was here, also, that Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi at the sight of Narendrar.

The Abode of Joy

The Kali Temple has become the Abode of Joy. Radhakanta, Bhavatarini, and Mahadeva are worshiped here daily. Offerings for worship are made and guests served. On one side the sacred view of the Bhagirathi (the Ganges) stretches far into the distance; on the other is a unique and varied flower garden that charms everyone with its abundant fragrance and beauty. As well, there is the God-man, intoxicated day and night with love

for God. And there is the perennial festival of the ever-joyful Divine Mother. Music emanates from the nahabat at the sacred time of the dawn arati and again when worship starts about nine in the morning. At noon it sounds after the food offering, when the deities retire to rest. It is again played at four o'clock when they rise after their rest. Music is heard again from the nahabat at the time of evening arati and last of all, at nine at night, when, after the evening offerings of food, the deities go to bed.

Chapter Two

Tava kathāmṛtaṁ taptajivanaṁ kavibhir iḍitaṁ
kalmaṣāpaham |
śravaṇamaṅgalaṁ śrīmad ātataṁ bhuvi gṛṇanti te
bhūridā janā ||

[The nectar of Your story revives the parched soul of man. Poets (men of knowledge) praise it. It wipes away our sins. To hear it is, in itself, auspicious. It is pervasive, limitless, and beautiful. Only those who have been generous in their past lives understand it.]

– Srimad Bhagavata X:31:9

The first meeting – month of February 1882

The Kali Temple at Dakshineswar on the bank of the Ganges. It is springtime in February 1882. On Thursday, 23 February, one day after his birthday, Sri Ramakrishna went for a cruise on a steamer with Keshab Sen and Joseph Cook. It is now a few days later, and evening is approaching. M. comes to Sri Ramakrishna's room. It is his first visit.

He sees a roomful of people seated motionless, drinking in the nectar of his words. Thakur is seated on his bed, facing east and talking about God with a smiling face. The devotees are sitting before him on the floor.

When does renunciation of work take place?

M. looks in and is speechless. He wonders if it is Sukadeva telling the story of the Lord and if at that spot all the places of pilgrimage have gathered together. Or is it Sri Chaitanya sitting in the holy land of Puri singing the names and glories of Bhagavan¹ with Ramananda, Swarup, and other devotees seated before him?

Sri Ramakrishna is saying, “When your hair stands on end just at the name of Hari or Rama, and tears flow from your eyes, know for certain that sandhya² and other daily observances are no longer necessary. They are over for you. You have then gained the right to give up work. Indeed, karmas fall off of their own accord. In that state mere repetition of the name of Rama or Hari, or the Omkara³ is enough.” And he adds, “Sandhya ends in Gayatri⁴ and Gayatri in Om.”

M. has walked here, from garden to garden, with Sidhu⁵ from Baranagore. It is Sunday, 26 February, 15th Phalgun, a holiday, and he has come out for a walk. A little earlier he was strolling in Prasanna

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1. The beloved Lord.
 2. Daily service morning, noon, and evening, as laid down for the twice-born.
 3. Om, the Vedic symbol for the Supreme Being.
 4. The ancient Vedic mantra (sacred text) that the brahmins and other twice-born Hindus repeat everyday while meditating on the Supreme Being.
 5. Siddheswar Majumdar. His home is in north Baranagore.

Bannerji's garden. It was there that Sidhu said, "There is a beautiful garden on the bank of the Ganges. Would you like to see it? A paramahansa lives there."

Entering the garden through the main gate, M. and Sidhu come directly to Sri Ramakrishna's room. M. is speechless as he watches. He thinks, how charming this place is, how charming this man is, how sweet is his talk – I don't feel like leaving. After a while he says to himself, But let me first look around and see where I have come. I will then come back and sit down.

As he comes out of the room with Sidhu, the sweet sound of arati¹ begins with cymbals, bells, and drums all sounding in unison. Music comes from the nahabat on the southern side of the garden. Floating over the bosom of the Ganges, it seems to fade somewhere far, far away. The spring breeze is gentle and fragrant with the sweet smell of many flowers. In the spreading moonlight, preparation for the arati of the deities is taking place all around. Watching the arati in the twelve Shiva temples and in the temples of Radhakanta and Bhavatarini, M. is filled with supreme joy. Sidhu says, "This is Rasmani's temple. Here the gods are worshiped every day from morning till evening. Many holy guests and the poor come here."

After passing through a grand brick quadrangle, they emerge from the Bhavatarini Kali Temple, talking. When they reach Sri Ramakrishna's room, the door is closed. Incense was burnt a little while before.

1. Waving of lights before sacred images along with singing of hymns.

Having been educated in English ways, M. cannot enter a room that is closed. The maidservant, Vrinde, is standing at the door. M. asks, "Is the holy man¹ in the room now?"

Vrinde: "Yes, he is inside."

M.: "How long has he been here?"

Vrinde: "Oh, many, many years!"

M.: "Well, does he read many books?"

Vrinde: "Oh dear, books and things like that are all on his tongue!"

M. is fresh from college. He is very surprised to hear that Sri Ramakrishna does not read books.

M.: "Well, perhaps he is now performing evening devotions. Can we enter the room? Will you please tell him about us?"

Vrinde: "Why, go in, my children. Go inside and sit down."

Thereupon they enter the room and see that no one else is there. Sri Ramakrishna is seated alone on the bedstead. Incense is burning and all the doors are closed. M. folds his hands in greeting as he enters the room. At the bidding of Sri Ramakrishna, M. and Sidhu sit on the floor. Thakur asks, "Where do you live? What do you do? What has brought you to Baranagore?" M. answers all his questions, but he notices that in the course of conversation, Thakur's mind wanders away to something on which he is meditating. Later, M.

1. Sadhu maharaj.

hears that this is called bhava samadhi.¹ It is like a man sitting with a fishing rod in his hand, waiting to catch a fish. The fish comes and begins to bite at the bait and the float trembles. The man is all attention. He grasps the rod and looks at the float with a concentrated mind, talking to no one. Sri Ramakrishna's state is exactly like this. Later, M. hears and sees that Thakur goes into this state after his devotions. At times, he loses all external consciousness.

M.: "You will now perform your evening worship.² Perhaps we should leave."

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): "No evening worship. No, it is not that."

After some conversation, M. salutes Thakur and takes his leave.

Thakur says, "Come again."

On his way home, M. wonders to himself, Who may this god-man be? How is it that my soul longs to see him again? Can a man be great without reading books? How strange that I feel like visiting him again. He said, "Come again." I shall come tomorrow or the day after, in the morning.

1. God-consciousness, ecstasy.

2. Sandhya.

Chapter Three

akhaṇḍamaṇḍalākāraṁ vyāptaṁ yena carācaram |
tatpadaṁ darśitaṁ yena tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ ||

[Salutations to the guru who has made it possible
to realize Him who pervades this entire universe
of the moving and unmoving.]

– Vishveshwara Tantra 2

Second meeting and conversation between the guru and the disciple

The second meeting is at eight o'clock in the morning. Thakur is going to have a shave. The winter cold still lingers, so he wears a moleskin shawl hemmed with muslin. Seeing M., he says, "So you have come! Good. Sit here."

They are on the southeast verandah with the barber. Thakur sits for a shave and talks to M. He wears the shawl, and slippers on his feet. He is smiling. He stammers a little when he talks.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, where do you live?"

M.: "In Calcutta, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Who have you come to see who lives around here?"

M.: "I came to Baranagore to visit my elder sister at Ishan Kaviraj's house."

Keshab Chandra – Sri Ramakrishna weeps before the Divine Mother

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, how is Keshab these days? He was seriously ill."

M.: “I also heard that. I hope he is well now.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I made a vow to offer a green coconut and sugar to the Divine Mother for Keshab’s recovery. Sometimes I used to wake up at midnight and cry to Her, saying, ‘O Mother, please let Keshab get well! If he doesn’t live, whom shall I talk to when I go to Calcutta?’ That’s why I vowed to offer green coconut and sugar.

“A Mr. Cook came here. Does he lecture? Keshab took me on board a steamer. Mr. Cook was there.”

M.: “Yes, I did hear of him, but I haven’t attended any of his lectures. I don’t know much about him.”

Household and the duty of a father

Sri Ramakrishna: “Pratap’s brother came here and stayed for some days. He had no work to do. He said that he wanted to stay here. He had left his wife, son, and daughter in the care of his father-in-law. He has many children. I took him to task. Look, he has so many children! Should they be fed and looked after by neighbours? He’s not ashamed for somebody else to take care of his family and that they are a burden to his father-in-law! I scolded him rather severely and told him to look for work. After that he left here.”

Chapter Four

ajñānatimirāndhasya jñānāñjanaśalākayā |
cakṣur unmilitaṁ yena tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ ||

[Salutations to the Guru who, with the collyrium stick of knowledge, has opened the eyes of one blinded by the disease of ignorance.]

– Vishveshwara Tantra 3

M. is reprimanded – his egotism is crushed

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Are you married?”

M.: “Yes, sir.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*startled*): “I say, Ramlal!¹ Ah me, he has already taken a wife.”

M. is confused and sits speechless, hanging his head as though he were guilty of a serious offence. He thinks to himself, Is marrying so bad?

Thakur then asks, “Have you any children?”

M. can hear the beating of his own heart. He says fearfully, “Yes sir, I have children.”

Thakur rebukes M. all the more, saying, “Alas, you have children too!”

M. is stunned by the blow. His egotism is being crushed.

After a while Sri Ramakrishna looks at him kindly and speaks affectionately, “See, you have some good signs. I can tell by looking at a person’s eyes and forehead.

1. Ramlal, nephew of Sri Ramakrishna and the priest of Kali Temple.

“Well, what kind of wife do you have? Is she vidyashakti or avidyashakti?”¹

What is jnana? – image worship

M.: “Sir, she is good, but ignorant.”²

Sri Ramakrishna (*sharply*): “And you are wise!”³

What jnana is and what ajnana is, M. does not know. Until now he has only known that a jnani is one who has received an education and can read books. This false notion was afterwards destroyed when he learned that to know God is jnana and not to know Him is ajnana. Thakur had said, “Do you think you have attained wisdom?” M.’s egotism again received a hard blow.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?”

M. (*confused, to himself*), Is it possible to have faith in the formless God and believe at the same time that He is with form? How can it be that while believing God to be with form, one can think of Him as formless? Can the two contradictory states coexist in the same substance? Can white things like milk also be black?

M.: “I like the formless God.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That’s all right. Having faith in either of the two points of view is enough. To think of God as formless is quite right. Even so, don’t think that only this idea is true and all others are false. Know this: that the formless God is true

1. Vidyashakti, the power of spiritual wisdom, leading to God and light; Avidyashakti is its opposite, keeping one immersed in ignorance, darkness, and bondage.

2. Ajnani.

3. Jnani.

and so is God with form. You must hold to that which you believe.”

Hearing again and again that both ideas are true, M. is speechless. Never has he read such a thing in any of his books. His egotism has been crushed for a third time, but it is not yet completely knocked out. So he advances with his reasoning a little further.

M.: “Well sir, let one believe that God is with form, but surely He is not an earthen image.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “My dear sir, why earthen? It is the image of spirit!”

M. does not understand the significance of the “image of spirit.” He says, “Well, should one not make it clear to those who worship images that God is not the image and that while worshiping, they should keep God in view and not worship the clay?”

Lecture and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna (*sharply*): “It is fashionable for Calcutta people to lecture and bring others to light! How to bring light to themselves, they do not know. Who are you to teach others? The Lord of the Universe will teach – He who has made this universe of moon, sun, seasons, human beings, and beasts. He who has provided food for men and beasts, and parents to rear and love their young ones – He Himself will teach. He has made all this; will He not provide for it, too? If there is a need to know, God Himself will surely make it understood. He is the inner controller.¹ You say it is wrong to worship a clay image. Does He not know that He

1. Antaryamin.

Himself is being called upon? He is pleased with this very worship! Why should you have a headache over it? Only seek for yourself, that you may gain knowledge and develop love and devotion.”

This time M.'s egotism is completely crushed. He says to himself, What he says is certainly true. Why do I need to go around preaching to others? Have I myself known God? Have I developed love and devotion for Him? It is like the proverb says: “Bidding my friend Shankara to lie down on my bed when there is no bed for myself to lie on.” Knowing nothing, listening to no one, and yet going out to preach to others! It would be shameful, indeed great folly. Is this mathematics or history or literature that you can teach to others? It is the science of God! Whatever he says fully appeals to me.

This was M.'s first and last attempt to argue with Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna: “You were talking of worshipping clay images. Even if made of clay, there is need for this kind of worship. God Himself has provided various methods of worship. He who has created the universe has provided different forms to suit people with different understanding. A mother provides food so that her children get what agrees with each.

“Say a mother has five children and she has fish to cook. She makes different dishes out of it to suit each of her children. Pulao¹ with fish for one, fish with sour tamarind for another, charchari² for yet another, and fried fish for still another – she

1. A highly spiced fish dish of rice and meat boiled in clarified butter.
2. Dry fish with spiced vegetables soaked in oil.

prepares exactly what they like, exactly what agrees with their stomachs. Understand?”

M.: “Yes, sir.”

Chapter Five

samsārāṇavaghore yaḥ kaṇadhārasvarūpakaḥ |
namo ‘stu rāmakṛṣṇāya tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ ||

[Salutations to Sri Ramakrishna, salutations to that Guru who is the pilot to take one across the deep sea of the world.]

– Vishveshwara Tantra 3

How to gain love and devotion for God

M.: “How may one fix the mind on God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “By chanting His names and glories without ceasing. And keeping the company of the holy. One must frequently go to God’s devotees, or sadhus. The mind doesn’t fix itself on God while living day and night in the midst of worldly activities and family life. So one must go into solitude now and then to meditate on God. In the first stage it is very hard to fix the mind on God without frequently going into solitude.

“When a plant is young, it needs a fence around it. Without the fence, goats and cows devour it.

“The mind, a solitary corner, and the forest are the places to meditate. And you must always have good thoughts in your mind. God alone is real, the eternal substance, and all else is unreal, transitory. Discriminating in this way, you will shake off attachment to the perishable things of the world.”

M. (*humbly*): “How to live in the household?”

Sannyasa in the household – the way – sadhana in solitude

Sri Ramakrishna: “Do all your duties, but keep your mind fixed on God. Wife, son, father, and mother – live with them all and serve them as if they are your own, but know in your heart that they are really not yours.

“A rich man’s maidservant attends to all her duties, but her mind is always on her own home in the village. She nurses her master’s children as if they were her own; she calls out, ‘My Rama, my Hari,’ but all the while she knows full well they are not hers.

“A tortoise moves around in water, but do you know where its mind dwells? On the bank of the river, on dry land where its eggs are laid. Attend to all your worldly work, but take care that your mind rests in God.

“If you enter the world before you have acquired love and devotion for God, you will surely become entangled more and more. Misfortune, grief, and other ills of the world will make you lose your mental balance. The more you think of worldly matters, the more attachment will come.

“Rub your hands with oil before you break a jackfruit; otherwise, its milky juice will stick to your hands. First acquire the oil of love for God, and then engage in the affairs of the world.

“But to acquire love for God, solitude is needed. If you want to make butter, the curds have to be set

in a quiet corner. The curds will not set if they are disturbed. You have to sit in a quiet place, giving up all other work, and churn the curds. Only then can you get butter.

“By giving your mind to God in solitude, you gain spiritual knowledge,¹ dispassion,² and love for Him. But if you give the same mind to the world, it becomes coarse. In the world there is nothing but thoughts of ‘lust and greed.’

“The world is like water, and the mind like milk. If milk is poured into water, it will get mixed with the water and become one with it. You will not be able to get pure milk, however much you try. But if the milk is turned into curds, the butter that is made from it will then float on water. So first get the butter of spiritual knowledge and love for God by practicing spiritual disciplines in a solitary place. This butter, when put in the water of the world, will not mix with it. It will float on its surface.

“Along with this, the practice of discrimination is necessary. ‘Lust and greed’ are transitory; God is the only reality. What does money give? It gives us food, clothes, and a place to live – that much, no more. It does not help us to attain God. So money cannot be the end of life. This is the process of discrimination. Do you see this?”

M.: “Yes, sir. I have recently read about discrimination in *Prabodha Chandrodaya* [a Sanskrit play].”

1. Jnana.

2. Vairagya; non-attachment.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, discrimination. Just think, what is there in money or in a beautiful body? Think about it: the body of a beautiful woman only consists of bones, flesh, fat, urine, and excreta. Why does a man give his mind to such things and lose sight of God? Why does he forget God?”

How to see God

M.: “Sir, can God be seen?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes. There is no doubt about it. Going into solitude from time to time, chanting His name and glories, practicing discrimination – these are what you have to do.”

M.: “What state of mind leads to God-realization?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Cry with a deep yearning in your heart and you will see God. People shed pitchers full of tears for wife and children, they weep streams of tears for money, but who cries for God? Call out to God with a longing and yearning heart. Saying this, Thakur sings:

Cry out with yearning, O mind, and see how

Mother Shyama can withhold Herself from you!

How can Shyama stay away? How can Kali remain away?

O mind, if you are in earnest, bring bel leaves and red hibiscus flowers,

Touched with the sandal paste of devotion, and offer them at Her feet.

“A yearning heart brings the dawn; soon after, the sun is visible. After longing comes God-vision.

“You can see God if you have these three attachments combined: the attachment of a worldly man to things of the world, the attachment of a mother to her child, and the attachment of a chaste wife to her husband. If these three attachments are united, their combined power makes it possible to see God.

“The real thing is that you must love God the way a mother loves her son, a chaste wife her husband, and a worldly man the things of the world. When your love for God has the combined intensity of all these three, you will see Him.

“One should call upon God with a yearning heart. A kitten knows only how to cry out to its mother, ‘Mew, mew.’ Wherever the mother puts it, it remains, whether in the kitchen, on the floor, or on the bed. When it feels hurt, it simply cries ‘mew, mew’ and knows nothing else. Wherever the mother may be, she comes when she hears its mewing.”

Chapter Six

sarvabhūtaṣṭham ātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani |
ikṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ ||

[His mind being harmonized by yoga, he sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself; he sees the same in all.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:29

Third meeting – Narendranath, Bhavanath, and M.

M. was then staying at his sister’s house in Baranagore. Ever since he met Sri Ramakrishna, he had been constantly thinking of him. The same joyful

image always appeared before his eyes as he remembered Thakur's words, sweet as nectar. He wondered to himself, How has this poor brahmin learned all these deep truths? M. had never before seen anyone explain all these things so clearly. Day and night he wondered, When shall I go and see him again?

Not long after this, at four o'clock on Sunday, 5 March, M. reaches the garden of Dakshineswar with Nepal Babu of Baranagore. He finds Sri Ramakrishna in the same room, seated on the smaller bed. The room is filled with devotees since on Sunday, they have time to come see him. M. does not yet know any of them. He takes a seat on one side of the group and watches Thakur talk to the devotees with a smile on his face.

Addressing a young man of nineteen, Thakur speaks to him joyfully about a number of things. The young man is Narendra.¹ He is a college student who often visits the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. His words are full of spirit. His eyes are bright with the look of a devotee.

M. sees that the subject of the talk is the conduct of worldly men attached to the pleasures of the world, and people who ridicule those who seek God and religion. Also how many wicked people there are in the world and how to deal with them. Such is the topic of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "What do you say, Narendra? Worldly men say all sorts of things. But see, when an elephant walks by, many animals roar and howl and bark, but the elephant doesn't

1. Later Swami Vivekananda.

even look at them. If someone condemns you, what will you think of him?"

Narendra: "I'll think that dogs are barking at me."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "No, my child, you mustn't go that far. Know that God is in all things. But you must mix with the good and keep a distance from the bad. God is present even in a tiger, but surely you can't hug him for that reason. (*Laughter.*) If you say, 'The tiger is also God, why should I run away?' the answer is, 'He who says, 'Run away!' is also God. Why should you not listen to him?"

"Listen to a story:

"A sadhu lived in a forest. He had a number of disciples. He had taught them, 'Narayana is in all things. Knowing this, offer salutations to all.' One day a disciple went out to collect firewood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly there was a shout, 'Run! Run away wherever you can! A mad elephant is coming!' Everyone ran except this disciple. He reasoned, There is Narayana in the elephant, too, so why should I run away? Thinking this, he stood still and saluted the elephant. He started to offer prayers. The mahut (elephant driver) shouted, 'Run away, run away!' Still the disciple did not move. Finally the elephant came and seized him with its trunk. It threw him on the ground, and then went on its way. The disciple, cut and bruised, lay unconscious on the ground.

"Hearing what had happened, his guru and brother disciples came and carried him back to the

ashrama and applied medications. After some time, when he came to, one of them asked, ‘Why didn’t you move away when you heard that a mad elephant was coming?’ He answered, ‘Because our master told us that Narayana Himself is present in all living creatures. Seeing the elephant coming as Narayana, I did not leave.’ His guru replied, ‘My son, indeed it is true that the elephant as Narayana was coming – but, my child, Narayana as the mahut warned you! If everybody is Narayana, why did you not listen to the mahut Narayana? You should have listened to the driver’s words.’

“The scriptures say, ‘Apo Narayana (water is God).’ But some water is used for worship of God and some only for washing the face, mouth, hands, and clothes. The latter water cannot be used for drinking or for worship. Similarly, Narayana is in the hearts of the unholy as well as the holy, in the hearts of devotees and non-devotees. But one cannot have dealings with the unholy and wicked or be close to them. With some, one may only have a nodding acquaintance, while with others, even that is not possible. One must live apart from such people.”

A devotee: “Sir, when a bad person tries to harm us or actually does so, should we do nothing?”

The household and spirit of resisting evil

Sri Ramakrishna: “When you live in the world, to protect yourself from bad people, you must make a show of tamas. But it isn’t right to harm anyone just because you think he may harm you.

“A cowherd boy used to graze his cattle in a field where a terribly venomous snake lived. Everybody was very cautious because of the danger. One day a brahmachari was passing through the field. The cowherd boys ran up to him and said, ‘Revered sir, please don’t go this way. There is a terribly venomous snake here.’ The holy man said, ‘Child, never mind. I’m not afraid of it. I know a mantra to ward off this danger.’ Saying this, he went into the field. Out of fear, no cowherd boy accompanied him. And here came the snake with its hood raised, moving swiftly. But as it came near, the holy man uttered the mantra and lo! the snake fell at his feet like an earthworm. ‘Well,’ he asked, ‘why do you go around harming others? Come here. I’ll give you a mantra to repeat so you’ll develop love for God. Then your desire to harm others will leave you.’ Saying this, he gave the mantra to the snake. The snake bowed before the guru and asked, ‘Sir, please tell me what spiritual practice I should carry out.’ The guru said, ‘Repeat this mantra and don’t harm anyone. I will come again.’ Then he left.

“Some days passed and the cowherd boys noticed that the snake no longer tried to bite them. Even when they threw stones at it, it did not react – it had become like an earthworm. One day one of the boys went to it and caught hold of its tail. He whirled it around and around and dashed it several times on the ground. The snake vomited blood and fell unconscious. It could not move. The boys thought it was dead, so they left.

“Late that night, the snake regained consciousness and slowly dragged itself with great difficulty

into its hole. Its body was broken and it had no strength to move. After a few days, when it was reduced to a mere skeleton, the snake came out of its hole during the night to look for food. Being afraid of the boys, it did not come out during the day. After its initiation with the mantra, it ceased to harm anyone. It lived as well as it could on leaves and fruits fallen on the ground.

“After almost a year had passed, the brahmachari came that way again. He looked around for the snake, but the cowherd boys said it was dead. The brahmachari found that hard to believe. He knew that the snake had received a mantra, so death was out of the question before it had seen God. He searched where he had seen it last and called out for it by the name he had given it. Hearing the voice of its guru, the snake came out of its hole and bowed down reverently before him. The man asked, ‘How are you?’ The snake replied, ‘I’m quite well, sir.’ Again he asked, ‘But why are you so weak?’ The snake said, ‘Holy sir, you asked me not to harm anybody. So I live on leaves and fruit. Perhaps this is the reason why I have grown weak.’ The snake had developed the quality of *sattva*,¹ you see. That’s why it didn’t get angry with anyone. It had forgotten that the boys had tried to kill it. The holy man said, ‘Lack of food alone could not have brought you to this pass. Surely there is something else. Just think about it.’ The snake then remembered that the boys had once whirled it around and around and dashed it on the ground, so it said, ‘Holy sir, now I remember. One day the

1. Serenity.

cowherd boys threw me violently on the ground, but they didn't know what change had come over my mind. How could they know that I wasn't going to bite them or do any harm?" The holy man said, 'Fie! You are so stupid! You don't even know how to save yourself! What I forbade was your biting. I didn't ask you not to hiss! Why didn't you frighten them away by hissing?'

"You should hiss at bad people to frighten them so they don't harm you. But you must not inject poison into others and injure them."

Are all men equal? Their natures differ

"In the Lord's creation there are different types of creatures and plants. Among animals, there are bad as well as good. There are beasts like tigers that kill others. Among trees, some bring forth fruit as sweet as nectar, but others yield poisonous fruit. In the same way, there are good men and bad men, holy and unholy, men attached to the world, and also devotees.

"People can be divided into four classes: those bound to the world, seekers after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-free.

"The ever-free, like Narada and others, are those who live in the world for the good of mankind, to teach truth to others.

"Bound souls are attached to worldly things. They forget God and never give a thought to Him.

"Seekers after liberation struggle for liberation. But only some of them attain it.

“The liberated are not attached to ‘lust and greed’ – for example, sadhus and great spiritual personalities. There is no attachment to worldly things in their minds. They always meditate on the lotus feet of God.

“Suppose a net is cast into water. Some of the fish are too clever to be caught in the net. They can be likened to ever-free souls. However, most of the fish get caught. Of these, some try to escape. They are like the seekers after liberation. But not all the fish can escape. Only a few are able to leap out of the net. The boys then shout, ‘Look! A big fish has escaped!’ But most of the fish caught in the net don’t escape – they don’t even try to. What is more, they hold the net in their mouths and lie quietly, trying to hide themselves in the mud at the bottom. They think, We are quite safe now; there is no danger. They don’t know that the fishermen will haul them up with a jerk and throw them out on the river bank. They may be compared to worldly men.”

Worldly men – bound in fetters

“Worldly men remain bound to ‘lust and greed.’ Although they are bound hand and foot, they still think they can find happiness and security in the world, in ‘lust and gold.’ They don’t know that they will only die there. When a worldly man is on his deathbed, his wife says to him, ‘You are departing. What have you done for me?’ Besides, the influence of maya is such that, seeing a lamp burning for a long time, a bound man says, ‘Too much oil is being used! Lower the wick!’ And here he is, lying on his deathbed!

“A worldly man doesn’t think of God. Even when he has leisure, he either indulges in empty talk or engages himself in useless activities. He says, ‘I’m not able to sit idle, so I’ll plant a hedge.’ When time hangs heavy, he might even start playing cards.”
(*All laugh.*)

Chapter Seven

yo mām aḥam anādim ca vetti lokamaheśvaram |
asaṁmūḍhaḥ sa martyeṣu sarvapāpaiḥ pramu-
cyate ||

[He who knows Me as unborn and beginningless,
the great Lord of the worlds, is no more deluded
among mortals and is freed from all evils.]

– Bhagavad Gita 10:3

The way – faith

A devotee: “Sir, is there no way out for such a worldly man?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Certainly there’s a way. To now and then seek the company of holy men, and at times to meditate on God in solitude. And you should practice discrimination and pray to God: ‘Grant me love and faith!’

“Once you acquire faith, your work is done. There is nothing higher than faith.

(*To Kedar*) “You have heard how powerful faith is. The Purana says that Ramachandra, the perfect incarnation of Brahman and Narayana, had to build a bridge to reach Lanka. But Hanuman had such great faith in the name of Rama that, taking

Rama's name, he was able to jump across the sea. He had no need for a bridge. (*All laugh.*)

“Bibhishana wrote Rama's name on a leaf and tied it in the folds of the cloth of a man who wanted to cross the sea. Bibhishana said to him, ‘Fear not. Have faith and walk across the sea. But mind you, as soon as you lose your faith, you will drown.’ The man walked easily onto the water, but he was seized with intense curiosity to see what was tied in the folds of his cloth. He untied it and saw that it was just the name of Rama written on a leaf. He said to himself, ‘What! Just the name of Rama?’ In the instant that he lost faith, he sank.

“One who has faith in God can be saved from the vilest of sins, no matter what he may have done – killed a cow, a brahmin, or a woman. Let him only say, ‘I shall not do so again.’ Then he need not be afraid of anything.”

Saying this, Thakur sings:

Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips,

I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse to rescue me.

Should I have killed a Brahmin or a cow, or destroyed a child in the womb, or indulged in drink, or slain a woman,

For all those heinous deeds I care not in the least; still may I aspire to Brahman.

Narendra – the homa bird

“You all see this boy. He acts one way here. When a naughty boy is in the presence of his father, he behaves meekly, as if there were a goblin present. But when he plays in the chandni, he is quite different. A boy like this belongs to the class of the

ever-perfect. They never become attached to the world. When they are a little older, they feel an awakening within the heart and move directly towards God. They come to the world to teach mankind. They have no love for the things of the world. Their minds never go toward 'lust and greed.'

"A bird called *homa* is mentioned in the Vedas. It lives high up in the sky. There it lays an egg, and the egg begins to fall. But it is so high up that it goes on falling for days. During the fall, a young chick breaks out of the shell with its eyes open and its wings ready for flight. When it sees the earth fast approaching, to avoid being smashed on the ground, it suddenly swoops upward toward its mother high above."

Narendra rises and leaves. Kedar, Prankrishna, M., and many others remain in the room.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see, Narendra excels in everything – singing, playing musical instruments, reading, and writing. The other day he had a discussion with Kedar. He just destroyed Kedar's arguments. (*Thakur and all the others laugh.*) (*To M.*) Is there a book in English on reasoning?"

M.: "Yes, sir. It's called *logic* in English."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, give me some idea of it."

M. now finds himself in a difficult situation. He says, "One part of logic is reasoning from the general proposition to a particular. For example: All men will die. Pundits are men. So pundits will die."

“Another part deals with reasoning from a particular illustration or event to a general proposition. Such as: This crow is black; that crow is black; all the crows I see are black; hence, all crows are black.

“But to arrive at a conclusion in such a way is open to fallacy. When you’re looking for crows, you might find a white one somewhere. Another illustration is: Where there is rain, there must be clouds. The general proposition is that rain comes from clouds. Yet another illustration is: This man has thirty-two teeth. That man has the same number. Everybody we see has thirty-two teeth. Thus all men have thirty-two teeth.

“There are such general propositions in English logic.”

Sri Ramakrishna listened to it all but, since his mind was elsewhere, there was no further talk on the subject.

Chapter Eight

śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā |
samādhāvacalābuddhis tadā yogam avāpsyasi ||

[When your intellect, perplexed by what you have heard, has become poised and firmly fixed in the Self; then you shall attain yoga.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:53

In samadhi

The meeting ends. The devotees walk around here and there. M. strolls around the panchavati and other places. Returning to Sri Ramakrishna's room about five o'clock, he comes upon a strange sight on the small verandah north of the room:

Sri Ramakrishna is standing still. Narendra is singing a hymn, and devotees are standing around. M. is charmed with the song. Other than Thakur's, never and nowhere has he heard such a sweet voice. As he looks at Thakur, he becomes speechless. Thakur is standing motionless, his eyes unmoving. It is difficult to say whether or not he is breathing. When asked, a devotee tells him that this state is known as samadhi (superconscious awareness).

M. has never seen or heard of anything like this. He wonders to himself, Is it possible that the thought of God can make one lose outer-consciousness? How great must one's love and faith be to enter into such a state!

The song is as follows:

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The essence of consciousness, free from all impurity.

Without equal is His glory, enchanting is His form!
How beloved is He in the hearts of His devotees.

The fresh beauty of newly awakened love
Casts into shade the effulgence of a million moons!

His glory flashes like lightning,
And His devotees' hair stands on end in sheer delight.

Sri Ramakrishna is deeply touched when this line of the hymn is chanted. The hair on his body stands on end. His eyes swim with tears of joy. Now and then he smiles, as though he were seeing

something. What vision of unequalled beauty might he be enjoying that would put into shade the effulgence of a million moons? Is this what is called the vision of God? What must the intensity of spiritual discipline and austerities be, how much love and faith must one have, to bring about such a vision!

The song goes on:

With a mind made pure and eyes sparkling with love,
Worship His holy feet in the lotus of your heart,
And gaze upon the peerless beauty of His beloved form.

That bewitching smile once more! His body becomes motionless in the same manner. Eyes fixed, it seems as if he is beholding a strange inner vision, seeing which he is swimming in supreme joy.

The song comes to an end. Narendra sings:

Spellbound in love divine, O mind, be ever immersed in
Him, the fount of consciousness and love's sweet bliss.

Carrying in his heart this unique picture of samadhi and the bliss of love, M. leaves for home. Intoxicating sweet music bubbles up from time to time in his heart:

Spellbound in love divine, O mind, be ever immersed in
Him, the fount of consciousness and love's sweet bliss.

Chapter Nine

yaṁ labdhvā cāparaṁ lābhaṁ manyate nādhikaṁ
tataḥ |
yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate ||

[And having gained which, he thinks there is no greater gain than that, therein established he is not shaken by even the profoundest affliction.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:22

Fourth visit – joy and fun with Narendra, Bhavanath, and others

The next day, 6 March, is also a holiday. M. has come again at three o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller bed in his room. A mat is spread on the floor, on which Narendra, Bhavanath, and two other devotees are sitting. Some are young men, nineteen or twenty years old. A smile plays on Thakur's face as he talks happily with the devotees.

Seeing M. enter the room, Thakur laughs loudly and says to the devotees, "Look, he's here again!" They all join him in laughter. M. comes in and salutes Sri Ramakrishna, prostrating himself on the floor. Then he takes a seat. He had formerly saluted Thakur with folded hands, in the manner of English-educated people, but today he has learned to salute by lying face-down before him. As he sits down, Sri Ramakrishna tells Narendra and the other disciples what has made him laugh.

"Listen, some opium was given to a peacock at four o'clock in the afternoon. The next day the same peacock arrived punctually at four in the afternoon.

It had become an opium addict, so it came at the same time for another dose.” (*All laugh.*)

M. thinks to himself, He is right. I go back home, but my mind, day and night, is fixed on him, thinking, When shall I see him? When shall I see him? It’s as if someone has pulled me here. I can’t go anywhere else; even if I want to, I have to come here.

While M. is thinking this, Thakur amuses himself with the young men as if he were their age. Peals of laughter begin to fill the room, making it a centre of joy.

M. is speechless as he looks at this unique character. He says to himself, Is this the same person I saw yesterday in samadhi, absorbed in a bliss of divine love that I have never seen before? Is this the same man behaving like an ordinary person today? Is it he who scolded me on my first visit, teaching me that God with form and the formless God are both true? Didn’t he tell me that God alone is real and all else in the world is transitory? Didn’t he advise me to live in the world like a maidservant?

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna is having great fun and glances at M. every now and then. He sees M. sitting in silence. Addressing Ramlal, he says, “You see, he’s a little older, therefore somewhat serious. These people are laughing and having fun, but he sits quietly.” M. was then about twenty-seven years old.

During the conversation, they talk of Hanuman, the great devotee. There is a picture of Hanuman on the wall of Thakur’s room. Thakur says, “Just think of Hanuman’s state of mind! He wanted neither wealth nor honour nor bodily comforts. He longed only for God. When he was running away

with the Brahmastra (a heavenly weapon of Brahma) taken from the crystalline pillar, Mandodari showed him many kinds of fruit. She thought that, tempted by fruit, he might climb down and drop the weapon. But Hanuman could not be tricked. He sang:

Do I want for any fruits?

The fruit that makes my life fruitful, that I have,

For in my heart is planted the tree that bears the fruit of liberation – Sri Rama.

Sitting beneath Sri Rama's wish-fulfilling tree,¹ whatever fruit I desire is mine.

But the fruit of which you speak, my friend – for that common fruit I bargain not.

I depart, leaving to you the bitter fruit of your deeds.

In samadhi

Singing this song, Thakur again goes into samadhi. Again his body is motionless, his eyes are fixed, and he sits still. He is seated the same as in the photograph. Only a moment ago the devotees were laughing and having fun; now they all gaze silently at him in this unique state. It is the second time that M. has observed Thakur in the state of samadhi. After some time a change comes: his body is relaxed and a smile plays on his face. His senses begin to function again in the normal way. Shedding tears of joy from the corners of his eyes, he repeats the name, "Rama! Rama!"

1. Kalpataru.

M. says to himself, Is this the same great saint who was having such fun with the boys? Then he acted like a five-year-old child.

Returning to his normal state of mind, Thakur behaves like an ordinary man again. He says to M. and Narendra, “I would like to hear both of you talk in English. Question and reason among yourselves.”

M. and Narendra both laugh at his words. They talk a little, but in Bengali. It is not possible for M. to argue any more in front of Thakur. His entire tendency to argue has been erased by Thakur’s grace. How can he argue now? Thakur presses them once again, but talk in English does not come about.

Chapter Ten

tvam akṣaram paramaṁ veditavyaṁ tvam asya
viśvasya paraṁ nidhānam |
tvam avyayaḥ śāśvatadharmagoptā sanātanas tvam
puruṣo mato me ||

[You are the imperishable, the Supreme Being to be realized. You are the great resting place of this universe; You are the imperishable guardian of the eternal dharma. I deem You to be the ancient Purusha.]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:18

With his intimate disciples – ‘who am I?’

It is five o’clock. Many devotees have gone, each one to his own home. Only M. and Narendra have remained. Narendra goes to the Hanspukur and the jhautala with a pitcher for washing. M. walks on

the path around the temple. After a while, he goes toward the Hanspukur near the kuthi. He finds Sri Ramakrishna standing on the steps of the staircase south of the tank. Narendra has washed his face and stands with the pitcher in his hands. Thakur is saying, "Look, you must come here more often. You are a newcomer, you see. After the first acquaintance, people meet more often, like a newly wedded husband. (*Narendra and M. laugh.*) Won't you come?" Narendra belongs to the Brahma Samaj. He laughs and says, "Yes sir, I will try."

They all go back to Thakur's room by way of the kuthi path. Near the kuthi, Thakur says to M., "You know, peasants go to market to buy bullocks. They know a good bullock from a bad one easily. They touch the tail. Some bullocks lie down on the ground as soon as their tails are touched. Peasants don't buy such bullocks. They choose only those who spring up with a start as soon as their tails are touched. Narendra is a bullock of the latter class. There is a lot of mettle in him." Saying this, Thakur smiles and adds, "But there are so many who are soft, like puffed rice soaked in milk – no strength within, no grit. Soft and slippery."

It is dusk. Thakur is meditating on God. He says to M., "Go and talk to Narendra and tell me what sort of boy he is."

The arati is over. After quite some time, M. meets Narendra west of the chandni. They talk for a while. Narendra says, "I belong to the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. I am a college student," and so forth.

When night falls, M. decides to leave. Something, however, seems to hold him back, so when he leaves Narendra, he looks around for Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur's songs have charmed his heart and mind. He longs to hear him sing again. At last, he finds him alone, pacing up and down the natmandir in front of Mother Kali's temple. There are brilliant lights burning on both sides of the Mother in Her temple. The vast natmandir, however, has only one light, and it is rather dim, blending light and darkness.

M. is beside himself, spellbound like a snake, when he hears Thakur's songs. He asks Thakur humbly, "Will there be any more songs today?"

Thakur thinks for a moment and says, "No, there will be no more singing today." As he says this, it seems as if he is reminded of something and says immediately, "But you can do this. I'm going to Balaram's house in Calcutta. Come there. There you will have songs."

M.: "All right, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You know him, Balaram Bose?"

M.: "No, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Balaram Bose. His house is in Bosepara."

M.: "Very well, sir. I will find it."

Sri Ramakrishna (*as he walks in the natmandir with M.*): "Well, let me ask you something: what do you think of me?"

M. remains silent.

Thakur says again, “What do you feel? How many annas¹ of knowledge do I have?”

M.: “Annas! I don’t understand. But never have I seen anywhere such knowledge, such love for God, such faith, such dispassion,² and such universality.”

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna laughs.

After this conversation, M. bows and takes his leave.

He comes to the main gate but, remembering something, returns immediately. He goes to Sri Ramakrishna in the natmandir. Thakur is still walking up and down in that dim light – alone, with no companion, like a lion, the king of beasts, who walks alone in the forest. Atmarama,³ the lion rejoices in being alone, in moving around companionless. M. stands, speechless, and again looks at the great man.

Sri Ramakrishna: “You’ve come back.”

M.: “Sir, they may not let me enter the rich man’s house. So I think I won’t go there. It is here that I’ll come to see you.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “No, my dear sir, why not? You can mention my name. Say that you want to see me. Someone there will surely lead you to me.”

Saying, “As you please,” M. bows down again and leaves.

1. Anna – sixteen annas make one rupee.

2. Vairagya; non-attachment.

3. Rejoicing in the Self within.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna's Steamer Trip with Keshab Chandra Sen In Joy and Conversation

Chapter One

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna – in samadhi

Today is the day of the Kojagar Lakshmi Puja,¹ Friday, 27 October 1882. Thakur is seated in his room at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar, talking with Vijay Goswami and Haralal. Someone comes in to tell him that Keshab Sen has come in a steamer and is waiting for him at the ghat.

Keshab's disciples salute Sri Ramakrishna and say, "Sir, the steamer has arrived. Please come for a little excursion. Keshab Sen is on board and has sent us to invite you."

It is 4 o'clock when Thakur boards the steamer from a smaller boat. Vijay accompanies him. As Sri Ramakrishna steps aboard, he loses outer consciousness and goes into samadhi.

M., who had boarded the steamer at 3 o'clock in Calcutta, looks at Thakur in samadhi. He is very eager to witness the meeting between Thakur and

1. Kojagar Lakshmi Puja: the full-moon night of the dark fortnight of Aswin. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, is worshiped in North India on Diwali night. In Bengal Lakshmi is worshiped fifteen days prior to Diwali. On Diwali, the festival of lights, people worship Kali in Bengal.

Keshab, to observe their joy and to hear their conversation.

By his saintly character and eloquence, Keshab has captivated the minds of many young Bengali men like M. Regarding Keshab as their own, many have given him their heart's love. Keshab is British-educated and well versed in English philosophy and literature. He has often described the worship of gods and goddesses as idolatry. It is rather strange that such a man looks upon Sri Ramakrishna with reverence and admiration and visits him occasionally. M. and others are curious to find on what common ground they agree. Though Thakur believes in the formless God, he also holds that God is with form. He meditates on Brahman, but at the same time worships gods and goddesses with flowers, incense, and other offerings. Then again, diving deep in intense love for God, he sings and dances. He sits on his bed, which is covered with a bedspread. He wears a red-bordered dhoti, shirt, socks, and shoes, but he is not a householder. His prevailing mood¹ is entirely that of a sannyasin, hence people call him a paramahansa. On the other hand, Keshab believes in God without form, has a wife and children, and lives the life of a householder, delivering lectures in English, publishing a paper, and attending to worldly affairs.

Toward the east are a cement ghat and the chandni, the portal of the temple. On either side of the chandni stands a row of twelve Shiva temples, six on the right and six on the left. On the canvas of the blue autumn sky are visible the pinnacle of the temple of Bhavatarini and to the north, the top of the trees of the panchavati and the willowgrove. Near the bakultala is a music pavilion and to the south of the Kali Temple is another music pavilion. Between them are garden paths and rows of flowering plants. The blue of the sky is reflected in the holy waters of the

1. Bhava.

Ganges¹ and a serene atmosphere prevails. The same serenity is in the hearts of the Brahma devotees. Above is the beautiful, dark blue, infinite sky; in front, the beautiful temple; and below, the holy water of the Ganges.

On the banks of the sacred river Aryan rishis have meditated on God since ancient times. Now again a special Great Soul² has come, an incarnation of the Eternal Religion.³ It is not the fortune of most men to observe such a sight. Seeing such a great soul in samadhi, who would not but feel the stirring of love for God? Whose stone-like heart would not melt?

Chapter Two

vāsāmsi jirṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gṛhṇāti naro
 'parāṇi |
 tathā śarīrāni vihāya jirṇāni anyāni saṁyāti navāni
 dehī ||

[As a man, having cast away old garments, puts on new ones, so, having cast away worn-out bodies, the soul enters into new ones.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:22

In samadhi – the imperishable Atman – Pavhari Baba

The boat has come alongside the steamer. There is a big crowd, all eager to see Sri Ramakrishna. Keshab is very anxious that Thakur be brought safely aboard the steamer. With great difficulty he is brought back to normal consciousness and taken inside the cabin. He is still in divine ecstasy and

1. Jahnavi.
 2. Mahapurusha.
 3. Sanatana Dharma.

leans on a devotee as he walks. As he enters the cabin, his feet move without his awareness. Keshab and the other devotees salute him, but he has no sense-consciousness. Inside the cabin are some chairs and a table. Thakur is made to sit on a chair. Keshab sits on another, and Vijay also has taken a seat. Other devotees sit wherever they find a place, even on the bare floor. Many don't find a place but peer in from outside. Thakur, after sitting down, again goes into samadhi, absolutely devoid of outer consciousness. All eyes are on him. Keshab sees that so many people are in the cabin that Thakur might need more air. As the air in the room is stuffy because of the crowd of people, Keshab opens the windows.

Keshab is also a little embarrassed to see Vijay, who had left the Brahmo Samaj and joined the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj instead. Vijay spoke against many of Keshab's activities, such as the early marriage of his daughter. Keshab leaves his seat to open a window of the cabin.

The Brahmo devotees look fixedly at Sri Ramakrishna. He comes down from samadhi but is still fully absorbed in divine fervour.¹ He speaks in a voice that is hardly audible, "Mother, why have You brought me here? Shall I be able to save them from their prison?"

Does Thakur look upon men of the world as though they are in prison, unable to come out, unable to see the light outside? All of them are bound hand and foot by worldly affairs. They only see the things that are within their prison and think the aim of life is only to

1. Bhava.

enjoy physical comfort, worldly work, "lust and greed."
Is it for this reason that Thakur says, "Mother, why
have You brought me here? Shall I be able to free
them from their prison?"

Thakur gradually regains outer consciousness.
Nil Madhava of Ghazipur and a Brahma devotee
begin to talk about Pavhari Baba.

Brahma devotee (*to Thakur*): "Sir, they have all
seen Pavhari Baba. He lives in Ghazipur. He is
another holy man like yourself."

Even now Thakur is not in a position to speak.
He smiles gently.

Brahma devotee (*to Thakur*): "Sir, Pavhari Baba
has your photograph in his room."

Thakur smiles and says, pointing to his body,
"This pillow case!"

Chapter Three

yat sāṅkhyaiḥ prāpyate sthānam tadyogair api
gamyate |
ekaṁ sāṅkhyam ca yogam ca yaḥ paśyati sa
paśyati ||

[The state reached by the jnani is also attained by
the yogi. He indeed sees rightly who sees that
jnana and yoga are one.]

– Bhagavad Gita 5:5

Harmony of jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, and karma yoga

The pillow and its pillow case – the soul and the body.
Is Thakur saying that the body is perishable, that it
won't last, that only the soul within the body is
imperishable? So what is the use of having a

photograph of the body? The body is transitory. Why have regard for it? Rather, it is right to worship only the antaryamin, God who is present within the human heart.

Thakur has returned partially to the normal state of consciousness. He says, “But there is one thing. The heart of the devotee is His dwelling place. It may be that God is manifest in all things, but He is manifest in a special sense in the heart of a devotee of God. For example, a landlord can be seen any place on his estate. Still, people say that he is usually seen in a particular drawing room. The heart of the devotee is the Lord’s drawing room.” (*All rejoice.*)

**One Lord with different names –
the jnani, the yogi, and the devotee**

“The same Being whom jnanis call Brahman (the Absolute) is called Atman (Universal Soul) by yogis and Bhagavan (Personal God with divine attributes) by devotees.

“A brahmin is one and the same person. When he worships, he is called a priest; when employed in the kitchen, he is called a brahmin cook. The jnani holds to jnana yoga by reasoning, ‘Not this, not this.’ That is, Brahman is neither this nor that, neither the individual soul nor the external world. When, as a result of this reasoning, the mind becomes steady, it vanishes, and one goes into samadhi. Then one attains brahmajnana.¹ The knower of Brahman truly realizes that Brahman is real and the world unreal; names and forms are all

1. Knowledge of the Absolute.

but dreams. What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words, nor can He be said to be a person.

“Jnanis say the same as the Vedantists. But devotees accept all the states of consciousness. They look upon the waking state as real, and they do not consider the external world a dream. Devotees say that this world is the glory of God. The sky, the stars, the sun, the moon, the mountains, the ocean, men, birds, and beasts – all are created by God. These are His ‘riches.’ He is both within the core of the heart and He is without. The superior devotee says, ‘God Himself has become the twenty-four categories¹ – living beings and the universe.’ The devotee does not want to become sugar, but to taste it. (*All laugh.*)

“Do you know how a devotee feels? ‘Oh Lord, You are the Master, I am Your servant. You are my Mother, I am Your child. And again, You are both my Mother and Father. You are the whole, I am Your part.’ The devotee doesn’t like to say, ‘I am Brahman.’

“The yogi² seeks to see the Paramatman. His aim is union of the embodied soul with the

1. The twenty-four categories or cosmic principles enunciated in the Samkhya Philosophy are: *mahat*, cosmic intelligence; *buddhi*, the discriminating faculty; *ahamkara*, the sense of ego; *manas*/mind-stuff/*chitta*, the recording faculty; five organs of sense-perception (hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell); five organs of action (hands, feet, speech, organ of excretion, organ of generation); five *tanmatras* (sound-potential, touch-potential, sight-potential, taste-potential, smell-potential), the finer materials of the gross elements which, combining and recombining produce the five gross elements (ether/akasha/space, air, fire, water, and earth).

2. The aspirant who seeks union with God through raja yoga, the path of meditation.

Supreme Self.¹ The yogi withdraws his mind from worldly objects and tries to fix it on the Paramatman. So to begin with, he meditates on Him in solitude, in a fixed posture, with a concentrated mind.

“But It is one and the same Substance. The difference is only in name. He who is Brahman is Himself the Atman and also God. He is the Brahman of the Brahmajñani,² the Paramatman of the yogi,³ and the Lord of the devotee.”⁴

Chapter Four

tvameva sūkṣmā tvam̐ sthūlā vyaktāvyaktasva-
rūpiṇī
nirākārāpi sākārā kastvaṁ veditum arhati||

[You are the subtle and You are the gross; You, O Mother, are manifest as well as unmanifest. You are both with form and formless. Who has the capacity to know You?]

– Mahanirvana Tantra 4:15

Harmony of Veda and Tantra – glory of the Primordial Power

The steamer is on its way to Calcutta. Those who are having the darshan of Sri Ramakrishna and listening to his nectar-like words in the cabin are not even conscious of the movement of the steamer. Does a bee buzz when it rests on a flower?

-
1. Paramatman.
 2. Monist.
 3. The seeker of union.
 4. Dualist.

Dakshineswar, with its beautiful Kali temple, has slowly vanished from sight. As the steamer plows through the holy waters of the Ganges that reflect the blue firmament above, the waves are broken into crests of foam, making a rushing sound. But the murmurs of the waves are now lost on the ears of the devotees. Spellbound, they gaze at the smiling, joyful, sweet face and loving eyes of this wonderful yogi. They see in him an all-renouncing and loving vairagi¹ intoxicated with love for God and knowing nothing other than God. In the meantime Sri Ramakrishna talks to them.

Sri Ramakrishna: “The followers of non-dualistic Vedanta say that creation, preservation, dissolution, living beings, and the world are all playful manifestations² of Shakti (the Divine Power). If you reason it out, you will find that they are all illusory, like dreams. Brahman alone is the Reality, all else is unreal. Shakti is also like a dream, unreal.

“But you may reason a thousand times and you will not go beyond the jurisdiction of Shakti without attaining the state of samadhi. ‘I am meditating,’ ‘I am thinking’ – all this is within the jurisdiction of Shakti.

“That’s why Brahman and Shakti are inseparable. Belief in one implies belief in the other – like fire and its burning power. If you consider fire, you must consider its burning power. Fire cannot be thought of apart from its burning power, nor can its burning power be thought of apart from the fire. The sun’s rays cannot be conceived of apart

1. One who is dispassionate for everything but God.

2. Lila.

from the sun, nor can the sun be conceived of apart from its rays.

“What is milk like? Well, it is something white. Its whiteness cannot be conceived of apart from the milk, nor can the milk be conceived of apart from its whiteness.

“Thus, Shakti cannot be thought of apart from Brahman, nor can Brahman be thought of apart from Shakti. Nitya (the Absolute) and lila (the relative phenomenal world) cannot be thought of apart from each other.

“The Primordial Divine Energy¹ creates, preserves, and dissolves. She is known as Kali (the Mother of the universe). Kali is Brahman and Brahman is Kali, one and the same substance. When She is inactive – neither creating, nor preserving, nor destroying – I call her Brahman. When She performs all these activities, I call Her Kali, I call Her Shakti. But the Being is the same, only the names and forms are different. For example – jal, water, and pani. A reservoir may have three or four ghats. At one ghat Hindus drink water and they call it jal. At another ghat Muslims drink water and they call it pani. At another ghat the English drink water and call it water. These three are one and the same. Only the names are different. Some call Him Allah, some God, some Brahman, some Kali, again some call Him Rama, Hari, Jesus, and Durga.”

Keshab: “Please tell us in what different ways Kali manifests Herself.”

1. Adya Shakti.

Talk with Keshab – Mahakali and mode of creation

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “She plays in various ways. She Herself is Mahakali (the Goddess, unconditioned, Absolute, without form), Nityakali (the everlasting Goddess), Shmasanakali (Goddess of the cremation ground), Rakshakali (the Goddess that blesses and is ready to preserve) and Shyamakali (the Mother of dark blue complexion, the consort of Shiva, the God of eternity and infinity). The Tantras speak of Mahakali and Nityakali. When there was no creation, no moon, no sun, no planets, no earth – nothing but deep darkness – then there was only the formless Divine Mother Mahakali living with Mahakala.

“Shyamakali has a very tender heart. She is the bestower of fearlessness. She is worshiped in households. In times of epidemics, famine, earthquakes, drought, and floods, you should worship Rakshakali. Shmasanakali has the form of destruction. She lives in the midst of dead bodies, jackals, and dakinis and yoginis¹ in cremation grounds. Streams of blood pour from Her mouth. She wears a garland of skulls around Her neck, and at her waist She wears a girdle of human hands. At the time of the total dissolution of the world,² the Mother preserves all the seeds of creation, just as the mistress of the house has a hodgepodge pot in which she keeps things of all kinds. (*Keshab and the others laugh.*)

1. The spirits of destruction.

2. Mahapralaya.

(Smiling) “Yes, my friend, the mistress of the house does have such a pot in her possession. In it she keeps sea-foam in a solid state, small packets containing the seeds of cucumber, pumpkin, gourd, and so on. All types of seeds are kept carefully. She brings them out when needed. In the same way the Divine Mother keeps all the seeds at the time of the dissolution of the world. After the creation, the Primordial Divine Energy lives very much in the world. Giving birth to the world, She lives within it. The Vedas talk of the Urnanabhi – the spider and its web. The spider creates a web out of itself and then lives in that same web. The Lord is both the container and the contents of the world.”

Kali is Brahman – with form and without form

“Is Kali dark? She seems to be of dark complexion because She is far off. When you know Her, She does not appear dark.

“The sky appears to be blue because of distance. When seen up close, it has no colour. Sea water appears blue from a distance. When you go near it and take some in the palm of your hand, it has no colour.”

Saying this, drunk with the wine of divine love, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing a song:

Infinite is the garment that She wears! She illumines the lotus of the heart!

Chapter Five

tribhir guṇamayair bhāvair ebhiḥ sarvam idam
 jagat!
 mohitaṁ nābhijānāti mām ebhyaḥ param
 avyayam ||

[Deluded by the three gunas, this world does not
 know Me, who am beyond them and immutable.]

– Bhagavad Gita 7:13

Why does this world exist?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and others*): “She is the creator of both bondage and liberation. Due to Her maya (illusion), worldly man is bound with the chains of ‘lust and greed.’ And then he is liberated by Her mercy and grace. She is the Being who takes bound souls across the sea of the world by removing their fetters.”

Saying this, Thakur sings a song by Ramprasad in a voice sweeter than the gods of the heavens¹ who sing the glories of the Most High:

In the world's bustling marketplace, O Shyama, You fly
 kites that soar on the wind of hope, held fast by maya's
 string,

Kites made of bone, nerve, and skin, all fashioned from
 the gunas three. How intricate is their workmanship!

With worldliness have You imbued their strings, rubbed
 with a paste of powdered glass to make them sharp and
 strong.

Among a hundred thousand kites only one or two break
 free. And then, O Mother, how you laugh and clap your
 hands!

1. Gandharvas.

Says Ramprasad, A kite set free will swiftly ride the favouring wind across this world's ocean and soon alight on the other shore.

“The Mother is always in Her sportive mood. This world is Her sport. She has Her own way and She is full of joy. She liberates only one among millions.”

A Brahma devotee: “Sir, She can free everyone if She so desires. Why has She bound us with the chains of the world?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It is Her pleasure! It is Her desire to sport with all this. If a player touches the “granny” (in the game of hide and seek), he no longer has to run about. If all the players touch her, how will the game continue? If everyone should touch the “granny,” she would be unhappy. The “granny” is happy for the game to continue. That's why She (the Mother of the Universe) is happy and claps Her hands when She cuts the string of one or two kites (bound souls) out of a hundred thousand. (*All laugh.*)

“With a wink of Her eye, She has directed the mind to go and enjoy the world. How can it be the fault of the mind? Again, by Her grace, when She turns that mind from the clutches of worldliness, one is liberated. Then the mind goes to Her lotus feet.”

Thakur sings, assuming the position of a man of the world, expressing his complaint to the Divine Mother:

This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.

Time and again I resolve to repeat Your holy name, yet at the proper hour forget. Now I understand: this is all Your trick!

As You have not given, so have You not received. Am I to blame? Had You but given, surely You would have received. Out of Your own gifts would I have given to You.

Glory and infamy, the bitter and the sweet – all these are Yours. O Mother, ever immersed in your own sweet bliss, why do you break my tender feelings?

Says Ramprasad, You have given me this mind and turned it, with a wink, to seek enjoyment in the world. And so I wander, as if cursed by an evil eye, taking the bitter for the sweet and the unreal for the real.

“Baffled by Her delusion, man has become worldly. Ramprasad says, ‘You have given me this mind and have turned it, with a wink, to seek enjoyment in the world.’”

Instruction about karma yoga – the world and selfless work¹

A Brahma devotee: “Sir, isn’t it possible to realize God without renouncing everything?”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “Of course. Why do you have to renounce everything? You are fine and happy as you are. You are all right at ‘do, re, mi’ (lower notes of the musical scale). (*All laugh.*) Do you know the game of nax (a game of cards)? I have been ‘burnt.’ I have scored too many times, so I am out of the game. You are very clever. Some of you are at ten points, some at six, and others at five (out of the seventeen needed to win). You didn’t score more, so you have not been ‘burnt’ like me. The game is going on nicely! (*Everybody laughs.*)

1. Nishkama karma.

“Truly, I tell you, there is nothing wrong in living as a householder, as you are. However, you have to fix your mind on God. Otherwise, it won’t do. Do your work with one hand and hold onto God with the other. When you finish your work, you will hold God with both hands.

“It is the mind that matters. If the mind is bound, you are bound; if the mind is free, you are free. The mind gets dyed in the colour into which it is dipped. It is just like a laundered white cloth. You can dip it in any colour – red, blue, or green. It gets the colour you dip it into. Just see, if you study a little English, you start speaking English in spite of yourself: Foot-fut, it-mit. (*All laugh.*) And also putting on shoes (English boots), whistling and singing – all these actions follow. If a pundit studies Sanskrit, he starts quoting slokas. If the mind is kept in bad company, it adopts the same style of conversation and thoughts. If you keep it in the company of devotees, and if you meditate on God, then talk about God will follow.

“It is, indeed, the mind that matters. You have a wife on one side and a child on the other. The attraction for the wife is of one kind, the affection for the child is another. But the mind is the same.”

Chapter Six

sarvadharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja |
 ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā
 śucaḥ ||

[Relinquishing all duties, take refuge in Me alone. I shall liberate you from all sins; grieve not.]
 – Bhagavad Gita 18:66

**Instruction to Brahmos – Christianity, Brahmo Samaj,
and the concept of sin**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Brahmo devotees*): “It is the mind that binds and it is the mind that liberates. I am a free soul, I may live in the household or in the forest, there is no bondage for me. I am a child of the Lord, the son of the King of Kings; who will bind me then? When bitten by a snake, if you say with conviction, ‘There is no poison!’ you are rid of the venom. In the same way, if you say emphatically, ‘I am not bound, I am free!’ you become so. You become liberated.”

**The earlier story of his life – Sri Ramakrishna listens to
the Bible – Krishnakishore's faith**

“Someone gave me a book on Christianity. I asked him to read it to me. It contained sin and sin alone. (*To Keshab*) Your Brahmo Samaj also speaks of sin and sin alone. One who constantly says, ‘I am bound, I am bound,’ that rascal really becomes bound! He who repeats day and night, ‘I am a sinner, I am a sinner,’ does become a sinner.

“One should have such faith in the name of God that one feels: ‘I have chanted His name. How can I still be a sinner? What sin is there for me? What bondage for me?’ Krishnakishore is a pious Hindu, a brahmin who worships the Lord with single-minded devotion. Once he went to Vrindavan. Walking around one day, he felt thirsty. He came to a well where a man was standing. He said to the man, ‘Brother, will you please give me some water? Of what caste are you?’ The man replied, ‘Revered sir, I belong to a low caste – a cobbler.’

Krishnakishore said, ‘Just say “Shiva” and then draw water for me.’

“By chanting the name of God, both the body and mind become pure.

“Why talk of sin and hell? Just say but once, ‘I shall not repeat the wrongs I have done,’ and have faith in His name.”

Thakur, overwhelmed with love, sings of the power of God’s name.

Mother, can I but die with Durga’s name upon my lips,

I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end You cannot refuse to rescue me?¹

“I prayed to my Divine Mother for pure love of God. Holding flowers in my hands I offered them at Her lotus feet and said, ‘O Mother, take Your sin and Your merit, and grant that I may have only pure love for You. Take Your knowledge and take Your ignorance, and grant me pure love for You. Here is Your purity, and here Your impurity; grant me pure love. Take Your righteousness² and Your un-righteousness,³ and grant me pure love.”

(*To the Brahma devotees*) “Listen to a song by Ramprasad.”

Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree, and gather there the four fruits of life.⁴

1. For complete song see Section I, Chapter VII of this book.

2. Dharma.

3. Adharma.

4. Four fruits: Dharma (good works), artha (wealth), kama (desires), moksha (liberation).

Of your two wives, Desire¹ and Dispassion,² take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination,³ for the truth about Reality.

When will you lie down happily between your wives, Purity and Defilement? When you see no difference between these two, then shall you see the Divine Mother Kali.

Drive out your parents, Ego and Ignorance, and should Delusion attempt to drag you into its pit, hold fast to the post of Patience.

Tie the goats of Virtue and Vice to the post of Unconcern, and should they become unruly, kill them both with the sword of knowledge.

Admonish, O mind, the children of your first wife, Desire, and tell them to keep their distance. Should they not obey you, then drown them in the sea of knowledge.

Ramprasad says: If you can do this, you will render a proper account to the Lord of Death, and I shall be pleased to call you my dear one, a mind after my own heart.

“Why should God-realization not be possible while living in a household? King Janaka realized God. This world is a ‘structure of dreams,’ Ramprasad said. After attaining love and devotion at His lotus feet:

The world is indeed a source of joy, so let me eat, drink, and be merry!

Was King Janaka in any way below a holy man who has given up the world?

Oh no, he was loyal to both matter and Spirit, having realized God while he drank his cup of milk. (*All laugh.*)

1. Pravritti.

2. Nivritti.

3. Viveka.

Brahmo Samaj and King Janaka – the way of the household – to live in solitude and discrimination

“But one cannot become King Janaka all at once. King Janaka performed austerity in solitude for a long time. Even while living in the family, one must go into solitude at times. It’s good if one can cry for God even for three days in solitude, away from home. But even if a man goes into solitude for a day when he gets the opportunity, and thinks of Him, that too is good. People shed pitchers full of tears for wife and children, but who cries for God, tell me? One should go into solitude at times and perform spiritual practices¹ to realize God. In the beginning there are many difficulties in making the mind steady while attending to all the duties of the world. The mind, in the initial stage, is like a young tree on the footpath; it may be eaten by goats or cows. A fence is needed to protect it. When, however, the trunk grows big and strong, no fence is needed. Then even an elephant tied to the trunk will not harm it.

“Take the disease of typhoid. There is a pot of water and tamarind pickles in the room where a patient is lying. If you want to cure this patient, you’ll have to remove him from the room. A worldly man is a typhoid patient, worldly things are pots of water, and the desire for sense enjoyments is his thirst. The mouth begins to water at the mere thought of tamarind pickles. They should not be placed near the patient. Such things are present in the household – the company of a woman and so on.

1. Sadhana.

That is why living in solitude is necessary for a cure.

“One can enter family life after attaining discrimination and dispassion.¹ In the ocean of the world are the crocodiles of passion – anger and so forth. If you enter the water after smearing your body with turmeric, you need not fear the crocodiles. Discrimination and non-attachment are the turmeric. Knowledge of what is real and what is unreal is known as discrimination. God alone is real and eternal. All else is unreal, transitory, lasting just a few days. One must realize this and develop love for God, attachment to God, devotion to Him. The gopis had such an attraction for Krishna. Here is a song:”

The way – love for God – attachment, or attraction like that of gopis

Listen! The flute plays in yonder wood.

There I must go, where Krishna² awaits me on the path.

Tell me, dear friends, will you not come along?

To you, my friends, Krishna is but a mere name, an empty name,

But to me He is an ache in my heart.

You hear His flute with only your ears, but I hear it playing in my heart:

Krishna's flute that beckons, “Come, O Radha!

Without you there is no beauty in the grove.”

Singing this song with tears in his eyes, Thakur says to Keshab and the other devotees, “You may or

1. Viveka and vairagya.

2. Shyam, of dark blue complexion.

may not accept Radha and Krishna, but make their feelings of attraction and attachment your own. Who has such yearning for God? Make an effort. Only when you yearn for God, will you realize Him.”

Chapter Seven

samniyamendriyagrāmaṁ sarvatra samabuddha-
yaḥ |
te prāpnuvanti mām eva sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ ||

[Having restrained the multitude of senses, even-minded in everything, rejoicing in the welfare of all beings, they indeed come to Me.]

– Bhagavad Gita 12:4

Steamer trip with Keshab Sen – engaged in the welfare of all beings

It is ebb tide and the steamer is progressing rapidly toward Calcutta. The captain has given orders to go a little farther down the river to the Botanical Gardens on the other side of the bridge. How far the steamer has gone is not known to many, they have been listening to Sri Ramakrishna’s words with such rapt attention. They have no idea of time.

They are all eating puffed rice with coconut that they have kept in the folds of their cloths. It is a festivity of joy. Keshab had arranged for the puffed rice. At this moment Thakur sees that Vijay and Keshab are not at ease in each other’s company. Now he will make them compromise, as if they are two innocent boys. He is engaged in the welfare of all beings.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab*): “Look, Vijay is here. Your disputes and differences are like battles between Rama and Shiva. (*Laughter.*) Shiva is

Rama's guru. They had a fight, and then they made up. But the fighting and gibberish between Shiva's ghosts and Rama's monkeys has no end! (*Loud laughter.*)

"You are the same flesh and blood. Yet, you know, such things can't be avoided. Lava and Kusha (Rama's sons) fought a war with their father. And, you know, a mother and her daughter observe Tuesday's fast and prayers separately. It's as if the good fortune of the mother and the daughter were different. In fact, the mother's Tuesday observance brings good fortune to the daughter, just as her daughter's separate observance does for her mother. In the same way, Keshab has a samaj (religious society) of his own and Vijay thinks he must have a separate samaj. (*Laughter.*) Still, it is necessary. You may ask, 'When the Lord Himself enacts His sport why is there need for Jatila and Kutila?'¹ Without troublemakers like Jatila and Kutila, the sport doesn't develop. (*All laugh.*) And without Jatila and Kutila, there is no fun. (*Loud laughter.*)

"Ramanuja was a believer in the doctrine of Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism). His guru believed in Advaitavada (non-dualism). In the end they had differences. The guru and the disciple started criticising each other's views. This happens quite often, even though people are our own flesh and blood."

1. Troublemakers who disturb the peace.

Chapter Eight

pitāsi lokasya carācarasya tvam asya pūjyaśca gurur
 garīyān |
 na tvatsamo 'sty abhyadhikaḥ kuto 'nyo lokatraye
 'py apratimaprabhāva ||

[You are the Father of the moving and the un-
 moving universe. You are adored by this world,
 You are the revered Guru. In the three worlds
 there is none who can surpass you. You, O Being
 of incomparable power!]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:43

Advice to Keshab – gurudom and Brahma Samaj – Sat- chit-ananda alone is Guru

All are rejoicing. Thakur says to Keshab: “You do not examine the nature of your disciples before accepting them. That’s why they break away like this.

“Men are the same in appearance, but they differ in nature. In some, sattvaguna¹ dominates, in others rajoguna,² and again in others tamoguna.³ Puli (a kind of stuffed sweet) may all have the same look. But some contain sweetened condensed milk, some the kernel of coconut sweetened by treacle or sugar, and some have kalai pulse boiled without any sweetening added. (*All laugh.*)

“Do you know what I think about it? I go on eating and drinking, and the Divine Mother knows

1. Qualities that lead Godward.

2. Qualities that incline one to multiply work and duty.

3. Qualities that cause ignorance and laziness and turn the mind away from God.

all. There are three words that prick me – guru, doer, and father.

“There is only one Guru, who is Sat-chit-ananda. It is Sat-chit-ananda alone who teaches. For my part, I feel like a child. You can find lakhs of men as gurus. Everyone wants to be a guru. Who wants to be a disciple?”

“Teaching mankind is very difficult. It is only when God manifests and gives a commission that it is possible. Narada, Sukadeva, and others received that command to teach. Sankaracharya also was commissioned by God. If you are not commissioned, who will listen to you? You know the minds of Calcutta people. So long as there is fire, the milk continues to boil. As soon as the fire is withdrawn, it stops boiling. The people of Calcutta are so impatient. For need of water, they start digging a well, but give up when they find a few rocks. Then they start digging at another place. If they find sand there, they become discouraged and look once again for another place to dig. This is what they do.

“Again, it's not enough to imagine that you have received God's command. Such an idea is quite mistaken. God actually appears before you and speaks to you. Only then do you receive the command. What a weight such words carry then! They can move a mountain. Mere lecturing? People will listen for a few days and then forget. They won't act on the instruction.”

**Earlier story of his life – ecstatic vision of
Haldarpukur**

“In the countryside (at Thakur’s native village) is a pond called Haldarpukur. People used to defecate on its bank every morning. Others would shout abuse, yet the same thing would happen the next day. The defecation didn’t stop. People then ap-proached the Company (Municipality). They, in turn, sent out an official to put up a notice that said, ‘Do not relieve yourself here.’ The nuisance stopped immediately. (*Everybody laughs.*)

“To teach others, a person must have the badge of authority. Without it, the teaching is ridiculous. We do not teach ourselves, but go preach to others instead! It is like the blind leading the blind. (*Laughter.*) It brings more harm than good. Only when you have seen God can you see through other people and understand what diseases of the soul they have been stricken with. Only then can you instruct them.”

Clouded by egotism one thinks that he is the doer¹

“You must have a direct command from God. Otherwise, it will only be self-assertion to say, ‘I teach mankind.’ Self-assertion is the offspring of ignorance. Out of ignorance one feels, ‘I am the doer.’ One becomes a jivanmukta only by realizing, ‘God is the sole actor in the three worlds. I am a mere instrument in His hands.’ All troubles, all

1. Ahamkār vimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate| Bhagavad Gita 3:27.

want of peace, come from the notion, 'I am the doer, I am a free agent.'”

Chapter Nine

tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara |
asakto hyācarankarma param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ ||

[Therefore, constantly perform your own duties without attachment; for by doing duties without attachment, man verily obtains the Supreme.]

– Bhagavad Gita 3:19

The steamer trip – instruction to Keshab and other Brahmo devotees on karma yoga

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and the other devotees*): “You talk of doing good to the world. I ask you, is the world so small? Who are you to do good to the world? Attain God by performing spiritual practices. Attain Him. He will give you power. Only then will you be able to do good to others; otherwise not.”

A devotee: “Should we give up all work until we realize God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “No, why should you give up work? You will have to do all this: meditate on God, chant His names and glories, and perform your daily devotions.”

A Brahmo devotee: “But what about worldly work? Worldly affairs?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, you should attend to that too, as much as is necessary to run the household. But you must cry in a lonely corner and

pray to God so that you do all these works selflessly.¹ And you should pray, ‘O Lord, please lessen my worldly work, because O Lord, I see that when I am engrossed in too much work, I forget You. I think that I’m doing the work in a selfless way, but it turns out to be with a motive.’² A desire for name and fame can crop up when I increase my giving in charity and distributing free meals.”

The earlier story of his life – talk on activities such as charity with Sambhu Mallick

“Sambhu Mallick brought up the topic of hospitals, dispensaries, schools, roads, and reservoirs. I said to him, ‘You should do only that which comes your way and which appears to be of pressing necessity – this too in the spirit of not expecting any reward. Don’t seek more work. If you do, you will lose sight of God. Say you go to the Kalighat Temple and busy yourself in distributing alms – but you miss the darshan of Kali! (*Laughter.*) First of all, have the darshan of Kali, even if you have to push your way through to reach Her. Afterwards you may or may not practice charity. If you like, give as much as you can. After all, work is meant for realizing God. That’s why I said to Sambhu, ‘Suppose the Lord appears before you, what will you say to Him? “Please build a number of hospitals and dispensaries?”’ (*Laughter.*) A devotee never asks for such things. Instead he says, ‘Lord, grant me a place at Your lotus feet, always keep me with You, grant me pure love and devotion to Your lotus feet.’

1. Nishkama.

2. Sakama.

“Karma yoga is very hard indeed. The rituals laid down in the sacred books are very hard to practice in the Kaliyuga. Life is dependent on food. Too much work is not possible. It will all be over for the patient suffering from fever if he's given a slow-acting treatment as prescribed by an old-fashioned Hindu physician¹ – he cannot last long. These days he needs the fast-acting fever mixture of D. Gupta.² In the Kaliyuga one should practice Bhakti Yoga, chanting the Lord's name and His glories, and prayer. Indeed, Bhakti Yoga is the law of this age. (*To the Brahma devotees*) You Brahmos also practice Bhakti Yoga. You repeat the name of God and chant the glories of the Divine Mother. You are indeed blessed! Your path is really fine. You are not Vedantists. You don't say, 'The world is like a dream.' You are not such brahmajnanis; you are devotees. You believe that God is a person. This is very fine. You are devotees. You will certainly attain God when you call upon Him with a yearning heart.”

Chapter Ten

Surendra's house – with Narendra and others

The steamer has now returned to the Kayalaghat (Calcutta). All prepare to land. Coming out of the cabin, they see that the full moon of Kojagar (the month of Aswin) is shining brightly. The bosom of the Ganges³ sparkles in the moonlight. A carriage is called for Sri Ramakrishna. In a little while he enters it with

1. Kaviraj.
2. A patent medicine.
3. Bhagirathi.

M. and some other devotees. Nandalal, Keshab's nephew, also gets in. He will accompany Thakur for some distance.

When they all are seated in the carriage, Thakur asks, "Where is he?" meaning Keshab. Soon Keshab appears alone, smiling. He asks who is accompanying Thakur. After everyone is seated in the carriage, Keshab prostrates on the ground and takes the dust of Thakur's feet. Thakur bids him an affectionate goodbye. The carriage rolls along the beautiful main thoroughfare of the English neighbourhood. Lighted mansions adorning both sides of the road seem as if they are in repose in the mellow, serene rays of the full moon. Near the main gates are gaslights. In almost every home English ladies are singing to the accompaniment of the harmonium or piano. Thakur smiles joyfully as he passes. Suddenly he says, "I'm feeling thirsty. What can be done?" What to do! Nandalal stops the carriage near the India Club, goes upstairs to get water, and brings back a full glass tumbler. Thakur asks sweetly, "Has the tumbler been well washed?" Nandalal says, "Yes, it has." Thakur drinks the water from the tumbler.

Thakur has the nature of a child. When the carriage starts again, he puts his head out of the window to look at the people and the horses and carriages in the moonlight. He is happy to see them all.

Nandalal gets down at Calootola. Thakur's carriage stops in Shimuliya Street at Suresh Mitra's house. Thakur calls him Surendra. He is a great devotee of Thakur's.

But Surendra is not at home. He has gone to his new garden house. The members of the household open a room on the ground floor for the guests. The carriage fare needs to be paid. Who will pay it? Had Surendra been there, he would have paid it. Thakur says to a devotee, "Ask the ladies of the house for the fare. Don't they know that their men are frequent visitors?"

Narendra lives nearby. Thakur sends for him. Meanwhile, Thakur is led to a room on the second story. The floor of the room is covered by a sheet, and a few bolsters are lying on it. On the wall is an oil painting in which Thakur is showing Keshab the harmony of all religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism, as well as Vaishnava, Shakta, and Shaiva sects. Surendra had had it painted.

Sitting there, Thakur talks happily. As Narendra enters, it is as if Thakur's joy is doubled. He says, "I went on a steamer trip with Keshab Sen. Vijay was there and also all these people." Pointing to M. he adds, "You may ask him how I told Vijay and Keshab about 'Tuesday' for the mother and the daughter and that God's sport is not nourished without Jatila and Kutila – all these things. (*To M.*) Was this not so?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

It is getting dark, but Surendra has not yet come back. Thakur must return to Dakshineswar and cannot wait any longer. It is 10.30 at night. The road is bathed in moonlight.

A carriage arrives and Thakur gets in. Narendra and M. salute him and return to their homes in Calcutta.

Section III

Visit to the Sinthi Brahma Samaj Joyful Conversation with Shivanath and Other Brahma Devotees

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna at a religious festival

The Paramahansa Deva has come to visit the Brahma Samaj at Sinthi. It is Saturday, 28 October 1882, the second day of the dark fortnight in the month of Aswin.

It is the semiannual celebration of the Brahma Samaj, and grand festivities are going on today. Sri Ramakrishna has been invited, together with a number of other devotees. At three or four in the afternoon they arrive at the beautiful garden house of Sri Veni Madhava. They have come by carriage from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. It is in this garden house that the Brahma Samaj conducts meetings. Sri Ramakrishna has great love for the Brahma Samaj, and its devotees love and revere him in return. Only yesterday, Friday evening, he enjoyed a steamer trip on the Ganges, from the Kali Temple to Calcutta, with Keshab Chandra Sen and his disciples.

Sinthi is near Paikpara, about three miles north of Calcutta. Located far from the din of the city, the beautiful garden house is particularly suitable for the worship of God. The owner of the garden house organizes two festivals a year – one in the autumn and the other in the spring – and invites many devotees from Calcutta and the nearby village of Sinthi.

Shivanath and other devotees from Calcutta have come. Most of them attended the morning service and are now waiting for the evening service. They are particularly interested because they have heard that a great saint will be there in the afternoon. They want to see his happy figure and imbibe the nectar of his words, and they want to hear his sweet devotional songs and watch him dance full of love for God. Such a dance is rare even among the gods.

By afternoon a large crowd has gathered in the garden. Some are sitting on wooden benches under the shadow of vines. Others are walking with their friends along the bank of a beautiful artificial lake. Many have already taken their seats in the Samaj house, awaiting Sri Ramakrishna's arrival. There is a betel leaf shop at the entrance to the garden. Entering the garden, one feels that it is a place of worship. In the evening there will be a musical play. In all four directions the blue autumn sky reflects joy. Since early morning, a current of delight has passed through the trees, vines, and shrubs of the garden – as though they, together with the sky and all creatures, are singing one melody. Even the breeze seems divinely propitious, carrying such joy into the hearts of the devotees.

Everyone is thirsty for the appearance of the Paramahansa Deva when his carriage arrives in front of the house. They all rise to welcome the great saint and form a circle around him.

A platform has been built in the middle of the main hall of the Samaj building. The place is filled with people. In front is the vestibule where the Paramahansa Deva and others are seated. People also occupy the two rooms on both sides of the vestibule. Others are standing at the doorways, craning their necks to see. Even the steps leading up to the vestibule are crowded with devotees. Two or three trees near the steps support a canopy of vines and a number of benches offer seating for a few

devotees, who also strain their necks to see the great saint and try intently to hear him. Nearby a path stretches between many rows of flower beds and fruit trees. The trees gently wave in the whispering breeze, as if bowing in joy to offer Sri Ramakrishna a hearty welcome.

When the smiling Paramahansa Deva, Sri Ramakrishna, takes his seat, the sight of all those within spontaneously falls upon this happy and most joyful figure. Until the start of the play, the rest of the devotees walk around, some alone and others with friends. Some chew betel leaf or tobacco or smoke cigarettes. Some laugh, others engage in worldly discussions on one thing or another, but as soon as the curtain rises, all talk ends and the full attention of the audience is directed to the play. Like so many bees when the lotus blooms, their attention is drawn from the other flowers of the garden, and they swarm to the nectar of the lotus.

Chapter Two

mām ca yo 'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate |
sa guṇān samatīyaitān brahmabhūyāya kalpate ||

[He who serves Me with unswerving devotion goes beyond the three gunas and is fit to merge in Brahman.]

– Bhagavad Gita 14:26

Conversation with devotees

Smiling, Sri Ramakrishna looks at Shivanath and the other devotees and says, “Look! Here is Shivanath! You see, you are a devotee, so I feel very happy to see you. This is the nature of a man who is addicted to smoking hemp. He feels happy when he meets another hemp smoker. He may even embrace him.” (*Shivanath and the others laugh.*)

**Nature of a worldly man – the great importance of
name**

“When I see a person whose mind is not on God, I tell him, ‘Please go sit over there.’ Or I say, ‘Go see the beautiful buildings! Go see them.’ (*All laugh.*)

“And I see that some people who come with the devotees are not of a serious nature. They are worldly-minded; they don’t like spiritual talk. Devotees like to talk about God for a long time, but these men can’t sit long. They become restless and whisper into their friend’s ear, ‘When are you leaving?’ The devotee sometimes says, ‘Wait a while. We’ll be leaving shortly.’ But they are impatient and say, ‘All right, carry on. We’ll wait in the boat.’ (*All laugh.*)

“If you ask worldly people to renounce everything and devote themselves to God, they don’t listen to you. That’s why, to attract worldly people, Gaur¹ and Nitai,² the two brothers, thought up a stratagem that involved soup of magur fish, the embrace of a young woman, and repeating the name of God. In the beginning, many people came to chant the name of God, tempted by the first two. Then, having tasted a bit of the nectar of the Lord’s name, they realized that the fish soup was nothing compared to the tears that fall for the love of God. And that ‘a young woman’ meant the earth – the ‘embrace of a young woman’ meant to roll around in the dust for love of God.

1. Chaitanya.

2. Familiar name of Nityananda, disciple and companion of Chaitanya.

“Nitai, in one way or another, found a way to make people repeat the name of God. Chaitanya Deva said that there is great importance in the name of the Lord. It may not show immediate results, but sooner or later it does yield fruit. For example, suppose there is a seed on the cornice of a house. After a long time, the house falls down. The seed will then fall to the ground, develop into a tree and, in time, bear fruit.”

**Man’s nature and the three gunas – sattva, rajās, and
tamas of devotion**

“Just as there are the three gunas of sattva, rajās, and tamas in worldly people, in the same way there are the three qualities of sattva, rajās, and tamas of devotion, too.

“You know what kind of sattva a worldly man has? His house is somewhat in shambles, but he doesn’t get it repaired. There are pigeon droppings in the vestibule of the shrine, and moss grows in the courtyard, but he is unaware of it. Household furniture may have grown old, but he doesn’t polish or replace it. He dresses in simple clothes. Such a man is very calm, polite, compassionate, and peaceful. He does no harm to anyone.

“There are also signs of rajās in a worldly man. A watch with a chain, and two or three rings on his fingers. The furnishings of his house are in tip-top shape. On the walls hang a picture of the queen and a picture of the prince – or of some great personage. His house is well plastered and so forth; there is no stain anywhere. He has a large closet of fine clothes, and uniforms for his servants.

“The tamas of a worldly man also has its signs: sleep, lust, anger, pride, and so on.

“Devotion also has its sattva. The devotee who possesses the quality of sattva meditates secretly. Perhaps he meditates inside his mosquito net. Everybody thinks he is either sleeping or that he did not sleep well during the night and is late getting up. His attachment to his body is only to the extent of filling his stomach – a simple dish of rice with spinach suffices for him. There is no fuss and bother about his meals, nor in his dress or household furnishings. And a sattvic devotee never flatters anybody for money.

“When a person has devotion of the rajasic type, he may wear a holy mark on his forehead and a rosary of rudraksha¹ interspersed with gold beads. (*Everybody laughs.*) When he worships, he dresses himself in a silk cloth.”

Chapter Three

klaibyaṃ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha naitat tvayyupa-
padyate |
kṣudraṃ hṛdayadaurbalyaṃ tyaktvottiṣṭha paraṃ-
tapa ||

[O Partha (Arjuna), do not yield to cowardice. It does not benefit you. Give up your despicable faint-heartedness and arise, O vanquisher of foes!]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:3

1. The kernel of a berry used for beads in rosaries.

**The great importance of name, and sin –
three kinds of teachers**

Sri Ramakrishna: “A man with the devotion of *tamas* has burning faith. Such a devotee forces the Lord like a dacoit forces a man to part with his wealth. ‘Tie him up! Beat him! Kill him!’ Such is the disposition of a dacoit.”

Sri Ramakrishna looks upward and sings in a voice infused with love:

Why go to Gaya, Ganga, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I
can breathe my last chanting Kali’s name?

Of what use are rituals¹ for one who utters Kali’s name at
dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his
footsteps, never catching up.

Charity, vows, and almsgiving no longer appeal to
Madan’s mind. His worship alone is surrender at the
Mother’s blessed feet.

Lord Shiva Himself, the God of Gods, with all His powers,
sings Her praises. Who, then, can conceive of the power of
Her holy name?

Thakur sings, intoxicated in ecstasy as if he is
initiated in *agnimantra*:²

Mother, can I but die with Durga’s name upon my lips,

I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse
to rescue me.

“Why, I have chanted Her name! How can there
be any sin in me? I am Her son! I am the inheritor
of Her power and glory! Such must be the spirit.

1. Sandhyas performed at dawn, noon, and twilight.

2. A mantra that makes one determined to achieve an extremely
difficult and daunting task.

“If you can give a turn to your tamoguna, you can use it to realize God. Force your demands on Him! He’s no stranger. Indeed, He is our own. And then see how the quality of tamas can be used for the welfare of others.

“There are three types of physicians – superior, mediocre, and inferior. The physician who comes, feels the patient’s pulse, and then says to him, ‘Brother, please take this medicine,’ and leaves – he is an inferior physician. He doesn’t bother to find out if the patient has taken the medicine. The physician who persuades the patient in many ways to take the medicine, who says in a sweet voice, ‘Oh brother, how can you be cured unless you take the medicine? Dear brother, please take it. See, I myself am mixing it for you. Now take it,’ – he is a mediocre physician. And the physician who sees that a patient stubbornly refuses to take the medicine, puts his knee on the patient’s chest, and forces the medicine down his throat – he is a superior physician. This is the tamoguna of the physician. It helps the patient; it does not harm him.

“Like physicians, religious teachers¹ are also of three types. Those who instruct their disciples on spiritual matters and then make no inquiries about their progress are of the inferior type. Those who repeat their teachings again and again for the good of their disciples so that they may internalize the instructions, who make requests in various ways, and show love – these are the mediocre type of

1. Acharyas.

teacher. And those who use force when they find that the disciples do not listen, I call superior.”

Chapter Four

yato vāco nivartante | aprāpya manasā saha |

[Where mind and speech cannot reach.]

– Taittiriya Upanishad 2:4

What Brahman is cannot be expressed by speech

A Brahmo devotee asked, “Is God with form or formless?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “One cannot limit God. He is formless and then with form, too. For a devotee, He is with form. For a jnani, that is to say, one who considers the world a dream, God is formless. The devotee thinks that God is one and the world is another. That is why the Lord manifests to him as a person. Jnanis such as Vedantists reason, ‘Not this, not this.’ By so reasoning, the jnani has the inner feeling and experience¹ that his individuality is an illusion, so the world also is like a dream. The jnani feels the consciousness of Brahman within. But what God is, he cannot express in words.

1. Bodhebodha: An intellectual, literal, imaginative, inner feeling of the real nature of Brahman (Atman). The Vedanta illustrates it in this way (taken from Vol. III of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, 24 August, 1882): A person is lying in a room in the dark. Somebody gropes in the dark to reach him. His hand touches a couch and he says, “No, this is not he.” Then he touches the window. “This too is not he.” Then he touches the door and again says to himself, “No, not he. Not this, not this, not this.” At last his hand touches the person. Then he says, “That’s it. That is the person.” This means that he has reached the person, but he hasn’t known him intimately.

“Do you know what it’s like? It’s like a shoreless ocean of Sat-chit-ananda.¹ Water in the ocean turns into ice at places with the cooling influence of love. This ice takes a form. In other words, at times God manifests and takes a physical form for the devotee. When the sun of knowledge rises, the ice melts. Then God does not appear as a person. Also His form is not visible. What God is cannot be expressed in words. Who is there to express Him? He who would describe Him has disappeared. You cannot find his ‘I,’ even if you search for it.

“When one continues to reason, one’s ‘I-ness’ vanishes completely. First you peel off the outer red skin of an onion, then the soft white one. One continues to peel in this way until nothing of the onion remains.

“When ‘I-ness’ vanishes, who remains to look for it? Who is there to tell what the inner feeling and experience² of the real nature of Brahman is?

“A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. As soon as it went into the water, it melted and became one with it. Then who was there to tell about it?

“A sign of the highest spiritual knowledge³ is that a person becomes silent. The salt doll of ‘I-ness’ gets dissolved in the sea of Sat-chit-ananda – not a trace of differentiation remains.

“As long as reasoning is not complete, man continues to indulge in endless discussions. But no

1. Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

2. Bodhebodha.

3. Purna jnana.

sooner does one stop reasoning than one becomes silent. The gurgling sound of water stops when the pitcher is filled with water – that is to say, when the water in the pitcher becomes one with the water of the pond the pitcher is dipped in. There is a gurgling sound only so long as the pitcher is not filled with water.

“In the olden days people used to say that a ship does not return if it reaches ‘black waters.’”

But ‘I-ness’ does not vanish

“When the ego vanishes, all troubles cease. You may reason a thousand times, but the ego does not disappear. For you and me, it is good to cherish the ‘I’ of a devotee of God.

“For a devotee, Brahman is with qualities.¹ In other words, God is visible as a person with a form. And it is He who listens to prayers. All your prayers are addressed to Him alone. You are not Vedantists, nor are you jnanis; you are devotees. Whether you accept God with form or not does not matter. It is enough to feel that God is a person who listens to your prayers, who creates, preserves, and dissolves – a person who is infinitely powerful.

“It is easier to reach God by the path of love and devotion.”

1. Saguna.

Chapter Five

bhaktiyā tv ananyayā śakya aham evamvidho 'rjuna!
jñātuṁ draṣṭuṁ ca tattvena praveṣṭuṁ ca paraṁ-
tapa||

[But by unswerving devotion that form of Mine can be known and seen in reality and also entered, O scorcher of foes.]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:54

Vision of God – with form or without form

A Brahma devotee asked, “Sir, can we see God? If so, why don’t we see Him?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, surely He can be seen. He is seen with form and He is seen without form, too. How can I explain this to you?”

The Brahma devotee: “By what method can one see Him?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Can you weep for Him with great longing?”

“People shed pitchers full of tears for son, wife, and money. But who weeps for God? As long as a baby remains distracted with his pap, his mother attends to cooking and all her household chores. But when the child tires of the pap and throws it away, screaming for its mother, she takes the rice pan off the fire, comes running, and picks the baby up in her arms.”

The Brahma devotee: “Sir, why are there so many ideas about God’s form? Some say that God is with form, some say that He is formless. And even

among believers in God with form, we hear of so many different forms. Why such confusion?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Whichever form of God a devotee sees, he believes in that alone. In reality, there is no confusion. If God is attained by any means, He will Himself explain everything. If you have never been to a particular neighbourhood, how can you know everything about it?

“Listen to a story. A man went out to relieve himself. He saw a creature in a tree. On his return he said to another man, ‘I saw a beautiful red animal on that tree.’ The other man replied, ‘When I went there, I also saw it. But it’s not red, it’s green.’ Yet another man said, ‘No, no, I also saw it. It’s yellow.’ In the same way others said, ‘No, it is the colour of tobacco, or eggplant, or blue, and so on.’ All this led to a quarrel. Then they went to the foot of the tree and saw a man sitting there. When asked about it, he said, ‘I live under this tree. I know it very well. Whatever you say is true. It is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, sometimes blue, and also of many more hues. It has many colours, and sometimes it has no colour at all. Now it has qualities, now it has none.’

“This means that only the man who is always thinking of God can know His real nature. That person alone knows that God is seen in different forms and in different aspects. He is with qualities, and He is also without qualities. Only he who lives under the tree knows that the variegated chameleon has different colours, and that sometimes it has no colour at all. Other people just argue, quarrel, and trouble themselves.

“Kabir used to say, ‘The One without form is my Father and with form, my Mother.’

“God reveals Himself in the form the devotee loves most – gracious loving Lord of the devotee¹ that He is. The Purana says that God assumed the form of Rama for the sake of his heroic devotee, Hanuman.”

Explanation of the forms of Kali and Shyama – the Infinite is incomprehensible

“In Vedanta philosophy there are no forms. Its ultimate principle is that Brahman is the only Reality, and the phenomenal universe made of names and forms is illusory. As long as one cherishes the idea, ‘I am a devotee,’ it is possible to have a vision of the form of God and to see Him as a person. From the standpoint of reasoning, the feeling ‘I am a devotee’ keeps him somewhat away from God.

“Why are the forms of Kali and Shyama three and a half cubits high? Because of distance. On account of distance, the sun seems small. If you go near, it will look big beyond your imagination. So why are Kali and Shyama black? Because of distance. Again, water in a lake appears green, blue, or black from a distance, but if you go near and take some water in your palm, you will find that it has no colour. The sky from a distance appears blue, but if you go near it, it has no colour.

“So I say that according to the Vedanta philosophy, Brahman is without attributes. What its real nature is cannot be expressed in words. But

1. Bhakta vatsala.

as long as you as a person are real, the world is also real. Then the names and forms of God are also real. And feeling Him to be a person is real, too.

“Yours is the path of love and devotion for God. It is a very good and easy path. Can the Infinite be known? Besides, what is the need to know It? Having the rare privilege of being born as human beings, we should develop devotion to His lotus feet by any means possible.

“If I can quench my thirst with one glass of water, what need is there for me to measure the quantity of water in the lake? I get intoxicated with half a bottle of wine. What is the need to know the quantity of wine in the wine shop? In the same way, what is the need to know the Infinite?”

Chapter Six

yastvātmaratireva syād ātmatrptaś ca mānavaḥ |
ātmanyeva ca saṁtuṣṭas tasya kāryaṁ na vidyate||

[For the one who rejoices in the Self, is satisfied with the Self, and is centred in the Self, for that person there remains no duty to act.]

– Bhagavad Gita 3:17

Signs of God-realization – seven planes and the knowledge of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna: “The Vedas describe the different states of a knower of Brahman. However, this path, the path of knowledge, is a very difficult path. If the least trace of worldliness – attachment to ‘lust and greed’ – persists, one cannot attain knowledge. This path is not for the Kaliyuga.

“Regarding this, the Vedas talk of the seven planes, or states of mind. When the mind is attached to the world, it dwells in the sex organ or the organ of evacuation or the navel. It does not look upward in this state. Its only concern is ‘lust and greed.’ The fourth plane of the mind is the heart. It is here that the mind gains initial spiritual awareness. One sees light all around. Seeing the divine light, one is amazed and exclaims, ‘What is this? What is this!’ The mind then does not go downward [toward the world].

“The fifth plane of the mind is at the throat. When the mind of a person rises to the throat, he is freed from all ignorance and illusion. He does not like to talk or hear about anything but God. If someone talks of other things, he leaves the place. The sixth plane of the mind is at the forehead. When the mind reaches there, one sees a divine form all twenty-four hours of the day. However, a bit of ‘I-ness’ exists even then. Such a person feels intoxicated at the vision of that supreme and unique form. He tries to touch and embrace the form, but cannot. It is like the light in a lantern. One feels that one can touch the light, but because of the glass in between, one cannot touch it. At the top of the head is the seventh plane. When the mind rises to it, one goes into samadhi and the follower of the path of knowledge has the direct vision of Brahman. But in this state, the body does not last for many days. The person remains unconscious and can eat nothing. If milk is poured into the mouth, it runs out. On this plane of consciousness, death comes in twenty-one days.

This is the state of the Brahmajnani.¹ Yours is the path of love and devotion to God. It is a very good and easy path.”

Actions drop off after samadhi – an earlier story of his life – how Thakur gave up karmas such as offering drinking water to the deities

“Once a person asked me, ‘Sir, can you teach me samadhi?’ (*Everybody laughs.*)

“All actions drop off after samadhi. Actions like worship, japa, and all worldly activities drop off. In the beginning one is very active, but as a man advances towards God, the outer display of actions becomes less – so much so that even singing His names and glories ceases. (*To Shivanath*) Before you arrived at the meeting, people talked a great deal about your good name, qualities, and so on. But as soon as you arrived, all that stopped. Now everybody takes joy at the sight of you and says, ‘Here is Shivanath Babu!’ All other talk about you stops.

“After this state of mine I noticed that at the time of offering Ganges water to the deities, it trickled through my fingers. I began to cry and asked Haladhari, ‘Brother, what has happened?’ Haladhari told me that it is called the fingers of the hand remaining apart.² After the vision of God, actions such as offering water to the deities³ drop off.

1. Knower of Brahman.

2. Galitahasta.

3. Tarpana.

“In the group singing of hymns, one first sings, ‘Nitai is my mad elephant.’ As this mood deepens, one simply utters, ‘Elephant, elephant.’ Next it is only, ‘Elephant.’ And lastly, while saying, ‘Ele,’ one goes into bhava samadhi. Then the person who was singing says not a word.

“It is the same as at a feast given to brahmins. In the beginning there is so much activity. When they sit down with leaf plates in front of them, much of the noise ceases. One hears only, ‘Bring some luchis, bring some here.’ And again, when they begin eating the luchis and vegetables, seventy-five percent of the noise subsides. When they have curds, you can hear only one sound, ‘sup, sup’ (from smacking their lips). (*All laugh.*) One can say that nobody utters a word. The feast over, the next step is to go to sleep. Then there is absolute silence.

“Therefore, I say that in the beginning there is a lot of activity, but the more you advance on the path towards God, the less your activities will be. At the end, all work drops away and samadhi follows.

“When a housewife is pregnant, her mother-in-law reduces her duties. In the last month, she is almost free from work. When the child is born, there is complete renunciation of work. The mother only has to look after the baby. All chores in the household are attended to by the mother-in-law, the husband’s sister, or his elder sister-in-law.”

**Avatars and the like live after samadhi for instruction
of mankind**

“After samadhi, a person usually dies. But some, like Narada, and avatars like Chaitanya Deva, live to instruct mankind. After digging a well, most people throw away the spade and basket. But there are some who keep them, thinking that they may, perhaps, be needed by their neighbours. In the same way, highly spiritual personalities feel greatly concerned for the suffering of others. They are not so selfish as to be satisfied with their own illumination. You know well how selfish people behave. If you ask them to urinate here, they won’t, lest it should later do you good. (*All laugh.*) If you ask them to bring sandesh for a pice from a shop, they’ll lick it on their way back. (*All laugh.*)

“There is a special manifestation of divine power in some. An ordinary man is afraid to give instruction to others. Old and worn out wood¹ may float on water, but it sinks the moment a bird sits on it. Sages like Narada are like huge logs² that will not only float on water, but also carry men, bullocks, and even elephants.”

1. Habate wood.

2. Bahaduri wood.

Chapter Seven

adr̥ṣṭapūrvam hr̥ṣito 'smi dr̥ṣṭvā bhayena ca pravayathitaṁ mano me |
tad eva me darśaya deva rūpaṁ prasīda deveśa
jagannivāsa ||

[I rejoice that I have seen what was never seen before, but my mind is shaken with fear. Show me that form I once saw, O God; have mercy, O God of gods and Abode of the Universe.]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:45

Prayer system of the Brahma Samaj and talk on God's powers and glory

An earlier story of his life – theft of an ornament from the Radhakanta Temple at Dakshineswar

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shivanath*): “Yes, my dear sir, why do you dwell so much on the glories and powers of God? I said the same to Keshab Sen. One day they all came to the Kali Temple. I said, ‘I would like to hear how you lecture.’ A meeting was then arranged in the chandni (portal) on the Ganges ghat and Keshab began to lecture. He spoke so well, I went into samadhi. Later I said to him, ‘Why do you talk so much about all this: “Oh Lord, what beautiful flowers You have made! You have created the sky, the stars, the sea, and so on!” Those who love splendour, love to talk about God’s splendour.’ When Radhakanta’s ornament was stolen, Mathur Babu¹ went to the Radhakanta Temple and said to the deity, ‘Fie on you, Lord! You couldn’t guard your own ornaments!’ I said to

1. Son-in-law of Rani Rasmani.

Mathur Babu, ‘What [low] intelligence you have! He who has Lakshmi herself for his handmaid, he whose feet she massages, how can he lack splendour? Jewelry is very precious to you, but for the Lord it is just a few clods of earth. Fie on you! You should not talk so stupidly. What riches can you give to God?’ That is why I say that a man seeks a person in whom he finds joy. What use is it to find out from him where he lives, how many buildings and gardens he owns, how much wealth, how many relatives, how many male and female servants he has? When I see Narendra, I forget everything. I’ve never asked him, even by mistake, where he lives, what his father does, how many brothers he has, and so on. Dive deep into the sweetness of God’s love. What need is there for us to find out about God’s infinite creation, His limitless splendours?”

Sri Ramakrishna again sings a song full of sweetness with a voice that surpasses the voices of the celestial musicians¹ who sing there the glories of the Most High:

Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.²

Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love. Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will ever shine.

Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy feet.

1. Gandharvas.

2. Prema.

“Even so, after the vision of God, the devotee wants to witness His lila. After slaying Ravana, Ramachandra entered Lanka. Nikasha, Ravana’s old mother, tried to run away. Lakshmana said, ‘Brother Rama, how strange this is! This Nikasha is such an old woman, she’s suffered so much at the loss of her sons, yet she’s terrified of losing her own life and is taking to her heels.’ Ramachandra, giving assurance of safety to Nikasha, called her to him and asked her about it. She replied, ‘Rama, I have been able to watch all this lila of yours because I’m alive. I want to live longer so that I may see more of it.’ (*All laugh.*)

(*To Shivanath*) “I like to see you. What shall I live for if I don’t see pure-souled ones? The reason? I feel that pure-souled ones are my friends from a previous incarnation.”

A Brahma devotee asks, “Sir, do you believe in rebirth?”

Rebirth – O Arjuna, you and I have passed through many births¹

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, they say there is rebirth. How can we of tiny intellect understand the actions of God? Many people have said it is so, so I don’t disbelieve. Bhishma Deva lay dying on his bed of arrows. All the Pandavas were standing by with Sri Krishna. They saw tears flowing from Bhishma Deva’s eyes. Arjuna said to Sri Krishna, ‘Brother, how strange it is! Pitamah, who is Bhishma Deva himself, who has truly conquered

1. bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava cārjuna| Bhagavad Gita 4:5.

his senses – a jnani and one of the eight Vasus¹ – even he weeps at the time of his death because of maya. When Sri Krishna asked Bhishma about it, Bhishma replied, ‘Sri Krishna, you know very well that I’m not weeping because of that. When I see that there is no end to suffering, even of the Pandavas who have the Lord Himself as their charioteer, I weep, thinking that I have not been able to understand anything of the ways of God.’”

In the joy of devotional singing with the devotees

Now the evening worship begins in the Samaj building. It is about half past eight. After four or five dandas,² the moon lights up the night. The trees and leaves of the creepers in the garden seem to float in the clear autumnal moonbeams. In the meantime devotional singing³ has begun in the prayer hall. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing, intoxicated with love for God. Brahma devotees holding drums and cymbals dance around him. Everyone is intoxicated, in bhava, as if having the vision of God. The sound of God’s name rises to a crescendo. Villagers all around listen, their minds full of gratitude to Veni Madhava, the devotee owner of the garden.

At the end of the kirtan, Sri Ramakrishna prostrates on the ground to salute the Mother of the Universe. While doing so, he says, “Bhagavata, Bhakta, Bhagavan! Salutations at the feet of jnanis, salutations at the feet of devotees, salutations at the feet of the devotees of God with form, salutations at the feet of the devotees of God

1. A group of eight devas (gods).

2. According to Vedic astrological calculations, the twenty-four hours of a day and night are divided into sixty dandas.

3. Kirtan.

without form, salutations at the feet of the knowers of Brahman of old, salutations at the feet of the knowers of Brahman of today's Brahmo Samaj.”

Veni Madhava has provided various kinds of delicious dishes for the enjoyment of the assembled devotees. Full of joy in their company, Sri Ramakrishna also partakes of the prasad.¹

1. Sacramental food offered to the deity.

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna Instructs Vijaykrishna Goswami and Other Brahmo Devotees

Chapter One

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin nāyam bhūtvā bhavitā
vā na bhūyaḥ |
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yam purāṇo na hanyate
hanyamāne śarīre ||

[The Atman is neither born nor does it die.
Coming into being and ceasing to be do not take
place in it. Unborn, eternal, constant, and
ancient, it is not killed when the body is slain.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:20

Is it suicide if a liberated person ends his life?

It is the month of Agrahayana, the fourth day of the bright fortnight, Thursday, 14 December 1882. Vijaykrishna Goswami has come to see Sri Ramakrishna at the Kali Temple garden at Dakshineswar. He is accompanied by three or four Brahmo devotees. They have come from Calcutta by boat with Balaram, a great devotee of the Paramahansa Deva.

At midday, Sri Ramakrishna is resting. On Sundays people come in large numbers to see him, but devotees who want to have a personal talk with him usually visit on other days.

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his wooden cot. Vijay, Balaram, M., and some of the other devotees sit on a

mat facing west, others on the bare floor, in front of Thakur. The Ganges is seen from the western door of the room. Its winter waters are calm and clear. Just beyond the door is the western semicircular verandah. Beyond it are flower gardens and then the embankment. Along the western side of the embankment flows the holy Ganges, the purifier of sins, as if joyfully washing the feet of the temple of the Lord.

It is winter, so all are dressed in warm clothes. Vijay is suffering from colic and has brought medicine in a small glass bottle. He is to take the medicine at prescribed times.

Vijay is a salaried preacher in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and delivers sermons from the pulpit. He now finds himself involved in different controversies with the Samaj, but is not allowed the freedom to act on or to express his independent views. He feels helpless because he has accepted the assignment. Vijay comes from the very pious family of Advaita Goswami, a jnani who meditated upon the formless Brahman; at the same time he displayed the highest intensity of divine love. He was a foremost and intimate disciple of Lord Chaitanya Deva. Mad with love for God, he used to dance with such fervor that he would lose outer consciousness, often dropping the cloth that he was wearing. Vijay, having joined the Brahmo Samaj, meditates on the formless Parabrahman, but the blood of the great devotee, Advaita Goswami, flows through his veins. The seed of God's love lies ready to sprout within him; it is only a matter of time. That is why he has been charmed to see the state of Sri Ramakrishna's divine fervour, stemming from love for God, a state rare even among the gods. Just as a snake charmed by music continues to sit beside the snake charmer, Vijay, charmed by the divine words emanating from the holy lips of Sri Ramakrishna, stays by his side. And when he dances like a child with love for God, Vijay dances with him.

A boy named Vishnu who lived in Ariadaha has recently committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor. Today this topic comes up first.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay, M., and the other devotees*): “Look, this boy has ended his life. When I heard about it, I felt very bad. He used to come here. He was a schoolboy, but he’d often say that he had no liking for the world. He had lived for a few days with some relatives in the west (west of Bengal, i.e. Uttar Pradesh or Punjab). He used to meditate in a solitary field or forest or in the hills. He used to tell me that he had strange visions of various forms of God.

“I believe it was his last birth. In his previous birth he must have accomplished a lot. Perhaps only a little was left undone and he finished that in this life.

“One must admit the tendencies of one’s past birth.¹ There is a story about a man practicing spiritual discipline on a corpse² in a deep forest. He was worshiping the Divine Mother³ and he began to have frightful visions. Finally a tiger carried him away. There was another man who had climbed up a nearby tree in fear of the tiger. Seeing the dead body and arrangements for worship, he came down, took some holy water, and sat on the corpse. He had performed only a little japa when the Divine Mother appeared before him and said, ‘I am pleased with you. Ask for a boon.’ Bowing low at the lotus feet of the Mother, he said, ‘Mother, may I just ask

1. Samskaras.

2. Shava sadhana.

3. Bhagavati.

You one thing? I am amazed at Your action. After that other man made so many arrangements for worship and practiced spiritual disciplines laboriously for so many days, You did not bless him. But I who know nothing and hear nothing – I never repeat Your name or practice any spiritual discipline, I have neither spiritual knowledge nor love and devotion for You – yet I receive Your grace! The Divine Mother laughed and said, ‘Child, you don’t remember your past lives. You practiced austerities for me for so many births! It is because of the strength of those austerities that all these things were arranged for you. It is also for that reason that you are blessed with my vision. Now tell me, what boon do you want?’”

A devotee: “I feel frightened to hear of the suicide.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Suicide is a great sin. A person who commits suicide will have to return and again suffer the world’s trials and tribulations.

“But if a person ends his life after having the vision of God, it is not suicide. There is no harm in giving up the body that way. Some people end their lives after attaining Knowledge. After a gold image has been cast in a clay mould, the mould may be preserved, or, if it is cracked, it can be thrown away.

“Many years ago a boy named Gopal Sen used to come here from Baranagore. He was about twenty years old. He would experience such deep emotions that Hriday had to hold him. He later did fall and break some bones. One day the boy suddenly touched my feet and said, ‘Sir, I won’t be able to

come here any more, so I take your leave.’ A few days later I heard that he had given up his body.”

Chapter Two

anityam asukhaṁ lokam imaṁ prāpya bhajasva
mām ||

[Having come to this impermanent and unhappy world, worship Me.]

– Bhagavad Gita 9:33

Four classes of men – attachment to “lust and greed” is a sign of the worldly

Sri Ramakrishna: “There are four classes of human beings – bound souls, seekers after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-free. The world is like a fishing net. Individual souls are the fish, and God, whose maya is the world, is the fisherman. When fish fall into the net, many of them try to tear it to free themselves. They are like those seeking liberation. However, not all who try to escape are able to do so. Only a few fish slip out with a splash. Then people cry out, ‘There goes a big one!’ Those few are the liberated ones. Some fish are so cautious by nature that they never fall into the net. Narada and other such saints are ever-free; they never fall into the net of the world. But most fish are unaware that they have fallen into the net and will die there. They dart straight ahead, taking the net along with them, and try to hide in the mud. They make no attempt to escape; rather, they dig deeper into the mud. They are like bound souls. They live in the net and think, ‘We are

quite happy here.’ Bound souls remain attached to the world, that is, to ‘lust and greed.’ They remain sunk in the sordid sea and think they are very happy. Those who seek liberation and those who are liberated look upon the world as a deep well. They don’t like it. Some of them who attain Knowledge, the vision of God, give up their bodies. But giving up the body in this way is very rare.

“Bound creatures, the worldly, do not wake up. They suffer so much misery, so many trials, so many sorrows. Even then they do not awaken.

“A camel likes thorny bushes, but the more it eats, the more its mouth bleeds. Yet it keeps on eating the same thorny bush; it doesn’t stop. The worldly suffer so much agony, so much sorrow, yet they revert back to the old self quite soon. If a man’s wife has died, or she has proved unfaithful to him, he marries again. Perhaps he has lost a son and suffered much sorrow, but he forgets all this in a few days. The mother of the boy, beside herself with grief, ties up her hair again and bedecks herself with jewelry. In the same way, though people spend all they have on the marriage of their daughters, they continue giving birth to more children year after year. They lose everything in litigation, yet they go again to court. They can’t feed the children they have, neither can they educate them, nor can they look after them properly. Still they have more children every year.

“At times their state can be likened to that of a snake trying to swallow a mole. The snake can neither swallow the mole nor give it up. The bound soul may have realized that there is no substance to

the world – that it is like a hog plum containing nothing but stone and skin – yet he cannot give it up, cannot turn his mind to God.

“A fifty-year-old relative of Keshab Sen was playing cards – as if the time was not yet ripe for him to think of God!

“There is yet another sign of a bound soul. If he is lifted from worldly life to a spiritual environment, he will pine away to death. The worm that lives in dung only feels happy there – only there does it thrive. If you put that worm in a pot of rice, it will die.” (*All laugh.*)

Chapter Three

asañśayaṁ mahābāho mano durnigrahaṁ calam |
abhyāsenā tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca gṛhyate ||

[O mighty armed, the mind is undoubtedly restless and hard to control, but by practice and non-attachment, O son of Kunti, it can be controlled.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:35

Deep dispassion¹ and bound souls

Vijay: “What must be the state of mind for a bound soul to attain liberation?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “When one develops deep dispassion by the grace of God, one can be freed from the attachment to ‘lust and greed.’ What is deep dispassion? Mild dispassion is to let whatever is continue as it is, just to go on repeating the name

1. Vairagya: non-attachment.

of God. But in one who has deep dispassion, the prana (life breath) becomes restless for God, like a mother restless for the child in her womb. A person who has deep dispassion does not want anything but God. That person sees the world as a deep well and feels that he is drowning in it. He looks upon his relatives as venomous snakes and wants to run away from them. And he does run away. He doesn't think, 'Let me first make arrangements for my family and then I will think of God.' He has great resolve.

“What is deep dispassion like? Listen to a story. Once there was a drought in a certain part of the country. All the farmers were busy digging canals to bring water from a distance. One farmer had great determination. He resolved that he would go on digging until water from the river flowed along his whole canal. When the time came for his bath, his wife sent their daughter with some oil. The daughter said to him, 'Father, it's time for your bath. Massage your body with the oil and take your bath.' He replied, 'Please go away, I have some work to do.' It was past midday, and the farmer was still at work in his field. He had forgotten all about his bath. Now his wife came to the field and said, 'Why haven't you taken your bath yet? Your rice is getting cold. You always overdo things. If the work is not finished yet, do it tomorrow, or do it after your meal.' Taking his spade in hand, the farmer drove her off, scolding and shouting, 'You have no sense! There's been no rain. There is no crop. What will the children eat? Without food, we will all starve to death! I have vowed that I will bring water to the field today. After that, I will think

about bathing and eating.’ Seeing his determination, the woman left. The farmer worked very hard throughout the day and joined the canal to the river in the evening. Then he sat on the bank and enjoyed watching the water gurgle into his field. He was now at peace and full of happiness. He went home and called to his wife, ‘Now bring some oil and prepare a smoke.’ In a carefree mood he took his bath, ate his meal, and retired to bed where he snored happily. This kind of determination illustrates deep dispassion.

“There was another farmer who was also trying to bring water to his field. His wife said to him, ‘It’s already late. Come on now. There’s no need to work so hard.’ Without much protest, this fellow put down his spade and said, ‘Since you say so. I’m coming.’ (*All laugh.*) This farmer could never bring water to his field. This is an example of mild dispassion.

“Just as a farmer can’t bring water to his field without great determination, in the same way, only with great effort does a man realize God.”

Chapter Four

āpūryamāṇam acalapratiṣṭhaṁ samudram āpaḥ
praviśanti yadvat |
tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve sa śāntim āpnoti
na kāmakāmī ||

[He into whom all desires enter as waters enter the full, unmoving sea, he attains peace; not so the desirer of desires.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:70

Slaving for ‘lust and greed’

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): “You used to come here so often. Why not recently?”

Vijay: “Sir, I want to come very much, but I’m not free. I have accepted work in the Brahma Samaj.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): “‘Lust and greed’ bind a man. One loses one’s freedom. When there is a woman, you need ‘gold,’ and for that, you have to be a slave to another person. A man loses his freedom and cannot act as he wishes.

“The priests of the Govindaji temple in Jaipur didn’t used to marry. They had great spiritual and mental powers then. The king once sent for them, but they refused to go to him. Instead, they sent a message, ‘Let the king come here.’ After consulting his counselors, the king arranged for their marriage. Now the king no longer needed to send for them. They would come to him of their own accord, saying, ‘Sir, I have come to shower my blessings. Here are some sacred flowers; please accept them.’ They had to go to the king for everything – building a house, celebrating the rice-taking ceremony of their sons, putting their children through school, and so on.

“Twelve hundred nedas¹ and thirteen hundred nedis² – you know this story.³ Nityananda Goswami’s son, Virabhadra, had thirteen hundred nedas as his disciples. When they became

1. Shaven-headed Vaishnava monks.

2. Shaven-headed Vaishnava nuns.

3. Re: Bengali proverb ‘*Tar sakshi udam sari.*’

spiritually perfect, Virabhadra was alarmed. He thought, They have all become spiritually perfect, so anything they say will come true. There was reason to fear: wherever they went, people might come to grief by offending them unwittingly. Thinking this, Virabhadra called them to him and said, 'Go to the Ganges, perform sandhya and worship, and then come to see me.' The nedas had attained such spiritual perfection that they would go into samadhi when they meditated. When the flood tide came, they would not be aware of it. They would remain absorbed in meditation even when the ebb tide had receded. Now one hundred of the thirteen hundred nedas anticipated what Virabhadra would ask them to do. Thinking that they should not disobey their preceptor, they disappeared, never to see Virabhadra again. The remaining twelve hundred went to Virabhadra, who said to them, 'These thirteen hundred nedas will serve you. Please marry them.' 'As you please,' they said, 'but one hundred of us have disappeared.' So each of the twelve hundred nedas, had one nedi to serve him. After this, regardless of the strength of their austerities, their spiritual powers lessened. Living with women, they lost their powers because in their company they lost their independence.

(To Vijay) "You yourself have seen what happens when you accept employment under others. Many scholars who have studied English and passed many examinations are trampled every morning and evening under the feet of their [English] masters. The reason for this is lust. Having married and enjoyed the happy household life, they now can't escape. That's why they put up

with so much suffering – from slavery and humiliation.”

After God-realization women are worshiped as Mother

“Once you develop deep dispassion and realize God, you will no longer have attachment to women. Even if you live in the household, you won’t feel that attraction – there is no danger then. Say there’s a big magnet and a small one. Which will attract the iron with greater force? Surely the big one will exert a stronger pull. God is the big magnet. Compared to Him, woman is a small magnet. What can she do?”

A devotee: “Sir, should we hate women?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Those who have realized God do not look upon women with lustful eyes, so they have nothing to fear. They actually see that women are but manifestations of the Mother of the Universe, so they worship them all as the Mother.

(*To Vijay*) “Do come here now and then. I like to see you very much.”

Chapter Five

**The real religious teacher is one who has received
the command of God**

Vijay: “I have to do the work of the Brahma Samaj, so I can’t come often. I’ll visit whenever possible.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): “Look here, the task of a religious teacher is very difficult. You can’t teach people without having a direct command from God.

“If you preach without receiving a direct command, people won’t listen. Such teaching carries no force. First of all one must attain God by practicing religious disciplines, or by any other means. Only after receiving His command can one teach. In Kamarpukur there is a pond called Haldarpukur. Every day people used to defecate on its banks. Those who came to the pond in the morning would shout at the offenders with foul language and in general create a great fuss. This did not stop the nuisance. The following day the banks would be covered with filth again. At last a government worker put up a notice: ‘Stop defiling the banks. Offenders will be prosecuted.’ After the sign was posted, nobody defecated there again.

“After receiving a command from God, one can be a religious teacher and give lectures anywhere. He who receives God’s authority also receives power from Him. Only then can he perform the difficult task of a religious preceptor.

“When a simple tenant went to court against a big landlord, people knew there had to be a powerful man behind him. Perhaps another big landlord was fighting the case through this man. Man is insignificant. He cannot perform the difficult duty of a religious teacher without receiving direct power from God.”

Vijay: “Sir, don’t the teachings of the Brahma Samaj liberate people?”

**Sat-chit-ananda Himself is the Guru –
It is He who liberates**

Sri Ramakrishna: “How is it possible for one man to liberate another from the bondage of the world? Only He who is the creator of this world-bewitching maya can liberate man from maya. Except for Sat-chit-ananda Guru, there is no refuge. How is it possible for those who have neither realized God nor received His command, who have not become powerful with His power, to liberate an embodied soul from the bondage of the world?”

“One day I was going from the panchavati to the jhautala [pine grove] to answer the call of nature. I heard a bullfrog croaking loudly. I thought it must have been seized by a snake. After quite some time, when I was returning, I heard the frog still croaking, so I looked to see what was the matter. I saw that a nonpoisonous snake had seized it. It could neither release the frog nor swallow it. There was no end to the frog’s agony. I said to myself, ‘Had it been a cobra, the frog would have been silent after three croaks.’ But it had been seized by a nonpoisonous snake, so the snake and frog were both suffering.

“The ego of an embodied soul ends with just three cries if one has a real teacher.¹ But if the guru is unripe, both the guru and the disciple undergo suffering. The disciple doesn’t get rid of his ego or his bondage to the world. Falling into the hands of an unripe guru, the disciple does not attain liberation.”

1. Sadguru

Chapter Six

ahankāravimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate||

[Deluded by egotism one thinks, 'I am the doer.']

– Bhagavad Gita 3:27

Liberation or God-realization comes as soon as maya, the veil of ego, goes

Vijay: “Sir, why are we bound like this? Why can't we see God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The very ego of man is maya. This egotism has veiled everything. ‘All troubles cease when “I-ness” dies.’ If by the grace of God a man realizes, ‘I am not the doer,’ he becomes a jivanmukta.¹ Then he has nothing to fear.

“Maya, or ‘I-ness,’ is like a cloud. The sun is not visible if there is even a patch of cloud. As soon as the cloud passes, one can see the sun. If, by the grace of the guru, the feeling of ‘I-ness’ vanishes, one sees God.

“Sri Ramachandra, the Lord Himself, was only two-and-a-half cubits away from Lakshmana, but maya in the form of Sita stood between them. The individual soul, Lakshmana, could not see the Lord. Just see, I'm creating a barrier in front of my face with this hand towel. You cannot see me, though I am so near. Similarly, God is so near to us all! Even then, we can't see Him because of the veil of maya.

“An embodied being is of the essence of Sat-chit-ananda, but because of maya or ego, it is covered

1. Liberated in this very life.

with various unreal qualities¹ and has forgotten its own real Self.

“Every unreal quality changes a person’s nature. A man who wears a black-bordered dhoti is at once found to hum the love songs of Nidhu, or he begins to play cards, or automatically he picks up a stick to go for a walk! Even a sickly person begins to whistle as soon as he puts on English boots. And when he climbs stairs, he jumps from one step to the other like an Englishman. If a man is holding a pen in his hand, he begins to scribble the moment he finds a piece of paper.

“Money is also a great upadhi. As soon as money comes to a man, he becomes so different – he is no longer the same man.

“A brahmin who was outwardly very humble used to come here. After a few days I went to Konnagar. Hriday was with me. When I got off the boat, I saw the same brahmin sitting on the bank of the Ganges, probably enjoying the breeze. Seeing us, he said, ‘I say, how are you, Thakur?’ Hearing his tone, I said to Hriday, ‘Oh Hriday, this man has acquired some money. That’s why he is talking this way.’ Hriday laughed.

“A frog had a rupee which he kept in a hole. One day an elephant walked over the hole. Rushing out angrily, the frog raised its foot at the elephant and cried, ‘How dare you walk over me!’ Such is the pride money breeds!”

1. Upadhis: limiting adjuncts.

**The seven planes – when does “I-ness” vanish –
the state of brahmajnana**

“You can get rid of I-consciousness when you attain spiritual knowledge. Attaining it, you go into samadhi, and only in samadhi does ‘I-ness’ disappear. But it is very difficult to attain spiritual knowledge.

“The Vedas say that ‘I-ness’ vanishes only when the mind ascends to the seventh plane. ‘I-ness’ only disappears upon attaining samadhi. Where does the mind generally dwell? In the first three planes – at the organs of sex, and of evacuation, and at the navel. At these planes the mind remains only attached to the world, to ‘lust and greed.’ When the mind dwells in the heart, one sees a divine light. Seeing it, one exclaims, ‘Oh, what is this? What is this!’ The next plane is at the throat. At this plane one likes to hear and speak only of God. When the mind goes to the forehead, between the eyebrows, one sees the form of Sat-chit-ananda. One has the desire to embrace and touch this very form, but cannot. Though the flame in a lantern can be seen, it cannot be touched. You feel as if you are just touching it – but you cannot. When the mind ascends to the seventh plane, ‘I-ness’ vanishes, and one goes into samadhi.”

Vijay: “When the mind reaches there, one attains brahmajnana. What does one see then?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What happens when the mind ascends to the seventh plane cannot be described in words. Once a ship enters dark waters, it doesn’t return. No one knows what happens to

the ship – and it cannot give us any information about the sea.

“Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the sea. No sooner did it enter the water than it dissolved. Now who could tell how deep the sea was? The one who was to tell had itself dissolved. The mind vanishes at the seventh plane and one attains samadhi. What one feels then cannot be described in words.”

‘I-ness’ does not vanish – ‘rascal I’ and ‘servant I’

“The ‘I’ that makes one worldly and attaches one to ‘lust and greed’ is the ‘rascal I.’ Because of it, the individual soul and the Atman appear apart. If a stick is put on water, the water appears to be divided into two. In reality the water is one, but it appears to be two because of the stick.

“‘I-ness’ is the stick. Remove the stick and the water will become one as before.

“What is the ‘rascal I?’ That which says, ‘Don’t you know me? I have so much money. Who’s greater than I?’ If a thief steals ten rupees, the victim first snatches the money back and then gives the thief a good beating. He doesn’t leave him even then. He hands him over to the police and gets him punished. The ‘rascal I’ says, ‘Don’t you know who you robbed of ten rupees? Such impertinence!’”

Vijay: “If you can’t experience samadhi and be freed from attachment to the world without getting rid of I-consciousness, it seems better to follow the path of brahmajnana to attain samadhi. If ‘I-ness’ persists in the path of devotion, it would seem better to take to the path of knowledge.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “One or two can get rid of I-consciousness by experiencing samadhi, but usually ‘I-ness’ does not go. You may reason a thousand ways, but this ‘I-ness’ still finds its way back to you. Cut the ashwattha tree today, tomorrow morning you will see it sprouting again. So if ‘I’ does not go, let the rascal remain as the ‘servant-I’: ‘O Lord, You are my Master, I am Your servant.’ Live with this attitude. ‘I am the servant,’ ‘I am the devotee’ – there is no harm in this kind of ‘I-ness.’ Sweetmeats cause acidity in the stomach. But sugar candy is not counted among sweetmeats.

“The path of knowledge is very difficult. Knowledge can’t be attained without ridding yourself of the conviction that you are the body. In the Kaliyuga life depends on food. With the conviction that I am the body, ‘I-ness,’ does not disappear. So the path of devotion is enjoined for the Kaliyuga. It is an easy path. If you sing His names and glories and pray to Him longingly from the core of your heart, you will attain God. There is no doubt about it.

“It’s like drawing a line on the surface of water without placing a bamboo stick on it. You find that the water has been divided into two parts – but this line does not last. The feeling of the ‘servant-I’ or the ‘I of a devotee’ or the ‘I of a child’ is only like a line drawn on water.”

Chapter Seven

kleśo 'dhikataras teṣām avyaktāsaktacetāsām |
avyaktā hi gatir duḥkhaṁ dehavadbhir avāpyate ||

[It is more difficult for those whose minds are attached to the Unmanifest, because it is very hard for the embodied soul to reach the Unmanifest.]

– Bhagavad Gita 12:5

The path of loving devotion to God is the law of this age – the path of knowledge is very difficult – ‘servant I,’ ‘I of a devotee,’ ‘I of a child’

Vijay (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Sir, you ask us to renounce the ‘rascal I.’ Is there any harm in the ‘servant I?’”

Sri Ramakrishna: “One should have this ego – the ‘servant I.’ That is to say, ‘I am the servant of the Lord, I am His devotee.’ There’s no harm in that. Rather, it leads to God-realization.”

Vijay: “Well, sir, what is the nature of the feelings of lust and anger of a man who has the ‘servant I?’”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It is only the semblance of lust and anger in the man if he has the right feeling. If he retains the feeling of the ‘servant I’ or the ‘I of a devotee’ after having God-realization, he can do no harm to others. After a sword has touched the philosopher’s stone, it becomes gold; it has the semblance of a sword, but it can’t kill anybody.

“The fronds of a coconut tree dry up and drop off, leaving only a mark [on the trunk]. One can

make out from these marks that there were once palm fronds there. Similarly, the ego of one who has realized God only leaves a mark, only a semblance of lust and anger. He is then like a child. A child is not subject to the three gunas [qualities] of sattva, rajas, and tamas. It takes the same amount of time for a child to give up something as it does for him to be attracted to it.

“You can take a child’s piece of cloth worth five rupees by tempting him with a half-a-pice doll. He may first say firmly: ‘No, I won’t give it to you! My father bought it for me!’ But everything is the same to a child; there is nothing big or small to him. He has no feeling of caste. His mother says, ‘He is your elder brother.’ Then even if he is a carpenter [low caste], the child will sit with him and eat from the same plate. A child hates no one; he has no feeling of purity and impurity. He doesn’t bother to clean his hands with mud after relieving himself.

“Even after attaining samadhi some people live with the ‘I of a devotee’ or the ‘I of a servant.’ The devotee retains the feeling of ‘I-ness’: ‘I am Your servant, You are my Master,’ ‘I am Your devotee, You are my Lord.’ Even after God-realization one retains this ‘I-ness.’ One’s ‘I-ness’ does not vanish completely. The practice of this feeling of ‘I-ness’ leads to God-realization. This is what is known as the path of devotion.

“By following the path of devotion, one can attain the knowledge of Brahman, too. God is omnipotent. He can also impart the knowledge of Brahman to a follower of the path of devotion. But generally speaking, a devotee does not seek the

knowledge of Brahman. He wishes to retain the ‘I-ness’ of ‘I am Your servant, You are my Master,’ ‘I am Your child, You are my Mother.’”

Vijay: “Will the people who reason according to Vedanta also attain Him?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, He can also be attained by the path of reasoning and discrimination. This is known as Jnana Yoga. The path of reason is very difficult. I told you about the seven planes. When the mind reaches the seventh plane, one attains samadhi. On genuine realization that Brahman is real and the world illusory, the mind merges, and it experiences samadhi. But in the Kaliyuga, the life of a man depends on food. Then how can he understand that Brahman is real and the world illusory? Such awareness does not come without getting rid of body consciousness: ‘I am neither the body, nor the mind, nor the twenty-four cosmic principles.¹ I am beyond pleasure and pain. How then can I have disease and sorrow, old age and death?’ Such a realization is difficult in this Kaliyuga. However much you may reason, the conviction that I am the body creeps in somehow and shows itself. You may cut down an ashwattha tree and think its roots are dead, but the very next morning you will see that a new sprout has appeared. The feeling of the body does not go away. Thus the path of devotion is a good and easy path in this age.

1. Twenty-four cosmic principles: see Section II, Chapter III.

“I don’t want to become sugar, I want to taste it. I never feel like saying, ‘I am Brahman.’ I say, ‘You are my Lord and I am Your servant.’ It is good to play between the fifth and sixth planes. After crossing the sixth plane, I have no desire to stay on the seventh plane for long. My desire is to sing His name and glories. The attitude of the Master and the servant is very good. Look, everybody says that the wave belongs to the Ganges, not the Ganges to the wave. The feeling ‘I am He’ is not good. If a person entertains such a feeling of ‘I-ness’ but retains identification with his body, it will bring great harm to him – he won’t advance further. And because he cannot understand his own predicament, he deceives others as well as himself. He gradually goes down spiritually.”

Two kinds of devotion – most eligible aspirant – means to God-realization

“Devotion alone does not enable you to realize God. Unless you have intense love for God,¹ you cannot attain Him. Passionate devotion² is another name for intense love. Without intense love, you cannot realize God. Without loving God, you cannot attain Him.

“There is another kind of devotion known as ritualistic devotion.³ You have to repeat the name of God a fixed number of times. Along with this, you must fast, go on pilgrimage, worship in a prescribed manner, make so many sacrifices, and so

1. Prema bhakti.

2. Raga bhakti.

3. Vaidhi bhakti.

on. These are all part of ritualistic devotion. By practicing it you gradually gain raga, intense devotion. But God cannot be realized as long as you don't have this intense love for Him. You must have love for Him. When your worldly way of thinking disappears completely and your mind goes to Him one hundred percent, only then do you attain God.

“But some people acquire loving devotion naturally. They are born that way. Being perfect from childhood, they weep for God at an early age, as Prahlada wept for Vishnu. Ritualistic devotion is like moving a fan to make a breeze. You need a fan to create a breeze. You will eventually attain love for God by repetition of the name, austerity, fasting, and such practices. But when the southern breeze blows of itself, you can put the fan aside. When intense love¹ for God comes of itself, rituals like repetition of the name, and so on drop off. When you are mad with love for God, how can you perform rituals?

“As long as you haven't acquired love for God, your devotion is unripe. When you have love for Him, your devotion is called ripe.

“A person who has unripe devotion cannot internalize spiritual instructions or talk about God. It is only when the photographer's glass is coated black with love for God, so to speak, that it catches an image and is retained. You may throw a thousand images on ordinary glass and not one of them will stay. As soon as the object is removed, the glass becomes the same as it was. You cannot

1. Prema.

internalize spiritual instruction unless you have developed love for God.”

Vijay: “Sir, is love for God enough to attain Him, to have His vision?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, you can see God through love alone – but it must be ripe, prema bhakti, or raga bhakti. Only after gaining that kind of love can you love God as the son loves his mother, or the mother loves her child, or the wife loves her husband.

“When you have such love for God, you don’t feel the attraction of maya – for wife, children, or dear relatives. You only retain compassion for them. The world then appears to be a foreign land, a land of duty alone. It’s like having your home in a village and your place of work in Calcutta. You may have to live in a rented house in Calcutta for work. When you’ve gained love for God, you are completely rid of attachment to the world and of so-called worldly wisdom.

“If there is just a trace of worldliness, you can’t see God. If a match-stick is wet, you may strike it a thousand times and it won’t ignite; you will only waste a pile of matches. The mind attached to the world is like a wet match stick.

“When Srimati (Radha) said, ‘I see Krishna everywhere,’ her gopi friends¹ said, ‘How? We can’t see him. Are you delirious?’ Srimati said, ‘Friend, apply the collyrium of love to your eyes and you will be able to see him.’ (*To Vijay*) A song of your

1. Sakhis.

Brahmo Samaj says: ‘O Lord, is it possible to know You without love, however much one may perform sacrifices, worship, and the rest?’

“If you but once acquire this love, this longing, this ripe devotion, you will see Him both with form and without form.”

God-vision not possible without His grace

Vijay: “How can one see God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Not until the mind is purified. Attached to ‘lust and greed,’ the mind remains soiled, it remains covered with dirt. If a needle is covered with mud, a magnet can’t attract it. But when the mud and dirt are washed off, the magnet attracts. You can wash the dirt of the mind with the tears from your eyes. If you weep with tears of repentance, crying, ‘O Lord, I shall never do such a thing again!’ then this dirt is washed away and the magnet of God can attract the needle of the mind. You then go into samadhi and have the vision of God.

“But though you try a thousand times, nothing is achieved without God’s grace. Without His grace, you cannot see Him. Is it easy to gain His grace? You have to get rid of your ego completely. When you have the feeling that you are the doer, you cannot see God. Suppose a man is in charge of the storeroom and somebody comes and says to the master of the house, ‘Sir, please give me some provisions from your storeroom.’ The master says, ‘There’s a man in the storeroom. I don’t have to go there.’ God doesn’t appear easily in the heart of the person who feels himself to be the doer.

“Only after gaining God’s grace can you have His vision. He is the sun of knowledge. With just one of His rays, this whole world is illumined. That’s how we’re able to know one another and acquire different kinds of knowledge in the world. If God only once brings His light to His own face, we can see Him. A police sergeant goes around at night with a lantern in his hand. Nobody can see his face. But in this light he can see everybody else’s face, and others can see each other.

“If you want to see the sergeant, you must ask, ‘Sir, be kind enough to turn the light on your own face so that I may see you.’

“You must pray to God, ‘Lord, be kind enough to turn the light of knowledge on Your own face so that I may see You.’

“If there is no light in a house, it means poverty. You must light the lamp of knowledge in the heart: ‘Lighting the lamp of knowledge in the house, behold the face of the all-blissful Mother.’”

Vijay has brought medicine with him and wishes to take it now. The medicine has to be taken with water, so Thakur asks that some be brought.

Thakur is a sea of motiveless grace. Vijay cannot afford a carriage or the boat fare to go to see Sri Ramakrishna, so now and then Thakur sends someone to bring him. This time he sent Balaram, who paid for the carriage in which Vijay accompanied him. In the evening Vijay, Nava Kumar, and others of Vijay’s companions go to Balaram’s boat. Balaram will take them to the Baghbazar ghat. M. takes the same boat.

The boat reaches the Annapurna ghat in Baghbazar. When they are close to Balaram's residence in Baghbazar, the moon begins to cast a mellow light.

Today is the fourth day of the bright fortnight. It is winter and a bit chilly. Pondering the nectar-like teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and carrying his blissful image in their hearts, Vijay, Balaram, M. and the others return home.

Section V

Conversation with Amrita, Trailokya, and Other Brahmos at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

It is the fifth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Phalgun, Thursday, 19 Chaitra (29 March 1883). After his midday meal, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna is resting in his room at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. The Ganges is flowing west in front of the temple. Its flood tide started at two o'clock. A few devotees have arrived. Among them are the Brahma devotee Amrita and the singer Trailokya, whose sweet songs of the glories of divine play have charmed the minds of young and old many times in Keshab's Brahma Samaj.

Rakhal is not well. Sri Ramakrishna tells the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, Rakhal isn't well. Would soda water be of any help? I don't know what will happen. Rakhal, take some of Jagannath's prasad."

As he speaks, Sri Ramakrishna goes into an extraordinary state.¹ Perhaps he is seeing the Lord Himself taking the form of a boy in the body of Rakhal, who is sitting in front of him. This young devotee, pure in spirit, has renounced 'lust and greed.'

1. Bhava.

Sri Ramakrishna, who himself remains inebriated day and night with the love of God, looks at him lovingly. The attitude of parent and child,¹ is natural to him, so perhaps he is looking upon this young boy, Rakhai, with the attitude of a mother toward her child. He begins to chant ‘Govinda, Govinda’ tenderly. He seems to be feeling the same emotion Yashoda felt when she saw Baby Krishna.

The devotees watch this amazing scene. Suddenly everything becomes very still. Uttering the name “Govinda,” Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi. His body becomes as motionless as a picture, his sense organs seem to have ceased working, and his eyes are fixed on the tip of his nose. It is impossible to know if he is breathing. Only his body seems to be left on earth, the bird of his soul having soared into the sky of God-consciousness.

Where is he who was worrying with a mother’s tenderness over her child? Is this amazing transformation of feeling known as samadhi?

Just then, dressed in the ochre cloth² of a monk, an unknown Bengali enters the room and sits on the floor.

Chapter Two

karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasā smaran |
indriyārthān vimūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate ||

[He who sits, restraining the organs of action while letting his mind dwell on sense objects, deludes himself; he is called a hypocrite.]

– Bhagavad Gita 3:6

1. Vatsalya bhava.
2. Gerua.

**The gerua cloth and sannyas –untruth is not good even
in acting**

Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi is gradually coming to an end. He talks in a state of ecstasy, as if to himself.

Sri Ramakrishna (*at the sight of the gerua cloth*):
“Why this gerua? What can be achieved by merely wearing the cloth? (*Laughter.*) Somebody said, ‘Giving up the Chandi, I have taken to the drum.’ He used to sing the hymns of the Chandi, now he beats the drum. (*All laugh.*)

“Dispassion¹ is of three or four kinds. Having become burnt by the fire of the world, one puts on gerua. Such dispassion does not last long. Or perhaps a man is out of work, so he puts on the ochre cloth and leaves for Kashi. After three months his family gets a letter, ‘I have a job now. I shall return home in a few days. Please don't worry.’ And then there is the man who has everything, who lacks nothing, but does not enjoy anything. He weeps only for God. This kind of dispassion is genuine dispassion.

“Any untruth is bad. Even false garb is not good. If one's dress does not correspond to one's mind, it gradually brings complete ruin. By speaking lies or practicing falsehood, one gradually loses the fear of it. It is better to wear white clothes. When there is attachment in the mind and lapse of the ideal within while wearing gerua – this is dreadful!”

1. Vairagya.

Visit to Keshab’s house and watching the *Nava Vrindavan*

“The point is that even while acting in a play, virtuous people should not use false words or do anything that’s not true. I went to Keshab Sen’s house to watch the play *Nava Vrindavan*. A person brought something on the stage called a cross, and then he began to sprinkle water, saying, ‘It is the water of peace.’ I also saw a man staggering around acting intoxicated.”

A Brahma devotee: “It was Ku-Babu.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It’s not good for a devotee to even play such a part. Keeping the mind on such matters for any length of time brings harm. The mind is like a fresh white cloth. It takes on the colour it’s dipped in. By keeping the mind in falsehood for any length of time, it will take on the colour of falsehood.

“Another day I went to see the play *Nimai Sannyasa*¹ at Keshab’s house. Some flattering disciples of Keshab spoiled the whole drama. One of them said to him, ‘You are the Chaitanya of Kali.’ Keshab looked at me and said with a smile, ‘And what about him?’ I said, ‘I am the servant of your servants, the dust of your dust.’ Keshab has a desire for name and fame.”

1. The play depicting the sannyas of Sri Chaitanya.

**Narendra and others are ever-perfect – they have
inborn love and devotion**

(*To Amrita and Trailokya*): “Narendra, Rakhal, and these youngsters are ever-perfect. They are devotees of God in every birth. Ordinary devotees attain a little devotion after practicing spiritual disciplines and austerities, but these boys have felt love for God since their birth. They are like the natural image of Shiva which comes from the earth and is not made by man.

“The ever-perfect are a class by themselves. Not every bird has a crooked beak. They are never attached to the world. There is the example of Prahlada.

“Ordinary people practice spiritual disciplines and have love for God, but they are also attached to the world, they are enchanted by ‘lust and greed.’ They are like a fly that sits on a flower, on sandesh,¹ and also on filth. (*All are still and silent.*)

“The ever-perfect are like bees, which sit only on flowers to sip honey. The ever-perfect drink the nectar of the Divine; they never seek worldly pleasures.

“The love and devotion of the ever-perfect is not like the ordinary devotion acquired by practicing spiritual disciplines. Performing so much repetition of the name and so much meditation is worshiping in a prescribed manner, is ritualistic devotion. It’s like going around a rice field along the outside ridge to reach the other side. Or it’s like going to a

1. A Bengali sweet.

village in a roundabout way along the banks of a winding river.

“When raga bhakti,¹ prema bhakti,² or love for God as one’s near and dear one develops, one doesn’t have to practice rituals any more. It’s like crossing a rice field after the harvest. One doesn’t have to walk along the ridge of the field, but can go straight across.

“When a river floods, you don’t have to walk along its winding banks; when the field is pole-deep with water, you can go straight across it in a boat.

“You cannot realize God without that kind of passionate love, intense devotion.”

The essence of samadhi – savikalpa and nirvikalpa

Amrita: “Sir, what do you experience in the state of samadhi?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Haven’t you heard about the cockroach becoming a beetle by meditating on a beetle? Do you know how I feel? Like a fish released from a pot into the Ganges.”

Amrita: “Isn’t there the least trace of ego left then?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, usually a little ego remains. However much you may grind a little piece of gold on a grindstone, a small grain of it remains. Another example is a big fire and its spark. Outer consciousness disappears, but usually a bit of ‘I-ness’ remains for enjoyment. Enjoyment

1. Loving devotion for God.

2. Ecstatic love.

is only possible when there is 'I' and 'you.' But sometimes He effaces even this 'I-ness.' This is called jada samadhi – nirvikalpa samadhi. What this experience is cannot be described in words. A salt doll went to measure the depth of the sea, but it only went in a little way before it was dissolved. It became just like the sea. Then who was there to come back and give an account of how deep the sea is?"

Section VI

Conversation with Devotees about the Essence of Brahman and Primal Power at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple

Talk on Vidyasagar and Keshab Sen

Chapter One

It is Sunday, the third day of the dark fortnight in the month of Ashadha, 22 July 1883. The devotees have come again to see Sri Ramakrishna. They do not generally have the leisure to come on other days of the week. Adhar, Rakhal, and M. arrived at the Kali Temple from Calcutta at about one or two in the afternoon. They came in a hired carriage. Sri Ramakrishna has taken a little rest after his midday meal. Mani Mallick and some other devotees are also there.

The temple of Radhakanta and the temple of Bhavatarini¹ are located in the eastern part of the large courtyard of Rasmani's Kali Temple. The twelve Shiva temples are in the western area. Directly to the north of the row of Shiva temples is Sri Ramakrishna Deva's room. To the west of his room is a semicircular verandah. Looking west from there he watches the Ganges. Between the embankment of the Ganges and the verandah is an extensive flower garden belonging to the temple. It stretches from its southern boundary to the panchavati in the north where Sri Ramakrishna practiced austerities. On the east of the garden are

1. Saviour of humankind, a name of the Divine Mother.

two entrances. By the Paramahansa Deva's room are a few poinciana trees.¹ Nearby are gardenia, kokilax, and white and red oleanders. On the inner wall of Sri Ramakrishna's room hang pictures of gods and goddesses, among them a picture of Christ holding Peter's hand to save him from drowning. There is also a stone image of the Buddha. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on a wooden cot, facing north. Devotees are sitting, some on the floor, some on a mat, and others on small carpets.² All of them are gazing at the great man's blissful figure. Not far from the room, along the western side of the embankment, the holy river Ganges flows south. It is as though the strong current of the rainy season is rushing to meet the sea, glancing on the meditation room of the great saint and touching it on its way.

Mani Mallick is a Brahmo devotee, sixty or sixty-five years old. A few days ago he visited Kashi.³ Today he has come to see Thakur and is giving him an account of his visit.

Mani Mallick: "I met another sadhu. He said, 'Without control over the senses, nothing can be achieved. How does it help merely to cry, 'Lord, Lord?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you know what people like that sadhu believe? That one must first practice spiritual disciplines: tranquility (shama), self-control (dama), and forbearance (titiksha). These people strive for nirvana. They are Vedantists. They only meditate on this: 'Brahman is real and the world illusory.' It is an extremely difficult path. If the world is illusory, then you too are illusory. Those who say so are also illusory, and

1. Krishnachuda, or gulmohar.

2. Asanas.

3. Benares, a place of pilgrimage.

what they say is also like a dream. It is a very abstruse philosophy.

“Do you know how it is? Like burning camphor that leaves no trace. When you burn firewood, you still get an ash residue. After ultimate reasoning comes samadhi. Then there is no awareness of ‘I,’ ‘you,’ and ‘the universe.’”

Meetings with Pundit Padmalochan and Vidyasagar

“Padmalochan was a man of great spiritual knowledge. He had great respect for me, even though I repeated ‘Mother, Mother.’ Padmalochan was the court pundit of the King of Burdwan. He came to Calcutta and stayed in a garden house near Kamarhati. I felt some desire to visit the pundit, but I sent Hriday to find out if he had any vanity. I was told that the pundit had no ego. So I met him. Such a great jnani and such a pundit! Yet he began to weep when he heard me sing a song of Ramprasad’s. The satisfaction I found in talking with him, I have never found with anybody else. He said to me, ‘Give up your desire for the company of devotees. All these different people will bring your downfall.’ Once he had a written discussion with Utsavananda, Vaishnavcharan’s guru. He said to me, ‘Let me tell you about it.’ There was a discussion at a meeting about who was the greater, Shiva or Brahma. At the end of the discussion the pundits consulted Padmalochan. Padmalochan was so guileless he replied, ‘Not one of my ancestors for fourteen generations ever saw Shiva or Brahma.’ Hearing about my renunciation of ‘lust and greed,’ he said to me one day, ‘Why have you given them up? This is money and that is clay. Such a feeling

of difference is the result of ignorance.’ What could I say to him? I said, ‘I don’t know, my dear! I don’t relish money and the like.’”

Charities of Vidyasagar, but gold lies buried within

“There was a pundit who was very vain. He didn’t accept God with form. But who can understand the ways of God? He revealed Himself to the pundit in the form of Primordial Power. The vision made the pundit unconscious for a long time. After regaining a little consciousness he could only utter, ‘Ka! Ka! Ka!’ (that is, Kali) – just that syllable.”

A devotee: “Sir, you have met Vidyasagar. What do you think of him?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Vidyasagar has scholarship, and he is kind, but he lacks insight. Gold lies buried within him. Had he discovered this gold, much of his external activities would have been reduced. Finally he would have given them up completely. Had he known that God resides inside, in the heart, his mind would have been directed to Him in meditation and contemplation. Some people develop dispassion after performing selfless work¹ for a long time. Their mind goes to God, and becomes absorbed in Him in the end.

“The kind of work Ishwar Vidyasagar does is very good. It is good to have compassion for others. There is, however, a great difference between compassion [daya] and attachment [maya]. Compassion is good; attachment is not good. Maya

1. Nishkama karma.

is love for one's own near and dear ones – wife, son, brother, sister, brother's son, sister's son, father, and mother – love for these. Compassion, however, is love for all beings equally.”

Chapter Two

guṇatrayavyatiriktam sacchidānandasvarupam |

[The real nature of Sat-chit-ananda is beyond the three gunas.]

Brahman is beyond the three gunas, beyond speech

M.: “Is compassion [daya] also bondage?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That is a very subtle concept. Compassion comes from sattvaguna. Sattvaguna preserves, rajoguna creates, and tamoguna destroys. But Brahman is beyond the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas. It is beyond nature.¹

“The gunas cannot really reach Brahman. They are like robbers who cannot go out in the open, afraid that they might be arrested. Sattva, rajas, and tamas – all three gunas – are robbers. Let me tell you a story:

“Once a man was going through a forest when three robbers came and caught hold of him. They robbed him of all he possessed. One of the robbers said, ‘Why keep this man alive now?’ Saying this, he stepped forward with a sword to kill him. The second robber then said, ‘No brother, what use is it to kill him? Let's tie his hands and feet and leave him here.’ Doing so, the robbers left him and went

1. Prakriti.

on their way. After a while one of them returned and said, 'Oh, you're suffering so much! Let me free you from the bonds.' Untying the man, he said, 'Come with me. I'll take you to the main road.' After a long time, when they reached the road, the robber said, 'Follow this road. See, there is your house.' The man then said to the robber, 'Sir, you have been very kind to me. Please come with me to my house.' The robber said, 'No, I can't go there. The police will come to know.'

"The world itself is a forest. In this forest sattva, rajas, and tamas are robbers. They rob a person of spiritual knowledge. Tamoguna wants to destroy him, and rajoguna binds him to the world. But sattvaguna saves him from rajas and tamas. By taking refuge in sattvaguna, one is saved from lust, anger, and other such evil effects of tamas. Besides, sattvaguna loosens the bonds of the world. But even sattvaguna is a robber. It can't give spiritual knowledge. What it does is put you on the road to God. Putting you on the road, it says, 'Just look, there is your home.' But sattvaguna remains at a great distance from the knowledge of Brahman.

"What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words. He who attains Brahman cannot give information about Him. There is a saying, 'A ship never returns once it reaches the black waters.'

"Four friends taking a walk came upon a high wall. Curious to know what was on the other side, one of the men climbed up to look. As he peeped over the wall, he exclaimed with wonder, 'Ah! Ah!' and he fell in. He gave no information. Each of

them climbed up and cried out, 'Ah! Ah!' and jumped in. Who could then tell what they saw?"

**Jadabharata, Dattatreya, and
Sukadeva – all knowers of Brahman**

“After realizing Brahman, Jadabharata and Dattatreya could give no information about It. One’s I-consciousness vanishes after passing into samadhi, after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. So Ramprasad says: ‘If you cannot attain (the knowledge of Brahman) yourself, O mind, take Ramprasad with you.’ The mind must dissolve. After that, Ramprasad, that is, the ego, must merge. Only then does one attain knowledge of Brahman.”

A devotee: “Sir, didn’t Sukadeva attain Ultimate Knowledge?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Some say that Sukadeva only saw and touched the ocean of Brahman but did not dive deep into It. That’s why he could return and impart spiritual instruction. According to others, he returned after attaining the knowledge of Brahman in order to teach mankind. He had to narrate the Bhagavata to Parikshit and also teach people in various ways. So God didn’t merge his ‘I’ altogether. His ‘I of knowledge’ was retained.”

**Instruction to Keshab –
organization (sectarianism) is not right**

A devotee: “Can one keep an organization intact after attaining the knowledge of Brahman?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I talked to Keshab Sen about the knowledge of Brahman. Keshab said, ‘Please

elaborate further.’ I said, ‘If I talk further, you will not be able to keep your organization intact.’ ‘Then please don’t tell me any more, sir!’ Keshab replied. (*All laugh.*) Then I said to him, “I and mine” – these indicate ignorance. “I am the doer, this is my wife, that is my son, these are my possessions,” honour, respect, and so on – such feelings arise because of ignorance.’ Thereupon Keshab said, ‘Sir, if you give up the “I,” nothing whatsoever will remain!’ I said, ‘Keshab, I’m not asking you to renounce your “I” altogether. Only give up your “unripe I.” “I am the doer, this is my wife or son, I am the guru,” and so on – this pride is the “unripe I.” Give it up. Renounce it and keep the “ripe I” – “I am His servant, I am His devotee, I am not the doer, He is the doer.”’”

**It is right to preach religion only when one has
received God’s command**

A devotee: “Can the ‘ripe I’ create an organization?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I said to Keshab Sen, ‘I am the leader of the organization, I have made it, I impart instruction to mankind’ – this ‘I’ is the ‘unripe I.’ It is very difficult to propagate religion. Without the command of God it cannot be done. His command is needed. For example, Sukadeva received the command to narrate the story of the Bhagavata. There’s nothing wrong in preaching and instructing mankind after seeing God and having received His command. The ‘I’ of such a person is not the ‘unripe I’ – it is the ‘ripe I.’”

“I asked Keshab to renounce the ‘unripe I.’ There is no harm in having the ‘I of a servant’ or the ‘I of a devotee.’

“You’re talking about your organization. Many people are leaving it. Keshab said, ‘Sir, during the last three years people from my group have returned to the other group. They spoke unkindly when they left.’ I said, ‘Why didn’t you see their natures? This is what comes of making disciples indiscriminately.’”

Instruction to Keshab: accept the Primal Power

“And I said to Keshab, ‘Accept the Primal Power. Brahman and Shakti (His power) are inseparable. He who is Brahman is Himself Shakti. So long as there is body consciousness, you are conscious of duality. They are two only in name.’ Keshab later accepted Kali (Shakti).

“One day Keshab came here with his disciples. I said to him, ‘I’d like to hear you lecture.’ He delivered his lecture seated in the chandni. Then we sat at the ghat and had a long talk. I said, ‘He who is Bhagavan¹ is Himself the devotee in another form. He Himself is also the Bhagavata (a scripture) in yet another form. You Brahmos, please say, “Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.” Keshab said it and his disciples also repeated together, ‘Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.’ When I said, ‘Please say, “Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava,” Keshab said, ‘Sir, not that far. If I say that, people will call me orthodox.’”

1 . The Personal God as Lord.

**Past story of his life – Sri Ramakrishna swoons on
seeing the ways of maya**

“It is very difficult to go beyond the three gunas. It is not possible before God-realization. The embodied soul lives in the domain of maya. This maya doesn’t let one know God; it keeps a human being in ignorance. Hriday once brought a little calf. One day I saw that he tied it in the garden to graze. I asked him, ‘Hriday, why do you tie it there every day?’ Hriday replied, ‘Uncle, I will send this calf to the village. When it grows, it will be yoked to the plough.’ As he said these words, I became unconscious and fell down. I said to myself, ‘Such are the ways of maya!’ Kamarpukur and Sihore are so far from Calcutta! This little calf will tread so long a path! It will grow there. And later, after so many days, it will pull the plough – this is what is called the world, and this is what is called maya.

“It was after a long time that I regained consciousness.”

Chapter Three

In samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna merges in samadhi day and night. How his days and nights pass! At times he talks of God or takes part in singing hymns with the devotees. At about three or four o’clock M. sees him seated on his smaller cot, lost in ecstasy. After some time he begins to talk to the Divine Mother.

Talking to the Mother, Thakur says, “Mother, why have You given him only one kala (one sixteenth part of divine power)?” He remains silent for a moment. Then he says, “I understand, Mother.

This one kala will be enough for him. Only one kala will enable him to do Your work – to preach to mankind.”

Does Thakur transmit spiritual powers to his inner and intimate disciples in this way? What is it all about? Later these disciples will teach humankind. Is he making arrangements for this?

Besides M., Rakhal is also there. Thakur is still in a divine mood. He says to Rakhal, “You were angry with me. Why did I reprimand you? There was a reason for it: to make the medicine work. When disease of the spleen advances, a leaf of *mansa* (a medicinal herb) has to be applied.”

After a while he says, “I have seen that Hazra is like a dry piece of wood. Yet he lives here. Why? There’s a reason for this. Without Jatila and Kutila (the trouble-making mother and sister-in-law of Radha), the play does not develop.

(*To M.*) “You must accept the forms of God. Do you know the significance of the Divine Mother in the form of Jagaddhatri? It is She who supports the world. If She doesn’t support it, doesn’t protect it, the world will fall, it will perish. Jagaddhatri only dawns in the heart of one who can tame the elephant of the mind.”

Rakhal: “*Mana-matt-kari.*” (The mind is a mad elephant.)

Sri Ramakrishna: “That’s why the lion of Simhavahini (Durga, riding a lion) keeps the elephant under its control.”

At dusk arati is performed in the temple. Sri Ramakrishna chants the names of the gods and

goddesses in his room. Incense has been burnt in the room. With hands folded, he is seated on the smaller cot, meditating on the Divine Mother. Govinda Mukherji of Belgharia and some of his friends enter the room, offer their salutations, and take their seats on the floor. M. and Rakhal are sitting there.

Outside the moon is shining and all of nature is still; it seems to be smiling. Inside, everyone is sitting quietly, gazing at the serene image of Sri Ramakrishna. He is absorbed in ecstasy. After a while, still in a state of ecstasy, he begins to talk.

**The form of Shyama – Purusha and Prakriti –
Yogamaya – Shiva and Kali, and Radha and Krishna –
explanation of the forms – superior devotee – the path
of reason**

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): “Tell me if you have any doubt. I will explain everything to you.”

Govinda and other devotees are thoughtful.

Govinda: “Revered sir, why is Shyama¹ dark?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It’s because She’s at a distance. Go near and you’ll find that She has no colour. The water in a pond looks dark from a distance. Go near it, take some in your hand, and you see that it has no colour. The sky appears blue from a distance. Look at the sky near you and you see that it is colourless. The nearer you go to God, the more you will realize that He has neither name nor form. Move a little away from Mother Shyama and you will find that She is the colour blue, like

1. Goddess Kali.

grass flowers. Is Shyama Purusha¹ or Prakriti?² A devotee was performing worship. Another man came and saw the deity wearing a sacred thread. He said, 'You have put the sacred thread round the Mother's neck!' The worshiper said, 'Brother, you alone have recognized the Mother. As for me, I have never been able to know whether She is male or female. That is why I have put a sacred thread round her neck.'³

"The One who is Shyama is also Brahman. The One who has form is also formless. The Being who has attributes is also without attributes. Brahman is Shakti, and Shakti is Brahman. They are inseparable – the male Sat-chit-ananda and the female Sat-chit-ananda."

Govinda: "What is the meaning of yogamaya?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yogamaya means the union of Purusha and Prakriti. Whatever you see is the union of Purusha and Prakriti. In the image of Shiva and Kali, Kali stands on Shiva; he lies like a corpse while Kali looks down at him. All this is the union of Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is inactive, so Shiva is lying like a corpse. It is in conjunction with Purusha that Prakriti performs all Her actions. She creates, preserves, and dissolves.

"The dual image of Radha and Krishna [both Radha and Krishna in one piece] also signifies the same. Because of this union they are bent towards

1. The Self, the Absolute, Spirit. Pure Consciousness, the witness of the changes of Prakriti.

2. Primordial Nature, composed of the gunas, the material of the universe of mind and matter.

3. Only the images of male deities wear a sacred thread.

each other. To denote this very union, Sri Krishna wears a pearl in his nose and Radha a blue stone in hers. Radha has the fair complexion of a bright pearl, while Sri Krishna is of dark complexion. It is for this reason that Radha wears the blue stone. Furthermore, Sri Krishna's apparel is yellow; that of Radha is blue.

“Who is the best devotee? The one who, after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, sees that God alone has become the universe and the twenty-four cosmic principles. One first reaches the roof by discriminating, ‘Not this, not this.’ Then he realizes that the steps are made of the same material as the roof – brick, lime, and brick-dust. Then he sees that Brahman Himself has become all living beings and the universe.

“Mere reasoning! I spit on it! I spit on it! It is of no use. (*Thakur spits on the ground.*) Why make yourself dry by reasoning? As long as you have the consciousness of ‘I’ and ‘you,’ you must have pure love and devotion at His lotus feet.

(*To Govinda*) “At times I say, ‘You are I, and I am You.’ And sometimes ‘You’ remains. The ‘I’ has then disappeared and is not traceable.

“It is Shakti that becomes the avatar. According to one school of thought, Rama and Krishna are but two waves of the Ocean of Bliss and Consciousness.¹

“After attaining the knowledge of non-duality (advaita jnana) comes spiritually awakened consciousness (chaitanya). Then one sees that God

1. Chidananda.

alone exists in all things as Consciousness. After this realization comes ananda (bliss). Advaita, Chaitanya, and Nityananda.¹

**The Lord has forms – longing for Him comes after
desire for enjoyment vanishes**

(*To M.*) “I say to you, don’t disbelieve in the forms of God. Have faith that God has forms and meditate on the form that you love most.

(*To Govinda*) “Do you understand? As long as the desire for enjoyment remains, so long does one not feel the yearning to know God and attain His vision. A child plays with his toys, forgetting everything else. Cajole him with sandesh, he will eat just a piece of it. When he neither likes his toy nor enjoys the sandesh, he says, ‘I want to go to my mother!’ He doesn’t need more sandesh. If a person he doesn’t know and has never seen says to him, ‘Come with me, I’ll take you to your mother,’ the child goes with him. He goes with anyone who will carry him in his arms to his mother.

“You develop yearning for God when you’re finished with the enjoyment of worldly things. Then your only concern is to attain Him. You listen to anything anyone tells you about God.”

M. (to himself), One yearns for God only when one has finished with desire for worldly enjoyment.

1. Non-duality, Consciousness, and Eternal Bliss.

Section VII

With Devotees at Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter One

Talk on Vedanta

Sri Ramakrishna is with the devotees at the Dakshineswar temple. It is Sunday, 19 August 1883, the first day of the dark fortnight in the month of Shravana. Only a short time ago the sanai¹ was played during the worship while food was offered to the deities.² The doors of the temple have been shut. Sri Ramakrishna has taken a rest after his midday meal and is now sitting on the smaller cot in his room. It is noon. M. enters and bows to him. After a while Sri Ramakrishna begins to talk to him about Vedanta.

Belief of Vedantists – talk about Krishnakishore

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Listen, the Ashtavakra Samhita talks about Self-knowledge. The knowers of the Self say ‘So ‘ham’; that is, ‘I am that Paramatman (the highest Self).’ This is the view of the sannyasins of the Vedantic school. But it is not suited for householders. They feel they perform all actions and duties themselves, so how can they say, ‘I am that Paramatman beyond all action?’ According to Vedantists, the Self has no attachment to anything. Pleasure and pain, virtue and vice, none of these can harm the Self. But they

1. A double-reed wind instrument, similar to an oboe.
2. Bhoga arati.

do afflict those who identify themselves with their bodies. Smoke soils a wall, but it cannot affect space. Krishnakishore used to talk like a jnani and say, 'I am kha,' that is, like space – but then he's a real devotee and can say that. It is not appropriate for others."

Vice and virtue – maya or compassion

"But to cherish the idea 'I am free' is very good. If you say again and again, 'I am free, I am free,' you become free. On the other hand, if you constantly say, 'I am bound, I am bound,' you indeed become bound. He who repeats 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner,' that wretch is sure to have a fall. Rather, one should say, 'I have chanted the name of God, what evil can befall me, what bondage?'"

(*To M.*) "Look here, my mind is upset. Hriday¹ has written me a letter saying he is very ill. Is my concern maya or daya (compassion)?"

What can M. say? He remains silent.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you know what maya is? Love toward your relatives: toward father and mother, brother and sister, wife and son, nephew and niece – that is maya. But daya means love for all created beings. Well, what is it in my case – maya or daya? Hriday has done so much for me, served me so well. He has cleaned my excrement with his own hands. But he was equally hard on me

1. Hriday served Sri Ramakrishna for almost twenty-three years at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, until the day of Snana Yatra Festival (the ceremony of Jagannath's going out in procession for a bath) in 1881.

at the end. He became so harsh that once I went to the embankment to throw myself into the Ganges to drown. But he has done a lot for me. If he could get some money, my mind would be at rest. But whom can I ask for it? I don't want to ask any of the gentlemen who come to see me."

Chapter Two

Clay image of the Divine Mother – vision of the Divine Mother Mrinmayi in Vishnupur

At two or three o'clock in the afternoon the great devotees Adhar Sen and Balaram Bose arrive. They prostrate before Sri Ramakrishna and sit down, asking him how he is. Sri Ramakrishna says, "Well, my body is all right, but my mind is a little disturbed."

He does not mention anything about Hriday's trouble.

The conversation turns to Goddess Simhavahini¹ in the house of the Mallicks of Burrabazar.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I went to see Simhavahini at the house of the Mallicks in Chashadhopa Para. The family lives in a dilapidated house in straightened circumstances, with pigeon droppings here, moss there, and lime and sand plaster crumbling off the walls. The prosperity that I have seen in the houses of other Mallicks was not in this one. (*To M.*) Tell me, what does this mean? Please tell me."

1. The Divine Mother seated on a lion.

M. remains silent.

“Do you know what? Everyone must reap the consequences of his past actions. One has to accept that there are tendencies from past births¹ and the fruits of these actions are now being played out.²

(*To M.*) “And in that dilapidated house, I saw the face of Simhavahini beaming with glory. You have to believe in the divine presence in an image of the Deity.³

“Once I went to Vishnupur. The king has a beautiful temple there. There is an image of the Divine Mother called Mrinmayi. There are several lakes near the temple: Krishna-bandh, Lal-bandh and so on. Now tell me why I smelled the ointment used by women for their hair. I didn’t know at the time that women devotees offer the goddess this ointment when they go to have Her darshan. I went into bhava samadhi near the lake, before I had seen the image. In that ecstatic state I had the vision of Mrinmayi from the waist up.”

**Pleasure and pain of the devotee – stories of the
Bhagavata and Mahabharata**

By this time some other devotees have arrived. The conversation turns to the coup and war in Kabul. One of them says, “Yakub Khan has been deposed.” Addressing the Paramahansa, he says, “Sir, Yakub Khan is a great devotee.”

1. Samskaras.

2. Prarabdha karma.

3. Avirbhava – manifestation, visible presence.

Sri Ramakrishna: “The fact is that pleasure and pain are the characteristics of embodiment. In Kavi Kankan’s Chandi it is said that Kaluvir was sent to jail and stones were placed on his chest, though Kaluvir was a highly favoured child of the Divine Mother, Bhagavati. When one takes on a body, pleasure and pain come with it.

“Srimanta was a great devotee. And the Divine Mother had great affection for his mother, Khullana. Yet Srimanta suffered so much. He was taken to the cremation ground to be cut into pieces!

“A woodcutter was another great devotee. The Divine Mother granted him Her vision. She loved him immensely and bestowed on him much grace. Yet the woodcutter was not freed from work. He still had to earn his living by cutting wood. Devaki had the vision of the four-armed Lord Vishnu holding conch, discus, mace, and lotus, but her imprisonment did not end.”

M.: “Why speak only of ending the imprisonment? This body is the source of all the trouble. It would have been better for her to be freed from the body.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The fact is that one reaps the fruit of those past actions which are producing results in this life.¹ One has to remain in the body until the results of those past actions wear out. Once a blind man had a dip in the Ganges. He was freed from all his sins, but his blindness was not cured. (*All laugh.*) It was the fruit of actions in his past life, so he had to bear it.”

1. Prarabdha karma.

Mani: “The arrow once shot is no longer under one’s control.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Whatever the pleasure and pain of the body may be, a devotee’s spiritual knowledge, the wealth of his love and devotion for God, endures. This treasure is never lost. Just see what calamities the Pandavas suffered! But they never once, in all their troubles, lost their spiritual consciousness. Where can you find such men of knowledge and devotion?”

Chapter Three

In samadhi – arrival of the Captain and Narendra

Just then, Narendra and Vishwanath Upadhyaya arrive. Vishwanath is the emissary of the king of Nepal and the representative of that kingdom. Thakur calls him Captain. Narendra is twenty-two years old and is studying for his B.A. He comes to Sri Ramakrishna at times, particularly on Sundays.

They salute Sri Ramakrishna and sit down. The Paramahansa Deva asks Narendra to sing. A tanpura (stringed instrument) is hanging on the western wall of the room. Now, all eyes turn toward the singer while the banya¹ and the tabla are being tuned. They are all anxious for the singing to start.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): “Listen, this one doesn’t sound as good as it did before.”

Captain: “It’s filled to the brim, so there’s no sound. (*All laugh.*) Like a pitcher filled to the brim with water.”²

1. A semi-circular percussion instrument played along with tabla.
2. Purna kumbha.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Captain*): “But what about Narada and sages like him?”

Captain: “They spoke because they were moved by the sufferings of others.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes. Narada and Sukadeva came down from samadhi out of compassion. They spoke for the good of others.”

Narendra begins to sing:

Truth, goodness, and beauty¹ shine in the temple of my heart.

When will dawn that day when my mind, gazing on Him raptly, will dive deep into the ocean of that beauty divine?

When, O Lord, will infinite knowledge illumine my heart,

And this restless mind, made dumbfounded, take shelter at Your feet?

When, O Friend of my soul, will this mind be surrendered at the feet of the King of kings,

Where it will find peace and goodness without equal? Only there will the goal of my life be attained!

Where else can I find the grace of heavenly bliss while in this very body, in this very life?

O Lord, at the sight of Your pure, unblemished form, at the sight of Your radiance, the darkness of sin will flee, even as darkness is dispelled by light.

Just as the chakor² frolics in delight at the rising of the moon,

So too does bliss, like embodied nectar, well up in my heart as I, O Lord, become intoxicated with Your light.

1. Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram: Absolute Truth, Absolute Good, and Absolute Beauty, which are one.

2. A red-legged partridge.

O, Friend of the lowly, fulfil my desire and light in my heart a blazing faith, as bright and steady as the polestar.

Then shall I remain immersed both night and day in the joy of love, forgetting myself in the finding of You.

But when will dawn such a day?

When Sri Ramakrishna hears the words 'bliss, like embodied nectar,' he goes into deep samadhi. He sits with his hands folded, facing the east. His body erect, he dives deep into the ocean of beauty – the All-Blissful Mother. He has lost all external consciousness. One cannot even tell if he is breathing. He is still and unblinking, sitting like an image drawn on canvas, gone from this kingdom.

Chapter Four

Ways to attain Sat-chit-ananda – difference between a man of knowledge and a devotee

Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi comes to an end. When he was in samadhi, Narendra had left the room and gone to the eastern verandah where Hazra was sitting on a blanket with a rosary in his hand. Narendra and he had begun to talk. By now Sri Ramakrishna's room is full of devotees. He looks around at them when his samadhi is over. He finds that Narendra is not there. The tanpura is lying on the floor. All the devotees gaze at him with curiosity.

Sri Ramakrishna: "He has lit the fire. Now it does not matter whether he stays or goes. (*To Captain and the others*) Give your mind to the

Being of bliss and consciousness¹ and you will also feel joy. The bliss of God-consciousness is always there, it is only hidden by a veil. The less you are attached to the senses, the more the mind will go towards God.”

Captain: “The more you proceed toward Calcutta, the farther you go from Kashi; and the more you proceed toward Kashi, the farther you will be from your home.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The more Radha advances toward Krishna, the more she smells the sweet fragrance of his body. The more one advances towards God, the more one gains fervour² and loving devotion to Him. The more a river advances to the sea, the more one sees its ebb and flow.

“The Ganges flows only in one direction within a man of knowledge. For him everything is like a dream. He always dwells in his own true Self. Within a devotee the Ganges does not flow only in one direction; it has its ebb and flow tides. The devotee laughs and weeps, sings and dances. The devotee wants to enjoy God. Sometimes he swims; sometimes he dives; other times he rises – just as a piece of ice floats up and down in water.”
(*Laughter.*)

1. Chidananda.

2. Bhava.

**Sat-chit-ananda and Sat-chit-anandamayi –
Brahman and Primal Power are inseparable**

“The jnani wants to know Brahman, but the devotee wants the Almighty Lord possessed of the six kinds of spiritual wealth. The fact is, Brahman and Shakti are inseparable. He who is Sat-chit-ananda is Himself Sat-chit-anandamayi.¹ For example, take a jewel and its lustre. When you talk of the lustre of a jewel, you think of the jewel – and when you talk of the jewel, you think of its lustre. Without knowing the jewel, you cannot know its lustre. Without knowing the lustre of a jewel, you cannot know what the jewel is.

“There is but one. Sat-chit-ananda is associated with different adjuncts because of differing manifestations of power. God has many forms – ‘Thou art He, O Mother.’² Where there is action (of creation, preservation, and dissolution), there is Shakti (Power). It is water, whether it is still or has ripples and bubbles over its surface. The same Sat-chit-ananda is Himself the Primal Power who brings about creation, preservation, and dissolution. When Captain is not working, he is still Captain, and when he is worshiping, he is the same being. When Captain goes to the Governor General, he is still the same – he is only assuming a particular role.”³

Captain: “Quite right, sir.”

1. All-Knowing, All-Intelligent and All-Blissful Mother of the Universe.

2. Tara.

3. Adjunct.

Sri Ramakrishna: “I said the same to Keshab Sen.”

Captain: “Keshab is deficient. He is self-willed; he is a gentleman, not a sadhu.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “Captain doesn’t want me to visit Keshab.”

Captain: “Sir, I can’t do anything about your going.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): “You can go to the Governor General for money but I can’t go to Keshab Sen! He meditates on God and chants His name. You yourself say that one God has become all living beings and the universe, ‘Ishwara maya jiva jagat.’”

Chapter Five

With Narendra – synthesis of Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Saying this, Thakur leaves the room abruptly and goes to the northeast verandah. Captain and the other devotees wait for him to return. M., however, accompanies him to the verandah, where Narendra is talking with Hazra. Sri Ramakrishna knows that Hazra, who is given to dry reasoning, says, “The world is like a dream; all worship and offerings are mental delusions. One’s only aim is to meditate on one’s own true Self: ‘I am That.’”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “Well, what are you talking about?”

Narendra (*smiling*): “We’re talking about all kinds of things. We’ve been talking a long time.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “But pure knowledge and pure devotion are the same. Pure devotion takes you to the same place that pure knowledge does. But the path of devotion is smooth and easy.”

Narendra (*quoting a song*): “I have no need to reason. Mother, grant that I may be mad with Your love!’ (*To M.*) Look, I’ve read Hamilton. He wrote, ‘A learned ignorance is the end of philosophy and the beginning of religion’”.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “What does that mean, brother?”

Narendra: “When one completes the study of philosophy, one becomes a ‘learned fool.’ Then he begins to talk on religion. His religion starts then.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Thank you, Thank you!!”
(*Laughter.*)

Chapter Six

Chanting the name of God as evening approaches – many qualities of Narendra

After some time, seeing the evening draw nigh, most of the people depart. Narendra also leaves.

It is getting late, almost evening. The temple lighting attendants² are arranging for light all around. Two priests of the Kali and the Vishnu Temples are standing waist-deep in the Ganges to purify themselves, body and soul, before they perform the evening arati and offer the evening meal to the deities. Young men of Dakshineswar village, some

1. Sri Ramakrishna actually used these English words.
2. Faras.

with walking sticks, some with friends, have come out for a stroll in the garden. They walk along the embankment to enjoy the pure evening breeze made fragrant with flowers and to watch the slightly undulating breast of the fast-flowing Ganges in this month of Shravana. Some, perhaps more reflective than others, are strolling through the solitary panchavati. Sri Ramakrishna stands on the western verandah watching the Ganges for a while.

By the time darkness has fallen, the lamp men have lighted all the lamps. A maidservant comes to Sri Ramakrishna's room, lights his lamp, and burns incense.

In the meantime arati has begun in the twelve Shiva temples. Soon after, it begins in the temples of Vishnu and Kali. Cymbals, gongs, and bells begin to ring in sweet solemnity, as the murmuring Ganges flows close by.

It is the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana. In a short time the moon appears. The big courtyard and the tops of the trees in the garden are bathed by rays of moonlight as is the water of the Ganges flowing so joyfully.

When evening falls, Sri Ramakrishna bows to the Mother of the Universe and chants 'Haribol,' clapping his hands. In his room are images of many gods and goddesses: of Dhruva, Prahlada, King Rama, Mother Kali, and Radha-Krishna. He bows down to all the deities, repeating their names, and then he says, "Brahman-Atman-Bhagavan, Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan, Brahman-Shakti, Shakti-Brahman; Veda, Purana, Tantra, Gita, Gayatri. My only refuge, my only refuge. Not I, not I, but You, only You. I am just the instrument, You are the Being who uses the instrument," and so on.

After repeating these divine names, Sri Ramakrishna meditates on the Divine Mother, his hands folded. Some of the devotees walk on the bank of the river. Soon after arati is over, they come, one by one, and assemble in the Paramahansa's room. He is sitting on the bed. M., Adhar, Kishori and others are sitting in front of him on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “Narendra, Bhavanath, and Rakhal are ever-perfect souls. They belong to the class of the ishvarakoti.¹ Teaching them is not necessary. For example, Narendra doesn't care for anybody. He was with me in Captain's carriage. When Captain asked him to take a comfortable seat, he didn't even look at him. He is independent even of me. And he doesn't say what he knows lest I tell others in his presence that he is very learned. He has no delusion, no attachment – free from bondage. He is very talented in so many things – vocal and instrumental music, reading and writing. At the same time he has control over his senses. He says that he won't marry. There is a great affinity between Narendra and Bhavanath – as between husband and wife. Narendra doesn't come here very often. That is good. I become overwhelmed if I see him too often.”

1. Eternally free and perfect souls.

Section VIII

Visit of Sri Ramakrishna to Sinduriapatti Brahma Samaj

Conversation with Vijaykrishna Goswami and others

Chapter One

In samadhi

The eleventh day of the dark fortnight in the month of Kartik, 26 November 1883. The Sinduriapatti Brahma Samaj holds its sessions at the house of Manilal Mallick on Chitpur Road. It is at the southern corner of Harrison Road, a little north of the shops that sell pomegranates, apples, other fruits, and pistachios. The Samaj holds its session in the first floor hall on the side of the house near the main road. Today is its annual session and Manilal has made suitable arrangements for the occasion.

The worship room is full of joy today, decorated inside and out with green leaves and various flowers and garlands. Devotees sitting in the hall are waiting for the worship to begin. There is not enough space for everybody in the room, so a number of them are pacing the western roof or are sitting on the beautifully made colourful benches placed here and there. At times the master of the house and family come to greet the devotees with sweet words. The devotees have begun to arrive in the late afternoon, inspired with a special zeal today because Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva is to come. He is loved by the Brahma devotees because of his great affection for their leaders – Keshab, Vijay, Shivanath, and others. He is intoxicated with the wine of divine love for God. This love, together with a burning faith,

childlike conversations with the Divine Mother, tearful yearning, a worship of women as Mother, avoidance of all worldly talk, and his incessant talk about God like an unbroken flow of oil, his harmony of religions and absence of the least trace of contempt for other religions, his tearful cry for the devotees of God – all these things have attracted the minds of Brahma devotees. That is why so many people have come from distant places to have his darshan.

Shivanath and speaking truth

Sri Ramakrishna talks happily with Vijaykrishna Goswami and other Brahma devotees. The assembly room has been lighted. Worship is to begin soon.

Sri Ramakrishna says: “Brother, why isn’t Shivanath coming?”

Brahma devotee: “Well, he is very busy today. He will not be able to come.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I feel very happy when I see Shivanath. He seems drenched in the bliss of love for God. Besides, when so many respect him, there is certainly some divine power in him. But Shivanath has a serious defect: he does not keep his word. He once told me he would come to the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar, but he didn’t show up. He didn’t even send word. That isn’t right. It is said that truthful speech is the austerity in this Kaliyuga. By sticking to truth, one realizes God. By not sticking to truth, one gradually loses everything. Keeping this in mind, if I say I’m going to answer the call of nature but then feel no need to, I take a wash pot and go to the jhautala anyway. My concern is that I might ultimately lose my regard for truth. In this state of mind, I took

flowers in my hand and said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, here is your knowledge, and here is your ignorance; take them both, and grant me pure love. Here is your purity, and here is your impurity; take them both, and grant me pure love. Here is your good, and here is your evil; take them both, and grant me pure love. Here is your virtue, and here is your vice; take them both, and grant me pure love.'

"When I said these things, I could not say, 'Mother, take your truth and take your untruth.' I could give up everything to the Divine Mother – but I could not give up truth."

The worship starts according to the Brahma system. The preacher is on the platform; a lantern illumines him. After the initial ceremony, he chants verses from the Vedas on the supreme Brahman. The Brahma devotees begin to chant together the ancient words of the Aryan rishis. They chant: "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, and the Infinite. It shines as Bliss and Immortality. It is Peace, All-Good, One without a second. It is pure and untouched by sin."

The chanting, filled with the sound of 'Om,' resounds in the hearts of the devotees. Most of them have almost entirely relinquished worldly desires. Their minds have become quite steady and meditative. They all sit quiet for some time, eyes closed in contemplation of the qualified Brahman of the Vedas.

The Paramahansa Deva is overwhelmed with divine emotion. His body still as a picture, his eyes fixed, he is speechless. The wings of his soul are

flying elsewhere in joy. Only his inert body remains, as if emptied out.

As soon as his samadhi is over, Sri Ramakrishna opens his eyes and looks around. He notices that everyone at the meeting is sitting with closed eyes. With the words “Brahman! Brahman!” he suddenly stands up. Then, as the worship ends, and with the accompaniment of drum and cymbals, the devotees sing. Intoxicated with the joy of ecstatic love,¹ Sri Ramakrishna joins them in dance. Everyone is charmed to watch his graceful dance. Vijaykrishna and other devotees also begin to dance, encircling him. Watching this wonderful scene and enjoying the communal singing, many forget the world for some time. Drunk with the wine of God’s name, they have begun to feel that worldly joy is, indeed, bitter; they forget worldly pleasure for a while.

When the devotional singing ends, they all sit around Thakur to hear what he is going to say.

Chapter Two

Advice to householders

Sri Ramakrishna addresses the assembled Brahma devotees: “It is very difficult to lead a householder’s life without attachment. Pratap used to say, ‘Sir, we follow King Janaka. He lived a householder’s life, but without attachment. We shall do the same.’ I said, ‘Can you become King Janaka just by wishing to? King Janaka gained spiritual knowledge after much austerity! He

1. Prema.

returned to his family only after undergoing extremely hard austerities – like standing on his head for years.’

“Does that mean there is no way for householders? Certainly there is. A householder should practice religious disciplines in solitude for some days. By doing so, a person develops love and devotion for God and gains spiritual knowledge. After this, there is nothing wrong in going back and leading a family life. When a man practices spiritual disciplines in solitude, he must separate himself completely, by all means, from the household – from wife, son, daughter, mother, father, brother, sister, near relatives. No one should stay with him. During solitary spiritual practice, he should say to himself, ‘I have no one in the world to call my own. God is my all in all.’ He should weep persistently and pray for spiritual knowledge and love and devotion for Him.

“If you ask how many days you should live away from the family, even one day is good, but three days are still better. You can live for twelve days, a month, three months, a year – as long as possible. After gaining knowledge and loving devotion to God, there is not much danger in living a householder’s life.

“If you rub your hands with oil before you cut a jackfruit open, its sticky juice won’t stick to your hands. When playing the game of hide and seek, you are safe if you touch the granny. Touch the philosopher’s stone once and you become gold. After turning into gold, something may be buried

underground for a thousand years and will still be gold when you take it out.

“The mind is like milk. If you keep it in the water of the world, the milk will get mixed with water. You must transform the milk into curds in a lonely corner to take the butter from it. When, by practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude, you’ve taken out the butter of spiritual knowledge and love for God from the milk of the mind, then that butter can easily be kept in the water of the world. It will never get mixed with the water. It will float on the surface, free from any attachment.”

Chapter Three

Solitary spiritual disciplines of Vijaykrishna Goswami

Vijay Goswami has recently returned from Gaya. He spent quite a few days in solitude and lived in the company of sadhus. He has now taken to wearing the ochre cloth. He is in a very good state of mind – as if always drawn within. He keeps his head bent before the Paramahansa Deva, as if absorbed in contemplation of God.

Looking at Vijay, Sri Ramakrishna asks him: “Vijay, have you found a place to stay?”

“Listen to this. Two sadhus came to a city during their wanderings. One of them was looking with curiosity at the bazaar, shops, and residential quarters of the town when he came across the other sadhu. The latter said, ‘You’re going around the city agape. Where is your luggage?’ The first sadhu replied, ‘I found a place to stay.¹ I’ve locked my

1. Vasa.

belongings there. Now I've come out to wander around the city without having to worry about them.' That's why I'm asking whether you've found a place to stay. (*To M. and the others*) Look, the fountain within Vijay has been covered for so long. Now it's open."

**Vijay and Shivanath – selfless work – sannyasin's
renunciation of desire**

(*To Vijay*) "Look, Shivanath has so many problems. He has to write for the newspaper, among many other things. Worldly work causes restlessness and brings anxiety and worry to the mind.

"The Srimad Bhagavata talks about the twenty-four gurus of the Avadhuta (Rishi Dattatreya), one of which was a kite. Some fishermen were catching fish at a certain place when a kite came swooping down, grabbed one of the fish, and carried it away. Seeing it, some thousand crows flying in formation followed the kite, cawing and creating a great nuisance. Whatever direction the kite flew with the fish, the crows followed. The kite flew south and the crows went south. When it flew north, the crows did the same. When the kite flew to the east or to the west, they followed. At last when the kite became confused and began flying around in circles, it dropped the fish. The crows left the kite and flew after the fish. The kite then sat on the branch of a tree and thought to itself, That fish created all this trouble. Now that I have no fish, I am at peace.

"The Avadhuta learned from the kite that as long as one has the fish of desire, there is work to

do. And because of work, there is worry, anxiety, and restlessness. As soon as one gives up desires, work no longer binds¹ and one is at peace.

“That is why working without expectation of any reward is good. It does not bring restlessness. But it is very difficult to do. I may think that I’m doing selfless work, but somehow selfish motivation creeps in, from where I don’t know. Only with the power that comes from a great deal of spiritual disciplines are a few able to work selflessly. After God-realization, selfless work comes automatically. With God-realization, a person can almost give up work. Only one or two (like Narada) keep working to teach others.”

**Sannyasin will not hoard – renunciation of work only
after developing intense love for God²**

“The Avadhuta had another guru, a bee. The bee collects honey by labouring hard for days on end, but the honey is not its own. Someone comes and breaks the honeycomb and takes away the honey. The Avadhuta learned from the bee that one should not hoard. Sadhus should depend one hundred percent on God. They should not accumulate things.

“However, this is not true for householders. A householder must take care of his family, so he has to save. Birds and sadhus don’t lay things away – but a bird does accumulate when it has a chick; it collects food in its beak for its chick.

1. Karmakshaya.
2. Prema.

“Look here, Vijay. If you see a sadhu with baggage or a bundle of things tied with fifteen knots, don’t trust him. I saw such sadhus under the banyan tree. Two or three of them were sitting there. One was separating good lentils from bad, the other was repairing his dhoti,¹ and they were talking of feasts given by rich men. They were saying, ‘I say, that gentleman has spent hundreds of thousands of rupees. He fed the sadhus so well! He prepared puris, jilibis, peras, barfis, malapuas, and all sorts of things.’” (*All laugh.*)

Vijay: “Yes, I saw sadhus like that in Gaya, too. In Gaya, sadhus swindle.” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): “When you develop ecstatic love for God, work falls off automatically. Let those act whom the Lord makes act. Your time has come now. Giving up everything, you should say: ‘O my mind, may you and I behold Her and no one else!’

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sings in his exquisitely sweet voice, showering the sweetness of God:

Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.

O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude. Leaving behind all passions, anger and such vices, come, O mind, and let us behold her in solitude,

Taking with us only the tongue, that it may call on Her now and then, repeating, “Mother, Mother!”

O mind, allow neither baseness nor enticement to draw near, but let the eyes of knowledge, ever alert, keep watch.

1. A wearing cloth.

(*To Vijay*) “You have taken refuge in God. Now shun the feelings of shame, fear, and the like. Give up the feeling that if you dance and sing the name of God, people will say things about you.”

Feeling of shame, contempt, and fear

“When you have the feelings of shame, hatred, and fear, you cannot succeed. Feelings of shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, secretiveness, – these are all bonds. The embodied soul is liberated only when he is free of them.

“He who is bound is embodied (jiva), and he who is free from bonds is divine (Shiva). Love for God is very rare. If you have single-minded devotion¹ to God, like a wife has for her husband in the beginning, only then do you develop love for God. Pure selfless love is very difficult to attain. In it, the soul and mind lose themselves in Him.

“Then comes the state of bhava.² In bhava man becomes speechless. His breathing stops – he automatically experiences suspension of breath,³ as happens when a man fires a gun. A marksman firing a bullet becomes speechless, and his breathing stops.

“Attaining intense love for God is very rare. Chaitanya Deva attained it. When you have ecstatic love for God, you forget external objects, you forget the world. You forget even your own body which is so dear to you.”

1. Nishtha bhakti.
2. Ecstasy.
3. Kumbhaka.

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing again:

When will dawn that day when tears stream from my eyes
as I repeat Lord Hari's name?

When will dawn that day when worldly desires disappear
from my heart?

When will dawn that day when my body thrills and my
hair stands on end?

When will dawn that day?

Chapter Four

Bhava and suspension of breath – vision of God when spiritual current rises

While the conversation continues, many other invited Brahma devotees arrive. Several are learned, some occupying high positions in the government. One of them is Rajni Nath Ray.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "In a high spiritual state,¹ breathing stops." He further says, "When Arjuna aimed at his target, his sight was fixed solely on the eye of the fish. He didn't see anything else. He didn't see any other part of the fish but the eye. In such a state, breathing stops and a person experiences retention of breath.

"There is another sign of God-vision: The spiritual current² from within rushes up toward the brain. At that time, if you attain samadhi, you realize God."

1. Bhava.

2. Mahavayu.

**Mere learning itself is deceptive – riches, power,
honour, and rank all illusory**

(Looking at the Brahma devotees who have just arrived) “Those who are merely learned and have no love for God say conflicting things. There was a pundit, Samadhyayi by name, who said, ‘The Lord is totally devoid of love, joy, sweetness, and bliss.¹ Make Him sweet² by your intense love and devotion for Him.’ He who is called the Essence of Bliss³ in the Vedas was termed devoid of sweetness by this fellow. This only shows that the man didn’t know at all what God really is. That is why he talked so absurdly.

“Somebody said, ‘There is a cowshed full of horses in my maternal uncle’s house.’ From this you understand that there was not a single horse – horses are not kept in cowsheds. *(All laugh.)*

“People are proud of wealth, possessions, property, honour, rank, and so on. But these last for only a few days; nothing will accompany you at death. A song goes like this:

Consider this, O mind: no one is your own. In this world there is mere illusion.

Do not forget the beneficent Mother by getting ensnared in Her maya’s net.

Think of those over whom you fret almost unto death: in death would they accompany you?

Even your beloved wife would deny you and shun your corpse as something impure.

1. Neeras.
2. Saras.
3. Rasasvarupa.

Just for a day or two do people call you lord and master; they will cease to call you so when the master called Death arrives for you.

**The great remedy for pride –
there are others greater than you**

“You shouldn’t be proud of your money. If you think you’re wealthy, another is wealthier than you, and still others wealthier than he. After dusk a firefly comes out and thinks it lights the world. But as soon as the stars appear, its pride takes a fall. The stars then begin to think that they are lighting the world. After some time, when the moon appears, the stars are dimmed in shame. The moon then begins to think that the whole world is smiling because of its light, that it is lighting the world. But not much later comes the dawn. And then the sun rises and now the moon is dim. In a short time it is invisible.

“If wealthy people were to think this way, they wouldn’t take pride in their wealth.”

Manilal has arranged for a big feast in connection with the festival. He serves food to Sri Ramakrishna and the assembled devotees with great love and attention, and to their heart’s content. It is quite dark when they begin to leave for home, but no one feels inconvenienced.

Section IX

Visit to the House of Jaygopal Sen

Chapter One

Family life and Sri Ramakrishna

It is 28 November 1883. At about four or five in the afternoon, Sri Ramakrishna went to the Lily Cottage of Keshab Chandra Sen. Keshab has been ill and will soon leave this world. After visiting him, Thakur comes with some devotees to the house of Jaygopal Sen on Mathaghasha Street. It is after seven in the evening.

The devotees are thinking about many things: We see Thakur day and night overwhelmed with the love of God. He is married but has not established a conjugal relationship with his wife. He has love and devotion¹ for her and worships her, but he only talks about God with her. He sings of God, worships God, meditates on Him; he has no worldly connection. He sees that God is the only Reality and all else is unreal. He cannot touch money or any metal object – jug or bowl. He cannot touch a woman; if he does, his body shivers at the spot as if stung by a singi fish. His hand twists when money or gold is placed in his palm, like a cripple, and his breathing stops. When he throws them away, he begins to breath normally, as before.

The devotees think of many questions, such as: Will we have to renounce the world? What is the need for studying anymore? If we don't marry, we won't have to get a job. Will we have to leave our parents? Or: I

1. Bhakti.

have married, I have children, I have to take care of my wife – what about me? I also want to remain absorbed in the love of God day and night. When I see Sri Ramakrishna, I say to myself, What I am doing? Day and night he meditates on God, like an unceasing flow of oil. But I am running around all the time thinking about worldly things. Just his presence is like a small spot of light in a sky overcast with clouds. Oh, how can I solve the problem of my life?

He has given the example of his own personal practice. Why do I still have doubts?

Shall I break this dam of sand and fulfill my desire? Is this (world) really a sand dam? If so, why can't I give it up? I see that I'm not strong enough. When I have developed that sort of love for Him, I won't calculate. If a tide flows in the Ganges, who can stop it? If one has just a drop of the ecstatic love¹ which made Sri Chaitanya put on the loin cloth, or the intense love for God that moved Christ to go into exile without consideration of anything else and made him give up his body after having a vision of the face of his loving Father, or the ecstatic love that made the Buddha give up his princely luxury and become a renunciate,² then the transitory world can be cast away.

So what is the way for those who are weak, who have not developed ecstatic love, who are worldly beings tied by the fetters of maya? I won't leave the company of this great soul intoxicated with love for God, who looks for nothing but God. Let me see what he says.

All these thoughts occupy the minds of the devotees. Thakur is sitting in Jaygopal's drawing room. Seated in front of him are Jaygopal, his family, and some of his neighbours. One neighbour, ready for discussion, starts the conversation. Vaikuntha, Jaygopal's brother, is also there.

1. Prema.

2. Vairagi.

Family life and Sri Ramakrishna

Vaikuntha: “We are worldly people, please tell us something.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “After knowing God, keep one hand on His lotus feet and attend to your worldly duties with the other.”

Vaikuntha: “Sir, is this world unreal?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It is unreal until you know God. Man forgets Him and thinks, ‘Mine, mine.’ Bound by maya, deluded by ‘lust and greed,’ he goes down and down. Entangled so in maya, he has lost his senses. He can’t find a way out, even when there is a way. There is a song that says:

With her magic what a spell Mahamaya casts! Even
Brahma and Vishnu have lost their senses. What, then,
can mere mortals hope to know?

When a trap for fish is set, they enter, and though the way
out is clear, they fail to emerge.

The silkworm spins its own cocoon and surely can escape;
yet by Mahamaya’s delusion bound, it emerges not but
remains within to die.

“You yourselves are able to see that the world is transitory. Why don’t you see this very family as transitory? So many people have come and then departed, so many born and then died. The world now is and then is not – it is ephemeral. They whom you call ‘my’ and ‘mine’ are not there as soon as you shut your eyes at death. A person might not have close relations – but still does not go to Kashi because of a grandson: ‘What will happen to my Haru?’ There is a way out, yet the fish do not

escape. The silkworm dies in its own secretions. This world is unreal, it is impermanent.”

Neighbour: “Sir, how can I hold to God with one hand and the world with the other? If the world is transitory, why should I hold onto it with even one hand?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “If you live in the world after knowing Him, the world is no longer ephemeral. Listen to this song:

O mind, you do not know how to farm.

The field of your life lies fallow; were you to cultivate it, you would reap a golden harvest.

Fence it around with Kali’s name, and your crop will not be harmed.

That fence of the Mother with long flowing hair is strong indeed: not even Death himself dares come near.

Not today or in a hundred years will your crops be snatched away.

Work now, O mind, to reap your harvest to the full. Sow the seed, your guru’s gift,¹ and shower it with the water of love.

If you cannot do so by yourself, take Ramprasad along.

Chapter Two

How to realize God in family life

Sri Ramakrishna: “Did you hear the song, ‘Fence it around with Kali’s name, and your crop will not be harmed’? Take refuge in God and you’ll get everything. This fence of the Divine Mother with long flowing hair is very strong. Not even

1. Mantra.

Yama, the God of Death, dares to approach it. It is a very strong fence. If you can realize God, the world will appear unimportant. Whoever knows God sees that He Himself has become the world, its creatures, and all that. You will feed your boy as though you were feeding Gopal.¹ You will see your father and mother as God and the Divine Mother, and you will serve them as though they were. If you live in the family after knowing God, you won't maintain a worldly relationship with your wife. Both of you, being devotees, will talk only of God, only of divine matters. You will serve the devotees of God, knowing Him to be present in all existence. Both of you will serve God."

Neighbour: "Sir, such a husband and wife can be found nowhere."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, there are such people, but they are rare. Worldly people cannot recognize them. But both of them have to be good to reach that state. This is possible only when both derive divine joy from it. For this, God's special grace is necessary. Without it, there is always misunderstanding between them, and one of them has to leave. There is great discord if they don't agree. The wife may possibly complain day and night, 'Why did father give me away in marriage to this family? Neither have I myself eaten well, nor have I been able to feed my children. Neither have I good clothes to wear, nor do my children. You have given me not a single piece of jewelry. What joy of life have you given me in this house? You keep on

1. Baby Krishna.

repeating ‘Lord, Lord’ with your eyes closed. Give up this type of madness!”

Devotee: “There are such obstacles, of course. Then the sons may be disobedient! How troublesome that is! So what is the way, sir?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It is very difficult to practice spiritual disciplines while living in the family. There are so many hindrances. I don’t have to tell you about these – disease, sorrow, poverty, discord with wife, and sons who are disobedient, ignorant, and foolish.

“Even so, there is a way. Occasionally you must go into solitude and pray to God. You should make an effort to attain Him.”

Neighbour: “Should one leave the family?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That’s not necessary. But whenever you are free, go to a solitary place and live there for a day or two so that you are detached from family affairs and don’t have to talk of worldly things to any worldly person. Either live in solitude or keep the company of the holy.”

Neighbour: “How do we recognize a holy person?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “A holy person is one whose mind, heart, and soul are merged in God. He who has renounced ‘lust and greed’ is a holy person. A man who is holy doesn’t see a woman with a carnal eye. His mind is always drawn within. If he happens to be near a woman, he looks upon her as Mother and worships her. A holy person is always thinking inwardly of God. He talks of nothing but Him. And knowing that God is present in all

existence, he serves Him. Broadly speaking, these are the characteristics of a holy person.”

Neighbour: “Does one always have to live in solitude?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Think of a tree on a footpath. As long as it’s small, it has to be fenced on all sides; otherwise, a goat or a cow might eat it. But when the plant develops a thick trunk, no fence is needed. Then, even if an elephant is tied to it, the tree doesn’t break. If you can develop the trunk, there’s no worry, no fear. First try to gain discrimination. If you rub your hands with oil before you cut open a jackfruit, its milky sap will not stick to your hands.”

Neighbour: “What is discrimination?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That only God is real,¹ all else is unreal.² Thinking this way is discrimination. ‘Real’ means eternal, and ‘unreal’ means transient. Whoever has attained discrimination knows that God is the only reality, that all else is unreal. When you’ve developed discrimination, you want to know God. If you are inclined to the unreal, you like physical comforts, name and fame, money, and all these things. You don’t feel the need to know God, who is Reality Himself. When you know the difference between the real and the unreal, only then will you want to seek God. Listen to this song:

Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree and gather there the four fruits of life.

1. Sat.

2. Asat.

Of your two wives, Worldliness and Dispassion, take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination,¹¹ for the truth about Reality.

When will you lie down happily between your wives, Purity and Defilement? When you see no difference between these two, then shall you see the Divine Mother Kali.

Drive out your parents, Ego and Ignorance, and should Delusion attempt to drag you into its pit, hold fast to the post of Patience.

Tie the goats of Virtue and Vice to the post of unconcern, and should they become unruly, kill them both with the Sword of Knowledge.

Admonish, O mind, the children of your first wife, Worldliness, and tell them to keep their distance. Should they not obey you, then drown them in the Sea of Knowledge.

Ramprasad says: If you can do this, you will render a proper account to the Lord of Death, and I shall be pleased to call you “my dear one,” a mind after my own heart.

“You attain discrimination only when dispassion comes to the mind. When you have attained discrimination, you begin to think of the truth. Then the mind has the desire to stroll under the kalpataru (wish-fulfilling tree) of Kali. When you are under this tree, when you are near God, the four fruits come to you effortlessly. You have only to pick them up – the fruits of dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), kama (fulfillment of legitimate desires) and moksha (liberation). When a householder attains Him, whatever he needs – dharma, artha, or kama – he gets.”

Neighbour: “Why is the world called maya?”

**Vishishtadvaitavada (Qualified Non-dualism) and Sri
Ramakrishna**

Sri Ramakrishna: “As long as you have not realized God, you must renounce, saying, ‘Not this, not this.’ Those who have realized Him know that He has become all – God, maya, individual souls, and the universe.¹ Then they perceive that the world and its beings are nothing but God. If you were asked to weigh a bel fruit, having its shell, kernel, and seeds separated out, would you remove its shell and seeds and weigh only the kernel? No, you would also have to take into account the shell and the seeds – all these – while weighing. You can tell the weight of a bel fruit only when you weigh all of it. This world is the shell, creatures are the seeds. While reasoning, the world and its creatures are called anatman (not the Atman); they are considered unreal. While discriminating, you feel that only the kernel is important, not the shell and the seeds. But then we consider that the shell and the seeds belong to the same substance to which the kernel belongs. Understand the illustration of the bel fruit and you will understand.

“It is the process of evolution and involution. Butter goes with buttermilk and buttermilk goes with butter. If there is buttermilk, there is butter; if there is butter, there is also buttermilk. If there is Atman, there is anatman (non-Atman) too.

“The Absolute belongs to the same Being as the phenomenal world, and the phenomenal belongs to the same as the Absolute. He who is called Ishvara

1. Ishvara, maya, jiva, and jagat.

has Himself become the individual being and the world. He who has understood this knows that God Himself has become all – father, mother, son, neighbour, man and beast, good and bad, purity and impurity.”

Sense of sin and responsibility

Neighbour: “So, there is no sin and no virtue?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “They are, and yet are not. If God keeps the ego in you, He also keeps your sense of differentiation and the knowledge of virtuous and sinful acts. However, in a few, God completely erases the sense of I-consciousness. Such people go beyond virtue and vice, good and bad. As long as a person doesn’t realize God, the sense of differentiation and the knowledge of good and bad are bound to persist. You may say that vice and virtue have become one for you, that you do only what He makes you do, but in your heart you know that these are mere words. When you do evil deeds, your heart palpitates.

“However, even after God-realization, if He so wills, He lets you retain the ‘servant I.’ In that state the devotee says: ‘I am Your servant, You are my Master.’ Such a devotee likes to hear talk about God, likes to work for God. He doesn’t like people who are opposed to God; he doesn’t like work, except work for God. When this comes about, God lets such a devotee retain a sense of differentiation.”

Neighbour: “Sir, you say that we should live in the world after knowing God. Can we know Him?”

The Unknown and the Unknowable

Sri Ramakrishna: “He cannot be known by the senses or the mind. He can only be known by the pure mind, the mind that has no worldly desires.”

Neighbour: “Who can know God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Who can really know Him? It is enough to know as much as one needs. What is the need for a whole well? A jug of water is enough. An ant went to a mound of sugar. What need had it for the whole mound? A grain or two made it happy.”

Neighbour: “What can a single jug of water do for the delusions¹ we have? I want to know God fully.”

The world – aberration and its remedy – take shelter in Me

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, that may be true. But there is a remedy for the delusion of the world.”

Neighbour: “What is the remedy, sir?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The company of the holy, chanting His name and glories, and constant prayer to Him. I said to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, I don’t want knowledge. Take Your knowledge and take Your ignorance. Mother, kindly grant me only pure love at Your lotus feet. I want nothing else.’

“As is the disease, so is the remedy. The Lord says in the Gita, ‘O Arjuna, take refuge in me, I shall free you from all your sins.’ Take refuge in

1. Vikara; A bodily or mental condition which obstructs God-realization.

God. He will grant you right understanding. He will take up your whole burden. Then all your defects and aberrations will be wiped away. Can you understand Him with this intellect of yours? Can a one-seer jug contain four seers of milk? Besides, can anybody understand God unless He makes him understand? So I say, take refuge in God. Let Him do what He wills. He has His own way in everything.¹ What power does man have?”

1. Icchamaya.

Section X

Festival in Surendra's Garden

Chapter One

Thakur rejoices with the devotees

Today Thakur has come to Surendra's garden. It is Sunday, 15 June 1884, the sixth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Jaishtha. Thakur has been enjoying the company of the devotees since nine in the morning.

Surendra's garden is in the Kankurgachi district near Calcutta. Not far away is Ram's garden,¹ which Thakur visited some six months ago. Today there is a festival in Surendra's garden.

Group singing of devotional songs² began earlier in the morning. The songs are about the life of Sri Krishna in Mathura. They describe the ecstatic love of the gopis and the sorrow of Radha at her separation from Sri Krishna. Every now and then Thakur is overwhelmed with ecstasy.

The devotees stand in rows in the garden house. The singing is going on in the main hall of the garden house. A white sheet has been spread on the floor, with bolsters here and there. The hall is flanked on the east and west by rooms, one on each side, and there is a verandah running north and south. In front of the garden house – that is, to the south – is a beautiful pond with specially built brick steps. Between the hall and the steps, a garden path runs

1. Sri Ramakrishna had mentioned the garden as an ideal place for meditation, so Ram named it "Yogadyan" (a place for practicing yoga).

2. Sankirtan.

east-west. On both sides of the path are flower bushes, croton trees, and other plants. Another path runs from the eastern edge of the garden house to the north gate. It is surfaced with red brick dust and is bordered on both sides with various flowering bushes and croton trees. Near the gate and to the east of the path is another pond with cement steps. The men of the neighbourhood take their bath here and fetch drinking water. On the west side of the garden house is a path, and southwest of it is the kitchen. There is a great deal of activity here today in preparation for the feast to serve Thakur and the devotees. Suresh and Ram are supervising.

The devotees have assembled on the verandah of the garden house as well. Others stroll on the bank of the pond mentioned earlier, either alone or with friends. Some stop at the cement steps for a rest during the stroll.

The songs continue. A crowd of devotees has assembled in the hall. Bhavanath, Niranjana, Rakhal, Surendra, Ram, M., Mahimacharan, Mani Mallick, and many others are there. Many Brahma devotees are also present.

The songs of Mathura are being sung. The singer begins with *Gaur Chandrika* (verses of Chaitanya Deva's adoration). Gauranga had taken sannyas; he was mad with love for Krishna. The devotees of Navadvip wept in distress to see him. The chorus is singing: "Gaur, please come to Nadia."

Thereafter, they sing of Radha's anguish at separation from Krishna. Thakur is overwhelmed with ecstasy. He suddenly stands and adds lines full of pathos to the song: "Friend, either bring me

the beloved of my soul¹ or take me to him.” Thakur goes into the mood of Radha. He becomes speechless as he says these words, his body still, his eyes half-closed. He has lost all consciousness. Thakur has gone into samadhi.

After some time he regains normal consciousness. Again, with the same plaintive tone, of the gopis, he says, “Friend, make me your slave and take me to him! I shall become your maidservant forever! It is you who taught me to love Krishna, the beloved of my soul.”

The chorus goes on singing. Radha says, “Friend, I shall not go to the holy Jamuna to fetch water. I saw our beloved friend (Krishna) under the kadamba tree. When I go there, I become overwhelmed.”

Thakur is again overcome with emotion. Taking a long breath, he heaves a sigh: “Ah! Ah!”

The song continues. Radha says:

The desire for Krishna's presence has refreshed my feverish body.

Now and then the musicians improvise verses: “Perhaps He will become yours. Please let me see Him once, O friend! The Jewel of Jewels is gone. What need have I now of other jewels? My good days are over. I have fallen again on evil times. Haven't my evil days lasted long enough?”

Thakur adds: “Has that time not yet come?”

1. Pranavallabha.

The chorus sings: “So much time has passed!
Has that time not yet come?”

The singing continues:

O friend! I am surely dying.

To whom shall I leave my Krishna,¹ my priceless treasure?

Friend, do not cremate this, Radha’s body, or cast it into the river, this body that has been enjoyed by the Dark One.

Neither cast it into the water, nor consign to the flames, but bind it, when I die, to the tamal tree,

And keep it there, bound close to the tamal’s blackness – so that it may keep on getting its touch.

My Krishna is black, and the tamal is black. Black is the colour I dearly love and from my earliest days have cherished.

See that my body be not parted from my Krishna, my Dark One, to whom it belongs.

In her tenth stage, Radha falls into a faint.

Radha, lying fallen on the ground, has lost all outer consciousness while repeating Krishna’s name.

How, then, has this joyful play come to such an end?

At this moment her eyes are closed; how has this happened to Radha, who only a moment ago was speaking to us?

Someone anoints her body with sandal paste, while the others lament: “Our beloved soul departs!”

They sprinkle water on Radha’s face, hoping to revive her, but can mere water save one who is dying from love for Krishna?

1. Kanai.

Seeing Radha in a swoon, her friends chant the name of Krishna. Hearing the name, Shyam,¹ she regains consciousness. Then seeing the tamal tree, she thinks that perhaps Krishna himself has come to her.

By Krishna's name restored to life, Radha looks round and round, searching, searching.

Failing to find her beloved's face, she weeps the bitterest of tears,

Crying "Where is Sri Dam,² whose name you chant? Bring him here that I may see Him once, just once."

Then catching sight of the black tamal tree, Radha exclaims, "Behold! There is my Krishna's crest!"

Spying a peacock in the tree, she sighs, "There you see His feathered crest!"

Her friends decide to send a messenger to Mathura. The messenger makes friends with a resident woman of the city, a woman of her age, who asks for her credentials.

Radha's messenger friend says, "I will not have to call him. He will come on his own." She then goes with the Mathura woman to where Krishna is and calls out, weeping, with a longing heart. "Where are you, O Hari, the life of the gopis, the beloved of my soul, Radha's sweetheart, the allayer of shame? Come show yourself. I have said with great pride that you will come of your own accord."

The song continues:

A woman of Mathura laughs in scorn, saying,

1. A name of Krishna.

2. A name for Krishna.

“O lowly milkmaid, how can you, dressed in beggar’s rags, hope to see Him,

“The king, who dwells beyond the seventh gate? How, oh how, will you ever reach Him?

I am ashamed at your boldness. Tell me, how will you ever enter there?”

“Alas! Alas!,” the milkmaid cries, “O Krishna, the gopis’ very life, you philanderer! Where are you? Show Yourself and save now the maid who yearns for You!

“O life of the gopis, where are You? Master of Mathura, show Yourself and save her heart and soul!

“Where are you, Hari, the beloved of Radha! O Hari, allayer of my shame, reveal Yourself and save my honour!”

The messenger woman then calls out, “You, life and soul of the gopis, you philanderer! Where are you, the milkmaids’ beloved?”

Hearing this, “Where are you, the life and soul of the gopis,” Thakur goes into samadhi. When the songs end, the chorus sings the name of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna¹ stands up again in samadhi. Regaining consciousness a little, he says, indistinctly, “Kittan, Kittan (Krishna, Krishna).” He is absorbed in divine emotion, so he cannot pronounce the name (of Krishna) properly.

The chorus sings about Radha being united with Krishna.

Thakur adds:

Look, Radha is standing,

Turning round and swaying,

Standing now to the left of Shyam,

1. Prabhu, Master.

Like a creeper embracing the tamal tree.

Now they sing the names of the Lord, accompanying themselves with drums and cymbals: "Victory to Radha Govinda! Victory to Radha Govinda!" All are seized with the madness of love for God.

Thakur dances. The devotees also dance, forming a ring around him and chanting, "Victory to Radha Govinda! Victory to Radha Govinda!"

Chapter Two

Guilelessness and God-realization – service of God and duties of the world

When the music ends, Thakur sits for a while with the devotees. Niranjan arrives and prostrates before him in salutation. Seeing him, Thakur stands up and, with a joyful expression, says, "So you have come!"

(*To M.*) "Look, this boy is remarkably simple. Such openness and simplicity doesn't come without a great deal of austerity in previous births. A cunning and calculating person can't realize God.

"Don't you see that wherever God has incarnated Himself, there has been guilelessness?"

"How simple was Dasharatha!¹ Nanda Ghosh, Sri Krishna's father, was free from guile. The saying goes, 'What a nature he has! Exactly like that of Nanda Ghosh!'"

1. Father of Lord Rama.

The devotees are free from guile. Is Thakur hinting that God has incarnated Himself again?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Niranjan*): “It looks like a shadowy film has spread over your face. This is because you work in an office. You have to keep accounts and perform so many other duties there that you are always worried.

“You have a job, like other men of the world. But there is a little difference. You have accepted the job for the sake of your mother.

“A mother is venerable. She is the very embodiment of the all-blissful Mother of the Universe. If you had taken up a job for your wife or son, I would have said, ‘Fie on you! You are accursed! A hundred times shame on you!’

(*To Mani Mallick*) “Just see, this boy is free from guile. He has only one fault: sometimes he tells a fib. One day he said he’d come, but he didn’t show up. (*To Niranjan*) That’s why Rakhai asked you why you didn’t come to see me, even though you came to Ariadaha.”

Niranjan: “I only went to Ariadaha a couple of days ago.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Niranjan*): “He’s a headmaster. He went to see you. I sent him. (*To M.*) Did you send Baburam to me the other day?”

Chapter Three

Radha and Krishna – the ecstatic love of the gopis

Thakur is talking with three or four devotees in the western room. A number of chairs and tables have been placed together.

Thakur is leaning on a table, half standing and half sitting.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Oh, what love and devotion the gopis had! They would be seized with the madness of love just to see the tamal tree! Such was the fire of separation burning in Radha's heart that tears from her eyes would dry up from its heat – the tears would just evaporate. Sometimes people didn't know of her divine emotion. When an elephant enters a big lake, no one notices.”

M.: “Yes sir, it was the same with Gauranga (Chaitanya Deva). When he saw a forest, he thought he was in Vrindavan; when he saw the ocean, he thought it was the Jamuna.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Oh, if a person could receive just a drop of this ecstatic love! What devotion! What love! Not only sixteen annas¹ of love, but five sikas² and five annas! This is called the madness of love. The important thing is to love Him, to have longing for Him. Then you may take whatever path you like, whether you believe in God with form or God without form, whether you believe that God incarnates as a man or not. It is enough to have

1. Full complement.

2. One sika equals four annas; sixteen annas make one rupee.

devotion for Him. He Himself will then tell you what He is.

“If you must be mad, be not mad for the things of this world. Be mad for God!”

Chapter Four

Conversation about God with Bhavanath, Mahima, and other devotees

Thakur returns to the hall. They have placed a bolster near his seat. While sitting down, he touches the bolster and murmurs, “Om Tat Sat.”¹

Worldly people often visit this garden; they all use this very bolster. Perhaps Thakur recites the sacred words to purify it from the contamination of their worldliness.

Bhavanath, M., and some others sit beside him. Though it is already dark, they have not yet laid out the feast.

Thakur has the nature of a child. He says: “Why haven’t you fed us? Where is Narendra?”

A devotee (*laughing, to Thakur*): “Sir, Ram Babu is in charge. He is supervising everything.” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): “Ram in charge! That is the reason!”

A devotee: “Sir, it’s always like this when Ram Babu is in charge.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “Where is Surendra?”

1. The Lord is the only Reality.

“Oh, what a fine temperament he has developed. He is very frank – not afraid to speak up. And how generous he is! He never turns anyone away who asks for his help. (*To M.*) Did you go see Bhagavan Das? How did you find him?”

M.: “Yes sir, I went to Kalna. Bhagavan Das is very old now. I saw him in the evening. He was lying on a cotton bed sheet and someone fed him prasad. He is only able to hear when you speak loudly. Hearing your name, he said, ‘What is there for you to worry about now?’

“There is worship of the name of Brahman in that house.”

Bhavanath (*to M.*): “You haven’t been to Dakshineswar for a long time. He was asking me about you. He said, ‘Perhaps M. has developed a distaste.’”

Saying this, Bhavanath begins to laugh. Thakur has been listening to the conversation between them. With eyes full of affection, he says to M.: “Yes, yes. Why haven’t you been to Dakshineswar for such a long time? Tell me.”

M. stammers a lame excuse.

Just then Mahimacharan arrives. Mahimacharan, a resident of Cossipore, has great reverence for Thakur. He often visits Dakshineswar. He belongs to a brahmin family and has inherited some ancestral property. He lives independently and has not taken a job under anyone. He spends most of his time studying the scriptures and meditating on God. He is a man of

some learning. He has studied a number of books in English and Sanskrit.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to Mahima*): “What is this? A big ship has arrived! (*All laugh.*) Only canoes come here, but look! This is a ship! (*All laugh.*) But then it is the month of Ashadha (month of rains).”

Thakur talks for a long time to Mahimacharan.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): “Feeding others is also a kind of service to God. What do you say? God is in all beings in the form of the fire of hunger. Feeding someone means making an offering to Him.

“Even so, at [religious] feasts one shouldn’t feed a wicked person, such as those who have committed adultery, fornication, and other vile sins, those who are drowned in sensuality. The earth on which they stand is polluted more than seven cubits deep.

“Once Hriday fed people in Sihore, many of them wicked. I said to him, ‘Look here Hriday, if you feed these people, I shall leave your house immediately.’ (*To Mahima*) Well, I heard that you used to feed many people. Perhaps the expenses have now gone up.” (*All laugh.*)

Chapter Five

With Brahma devotees

Leaf plates are now being placed on the southern verandah. Thakur says to Mahimacharan, "Please go there and see what they're doing. I can't ask you, but maybe you could help a little in serving the food."

Mahimacharan says, "Let them bring the food first. Then I'll see if I can do anything." Hemming and hawing, he goes to the verandah but soon returns.

Thakur sits down to eat with the devotees. He is filled with great joy. After the meal he rests a while. The devotees go to the southern pond, wash, and again assemble near Thakur, who is chewing betel leaves. They all sit down. Pratap, a Brahma devotee, arrives a little after two o'clock and salutes Thakur. Thakur salutes him as well, bowing down to him. He talks about a number of things with Pratap.

Pratap: "Sir, I went to the hills (Darjeeling)."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But you don't look healthy. Are you suffering from some illness?"

Pratap: "Sir, I'm suffering from the same disease as Keshab."

They begin to talk about Keshab. Pratap says, "Keshab's dispassion¹ was evident even in childhood. He was seldom seen having fun and playing with other boys. He was a student in the

1. Vairagya: nonattachment to the world.

Hindu College, where he became a great friend of Satyendra. Through him, he came in contact with Devendranath Tagore. Keshab had yoga as well as love and devotion. At times, due to excessive love, he would become semiconscious. The main goal of his life was to bring religion to family life.”

**Ego and fame – ‘I the doer,’ ‘I the guru’ –
signs of God-realization**

The conversation turns to a lady from Maharashtra.

Pratap: “Some women of this province have gone to the West. One such lady from Maharashtra was very learned. She went there, but she has embraced Christianity. Sir, have you heard about her?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “No, but from what you say, she seems to have had a desire for name and fame. Egotism of this kind is not good. The idea ‘I am the doer,’ comes from ignorance. ‘Oh Lord, You are the doer’ – this is knowledge. The Lord alone is the doer and all others are non-doers. You bring upon yourself such trouble if you say, ‘I, I.’ You can understand if you consider the state of a calf. The calf bellows, ‘Hamma, hamma,’ that is, ‘I, I.’ See what troubles befall it! Perhaps it is yoked to a plough from morning till evening, in sun or rain alike. Or perhaps a butcher kills it for people to eat. And then its skin might be tanned into hide. This hide will be used to make shoes and other things. People will put their feet into them to walk. Even then its troubles don’t end. From its skin a drum is made and then beaten constantly with a stick. In the end, its intestines are used to make strings for the bow of a cotton carder. Then it makes the

sound, 'Tuhum, tuhum,' (Thou, Thou). Then it no longer says, 'Hamma, hamma.' Only saying 'Tuhum, tuhum' releases, brings liberation. Then it doesn't have to return to the field of activity.

"Similarly, when an embodied soul says, 'O Lord, I am not the doer, You are the Doer; I am an instrument, You are the Being who uses the instrument,' his trials and tribulations in the world cease. Only then is the embodied soul liberated; it doesn't have to return to this field of activity."

Devotee: "How can an embodied soul get rid of his ego?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It disappears only when one has realized God. When a person is rid of his ego, he surely has had a vision of God."

Devotee: "Sir, how can you know if a person has seen God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are signs of God-vision. According to the Srimad Bhagavata, there are four signs of God-vision. One becomes like a child, like an unclean spirit,¹ like an insentient being, or like a madman.

"A person who has seen God develops the temperament of a child. He goes beyond the three gunas.² He does not become bound by any of them. He seems to make no distinction between purity and impurity – thus he is like an unclean spirit. And then like a madman he sometimes laughs, sometimes weeps. At one time he may dress himself

1. Pishacha.

2. The three qualities of sattva, rajas, and tamas.

like a gentleman, but soon after he may strip himself naked and begin to wander around with his dhoti under his arm. He seems to act like a mad man. Than again he may sit quietly at one place like an insentient being – an inert, lifeless, material body.”

Devotee: “Does one get rid of the ego totally after the vision of God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Sometimes God completely erases one’s ego, as in the state of samadhi. But generally the person retains a trace of ego. There is no harm in this ego. It’s like the ego of a child. A five-year-old child says, ‘I, I,’ but that ego doesn’t harm anybody.

“Iron becomes gold by touching the philosopher’s stone. An iron sword becomes a sword of gold. It keeps the shape of a sword, but can’t hurt anybody. You can’t cut or kill with a sword made of gold.”

Chapter Six

Worship of ‘gold’ in the West — is work or God-realization the aim of life?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): “You went to England. What did you see there? Do tell me about it.”

Pratap: “In the West people are worshipers of what you call ‘gold.’ Generally speaking, from one end to the other, activity¹ reigns supreme there – it is the same in America. Still, there are some good people, some who are unattached to worldly life.”

1. Rajas.

**The West and Karma Yoga – Karma Yoga or Bhakti
Yoga, which one for the Kaliyuga?**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): “It is not true that attachment to worldly work is only found in the West. It’s all over the world. And do you know why? Work is a sign of the first stage of life. God cannot be realized without devotion, discrimination, dispassion, kindness, and the like.¹ The very nature of work² involves a person in worldly activities, so it brings a darkness³ with it. Too much work makes one forget God and leads to greater attachment to ‘lust and greed.’

“However, it is not possible to give up work all of a sudden. Your nature will lead you to do it, whether you want to or not. So the instruction is: work without attachment. Work done without attachment means work done without any expectation of reward. For example, you may take to worship, repeating the name of God,⁴ and religious austerities, but not for recognition or for earning merit.

“Working unattached in this way is called Karma Yoga. But it is very difficult. In the Kaliyuga attachment creeps in so easily. You may resolve to work without attachment, but attachment enters from somewhere, you don’t know from where. Say you have celebrated a big holy feast or served a number of paupers. You may have thought, I am doing all this without any

1. Sattvaguna.
2. Rajoguna.
3. Tamoguna.
4. Japa.

attachment; yet the desire for name and fame enters from somewhere unseen. Thus, it is only possible for those who have seen God to be completely unattached.”

Devotee: “What is the way for those who have not seen God? Should they renounce all worldly work?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “For the Kaliyuga, Bhakti Yoga is best suited – the path of love and devotion enjoined by Narada: chanting the name and glories of God and praying with a longing heart, ‘O Lord, grant me knowledge and devotion, reveal Yourself to me.’ Karma Yoga is very difficult. That’s why you must pray to God, ‘O Lord, lessen my work. And whatever the work you have for me, may I, by Your grace, be able to perform it without attachment. Besides that, grant that I may have no desire to engage myself in more work.’

“It is not possible to give up work. To meditate – that, too, is work. When you have gained love for God, your worldly work decreases by itself. And then you don’t like it anymore. Who likes water sweetened with molasses after having tasted water sweetened with sugar candy?”

A devotee: “Westerners urge us to work more and more. Is work the aim of life?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The aim of life is to realize God. Work is only the first chapter of human life. It can’t be the aim of life. Even selfless work¹ is only a means, not the end.

1. Nishkama karma.

“Sambhu said, ‘Please bless me that the money I have may be spent on good causes – in building hospitals, dispensaries, roads, wells, and so on.’ I said, ‘It’s good to do all this work unattached, but it is very difficult. You must always remember, in whatever you do, that the aim of human life is to attain God, not to build hospitals and dispensaries. Suppose God appears before you and tells you to ask for a boon. Will you ask Him to build some hospitals and dispensaries for you? Or will you say to Him, “O Lord, grant me pure love at your lotus feet. May I see You always.” Hospitals, dispensaries, and so on are all transient things. God is the only Reality; all else is unreal. When He is attained, one realizes that He alone is the doer and that we do nothing. Why should we forget Him and destroy ourselves with so much work? When He is attained, hospitals and dispensaries may be built if He so wills. I say that work is only the first chapter of human life; it is not the end of life. Take to spiritual practice and go forward. As you practice and advance further, you will come to know in the end that God is the only Reality and all else is unreal – and that the aim of life, truly, is to realize God.

“A woodcutter went to the forest to cut wood. There he happened to meet a brahmachari.¹ The brahmachari said to him, ‘My good man, go forward.’ On returning home, the woodcutter began

1. A brahmachari is a spiritual aspirant practising control over the mind and preparing for the next step of life – that of the householder, or the ascetic.

to wonder why the brahmachari had asked him to go forward.

“Some days passed. One day he was reminded of the words of the brahmachari. He said to himself, ‘Today I will go forward.’ As he went deep into the forest, he found numberless sandalwood trees. Full of joy, he brought some sandalwood back. Selling it in the market, he became very rich.

“In this way some days passed, when he was again reminded of the words of the brahmachari, ‘Go forward.’ Now, as he went farther into the forest, he found a mine of silver near the bank of a river. This he could never have dreamt. He mined the silver and sold it. He made so much money that he became a very wealthy man.

“Some more days passed. One day he again said to himself, ‘The brahmachari didn’t ask me to go only up to the silver mine. He asked me to go forward.’ This time he crossed the river and saw a gold mine. He then said to himself, ‘Nice indeed! That is why the brahmachari asked me to go forward.’

“After a few days, he again went farther and lo! he found heaps of diamonds and jewels lying on the ground. Now he became as rich as the god of wealth himself.¹

“So I say, whatever you may be doing, if you go forward, you will find something better. If you receive inspiration after reaching a particular stage, don’t think that you have come to the end. Work is not the goal of life. Go forward and you will

1. Kubera.

be able to work selflessly. But selfless work is very difficult. So pray to God with a longing heart, 'Oh Lord, grant me love and devotion at Your lotus feet and reduce my work. Whatever work you give me to do, grant that I may be able to do it selflessly.'

"If you go further, you will find God. You will have His vision. And gradually you will talk intimately with Him."

The conversation now turns to the dispute about preaching in the temple of the Brahmo Samaj after the demise of Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "I hear that there has been some controversy with you over the pulpit. The ones who started this dispute are insignificant people.¹ (*All laugh.*)

(*To the devotees*) "You see, people like Pratap, Amrita, and some others "blow the conch shell" (make a loud noise). And others produce no sound at all."

Pratap: "Sir, so far as musical sound is concerned, even a mango stone gives sound!"

1. Sri Ramakrishna said "Hare, Pela, and Pancha," which means people of ordinary calibre. The English equivalent would be "Tom, Dick, and Harry."

Chapter Seven

Brahmo Samaj and Sri Ramakrishna – instruction to Pratap

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): “Listen, hearing the lectures of your Brahmo Samaj preachers, one can very well understand the inner feeling¹ of the people there. Once they took me to a meeting at the Hari Sabha.² The preacher was a pundit named Samadhyayi. He said, ‘The Lord has no sweetness.³ We have to make Him juicy⁴ with our loving devotion.’ I was flabbergasted to hear this and was reminded of a story. Once a boy said that his maternal uncle had a cowshed full of horses at his home. No horse is kept in a cowshed! Only cows are kept there! Hearing such absurdity, what can one conclude? Just this: that there are no horses or anything else there!” (*All laugh.*)

A devotee: “Not just that there are no horses there; there is not even a cow! (*All laugh.*)”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Look, He who is the fountain of love and bliss⁵ was said by that man to be totally devoid of sweetness.⁶ It only shows that he has never experienced what God is.”

1. Bhava.

2. A meeting hall for religious talks and study of the scriptures.

3. Rasa.

4. Saras.

5. Rasa-swarup.

6. Neeras.

**'I am the doer,' 'this is my house' – all this is ignorance
– 'diving deep' is the aim of life**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "Listen, I tell you, you are well read, intelligent, and serious-minded. You and Keshab were two brothers, like Gaur and Nitai. You have had enough lecturing, discussions, quarrels, and disputes. Are you interested in these things anymore? Gather your whole mind and concentrate it on God. Just jump into God."

Pratap: "Yes sir, there is no doubt about that. This clearly is my duty now. But I am doing all this to preserve Keshab's name."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "You say you're doing all this to keep his name alive. But after some time this spirit will not last. Listen to a story.

"A person had his house on the top of a hill. It was a small, thatched house. He had laboured hard to build it. After a few days there was a terrible storm. The house began to shake. The man became very worried as to how to save it. He said, 'O, Pavana Deva (the god of wind), please don't destroy my house!' But the god of wind turned a deaf ear to his words. The house began to shake violently. Then he remembered that Hanuman was the son of Pavana Deva. As soon as this thought entered his mind, he cried out, 'O Father, don't destroy this house. It is Hanuman's house! I beseech you!' But the house still shook. Who would listen to him? When he repeated 'Hanuman's house, Hanuman's house' so many times and nothing happened, he began to say, 'Father, it is Lakshmana's house, it is the house of Lakshmana!' This too carried no weight. Then he began to call out, 'Father, it is

Rama's house, it is Rama's! I say Father, don't wreck it! I beseech you!' Even now nothing happened. The house began to collapse. The question now was how to save his own life. Running out of the house, the man cried, 'It is the devil's own house!'

(*To Pratap*) "You don't have to save Keshab's name. Know that everything happens by the will of God. It was there by God's will and it is coming to an end by His will. What can you do? Now your duty is simply to give your whole mind to God, to dive deep into His ocean of love."

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing a song in his uniquely sweet voice:

Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty,
and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the
gem of Love.

Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within
your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love.

Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will
ever shine.

Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is
your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy
feet.

(*To Pratap*) "Did you listen to the song? Enough of lectures and quarrels. Now dive deep. Diving into this sea, there is no fear of death. It is the sea of immortality. Don't think that it will make you lose your head. Don't think that a person becomes mad by calling longingly on God. I said this to Narendra."

Pratap: "Who is Narendra?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, he's a young man. I said to him, 'Look here, God is the sea of nectar.¹ Don't you want to dive into that sea? Just imagine a bowl of nectar, and you are a fly. Where will you sit to drink the nectar?' Narendra said, 'I will sit on the edge of the bowl and sip by leaning over it.' I asked, 'Why? Why sit on the edge?' He said, 'If I go farther, I'll be drowned and lose my life.' Then I said, 'My boy, there is no such danger in the sea of Sat-chit-ananda. It is the sea of immortality. By diving into this sea, nobody dies, but instead becomes immortal. One does not lose one's head by being mad for God.'

(*To the devotees*) "I and mine': this is ignorance. Rasmani built the Kali Temple – everybody says this. Nobody says that God built it. So-and-so founded the Brahmo Samaj – everybody says so. Nobody says that it came into being only by the will of God. 'I am the doer': this is ignorance. 'O Lord, You are the doer, I do nothing; You are the operator, I am the machine': this is knowledge. 'O Lord, nothing is mine. This temple is not mine, the Kali Temple is not mine, the Samaj is not mine – these are all Yours. Wife, son, family – none of these is mine – they are all Yours': this is knowledge.

"People say, 'This is mine, it belongs to me.' Loving all such objects as your own is maya. But loving all things is compassion.² 'I love only the members of the Brahmo Samaj,' or 'I love only my family': this is maya. To love only your compatriots

1. Rasa: liquid sweet.

2. Daya.

is maya. To love people of all countries, to love followers of all religions, comes from love of God, from compassion.

“Maya binds man. It takes one away from God. Compassion leads one towards Him. Sukadeva and Narada both had compassion.”

Chapter Eight

Instructions to Pratap – Brahmo Samaj and ‘lust and greed’

Pratap: “Sir, those who come to you, are they making progress gradually?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You know, there’s no harm in leading a family life. But you have to live in the family like a maidservant.”

Spiritual practice in the family

“A maidservant refers to her master’s house as ‘our house,’ though she has her own home in another village. Seeing her master’s house, she says, ‘our house,’ but in her mind she knows that this house is not hers and that her own home is in the village. Again she rears her master’s son and says, ‘My Hari has become very naughty. My Hari doesn’t like sweets.’ Though she says, ‘my Hari,’ she knows that Hari is not hers, that he is her master’s son.

“Therefore, I say to those who come here, ‘Why not live a family life? There is no harm in it. But fix your mind in God while living a householder’s life. Know that the house and family are not yours. They are all God’s. ‘My real home is with God.’ And

I also say to them, 'Pray earnestly for love and devotion at His lotus feet.'

The conversation again turns to foreign countries. A devotee says, "Sir, these days learned men of the West don't accept even the existence of God."

Pratap: "They may be saying that but I don't think any of them is an atheist at heart. Many have admitted that there is some Supreme Power behind the affairs of the world."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's enough if they believe in Power.¹ How are they atheists then?"

Pratap: "Besides, Western scholars also believe in a moral government (which rewards good actions and punishes evil ones)."

After a long conversation, Pratap rises to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "What more can I tell you? I only ask that you not involve yourself in quarrels and controversies.

"And one thing more – it is 'lust and greed' that take a man away from God. They are obstacles to God-realization. Everybody praises his own wife, whether or not she is good. (*All laugh.*) Whether one's wife is good or not, if you ask what kind of a wife he has, a man will immediately say, 'Sir, she is good indeed.'"

Pratap: "May I leave now?"

Pratap leaves. Thakur's sweet words about renunciation of 'lust and gold' have not ended. The

1. Shakti.

leaves of the trees in Surendra's garden are fluttering and murmuring in the southern breeze. All these words mix in their sound, but as they float into the infinite sky, they have struck the hearts of the devotees.

But have these words resounded in Pratap's heart?

After some time Manilal Mallick says to Thakur, "Sir, you must now depart for Dakshineswar. Keshab Sen's mother and other ladies of the house are going there to have your darshan. Not finding you there, they may be disappointed and leave."

Keshab had departed from this mortal world many months ago. His venerable mother, wife, and other ladies of his household are going to visit Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani Mallick*): "Wait a little, brother. I haven't had my nap. Besides, I can't do anything in a hurry. If they have gone there, what can I do about it? They will have a nice stroll in the garden and enjoy it."

After a little rest Thakur is ready to leave for Dakshineswar, but before leaving he prays for the welfare of Surendra. He visits all the rooms, one by one, softly repeating the name of God. He doesn't want to leave anything unfinished. Standing there, he says, "I didn't eat luchis¹ before. Bring me a little now."

He takes a small piece of luchi, eats it and then says, "This means something. If I remembered that

1. Fried bread.

I had not eaten the luchi, I would want to come back for it.”

Mani Mallick: “That would have been nice! We, too, could have come with you!”

All the devotees laugh.

Section XI

Sri Ramakrishna's Meeting with a Pundit

Chapter One

Visit to Ishan's House

Today is the Car Festival,¹ Wednesday, 25 June 1884, the second day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. At Ishan's invitation, Sri Ramakrishna has arrived this morning at his house in the Thanthania district of Calcutta. Upon arrival Thakur has come to know that Pundit Shashadhar is staying nearby with the Chatterjis on College Street. He is very keen to meet the pundit, so it is decided that he will go to see him in the evening.

It is now about ten o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with devotees in Ishan's ground floor parlour with some brahmins from Bhattapada, one of them a Bhagavata pundit. Hazra and two devotees have come with Thakur. Ishan's sons, one of them Shrish, and a devotee who worships Shakti and wears a vermilion mark on his forehead are also there. Thakur has a sense of humor. Seeing the vermilion mark, he laughs and says, "He is branded!"

After a while Narendra and M. arrive from their Calcutta homes. After saluting Thakur, they sit beside him. Thakur had told M. previously, "I'll be going to Ishan's house on a certain date. You go too, and bring Narendra with you."

1. Ratha Yatra.

Thakur says to M., “The other day I wanted to go to visit your house. Where do you live?”

M.: “Sir, now I live at Telipada in Shyampukur, near the school.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Didn’t you go to school today?”

M.: “Sir, today the school is closed for the Car Festival.”

Since the death of Narendra’s father, there have been great problems in his family. Narendra is the eldest of several brothers and sisters. His father had been a lawyer but had not saved anything. Narendra is looking for a job to meet the family’s expenses. Thakur has asked Ishan and some other devotees to find him a job. Ishan is a superintendent in the Comptroller General’s office. Thakur worries whenever he hears of Narendra’s family problems.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): “I have spoken to Ishan about you. He was at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar one day. I spoke to him then. He knows many people.”

In addition to Thakur, Ishan has invited many friends for the occasion. Songs will be sung to the accompaniment of banya,¹ tabla, and tanpura,² and one member of the family has brought very fine flour for the pakhavaj.³ At about eleven, Ishan asks Narendra to sing.

1. A semi-circular instrument.

2. A stringed musical instrument.

3. A barrel-shaped drum with membranes placed over each end; the left end is the bass and it is smeared with varying amounts of moist

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): “Just fine flour! Then it will be quite some time until our meal is ready.”

Ishan: “No sir, it won't take too long.”

Some of the devotees laugh. A scholar well versed in the Bhagavata laughs as he recites an uncommon couplet, not written in any book.¹ After reciting the couplet, he explains it:

“Poetry is more pleasing than philosophy. When poetry is recited or heard, schools of philosophy such as Vedanta, Samkhya, Nyaya, and Patanjala all seem dry. But music is more attractive than poetry. Even a heart made of stone melts on hearing music. Then again, if a beautiful woman passes by, the poetry is forgotten and the song loses its flavour. The whole mind goes to that woman. But when you're hungry and craving food, then you want neither poetry nor song nor woman. The thought of food is all-consuming!”

Sri Ramakrishna: “He is witty indeed.”

When the pakhavaj is tuned, Narendra begins to sing, and Thakur goes upstairs to the drawing room overlooking the road for a rest. M. and Shrish accompany him. Kshetra Nath Chatterji, Ishan's father-in-law, built the room.

flour, dough, to vary the pitch. It has a strap that goes around the neck of the drummer to hold it while standing.

1. *Kavyam darshanam hanti, kavyen giten hanyate, Gitancha istrivilasen, sarve hanti bubhukshuta.*

Upon obtaining this couplet it was later included in the footnote.

M. introduces Shrish, saying, “He is a learned man, very serene in temperament. He’s been my classmate since childhood. He’s a lawyer now.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “For such a person to be a lawyer!”

M.: “He took up the profession by mistake.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I know a lawyer named Ganesh. Sometimes he comes to the Dakshineswar Kali Temple with some other gentlemen. Panna also comes. He’s not handsome, but he sings well. He has great regard for me. He is a simple-hearted man.

(*To Shrish*) “What do you think is the essence of life?”

Shrish: “God exists and He alone does everything. Even so, what we conceive of His attributes isn’t right. How can a man conceive of Him? He’s infinite!”

Sri Ramakrishna: “How many trees are in a garden and how many branches each tree has – what is the use of such calculation? You’ve come to the garden to eat mangoes. Eat them and leave. It’s only to attain love and devotion to God that you’ve taken birth as a human being. Eat the mangoes and be satisfied.

“You’ve come to drink wine. What is the use in knowing how many maunds¹ of wine are in the wine shop? Just a tumbler-full is enough for you.

1. An Indian measurement of weight.

“What is the need for you to know His infinite affairs?”

“If you look for His attributes for millions of years, you will still not be able to know even a fraction of them.”

Thakur is silent for a while and then he resumes talking. A brahmin from Bhattapada is also there.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “There is nothing in worldly life. As things go, Ishan's is better than most. If his family had not been good, if the boys had been womanizers, drug-addicts, drunkards, or disobedient, there would have been no end to his troubles. In his family everyone's mind is turned towards God. It's a truly religious household. It is rare. I have seen very few homes such as this. Usually there are endless misunderstandings, quarrels, and jealousy. Besides, there are disease, sorrow, and poverty. Seeing this, I said, ‘Mother, please turn my mind from the world.’ Just see what problems Narendra is facing! His father is dead, the members of his family don't have food to eat, a job is so difficult to find. He's trying hard, but he can't find one. Just see how he is wandering around!

“M., you used to come to Dakshineswar so often. Why have your visits become so few? Maybe you've gotten too attached to your family. Is that why?”

“This isn't anybody's fault. Everywhere there is ‘lust and greed.’ That's why I pray, ‘Mother, if I ever have to take a human body again, don't make me a worldly man!’ ”

The brahmin from Bhattapada: “But sir, household life has been praised in the holy books.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, but it is very difficult.”

Thakur changes the subject of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “How wrong of us! They are singing – Narendra is singing – and we’ve all left the room.”

Chapter Two

Bhakti Yoga, not Karma Yoga, is for the Kaliyuga

At about four o’clock, Thakur gets into the carriage. He is very delicate, so his body must be treated very carefully. It is difficult for him to walk on the road; he cannot walk even a short distance. When he gets into the carriage, he is absorbed in bhava samadhi. It is the rainy season and is drizzling. The sky is overcast and the road is muddy. The devotees walk behind the carriage. Being the day of the Car Festival, children are blowing horns made from palm leaves.

The carriage stops at the entrance to the house Shashadhar is visiting. Thakur is warmly received by the host and his relatives.

A staircase leads up to the drawing room. As he goes up, Sri Ramakrishna sees Shashadhar coming to welcome him. The pundit appears to be middle-aged. His complexion is fair and shining and he wears a rosary of rudraksha beads around his neck. Humbly and with great reverence, he salutes Thakur and leads him to the drawing room. Devotees follow and take their seats.

Everyone is keen to sit near Sri Ramakrishna and to listen to the nectar of his words. Narendra, Rakhal, Ram, M., and many other devotees are present. Hazra has also come with him from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple.

Looking at the pundit, Thakur goes into a semiconscious state. After a while, in the same state, he smiles at the pundit and says, "Very well, very well!" He adds, "What kind of lectures do you give?"

Shashadhar: "Sir, I try to explain the teachings of the scriptures."

Sri Ramakrishna: "For the Kaliyuga the path of love and devotion as preached by Narada is enjoined. Where is the time to perform all those rituals mentioned in the scriptures? These days the decoction of ten medicinal roots¹ does not help cure a fever. By the time such a decoction begins to show effect, the patient runs the risk of being carried off. 'Fever mixture' is the medicine for the present age. If you ask them to perform rituals, give them fish minus the head and tail. I tell people that they don't have to perform the sandhya² and other such elaborate acts. Recitation of the Gayatri³ is enough. If you have to talk of rituals at all, do so only to a few, like Ishan."

Lecture to worldly men

"You may lecture a thousand times, and you'll not be able to change worldly men. Can one drive a nail into a stone wall? The nail is what will bend. The wall will remain as it is. What can the blow of a sword do to a crocodile? The bitter gourd water

1. Dashamul pachan, a traditional Hindu prescription.

2. Divine service three times a day.

3. A short text from the Vedas, the repetition of which leads to meditation on God.

pot¹ of a wandering monk goes to the four principle places of pilgrimage in India,² yet it remains as bitter as before. Your lectures to worldly men are not helping very much. You will understand this gradually. A calf can't stand all at once. It falls to the ground and then stands up again. That is how it learns to stand up and walk.”

**First love³ and then reasoning – karma falls off with
God-realization – yoga and samadhi**

“You cannot distinguish a devotee from a worldly person. That isn't your fault. During the first burst of a storm, it is not possible to distinguish a tamarind tree from a mango tree.

“Before God-realization one cannot suddenly give up performance of rituals. How long, then, does one have to perform sandhya and such ritualistic worship? As long as tears do not flow and the hair does not stand on end at the sound of God's name. If tears fill the eyes even once when saying 'Om Rama,' know for certain that your karmas are over. You will not have to perform sandhya and other rituals any more.

“The blossom falls off as soon as the fruit appears. Karma is the blossom, and love for God is the fruit. The daughter-in-law of the house can't work much when she's pregnant; her mother-in-law gradually frees her from work. During the last month she barely lets her work at all. When the infant is born, the mother only attends to it and not

1. Kamandalu.
2. Dhams.
3. Nava-anuraga.

to any other work. The sandhya merges into Gayatri and then Gayatri into Om. Om then becomes merged in samadhi – as the sound of a bell 't-o-m.' Following the trail of the sound 'Om,' the yogi becomes lost in the Supreme Brahman.¹ Sandhya and such karmas disappear in samadhi. In this way the duties of the jnani fall off."

Chapter Three

Mere learning is of no use – spiritual practice, discrimination, and dispassion

While talking of samadhi, Sri Ramakrishna goes into an ecstatic mood. A divine light begins to shine from his beautiful face. He has no external consciousness. Not a sound comes from his mouth and his eyes are fixed. Surely he is having a vision of the Lord of the Universe. After a long time he returns to normal consciousness. Like a child, he says, "I'll have some water." Whenever he asks for water after samadhi, the devotees know that he is gradually returning to normal consciousness.

Still in ecstasy Thakur says to the Divine Mother, "Mother, the other day you showed me Ishwar Vidyasagar. After that I said, 'Mother, I want to see another pundit.' That is why You have brought me here."

Glancing at Shashadhar, he says, "Son, gain a little more power. Practice spiritual disciplines for some time more. You have barely started climbing

1. Parabrahman.

the tree before you wish for a bunch of fruit. Of course you do all this for the benefit of others.”

Saying this, Thakur salutes Shashadhar by bowing his head.

And he adds, “When I heard about you for the first time, I asked whether this pundit is just a learned man, or if he also has discrimination and non-attachment.”

**One cannot become a religious teacher without
receiving a commission from God**

“A pundit without discrimination is no pundit at all.

“If one has received a commission from God, it is all right to teach others. When a person teaches after getting a commission, nobody can confound him.

“Getting only a single ray from the goddess of learning (Saraswati), one attains such strength that even the most learned become like earthworms before him.

“When you light a lamp, swarms of moths come to it by themselves: they don’t have to be called. Similarly, one who has received a commission from God doesn’t have to invite people by announcing that a lecture will be delivered at a certain time. No message needs to be sent. He has such attraction that people flock to him of their own accord. Then princes and gentlemen come in swarms. And they ask again and again, ‘What would you like? I have brought mangoes, sandesh (a Bengali sweet), money, a shawl, and so on. Will you accept them?’ I

tell all those people, 'Keep them. I don't care for those things. I don't want anything.'

"Does a magnet invite iron by saying, 'Come near?' It doesn't have to say that; the iron rushes to the magnet because of the magnet's attraction.

"Such a man may not be a pundit, but don't think that he lacks knowledge. Can you acquire knowledge by just reading books? The knowledge of a person who has received a commission from God is inexhaustible. This knowledge flows from God and is never-ending.

"In the countryside, one person weighs paddy while another pushes heap after heap toward him. It's the same thing with the person who has received a commission from God. The Divine Mother keeps on pushing heaps of knowledge toward him from behind. This knowledge never comes to an end. If the Divine Mother but once casts a glance, can there remain any lack of knowledge? That's why I ask whether or not you have received a commission."

Hazra: "Yes, surely he's received a commission. Haven't you, sir?"

The pundit: "No, I haven't received such a commission."

The host: "He may not have received a commission, but he lectures out of a sense of duty."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What will his lectures achieve if he has no commission from God?"

"Once a Brahma preacher said in his lecture, 'Brothers, I used to drink so much liquor! I used to

do this, and I used to do that.’ Hearing it, people began to whisper among themselves, ‘What is this rascal saying? He used to drink liquor?’ His words caused confusion in the audience. A lecture benefits no one if the speaker lacks a good character.

“A high government official¹ from Barisal said, ‘Sir, you begin to preach and I will get ready.’ I said, ‘Brother, listen to a story. In the countryside,² there is a pond known as Haldarpukur. People used to defecate on its bank. In the morning people coming to the pond would shout abuses in plenty, but to no avail. The very next morning they would see the bank littered with faeces again. After some days the municipality sent a worker who placed a notice near the pond. What a wonder! The defecation on the banks stopped immediately!

“So I say, a lecture by a worthless person is of no use. When you have the badge of authority, then alone will people listen to you. Unless you receive God’s commission, you can’t teach others. He who is going to preach must have sufficient spiritual power. In Calcutta there are so many wrestlers like Hanumanpuri. You have to wrestle with them. These people (the congregation) are mere sheep!

“Chaitanya Deva was an incarnation of God. What is left of the work that even he did, just tell me! What good can come out of lectures by those who have not received a commission from God?”

1. Sub-judge.

2. Kamarpukur village, where Sri Ramakrishna was born and brought up.

How does one receive a commission?

Sri Ramakrishna: "So I say, become absorbed at God's lotus feet."

Saying this and intoxicated with the wine of divine love, Thakur begins to sing:

Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty,
and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the
gem of Love.

"By drowning in this sea, one does not die. It is the ocean of immortality."

**Instruction to Narendra – God is the ocean of
immortality**

"I said to Narendra, 'God is an ocean of nectar. Tell me if you will dive into it. Imagine a cup full of sugar syrup and you're a fly. Where will you perch to drink the syrup?' Narendra said, 'I'll sit on the edge of the bowl and stretch my neck to sip from there. If I were to go farther, I would drown.' Then I said, 'My son, this is the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda. There's no fear of death in it. It's the ocean of immortality.' Only ignorant people say you shouldn't overdo your love and devotion for God. Is there any limit to love for God? So I say to you, immerse yourself in the sea of Sat-chit-ananda.

"What worry can there be when you have realized God? Then you will not only receive His commission, but also teach mankind."□

Chapter Four

Countless paths for God-realization – Bhakti Yoga is the path for this age

Sri Ramakrishna: “Look here, there are numberless paths to reach the ocean of immortality. Any path you take, it is enough if you can jump into this ocean. Imagine a reservoir of the nectar of immortality. If only a small drop of it somehow falls into your mouth, you become immortal. Whether you jump into it or go into it slowly by a staircase and take a drop of it from there, or if you are pushed into it, the result will be the same. You will become immortal by just tasting a drop of this nectar.

“There are innumerable paths. Among them are the path of knowledge, the path of action, and the path of love and devotion. You will attain God by any path if you have sincere longing for Him.

“There are three kinds of yogas: the yoga of knowledge, the yoga of action and the yoga of love and devotion.

“Jnana Yoga. In the path of knowledge the jnani wants to know Brahman, the Absolute. He says to himself, ‘Not this, not this.’ He reasons, ‘Only Brahman is real and the world unreal.’ He meditates on what is real and what is unreal. When his reasoning stops, he goes into samadhi and he gains the knowledge of the Absolute.

“Karma Yoga. The path of action is to keep the mind in God by doing work – this is what you are

teaching. It is the practice of breath control,¹ meditation,² and concentration without attachment to results. If householders attend to their duties in life in an unattached manner with devotion for Him and surrender the result of their work to Him, it, too, is Karma Yoga. To perform worship, repetition of God's name, and other such actions, surrendering the result to God, is also the path of action. The goal of this path is also God-realization.

“Bhakti Yoga. The path of devotion, Bhakti Yoga, is in fixing the mind on God by repeating His name and singing His glories. Bhakti Yoga is the easy path for the Kaliyuga. It is indeed the path for the present age.

“Karma Yoga. The path of action is very difficult. In the first place, as I told you earlier, you do not have the time for it these days. Where is the time to perform all the rituals enjoined in the scriptures? Life is short in the Kaliyuga. And then it is extremely difficult to work without expectation of reward, to work unattached. One cannot be truly detached without having first realized God. Attachment to results come, one knows not from where.

“The path of knowledge is also very difficult in this age. In the first place, human life is dependent on food. Second, life is short. Third, it is not possible to rid oneself of body consciousness. Spiritual knowledge is impossible without freedom from body-consciousness. The follower of the path of

1. Pranayama.

2. Dhyana.

knowledge says, 'I am Brahman; I am not this body, I am beyond hunger, thirst, disease, grief, birth, death, pleasure, pain, and the like.' If you are aware of disease, grief, pleasure, pain, then how can you be a man of knowledge? When your hand is torn by thorns, you bleed profusely and suffer pain; yet you say, 'No, my hand is not scratched and torn. Nothing has happened to me.'

The paths of knowledge and action are not the religion of this age

“That is why, for this age, the path of love and devotion is best. One can approach God more easily through it than by any other path. One can reach God by way of knowledge or action and by other paths too, but all these are very difficult.

“Bhakti Yoga is the religion for this age. This does not mean that a lover of God reaches one goal and the followers of the path of knowledge and action reach another. It means that those who want the knowledge of the Absolute will attain it, even if they adopt and tread the path of love and devotion. Remember that the gracious loving Lord of the devotees¹ grants the knowledge of Brahman if He so wishes.”

**Does a devotee attain knowledge of the Absolute?
How does he perform actions and prayer?**

“The devotee wants to see God with form. He wants to talk to Him. Usually he doesn't want the knowledge of the Absolute. Even so, God's will is the law. If He wills, He can bestow on the devotee

1. Bhakta-vatsala.

all spiritual wealth. He gives not only love and devotion, but divine knowledge as well. If one can get to Calcutta, one can also see Fort Maidan, the Asiatic Society's Museum – everything.

“Now the question is how to reach Calcutta.

“If you reach the Mother of the Universe, you will get love and devotion as well as spiritual knowledge. In bhava samadhi,¹ you see God with form; in nirvikalpa samadhi, you see akhanda Sat-chit-ananda (indivisible, absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). Then your ‘I-ness’ – name and form – do not exist.

“The devotee says, ‘Mother, I am afraid of performing work with a motive. In such work there is desire, and the action will yield some fruit. It is very difficult to work with detachment. By doing work with motive, I will forget You. Therefore, I do not want to do it. Until I attain You, may my work decrease. What little I have to do, may I do without attachment, and may I gain greater love and devotion for You. Until I attain You, may my mind not engage itself in any new work. I shall work only when You command me; otherwise not.’”

1. A kind of ecstasy attained by following the path of love and devotion for God.

Chapter Five

**Pilgrimage and Sri Ramakrishna –
three classes of religious teachers**

The pundit: “Sir, how far did you go on your pilgrimage?”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “I saw a few places. Hazra went farther and higher; he went to Hrishikesh. (*All laugh.*) I didn’t go that far, or that high. Kites and vultures soar very high, but their eyes remain fixed on the charnel pits where carcasses of dead animals are thrown. (*All laugh.*) Do you know what I mean by charnel pits? ‘Lust and greed.’

“If you can cultivate love and devotion for God sitting here, what is the need to go on pilgrimage? When I went to Kashi, I saw that the trees were the same, the tamarind leaves were also the same.

“If you do not develop love for God at places of pilgrimage, your visit to those places has been of no use. Love for God alone is the essential thing, the only thing needed. Do you know what I mean by kites and vultures? Many people come here and they talk big and say, ‘We have performed many of the rites and duties enjoined by the holy books.’ But their minds remain attached to the world. They are busy with money, name and honour, comfort, and so on.”

The pundit: “Yes, sir. Going on pilgrimage is like searching for diamonds and jewels while throwing away Vishnu’s own gem.”¹

1. Kaustubhmani.

Sri Ramakrishna: “And you must also know that, though you may preach a thousand things, they will be of no use unless it is the right time. When going to bed, a child says to his mother, ‘Mother, please wake me up when I have to go to the bathroom.’ The mother replies, ‘Child, its pressure itself will wake you up. You don’t have to worry about that.’ (*Laughter.*)

“Similarly, longing for God comes in its own time.”

Preach only to the competent – is God merciful?

“There are three classes of physicians.

“One class feels the pulse of the patient, prescribes medicine for him, and leaves him, saying, ‘Take this medicine.’ Such physicians are the lowest class. Similarly, some religious teachers give instructions, but they don’t check to see whether or not their teachings have done any good. They don’t bother to find out.

“Another class of physician arranges for the medicine and asks the patient to take it. If the patient does not want to take it, they reason with him in many ways. These are physicians of the mediocre class. Likewise, there are mediocre-class religious teachers. They preach and also explain to people in many ways so that their advice is followed.

“And then there is the highest class of physician. If gentle persuasion fails to make the patient understand, such physicians even use force. If need be, they put their knees on the patient’s

chest and force the medicine down his throat. In the same way, there is a highest class of religious teacher. Such teachers also use force to direct their disciples to God.”

The pundit: “Sir, if there are religious teachers of the highest class, why do you say that one doesn’t gain knowledge till the right time?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That’s right. But think: if the medicine doesn’t reach the stomach, if it is vomited, what can the physician do? Then even the physician of the highest class is helpless.

“You should instruct only after judging the listener. You people instruct without having examined the receptacle. When a boy comes to me, I ask him about his family. Suppose his father is dead and he has left some debts. How can the boy give his mind to God? Do you hear what I am saying, brother?”

The pundit: “Yes sir, I am listening to everything.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Once a group of Sikh soldiers came to the temple at Dakshineswar. I met them in front of Mother Kali’s shrine. One of them said, ‘God is very kind.’ I said, ‘Are you sure? How do you know?’ He said, ‘Why Maharaj, God gives us food. He cares so much for us!’ I said, ‘What is that to wonder at? God is the father of all. If a father doesn’t look after his son, who else will? Will people of the neighbourhood do it?’”

Narendra: “So shouldn’t God be called merciful?”

Sri Ramakrishna: "Am I stopping you from calling Him merciful? What I mean is that God is our own. He's not a stranger."

Pundit: "Precious words!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "I was listening to your song, but I didn't enjoy it. I got up and left. I said to myself, 'His mind is now set on finding a job, so his singing is dull.'"

Narendra felt ashamed. He blushed and remained silent.

Chapter Six

Departure

Thakur asks for a drink of water. A glass of water had already been placed close to him, but he doesn't drink it. He asks for another glass. It was later heard that a very sensual person had touched the first glass.

The pundit (*to Hazra*): "You live with him day and night. You must be supremely happy."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is a great day for me today. I have seen the moon on the second day of the bright fortnight. (*All laugh.*) Do you understand why I said the moon of the second day of the bright fortnight? Sita said to Ravana, 'Ravana, you are the full moon, and my Ramachandra is the crescent moon of the second day of the bright fortnight.' Ravana did not understand, so he was very happy. But by this, Sita meant that Ravana had reached the limit of his power and that now he would wane every day like the full moon. Ramachandra, being

the moon of the second lunar day, would shine brighter and brighter day by day.”

Thakur rises. The pundit salutes him reverently, as do his friends and companions. Thakur and his disciples say goodbye.

Chapter Seven

Return to Ishan's house

Thakur returns to Ishan's house with the devotees. It is not yet dusk. They come and sit in Ishan's ground floor parlour. Some of the devotees, including a Bhagavata pundit and Ishan's sons, are already there

Sri Ramakrishna: “I said to Shashadhar, ‘You want the cluster of fruit before you even climb the tree! Practice spiritual disciplines a little more. Then you can teach others.’”

Ishan: “Everybody thinks that he can teach. A glowworm thinks it is illumining the world. Somebody said, ‘O glowworm, what light can you give? You only make the darkness more evident.’”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling a little*): “But he is not just a scholar. He also has some discrimination and dispassion.”

The Bhagavata pundit from Bhattapada is sitting there. He is between seventy and seventy-five years old. He is watching Thakur.

The Bhagavata pundit (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “You are a great soul.”

Sri Ramakrishna: "You can say that about Narada, Prahlada, or Sukadeva. I am like your child.

"But you can say so from the point of view that the devotee of God is greater than God because the devotee carries God in his heart: 'The devotee thinks of Me as small and of himself as great.' (*They all feel joy.*) Yashoda wanted to bind Krishna to her with a rope. She thought that if she didn't look after him, no one else would. Sometimes God is the magnet and the devotee a needle. By His power of attraction, He pulls the devotee. But sometimes the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. The devotee's attraction is so strong that, enchanted by his ecstatic love, God Himself comes to him."

Thakur is about to return to Dakshineswar. He goes to the southern verandah of the parlour. Ishan and the other devotees stand there with him. Thakur imparts many instructions to Ishan during their conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "The devotee who calls upon God while living in the household is brave and a real hero. God says: 'He who has renounced the world will naturally call upon Me and serve Me. There is no bravery in that. If he does not call upon Me, others will say, "Shame on him!" But the man who, while living in the midst of worldly duties, calls upon Me and looks after Me – after having pushed away a twenty-maund¹ stone,

1. One ton.

as it were – he is really blessed! He is brave, a hero indeed!”

Bhagavata pundit: “The holy books say the same thing. There is the story of the pious hunter¹ and the chaste wife. An ascetic thought that he had attained a very high state because he had burned a crow and a crane to ashes [with a glance]. He went to the house of a chaste wife. She had so much love for her husband that she served him day and night. When the husband came home, she would give him water to wash his feet; she would even dry his feet with her hair. The ascetic had come as a guest. When there was delay in getting alms from her, he shouted, ‘You will come to no good!’ The chaste woman at once replied, ‘This is not like burning a crow or a crane to ashes. Wait a little, holy man. Let me finish my service to my husband. Then I’ll attend to you.’

“The same ascetic went to a pious hunter to attain the knowledge of the Absolute. The hunter used to sell meat, but he would render service to his parents day and night, looking upon them as God embodied. The ascetic was wonderstruck when he saw him. He thought, ‘This butcher sells meat and is a worldly man. What knowledge of Brahman can he impart to me?’ But the butcher was a knower of the Absolute.”

Thakur is about to enter a carriage. He is standing near the door of Ishan’s father-in-law’s house. Ishan and the devotees stand close, waiting

1. Dharma Vyadha.

to say goodbye. Thakur again instructs Ishan during the course of conversation.

“Live in the world like an ant. In the world is both the True¹ and the transitory, all mixed up, just as sugar is mixed with sand. Be an ant and take only the sugar.

“Water and milk are mixed together, and so are spiritual joy and worldly pleasures. Like a swan, you must take only the milk and leave the water.

“And be like the waterfowl. When water touches its body, it flutters its wings and shakes it off. Or become like a mud fish. It lives in mud, but look at its body: it is clean and shines brightly.

“In the world² there is indeed a mixture of truth³ and make-believe.⁴ Discard the make-believe and take the truth.”

Thakur departs for Dakshineswar in a carriage.

1. Nitya; the Absolute; the Eternal.

2. Gol-mal.

3. Mal.

4. Gol.

Section XII

Another Visit to the Sinthi Brahma Samaj Instructions to Vijaykrishna and Other Brahmans Joyful Moments with Them

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna in Samadhi

The Brahma devotees have again assembled at the Sinti Brahma Samaj. It is 19 October 1884, the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kartik, the day after the Kali Puja. This is the time for the Autumn Festival. A session of the Brahma Samaj is being held again in the beautiful garden house of Beni Madhava Pal. The morning worship is over. The Paramahansa Deva arrives at half past four. When his carriage stops in the middle of the garden, groups of devotees immediately encircle him. The pulpit of the Samaj has been set in the first room, before which is the vestibule. Thakur enters the vestibule and sits down. The devotees follow and sit around him. They include Vijay and Trailokya among others. A former member of the Brahma Samaj, a sub-judge, is also present.

The Samaj house has been beautifully decorated for the great celebration, with multi-coloured flags strung about here and there. Some parts of the building and the ledges of the ventilators have been decorated with green foliage to give the illusion of beautiful and attractive trees. Outside, the blue autumnal sky casts

its reflection in the clear water of the lake mentioned earlier.¹ In the garden, on both sides of the red brick-dust pathways, are rows of flowering trees and fruit trees. Today again the devotees will hear Thakur chant the Vedas; he will chant the same verses which once emanated from the mouths of the Aryan rishis. The same message was heard by the twelve unlettered fishermen disciples from the mouth of Jesus – the supreme sannyasin in human form, his mind and soul fixed in Brahman, solicitous of the suffering of mankind, the gracious, loving Lord of the devotees, God-incarnate, overwhelmed with love for God. A similar chant issued from the Lord Sri Krishna in the form of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* on the holy field of Kurukshetra. These divine words Arjuna,² the humble and sincere son of Kunti, heard in thundering sounds from the mouth of Guru Sat-chit-ananda, who had come down in human form and served as his charioteer:

kaviṃ purāṇamanuśāsītāram aṇoraṇīyaṃsamanu-
smaredyaḥ |
sarvasya dhātāramacintyarūpam ādityavarṇaṃ
tamaśaḥ parastāt ||

prayānakāle manasā'calena bhaktyā yukto yoga-
balena caiva |
bhruvormadhye prāṇamāveśya samyak sa taṃ
paraṃ puruṣamupaiti divyam ||

yadaḥsaram vedaḥ vadanti viśanti yadyatayo
vītarāgāḥ |
yadicchanto brahmacaryaṃ caranti tatte padaṃ
saṅgrahaṇa pravakṣye ||

[He who meditates on the Omniscient, the Ancient, the Ruler, smaller than an atom, the

1. Refer Section III of this Volume, 28 October 1882.
2. Gudakesha.

support of all, of inconceivable form and sun-like like effulgence beyond all darkness; he, with a steady mind at the time of death, with devotion and the strength of yoga, fixing his life-force between the eyebrows, reaches the Supreme Purusha.

To you I shall proclaim briefly, That which the knowers of the Veda call the Imperishable, into which ascetics, freed from passion, enter, and desiring which they lead lives of self-control.]

– Bhagavad Gita 8:9–11

As Sri Ramakrishna sits down, he sees the beautifully decorated pulpit of the Samaj and bows to pay his homage. Since they talk of God from this platform, he feels that it is a holy spot. He sees that they talk of the Imperishable from here, so all holy places meet here. As on seeing a courtroom one thinks of lawsuits and a judge, on seeing where the story of the Lord is spoken, one is inspired with God.

Trailokya sings. Sri Ramakrishna says, “You sing ‘O Mother, make me mad’ so beautifully. Please sing it.”

Trailokya sings:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.

What need have I for knowledge or reason?

With the wine of Your love make me drunk,

You who steal the hearts of Your devotees!

Drown me in the ocean of Your love.

In this world, Your madhouse, some laugh, some weep,
some dance in joy.

Jesus, Moses, Gauranga,¹ – all are drunk with the wine of Your love.

When, O Mother, shall I join their blessed company?

In the heavens too is Your fair of madness: like guru, like disciples.

Who can understand this play of love?

O Mother, You who are mad with love, who are indeed the glory of the mad,

Make this, your beggar Premdas, rich with the treasure of love.

As Sri Ramakrishna hears the song, there is a change in his mood. He at once passes into samadhi – on seeing within himself the Great Essence beyond all essences, beyond the twenty-four cosmic principles, and beyond even mahat.² It is as if all his organs of action and of sense, mind, intellect, and ego have vanished. His body is as motionless as a picture. Once, seeing such a state in Sri Krishna, Yudhishthira, the chief Pandava, wept, his soul completely merged in Sri Krishna. At that time Bhishma Deva, the pride of the dynasty of the Aryans, was lying on a bed of arrows meditating deeply on God in his last moments. The Kurukshetra battle had just ended. It was a day when one cried in spite of oneself. Not able to understand Sri Krishna's state of samadhi, he wept. He was afraid that Sri Krishna had left his body.□□□□

1. Sri Chaitanya.

2. The second category in the evolution of the universe; the cosmic mind.

Chapter Two

Talk on spiritual matters – formless God of the Brahma Samaj

After some time, Sri Ramakrishna comes back to partial consciousness and instructs the Brahma devotees. His divine mood is so intense that he sounds intoxicated. It gradually diminishes. At last he returns to the normal state of consciousness.

“I shall eat hemp” – the Gita and the eight occult powers¹ – what is God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna: “Mother, I don’t want the joy of the Causal.² I shall eat siddhi.

“By siddhi, I mean the attainment of the Essence – not any of the eight occult powers. Krishna spoke of this to Arjuna. He said, ‘Brother, listen. If a person has even one of the eight occult powers, he cannot attain Me.’ Because with occult power comes pride, and when there is even a trace of pride, a person cannot reach God.

“There are beginners,³ those who are practicing,⁴ the spiritually mature,⁵ and the most perfect among the mature ones.⁶ He who has just begun spiritual practices belongs to first class. A beginner applies marks of sandalwood paste on his

1. Siddhi, the word for “occult power” also means “hemp.” Sri Ramakrishna is making a play on words

2. Karanananda.

3. Pravartakas.

4. Sadhakas.

5. Siddhas.

6. The siddha of the siddhas.

forehead, applies a sectarian mark on his body,¹ and uses a rosary. He shows a lot of external signs like these. The practicing aspirant is more advanced. His tendency to show off is reduced. He has yearning for God and calls upon Him sincerely. He repeats His Name and prays to Him with a guileless heart. Who is a spiritually mature person? One who has a firm conviction that God exists and that He does everything. Such a person has seen God. And who is ‘the most perfect among the mature ones?’ One who has talked with God – not just seen Him, but talked to Him as a son to his father, or a mother to her child, or a friend to a friend, or as a lover to the beloved.

“It is one thing to have the faith that fire is in wood; it is another to make fire with that wood, to cook rice, and to feel filled and satisfied by eating it.

“There is no end to divine states. There is always a state higher than the one before.”

**God of worldly men – yearning and realization – be
firm**

(In a deep spiritual mood) “These people are Brahmajnanis and believe in God without form. This is good.

(To Brahma devotees) “Believe firmly in one – either in God with form or God without form. Only then will you realize Him, not otherwise. A man with firm faith in God with form will attain Him, as will one who has firm faith in the formless God.

1. Tilak.

Whether you eat sweet bread straight or sideways, it will taste sweet both ways. (*All laugh.*)

“But you have to be steady and call upon Him with a yearning heart. Do you know what the God of a worldly man is like? Like children imitating a quarrel between a younger aunt and her elder, each saying, ‘I swear by God.’ It is also like a well-dressed gentleman, chewing betel leaf and holding a walking stick in his hand, who plucks a flower as he strolls in the garden and says to his companion, ‘What a beautiful¹ flower God has made!’ But the feeling of such a worldly man is only momentary, like a drop of water on red-hot iron.

“You have to be firm in one ideal. Dive. Without diving deep, you cannot reach the gems at the bottom of the sea. It is of no help to swim on the surface.”

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing in his sweet voice the same song that had charmed Keshab Sen and other devotees. All those present feel as if they are in heaven or in Vaikuntha (the abode of Lord Vishnu).

Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.

Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love. Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will ever shine.

Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy feet.

1. Sri Ramakrishna actually used this word in English.

Chapter Three

In the company of Brahma devotees – Brahma Samaj and talk on the glory of God

Sri Ramakrishna: “Dive. Learn to love God. Forget yourself in intense love for Him. Look here, I have heard your worship. Why do you talk so much of the glory of God in your Brahma Samaj? ‘O Lord! You have made the sky. You have made big oceans. You have created the moon, the sun, the stars, and so on.’ What is the need of all this?”

“People are struck with wonder when they see a rich man’s garden: what beautiful trees, what flowers, what a lake. They stand speechless at the sight of the drawing room and beautiful pictures. But who looks for the owner of the garden? Only one or two people. If you look for God with a longing heart, you can see Him, you can know Him, you can talk to Him just as I am talking to you. I tell you truly, you can see Him.

“But for whom do I speak these words? Who believes them?”

Scriptures and revelation – the law of revelation

“Can one reach God by reading scriptures? By reading scriptures you might at most understand that He exists. But unless you yourself dive deep, you cannot see God. Only when you have dived deep and He lets you know Him are all your doubts removed. You may read a book a thousand times, you may chant a thousand verses, but you cannot comprehend God without earnestly diving into Him. By mere scholarship you may deceive man, but you can’t attain God.

“Of what use are scriptures or other holy books alone? Without His grace nothing can happen. Seek for God with a longing heart! By His grace you will see Him. He will talk to you.”

Brahmo Samaj and equality – is God partial?

The sub-judge: “Does He shower His grace more on one than another? If that is so, God is guilty of partiality.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What do you mean! Take the two words *ghorata* and *sarata*.¹ Both have *-ta* as a suffix. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar also said what you are saying. He asked, ‘Sir, has God given more power to one than another?’ I replied, ‘He is present in every being as the all-pervading Spirit,² so he is in everything. Just as He is in me, He is in an ant, too. But there is special manifestation of God’s power in some. If everybody is equal, why have we come to see you when we hear your name, Ishwar Vidyasagar? Have you two horns that we have come to see? That is not so. You are generous, you are learned. You are well-known because you have more of these qualities than others. You know, there are people who can defeat a hundred men single-handedly; others run away in fear of a single person.’

“If there is no special power, why would people consider Keshab so great?”

1. The two words *ghora* (“horse”) and *sara* (“clay plate”) both have the suffix *.-ta*. The power of a horse is different from that of a clay plate. Because they both end in *-ta*, they don’t become equal. The horse has more power than the clay plate.

2. Vibhu.

“The Gita says: ‘If a person is considered great by many, whether it is because of his learning, his ability to sing and play musical instruments, his oratory, or anything else, know it for certain that he has within him a special power of God.’”

A Brahma devotee (*to the sub-judge*): “Please accept what he says.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Brahma devotee*): “What kind of a man are you? Merely accepting without conviction! It is hypocrisy. I see you as a sham.”

The Brahma devotee is very ashamed.

Chapter Four

Brahma Samaj – Keshab and detachment in family life – renunciation of world

The earlier story of his life – instructions to Keshab – spiritual practice in a solitary place – signs of spiritual knowledge

The sub-judge: “Sir, must one renounce the family?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “No, why should you have to renounce the family? You can renounce even while living in the family. But in the beginning you must live for some time in a solitary place. You must practice spiritual disciplines in solitude. You should find a place near your home where you can retire and go home only for a meal. Keshab Sen, Pratap, and others told me, ‘Sir, we have the same attitude as King Janaka.’ I said to them, ‘You cannot become King Janaka just by saying so. King

Janaka practiced many austerities in a solitary place, standing on his head. You people must do something! Only then can you become a King Janaka.' Someone may write English very fluently, but could he do that all of a sudden? He was the son of a poor man. He used to live in somebody's house, cooking for him, and ate little. He learned to read and write with great difficulty. That is how he is able to write so fluently now.

"I said something else to Keshab Sen: 'Without going into solitude, how can you get rid of a serious disease? You are a patient with delirium, living in a room in which there are pickled tamarind and a pitcher of water. How can you get rid of the disease?' Look, just by talking of tamarind pickles, my mouth has begun to water! (*All laugh.*) You all know what happens when they are within reach. For men, women are the pickled tamarind. Desire for enjoyment is the pitcher of water. There is no end to the thirst for enjoyment. Because all such things are found in the patient's room, how can the disease of delirium be cured there? You must live for a few days at a different place, where there are no tamarind pickles or pitchers of water. Later, after being cured, you can go back to the family without running any risk. After attaining God, if you live in the family, 'lust and greed' can do no harm. Then you can remain unattached like Janaka. But in the beginning you have to be careful. You have to live in solitude and carry out strict spiritual disciplines. When the ashvattha tree is a small plant, it has to be protected by a fence around it so that cows or goats won't destroy it. However, when it has grown a thick trunk, no fence

is necessary. Then, even if you tie an elephant to it, no harm can come to it. If you practice spiritual disciplines in a solitary place and develop love and devotion to the lotus feet of God and gain strength, then you can go home and live a family life. Then 'lust and greed' will not harm you at all.

“Make curds in a solitary corner, and churn them to bring out the butter. When the butter of knowledge and love for God is taken out of the milk of the mind, it will float unattached on the water of the world. But if you keep the immature mind, which is in the state of milk, in the water of the household, it will not float.

“To attain God while living a family life, hold onto His lotus feet with one hand and do your work with the other. Whenever you are free from work, hold His lotus feet with both hands, live in solitude, meditate on Him alone, and serve Him.”

The sub-judge (*joyfully*): “Sir, very beautiful words indeed! There is nothing other than this! What else could be required than to practice spiritual disciplines in solitude? But we forget this. We think we have become King Janaka already. (*Sri Ramakrishna and all the others laugh.*) That there is no need to leave family life, that one can attain God even while living in the family – hearing this, my mind is happy and at peace.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Why should you have to renounce? If you have to fight, it is better to fight from within a fort. You have to fight against your senses and against hunger and thirst. It is good that all these are fought while living in the household. Moreover, in the Kaliyuga life depends

on food. If you have nothing to eat, all talk of God will be knocked out of your brain. A person said to his wife, 'I am going to leave the family.' The wife was a somewhat sensible woman. She said, 'Why do you have to wander about? When you don't have to beg your bread from ten homes, go, but if you have to do that, it is better to be in one house.'

"Why do you have to renounce the home? It is convenient there. You don't have to worry about food, and there is no harm in living with your wife. In a family, all your bodily needs are easily met. If you fall ill, you have people to nurse you.

"Janaka, Vyasa, and Vasishtha lived in the family after attaining spiritual knowledge. They wielded both swords – the one of knowledge and the other of action."

The sub-judge: "Sir, how do you know when you have attained knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you have attained knowledge, you no longer see God at a distance. He is no longer 'He' – He becomes 'this.' Then He is seen in your own heart. God is in everybody. Whoever seeks Him finds Him."

The sub-judge: "Sir, I am a sinner. How can I say that God is within me?"

Brahmo Samaj, Christianity and the doctrine of sin

Sri Ramakrishna: "You Brahmos harp on sin! Maybe it's the view of Christianity also. Somebody gave me a book (the Bible). I asked someone to read me a little. It was all about one thing only – sin and sin. I have chanted His name – Ishvara or Rama or

Hari. How can I be a sinner? You must have such faith as this! You must have faith in the power of God's name!"

The sub-judge: "Sir, how do you have such faith?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love Him. One of your Brahma songs says, 'Lord, can one ever know You without loving You, by only performing worship and sacrifice?' Pray! Cry! Weep out loud to Him in solitude that you may gain such attraction for Him, such love for Him! People shed pitchers full of tears when their wives are ill, or they lose money, or for a job. Who weeps for God? Just tell me. I would like to know."

Chapter Five

Give God the power of attorney – how long do you have duties toward family

Trailokya: "Sir, he has no time. He has to work for the British."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the sub-judge*): "Well, give God the power of attorney. If you give your burden to a good person, can he ever do you wrong? Give Him your entire burden with a sincere heart, and then be at peace. Do only the work He assigns to you.

"A kitten doesn't have a calculating mind. It just cries, 'Mew, mew.' If its mother puts it in the kitchen, it lies there. It only mews for its mother. And when the mother puts it on a bed, it is the same: it just repeats, 'Mew, mew.'"

The sub-judge: “We are householders. How long do we have to attend to worldly duties?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Of course you have duties to do – to bring up your children, to provide for your wife, and to save money for her when you are no more. If you don’t do these, you are a heartless fellow. Sukadeva and other sages had compassion. A person who has no compassion is not a human being.”

The sub-judge: “How long must one look after one’s children?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Till they reach adulthood. When a bird grows up and can look after itself, its mother forces it out of the nest with its beak. She doesn’t let it near.” (*All laugh.*)

The sub-judge: “What is one’s duty toward one’s wife?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “During your lifetime you must instruct her in religion and must provide for her. If she is chaste, you must make plans for her care when you are gone.

“However, when a person is overwhelmed with spiritual knowledge, he is left with no duties to perform. God takes charge when you are no longer able to do so. When a zemindar dies, leaving behind a minor son, a guardian takes the entire responsibility for the boy. It is a matter of law. You know that quite well.”

The sub-judge: “Yes, Sir.”

Vijay Goswami: “Ah, beautiful! God Himself takes up the burden of one who meditates on Him

with a fixed mind, who is mad with ecstatic love for Him. A minor at once gets a guardian. Oh, when will such a state of mind come? Whoever experiences such a state is lucky indeed!”

Trailokya: “Sir, is it possible to gain true knowledge of God while living in the world? Can one really attain God?”

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): “Why not? You are already completely absorbed in Him! (*All laugh.*) You are already living in the world, and you have given your mind to Him. Why shouldn’t it be possible to realize God in the household? Certainly it is.”

**Signs of a householder jnani – signs of God-realization
– free in this very life¹**

Trailokya: “What are the signs of a householder’s having attained knowledge of God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Tears flow from his eyes, and the hair on his body stands on end at the name of God. No sooner does he hear the sweet name of God than the hair on his body stands on end and a stream of tears flows from the eyes.

“As long as there is attachment to worldly things, as long as there is attraction for ‘lust and greed,’ body-consciousness doesn’t leave you. The fewer the attachments, the nearer you are to knowledge of the Self,² and to the same extent, body-consciousness becomes less. One attains knowledge of the Atman when attachment to the

1. Jivanmukta.

2. Atmajnana.

world has completely disappeared. Then one begins to feel that the soul is one and the body another. It is difficult to separate the kernel of a coconut from its shell with a knife until the water in it has dried up. When the water is dried up, you only have to strike and shake it and the kernel becomes detached. This is called a dry coconut.

“The signs of God-realization are that a man becomes like a dry coconut – he is rid of identification with the body. Pleasure and pain of the body are no longer his concern. He does not seek comforts for the body. He roams about as one liberated in this very life.¹

“Kali’s devotees are free in this very life. They are full of unending joy.

“When you see tears begin to flow and the hair on the body stand on end at the very name of God, know that attachment to ‘lust and greed’ has disappeared and that one has realized God. If a matchstick is dry, strike it just once, and it will light. If it is wet, you may strike it fifty times, but it won’t ignite. You’ve just wasted the wooden sticks. If your mind is immersed in the liquid of worldly pleasures and is wet with ‘lust and greed,’ inspiration for God-consciousness will not arise. You may try a thousand times, but all your efforts will be in vain. It is only when the liquid of attachment to worldly pleasures dries up that there is instantaneous inspiration for God.”

1. Jivanmukta.

Yearning is the way – He is your very own Mother

Trailokya: “How do we dry up our craving for worldly pleasures?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Call on the Divine Mother with a longing heart. The liquid of worldly desire dries up on seeing Her; your attachment to ‘lust and greed’ will fully disappear. It happens at the very moment you realize that He is your own Mother. He is not your stepmother; He is your own Mother! Be earnest and even stubborn with Her! A boy holds onto his mother’s sari when he asks her for money to buy a kite. Perhaps the mother is busy talking to other women, and at first she refuses outright, saying, ‘No, your father doesn’t want me to give you any money. I’ll ask him when he comes. You might cause an accident by playing with a kite now.’ But when the boy starts crying and refuses to leave, the mother says to her friends, ‘Just wait a minute, sisters. Let me pacify this boy. I’ll be right back.’ Saying this, she opens her cash box with a key and throws a pice to the boy. You also must become stubborn with the Mother. She will certainly grant you Her vision. I said the same thing to some Sikhs. They had come to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. We talked in front of Mother Kali’s shrine, and they said, ‘God is all compassion.’ I said, ‘How is that?’ They answered, ‘Because, Sir, He is always looking after us. He gives us righteousness¹ and wealth² – everything. He gives us food.’ I said, ‘When somebody has children, doesn’t he take the responsibility of

1. Dharma.

2. Artha.

feeding them? Does somebody else from the neighborhood take up the duty?”

The sub-judge: “So is He not compassionate, sir?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Why should He not be? I only told them that He is our very own. We can force Him! To our nearest and dearest, we can even say, ‘You rascal, are you going to give it to me?’”

Chapter Six

Ego and the sub-judge

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the sub-judge*): “Well, do you think pride and ego come from knowledge or from ignorance? Pride is characteristic of the tamoguna and comes from ignorance. It becomes a veil through which one cannot see God. All troubles cease when the ego vanishes. Pride is of no use. Neither this body nor wealth is going to last. A drunkard was looking at an image of Durga. Seeing her decoration and adornments he said, ‘Mother, You may decorate Yourself as much as You like, but after two or three days, they will pull You out and throw You into the Ganges!’ So I tell everybody – whether a judge or anybody else – all this is for two days only. So give up pride and ego.”

The Brahma Samaj and equality – people have different natures

“The characteristics of sattva, rajas, and tamas are quite different. The signs of the tamoguna are pride, sloth, gluttony, lust, anger, and so on. A rajoguni has a tendency to involve himself more

and more in work and to dress well. He keeps his house clean and tidy. He also keeps a photo of the queen in the drawing room. When he meditates on God, he puts on a pure silk cloth and a string of rudraksha and gold beads. When someone comes to see the shrine, he guides the visitor, saying, ‘Come this way, there is more: see the white marble floor, see the assembly hall¹ with sixteen openings.’ And he makes a show of his charity. A sattvaguna person is very calm and quiet. Any clothes do for him. He earns only enough to live on and would never flatter anybody for money. His house remains in want of repair, he doesn’t worry about his children’s clothing, he makes no effort for name or fame. He meditates and gives away in charity secretly, so that nobody comes to know of it. He meditates inside a mosquito net so people think that he did not sleep at night and is sleeping late into the morning. Sattvaguna is the last step of the staircase. After it comes the roof. After sattvaguna is acquired, God-realization is not far off. Just a little more progress and He is attained. (*To the sub-judge*) You said that all people are equal. Just see how many different natures there are!

“And then there are many other kinds of human being: the ever-free,² the liberated,³ aspirants,⁴ and the bound.⁵ There are so many different types! Narada and Sukadeva are ever-free. They are like a steamboat which not only crosses over but also

1. Natmandir.
 2. Nityajivas.
 3. Muktajivas.
 4. Mumukshujivas.
 5. Baddhajivas.

carries big animals, even an elephant. They are like the superintendent of an estate.¹ Having governed one part,² he goes to govern another. Then there are seekers after liberation who try earnestly with all their hearts and souls to free themselves from the net of the world. Only one or two of them escape from the net. They become the liberated. The ever-free are like clever fish: they never become entangled in the net of the world. As for the bound souls, worldly people, they never even become aware that they are in the mesh of the net and bound by it. Such people, when they hear talk about God, leave the place, saying, 'The name of God is taken at the time of death. Why now?' And when he is lying on his deathbed, the worldly man says to his wife and children, 'Why is the lamp burning so brightly? Lower the wick a little. Too much oil is being consumed.' Thinking of his children and wife he weeps, saying, 'Alas, what will happen to them when I am gone?' The bound person repeats those very actions that made him suffer so much in the first place. He is like a camel which bleeds profusely when it eats thorny bushes, but it doesn't give up eating them. His son has died, leaving him in grief, but he produces more children year after year. Everything he has is spent on his daughter's marriage, but he goes on begetting daughters every year. He says, 'I can't help it. It is my fate.' If he goes on pilgrimage, he doesn't find time to meditate on God. He tires himself out just carrying the luggage of his wife and children. In the

1. Tehsildar, a sub-divisional revenue officer.

2. Taluka.

temple all he does is get holy water¹ for his son to drink and make him bow to the Deity and so on. A bound soul takes up service under others to earn a living for himself, his wife, and his children. He earns money by telling lies, cheating, and flattery. Such a person looks down on those who call upon God and meditate on Him, saying they are mad. (*To the sub-judge*) There are so many kinds of men, you see! You said men were equal. But how many varieties there are! Some have more power, some less.”

**A bound soul does not take the name of the Lord
at the time of death**

“A bound soul, attached to worldliness, talks only of the world at the time of death. What use is it to superficially count the beads or take a bath in the Ganges or visit holy places? If within oneself is attachment for the world, only the world comes before the eyes at the time of death. What nonsense such a person talks on his deathbed. Perhaps he cries out in delirium, ‘Turmeric powder! Five-spiced blend! Cassia leaf!’ A parrot might normally repeat ‘Radha Krishna’ but when a cat seizes it, the only sound that comes out of it is ‘Kaa! Kaa!’ The Gita says the same thing, that you will carry with you to your next life what you think at the time of your death. King Bharata left his body repeating, ‘Deer, deer.’ So he was reborn as a deer. If you think of God at the time of death, you attain Him, and then you don’t have to return to this world.

1. Charamrita.

The Brahma devotee: “Sir, say one has meditated on God at other times, but not at the time of death. Does it mean that he will have to come to this world of pleasure and pain again? Why would that be so if he had meditated on God earlier?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “A man might meditate on God but have no faith in Him. Time and again he forgets Him and becomes attached to the world. It’s like washing an elephant. It soils itself again with mud and dust. The mind is like a mad elephant.¹ But if the elephant is taken to its stable soon after the bath, it can’t rub mud and dust on its body. If a person thinks of God at the time of death, the mind is purified. Such a mind does not get another chance to become attached to ‘lust and greed.’

“People have no faith in God. That’s why they suffer so much from the consequences of actions. People say that when you take a dip in the Ganges, your sins leave you and perch themselves on a tree at the bank of the river. As soon as you return to the bank after the bath, all your sins fly back again to sit firmly on your shoulders. (*All laugh.*) You must prepare beforehand, so that your mind is in God at the time of death. The way is in constant practice.² Then you will remember God in your last moments.”

The Brahma devotee: “We’ve had a nice conversation. Very nice indeed!”

1. Manamattakari.

2. Abhyasa yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Oh, I’ve just been talking at random. But do you know my inner state of mind? ‘I am the instrument and He is the operator; I am the dwelling and He is the dweller; I am the engine, He is the engineer; I am the chariot, He is the charioteer. I move as He makes me move; I do as He makes me do.’”

Chapter Seven

Sri Ramakrishna joyfully singing God’s name

Trailokya sings again, accompanied by drum and cymbal. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing, mad with love for God. He has gone into samadhi a number of times while dancing. Now he stands in samadhi – his body motionless, eyes fixed, face smiling, leaning on the shoulder of a dear devotee. When he comes down a little from that state, he dances like an intoxicated elephant. Regaining external consciousness, he adds his own lines to the song:

Mother, dance around Your devotees,
 Dancing Yourself, make them dance too.
 O, my Mother, dance in the lotus of my heart.
 O Brahmamayi, whose essence is Brahman,
 Dance in Your world-bewitching form!

It is a rare sight, the dance of this divine child maddened with love, his soul merged in the Divine Mother. Brahma devotees dance around him like iron filings around a magnet. They all chant the name of Brahman in a frenzy of love. Then they chant the sweet name of Brahman, the name of Mother. Many of them weep like children as they repeat, “Mother, Mother!”

When the singing ends, they all take seats. The evening worship of the Samaj has not yet been performed. In the joy of singing, all rules had been brushed aside. The plans had been for Vijaykrishna Goswami to take the pulpit after dusk. It is about 8 p.m.

Everyone is now seated, Sri Ramakrishna also has taken his seat. Vijay is sitting in front of him. A message comes that Vijay's old mother-in-law and some other women devotees would like to see Sri Ramakrishna and talk to him, so Thakur goes into another room to meet them.

He returns in a little while and says to Vijay, "What great and loving devotion your mother-in-law has for God! She says, 'I will not talk about worldly things now – there, one wave disappears as another wave arrives.' I said, 'What does it matter to you? You already have knowledge.' At this, your mother-in-law said, 'What knowledge do I have? I have not yet gone beyond vidyamaya (the power of knowledge) and avidyamaya (power of nescience). It is not enough to go beyond avidya. You have to go beyond vidya too. Then alone will you gain spiritual knowledge. You say so yourself.'"

While they are talking, Beni Pal enters.

Beni Pal (*to Vijay*): "Sir, please rise. It is already very late. Please start the worship."

Vijay: "Sir, what is the need of worship now? You have provided the rice pudding first¹ – and then the lentils and other dishes."

1. Payas.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): “As is the devotee, so is the provision made by him. The sattvic devotee provides the rice pudding, the rajasic one offers fifty dishes to the deity, while the tamasic devotee sacrifices a goat or some other animal.”

Vijay ponders whether or not he should go up to the podium for worship.

Chapter Eight

Lectures in the Brahma Samaj – duties of a religious teacher – God alone is the guru [Instructions to Vijay]

Vijay: “If you will bless me, I will speak from the pulpit.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It’s all right if there is no pride. ‘I am lecturing, you listen’ – it is all right if you don’t have this attitude of ego. What are pride and ego? Do they result from knowledge or from ignorance? Only the person who has no pride can attain knowledge. Rainwater flows down from a higher level; it stands at a lower level.

“As long as you have egotism, you cannot gain knowledge. You also can’t attain liberation. You will have to come again and again to this world. A calf bellows ‘hamba hamba’ (‘I, I’), so it has to undergo so much suffering! The butcher cuts it up; its skin is used to make shoes and drums. How much beating a drum takes! There is no end to its suffering! Last of all, strings are made with its intestines for the carder’s bow. When the sound ‘tuhun tuhun’ (‘you, you’) is uttered by the carder’s string, only then is it freed. It no longer says, ‘I, I,’

only 'you, you.' In other words, 'God, You are the doer; I do nothing. You are the operator; I am the machine. Indeed, You are all.'"

Sri Ramakrishna and being a guru

"Guru, father, and doer – these three words prick my body like thorns. I am His son, His eternal child. How can I be a father? God is the doer; I do nothing. He is the operator; I am the machine.

"If anyone calls me guru, I say to him, 'What guru? Away with you, rascal!' There is no guru other than Sat-chit-ananda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute). Except for Him, there is no shelter. He alone is the pilot that takes one across the sea of the world.

(*To Vijay*) "It is very difficult to be a spiritual teacher. It is harmful for him to see a dozen men accept him as guru. Crossing one leg over the other and saying, 'Listen to what I say,' is a very bad attitude. Such a person gets that way with the respect of only a dozen people. People will at most say, 'Ah, how well Vijay Babu speaks! He is a great man of knowledge!' I say, 'Don't think this way.' As for me, I say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, You are the mechanic, I am Your instrument. I work as You make me work; I speak as You make me speak.'"

Vijay (*humbly*): "I shall go up to the podium and speak only if you give me permission."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "What can I say? The moon is everybody's uncle. Why don't you ask Him? If you are sincere, there is nothing to be afraid of."

When Vijay requested Sri Ramakrishna yet again, he said, “Yes. Go. Follow the rules. It’s okay if you have sincere love for God.”

Vijay goes to the podium and offers worship according to the Brahma custom. He repeats, “Mother, Mother” during his prayer. Everyone is moved.

After worship, preparations are made to serve the devotees. All the cotton carpets and the thick wool ones are removed, and leaf plates are put on the floor. The devotees sit down to eat. Sri Ramakrishna is also given a seat. Full of joy, he sits down and offers to God tasty luchis, kichouris, papad, various kinds of sweets, curd, and the rice pudding brought by Beni Pal. And then he partakes of the prasad.

Chapter Nine

Mother Kali and Brahman are one when one gains the highest knowledge

After the meal, everyone prepares to return home; they all chew betel leaves. Before leaving, Sri Ramakrishna sits in a corner and talks to Vijay. M. is present.

Brahmo Samaj and the Motherhood of God

Sri Ramakrishna: “You prayed to God addressing Him, ‘Mother, Mother.’ This is very good. They say that one is attracted more by mother than by father. You can force your mother, but you can’t force your father. Carts full of money were being brought from the estate of Trailokya’s mother with many men in red turbans guarding it

with sticks in their hands. Trailokya was waiting on the side of the road with his people. He forcibly took the whole treasure. You can use a great deal of force when it concerns your mother's treasure. Don't they say that a mother can't go to law against her son?"

Vijay: "If Brahman is the Divine Mother, is He with form or without form?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Brahman is the same as Kali, the Primal Power. When inactive, I call It Brahman. When creating, preserving, and dissolving, I call It Shakti (Power). Still water is an illustration of Brahman. When in motion, that same water is like Shakti, or Kali. Kali is She who communes with Mahakala, Brahman. Kali is with form, and again She is without form. If you believe in the Formless, then meditate on Kali as being formless. Be firm in one ideal. She Herself will make you understand what She is. When you reach Shyampukur, you will also know Telepada.¹ Then you will know that He is not only Existence, but He also speaks to you the way I am speaking to you. Have faith. It will all become clear. And there is one other thing. If you believe in the Formless, be firm in your belief, but don't be dogmatic, don't emphasize that God can be only this and not that. Say, 'I believe that God is formless. What else God is, only He knows. I don't know, and I can't understand.' Can a person with an ounce of intelligence know the nature of God? Can a one-seer container hold four seers of milk? If He, in His

1. The village of Shyampukur neighbours Telepada.

grace, grants His vision and makes one understand, then alone can one understand, not otherwise. That which is Brahman is also Shakti, the Divine Mother.”

It is He that I worship as Mother.

Says Ramprasad, shall I give away this secret in the teeming marketplace?

Why not guess, O mind, who that being is, from the hints that have been dropped?

“And then Ramprasad also says:

Knowing now the secret that Kali is one with the highest Brahman,

I’ve cast off both righteousness and unrighteousness for evermore.

“Adharma, unrighteousness, means engaging in unrighteous acts. Dharma, righteousness, means duties prescribed by the scriptures – so much charity, so much feeding of brahmins.”

Vijay: “What remains after one has given up both dharma and adharma?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Pure love of God. I said to the Divine Mother: Here is your dharma and here is your adharma; take them both, and give me pure love. Here is your virtue and here is your vice; take them both, and grant me pure love for you. Here is your knowledge, and here is your ignorance; take them both, and grant me pure love for you.

“Just see, I didn’t ask for knowledge, nor did I ask for worldly fame. When one has given up dharma and adharma, that which remains is pure

love – unalloyed love,¹ untainted by desires,² love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul.”³

**Brahmo Samaj and the Brahman of Vedanta – the
Primal Power**

A Brahmo devotee: “Is God different from His power?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “After one has attained the highest knowledge,⁴ both God and His Power are realized as one and the same, like a jewel and its lustre are inseparable. As soon as the brilliance of a jewel comes to the mind, one thinks of the jewel. Just like milk is inseparable from its whiteness – think of one and you think of the other. But this oneness does not come about until one has attained the highest knowledge. Having attained the highest knowledge, one goes into samadhi and then goes beyond the twenty-four cosmic principles, including the ego. How one feels in samadhi cannot be described in words. Coming down a little, one can give only a hint of it. When I repeat ‘Om, Om’ after samadhi, I have already come down a hundred cubits. Brahman is beyond the Vedic doctrine. One cannot speak of It. There is no ‘I’ or ‘you’ there.

“As long as there is I’ and ‘you’, as long as there is the knowledge, ‘I pray or I meditate,’ so long does the feeling of ‘You (the Lord) listen to my prayer’ exist. Then one thinks of God as a person. ‘You are

1. Amla bhakti.
2. Nishkama bhakti.
3. Ahehtuki bhakti.
4. Purna jnana.

the Master, I am Your servant; You are the whole, I am Your part; You are the Mother, I am Your son' – this awareness remains within. There is a feeling of difference: I am one, and You are another. This feeling of duality, He Himself gives us. That is why one is aware of being a male or a female. Or why one feels that here is light and there is darkness, and so on. As long as there is awareness of difference, one has to believe in Shakti, the Personal God. He Himself has kept this 'I-ness' in us. Reason a thousand times, but this 'I' does not leave you. And as long as it exists, He manifests as a person.

“As long as there is 'I', as long as you are conscious of duality, you cannot insist that Brahman is without attributes. You must accept Brahman with attributes. This very Brahman with attributes has been called Kali or Primal Power in the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras.”

Vijay: “How can we have a vision of this Primal Power? Or how can we have the knowledge of Brahman without attributes?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Pray to Him with a yearning heart and weep. This will purify your mind. In clear water you can see the reflection of the sun. In the mirror of the 'I,' the devotee sees Brahman with attributes, the Primal Power. But the mirror must be perfectly clean. If there is any dirt, it will not catch the correct reflection.

“As long as there is 'I,' you see the sun in the water of 'I.' There is no other way to see the sun. And as long as you have no means to see the real sun and you see only the reflected sun, that

reflected sun is the real sun to you – one hundred percent real. As long as the ‘I’ is real, the reflected sun is also real – one hundred percent real. This reflected sun is the Primal Power.

“If you want to attain the knowledge of Brahman, proceed toward the real sun through the reflection. Pray to Brahman with attributes, who listens to your prayers. He Himself will grant you the knowledge of Brahman. This is because He who is Brahman with attributes is Himself Brahman without attributes. He who is Shakti is Himself Brahman. One realizes that there is no duality after attaining the ultimate knowledge.

“The Divine Mother grants knowledge of Brahman too. But usually a real lover of God doesn’t want it.

“And there is another path, the path of knowledge – a very difficult path indeed. You members of the Brahmo Samaj are not followers of the path of knowledge, you are lovers of God. Those who follow the path of knowledge believe that Brahman is real and the world an illusion, like a dream. I, you, and everything else are like a dream.”

Ill-will and the Brahmo Samaj

“God is the inner controller. Pray to Him longingly with a pure mind. He will make you understand everything. Give up egotism and take refuge in Him. You will get everything.

Dwell, O my mind, within yourself,

And enter no one else’s house.

If you search within yourself,

You will find there all you seek:

God Himself, the philosopher's stone, is the supreme wealth

That can give you all you want.

At the outer court of the wish fulfilling gem,¹ so many gems lie strewn!

“When you mix with other people, you should be affectionate to them all, be one with them, have no grudge against anyone, whether a person believes in God with form and does not believe in the formless or accepts the formless and does not believe in God with form. ‘So-and-so is a Hindu, so-and-so is a Muslim or a Christian’ – do not say this; do not turn away or show contempt. God has given them a different understanding. Know that people have different natures. Know this and mix in their company as much as possible, and love them. Then retire to your chamber and enjoy peace and happiness.

Lighting the lamp of knowledge in the chamber of your heart, see the face of the Mother, the embodiment of Brahman.

“You will be able to see your true Self only within your own chamber. When the cowherd boys come out to graze their cows, all the cows mix together in the field and form a single herd. When they return home at dusk, they again separate. Each remains by itself in its stall.”

1. Chintamani.

**Sannyasins should not accumulate – Beni Pal's good
use of wealth**

After 10:00 p.m. Sri Ramakrishna enters the carriage to return to the Kali temple in Dakshineswar. He is accompanied by one or two devotees. It is very dark. The carriage is waiting under a tree. Beni Pal comes with some luchis and sweets for Ramlal.

Beni Pal: "Sir, Ramlal wasn't able to come. With your permission I'd like to send some food to him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Babu Beni Pal, please don't send all this with me! It is harmful to me! I can't carry anything with me, I must not accumulate. Please don't be offended."

Beni Pal: "As you please. But please bless me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It has been a very enjoyable day. He is a real man who holds his wealth as his slave. Those who don't know the right use of money are not men, though they are born as human beings. They only have the looks of a man, but the conduct of a beast. Blessed you are. You have given joy to so many devotees."

Section XIII

With Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter One

In Dakshineswar with Manomohan, Mahima, and other devotees

Come, brother. Let's go again for his darshan.¹ You will see the great man, the child who knows nothing but the Divine Mother and who has come in a human body for our sake. He will tell us how to solve the difficult problems of life. He will instruct the sannyasins, he will instruct householders. His door is open. He is waiting for us at the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar. Come, let us go see him.

He is a man of infinite qualities, of joyful countenance, whose sweet words bring tears to the eyes. Let us go, brother. Let us realize the aim of human life by meeting Sri Ramakrishna, who is intoxicated day and night with love for God, and who is the ocean of motiveless grace.

It is Sunday, 26 October 1884, the autumn season.² It is midday on the 7th day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kartik. Devotees have gathered in Thakur's room. There is a semi-circular verandah to its west and then a garden path running north-south further to the west of it. A flower garden for Mother Kali is just beyond this path. And then there is the embankment and the holy river Ganges flowing south.

1. Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness.

2. Hemant.

It is a mart of joy here today. Sri Ramakrishna's bliss and love for God are reflected in the faces of the devotees. How wonderful it is! Such joy is not only mirrored in the devotees' faces, but is also reflected in the garden outside, in the leaves of the trees, in the various kinds of flowers, on the vast bosom of the Ganges, in the blue sky lit up by the sun, in the cool breeze carrying drops of Ganges water flowing from the feet of Sri Krishna.¹ How amazing! Truly, even the particles of dust in the garden are filled with sweetness! I wish I could roll in the dust, secretly or with the devotees. I wish I could stand in this garden the whole day, gazing at the sweetly flowing waters of the Ganges. I wish I could embrace and talk with the creepers, bushes, shrubs, and the bright and beautiful trees adorned with leaves and flowers, feeling them my own. Doesn't Sri Ramakrishna stroll this path? Doesn't he walk among these trees, creepers, and shrubs? I wish my gaze could always be on this luminous vault of the sky! I see here the earth and the heavens all swimming in the joy of love.

How is it that the priest, the doorkeeper, and the attendants of the shrine all seem to be my very own? Why does this place appear as sweet as the motherland after a long absence? The sky, the Ganges, the temple of the deity, the garden path, the trees, the creepers, the bushes and shrubs, the attendants, the devotees seated there – they all seem to be made of the same material, the material of which Sri Ramakrishna is made. It is like a garden of wax in which everything – the trees, the plants, the fruits and the leaves – is made of the same material. The garden path, the gardener, the residents of the garden, the houses in the garden – all are made of wax. Everything in this place has been molded of joy!

1. Murari; M. is alluding here to a Vaishnava belief that explains the origination of the Ganges as Brahma washing the feet of the Incarnation of God, Vamana; in Vaishnava tradition the Incarnation of God is Krishna.

Manomohan, Mahimacharan, and M. arrive first. Then one by one Ishan, Hriday, and Hazra arrive. There are many other devotees besides them. Balaram and Rakhal are in holy Vrindavan, but some new devotees visit these days. Narayan, Paltu, the Younger Narendra, Tejchandra, Binode, Haripada, and Baburam come and stay sometimes. Rama, Suresh, Kedar, Devendra, and other devotees also come frequently – some every week, some every two weeks. Latu lives here permanently. Yogen's house is nearby; he comes almost every day. Whenever Narendra comes, it turns into a mart of joy. He sings the glories and names of God in his sweet and rare voice, rare even for the gods, sending Thakur immediately into various spiritual moods and into samadhi. It becomes a special festival. Thakur wishes that some of the boys would stay with him day and night, for they are pure souls not bound by the ties of marriage and worldly work. He had asked Baburam (later Swami Premananda) to stay on, and sometimes he does stay. Adhar Sen also comes frequently.

The devotees are seated in the room. Sri Ramakrishna stands there, like a child, in a reflective mood. The devotees are watching him.

The Undifferentiated and the differentiated

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manomohan*): "I see Rama in everyone. You who are sitting here – I see Rama in all of you in different forms."

Manomohan: "Rama has become all forms. But, as you say, 'Apo Narayana' – water is Narayana – but some water is fit for drinking, some only for washing the face, and some only for washing utensils."

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, but I see that He alone is everything. He has become the world and its creatures.”

Saying this, Thakur sits down on his smaller cot.

**Sri Ramakrishna’s insistence on truth
and aversion to accumulating things**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan*): “I ask you now, is it excessive of me to think that I have to speak only the truth? If I suddenly say I won’t eat, I can’t eat even if I’m hungry. If I say that so-and-so has to take my wash pot to the jhautala and if someone else does it instead, I have to send that person back. What has happened to me, brother? Is there anything to do about it?”

“And then I can’t carry anything with me – betel-leaf, food, or anything else – because that would mean keeping things for the future. I can’t even carry a lump of clay in my hand!”

Just then somebody comes in and says, “Sir, Hriday¹ has come to Jadu Mallick’s garden. He is standing at the gate and wishes to see you.” Sri Ramakrishna says to the devotees, “Please stay here. Let me talk to Hriday for a while.” He puts on black varnished slippers and walks toward the eastern gate. Only M. accompanies him. They walk eastward along the garden path, which is surfaced

1. Hriday Mukherji is the son of Ramakrishna’s cousin. His home is in Seor village near Kamarpukur. For almost twenty-four years Hriday stayed with Thakur, served him, and carried out the worship of Mother Kali at the Dakshineswar Temple. Later, he lost the confidence of the proprietor of the temple garden and therefore was not allowed to remain.

with red brick dust. They pass the treasurer, standing on the path, who bows to Thakur. A bearded gatekeeper sits at the gate of the southern courtyard. To the left is the kuthi, the house of the owners of the temple garden. A nilkuthi¹ used to grow here so it is called the kuthi. Beyond it flowering trees line both sides of the path and not far to the south of the path is a gazitala tree and the beautiful steps of Mother Kali's reservoir. Then comes the eastern gate, the gatekeepers' quarters to the left and the planter of tulasi bushes to the south. Coming out of the garden, Sri Ramakrishna finds Hriday standing near the gate of Jadu Mallick's garden.

Chapter Two

The attendant stands there

Hriday stands there with folded hands. As soon as he sees Sri Ramakrishna, he falls down prostrate on the road. Thakur asks him to stand up. Hriday folds his hands again and starts weeping like a child.

How strange! Sri Ramakrishna also begins to weep. There are tears in his eyes. He wipes them with his hands; yet his eyes look dry, as though he had not shed tears. How is this possible? This fellow Hriday has caused him so much trouble, but he has come so hurriedly to see him and is crying!

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why have you come now?"

1. Indigo plant.

Hriday (*weeping*): “I have come to see you. To whom else can I tell my sorrows?”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling to console him*): “In the world there are problems. Happiness and sorrow are a part of worldly life. (*Pointing at M.*) These people come now and then just for this reason. They come here to hear a word or two about God and find some peace. What is your problem?”

Hriday (*still weeping*): “I’ve lost your company. That is my grief.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “But you said yourself, ‘You live the way you want and let me do the same.’”

Hriday: “Yes, I did say that. But what did I know?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Go on home now. We’ll sit and talk about it some other day. It is Sunday and many people have come. They’re waiting. Did you have a good crop this year in the country?”

Hriday: “It wasn’t bad.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Let me say goodbye now. Come again some other day.”

Hriday again lies prostrate on the ground in salutation. Thakur returns to his room with M. by the same path.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “He tormented me as much as he served me. When I was reduced to a skeleton with stomach trouble and couldn’t eat, he’d say, ‘Just see how I eat. You can’t eat because of the state of your mind.’ And then he’d add, ‘Fool, if I weren’t here, what would have happened to your self-styled holiness?’ One day he troubled me

so much that I went to the embankment to drown myself in the flood tide.”

M. is speechless to hear this. He wonders how Thakur could be shedding tears for such a man.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Well, he did me so much service. How has he come to such a pass? He looked after me just like one looks after a child. I used to lie unconscious day and night. Besides, I was ill for so long. What happened to me was totally in his hands.”

What can M. say? He remains silent, saying to himself: Perhaps Hriday didn’t serve Thakur selflessly.

Thakur reaches his room while they talk. The devotees are waiting. Thakur goes in and sits on the smaller cot.

Chapter Three

**With devotees – talks on various subjects – the
profound meaning of ecstasy¹ and the highest
manifestation of divine love²**

Besides Mahimacharan and the other usual visitors, a number of devotees from Konnagar have arrived. One of them talks with Sri Ramakrishna for a long time.

Devotee from Konnagar: “Sir, I heard that you go into ecstasy, that you experience samadhi. Why and how does it happen? Please tell me.”

1. Bhava.

2. Mahabhava.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Radha used to experience the highest manifestation of divine love. When a gopi friend¹ wanted to touch her, another said, ‘Her body is enjoying Krishna. Don’t touch her. Krishna is sporting in her.’ One doesn’t attain ecstasy or this highest state of divine love without realizing God. When a fish comes up from deep water, the water splashes up behind it. The bigger the fish, the greater the splash. In ecstasy a man laughs, weeps, dances, and sings.

“One can’t remain in ecstasy long. If a person just keeps looking at himself in a mirror, people think he’s crazy.”

The devotee from Konnagar: “Sir, we hear that you often see God. Please show Him to us.”

Vision of God not possible without spiritual practices

Sri Ramakrishna: “Everything happens by the will of God. What can a man do? While repeating His name, sometimes tears flow from his eyes, sometimes they don’t. Sometimes when meditating on Him, one feels inspiration; at other times nothing happens.

“You have to work for it. Only then can God be seen. One day I had a vision of the Haldarpukur. I saw that a person of low caste was taking water from it after removing the scum from its surface. Each time he took water in his palm, he examined it. It was as if he was telling me that you can’t see the water unless you remove the scum. You can’t gain devotion or see God without making an effort.

1. Sakhi.

Meditation and repetition of name are all work; singing His name and glories is also work. And then, charity and worship are work.

“If you want butter, you have to make curd from milk and then keep it in a quiet place. When the milk is curdled, you have to make the effort to churn it and take out the butter.”

Mahimacharan: “Yes sir, no doubt one has to work for it. What can be gained without work? A lot of effort is needed. Only then can one achieve something. How much study is needed! There are so many holy books!”

What comes first: study (knowledge and reasoning) or God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan*): “How many holy books can you read? What will you gain by only reasoning? First try to attain Him. Putting your faith in the words of the guru, make some effort. If you have no guru, pray to God with a longing heart. He Himself will tell you what He is.

“What will you learn of God by reading books? Until you have reached the marketplace, you only hear noises in the distance. It is quite different when you reach the market. Then you see clearly, you hear clearly: ‘Take these potatoes. Pay for them.’

“From a distance you hear only an indistinct sound from the sea. When you go near it, you see many ships sailing, birds flying, and waves rising and falling.

“You cannot experience God by reading books. It is quite different. After realizing God, books, scriptures, science, all seem insignificant, like dry straw.

“You have to introduce yourself to the master of the house. Before that, why are you so eager to know how many houses, gardens, and certificates of company stock he owns? If you go to his servants, they won’t help you. What information can they give you of the company shares? On the other hand, try somehow to meet the master, even if you are pushed aside or you have to jump over the fence. He himself will tell you how many houses and gardens and shares he has. When you know the master, the servants, the doorkeeper, and everyone else will salute you.”¹ (*Everybody laughs.*)

The devotee: “So, how do we meet the master of the house?” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: “That’s why work for God is necessary. It does no good to say, ‘God is,’ and just sit there. Somehow you have to approach Him. Call upon Him secretly, pray to Him, ‘Please grant me Thy vision. Grant! Please!’ Say this and cry with a longing heart. Just as you roam about madly for ‘lust and gold,’ be a little mad for Him. Let people say that so-and-so person has gone mad for God. Give up everything for some days and only call upon Him secretly.

“What will it help just to say, ‘He exists,’ and do nothing about it? There are big fish in the

1. Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

Haldarpukur. Can you catch them by simply sitting on the bank? To attract them, you have to prepare some food and throw it into the pond. The fish will come up slowly from deep water and ruffle the surface. You will then feel happy. Perhaps you see a little bit of the fish once – and then one suddenly jumps and splashes. You are even happier when you see that.

“Turn milk into curds and churn it. Only then will you get butter.

(To Mahima) “What a bother this is! For somebody to show him God while he continues just to sit at ease! To extract the butter and take it to his mouth! *(All laugh.)* What trouble! Someone else must catch the fish and hand it over to him!

“Somebody wants to meet the king. The king is beyond the seven gates. Even before passing through the first gate, he asks, ‘Where is the king?’ The way is to pass through all the gates one by one.”

The way to attain God – yearn for Him

Mahimacharan: “What must we do to attain Him?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It’s not that you can attain Him by doing this and not by doing that. It depends on His grace. Yet you have to take to some action with a yearning heart. Longing for Him brings His grace.

“One needs the opportunity – the company of holy people, discrimination, finding a true

preceptor.¹ Perhaps one's elder brother takes up the responsibility of the household, or the wife is spiritual² and very virtuous; or maybe one is not married and has not become entangled in household life. It comes about when there are situations such as these.

“A person was very ill in a man's house, in critical condition. Someone said, ‘When it begins to rain when the Svati star is in the ascendant and the rainwater falls into a skull, and if a poisonous snake, while chasing a frog, pounces upon it and, in the process, the frog jumps away and the snake's poison falls into the skull, then if a medicine prepared with this poison is given to the patient, the patient can be cured.’ Now, after astrological consultation on the right day, time, and conjunction of the stars, a member of the family of the patient set out with a yearning heart to look for the above conditions. He prayed to God in his heart: ‘Lord, only if You let me procure all these will my objective be fulfilled.’ Roaming around in this way, he actually saw a human skull, and then, in no time, a rain shower came. The man then said, ‘Oh Lord, I have found the skull of a dead person, and it has also rained during the ascendancy of Svati, and the rainwater has also fallen into the skull. Now, Oh Lord, bestow Your grace and procure the rest of the articles.’ He was reflecting with a longing heart when he saw a poisonous snake approach. The man was extremely happy. He was so excited that his heart began to thump. He said, ‘Oh Lord, now the

1. Sadguru.

2. Vidya shakti.

snake has come and so many articles have been procured. Please get me the remaining articles too! While he was praying thus, lo! there came a frog. And the snake began to chase it. As soon as it approached the skull to pounce on the frog, the frog jumped over the skull and the snake's poison fell into the skull. The man then began to clap his hands and dance in joy.

“So, I say that anything can happen if one has the longing for it.”

Chapter Four

Sannyas and the household – God-realization and renunciation – who is a real sannyasin?

Sri Ramakrishna: “Until you have completely renounced in the mind, you cannot attain God. A sadhu cannot accumulate things. ‘The bird and the sadhu do not hoard.’ Birds and wandering monks¹ do not store things for tomorrow. As for me, I can't even carry a clod of earth to clean my hands. I can't carry a betel-leaf in a bag. When Hriday was troubling me so much, I wanted to go to Kashi. I said to myself that I would be able to take a dhoti with me, but how could I carry money? So I didn't go to Kashi. (*Everybody laughs.*)

(*To Mahima*) “You householders have to have ‘this’ as well as ‘that’ – to live in the world and also to stick to the spiritual path.”

Mahima: “Is it possible to have ‘this’ as well as ‘that?’”

1. Darvesh.

Sri Ramakrishna: “I threw money into the water on the bank of the Ganges near the panchavati, saying, ‘Money and earth – earth is money, money is earth.’ But then I became frightened. I said to myself, ‘Have I offended Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth)? If Mother Lakshmi stops giving me food, what will happen to me?’ Then I bargained like Hazra. I said, ‘Mother, please dwell in my heart!’ Once Mother Bhagavati, happy with a person’s austerity, said to him, ‘Ask for a boon.’ He said, ‘Mother, if you would grant me a boon, grant that I may eat rice on a gold plate with my grandson.’ Thus in one boon he asked for everything – grandson, prosperity, and a gold plate! (*Everybody laughs.*)

“When you have renounced ‘lust and greed’ in the mind, it goes to God and becomes absorbed in Him. One who is now bound can also attain liberation. One is bound by turning away from God. When does the lower needle not point to the upper needle of the goldsmith’s scale? The moment there is a load of ‘lust and greed’ in one of its pans.

“Why does an infant cry when it comes out of the womb? ‘I was in the womb, in union with God.’ After taking birth, it cries and asks, ‘Where am I? Where have I come? I was meditating on God’s lotus feet; now where am I?’

“For you [referring to householder devotees], mental renunciation is necessary. Live in your family without attachment.”

Is it necessary to renounce the world?

Mahima: “When the mind has gone to Him, do you stay with the family any more?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What are you saying? Where will you go if you don’t stay in the family? I clearly see that I am in Rama’s Ayodhya wherever I am. Family life, this world, is Rama’s Ayodhya. Having received spiritual instruction from his guru, Ramachandra said, ‘I will renounce the world.’ Dasharatha called Vasishtha to make Rama change his mind. Vasishtha saw that Rama had acquired deep dispassion. So he said, ‘Rama, first reason this out with me; later you may renounce the world. Tell me, is this world without God? If that be so, you may renounce it.’ Rama understood that God Himself has become the world, its creatures, everything. It is because of His power that one perceives everything as real. Ramachandra became silent then.

“You have to fight against lust, anger, and so on in worldly life; you have to fight against various desires. You have to fight against attachment. If the fight is from inside the fort, it is convenient. It is better to fight from home. There you get food, and your wife helps you in so many ways. In the Kaliyuga life depends on food. It is better to be at one place than to roam around for food from one place to another. Living at home is fighting from inside the fort.

“And you should live in the world like a torn-off leaf in a storm. The storm sometimes takes it inside a house, sometimes to a garbage heap. The leaf is carried away wherever the wind takes it,

sometimes to a clean place and sometimes to a dirty one. He has put you in the world; it is good that you stay there. Again, He may lift you from there and carry you to a better place. Let it happen as it will.”

Resignation in family life – Rama’s will

“What can you do if you are kept in the world? Resign, surrender everything to Him. Then there will be no trouble. You will then realize that it is He who does everything. All depends on Rama’s will.”

A devotee: “Rama’s will’ – what is that story?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “There was a weaver in a village who was very religious. Everybody trusted him and loved him. The weaver would go to the market to sell his cloth. When a customer asked the price, he would say, ‘By Rama’s will, cotton thread costs one rupee; by Rama’s will labour charges are four annas; by Rama’s will, profit is two annas. So the price of the cloth by Rama’s will is one rupee, six annas.’ People had so much faith in him that they would immediately pay the price and take the cloth. This fellow was a great devotee. After dinner he would sit in the worship hall¹ till late at night, meditating on God and singing His glories. One night – it was very late but this fellow did not feel sleepy – he was sitting there smoking when a group of robbers² passed by to commit a robbery. They needed a porter. They came to the weaver and said, ‘Come along with us.’ They took him by the hand. Then they robbed a house and placed many articles

1. Chandi mandap; a roofed place, usually with the four sides open.

2. Dacoits.

on the weaver's head to carry. Just then the police arrived. The thieves ran away, but the weaver was caught with all those articles on his head. He was kept in the police lock-up that night. The next day he was tried by a magistrate. When the villagers came to know of it, they all came to the jail. They said, 'Sir, this fellow could never commit a robbery.' The magistrate said to the weaver, 'Tell me what happened.' The weaver replied, 'Sir, by Rama's will, I took rice at night. By Rama's will, I sat in the worship hall. By Rama's will, it was very late at night. By Rama's will, I was meditating on Him and was singing His glories when, by Rama's will, a group of thieves passed by. By Rama's will, they pulled me up and took me along with them. By Rama's will, they committed robbery in a house. By Rama's will, they placed a load on my head. Then by His will I was caught. By Rama's will, the police put me in jail. And now this morning, by Rama's will, I have been brought before you.'

"Seeing that the fellow was so religious, the magistrate discharged him. On the way home the weaver said to his friends, 'By Rama's will, I have been discharged.'

"Whether one is living in the world or has taken sannyas, all is Rama's will. So, resign yourself to His will and do your duties in the world.

"What else can you do?

"A clerk was sent to jail. When the period of his sentence ended, he was released from jail. Now, will he dance joyfully to the beat of the drum, or will he return to his job as a clerk?

“A person liberated in this very life,¹ may live as a householder if he so wills. For a man who has attained spiritual knowledge, there is nothing like ‘here’ and ‘there.’ It is all the same for him. Everything ‘here’ as well as ‘there’ belongs to Him.”

**The earlier story of his life – conversation with
Keshab Sen – liberated in this very life in the world**

“When I first met Keshab Sen at a garden house, I said, ‘He has cast off his tail.’ Everybody in the assembly laughed. Keshab said, ‘Please don’t laugh. His words have meaning. Let me ask him.’ I said, ‘As long as a frog doesn’t shed its tail, it has to live in water. It can’t climb onto dry land and move around. As soon as it loses its tail, it hops out onto the bank. Then it can live both in the water and on the land. Similarly, until a man sheds the tail of his ignorance, he lives in the water of worldliness. When he casts off the tail of ignorance and attains knowledge, he is liberated and can move about anywhere. If he likes, he can live as a householder.”

Chapter Five

Context of household life – the unattached householder

Mahimacharan and other devotees are sitting and drinking the nectar of Sri Ramakrishna’s words, which are like variously-coloured jewels. The devotees pick up as many as they can, but their laps are already full, so heavy that they cannot be lifted. Their capacity is limited; they can contain no more. Sri Ramakrishna is solving all the problems that have arisen in the human heart since the creation of the

1. Jivanmukta.

world. Padmalochan, Narayan Shastri, Gauri Pundit, Dayananda Saraswati, and other scholars of the scriptures sit in silent awe. When Dayananda saw Sri Ramakrishna in the state of samadhi, he lamented, “We have studied so much of the Vedas and the Vedanta, but in this great man we see its manifestation. He proves that the learned only drink buttermilk when they churn the scriptures. Only such great men as he eat the butter.” Learned men like Keshab Chandra Sen, educated in English, are also amazed by Sri Ramakrishna. They think how wonderful it is that this illiterate person can explain such matters in rustic language, similar to the words of Jesus Christ. Thakur explains in the same way, by parables, so that all people – men, women, and children – can understand easily. Jesus repeated, ‘Father, Father’ like a madman. Sri Ramakrishna is mad, crying, ‘Mother, Mother!’ He has not merely an inexhaustible treasure of spiritual wisdom, but he also pours out endless pots of divine love. And he is a man of renunciation like Jesus. He has the same burning faith. That is why his words are so powerful. When worldly people talk, there is no power because they have no renunciation – no burning conviction in them. Learned men like Keshab Sen also wonder how this illiterate person has developed such broad-mindedness. How wonderful! There is no ill will in him at all. He respects followers of all religions and quarrels with no one.

Today, hearing Thakur’s conversation with Mahimacharan, some of the devotees say to themselves, “Thakur hasn’t asked anyone to renounce the world. On the contrary, he said that the household is like a fort; you can fight against lust, anger, and the like while staying in this fort.” He also said, “Where else will you go if you don’t live there? The clerk resumes clerkship when he is freed from jail.” In a way he is saying that a person liberated in this life can live as a householder. Keshab Sen was his example. To Keshab he said, “You have shed your tail;

no one else has.” But Thakur has said something very special, “You have to live from time to time in solitude. You have to build a fence around a young plant or it will be eaten by goats or cows. When the plant has grown a big trunk, you may remove the fence. Then even if an elephant is tied to it, the tree will not come to any harm. There is no danger if you live as a householder after having lived in solitude and after having attained spiritual knowledge and love for God.” That is why he talked so much of living in solitude.

The devotees are reflecting thus. After talking about Keshab, Sri Ramakrishna speaks about one or two other devotees.

Devendranath Tagore – yoga and bhoga (communion with God and sense enjoyments)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan and the others*): “I once went with Mathur Babu¹ to meet Devendra Tagore. I said to Mathur Babu, ‘I have heard that Devendra Tagore meditates on God. I would like to see him.’ Mathur Babu said, ‘All right, sir, I will take you to see him. We were class fellows at the Hindu College. He has special affection for me.’ After many days I had the opportunity of meeting him with Mathur Babu. Seeing Mathur Babu, Devendra said, ‘You have changed a little. You have developed a paunch.’ Mathur Babu introduced me, saying, ‘He has come to meet you. He is mad for God.’ To find out Devendra’s traits, I said to him, ‘Let me examine your body.’ Devendra took off his shirt. He was fair, and his body was rough, as if sprinkled with vermilion.

1. Sejo Babu – Mathur Nath Biswas, Rani Rasmani’s son-in-law. From the very beginning he served Sri Ramakrishna with extreme devotion, like a disciple.

“At first I noticed that there was some pride in him. And why not? He had so much wealth, so much learning, such name and fame. Noticing his pride, I asked Mathur Babu, ‘Does pride come from knowledge or ignorance? Does a person who has attained the knowledge of Brahman have pride of learning, or of spiritual knowledge, or of wealth?’

“While talking to Devendra, I suddenly went into a state of mind when I can see what kind of person a man really is. A hearty laugh arose within me. When I am in this state of mind, I feel that the learned are just like pieces of straw. When I see that there is no discrimination and dispassion in a pundit, he appears to me just like a dry piece of straw. I then see him as a vulture flying high but with its eyes on charnel pits below.

“I saw that he had both yoga and bhoga.¹ He had many small children. The family doctor was there. This showed that, though he was man of knowledge, he was occupied with worldly affairs. I said, ‘You are the “Janaka” of the Kaliyuga. Janaka held to both the world and spirit while he drank his cup of milk. You live with your family, keeping your mind on God. Hearing that, I have come to see you. Please talk to me about God.’

“He recited some portions from the Vedas. Then he said, ‘This world is like a chandelier and every being is a lamp in it.’ Once when I was meditating in the panchavati, I had a vision like that. It agreed with Devendra’s words, so I thought he was really a great man. I asked him to explain further. He said,

1. Desire for enjoyment of sense objects.

‘Who knows this world? God made men to proclaim His glory. If there is no light in the chandelier, it is dark everywhere. You can’t even see the chandelier.’”

**Incivility and the Brahma Samaj –
Captain, a householder devotee**

“After a long conversation Devendra said to me in a happy mood, ‘You have to come to our celebrations.’ I said, ‘It is all God’s will. You can see what the state of my mind is. I never know what state the Divine Mother will put me in.’ Devendra said, ‘No, no, you have to come. But please clothe yourself in a dhoti and upper cloth. I would be unhappy if somebody made a remark about how casually you dress.’ I replied, ‘I won’t be able to do that. I can’t become a gentleman.’ Devendra and Mathur Babu both laughed.

“The very next day Mathur Babu received a note from Devendra asking me not to attend the festival. The reason? It would seem rude if I were not able to retain the upper cloth on my body. (*All laugh.*)

(*To Mahima*) “And then there is another person, Captain.¹ Though a householder, he is a great devotee. You must talk to him.

“Captain knows the Vedas, the Vedanta, Srimad Bhagavata, the Gita, the Adhyatma Ramayana – all these by heart. Just talk to him and see for yourself.

“He has great devotion! He held his umbrella over my head when I was walking along the road

1. Vishwanath Upadhyaya, a resident of Nepal, was the emissary of the king of Nepal and his representative in Calcutta. He was a very orthodox brahmin and a great devotee.

from Baranagore. And how hospitable he is when he takes me to his house. He fans me, massages my feet, and serves me various kinds of vegetables. One day I lost consciousness in the toilet of his home. Even though he is so orthodox, he went into the room and helped me to sit. He is so orthodox, but he didn't feel any repulsion.

“Captain has to spend a lot. His brothers live in Kashi, and he sends money to them. His wife used to be miserly; now she is so hard-pressed with family expenses, she can't spend much on anything.

“Captain's wife told me that he doesn't like household life. She said once that he told her he would leave the world. Several times he said, 'I will leave, I will leave.'

“He comes from a family of devotees. His father was a soldier. It is said that with one hand he would worship Shiva and with the other, he would fight with a bare sword.

“Captain is very orthodox. He didn't come here for a month because I used to go see Keshab Sen. Why? Keshab Sen is not orthodox – he eats with the English, he has married his daughter into another caste, so he has lost his own caste. I said, 'What does all this matter to me? Keshab repeats the name of Lord Hari. I go for that reason. I go to him to hear talk about God. I eat plums, I am not concerned with thorns.' Even then Captain didn't leave me alone. He would say to me, 'Why do you go to Keshab Sen?' Feeling a little irritated, I said, 'I don't go to him for money! I go to him to hear of God! Why do you go to the Governor's house? He is

a mlechchha (non-Hindu). Why do you associate with him?’ When I said this, he stopped for a while.

“But he has great love and devotion for God. During worship, he performs arati with camphor, and while he sits on the asana,¹ he sings hymns. At that time he is quite a different man, as if he is completely absorbed.”

Chapter Six

The doctrine of maya in Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan*): “According to the Vedanta philosophy the world is all maya, all illusory like a dream. The Supreme Self² is the witness – the witness of the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. These conform to your way of thinking. The waking and dreaming states are equally true. Listen to a story. It agrees with your thinking.

“There was a peasant who lived in the countryside. He was a farmer, but spiritually he was very wise. After a long period, his wife bore him a son whom they named Haru. Both parents loved this boy. And why not? He was the precious, bright jewel of the family. The farmer was of a religious nature, and everybody in the village liked him very much. One day he was working on his farm when somebody came and told him that Haru had an attack of cholera. The farmer returned home and arranged for good medical treatment, but the boy died. Everybody in the family was grief-

1. Seat of worship and meditation.

2. Paramatman.

stricken, but the farmer acted as though nothing had happened. He even consoled others, saying that it was no use to grieve. And then he went back to his field to farm. When he returned home, he found that his wife was weeping even more bitterly. She said to him, ‘How hard-hearted you are! You have not shed a tear for your son!’ The farmer replied gently, ‘I’ll tell you why I’m not weeping. Yesterday I had a great dream. In it I was a king and the father of eight sons. I was in complete happiness when I woke up. Now I am in great confusion – whether I should grieve for those eight sons or for this one son of yours.’

“The farmer was a man of spiritual knowledge. He could see that the state of waking is as illusory as the state of dreaming. The Atman alone is eternal.

“I accept everything – the fourth state of turiya¹ as well as the states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. I accept all the three states. I accept Brahman as well as maya, living beings, and the world – all. If I did not accept all, I would not get the full weight.”

A devotee: “How does it lose weight?” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: “Brahman is qualified by living beings and the world. In the beginning, when discriminating ‘not this, not this,’ one has to determine what the individual soul is and what the world is. As long as one has the feeling of ‘I-ness,’ one feels that God Himself has become everything.

1. The transcendental state.

He indeed has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.

“When a man talks of the essence of a bel fruit, he means the pulp only – not its seeds and shell. But to be able to tell the weight of the bel fruit by simply weighing the pulp alone will not do. One has to take the pulp, the seeds, and the shell together to weigh it. The pulp, the seeds, and the shell all belong to it.”

**The Absolute belongs to Him and
so does the phenomenal world**

“So, I accept the Absolute as well as the phenomenal world. I don’t do away with the world by calling it maya. If I did, it would lose weight.”

**The doctrine of maya and Vishishtadvaitavada –
Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga**

Mahimacharan: “Beautifully harmonized! From the Absolute to the phenomenal world, and again from the phenomenal world to the Absolute.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Men of knowledge see everything as an illusion. Devotees accept all the states. The man of knowledge yields milk in droplets. (*All laugh.*) Some cows are very choosy when they graze, so they yield milk in dribbles. But the cows who don’t discriminate so much and eat everything give streams of milk. The highest class of devotee¹ accepts both the Absolute and the

1. The highest class devotee:

yo māṁ paśyati sarvatra sarvaṁ ca mayi paśyati |

tasyāhaṁ na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati ||

Bhagavad Gita 6:30. [He who sees Me everywhere and sees all in Me; I am not lost to him, nor is he lost to Me.]

phenomenal world, so he can enjoy the divine even when his mind comes down from the Absolute. The highest class of devotee yields milk in streams.” (*All laugh.*)

Mahima: “But that milk has a particular smell.” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “Yes, it has. It has to be boiled a bit. You must heat it a little on the fire of spiritual knowledge. Then it won’t smell anymore.”

Om and the union of the Absolute and phenomenal

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): “You explain Om with reference only to *a, u, m.*”

Mahimacharan: “*A* for creation, *u* for preservation, and *m* for dissolution.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I explain it with the sound ‘t-a-a-m’ of a brass bell – *t...a...m*. The merging of the relative¹ into the Absolute;² the merging of the gross, the subtle, and the causal into the Great Cause; it is the merging into the state of turiya from the states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. The bell rings as if something heavy has fallen into the ocean, giving rise to waves. The relative thus arises from the Absolute. The gross, the subtle, and the causal forms start appearing out of the Great Cause. The states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep emerge from turiya. And again, these waves of the Great Ocean lose themselves again in the Great Ocean. From the

1. Lila.

2. Nitya.

relative to the Absolute, and from the Absolute to the relative. I have been shown this. I use the simile of the sound ‘t-a-a-m.’ I have seen all this clearly. I was shown the Ocean of Consciousness – it is limitless. Everything on the relative plane arises from it and then merges back into it. Millions of universes come into existence in the Ocean of Consciousness, and then they merge back into it. I don’t know what your books say.”

Mahima: “Those who saw all this have not written the scriptures. They remained absorbed in their realization. Where was the time for them to write? To be able to write, one needs an analytical mind. Others who heard it from them wrote.”

**How long does attachment to the world remain?
Till the attainment of the bliss of Brahman**

Sri Ramakrishna: “Worldly people ask why they don’t get rid of the attachment to ‘lust and greed.’ The attachment goes when God is attained.¹ If you once taste the bliss of Brahman, your mind will not run after sense pleasures, wealth, and honour.

“If a moth sees light once, it doesn’t go into darkness again.

“Someone said to Ravana, ‘You conjure up so many different forms for Sita. Why don’t you once assume the form of Rama and go to her?’ Ravana replied, ‘When I think of Rama, even the seat of Brahma appears unimportant, what to speak of

1. rasavarjaṁ raso'pyasya paraṁ dr̥ṣṭvā nivartate | Bhagavad Gita 2:59. [The longing for sense objects also turns away when he has seen the Supreme.]

another man's wife. How then could I assume the form of Rama?"¹

The more one develops love for God, the less becomes the attachment to the world – Chaitanya's devotees are unattached

“All spiritual practices are done for the sake of attaining Him. The more you meditate on Him, the less will be your attachment for the ordinary things of the world. The more devotion you have for His lotus feet, the less desire you will have for sense objects, and the less your mind will concern itself with physical comfort. Someone else's wife will appear to you as your mother, and you will think of your own wife as your helper in spiritual life. She will be a friend in spiritual life. You will be freed from lower desires, and divine qualities will develop in you. You will be completely detached from the world. Then even if you live in the world, you will move about as one already liberated in life.² The devotees of Chaitanya Deva lived in the world without attachment.”

Deep secret of the man of knowledge and the devotee

(*To Mahima*) “You may discuss Vedanta a thousand times with a genuine devotee and call the world a dream, but his love for God will not disappear – though he may appear to shed it a little for a while. A pestle was lying in a field of willows. It resulted in the pestle destroying the dynasty.³

1. Tuchham Brahmapadam paravadhusangah kutah.

2. Jivanmukta.

3. Musalam kulanashnam, the story of the pestle: The childhood friends of Samba, one of Krishna's sons, playfully disguised him as a

“One becomes a man of knowledge who is born with an element of Shiva. His mind always goes to that knowledge ‘only Brahman is real, the world is an illusion.’ If one is born of Vishnu, one possesses loving devotion.¹ This intense love will never leave you. Even if it is diluted a little with reasoning, it returns to gush forth again, just as the pestle destroyed the dynasty of the Yadus.”

pregnant woman by dressing him in female clothes and hanging an iron pestle below his waist. They presented him before a group of ascetics and asked them what sort of child the woman would give birth to. Enraged that a joke had been played on them, the munis proclaimed a curse that the iron pestle would be the ruin of the entire clan of Yadus. Fearfully, the boys took the pestle to the ocean and rubbed it for a very long time. The particles that fell from it, on striking the ground, became strong willow reeds. The boys threw the last piece of pestle into the sea.

In the meantime Krishna’s clan, the Yadus, had become overbearingly vain and arrogant and they began to fight among themselves. At last they took the powerful willow reeds sprung from the pestle dust and, with them as weapons, fought each other to the death. Krishna, having decided that it was time that he also pass on, bade his father and his wives farewell and seated himself under a tree for meditation. Only one of his legs was not obscured by the leafy and outreaching branches of the tree. A hunter mistook him for a deer and killed him with an arrow, the point of which was the last piece from the pestle that had been thrown into the sea. Thus did the munis’ curse find fulfillment.

1. Prema bhakti.

Chapter Seven

Service to mother and Sri Ramakrishna – Hazra Mahashay¹

Hazra is sitting on the verandah to the east of Sri Ramakrishna's room, performing japa. He is forty-six or forty-seven years old and comes from the same region as Thakur. For quite a long time he has felt renunciation for the world. He remains away from his home and visits it only occasionally, although he has property in the village, which supplies the needs of his wife, son, daughter, and other family members. But he has incurred a debt of about a thousand rupees, and it continually worries him how to pay it back. He often visits Calcutta. Ishan Chandra Mukherji, who resides in Thanthania has great respect for Hazra and serves him like a holy man. Sri Ramakrishna keeps Hazra with him out of compassion. When his dhoti wears out, he gets Hazra a new one. He often enquires after him and talks about God with him. Hazra is very argumentative and is often carried away by his argument. He spends a lot of time on his asana on the verandah, performing japa on his rosary.

News has come of the illness of Hazra's mother. When Ramlal left their village, she held his hand and begged him, "Carry this humble request of mine to your uncle (Thakur), somehow to persuade Pratap (Hazra) to come home just this one time. May he come to see me just this once." Thakur has told Hazra, "Go home and see your mother, and then come back. She spoke about it repeatedly to Ramlal. How can one call upon God

1. Hazra (Pratap Chandra Hazra) left his wife and children in Madagod, near Kamarpukur, in order to lead a spiritual life, when he was approximately thirty-eight years old. Argumentative and critical of others, he nevertheless had extraordinary faith and devotion to Ramakrishna, who joked that he was there to "thicken the plot." He returned to his home and died there in the month of Chaitra, 1306 B.Y. (A.D. 1900) when he was sixty-four years old.

after hurting one's mother? Go, and then you may come back."

When the meeting of the devotees is over, Mahimacharan brings Hazra to Thakur. M. is also present.

Mahimacharan (*smiling, to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, I have to ask you something. Why have you asked Hazra to go home when he doesn't want to go back to his family?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "His mother expressed great grief to Ramlal, so I told him, 'Go for three days. Come back after seeing her once.' Can one practice spiritual disciplines after hurting one's mother? I was going to stay in Vrindavan when all of a sudden I remembered my mother. I said to myself, 'Mother would weep.' So I returned here with Mathur Babu.

"Anyway, what fear can a man of knowledge have to go see his family?"

Mahimacharan (*smiling*): "But sir, only provided one has attained knowledge."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Hazra has attained everything. Only a little of his mind is in the world. He has sons and has incurred some debt. The aunt has completely recovered, only a bit of sickness remains.' (*Everybody laughs.*)

Mahima: "But sir, where is his knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "O brother, you don't know? Everybody knows that Hazra is the only devotee who lives in Rasmani's temple. They

talk of Hazra only. They never talk of this (*pointing to himself*)." (*All laugh.*)

Hazra: "You are unmatched. You can't be compared with anyone. No one understands you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah, so that is why – the matchless one cannot help anybody. Why, then, talk of this (*meaning himself*)?"

Mahimacharan: "Sir, what does he know? He'll just do what you tell him to."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh? You'd better ask him. He tells me, 'I have nothing to do with you.'"

Mahima: "He is very argumentative."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And then he also lectures me from time to time. (*All laugh.*) In a discussion I scolded him. Later, lying inside the mosquito net remembering the language I used, I thought I might have offended him. So I went to salute him. Only then was my mind at peace."

Vedanta and the pure Atman

(*To Hazra*) "Why do you call the pure Atman Ishvara (God)? The pure Atman is beyond all action. It is only a witness to the three states. When I think of creation, preservation, and dissolution I call Him Ishvara. What is pure Self like? It is like a magnet lying at a distance, but the needle still moves toward it. The magnet itself remains unmoved – actionless."

Chapter Eight

Evening music and conversation with Ishan

It is almost evening. Thakur is taking a stroll. Seeing Mani sitting all alone and meditating, he suddenly addresses him lovingly, “Please bring me one or two coarse shirts. I can’t accept shirts brought by everybody. I was thinking of asking Captain, but you may give them to me.” Getting up, Mani says, “At your service.”

It is twilight. Incense is burnt in Sri Ramakrishna’s room. He bows to the pictures of gods and goddesses and, having repeated his bija mantra,¹ chants the names of God. There is a unique splendour outside the room. It is the seventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kartik and the pure rays of the moon falling on the temple seem to make it smile. As well, ripples play on the surface of the Ganges, which is rising and falling sweetly like a sleeping baby’s chest. The flood tide is over. The sound of arati mixed with a melodious murmuring of the bright and refreshing current of the Ganges loses itself in the distance. Three aratis are being performed at the same time in the temples – the Kali temple, the Vishnu temple, and each of the Shiva temples. The priest of the Shiva temples goes from one temple to the other. He holds a bell in his left hand and the lamp with five wicks² in the right. An attendant carries cymbals.

The sweet sound of the symphony of sanai and other instruments³ from the southwest corner of the compound is heard. Evening music⁴ is being played in

1. The letter or syllable of a mantra in which the essence of God is concentrated.

2. Panchapradip.

3. Roshan chowki.

4. Raga ragini.

the music pavilion.¹ A perpetual festival of the All-Blissful Mother reminds the devotees never to be unhappy. There are joys and sorrows in the world – let them be. The Mother of the Universe, our Mother, is here. Rejoice. The son of the maid of the house hasn't enough to eat, hasn't enough to wear, no house, no hearth. Even then, there is courage within: he has his mother. He is fearless in the lap of his mother. She is not a step-mother, She is the real mother. Who am I, from where have I come, what will happen to me, where will I go – all this the Mother knows. Why bother the mind about it? My Mother knows – my Mother who has made me a body, mind, life, and self. I don't even want to know. If it is necessary, She will tell me. Why worry about it so much? All children of Mother, rejoice!

Bathed in moonlight, the world outside is smiling. Inside his room, Sri Ramakrishna is seated, filled with the bliss of God's love. Ishan has come from Calcutta. More conversation about God takes place. Ishan has great faith. He says, "With a trident in his hand, Shiva² accompanies one who goes on a journey with the name of Durga on his lips. What is there to fear from misfortune when Shiva Himself is the guardian?"

**Attainment of God through faith –
instructions on Karma Yoga to Ishan**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "You have firm faith. I don't have that much. (*All laugh.*) One can realize Him by that faith alone."

Ishan: "Yes sir."

1. Nahabat khana.

2. Shulapani.

Sri Ramakrishna: “You perform repetition of the name¹ and daily puja, observe fasts, and perform purascharana² and other rites and rituals. This is very good. God makes one who has sincere attraction for Him do all these things. If one is able to perform them all without desire for their fruits, one surely attains Him.”

**Ritualistic devotion and loving devotion –
when do rituals fall off?**

“The scriptures instruct us to perform numerous rites, so I perform them. This is called ritualistic³ devotion. The other is loving devotion.⁴ It comes out of an especially deep love for God, such as Prahlada had. When one develops this love, there is no longer the need for rituals.”

Chapter Nine

In the heart of the disciple

Before evening, Mani is strolling in the temple garden as he recalls the story of Rama’s will. This is very beautiful, he thought. It solves the confusion between predestination and free will, between liberty and necessity. “I was captured by the robbers because of Rama’s will; I was smoking, that too by Rama’s will; I committed a theft by Rama’s will; I was held by the police also by Rama’s will. I have become a sadhu by Rama’s will. I pray, ‘O Lord, may my mind be not impure. May you not goad me to commit robbery.’” This too is Rama’s will. The right desire and the

1. Japa.

2. Performance of japa a certain number of times each day, methodically increasing and decreasing the number.

3. Vaidhi bhakti.

4. Raga bhakti.

wrong desire are both given by Him. Even so, there is a special point: Why should He give us the wrong understanding? Why should He give the desire to commit robbery? In answer to this, Thakur said, "Just as He has made the lion, the tiger, and the snake among animals, just as He has made poisonous trees among others, similarly He has also made thieves among men." Why has He made them, who can tell? Who can understand God's ways?

But then, if God has made everything, our responsibility ends. But why would it end? Unless you have realized God, unless you have had His vision, you cannot have one hundred percent faith. As long as you don't have full faith, you will certainly have the feeling of vice and virtue, and the feeling of responsibility. Thakur has explained what "Rama's will" is. Repeating "Rama's will" like a parrot won't do. As long as you don't know God, as long as "my" will and His will don't become one, as long as you don't have the full understanding that I am an instrument, so long does He retain the knowledge of vice and virtue, joy and sorrow, purity and impurity, good and bad, and the sense of responsibility. Otherwise, how can His world of maya go on?

The more I think of Sri Ramakrishna's love of God, the more I am struck with wonder. Keshab Sen repeats the name of Hari and meditates on God, so he (Thakur) immediately runs to meet him. Keshab at once became his own. Then he did not listen to Captain's objection that Keshab went to a foreign land, ate with white men, gave his daughter in marriage into a different caste – all these things. "I take only cherries. I have nothing to do with thorns." In the bond of love for God, believers in God with form and believers in God without form are united. Hindus, Muslims, and Christians – all are united, and also the four castes. Love of God, be victorious! Blessed you are, Sri Ramakrishna! Victory to you! You have

embodied the universal spirit of eternal religion.¹ It is perhaps for this reason that you hold such attraction. You embrace the followers of all religions as your own, without any difference. You have but one test – love for God. You only see if a person has that within, if he has devotion. If that is there, he immediately becomes your very own. If you see love of God in a Hindu, he is at once your own. And if a Muslim has the same love for Allah, he is also your own. If a Christian has love for Jesus, he is also your near and dear one. You say that all rivers coming from different directions flow into one and the same ocean.

Thakur does not consider this world a dream. If that were so, it would lose weight. It is not the doctrine of illusion,² it is the doctrine of qualified non-dualism.³ He does not consider the individual soul and the world imaginary; he doesn't think they are illusions. God is real, and so are men and the world real. Brahman is qualified by living beings and the world. You cannot get the whole of a bel fruit if you take away its seeds and shell.

It is said that the universe manifests itself in the Great Ocean of Consciousness⁴ and then merges back into it in time. A wave rises in the Great Ocean and then merges back into it. On the waters of this ocean of joy are an infinite number of waves. Where is the beginning of this sport and where is its end! It cannot be expressed in words. It cannot be thought by the mind. How little is man, how small his intelligence. It is said that great saints have seen this Eternal Supreme Person in the state of samadhi – they have witnessed the Absolute sporting as the ever-playful Lord. This they have surely done because Sri Ramakrishna also says so – but not with these physical eyes. They did it perhaps with what is called

1. Sanatana Dharma.
 2. Mayavada.
 3. Vishishtadvaita.
 4. Mahachidakasha.

the divine eye. Getting this divine eye, Arjuna saw the Universal Form of the Lord. With this divine eye, the rishis realized the Atman, and with this divine eye, Jesus saw his heavenly Father constantly. How can we gain that divine eye? We have heard Thakur say that one can get it by the yearning of the heart. But how to have such yearning? Does one have to renounce the world? No, he did not say that today.

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna's Arrival at a Devotee's House Conversation and Joy with Narendra, Girish, Balaram, Chunilal, Latu, M., Narayan, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

In the company of devotees in a devotee's house

It is the 10th day of the dark fortnight of Phalgun, Purva Ashadha nakshatra, Wednesday, 11 March 1885, the 29th of Phalgun. Arriving from Dakshineswar today at about ten o'clock, Sri Ramakrishna takes the prasad of Sri Jagannath at the home of a devotee, Balaram Bose. Latu and other devotees are with him.

Blessed you are, Balaram! Today your home has become the main centre of Thakur's work. He has bound devotee after devotee with the ties of divine love! How he has danced and sung with them, just as Sri Gauranga himself had established a mart of ecstatic love in the house of Srivasa!¹

Sitting at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, Thakur weeps with longing to see his intimate disciples. He suffers sleepless nights. He says to the Divine Mother, "Mother, he has so much devotion! Please attract him to this place. Mother, do please bring him here. If he

1. An intimate devotee of Sri Chaitanya.

cannot come here, then Mother, take me to him so that I can see him.” So he comes running to Balaram’s house. To others he says, “Sri Jagannath is worshiped in Balaram’s house. The food there is very pure.” Whenever he comes, he immediately sends Balaram to invite others. He says, “Please invite Narendra, Bhavanath, and Rakhai. Please invite Purna, the Younger Naren, Narayan – all these devotees. Feeding them is like feeding Narayana Himself. They are not ordinary. They are manifestations of divinity. You will be greatly benefited if you feed them.”

It was in Balaram’s house that Thakur first met Girish Ghosh. A joyous singing of hymns was held here at the time of the Car Festival.¹ So many times “a festivity of joy in the court of love” has been held at this very place.

Eagerly awaiting your arrival – the Younger Naren

M. teaches in a nearby school. He has come to know that Sri Ramakrishna will come to Balaram’s house today at ten o’clock. He finds time to go there during school hours and arrives in the afternoon and salutes Sri Ramakrishna. After his meal Sri Ramakrishna rests for a while in the visitor’s room. Every now and then he takes out some powdered spices and cubeb² from a small pouch and chews it. Young devotees are sitting around him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): “So you have come. Don’t you have school?”

M.: “I’m coming from school. There’s not much to do there now.”

A devotee: “No sir, he has played truant.” (*All laugh.*)

1. Rathayatra.

2. A small, spicy berry from a plant in the pepper family.

M. (*to himself*): "Oh, it is as if someone has dragged me here."

Sri Ramakrishna looks a bit worried. Then he asks M. to sit near him and speaks with him on various subjects. He says, "Can you wring this hand towel of mine and spread my shirt in the sun? My foot is aching a little. Can you massage it gently?" M. doesn't know how to render service, so Thakur teaches him. Rather confused, M. performs these actions one by one. While Sri Ramakrishna instructs him in different things during the conversation, M. gently strokes his feet.

**Sri Ramakrishna and the highest point
of renunciation – the true sannyasin**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Can you tell me why this has been happening to me? For some time now I haven't been able to touch anything made of metal. Once I put my hand on a metal cup and it felt like I'd been stung by a horned fish. My whole hand began to sting. But you know, you can't get along without touching a wash pot, so I thought I'd cover it with a piece of cloth and see if I could pick it up. No sooner did my hand touch it than it started to twitch with acute pain. So I prayed to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I won't do it again, please pardon me this time.'

"The Younger Naren comes here. Will his family object? He is very pure and absolutely free from lust."

M.: "He is a 'receptacle' of great capacity."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. He also says that he remembers everything he hears about God, even if

he only hears it once. He tells me that when he was a child he used to weep because he couldn't see God."

Sri Ramakrishna talks to M. about the Younger Naren for quite some time. One of the devotees present says, "Master Mahashay, aren't you going back to school?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What time is it?"

A devotee: "Ten to one."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "You had better go. It's getting late. You have already left your work to come here. (*To Latu*) Where is Rakhal?"

Latu: "He has gone home."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Without seeing me?"

Chapter Two

In the afternoon with devotees – incarnation and Sri Ramakrishna

Returning after school has closed, M. sees Thakur seated with a group of devotees in Balaram's drawing room. There is a sweet smile on his face, which is reflected on the faces of the devotees. Seeing that M. has come again and, after he has offered his salutations, Thakur beckons him to sit near. Girish Ghosh, Suresh Mitra, Balaram, Latu, Chunilal, and some other devotees are present.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Talk to Narendra and see what his views are."

Girish (*smiling*): “Narendra says that God is infinite. All that we see and hear, whether it is a person or a thing – even what we can't describe – is part of Him. What can a portion of infinity be? Infinity can't be split.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “God may be infinite, but if He wills, His essence can manifest in man – and it does. That He incarnates Himself cannot be explained by any analogy. One has to experience it. One has to see it himself. Analogy may give some idea. If you touch the horn of a cow, you have touched the cow. And if you touch its foot or tail, you have still touched the cow. But for us the principal thing is the cow's milk, and that comes from the udder.

“In the same way, God assumes a human body from time to time and appears on earth to teach us ecstatic love and devotion.”¹

Girish: “Narendra says, ‘Is it possible to comprehend Him completely? He is Infinite.’”

Perception of the Infinite²

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): “Who can comprehend God fully? One can not know any aspect of God, either the whole or a part. And what need is there to know Him fully? It is enough to have a vision of God. Seeing His incarnation is seeing Him. If somebody goes to the Ganges and touches its water and says, ‘I have seen and

1. Prema and bhakti.

2. Compare discussion about the order of perception of the Infinite and of the Finite in Max Muller's Hibbert Lectures and Gifford Lectures.

touched the Ganges,' it doesn't mean that he had to touch the whole of the Ganges from Hardwar to Gangasagar with his hand. (*All laugh.*)

"If I touch your feet, I have touched you. (*Laughter.*)

"If you go to the sea and just touch its water, you have touched the sea itself. The element of fire is present in everything, but it is more present in wood."

Girish (*laughing*): "I want the place where I can get fire."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "The element of fire is more in wood. If you are looking for the essence of God, you have to find it in man. God is more manifest in man. If you see deep and burning devotion¹ and ecstatic love² pouring forth from a man, if you see him mad for God, crazy in His love, know for certain that God has manifested in him.

(*Looking at M.*) "God is indeed present, but then His power manifests more in some than in others. His power manifests more in an incarnation. Sometimes this power exists in its fullness. It is Shakti³ that becomes the incarnation of God."

Girish: "Narendra says, 'He is beyond word and intellect.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, He may be beyond this mind, but He is known by the pure mind. He may be beyond this intellect, but He is seen with the

1. Urjita bhakti.
2. Prema bhakti.
3. The power of God.

pure intellect. As soon as one is freed from the attachment to 'lust and greed,' the mind and intellect become pure. Then pure mind and pure intellect are one. He is known by the pure mind. Haven't the sages seen Him? They saw Consciousness with the help of consciousness."

Girish (*smiling*): "I defeated Narendra in the argument."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No. He said to me, 'Girish Ghosh has so much faith in God's incarnation, what could I say? One shouldn't contradict such faith.'"

Girish (*smiling*): "We are all so free with our words, but M. is sitting tongue-tied. What is he thinking? Sir, what do you say?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Mukhahalsa bhetarbunde, kantulse, dighal ghomta nari, pana pukerer sheetal jala manda kari.¹" (*All laugh.*)

(*Smiling*) "But he is not like that. He is a very deep soul." (*All laugh.*)

Girish: "Sir, what does this saying mean?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Beware of these kinds of people. The mukhahalsa, whose words flow like water. And then the bhetarbunde, who keeps the door of his heart closed to you. Then the kantulse, who shows off his devotion by sticking a sacred tulasi leaf in his ear. Beware also of a dighal ghomta woman, a woman who wears a long veil. People think she is very chaste, when in fact she is not. And of panapukur water – water from a scum-

1. Sri Ramakrishna explains this verse below.

covered tank. When you bathe in it, you get typhoid fever.” (*Laughter.*)

Chunilal: “People have been talking about M. The Younger Naren and Baburam are his pupils, and so are Narayan, Paltu, Purna, and Tejchandra. It is being said that he has brought them here, and thus their studies are being neglected. He is being blamed.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Who will believe them?”

Such is the trend of conversation. Now Narayan comes in and salutes Thakur. Narayan is a student, of fair complexion, seventeen or eighteen years old. Sri Ramakrishna is very fond of him and is always eager to see and feed him. He often cries for him in Dakshineswar. He sees in Narayan the very presence of Narayana Himself

Girish (*to Narayan*): “Who told you? I see that it is M. himself who has shot this arrow.” (*Everybody laughs.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): “Stop, keep quiet! M. is already getting a bad name!”

Amazing is the worry over food – result of a brahmin’s acceptance of gifts

The conversation again turns to Narendra.

A devotee: “Why doesn’t he come as often as he used to?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Worry over food is amazing! It made even Kalidasa lose his wits.”

Balaram: “He often visits Annada Guha, Shiva Guha’s son.”

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. Narendra, Annada Guha, all these boys hold meetings of the Brahma Samaj at the house of an office clerk."

A devotee: "His name is Tarapada."

Balaram (*laughing*): "The brahmins say that Annada Guha is very conceited."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't listen to the brahmins in such matters. You know them well. If you don't give them gifts, you are bad; and if you do, you are good. I know Annada. He's a good man."

Chapter Three

Enjoying hymns in the company of devotees

Sri Ramakrishna expresses a desire to hear some songs. The drawing room in Balaram's house is full of people. They are all looking at him (Sri Ramakrishna) to see what he says and what he does.

Tarapada sings:

O Keshava,¹ who roam in Vrindavan's groves, to Your humble servant grant Your grace.

O Madhava,² who enchant the mind and steal the heart, playing sweetly on the flute.

(Utter, my mind, the name of Hari! Hari! Hari!)

O youth of Vrindavan, who tamed the serpent-king Kaliya and removed the fear of the distressed,

O You of flashing eyes, a peacock's feather on Your brow, the delight of Radha's heart,

1. An epithet of Krishna, meaning "one with beautiful, long hair."

2. An epithet of Krishna, the descendant of Madhu.

Upholder of the mount Govardhan, with wildflowers adorned!

O Damodara,¹ crusher of Kamsa's pride!

O dark-hued playmate of Vrindavan's gopis!

(Utter, my mind, the name of Hari! Hari! Hari!)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Oh, what a beautiful song! Did you compose all these songs?"

A devotee: "Yes, he composed all the songs in *Chaitanya Lila* ('Lord Chaitanya's Divine Play')."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "This song describes it so well!"

(*To the singer*) "Can you sing a song about Nitai?"

Tarapada sings a song by Nitai:

If you wish for young Radha's love, come here: the tide of love flows in.

A hundred waves of love are rising.

Take as much as you desire

Of this love the maiden pours out freely.

Drawn by her love, chant "Hari, Hari, Hari!"

This love sets the heart dancing, maddened with longing.

Come, let us all chant Hari's name, drawn by Radha's love.

Next he sings the song about Sri Gauranga:

Who are you, O golden-hued one, who set my heart at peace?

1. An epithet given to Krishna because his foster-mother tried to tie him up with a rope (*dama*) around his belly (*udara*).

A storm is raging on the sea of love, sweeping away all fetters of family, birth, and pride.

(Drown, O mind, in the thought of Gaur.)

Becoming a cowherd boy, you tended the cows in Vraja,

Stealing the hearts of the gopis with the sweet flute in your hand.

Lifting Mount Govardhan, you saved Vrindavan,

And your serene face was flooded with tears

As you humbled yourself, holding the wounded gopis' feet.

(Drown, O mind, in the thought of Gaur.)

Everyone tries to persuade M. to sing, but he is shy. In a whisper he asks to be excused.

Girish (*smiling, to Thakur*): "Sir, there is no way to make M. sing."

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): "He can bare his teeth at school, but feels shy to sing a song here!"

M. is ashamed and sits silently.

Suresh Mitra is seated at some distance. Glancing lovingly at him and pointing at Girish Ghosh, Sri Ramakrishna says happily: "What are you compared to him (Girish)!"

Suresh: "Yes, sir. He is my elder brother." (*All laugh.*)

Girish (*to Thakur*): "Well, sir, I didn't study anything in my childhood. Still people call me learned."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Mahima Chakravarty has read and heard so many scriptures! He is a good 'receptacle'. (*To M.*) What do you think?"

M.: “Yes, sir.”

Girish: “What? Studying! I have seen enough of it. I’m not going to be misled by it anymore.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): “Do you know the attitude ‘here’?¹ Books, scriptures, and the like only show the way to realize God. When you know the way, the means, what need is there for books and scriptures? One only has to act.

“A person received a letter asking him to send a few things to his relatives. It listed what articles were to be sent. When he went to buy them, he couldn’t find the letter. He was very confused and began to look for it. For a long time people helped him search, and at last the letter was found. There was no end to his happiness. He carefully held the letter and began to read it, eagerly, to see what was written in it. It said, ‘Send five seers of sandesh, a dhoti, and what-not.’ Now the letter was of no use to him. He put it away and began to gather the sandesh, dhoti, and other articles. For how long was the letter needed? As long as he didn’t know about the sandesh, dhoti, and so forth. When he knew what it contained, he followed its instructions.

“In the scriptures you will find ways to realize God, but after knowing them, you have to get to work. Then only will you attain the goal.

“What use is mere learning? A pundit may know a number of couplets, a number of scriptures. But he who is attached to the world, who has love for

1. Sri Ramakrishna used the pronoun ‘I’ very rarely. He referred to himself saying ‘here,’ ‘this place,’ and similar words.

'lust and greed' in his mind, has not internalized the contents of the holy books. His study has been in vain. The almanac says that it will rain twenty *adas*, but squeeze the almanac and not a drop will come out. Not a single drop!" (*All laugh.*)

Girish (*smiling*): "Sir, will not a drop fall when the almanac is pressed?" (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "The pundits talk grandly, but where is their attention? On 'lust and greed,' on sensual pleasures and money.

"Vultures soar high, but their eyes remain fixed on the charnel pits. (*All laugh.*) Their looks are only on charnel pits, dead animals, and corpses.

(*To Girish*) "Narendra is a very good boy. He is good at singing, at playing musical instruments, at reading and writing, and at studies. Besides, he has conquered his senses: he has discrimination and dispassion. He is truthful. He has a number of good qualities.

(*To M.*) "What do you think? Is he very good?"

M.: "Yes sir, he is very good."

Sri Ramakrishna (*aside to M.*): "See how much love and faith Girish has!"

M. looks at Girish wonderingly. Girish has been coming to Thakur for some time. M. feels as though they have known each other for a long time, that they are very close, like gems strung together on the same thread.

Narayan: "Sir, won't you sing?"

Sri Ramakrishna sings the name and glory of the Divine Mother in his sweet voice:

Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.

O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude. ...

Thakur sings to the Divine Mother, assuming the state of worldly people burned by the three fires complaining like a fretful child.

O Mother, ever blissful as You are,

Deprive me not of bliss.

My mind knows nothing but Your lotus feet.

The king of Death berates me.

Tell me, Mother, what I should say to him.

My one desire is to cross the sea of this world

With Your name, Bhavani, on my lips.

I did not even dream, O Mother,

That you would drown me in this shoreless sea!

I swim night and day taking Durga's name,

Yet to my sorrow there is no end.

If I die this time, O Beloved of Shiva, O Durga,

Nobody will ever repeat Your name!

Then he sings of the Divine Mother ever joyful in the bliss of Brahman:

In Shiva's company the Mother is ever lost in ecstasy;

Though drunk with the wine of bliss, She reels but does not fall.

She stands erect on Shiva's breast, the world trembling at Her tread.

More than mad, both He and She are indifferent to fear and shame.

The devotees listen to the songs in deep silence. They gaze at Thakur, who, in an amazing self-forgetful mood, is intoxicated with love for God.

The song ends. After a while Sri Ramakrishna says, "I could not sing well today. I have a slight cold."

Chapter Four

At the approach of evening

Evening has slowly set in, as if the blue shadows of infinity have fallen on the ocean's breast. Whether in a deep forest or on the peak of a mountain reaching into the sky, at the bank of a river with its water trembling at the touch of wind, or in a vast plain meeting the ends of the earth, the insignificant human being easily feels a change of mood. The sun was illuminating the universe. Where has it gone? wonders a child – and, as well, the childlike saint. It is evening. How amazing! Who has done this? Birds sheltered in the branches of the trees are chirping, men who are spiritually awake are repeating the name of the Supreme Poet, the Primal Being, the Cause of all causes.

Evening has come as they talk. The devotees remain seated while Sri Ramakrishna chants the sweet names of God. Everybody listens to him attentively. They have never heard such sweet chanting, as though a shower of nectar. They have never heard or seen a child calling his mother so lovingly, "Mother, Mother!" What need is there now to gaze at the sky or the hills, the ocean, open spaces, or the forest? What use is there now of seeing the horns or feet or limbs of a cow? Am I seeing with my eyes, here in this very room, "the udders of the cow," which the compassionate guru has spoken of? How peaceful has every restless mind become! How has this joyless

earth become so filled with joy? Why do I see the devotees so at peace, so joyful? Is this loving saint the infinite God in a beautiful form? Is this the place where one's thirst for milk is quenched? Whether or not he is God-incarnate, my heart is sold at the feet of this man and it cannot be withdrawn. I have made him the pole-star of my life. Let me see how the Primeval Supreme Soul reflects Himself in the lake of the heart!

Some of the devotees reflect in this way and feel blessed to hear the names of the Mother and the Lord being chanted from the holy lips of Sri Ramakrishna. After singing the names and glories of God, Thakur prays. It is as if the Lord Himself has assumed a body of love and is instructing the individual soul how to pray. He says:

Mother, I surrender at Your lotus feet, I give myself to You.

I do not seek creature comforts, nor name and fame do I ask,

Nor do I demand the eight occult powers. O Mother,

Only grant that I may have pure love and devotion at Your lotus feet,

That for You I may have pure love, both selfless and without motive.

And grant, O Mother, that by Your world-bewitching maya I be not enchanted.

Never may I have love for 'lust and greed.'

In Your world of maya, there is none else for me but You.

I know not how to chant Your name, O Mother,

I am poor in love, devotion, and knowledge.

Be compassionate and grant me love for Your lotus feet.

Mani thinks: What is worship for him who repeats the name of God at morning, midday, and evening; from

whose holy lips issue forth the Ganges of names ceaselessly, like a flow of oil? Mani later understands that Thakur has assumed a human body to impart instructions to mankind: The Lord Himself came in the guise of a yogi and sang the glory of the name.

Girish has invited Thakur to his home this very evening.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't you think it will be too late?"

Girish: "No, you may go whenever you like. I have to go to the theatre tonight. I have to settle a dispute."

Chapter Five

Sri Ramakrishna in a wonderful mood on the road

At Girish's invitation, Thakur is to go tonight. It is 9:00 P.M., and he still has to eat the dinner that Balaram has prepared for him. So that Balaram won't feel hurt later, Thakur tells him on the way to Girish's house, "Balaram, you may send the food you prepared."

As he comes down from the second floor, he becomes filled with divine emotion. He looks drunk. Narayan and M. are with him. Rama, Chuni, and many others follow. A devotee asks, "Who will go with him?" Sri Ramakrishna says, "One person will do." As he descends the stairs, he is overwhelmed with ecstasy. Narayan tries to hold his hand to keep him from falling, but Thakur expresses displeasure. Shortly, he says to Narayan with great

tenderness, “If you hold my hand, people will think I’m intoxicated. I will walk by myself.”

They cross a three-way juncture of Bosepara Lane. Girish’s house is only a little distance from here. Why is Sri Ramakrishna walking so fast? The devotees are falling behind. Who knows what divine emotion has taken possession of him? Is he walking like a madman thinking of that Being whom the Vedas say is “beyond mind and speech?” Only a short time ago he said at Balaram’s house that the Supreme Being is not beyond mind and speech, that He is realized by the pure mind, the pure intellect, and the pure soul. Perhaps at this moment he is beholding that Supreme Being. Is he seeing “whatever is, it is You?”

Just then Narendra is seen coming. Thakur is usually excited, almost to madness, at the sight of Narendra. But now as Narendra appears before him, Thakur is silent. People say, “This is God-consciousness.” Did Chaitanya Deva experience this same state?

Who can understand such divine fervour? Thakur has now arrived at the street from which one enters Girish’s house. The devotees are with him. He talks to Narendra.

“Are you keeping well, my child? I couldn’t speak to you then.” His every word is marked with tenderness. He has not yet reached the front door. He suddenly stops.

He looks at Narendra and says, “One word – ‘this’ (individual soul) is one and ‘that’ (the world) is another.”

The individual soul and the world! Was he seeing all this in ecstasy? Only he knows what he saw in that speechless state. He spoke a word or two – a phrase from the Vedas – as if a word from God, or as if he has gone to the infinite seashore and, standing there

speechless, hears a few echoes of the anahata¹ rising from never-ending waves.

Chapter Six

Thakur in the shrine of a devotee – newspapers – Nityagopal

Girish stands at the door to greet Sri Ramakrishna. As soon as Thakur and his devotees approach, Girish lies prostrate before him. He rises at Sri Ramakrishna's bidding, takes the dust of his feet, and leads him to the sitting room on the second floor. He asks him to sit there, and the devotees quickly sit down. Everyone is eager to be near him and to drink his sweet words.

As he sits down, Thakur notices a newspaper lying there. Newspapers have to do with worldly-minded men, worldly matters, gossip, and running down others, so a newspaper is unholy to Sri Ramakrishna. He makes a sign that it should be removed.

When the newspaper is taken away, he sits. Nityagopal salutes him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Nityagopal*): "Why have you not been to Dakshineswar?"

Nitya: "Sir, I haven't gone to Dakshineswar, because I haven't been well. I had pain."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How are you now?"

Nitya: "I am still not well."

1. The Anahata sound is produced on its own without two material objects being struck together; hence, it is called "the unstruck sound."

Sri Ramakrishna: “You’d better bring your mind down one or two notes.”

Nitya: “I don’t like people’s company. They say so many things that frighten me. But at other times I feel strong.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It’s only natural. Who lives with you?”

Nitya: “Tarak.¹ He’s always with me. But at times even he bothers me.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Nangta (Totapuri) used to say that there was a person at his monastery who had acquired some miraculous powers. He used to walk around gazing at the sky. But when his companion, Ganesh Garji, left him, he became disconsolate.”

While speaking, Sri Ramakrishna goes into ecstasy. In that mood he remains speechless. After a while he says, “You have come? I’m here too.”

Who understands these words? Is this the language of the gods?

Chapter Seven

With an intimate disciple – discussion on God-incarnation

Many devotees are sitting near Sri Ramakrishna, among them Narendra, Girish, Rama, Haripada, Chuni, Balaram, and M.

Narendra does not believe that God incarnates in a human body. On the other hand, Girish has

1. Taraknath Ghoshal, later Swami Shivananda.

burning faith that God incarnates in every age, that He assumes a human body and comes down to this mortal world. Thakur wants the two to argue this matter. He says to Girish, "Discuss this for a while in English. I want to listen."

The discussion starts. But not in English – in Bengali with a few words of English interspersed. Narendra says, "God is infinite. It is not possible for us to comprehend Him. He is present within everybody, it is not that He appears in only one human body."

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "I agree with him. He is everywhere. But this is also true, that there is a difference in manifestation of the divine power. He manifests Himself in some as ignorance¹ and in some as knowledge.² In some 'receptacles' there is greater power, and in others less. So all men are not equal."

Ram: "What is the use of such idle discussion?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*sharply*): "No, no. It has a special significance."

Girish (*to Narendra*): "How do you know that He doesn't assume a human body?"

Narendra: "He is beyond speech and mind."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, He can be known by the pure intellect. The pure intellect and pure Atman are indeed the same. The rishis realized the pure Atman with their pure intellect."

1. Avidya shakti.

2. Vidya shakti.

Girish (*to Narendra*): “If God does not incarnate in a human body, who will teach mankind? He assumes a human body to teach knowledge and love for God. If he doesn’t, who will?”

Narendra: “Why, He will teach from within the heart!”

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): “Yes, yes. He will teach as our Inner Controller.”¹

Now a heated discussion begins: Can the Infinite have parts? What does Hamilton say? What does Herbert Spencer say? What have Tyndall and Huxley said? This is the discussion.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “I don’t like such conversation. I see everything as God. What is there to reason about? I see that He is all, that He has become everything. He is this as well as that. In one state the mind and the intellect are lost in the Absolute. When I see Narendra, my mind is absorbed in the Absolute.

(*To Girish*) “What do you say to this? Say something.”

Girish (*laughing*): “I have understood nearly everything but this.” (*Everybody laughs.*)

Ramanuja and the doctrine of Qualified Non-dualism

Sri Ramakrishna: “And then I can’t talk unless I come down two steps. What Shankara understood and taught as Vedanta is true, but then the Qualified Non-dualism² of Ramanuja is also true.”

1. Antaryamin.

2. Vishishtadvaita.

Narendra: "What is meant by Qualified Non-dualism?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Qualified Non-dualism is Ramanuja's view that the finite soul and the phenomenal world are parts of the Absolute and not separate from it. The three are one.

"Take a bel fruit. Somebody separates its shell, seeds, and kernel, but now you want to know its weight. Will you be able to weigh it by weighing the kernel alone? The shell, the seeds, and the kernel will have to be weighed together. At first it seems that neither the shell nor the seeds are of any importance – that the kernel is all-important. But when you think about it, you realize that the kernel belongs to the same substance (fruit) as the shell and the seeds. In the beginning you have to reason 'not this, not this'; the finite soul is not permanent, nor is the world: only Brahman is real, all else is unreal. Later, you realize that the kernel belongs to the same substance as the shell and seed. The Absolute is the identical substance from which you derive the concept of the individual soul and the world. The phenomenal must be traced to that very Being, the Absolute must be traced. So Ramanuja says that the individual soul, the world, and Brahman are one. This is called Vishishtadvaita."

Chapter Eight

God-vision – God reveals Himself through the Incarnation

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “I see Him before my eyes; what more should I reason about? I’m seeing that God Himself has become everything, that He Himself has become the living beings and the world.

“But without awakening the consciousness within you, you can’t realize the Universal Consciousness. How long do you reason? As long as you do not realize Him. Mere talking will not do. I see that He indeed has become everything. One can only gain awakening by His grace. When you awaken, you go into samadhi. Sometimes you forget your body; your attachment to ‘lust and greed’ vanishes; you don’t like anything except talk about God; you feel pained to hear worldly talk.”

Revelation – instruction to Narendra – Kali truly is Brahman

“When the consciousness within is awakened, the Universal Consciousness is realized.”

At the end of the discussion Sri Ramakrishna says to M., “I have seen that you can know Him in one way through reasoning and in another way through meditation. Again, when God reveals Himself by showing how He plays as man, it is yet a different experience. When He reveals what God-incarnation is, you don’t have to reason any more, and nobody has to try to make you understand. Do you know what it’s like? It’s like striking a match and the place is suddenly illumined. Similarly, if

God suddenly gives you light, all doubts vanish. Can He be known by reasoning?"

Thakur calls Narendra and makes him sit near him. He enquires about him and shows great affection to him.

Narendra (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Alas, I have meditated on Kali for three or four days, but nothing at all has happened."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It will happen gradually. Kali is none other than Brahman. The One who is Brahman is Kali. Kali is the Primal Power. When It is inactive, I call it Brahman. When It creates, preserves, and dissolves, I call It Shakti, I call It Kali. Whom you call Brahman,¹ I call Kali.²

"Brahman and Kali are one and the same. They are like fire and its burning power. If one thinks of fire, its burning power immediately comes to mind. When one accepts Kali, one has to accept Brahman. Similarly, by accepting Brahman, one has to accept Kali.

"Brahman and Shakti are one and the same. I call Brahman Shakti, and the same Being I call Kali."

It is dark, and Girish must leave. He says to Haripada, "Brother, please call a cab. I have to go to the theatre."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Look here, see that you bring one!"

1. The Unconditioned, the Absolute.

2. God in relation to the conditioned.

Haripada (*laughing*): “I’m going to bring it. Why shouldn’t I?”

God-realization and work – Rama and work

Girish (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “I have to leave you to go to the theatre.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, you have to serve both parties. King Janaka was loyal to both matter and spirit and drank his milk from a full cup.” (*All laugh.*)

Girish: “I am thinking of leaving the theatre and everything to the younger fellows.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “No, no. This is all very good. It’s helping many.”

Narendra (*in a low voice*): “Just a moment ago he was harping on God, on incarnation of God, and now the theatre is drawing him!”

Chapter Nine

In samadhi – Sri Ramakrishna intoxicated with God

Seating Narendra by his side, Sri Ramakrishna looks at him. Suddenly he moves still nearer. Narendra does not believe in incarnations of God. What does that matter? Thakur’s love for him knows no bounds. Touching Narendra, he quotes from a song, “Do you feel that your dignity has been wounded? So be it. We are of the same mind as you, and we feel for you.”¹

1. These words were addressed by the gopis of Vrindavan to Radha.

One reasons till one realizes God

(*To Narendra*) “As long as there is reasoning, one cannot attain God. You were reasoning. I didn’t like it.

“How long is there noise at a feast? As long as people don’t sit down to eat. As soon as luchs and vegetables are served, seventy-five percent of the noise disappears. (*All laugh.*) When other dishes are served, it decreases further. When curds are served on leaf plates, one can only hear the sound of sipping. And when the feast is over, they all sleep.

“The nearer you come to God, the less you reason. When He is attained, no words, no reasoning, remains. Then it is sleep – samadhi.”

Saying this, Thakur gently strokes Narendra’s body and touches his chin. He says, “Hari Om, Hari Om, Hari Om.”

Why is he acting like this? Is Sri Ramakrishna seeing in Narendra the very presence of God? Is this what is known as seeing God in man? Soon Thakur begins to lose outer consciousness, all awareness of the outside world. Perhaps this is what is called the “half-consciousness” that Chaitanya experienced. He has his hand on Narendra’s feet, as if he is massaging the feet of Narayan. Again he moves his hand. Why so much caressing of the body and massaging of the feet? Is he serving the Lord, or is he transmitting power to Narendra?

Suddenly his mood changes. What is he saying to Narendra with folded hands? He says, “Sing a song and I will be restored. Then I’ll be able to

stand on my own legs. ‘Oh, he (my Nityananda) is intoxicated with the love of Gauranga.’”

He is silent for a while and sits speechless, like a figure in a painting. Then overwhelmed with divine emotion, he says, “Beware Radha, lest you fall into the Jamuna, you who are mad with love for Krishna!”

Still overwhelmed with divine emotion, he quotes a song:

Friend, how far is that wood
Where my Shyama Sundara is?
I sense Krishna here!
I can walk no farther.

Now Thakur has lost all consciousness of the world and remembers nothing. Narendra is seated before him, but he is not conscious of Narendra. He has no awareness of the outside world. It is as if his mind and soul have merged in God. *Madgat antaratma*.¹

“Deeply drunk with the love of Gaur!” Saying this, he stands up with a cry.² He sits down again and says: “Yonder a light approaches. I see it but do not know from where it comes.”

Now Narendra sings:

By giving Your vision, you have rid me of all sorrows and charmed my soul.
Beholding You, all the seven worlds forget their grief,
What to speak of my poor self so mean and unworthy.

1. madgatenāntarātmanā, “His inmost self merged in Me.” – Bhagavad Gita 6:47.

2. Humkar.

Sri Ramakrishna is losing all consciousness of the external world as he listens to the song. With eyes closed and body still, he goes into samadhi.

Just as a child who has lost his companion is confused; in the same way, after coming out of samadhi, he says, "Who will take me back?"

It is late at night, the tenth day of the dark fortnight of Phalgun. It is very dark when Thakur prepares to return to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. As he is about to get into a carriage, devotees stand nearby. Sri Ramakrishna gets in, helped gently by the devotees. He still remains in a God-intoxicated state.

The carriage leaves and the devotees go, each to his own home.

Chapter Ten

In the heart of the disciple

Overhead shines the starry night sky; upon the canvas of the heart is the wonderful image of Sri Ramakrishna, and in the memory the assembly of devotees. Like a happy dream, the mind's eye is filled with that love. The devotees are going home along the main road in Calcutta. Some of them, enjoying the pleasant spring breeze, sing the same song as they go: "By giving Your vision, You have rid me of all sorrows and have charmed my soul."

Mani walks along, wondering to himself: Does God actually assume a human form and come to earth? Is divine incarnation really true? How does the infinite God become a man three and a half cubits tall? Can the Infinite become finite? I have reasoned enough, but what have I understood? I have known nothing by reasoning.

Sri Ramakrishna has said beautifully, “As long as one argues and reasons, one does not attain the goal, one does not attain God.” This is also true: I have only an ounce of intellect. How can I know God with it? Can a one-seer pot contain four seers of milk? But then again, how can one have faith in incarnation? Thakur said, “If God in His mercy shows Himself to you, it is understood in a moment.” Goethe, lying on his deathbed, said, “Light! More light!” If God in His compassion strikes a light and shows it to you, then all doubts vanish, the way the illiterate fishermen of Palestine recognized Jesus, or devotees like Srivasa recognized Gauranga as the perfect God-incarnate.

And if God does not reveal Himself by His grace, what can be done? Sri Ramakrishna has said it; I shall put my faith in the incarnation of God. He himself has taught, “Faith, faith, faith! Faith in the words of the guru.”

I have made You the pole-star of my life, never shall I lose my way in this sea of the world.

By God’s grace I have developed faith in his words. I shall continue to believe what he says. Let others do what they like. Why should I give up such faith, faith that is rare even among gods? I now set aside all reason. Have I to become another Faust with intellectual discussions?

In the deep darkness of the night, a ray of the moon enters the window and Faust is lying alone in the room. “Alas, I have not been able to understand anything. The study of philosophy and science have served me in vain. Shame on me!” Saying this, will I then, like him, take up a vial of poison to commit suicide? Or else, like another person, Alastor, not being able to bare the burden of ignorance, shall I place my head upon a rock and wait for death? No, I need not try to fathom this mystery with an ounce of intelligence like all these tragic savants. There is no need to commit suicide because a vessel of one seer is

not able to contain four seers of milk. A wonderful counsel – “Faith in the words of the guru.” Oh God, give me that faith, and let me not wander from here to there for nothing. That which is not bound to happen, don't send me out to find. And what Thakur has instructed, “May I gain pure love and devotion at Your lotus feet – love without alloy and love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul.¹ And may I not be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya.” Bless me with this, I pray.

Reflecting over Sri Ramakrishna's incomparable love, Mani returns home by the main road on that dark night. He says to himself, “What love he has for Girish! Even when Girish has to go to the theatre, he visits his house. Not only that, he doesn't even ask him to renounce – to forsake home, relatives, worldly activities, all, for him – and embrace sannyas. I understand; it has a meaning. Unless the time is ripe, unless one has developed deep dispassion, renunciation will be painful. Thakur himself says that if you remove the scab from a wound before the wound is healed, it will bleed and be painful. But when the wound has healed, the scab will fall off by itself. Ordinary men who have no insight ask you to renounce the world immediately. This sadguru (real preceptor), this sea of motiveless grace, is the ocean of love. Day and night he cares only to do good to mankind.

And also what faith Girish has! It was just two days after he had seen Thakur that he said, “Lord, you are God indeed. You have come in a human body for my salvation.” Girish is right in saying, “How can God instruct like a member of the family without taking up a human body?” Who can make us realize that only God is real and all else unreal? Who can lift the weak child, having fallen on the ground, by holding his hand? Who can make a man attached to “lust and

1. Amla and ahetuki bhakti.

greed” and of the nature of an animal eligible for eternal life? And if He does not live with them as a human being, how will they, whose inmost Self is one with Him who does not want anything but God, spend their lives? That is why:

paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām |
dharmasamsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge
yuge ||

[For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of dharma, I take birth in age after age.]

– Bhagavad Gita 4:8

What love! He is mad for Narendra, weeps for Narayan. He says, “These and the other young men – Rakhal, Bhavanath, Purna, Baburam, and the rest – are Narayana (God) Himself. They have come to earth in a human body for my sake.” I say, this love is not born of human intellect. I see it as divine love. These boys are pure souls who have not touched women with carnal intentions. They have not developed greed, pride, envy, and the like by engaging in worldly activities. So there is greater manifestation of God in them. But who has such vision! Thakur has the insight. He sees everything: who is attached to the world, who is simple, who is magnanimous, who is a devotee of God. He serves such devotees as the Lord Himself. He helps them wash, puts them to bed, weeps to see them, and rushes to Calcutta for them. He beseeches others to bring them by cab from Calcutta. He often asks householder devotees, “Invite them to a meal. This will do you good.” Is it worldly love, or pure, divine love? One worships God in an earthen image, serving Him with the sixteen articles. Can’t He, then, be worshipped in a pure human body? Besides, they are helpers of the Lord in His every divine sport! They are His intimate companions in every incarnation.

As he gazes at Narendra, he forgets the external world; then gradually he forgets the embodied Narendra. He forgets the apparent man and sees only the real man. His mind merges into Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, seeing which he sometimes becomes mute and motionless and sometimes mutters, "Om, Om," or repeats, "Mother, Mother" like a child. He sees more of His manifestation in Narendra. He is mad repeating, "Narendra, Narendra."

Narendra does not believe in God incarnating as man. But what does that matter? Thakur has divine sight. He has seen that it is the pride of personality in him. God is very much our own. He is our own Mother, not an adopted one. Why does He not make us understand? Why does He not strike a light in compassion and show the Reality? Perhaps that is why Thakur said: "Do you feel that your dignity has been wounded? Be it so. We are of the same mind as you, and we feel for you."¹

If one cannot be difficult with one's dearest of the dear, with whom can one be so? Blessed are you, Narendranath. This supreme person has so much love for you! Seeing you, he becomes inspired by God so easily.'

Reflecting thus, with Sri Ramakrishna in their minds, the devotees return home in the deep of night.

1. These were the words addressed by her companions, the gopis of Vrindavan, to Radha, the greatest lover of God-incarnate Sri Krishna.

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna's Joyous Conversations with Ishan, Doctor Sarkar, Girish, and Other Devotees at the House in Shyampukur

Chapter One

On the householder way of life

It is the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Aswin. Celebrations of the three-day worship of Mahamaya¹ on the seventh, eighth, and ninth days are over. The tenth day is Vijaya day. Greetings for this occasion are already over. Sri Ramakrishna is staying with some devotees in the Shyampukur area of Calcutta. He is suffering from a serious disease, cancer of the throat. The Ayurvedic physician, Ganga Prasad, treated him when he stayed at Balaram's house. At that time Thakur asked whether or not his disease was curable. The physician did not reply; he remained silent. Allopathic doctors also hinted that the disease was not curable. Doctor Sarkar is now treating him.

Today is Thursday, 22 October 1885. A bed has been set up in a room on the second floor of the two-storied house in Shyampukur. Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the bed, while Doctor Sarkar, Ishan Chandra Mukhopadhyay, and some other devotees sit in front and around him. Ishan is a very charitable person. Though he lives on a pension, he gives in charity. He is always contemplating God. After hearing of Sri Ramakrishna's illness, he has come to see him.

1. Durga Puja.

Though Doctor Sarkar comes only to treat him, he stays for six or seven hours. He has great love and reverence for Sri Ramakrishna and looks upon the devotees as his very own.

It is about 7:00 p.m. on a moonlit night. It seems as if the full moon, the lord of the night, is raining nectar. Inside, a lamp is lit. Many people have come to be with this great man. They all watch him intently, anxious to hear what he says and see what he does. Looking at Ishan, Sri Ramakrishna addresses him.

Unattached worldly man – the way to be unattached

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): “Blessed is the worldly man who attends to his duties in life but has love and devotion for God’s lotus feet. He is indeed brave. He is like a man carrying a two-maund load on his head, who watches a bridal procession passing by. The man has a heavy load on his head, yet he sees the bridegroom. Without great power of mind, it is not possible. He is just like a mud fish living in the mud – not a speck of mud soils its body. Or like a waterfowl that is forever diving into water – no water clings to its body when it flutters its wings even once.

“To be able to live unattached in the world, some spiritual practice is necessary. You have to live in solitude for some days – a year, six months, three months – and meditate on God. You must pray to Him earnestly to grant you love and devotion. And you should say to yourself, There is no one in this world who is my own. Those whom I call mine are so for just two days. Only God is my own. He alone is my all. Oh! how can I attain Him?

“You can live in the world after acquiring love and devotion for God. It is like smearing your hands with oil before cutting open a jackfruit. Then its milky sap won’t stick to your hands. The world is like water and man’s mind is like milk. If you keep milk in water, the milk and water become one. That is why one has to curdle milk in a quiet corner. When the milk is curdled, you can extract butter from it. And this butter, when placed in water, does not dissolve in it, but floats on the surface unattached.

“Some members of the Brahmo Samaj said to me, ‘Sir, we have the attitude of King Janaka. We will attend to worldly affairs in an unattached manner like he did.’ I said, ‘It is very difficult to attend to worldly affairs in an unattached way. You do not become King Janaka just by saying so. King Janaka practiced austerities for a long time, standing on his head with his feet up.’ You won’t have to stand on your heads, but you do have to practice spiritual disciplines. And you have to live in solitude. When you have gained knowledge and love for God in solitude, then you may go and live in the world. Curds can only be set in a solitary corner. If you disturb the milk, it won’t curdle.

“Janaka was unattached. That is why he is known by the name Videha, which means he had no consciousness of the body. Though he lived in the world, he moved around in it like one liberated in this very life.¹ But to be rid of body-

1. Jivanmukta.

consciousness requires spiritual progress. It needs a lot of spiritual practice.

“Janaka was a great hero. He wielded two swords – one of spiritual knowledge and the other of work.”

**Spiritual knowledge of the householder and of the
sannyasin**

“If you ask whether there is a difference between the knowledge of a householder and a sannyasin, the answer is that both are the same. The former is a man of knowledge, and so is the latter – just the same. But there is some risk for a householder living in the midst of ‘lust and greed.’ Living in a sooty room, you cannot escape a little stain, however clever you may be.

“Once you have churned the butter from the milk, if you keep it in a new earthen pot, it runs no risk of spoiling. But if you keep it in a pot of buttermilk, it is risky. (*All laugh.*)

“When parched rice is roasted, a few grains jump out of the frying pan, making the sound ‘pat-pat.’ They are like a jasmine flower that has no stain. Parched rice in the pot is also good, but not pure white like the flower; the grains have a little stain on them. When either a householder or a sannyasin gains spiritual knowledge, he becomes stainless, just like a jasmine flower. But after gaining spiritual knowledge, if he lives in the frying pan of the world, there may be a little red stain on his body. (*Everybody laughs.*)

“Once a bhairavi¹ went to the court of King Janaka. Seeing a woman, Janaka lowered his head and cast his eyes down. Seeing this, the ascetic said, ‘Oh Janaka, you are still afraid of a woman!’ When one has attained the highest spiritual knowledge,² one’s nature becomes that of a five-year-old child. Then one no longer distinguishes between a man and a woman.

“So there may be a stain on the body of a person of knowledge who lives in the world, but this stain does no harm. The moon has stains – they don’t obstruct the moonlight.”

**Work after spiritual knowledge – for the welfare of
humanity**

“Some people take up teaching mankind after attaining knowledge – for example Janaka, Narada, and others. One must have spiritual power to teach mankind. The rishis attained knowledge for themselves. But religious teachers like Narada moved about for the good of mankind. They were heroes.

“When a bird sits on an old, dry piece of wood floating on water, it sinks. But when a heavy log floats on water, it can carry a cow, a man, and even an elephant across. A steamboat goes across with many passengers.

“Teachers such as Narada and others are like heavy logs of wood, or like steamboats.

1. Female ascetic.

2. Purna jnana.

“Some people eat, wipe their mouths with a hand towel, and sit down quietly lest others should know that they have eaten. (*All laugh.*) Another, having got a mango, cuts it into pieces to share with others.

“Narada and such religious teachers lived for the welfare of others, even after attaining spiritual knowledge.”

Chapter Two

The Religion for the Age – Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

The doctor: “When one has attained knowledge, one becomes speechless. The eyes are closed and tears flow. Then one needs love and devotion.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Bhakti is a woman. So she has access to the inner apartments. Jnana can only go to the visitor’s room.” (*Everybody laughs.*)

Doctor: “But all women aren’t permitted in the inner apartments. Prostitutes can’t go there. So knowledge is needed.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “If a man doesn’t know the right path but has love for God within and wants to know Him, such a person attains God by sheer love and devotion for Him. A great devotee set out to have the darshan of Lord Jagannath. He didn’t know the way to Puri. Instead of going south, he went west. He lost his way, so he enquired earnestly from others. They told him, ‘Not this way, go that way.’ This devotee at last arrived at Puri and had the darshan of Lord Jagannath. Just see, even if you don’t know the way, somebody will tell you.”

The doctor: “But he did lose his way.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, he did, but in the end he reached his goal.”

Somebody asks: “Is God with form or without form?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “He is with form and also without form. A sannyasin went to Jagannath. After seeing the image, a doubt arose in his mind as to whether God is with form or without form. He had a stick in his hand. He began to feel around with it to see if it touched Jagannath’s body. First he moved it from one side to the other and did not feel the image. So he understood that there was no image of the deity before him. But when he moved the stick in the opposite direction, it touched the deity’s body. The sannyasin then understood that God is with form as well as without form.

“But it is very difficult to understand this. How can He who is without form be with form at the same time? This doubt does come to mind. Again, if He is with form, why then are there so many forms?”

Doctor: “He who has created forms is Himself with form. He also created the mind, so He is formless. He can be everything.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Without realizing God, one can’t understand all this. For the aspirant, God manifests Himself in many forms, in many ways. Somebody had a tub for dyeing. Many people used to visit him to get their clothes dyed. The dyer would ask, ‘Which colour do you want?’ One perhaps says, ‘I want it dyed red.’ The dyer

immediately put it in his tub. Having dyed it, he says, 'Here is your cloth dyed red.' Maybe another says, 'I want it dyed yellow.' Dipping the cloth immediately in the same tub, the dyer says, 'Here is your yellow cloth. Take it.' When asked to dye it blue, he again dips the cloth in the same tub and says the same, 'Here is your cloth dyed blue.' In this way he dyed everybody's cloths, dipping them in the same tub. There was a person watching this strange affair. The owner of the tub asked him, 'How about you, brother? What colour do you want?' The man answered, 'Brother, please give me the colour of the dye in your vat.' (*Everybody laughs.*)

"Somebody went to defecate [in a forest]. There he saw a beautiful creature on a tree. When he came back, he said to someone, 'Brother, I saw a red-coloured creature on that tree over there.' That person said, 'I've seen it too, but it's not red; it's green.' Yet another person said, 'No, no. It's not green; it's yellow.' Others also spoke out, one saying it was violet, another blue, another black, and so on. This led to a quarrel. Then they all went to the tree. There was a man sitting there, and, when asked, he said, 'I live under this tree, and I know this particular creature very well. You are all speaking the truth. It is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, sometimes blue – so many colours. And at times I see that it has no colour at all.'

"Only a person who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature. Only he knows that God reveals Himself in various forms. He is seen in different ways. He has attributes, and then He is without attributes. Only he who lives under the

tree knows that this ever-changing creature has different colours, and at times no colour at all. The others only quarrel and trouble themselves.

“He is with form and He is formless. Do you know what He is like? Imagine an ocean of boundless Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. With the cooling effect of devotion, the water of this ocean freezes at places into icebergs. In other words, God takes a concrete form for the devotee, sometimes with a body. And when the sun of knowledge rises, the ice melts.”

Doctor: “When the sun rises, ice melts into water. But then, you know, water turns into formless vapour.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That is to say, when one realizes that the Absolute is the only reality and the world an illusion, one attains samadhi, and all forms vanish. Then one is not aware of Him as a person. What He is cannot be put into words. Who would speak of it? He who is to speak does not exist. His ‘I’ cannot be found even if you search for it. Then the Absolute is without attributes, and one has only an inner experience.¹ Brahman cannot be known through the mind and the intellect.

“So it is said that bhakti, love of God, is the light of the moon and jnana is the sun. I hear that in the north, as well as the south, there are oceans where it is so cold in certain places that water freezes into ice. A ship is unable to sail there.”

1. Bodhebodhe.

Doctor: “Then one comes across obstacles on the path of bhakti.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, that is true. But it doesn’t do any harm. It is that very water of the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda that freezes into ice. And there is no harm if you want to reason further by saying that Brahman is real while the world is an illusion. In that case the ice will melt by the heat of the sun of jnana. Then what remains is the same ocean of Sat-chit-ananda.”

**The ripe ‘I’ and the unripe ‘I’ –
the ‘I’ of a devotee and the I’ of a child**

“When you have reasoned it out and attained samadhi, your ‘I’ vanishes. But this is very difficult. The ‘I’ never wants to disappear – and since it doesn’t, you have to return to this world again.

“The bullock bellows, ‘Hamba, hamba’ (‘I, I’). There is so much misery for it. The whole day, in rain or sunshine, it pulls a plough. Or it is slaughtered by a butcher. Even that is not the end. A tanner tans the leather and shoes are made from it. Last of all, strings are made from its intestines. When it falls into the hands of a carder and says, ‘Tuhun, tuhun’ (you, you), only then is it released.

“When one says, ‘Naham, naham, naham’ (‘not I, not I, not I’), I am nothing, O Lord. I am the servant; You are the Master,’ it is only then that he is released, he is liberated.”

Doctor: “But one must fall into the hands of a carder.” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: “If ‘I’ simply refuses to go, let the rascal remain as the ‘servant I.’ (*All laugh.*)

“Some people retain their ego even after attaining samadhi, as the ‘servant I,’ the ‘devotee I.’ Shankaracharya retained the ‘I of knowledge’ to teach people. The ‘servant I,’ the ‘devotee I,’ the ‘I of knowledge’ are all the ‘ripe I.’ What is the ‘unripe I?’ ‘I am the doer, I am the son of such a big man, I am so learned, I am wealthy, how dare you talk to me in this way?’ – such kinds of attitudes. If somebody steals into a man’s house and is caught, first of all the stolen articles are snatched from him. Then, after the man gives the thief a good beating, he hands him over to the police, saying, ‘Don’t you know who you are robbing?’

“After you have realized God, your nature becomes that of a five-year-old child. The ‘I of a child’ and the ‘ripe ‘I.’ A child is not subject to the three gunas – it is beyond them. He is not subject to any one of the gunas – sattva, rajas, or tamas. See how a child is not governed by tamas. He may quarrel and fight with somebody now, but the next minute he puts his arm around him, shows him love, and plays with him. He is also not under the influence of rajas. He makes a toy house with so much effort! But soon afterward he leaves it and runs to his mother. He may wander around wearing a pretty cloth, but the next moment he lets it fall off into the dust. He may forget the cloth completely, or he may wander around with it under his armpit! (*Laughter.*)

“If you say to this boy, ‘You have a pretty cloth, whose is it?’ He replies, ‘It’s mine. My father gave it

to me.’ If you say to him, ‘Dear one, give me your cloth,’ he replies, ‘No, I won’t give it to you! It’s mine. My daddy gave it to me.’ Later, if you can cajole him by giving him a doll or a flute, he may give you his five-rupee cloth and leave. A five-year-old child is also not attached to sattva. He is so fond of his neighborhood companions that he can’t bear to be separated from them for even a moment. But when he goes away with his parents, he makes new friends and showers all his love on them. He forgets his old companions altogether. And then he has no pride of caste. If his mother has told him that so-and-so is his elder brother, he accepts him as his real brother one-hundred percent. If he is the son of a brahmin, and the other the son of a potter, he will eat with him from the same plate. And then also he has no idea of purity or impurity. He may eat without having washed his bottom after defecating. And he has no sense of shame: he may ask somebody if he has had full evacuation!

“And then there is the ego of an old man. (*The doctor laughs.*) Old people have a number of bonds¹ such as caste, pride, shame, contempt, fear, worldliness, calculation, and deceit. If he has any grudge or ill will toward someone, he can’t get rid of it easily – perhaps even as long as he is alive. And then there are pride of learning and the pride of wealth. An old man’s ‘I’ is an ‘unripe I.’”

1. The Tantric scriptures list eight bonds or fetters: shame (lajja), hatred or contempt (ghrana), fear (bhaya), pride of caste, rank or race (jati), hesitation or suspicion (shanka), secretiveness (jugupsa), pride of family, ancestry, or lineage (kula), and pride of good conduct, character or piety (shila).

Who cannot gain spiritual knowledge?

(To the doctor) “A few people cannot gain spiritual wisdom. People who have the ‘I of learning,’ the ‘I of knowledge,’ and the ‘I of wealth’ do not attain spiritual knowledge. If you tell these people that there is a nice holy man at a certain place and ask them if they would like to visit him, they immediately offer a number of excuses and say they can’t go. They think to themselves, I am such a big man. Why should I go?”

**The three gunas – sattva leads one to God –
the way to discipline the senses**

“The nature of tamas is pride. It comes from ignorance.

“The Puranas say that Ravana had more rajas, Kumbhakaran more tamas, and Bibhishana more sattva. This is why Bibhishana could attain Ramachandra. Anger is another characteristic of tamas. In anger one loses the sense of right and wrong. Hanuman set fire to Lanka without thinking that fire could destroy Sita’s cottage too.

“Then there is another characteristic of tamas – lust. Girindra Ghosh of Pathuraghat said, ‘You can’t get rid of enemies like lust and anger, so change their direction.’ Desire God. Have intercourse with Sat-chit-ananda. And if you can’t get rid of anger, bring the tamas of bhakti: ‘What! I have repeated the name of Durga, shall I not be liberated? There is no sin for me, no bondage.’ Thereafter, be greedy for God-realization. Fall in love with God’s beauty and say, ‘I am the servant of God. I am His son.’ If you have to be proud, be

proud of this. You can turn the directions of the six enemies¹ this way.”

Doctor: “It is very difficult to control the senses. You have to put blinders on both sides of a horse’s head. In some cases, you may have to cover both eyes completely.

Sri Ramakrishna: “There is no fear if He bestows His grace once, if the Lord grants you His vision, if you realize the Atman once. Then the six passions can do no harm.

“Ever-perfect saints like Narada and Prahlada don’t have to put blinders over their eyes.”

Doctor: “But it’s not good for a father to hold his boy’s hand.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That’s not true. Spiritually advanced people have the nature of a child. Before God they are childlike; their egos vanish. They derive all their strength from God. It is the strength of the Father – nothing is their own. This is their firm conviction.”

**The path of reason and the path of joy –
Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga**

Doctor: “Will a horse move forward unless you put blinders on the sides of its eyes? Unless the enemy² is subjugated, can one realize God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What you are saying is called the path of reason, Jnana Yoga. You can realize God this way too. Jnanis say that you must first

1. Lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and envy.

2. Doctor Sarkar is referring to passions.

purify your consciousness. Spiritual disciplines are needed first, then you can attain knowledge.

“You can attain Him by the path of devotion too. If you once develop love for the lotus feet of God, if you begin to enjoy chanting His name and glories, you don’t have to try to control your passions any more. They are subjugated automatically.

“Can a person who loses his son quarrel with anybody on that day? Or can he enjoy a feast? Can he walk around with his head high and enjoy sense pleasures?”

“If a moth sees light once, can it then live in darkness?”

Doctor (*smiling*): “No, it does not. Instead, it rushes into the flame, and it perishes there.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “No, the devotee doesn’t burn himself to death like a moth. It is the light of a jewel toward which the devotee rushes. The light of a jewel may be very bright, but it is cool and comforting. This light doesn’t burn the body, but creates peace and joy.”

Jnana Yoga is very difficult

“You can attain Him by the path of reasoning, by the path of Jnana Yoga. But this path is very difficult. ‘I am not the body, or the mind, or the intellect; I am neither disease, nor sorrow, nor restlessness. I am the Self of Sat-chit-ananda, beyond pleasure and pain, not subject to the senses.’ It is very easy to say all this in words, but it is very difficult to practice, to make it a part of your being. Your hand is scratched by thorns. It is

bleeding profusely, yet you say, ‘Where? My hand is not scratched by thorns! I am all right.’ To say this, you first have to burn the thorns in the fire of knowledge.”

Knowledge and book learning – Thakur’s system of education

“Many people think that without reading books, they can’t learn, they can’t attain knowledge. But it is better to listen than to read, and it is better to see than to listen. There is a great difference between hearing of Kashi and visiting Kashi.

“And then, a person who plays chess doesn’t see his move clearly, while the onlookers can see much better and can suggest moves to the player. Worldly people think they’re very intelligent, but they are attached to the world. They are playing the game, so they can’t understand their moves well. Holy people who have renounced the world are unattached to worldly things and are more knowledgeable than worldly people. Since they don’t play the game themselves, they can tell the moves better from outside.”

Doctor (*to the devotees, indicating Sri Ramakrishna*): “He couldn’t have gained so much knowledge by reading books. Faraday communed with nature, so he was able to discover great scientific truths. He couldn’t have attained all this by knowledge derived from reading books. Mathematical formulae only throw the brain into confusion. They are a great obstacle to original inquiry.”

Divine wisdom and book learning

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): “When I used to lie on the ground in the panchavati, I would call on the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, please show me what the karmis (ritualists) have achieved through their rituals, the yogis through yoga, and the jnanis through reasoning.’ I used to say much more. How to tell you all that!

“Oh, what a state I passed through! Sleep was lost to me.”

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sings:

I’ve shaken off my sleep; how can I fall into slumber again? For I am wide awake in the sleeplessness of union.

O Divine Mother, made one with You at last, my slumber I have lulled asleep for evermore.

“I have read no books. But you see, I repeat the Divine Mother’s name, so they all show me respect. Sambhu Mallick said to me: Here is Santiram Singh quite able to beat anybody even though he carries no sword or shield.” (*All laugh.*)

Now the talk turns to Girish Chandra Ghosh’s play, *Buddha Charita*. He had invited the doctor to see the play, and the doctor enjoyed it very much.

Doctor (*to Girish*): “You are a very bad man! Shall I have to visit the theatre every day?”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “What is he saying? I don’t understand.”

M.: “He liked the play very much.”

Chapter Three

Conversation about divine incarnation – an incarnation of God and an ordinary soul

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): “You haven’t said anything. This man (the doctor) doesn’t believe in divine incarnation.”

Ishan: “Sir, I can’t argue any more. I don’t like arguments.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Why? Why not speak out about what is right?”

Ishan (*to the doctor*): “Because of our ego, we people have little faith. Kak Bhushundi, the crow, didn’t accept Ramachandra as an incarnation of God in the beginning. At last, after it had wandered through the regions of the moon and the gods and had gone to Kailash, it saw that there was no way to free itself from Rama. And so it surrendered itself, taking shelter in him. Rama then took it in his hand and swallowed it. Bhushundi saw that, even though it was still perched on its tree. Pride having left it, it understood that, though outwardly Ramachandra was a human being like others, yet he had the whole universe in his belly – the sky, the moon, the stars, the sun, the planets, the ocean, hills, men, beasts, trees and so on. All these were inside his belly.”

Limited powers of the conditioned

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): “It is very difficult to understand that He is both limitless and limited. The Absolute belongs to the same Being as the phenomenal world. How can we force ourselves

with our little intelligence to say that He can't become a man? Can our little intelligence realize all these things? Can a one-seer pail contain four seers of milk?

“So you have to put your faith in the words of those holy men and great souls who have realized God. They contemplate God constantly, just as a lawyer remains involved with his lawsuit. Can you believe in the words of Kak Bhushundi?”

Doctor: “I have faith in what I think is right. And once I have faith, I don't doubt. But how can I call Rama an incarnation of God? First, take the murder of Vali. Rama killed him with his arrow and hid himself like a thief. This is how a man acts, not God.”

Girish Ghosh: “Sir, only God could do such a thing.”

Doctor: “And then remember his forsaking of Sita.”

Girish: “Sir, this too could be done by God, not by man.”

Science, or the words of saints

Ishan (*to the doctor*): “Why don't you believe in the incarnation of God? You yourself have just said that He who has created forms has form, and He who has created the mind is without form. You have just said that anything is possible for God.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): “That God can incarnate in a human form is not mentioned in his science. So how can he believe it? (*All laugh.*)

“Listen to this story. Somebody said, ‘Brother, I have just been to a place where I saw a house fall down with a terrible crash.’ The listener was an English-educated person. He said, ‘Wait a minute. Let me see if it’s in the newspaper.’ He didn’t find news of a house falling in the paper, so he said, ‘I say, brother, I don’t believe you. It isn’t in the newspaper, so it isn’t true.’” (*All laugh.*)

Girish (*to the doctor*): “You will have to accept Sri Krishna as God. I won’t allow you to look on Him as a man. You will have to call him either God or a demon.”

Simplicity of heart and faith in God

Sri Ramakrishna: “Unless you are simple at heart, you can’t have faith in God easily. God is very far from a person having a worldly intellect. A worldly intellect creates doubts, and different kinds of pride appear – the pride of learning, the pride of wealth, and so on. But he (the doctor) is simple at heart.”

Girish (*to the doctor*): “Sir, what is your opinion? Can a deceitful person ever attain spiritual knowledge?”

Doctor: “Oh Lord! Could he ever gain knowledge?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “How simple Keshab Sen was! One day when he came to the Kali Temple, he saw the guesthouse. He asked – it was four o’clock – ‘When are the guests and the poor going to be fed?’

“The more faith you have, the more spiritual knowledge you will gain. A cow which is choosy in

fodder doesn't give much milk. But the cow that gobbles anything you give it – vegetable leaves and skin, straw – yields streams of milk. (*Everybody laughs.*)

“Unless you have the faith of a child, you can't realize God. A mother says, 'He is your elder brother.' The child has such faith that he believes him to be his brother without the least doubt. The mother says, 'There's a bogey man!' The child believes one hundred percent that there is a bogey man in the room. God bestows His mercy on him who has the faith of a child. You cannot attain God with a worldly intellect.”

Doctor (*to the devotees*): “It isn't good to drink milk from a cow that eats all sorts of things. We used to feed our cow anything, and later I fell very ill. I wondered what the reason could be. After a great deal of enquiry, I found that it had been eating everything. That created a lot of problems. I had to go to Lucknow [to get cured]. In the end it cost me twelve thousand rupees! (*Roars of laughter.*)

“Well, it's not easy to see the relation between cause and effect. Why misfortune falls, one cannot tell. A seven-month-old girl of a family of the Paikpara gentleman fell ill with whooping cough. I went there to treat her. I couldn't uncover the cause of her illness until I found that she had drunk the milk of an ass that had gotten wet in the rain.” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: “What do you mean? It's like saying my cab passed under a tamarind tree and I

suffered from acidity!” (*The doctor and all others laugh.*)

Doctor (*laughing*): “The captain of a ship had a bad headache. After consultation, the doctor had a poultice applied to the side of the ship. (*All laugh.*)

**Company of the holy and
renunciation of sense enjoyments**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): “It is necessary to keep the constant company of holy people. The disease is chronic. One has to act on their advice and not just listen to them. One has to take medicine and control one’s diet. The diet prescribed by a doctor is important.”

Doctor: “Prescribed food is most important.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “There are three kinds of physicians – superior, mediocre, and inferior. The physician who comes, feels the pulse and leaves, saying, ‘You must take the medicine,’ is an inferior physician. He doesn’t bother to know whether or not the patient has taken the medicine. The physician who makes the patient understand in so many ways why he should take the medicine talks to him nicely, saying, ‘Brother, how can you get well unless you take the medicine? Dear brother, do take it. I, myself, will put it in your mouth.’ He is a mediocre physician. And the physician who puts his knee on the chest of the patient and forces the medicine down his throat when the patient refuses to take it is the superior physician.”

Doctor: “And there are medicines for which you don’t have to put your knees on the patient’s chest. For example, homeopathic medicines.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “There is no danger if a superior physician puts his knee on the patient’s chest.

“Like physicians, there are also three kinds of religious teachers. Those who don’t keep contact with their disciples after giving them instructions are the inferior ones. Those who explain to their disciples over and over again for their own good so that they can assimilate their instructions – those who implore the disciples lovingly – are mediocre ones. And those who even use force when they find that the disciple hasn’t listened are known as superior teachers.”

Women and sannyasins – hard rules for sannyasins

(To the doctor) “A monk has to avoid ‘lust and greed.’ He should not even look at the picture of a woman. Do you know what women are like? Like tamarind pickles – the moment you think of them, your mouth begins to water. Tamarind pickles should not be brought into view.

“But this is not for you householders – it is for a monk. As far as possible, you should live unattached among women. From time to time you should go into solitude and meditate on God. No one else should be there. When you have gained faith and love for Him, you will be able to live unattached to a large extent. After having one or two children, a husband and wife should live together as brother and sister. And they should pray to God that the mind not go to sense enjoyment – and that there will be no more children.”

Girish (*laughing at the doctor*): “You have been here for three or four hours. Aren’t you going to treat your patients?”

Doctor: “My practice and my patients are no more for me now! My meeting this paramahansa has deprived me of everything!” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: “Look here, there is a river called karmanasha (the destroyer of all activities). A great problem arises when you take a plunge into this river. Once you dive in, your activity is over. You can’t work after that.” (*The doctor and all others laugh.*)

Doctor (*to M., Girish, and other devotees*): “Look here, I am your very own. It’s not that I come here as a doctor. If you accept me as your own, I am your kith and kin.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): “There is such a thing as selfless devotion.¹ It is very good if one can attain it. Prahlada had this selfless devotion. Such a devotee says, ‘O Lord, I want neither wealth nor name nor bodily pleasures, and so forth. Only grant that I may have pure love for Thy lotus feet.’”

Doctor: “Yes, I have seen people bowing in the Kali Temple. They have nothing but desires within – ‘Grant that I may get some employment’ or ‘Grant that I be cured,’ and so on.

(*To Sri Ramakrishna*) “You should not talk with people because of this disease of yours. But when I come, you may talk with me.” (*Everybody laughs.*)

1. Ahetuki bhakti.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Please cure me of this disease. I can’t repeat His name and sing His glories.”

Doctor: “Meditation alone is enough.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What are you saying? Why should I live such a monotonous life? I eat fish cooked several different ways – sometimes in curry, sometimes spiced, sometimes with tamarind, and at times fried or baked. Sometimes I perform worship, sometimes I chant God’s name,¹ sometimes I meditate, and at other times I sing His name and glories. Sometimes I dance, repeating His name.”

Doctor: “I’m not monotonous either.”

What is the harm in not believing in the incarnation of God?

Sri Ramakrishna: “Your son, Amrita, doesn’t believe in the incarnation of God. What is the harm in it? You can realize God by believing in Him without form and you can also realize God by believing in Him with form. What is needed is to have faith in Him and to surrender yourself. Man is ignorant; he can make mistakes. Can you put four seers of milk in a one-seer jug? Therefore, whatever path you choose, call upon God with a longing heart. He is the knower within the heart. He will surely listen to your inner call. You will reach Him alone, whatever path you take, whether you believe in God with form or God without form, as long as you have a longing heart.

1. Japa.

“Whether you eat sugared roti (Indian bread) straight or sidewise, it will taste equally sweet. Your son, Amrita, is a very good boy.”

Doctor: “He is your disciple.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the doctor*): “No fellow is my disciple. Rather, I am everybody’s disciple. We are all children of God. We are all His servants. I also am a child of God, and His servant too.

“Uncle moon is everybody’s uncle.”

Everyone present enjoys this and laughs.

Section XVI

Vijay, Narendra, M., Doctor Sarkar, and Other Devotees in Joyful Conversation with Sri Ramakrishna

Chapter One

M. on his way to Doctor Sarkar to inform him of Thakur's condition

Today is Sunday, 25 October 1885, 10th of Kartik, the second day of the dark fortnight. Sri Ramakrishna is staying in a house in the Shyampukur area of Calcutta while being treated for cancer of the throat. Doctor Sarkar is his doctor now.

M. is sent daily to the doctor to inform him of Sri Ramakrishna's condition. This morning at half past six M. saluted Sri Ramakrishna and asked him, "How are you feeling?"

Sri Ramakrishna said, "Tell the doctor that in the early hours of the morning my mouth is full of fluid and I have to cough. Ask him if I can take a bath."

M. sees the doctor after seven o'clock and tells him all about Thakur. One or two of his friends and an old teacher are with the doctor. The doctor says to the teacher, "Sir, I woke up at three o'clock this morning concerned about the Paramahansa. I couldn't sleep after that. He's still on my mind." (*All smile.*)

A friend of the doctor says to him, “Sir, I hear that some people call the Paramahansa an incarnation of God. You see him daily. What do you think?”

Doctor: “As a man, I have the greatest regard for him.”

M. (*to the doctor’s friend*): “The doctor is very kind to treat him.”

Doctor: “Kindness!”

M.: “Not to him, but to us.”

Doctor: “No brother, no! You don’t know what I actually lose. I miss two or three calls a day. The next day I go to the patients’ houses on my own and don’t charge them. How can I charge them when I go to them without being called?”

The talk turns to Mahima Chakravarty. On Saturday when the doctor visited Sri Ramakrishna, Chakravarty was present. Seeing the doctor, he said to Sri Ramakrishna, “Sir, it is to feed the doctor’s vanity that you have gotten this disease.”

M. (*to the doctor*): “Mahima Chakravarty used to visit you. He used to come to your house to hear you lecture on medical science.”

Doctor: “Oh, is that so? How much tamas this fellow has! Didn’t you notice that I saluted him as ‘God’s Lower Third?’ God has within him all three qualities (sattva, rajas, and tamas). Did you catch his words, ‘You have taken up the disease to feed the vanity of the doctor?’”

M.: “Mahima Chakravarty believes that if the Paramahansa wants, he can cure himself.”

Doctor: “Oh, how is that possible? How can he cure himself? We are medical men and know what cancer is, yet we can’t cure it! He knows nothing about it! How will he cure it? (*To his friends*) You see, the disease is incurable, but they are all serving him with great devotion.”

Chapter Two

Sri Ramakrishna with his attendant

M. requested the doctor to visit Sri Ramakrishna and then returned home. At three o’clock, after lunch, he went to Sri Ramakrishna again and humbly told him everything. He said, “The doctor embarrassed me today.”¹

Sri Ramakrishna: “What happened?”

M.: “He heard yesterday when he came here that you had come down with this disease to add to the vanity of doctors.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Who said that?”

M.: “Mahima Chakravarty.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Then?”

M.: “He called Mahima Chakravarty ‘God’s Lower Third.’ Now the doctor says that God contains all three qualities (sattva, rajas, and tamas). (*Sri Ramakrishna smiles.*) He also told me that he woke up at three in the morning and has been worrying about you ever since. At eight o’clock

1. The Doctor had told M. that since he has to go to examine Sri Ramakrishna, he misses two or three calls a day. The next day he goes to the patients’ houses on his own and doesn’t charge them.

he said, ‘Even now the Paramahansa is on my mind.’”

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): “He has an English education. I can’t tell him to meditate on me. But he is doing it by himself!”

M.: “And then he said, ‘As a man I have the greatest regard for him.’ It means that he doesn’t regard you as an incarnation of God, but he has the greatest reverence for you as a man.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Did you talk about anything else?”

M.: “I asked him what the schedule for treatment was today. The doctor said, ‘Schedule, my foot! I’ll have to go again today. What else is there to schedule?’ (*Sri Ramakrishna laughs.*) And he added, ‘You don’t know how much money I’m losing every day. Every day I miss two or three visits.’”

Chapter Three

Sri Ramakrishna with Vijay and other devotees

A short while later Vijaykrishna Goswami comes to see the Paramahansa Deva. A number of Brahma devotees arrive with him. Vijaykrishna was in Dhaka for a long while and has now returned to Calcutta after a pilgrimage to many places in the west (Punjab and Uttar Pradesh). He prostrates before Sri Ramakrishna. A number of people are there – Narendra, Mahima Chakravarty, Navagopal, Bhupati, Latu, M., the Younger Naren, and others.

Mahima Chakravarty (*to Vijay*): “Sir, you have been on pilgrimage and visited a number of places. Please tell us what you saw.”

Vijay: “What can I say? I see that everything is here where I am sitting. It’s no use just wandering around. At some places there are one or two annas of him (meaning Sri Ramakrishna), four annas at other places, that’s all. Only here do I find the full sixteen annas.”

Mahima Chakravarty: “Quite right! And again, it is he who sends us roaming about or makes us stay in one place.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): “See what a state of mind Vijay has developed! All his characteristics have changed, as if he has been boiled.¹ I can recognize a paramahansa by his neck and forehead. I can tell whether someone is a paramahansa or not.”

Mahima Chakravarty: “Sir, are you eating less?”

Vijay: “Yes, it seems so. (*To Sri Ramakrishna*) I heard of your illness, so I came to see you. And in Dhaka...”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What?”

Vijay does not answer. He remains silent for a while.

Vijay: “It is very difficult to understand him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] without his help. Only here are sixteen annas.”

1. Sri Ramakrishna means: all impurities have been boiled away.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Kedar¹ says that at other places he doesn’t get enough to eat, but here he is given his fill.”

Mahima Chakravarty: “His fill! It overflows!”

Vijay (*to Sri Ramakrishna, with folded hands*): “I have now recognized who you are! You don’t need to tell me.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): “If so, so be it.”

Vijay: “I have understood.”

Saying this, he falls at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and holds his feet to his chest. Sri Ramakrishna sits like a statue, unaware of the outer world.

Seeing this wonderful scene and the flood of divine love, some devotees begin to weep. Others sing hymns of praise. They all gaze at Sri Ramakrishna, each according to his own understanding. Some see him as a great devotee, others as a holy man, and yet some others as God-incarnate, each according to his own feeling.

Mahimacharan begins to sing, his eyes filled with tears: ‘Behold, behold the image of Love.’ Now and then, as if having a glimpse of Brahman, he chants: “The Transcendental, Beyond the distinction of one and many, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.”

Navagopal is weeping. Bhupati, another devotee, sings:

1. Kedarnath Chatterji was in Dhaka for many days. His eyes would wet with tears on reading the story of the Lord. He was a great devotee. His house was in the city of Hali.

Victory, victory to Parabrahman! Infinite, incomprehensible are You, higher than the highest, the Essence of all essences.

You are the light of truth, the fount of love, the wellspring of all blessedness.

This creation of Yours, a many-flavored elixir, is filled with splendour.

You are the poet, great and primeval, of whose verses the sun and the moon are born, from which they rise, in which they set.

With the golden sprinkling of stars and letters traced from clouds, You have written songs across the blue expanse.

The six seasons of the year, in tune with the rejoicing earth, proclaim Your glory.

The flowers reveal Your beauty, and the waters Your serenity. In thunder resound your terror and majesty.

So deep is Your mystery – what can a foolish mind know of it, even meditating age after age?

Millions of suns, moons and stars joyfully bow at Your feet.

Men and women, seeing Your creation, shed tears of joy, overwhelmed.

Gods, men, and heavenly beings worship Your all-pervading divinity; You, the wellspring of all blessedness.

Bestow knowledge and love, give us devotion and peace. Grant, do grant, us shelter at Your blessed feet.

Bhupati sings again:

In the musical mode of Jhijhit – community singing

Ecstatic waves rise high on the sea of consciousness and bliss. How enthralling, how sweet is the play of great ecstasy!

So many waves of new feeling rise in the sports of love. So many waves – rising, falling, ever repeating. Repeat, O mind, the name of Hari!

The whole of creation becomes one in the great communion. All difference melts away. Time and place, the very thought of distinction – all those and all else are no more.

All my wishes, now fulfilled – they too have melted away.

Now, my mind, be lifted up in joy and repeat Lord Hari's name!

In the rhythmic pattern of Jhamp Tal

Gone are delusion, fear, and piety, ritual actions and good works. Pride of race and caste has vanished.

Where am I? And where is Hari? Having stolen my heart, he has run away.

Why did I come to this shore of love's ocean?

Filled full with feeling is my heart, not yet with dullness overcome.

Says Premdas, Hear all sadhus and all citizens of the earth! Such is the new way of God!

After a long time Sri Ramakrishna regains outer-consciousness.

Brahmajnana and 'strange arithmetic' – purpose of God-incarnate

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I don't know what happens to me when I'm in ecstasy. Now I feel ashamed, as though I had been possessed by a ghost. 'Me' and 'mine' vanish in that state.

"I can't count when I come down from this state. I count one, seven, eight – something like that."

Narendra: "It's because everything is one, isn't it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: “No, beyond one and two.”¹

Mahimacharan: “Yes sir, beyond duality² and non-duality.”³

Sri Ramakrishna: “There counting is meaningless. He can’t be realized through learning. He is beyond the scriptures – Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras. When I see a person even holding a book in his hands, I call him a rajarshi⁴ though he is a jnani. No outer sign can be found in a brahmarishi.⁵ Do you know the use of scriptures? Somebody wrote a letter asking for five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth. The recipient read the letter, remembered ‘five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth,’ and threw the letter away. Of what use was the letter then?”

Vijay: “Sandesh’ has been sent, I understand.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “God incarnates, assuming a human body. He is certainly present in all places, in all things, but man’s desire for God is not fulfilled unless God incarnates in a human form. His needs are not met. Do you know how that is? If you touch a cow anywhere on its body, you have touched the cow. Even if you touch its horn, you have touched the cow. But you can take milk only from its udder.” (*All laugh.*)

1. Beyond one and two: beyond distinction of the Absolute from the relative.

2. Dvaita.

3. Advaita.

4. A person filled with rajas.

5. One who has attained Brahman.

Mahima: “If you want milk, how will it help to suck the horn of the cow? You have to suck the udder.” (*All laugh.*)

Vijay: “But a calf first licks around here and there.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “And maybe, seeing the calf do this, someone directs its mouth to the udder.” (*All laugh.*)

Chapter Four

Rejoicing with the devotees

The conversation is going on this way when the doctor comes to see Thakur. Sitting down, he says, “I woke up suddenly last night at three in the morning. I could only think of you. I thought you might catch cold. And I thought of many other possibilities.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I had a cough and a sore throat. Very early in the morning my mouth was full of fluid. I feel like a thorn has been pricking it.”

Doctor: “I heard that this morning.”

Mahimacharan continues to talk about his visit to different places in India. He says, “On the island of Lanka¹ no one laughs.”

Doctor Sarkar says, “There must be one who laughs. I will have to ask about it.”

1. Now the nation of Sri Lanka; known by the British in Sri Ramakrishna’s time as Ceylon.

Medical profession and Sri Ramakrishna

Now the topic of conversation turns to the medical profession.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): “Many people think very highly of the physician’s calling. But the profession would be the highest of the high only if a doctor were to treat his patients without charge, only out of compassion for their suffering. A doctor becomes hard-hearted if he charges fees. It’s base to examine faeces and urine just to make money.”

Doctor: “If one only does that, it is certainly wrong. But talking about myself to you would be egotistical.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes. It’s very good if you can practice medicine in a selfless manner to help others – if you can do it.

“Even so, whatever work a man does, he must keep the company of the holy from time to time. If a man is devoted to God, he will seek holy company himself. I usually give this illustration: a hemp smoker keeps the company of other hemp smokers. If he sees someone who doesn’t smoke, he leaves, downcast, or hides. But when he sees another hemp smoker, he is filled with joy. (*All laugh.*) Again, a vulture keeps the company of vultures.”

Sadhu has compassion for all living beings

Doctor: “And a vulture flies away in fear of a crow. I say, ‘Why serve only man? You should serve all living beings.’ I often throw little pellets of wheat flour to sparrows, and flocks of them come to the roof.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Good! That’s very good. People who feed other living creatures are holy. Holy people feed sugar to ants.”

Doctor: “Will there be no singing today?”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): “Please sing a little.”

Narendra sings to the accompaniment of the tanpura and other musical instruments.

Sweet is Your name, O refuge of the lowly,
raining like nectar on our ears and comforting us,
O beloved of our souls!

The treasure of Your name is the abode of immortality.
He who chants Your name becomes immortal.

When the nectar of Your name touches our ears, it erases
in that instant the deep anguish of our hearts.

The sweet music of Your name fills the heart with
sweetness. O Master of our hearts, and Soul of our souls!

Narendra sings another song:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.

What need have I for knowledge or reason?

With the wine of Your love make me drunk,

You who steal the hearts of Your devotees!

Drown me in the ocean of Your love.

In this world, Your madhouse, some laugh, some weep,
some dance for joy.

Jesus, Buddha, Gauranga – all are drunk with the wine of
Your love.

When, O Mother, shall I join their blessed company?

In the heavens too is Your fair of madness: like guru, like
disciple.

Who can understand this play of love?

O Mother, who are mad with love, who are indeed the glory of the mad,

Make this, your beggar Premdas, rich with the treasure of love.

After the singing, an amazing sight follows. They all appear mad, overcome with divine ecstasy. Shaking off his pride of scholarship, a pundit stands up and quotes: "Mother, make me mad with Your love. What need have I of knowledge or reason?" Vijay is the first to rise to his feet; he stands there, intoxicated with divine emotion. Then Sri Ramakrishna stands up, having forgotten for the moment the serious and incurable pain of his body. The doctor stands in front of him. He is not conscious even of his patient. The Younger Naren is in a state of bhava Samadhi, and so is Latu. Doctor Sarkar, a student of science, stands wonderstruck at this amazing scene. He sees that those who are in ecstasy have no awareness of the outside world. They are all still, motionless. As their intoxication subsides, some cry and some laugh. They seem like a group of drunkards.

Chapter Five

With the devotees – Sri Ramakrishna and controlling anger

After this everyone sits down. It is 8:00 p.m. The conversation resumes.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "The divine ecstasy you saw just now – what do they call it in your science? Do you think it's all pretence?"

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “When so many people are in this state, it seems to be natural, not a pretence. (*To Narendra*) When you were singing, ‘O Mother, make me mad with Your love. What need have I of knowledge or reason?’ I too could not control myself. I also stood up. How could I help it? It was very difficult to control my emotion. I thought I shouldn’t make a display of it.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): “You are unshakable and immovable like Mount Sumeru. (*Everybody laughs.*) You are a deep soul. No one recognized the depth of Rupa and Sanatana’s emotion. If an elephant goes into a small pond, everything goes topsy-turvy. But if it plunges into a deep lake, there is no disturbance; no one even notices. Radha said to her gopi friend, ‘Friend, you are weeping so bitterly because of your separation from Krishna. But see how hard my heart is! There’s not a tear in my eye.’ Then Vrinda said, ‘You have no tears in your eyes, but that has meaning. A fire of separation is always burning in your heart. As soon as there is a tear in your eye, it dries up with the heat of that fire.’”

Doctor: “I can’t beat you in argument!”
(*Laughter.*)

Gradually they talk of other things. Sri Ramakrishna begins to describe his first ecstasy and how to control lust, anger, and other passions.

Doctor: “I heard that you were once in ecstasy and a wicked fellow came and kicked you.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You must have heard it from M. The man was Chandra Haldar of Kalighat. He

often visited Mathur Babu. I was lying on the ground, overcome with God-consciousness. It was dark. Chandra Halder thought I was pretending in order to win Mathur's favour. He came into the room and kicked me black and blue. Everybody said that Mathur Babu should be told, but I forbade it."

Doctor: "This too is due to the will of God. People will learn from it how to overcome anger and be forgiving."

Vijay and Narendra have a glimpse of God's form

In the meantime the devotees have a long talk with Vijay in Thakur's presence.

Vijay: "I feel that somebody is always with me. Even when I'm far away, he tells me what is happening."

Narendra: "Like a guardian angel."

Vijay: "I saw him (the Paramahansa Deva) in Dhaka. I even touched his body."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "It must have been someone else."

Narendra: "I have also seen him a number of times. (*To Vijay*) So how can I say I don't believe you?"

Section XVII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at the Shyampukur House

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna with Girish, M., the Younger Naren, Kali, Sarat, Rakhal, Doctor Sarkar, and other devotees

The next day is Monday, 26 October 1885, the 11th of Kartik, the third day of the dark fortnight of Aswin. Sri Ramakrishna is staying in the same house at Shyampukur in Calcutta for treatment.

Doctor Sarkar, his physician, visits almost every day, though devotees go to him regularly to report Thakur's condition.

It is the autumn season. The Saradiya Durga Puja was celebrated a few days ago. Sri Ramakrishna's devotees observed it with mixed joy and sadness, for their gurudeva has been suffering seriously for the last three months with cancer of the throat. Hearing that it is incurable, the unfortunate devotees shed tears in solitude. Some of them are living at the Shyampukur house in order to nurse Sri Ramakrishna, which they are doing with their hearts and souls. Through such service, Narendra and other unmarried young disciples filled with dispassion are learning to climb the steps of the renunciation of 'lust and greed.'

Despite Sri Ramakrishna's severe pain, crowds still come for his darshan. They feel peace and joy when they see him. He is an ocean of motiveless grace, and there is no end to his compassion. He talks to them all, anxious about their welfare. Finally, the doctors – particularly Doctor Sarkar – tell him not to speak at

all. But the doctor himself, who stays there for six or seven hours at a time, says, “You should not talk to anybody else, but you can talk to me.”

The doctor is simply enchanted with the nectar of Sri Ramakrishna’s words. That is why he stays for such long periods.

M. will go to the doctor at ten o’clock to report Sri Ramakrishna’s condition. He speaks to Sri Ramakrishna before going.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “I have much less pain. I feel much better. Is it because of the medicine? Should I take that medicine?”

M.: “I’m going to the doctor. I’ll tell him everything. He will prescribe what is best.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You know, Purna¹ hasn’t been here for two or three days. I’m worried.”

M.: “Kali, why don’t you go ask Purna to come?”

Kali: “I’ll leave immediately.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “The doctor’s son is a very good boy. Please ask him to come.”

Chapter Two

Conversation between M. and the doctor

Reaching the doctor’s house, M. finds him sitting with two or three friends.

Doctor (*to M.*): “I was talking about you just a minute ago. You said you would come at ten o’clock. I’ve been waiting here for an hour and a half. I was wondering what happened and how he was doing.

1. Purna Chandra is 14 or 15 years old.

(*To a friend*) “Brother, please sing that song.”

The friend sings:

Sing, as long as you live, the name and glories of Him
whose splendour illumines the universe,

Whose boundless love streams like nectar, bringing joy to
all.

The thought of His compassion brings a thrill, the hair
stands on end. What words can express Him, whose grace
instantly ends all sorrows!

“On every side – above, below, in water and sky – where is
His limit, where is His end?” his seekers forever ask.

He is the abode of consciousness, the great transformer,
stainless and pure, the ever-wakeful eye,
whose vision leaves not a trace of sorrow.

Doctor (*to M.*): “Isn’t it a beautiful song?
Particularly the line, “Where is His limit, where is
His end?” his seekers forever ask.”

M.: “Yes sir, it is indeed very beautiful, a
beautiful conception of the Infinite.”

Doctor (*affectionately*): “It is quite late. Have you
eaten? I finish my meal by ten o’clock and then go
out to give consultations. I don’t feel well if I go to
work without eating. Listen, I have been thinking
of inviting you all to a feast.”

M.: “That would be fine, sir.”

Doctor: “Well, where should it be, here or there?
Whatever you prefer.”

M.: “Sir, whether it is here or there, everyone
will enjoy it.”

Now the topic of conversation turns to Mother
Kali.

Doctor: “Kali is just a Santhal¹ woman.” (*M. laughs loudly.*)

M.: “Sir, where did you get that?”

The doctor: “I heard something like that somewhere.” (*M. laughs.*)

The previous day Vijaykrishna and some other devotees had experienced ecstasy. The doctor was present. The conversation turns to it.

Doctor: “I saw it. But is it good to have so much emotion?”

M.: “Paramahansa Deva says that an excess of ecstasy that comes by meditation on God does not harm you, even if it is very deep. He says, ‘The light of a gem soothes the body. It does not burn it.’”

Doctor: “But the lustre of a gem is only reflected light.”

M.: “He also says, ‘By drowning in the sea of immortality, one does not die. God is the lake of immortality. Diving into it does no harm. In fact, he becomes immortal – provided he has faith in God.’”

Doctor: “Yes, of course.”

Doctor Sarkar gets into his carriage. After examining three or four other patients, he will go see the Paramahansa Deva. On the way, he talks to M. about different things, beginning with [Mahima] Chakravarty’s egotism.

M.: “He visits Sri Ramakrishna. Even if he has a little ego, it will fall off in a few days. A person’s pride vanishes when he sits near him. It gets

1. Santhal, an aboriginal tribe of India.

crushed. The reason is that he has no egotism. Pride takes flight before a very humble man. Just see what a great person Vidyasagar is. What modesty and humility he showed Thakur. The Paramahansa Deva went to see him in his Badurbagan house. It was nine in the evening when he said goodbye. Vidyasagar himself carried a light to show the way from the library to the carriage. And he stood there with folded hands till the carriage left.”

Doctor: “Well, what does Vidyasagar think of him?”

M.: “He showed him great respect that day. But I think from what he said afterward that he doesn’t like what the Vaishnavas call ecstasy. His views are like yours.”

Doctor: “I don’t like folding hands or touching somebody’s feet with my head. There’s no difference between the head and the foot, but if you consider feet different, then go ahead and do it.”

M.: “You don’t like ecstasy or anything like that. The Paramahansa sometimes calls you a deep soul.¹ Perhaps you remember yesterday he told you that when an elephant goes into a small pond, it makes a big splash, but when it goes into a lake, there’s hardly any movement in the water. When the elephant of emotion enters into a deep soul, it can’t affect him in any way. He says that you are a deep soul.”

1. Gambhir atman.

Doctor: “I don’t deserve the compliment. After all, what is ecstasy? It’s a feeling. And then there are other feelings too. If love of God and other feelings are deep, some can control them, others cannot.”

M.: “Some explain ecstasy this way, others don’t. But sir, ecstasy or love of God is unique. I saw Stebbing’s book on Darwinism in your library. Stebbing says that whether or not the human mind is the result of evolution or is a special creation of God, it is equally wonderful. He illustrated it with the theory of light. Whether or not you know the wave theory of light, light in either case is wonderful.”

Doctor: “Yes. And did you see that Stebbing accepts Darwinism as well as God?”

They again talk of Sri Ramakrishna.

Doctor: “I see that he is a worshiper of Kali.”

M.: “What he means by Kali is different. What the Vedas call the Supreme Brahman (Parabrahman), he calls Kali. What the Muslims call Allah or the Christians God, he calls Kali. He doesn’t see many gods – he sees only one. What ancient knowers of the Absolute called Brahman, what yogis call Atman, or devotees call Bhagavan, he calls Kali.

“We have heard this from him: A person had a tub of dye. Anybody who wanted his cloth dyed would go to him. The dyer would ask which colour the fellow wanted. If the latter said green, he would dip the cloth in the tub and return it to him, saying, ‘Here is your cloth dyed green.’ If another asked

him for red, he would dye his cloth in the same tub and say, 'Here is your cloth dyed red.' He would dye the cloth green, blue, yellow – all colours in the same tub. Seeing this amazing spectacle, a person said to him, 'Sir, do you know what colour I want? Please give me the colour of the dye in your tub.' It is the same with Sri Ramakrishna – he has all the attitudes in him. People of all religions find peace and joy in him. Who can comprehend what his feeling is or its depth?"

Doctor: "All things to all men! But this isn't right, even if St. Paul says it."

M.: "Who can fathom his state of mind? We have heard from him that unless you trade in thread, you can't distinguish thread number 40 from thread number 41. Unless you are a painter, you can't appreciate another painter's art. The experience of a saint is very deep. Unless you become like Christ, you can't truly understand Christ. Perhaps the Paramahansa Deva's state of realization is the same as what Christ meant when he said: 'Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.'"

Doctor: "How have you arranged to look after him in his illness?"

M.: "At present an older devotee is supervising his nursing every day. Some days it is Girish Babu, some days Ram Babu, some days Balaram Babu, some days Suresh Babu, some days Navagopal, and on other days Kali Babu. It is this way."

Chapter Three

With devotees – what can mere learning do?

While they are talking, the doctor's carriage stops before the Shyampukur House where Thakur is staying. It is one o'clock. Thakur is sitting in a room on the first floor, where many devotees, including Girish Ghosh, the Younger Naren, and Sarat sit in front of him. They are all gazing at the great, ever-joyful yogi. They are sitting spellbound like snakes before a charmer, or like the escorts of a bridegroom reveling in a marriage procession. The doctor and M. come in, salute him, and sit down.

Seeing the doctor, Sri Ramakrishna laughs and says, "I'm feeling much better today."

In due course there is conversation on God.

The earlier story – Doctor Ramnarayan – conversation with Bankim

Sri Ramakrishna: "What use is mere learning without discrimination and dispassion? I go into a strange mood when I think of the lotus feet of the Lord. Then the cloth I wear on my body drops. And I feel a strange sensation move up from my feet to my head. Then everything appears to me as mere straw. When I see that a pundit is without discrimination and has no love for God, he appears to me just like a dry piece of straw.

"Doctor Ramnarayan was reasoning with me when I suddenly went into that mood. I said to him, 'What are you saying? What can you understand of Him with your reason? Or what can you understand of His creation? You have the simple mind of a weaver!' Seeing me in that state of mind, he began to cry and stroke my feet."

Doctor: “You see, Doctor Ramnarayan is a Hindu. Besides, he believes in sandal paste and flowers. He is an orthodox Hindu.”

M. (*to himself*): The doctor said earlier that he had nothing to do with gongs and conch-shells.¹

Sri Ramakrishna (*to doctor*): “Bankim² is one of your pundits. I met him once. I asked him, ‘What is the duty of man?’ He replied, ‘Eating, sleeping and procreating.’ When I heard him say this, he fell in my estimation. I said, ‘What are you saying? How low can you get? Whatever you think day and night, whatever you do all the time, comes out of your mouth. When you eat radish, you belch radish.’ Then we had a long conversation about God. There was devotional music, and I danced. Then Bankim said, ‘Sir, please visit my house once.’ I replied, ‘If God wills.’ Then he said, ‘You will find devotees there too.’ I laughed and said, ‘My dear, what kind of devotees do you have there? Are they like those who cried, ‘Gopal, Gopal!’”

Doctor: “Gopal, Gopal! What does that mean?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “A goldsmith had a shop. He was a great devotee – a true Vaishnava with beads around his neck, holy marks on his forehead, and a rosary in his hand. Everybody would go to that shop, thinking that he was such a great devotee that he wouldn’t cheat them. Seeing a party of

1. Used in ritualistic worship.

2. Bankim Chandra Chatterji is a resident of the Benetola area of Calcutta, a deputy magistrate, and a great devotee. Sri Ramakrishna met him at Adhar Sen’s house, and this was their only meeting. Bankim was also the celebrated Bengali author of *Vande Mataram*.

customers, one of his craftsmen would say, ‘Keshab, Keshab.’ After a while another would recite the name, ‘Gopal, Gopal.’ After some time, a third would say ‘Hari, Hari!’ And finally one would utter ‘Har-Har.’ Hearing so many names of God in the course of work, the customer would naturally say to himself, ‘This goldsmith is a man of very high character.’ But do you know the truth? The fellow who said, ‘Keshab, Keshab,’ meant to ask, ‘What are they like?’ The one who said, ‘Gopal, Gopal,’ would mean that he had assessed them and found them to be a herd of cows. (*Laughter.*) The one who said, ‘Hari, Hari’ meant, if they were just a herd of cows, should we rob them? (*Laughter.*) And he who said, ‘Har, Har’ would mean, ‘Yes, yes, do, since they are a herd of cows.’ (*Laughter.*)

“I went somewhere with Mathur Babu, and a number of pundits came to argue with me – me, a fool! (*All laugh.*) Seeing me in that strange mood, and after having talked with me, they said, ‘Sir, all that we have read, all our knowledge and scholarship, has turned to spittle after talking to you. We now understand that when God’s grace is granted, there is no lack of spiritual knowledge. A fool becomes wise, and the dumb begin to speak.’ That’s why I say that no one becomes learned just by reading books.”

**Earlier story – first instance of samadhi –
manifestation¹ of Saraswati² seated in the throat of a
fool**

“Yes, when you receive His grace, can there be any lack of knowledge? Look, I am a fool, I know nothing. Then who speaks all this? The storehouse of this knowledge is inexhaustible. One day in Kamarpukur I saw them weighing heaps of paddy. As they did, they chanted, ‘Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram.’ One person was weighing and the other was pushing the heap of paddy toward him as the first heap dwindled. It is the same in my case when I talk. Before I finish, my Divine Mother pushes more from Her inexhaustible store of knowledge.

“During my boyhood God manifested Himself in me. I was eleven and I was going across a field when I saw something above. They say I was completely unconscious, not aware of anything. I have become a different person since then. I began to see another person within me. When I went to worship the deity, my hand, instead of going to the deity, would come to my head and I would offer flowers to it. The young man who was living with me would not come near me. He said, ‘I see a strange light in your face. I’m afraid to come near you.’”

1. Avirbhava.

2. Goddess of knowledge.

Chapter Four

Free will or God's will

yantrārūḍhāni māyayā ||

[All beings revolve by His Maya, as though mounted on a machine.]

– Bhagavad Gita 18:61

Sri Ramakrishna: “I am a fool, I know nothing. So who, then, says all this? I say, ‘Mother, I am a machine, You are the operator; I am the house, You are the indweller; I am the chariot, You are the charioteer; I do what You make me do; I speak as You make me speak; I move as You make me move. Not I, not I. You, only You.’ She is ever victorious. I am merely an instrument. When Radha was carrying a pitcher with a thousand holes and not a drop of water leaked out of it, everybody began to praise her, saying that such a faithful¹ wife is rarely found. Then Radha said, ‘Why do you praise me? Instead you should say, “Victory to Krishna, victory to Krishna!” I am merely His maidservant.’ In that same mood I once put my foot on Vijay’s chest. Though I have such great respect for him, I put my foot on his chest! What would you say to that?”

Doctor: “You should be careful now.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*folding his hands*): “How can I help it? When that mood comes over me, I become unaware of everything. I have no idea what I’m doing.”

1. Sati.

Doctor: “You must be careful. It’s no use just to fold your hands with humility.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Can I do anything myself in that mood? What do you think of that state? If you think it is pretence, I would say that all your science is less than worthless.”

Doctor: “Sir, if I think that, why do I come so often? Look, I neglect my work to come here. I miss visits with many patients while I stay here for six or seven hours!”

I will not fight – the Bhagavad Gita – only God is the doer, Arjuna an instrument

Sri Ramakrishna: “I said to Mathur Babu, ‘Don’t think that I feel blessed because an important man like you believes me and respects me.’ You may respect me or not, but the fact is that a mere man can do nothing. Only God makes one respect another. Before God’s power, man is a mere straw.”

Doctor: “Do you think I respect you because some fisherman¹ believes you? I have respect and regard for you as a man.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Am I asking you to respect me, brother?”

Girish Ghosh: “Does he ask you to have respect for him?”

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Are you saying that it is all God’s will?”

1. Doctor Sarkar is referring here to Mathur Babu (Sejo Babu). He was a fisherman by caste.

Sri Ramakrishna: “What else am I saying? What can a man do before the will of God? Arjuna said in the battle of Kurukshetra, ‘I won’t fight this battle, I won’t kill my relatives.’ Sri Krishna said, ‘Arjuna, you will have to fight. Your nature will compel you.’¹ Sri Krishna revealed everything to him – that everyone had already been slain.² Some Sikhs that came to the temple said that even the leaf of an ashwattha tree trembles by the will of God, that not a single leaf can flutter without His will.”

Liberty or necessity – influence of motives

Doctor: “If it is the will of God, why do you chatter? Why do you talk so much to give spiritual knowledge to others?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “He makes me talk, so I talk. I am an instrument, He is the operator of the instrument.”

Doctor: “You say that you are the instrument. It’s all right to say that. Or be quiet knowing that everything is God.”

Girish: “Say what you like, brother. But it is He who makes us act. Can anyone take a single step against the Almighty’s will?”

Doctor: “But He Himself has given us free will. If I like, I can meditate on God, and if I don’t like, I don’t have to.”

1. Bhagavad Gita 18:59.

2. mayāivaite nihatāḥ pūrvam eva nimittamātram bhava savyasācin| Bhagavad Gita 11:33. [By Me they have already been destroyed; be you, O skilled archer, a mere instrument!]

Girish: “If you meditate on God or do any other good work, you do it because you like to. It’s not you who do these things, but your liking them that makes you do them.”

Doctor: “Why? I do them as duties.”

Girish: “That’s because you like to do your duty.”

Doctor: “Suppose a child is being burned. I go to save it out of a sense of duty.”

Girish: “You feel happy you are able to save the child. That’s why you rush into the fire. It’s the positive feeling that makes you go. You take opium in the expectation of enjoying spicy food later.” (*All laugh.*)

**Knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the knower
are the threefold impulse to action¹**

Sri Ramakrishna: “You have to have some kind of faith to take up any work. You think of your objective and take pleasure from that. Only then will you do the work. Suppose there is a metal jar full of gold coins buried in the ground. First you have to know about it, know it’s there. When you think of the jar, you feel pleasure. Then you begin to dig into the earth. As you dig, you hear a metallic sound, which makes you happy. Then the side of the jar becomes visible and you are happier still. In this way your happiness gradually increases. Standing on the verandah of the temple, I have seen sadhus preparing to smoke hemp and anticipating the joy.”

1. Bhagavad Gita 18:18.

Doctor: “But fire emits both heat and light. You are able to see in the light, but the heat burns your feet. When you do your duty, it’s not just that you get pleasure out of it – it also can bring trouble.”

M. (*to Girish*): “When your stomach is filled with food, your back can bear the load. There is pleasure even in trouble.”

Girish (*to the doctor*): “Duty is dry.”

Doctor: “Why so?”

Girish: “Then it must be juicy.” (*All laugh.*)

M.: “Very good! Beautiful! You take a bitter pill in the hope of something spicy later on.”

Girish (*to the doctor*): “You must feel that duty is pleasant. Why else would you do it?”

Doctor: “Because my mind is inclined that way.”

M. (*to Girish*): “Your nature pulls you to it. (*Laughter.*) If it is the inclination of your nature, where does free will come in?”

Doctor: “I don’t say that a person is absolutely free. A cow tied to a post is free only as far as the rope allows. The pull of the rope...”

Sri Ramakrishna and free will

Sri Ramakrishna: “Jadu Mallick also gave this illustration. (*To the Younger Naren*) Is it in some English book?

(*To the doctor*) “Look, it is God who does everything. ‘He is the operator and I am the instrument.’ If you can have this faith, you will

become liberated in this very life.¹ ‘You (God) do Your own work, but people say they are doing it.’ Do you know how it is? There is a beautiful illustration in the Vedanta. Rice is being cooked in a pot. Potatoes and eggplant have been put in with it. After a while the potatoes and eggplant begin to jump up and down as though they were proud of themselves – ‘I am moving, I am jumping up and down!’ When young children see it, they think that the potatoes, rice, and eggplant are alive and jumping up and down. But their elders, who know better, explain that the potatoes, eggplant, and rice are not animate; they don’t jump up and down by themselves. The moment you remove the burning log from under them, they stop moving. ‘I am the doer’ – this pride of man is the result of ignorance. People are powerful only by God’s power. Everything becomes quiet when you pull that burning log out from under. Marionettes dance beautifully when their strings are in the hands of a puppeteer, but the moment the strings fall from his hands, they can’t move.

“As long as you have not seen God, as long as you haven’t touched the philosopher’s stone, you remain under the delusion that you are the doer – that you are doing right or doing wrong. This awareness persists. The feeling of distinction is God’s maya and is necessary to run His world of illusion. But by taking refuge in the maya of knowledge,² by taking the road of truth, you can realize Him. He who realizes God, who gets His

1. Jivanmukta.

2. Vidyamaya.

vision, he alone can cross over His maya. ‘God alone is the doer; I do nothing’: someone who has this faith becomes liberated in this very life. I said that to Keshab Sen.”

Girish (*to the doctor*): “Free will, how do you know it exists?”

Doctor: “Not by reason. I feel it.”

Girish: “But I and others feel it otherwise.” (*All laugh.*)

Doctor: “There are two elements to duty. One, I go to work out of a sense of duty. Two, I find pleasure in it. But initially I don’t perform duty in the hope of pleasure. When I was a child, I noticed that the priest was very worried to see ants on the sandesh to be offered. The thought of the sweets gave him no pleasure. (*Smiling*) Instead, he felt worried.”

M. (*to himself*): “It is very difficult to say whether one feels pleasure while doing a duty or thinking of it afterward. Where is free will if action is impelled by pleasure?”

Chapter Five

Spontaneous love of God¹ – earlier story of his life: Sri Ramakrishna’s attitude of being a servant of God

Sri Ramakrishna: “What he (the doctor) is talking about is called devotion without any selfish motive: I don’t want anything from Mahendra Sarkar. I want nothing, but I like to see him. This

1. Ahetuki bhakti.

actually is called selfless love. If I derive a little pleasure out of it, how can I help that?

“Ahalya said, ‘Rama, I don’t mind even being born a pig, but I wish for pure love and devotion at Your lotus feet. I want nothing else.’

“Narada went to see Sri Ramachandra at Ayodhya to remind him that he was to slay Ravana. Seeing Sita and Rama, he began to chant their praises. Delighted with his devotion, Ramachandra said, ‘Narada, I am pleased with your chants; please ask for a boon.’ Narada said, ‘Rama, if you must grant me a boon, please grant that I may have pure love and devotion for your lotus feet. And may your world-bewitching maya not enchant me.’ Rama said, ‘Ask for another boon.’ Narada replied, ‘I want nothing more. I only want pure love for Your lotus feet.’

“It is the same with him (the doctor). He only wants to see God. He doesn’t want wealth, honour, and physical comforts. He wants nothing at all. This is called pure love and devotion.

“It does give some pleasure, but it’s not the pleasure of the senses. It’s the pleasure of devotion to God and ecstatic love. Sambhu Mallick once said when I went to visit him, ‘You come here because you feel happy talking to me.’ Yes, there is that bit of happiness.

“But there is a state higher than this, when one wanders around aimlessly like a child, perhaps just to catch a grasshopper.

(*To the devotees*) “Do you understand his (the doctor’s) attitude? It is a prayer: ‘O God, grant me

the right inclination so that I won't be tempted to do wrong.'

"I also felt this state. It is called the attitude of a servant. I used to cry, 'Mother, Mother' so desperately that people would gather around me. When I was in this state, someone brought a prostitute to my room to tempt me and cure me of my madness. She was a beautiful woman with pretty eyes. I ran out of the room crying, 'Mother, Mother.' Shouting for Haladhari, I said, 'Brother, come and see who has entered my room!' I told him and others about the woman. In this state I used to weep, crying, 'Mother, Mother, save me! Mother, purify me so that my mind doesn't go from truth to untruth!' (*To the doctor*) This attitude of yours is good. It is the attitude of a devotee,¹ the attitude of a servant of God."

Doing good to mankind – ordinary people – selfless work and purity of character²

"If someone is pure in character, he thinks only of God. He likes nothing else. Some people are born with pure sattva because of their past actions.³ By striving to act selflessly, one finally attains pure sattva. When sattva is mixed with rajas, the mind is diverted. Then one is possessed by the vanity of doing good to the world – but it's very difficult for an ordinary person to do good to the world. However, there is no harm in working selflessly to do good.⁴ It's very good for a person to try to work

1. Bhakti bhava.

2. Sattva.

3. Prarabdha karma.

4. Nishkama karma

in this way, but it isn't possible for everybody. It's very difficult. Of course everybody has to work; only a few can give up work altogether. Pure sattva is found in only a very few. But when a person works selflessly, the quality of sattva mixed with rajas gradually turns into pure sattva.

“It's only when one has developed pure sattva that he realizes God, through His grace.

“An ordinary person can't understand the state of pure sattva. Hem once said to me, ‘Well, my dear priest,¹ isn't the aim of life to earn name and fame in the world? Don't you think so?’”

1. Hem addressed Ramakrishna as Mr. Bhattacharya, a title of respect for priests. His remark is tinged with sarcasm and suggests that even so-called holy people can be attached to name and fame.

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra, Doctor Sarkar, Girish Ghosh, and Other Devotees

Joyful Conversation

Chapter One

The joy of devotional music – in samadhi

The next day at half past five, Tuesday, 27 October 1885. Narendra, Doctor Sarkar, Shyam Bose, Girish, Doctor Dukari, the Younger Naren, Rakhal, M., and others have come. The doctor feels Sri Ramakrishna's pulse and prescribes medicine.

Thakur talks about his pain and takes the medicine. After that the doctor says, "Now talk with Shyam Babu and I will leave."

Sri Ramakrishna and a devotee ask him, "Would you like to hear a song?"

Doctor: "You become so emotional. You have to keep your feelings under control."

The doctor sits down again. Narendra begins to sing in a sweet voice to the accompaniment of the tanpura (a stringed drone) and mridanga (drum). He sings:

Wonderful and infinite is this world of Yours,
This universe, a treasury of beauty.

The stars shine like a necklace of thousands of gems;
Innumerable are the moons and suns.

The earth luxuriates with a wealth of grain,
And full indeed is Your storehouse.

O great Lord, countless are the people who ceaselessly
sing Your praise!

Then he sings a second song:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty
sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain
cave.

In the lap of infinite darkness, on the waves of the great
silence,¹ eternal peace and joy float without end.

Putting on the form of the Formless One, in darkness
draped, O Mother, who are You seated alone in boundless
bliss?

At the lotus of Your fear-dispelling feet flashes the
lightning of love, while loud and earth-shaking laughter
issues from Your dazzling face.

The doctor says to M., “This is dangerous for
him, this singing. If he goes into ecstasy, it could be
dangerous.”

Sri Ramakrishna asks M. what the doctor said.
M. replies, “The doctor is afraid a song will excite
your feelings and bring on samadhi.” Even while he
speaks, Sri Ramakrishna goes into an ecstatic
mood. Looking at the doctor with folded hands, he
says, “No, no. Why should I go into samadhi?”
However, even while saying this, he goes into deep
samadhi, his body still, his eyes fixed. Speechless
and unaware of the outside world, he resembles a
wooden statue. His mind, intellect, and ego are all
turned inward. He is no longer the same person.

1. Nirvana.

Narendra continues singing the sweet song with his melodious voice:

What wondrous beauty, what an enchanting face I see!

The Lord of my soul has entered my humble hut,
and the spring of love wells forth.

O Lord, beloved of my heart, what treasure shall I offer
You?

Accept my soul, accept my life; whatever I have, accept all
that from me.

And again:

O gracious Lord, what happiness can there be in life
if the bee of my soul is not lost forever in the lotus of Your
feet?

What can I gain from limitless wealth if I do not seek the
gem supreme?

I do not wish to behold a child's tender face
if there I cannot catch a glimpse of Your loving
countenance.

Moonlight has no meaning for me: I see darkness
everywhere, unless in that moonlight I behold Your loving
face.

Even the untainted gold of the chaste wife's love is
stained, unless it holds the gem of Your love.

O Lord, doubt bites me endlessly, a deadly serpent whose
venom dilutes my love for You.

What more can I say, my Lord? You are the precious jewel
of my heart, the abode of my joy.

When the doctor hears the line, "Even the
untainted gold of the chaste wife's love," his eyes
fill with tears and he exclaims, "Ah! Ah!"

Narendra sings another song:

Oh, when will ecstatic love dawn in my heart? When shall I, wishing for nothing else, chant Hari's name while tears stream from my eyes?

When will my life breath and mind be pure, when shall I, a pilgrim to the Vrindavan of love, shed my worldly bonds?

When will the collyrium of knowledge drive away the darkness from my eyes?

When, by the touch of the philosopher's stone, will this body of iron turn to gold?

When shall I see the universe pervaded by God and be immersed in love divine?

Oh, when shall I be free from rites and work and the pride of family and caste?

When will fear and shame loosen their hold, and I be freed from convention's pride?

My body besmeared with the dust of devotees' feet, the sweet burden of perpetual dispassion on my shoulders, I shall scoop up the Yamuna's water of love divine and drink it from my hands.

Then drunk with love, I shall weep and laugh and swim in the sea of Sachchidananda.

Mad myself, I shall make others mad and dwell always at the feet of the Lord.

Chapter Two

Jnana and vijnana¹ – perception of Brahman

In the meantime Sri Ramakrishna regains outer consciousness. The songs have ended. Now a very interesting talk begins, intriguing to every type of

1. An intimate knowledge of God by which the universe and all living beings are seen as manifestations of the divine.

person – scholar and fool, young and old, man and woman – to all without distinction. All are spellbound, gazing at Thakur’s beautiful face. Where is his terrible pain now? His face looks like a lotus in full bloom, shining with divine light. Addressing the doctor, Thakur says, “Give up false modesty. Why be ashamed of repeating the name of God? As the proverb goes, ‘Shame, hatred, and fear keep one from attaining God.’ You think, I am a great man, so I can’t dance and utter the name of the Lord; if other big people hear of it, what will they think of me? It would be a shame for them to say, ‘The doctor was dancing and chanting the name of the Lord!’ Give up such ideas.”

Doctor: “I don’t think that way. I don’t care what others say.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You are too much that way! (*All laugh.*)

“Listen, go beyond knowledge and ignorance.¹ Only then will you be able to know God. Knowledge of many things is ignorance. Pride of learning is also ignorance. ‘God pervades all’ – this conviction is knowledge. Knowing Him intimately is called vijnana. Say a thorn has stuck into your foot. You need another thorn to take it out. When you have taken out the thorn that pricked you, you throw them both away. To remove the thorn of ignorance, you first have to acquire the thorn of knowledge. Then both the thorns of knowledge and ignorance have to be thrown away. He is beyond knowledge and ignorance. Lakshmana said to Rama, ‘How

1. Jnana and ajnana.

strange! Vasishtha Deva¹ is such a wise man, but even he wept inconsolably at the death of his son.’ Rama said, ‘Brother, he who has knowledge also has ignorance. He who has knowledge of one kind also has knowledge of other kinds. He who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. Brahman is beyond knowledge and ignorance, beyond virtue and vice, beyond righteousness and unrighteousness, beyond purity and impurity.’”

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna recites a song of Ramprasad:

Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree and gather there the four fruits of life.

Of your two wives, Worldliness and Dispassion, take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination, for the truth about Reality.²

Beyond speech and mind – the real nature of Brahman cannot be described

Shyam Bose: “What will remain when both thorns are thrown away?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The eternal, ever-pure Consciousness³ – the Essence. How can I make it clear to you? If somebody asks you how ghee⁴ tastes, how can you explain it? At the most you can say, ‘What is ghee like? It’s just like ghee.’ A girl said to her friend, ‘Your husband has arrived. Tell me, what is the joy you feel?’ The friend said, ‘Sister, you will only know when you have a husband. How can I tell you?’ The Purana says that

1. Rama’s preceptor and a holy sage.

2. For complete song see: Section II, Chapter VI.

3. Nitya-shuddha-bodha-rupam.

4. Clarified butter.

when Bhagavati, the divine Mother, took birth in the house of Himalaya, She showed Herself to Him in various forms. When Giriraj (the Lord of the mountains, Himalaya) had seen Her in many forms, He said to Her, 'Mother, may I now have the vision of Brahman mentioned in the Vedas?' Bhagavati replied, 'Father, if you want to see Brahman, you must have the company of holy people.'

"What Brahman is cannot be explained in words. Someone said, 'Everything has been made impure by the tongue, but Brahman has never been defiled.' It means that the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and other scriptures may be said to have been defiled because they are recited by the tongues of men. But what Brahman is, nobody has yet been able to express in speech. So Brahman has not yet been defiled. One cannot describe in words the play and communion with Sat-chit-ananda. Only he knows who has experienced it."

Chapter Three

The pride of a pundit – vice and virtue

Addressing the doctor again, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Look, you cannot attain knowledge until you are rid of the ego. There is a saying: 'When shall I be free? When "I" ceases to be.' 'My' and 'mine' are ignorance; 'You' and 'Yours' are knowledge. A devotee says, 'O God, You alone are the doer. You alone do everything. I am only an instrument. I do what You make me do. And all this splendour, this universe, is Yours. This house, this family, is Yours

– nothing is mine. I am Your servant. I have only the right to serve You as You command.’

“Anybody who has read even a little begins at once to put on airs. I had a talk about God with Kalikrishna Tagore. He said, ‘I know all that.’ I said, ‘Does a person who visits Delhi brag about it? Does a babu¹ go around saying he’s a gentleman?’”

Shyam Bose: “But Kalikrishna Tagore has great respect for you.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What can I say, brother? There was a scavenger woman at the temple garden in Dakshineswar. So puffed up because she had some jewelry! One day when she was walking on the path, a few people passed by her. Angrily she shouted at them, ‘Hey, get out of my way!’ If she could be so arrogant, what can I say about the pride of others?”

Shyam Bose: “Sir, there is punishment for sins. How can you say that God is doing everything?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You have the intellect of a goldsmith.”

Narendra: “A ‘goldsmith’s intellect’ means a calculating mind.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I tell you, eat the mangoes! What’s the use of calculating how many hundreds of trees there are in the orchard, how many thousands of branches, how many millions of leaves? Why calculate all this? You’ve come to eat mangoes. Eat them!”

1. A man of a highly respectable family or social position.

(*To Shyam Bose*) “You’ve been born in this world to worship God. Try to gain love and devotion for His lotus feet! Why bother with other things? What will you gain by philosophizing? Look, you can get drunk with only a little wine. Why do you have to know how many measures of wine there are in the wine shop?”

Doctor: “Besides, God’s wine is infinite. It has no measure.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shyam Bose*): “Give your general power of attorney to God. Lay the whole burden on Him. If you give responsibility to an honest fellow, will he deceive you? It’s for God alone to know whether or not He will punish you.”

Doctor: “Only He knows what is in His mind. How can anyone figure it out? God is above and beyond all human calculation!”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shyam Bose*): “You Calcutta people have only this to say: God is partial because He makes one person happy and another miserable. Whatever these rascals see in themselves, they see in God.”

Is earning name and fame the aim of life?

“Hem used to visit Dakshineswar. Whenever he saw me, he would say, ‘Well, revered priest, isn’t earning a name in the world the main thing?’ You see, very few people say that the aim of human life is God-realization.”

Chapter Four

The gross, the subtle, the causal, and the Great Cause

Shyam Bose: “Can anyone show us the subtle body? Can anyone demonstrate that this very subtle body leaves the gross body?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “A true devotee doesn’t care a whit to show you all this. What does he care if some fool believes him or not? He doesn’t care whether he influences some big fellow or not.”

Shyam Bose: “Well, what is the difference between the gross body and the subtle body?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The body that is made of five elements is the gross body. The subtle body is the mind, the intellect, the ego, and the mind-stuff. That by which one enjoys the bliss of God and communion with Him is the causal body. It is called ‘Bhagavati tanu’¹ in the Tantra – the Divine Body. Last of all is the Great Cause² which cannot be expressed in words.”

Need for spiritual disciplines – devotion to God alone matters

“What is the use of just listening to all this? You have to do something.

“What is the use of shouting, ‘Hemp, hemp?’³ Will that make you high?

1. The Causal body, derived from the Mother of Universe (Bhagavati).

2. Mahakarana, the unconditioned turiya.

3. A play on words: siddhi means both “attainment” and “hemp.”

“You can’t get high even if you rub hemp-paste on your body. You have to eat some. Which is number 41 grade yarn and which is number 40? You can’t tell unless you work in the yarn trade. A person in the trade has no difficulty at all picking out yarn of a particular grade. So I say, practice some spiritual disciplines. Then you will know it all – the gross, the subtle, the causal and the Great Cause. When you pray to God, just pray for love at His lotus feet.

“After Ahalya was freed from the curse, Ramachandra said to her, ‘Ask for a boon from me.’ Ahalya said, ‘Rama, if you wish to grant me a boon, grant that even if I am born a pig, my mind will always dwell at your lotus feet.’

“I asked the Divine Mother only for love and devotion. Offering flowers at Her feet and folding my hands, I said: ‘O Mother, here is Your knowledge, here is Your ignorance; please grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your purity, here is Your impurity, just grant me pure devotion. Here are Your virtuous acts, here is vice, just grant me pure love. Here is Your righteousness, here is Your unrighteousness, just grant me pure devotion.

“Righteousness – charitable work and so on. If you accept righteousness, you will also have to accept unrighteousness. If you accept virtue, you will also have to accept vice. If you believe in knowledge, you will have to accept ignorance too. If you accept ritual purity, you will also have to accept ritual impurity. If you are aware of light, you are also aware of darkness. If you have the knowledge of one, you also have the knowledge of

many. The person who has knowledge of good also has knowledge of what is evil.

“If a person has love and devotion for the lotus feet of God, even though he may eat pork, he is blessed. On the other hand, if a person’s mind is attached to the world, even if he lives on boiled rice with clarified butter...”

Doctor: “That’s not right. Let me tell you something. Buddha ate pork and he suffered from colic. Because of the pain, he took opium. Do you know what nirvana and all that is? Taking opium and remaining sedated. He’d lose all external consciousness. This was his nirvana.”

Everybody laughs to hear such an interpretation of Buddha’s nirvana. The conversation continues.

Chapter Five

Household and selfless work – Theosophy

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shyam Bose*): “There is no harm in leading a householder life. But you must do your work selflessly, fixing your mind at the lotus feet of God. You see, if a person has a boil on his back, he talks to everybody and attends to his work too, but his mind is always on the boil. It is the same.

“Or live in the world like an unchaste woman. Her mind is drawn to her lover even while she’s performing her household duties. (*To the doctor*) Do you understand?”

Doctor: “If I don’t have such an attitude, how can I understand?”

Shyam Bose: “You do understand it a little. Don’t you?” (*Everybody laughs.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): “He has been in this trade for quite some time. Isn’t that true?” (*All laugh.*)

Shyam Bose: “Sir, what do you think of Theosophy?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The thing is that people who go around making disciples are of inferior calibre. And those who want occult powers are also of a lower class. For example, the power to walk across the Ganges on foot, or to be able to tell what a person is saying at some distant place – that is an occult power. It is very difficult for such a person to have pure love for God.”

Shyam Bose: “But the Theosophists are trying to re-establish Hinduism.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I don’t know much about them.”

Shyam Bose: “Where the embodied soul¹ goes after death – whether to the region of the moon or some planet and so on – is all explained in Theosophy.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That may be so. But do you know how I feel? Somebody asked Hanuman, ‘What day and date is today?’ Hanuman said, ‘I don’t know the day, nor the date, nor the position of the planets – nothing. I only think about Rama.’ My attitude is exactly like that.”

1. Jivatman.

Shyam Bose: “They believe in Great Souls.¹ Do you?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “If you believe in my words, I say yes. Now leave these matters alone. Come when I feel a little better. If you have faith in me, you will find some way to peace. Don’t you notice that I don’t accept money or gifts of clothes? No offering has to be made here. That is why so many people visit me. (*All laugh.*)

(*To the doctor*) “I want to say this. Please don’t take offense. You have done all these things – earned money and name, lectured. Now fix your mind on God for a while. And come here now and then. Talking about God is inspiring.”

After some time the doctor rises to leave. At the same time Girish Ghosh arrives and, taking the dust of Sri Ramakrishna’s feet, takes a seat. The doctor is happy to see him and sits down again.

Doctor: “The whole time I was here, he didn’t come. Just as I rise to leave, he arrives!” (*All laugh.*)

The doctor and Girish begin to talk about the Science Association.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Will you take me there some time?”

Doctor: “If you go there, you will lose consciousness seeing all the wonderful works of God.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Really?”

1. Mahatmas.

Chapter Six

Adoration of the guru

Doctor (*to Girish*): “Do whatever you like, but please do not worship him as God. By doing so, you are bringing ruin to such a good man.”

Girish: “Sir, how can I help it? How else can I feel about him who has taken me across the ocean of the world and the ocean of doubt? Tell me, can I even look on his excrement as excrement?”

Doctor: “It’s not a matter of excrement. That doesn’t disgust me either. One day a shopkeeper’s son came to see me and he defecated. Everybody covered their noses with cloths. I sat beside him for half an hour and didn’t bring my handkerchief to my nose. I don’t even cover my nose when a scavenger passes by with a bucket on his head. I know that I am the same as he. How can I feel revulsion? Can’t I take the dust of his (Sri Ramakrishna’s) feet? See, I take it.” (*He takes the dust of Sri Ramakrishna’s feet.*)

Girish: “The angels are ringing bells at this moment.”

Doctor: “What is strange about taking the dust of a man’s feet? I can take dust of anybody’s feet. See? Watch me take it! (*He takes the dust of everybody’s feet.*)

Narendra (*to the doctor*): “We consider him to be like God. Do you know what it is like? There is a point somewhere between the vegetable and the animal kingdoms where it is very difficult to distinguish whether something is animate or

inanimate. In the same way, there is a point between the man-world and the God-world where it is difficult to tell whether a person is human or God.”

Doctor: “Well, dear brother, analogies do not apply to God.”

Narendra: “I’m not saying that he is God. I am only saying that he is a godlike man.”

Doctor: “One should not give vent to such feelings. It’s not good to express them. Nobody understands my own feelings. Even my best friends think of me as hard and cruel. Maybe even you people will turn me out after beating me with your shoes.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): “How can you say that? These people have great affection for you. They await your arrival as eagerly as the ladies in a bridal chamber await the coming bride-groom.”

Girish: “Everyone has the greatest respect for you.”

Doctor: “My son and even my wife think of me as hard-hearted. It is because I don’t express my feelings to anybody.”

Girish: “In that case, sir, you’d better open the doors of your heart out of pity for your friends so they can understand you.”

Doctor: “What can I say? My feelings get worked up even more than yours. (*To Narendra*) I shed tears in solitude.”

**Godlike men assume mankind's karma –
Narendra's attitude**

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Well, sometimes in ecstasy you place your feet on people. That's not good.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “But do you think I know that I'm putting my foot on anybody?”

Doctor: “You don't think it's right, do you?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “How can I tell you what happens to me in the state of samadhi? After I come down from it, I think that maybe I have this disease because of it. The thought of God makes me mad. All this happens in a state of divine madness. How can I help it?”

Doctor: “He agrees with me. He expresses regret for what he does. He knows that such an act is sinful.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): “You are very clever. Why don't you answer? Explain it to him.”

Girish (*to the doctor*): “Sir, you are mistaken. He is not sorry for that. His body is pure, untouched by sin. He touches people for their good. There is a great possibility of his getting a disease by taking their sins on himself. That is what he thinks sometimes. When you had colic pain, didn't you regret having stayed up late at night and reading? Does that mean it's bad to stay awake and read at night? He may regret that he's ill, but he doesn't think that it's wrong to touch others for their good.”

Doctor (*embarrassed, to Girish*): “I stand defeated. Give me the dust of your feet. (*He takes the dust of Girish’s feet.*)

(*To Narendra*) “I have to acknowledge his intellectual power.”

Narendra (*to the doctor*): “And think of it this way too. You can devote your life to the discovery of scientific truth and not care about physical hardship and comfort. Can he not risk his health for God, the greatest of all sciences?”

Doctor: “All religious reformers – Jesus, Chaitanya, Buddha and Mohammed – were filled with conceit in the end, saying, ‘Only what I say is true.’ What’s this all about!”

Girish (*to the doctor*): “Sir, you are now guilty of the same fault. You have the arrogance of all of them combined. When you point out their egotism, you are guilty of it yourself.”

The doctor is silent.

Narendra (*to the doctor*): “We offer him worship bordering on divine worship.”

Sri Ramakrishna laughs with delight, like a child.

Appendix I

Baranagore Math

Today is Monday, 9 May 1887, the second day of the dark fortnight of Jaishtha. Narendra and other devotees are in the monastery. Sarat, Baburam, and Kali have gone to Sri Kshetra.¹ Niranjan has gone to see his mother. M. is at the monastery.

The brothers of the Math are resting after the midday meal. The Elder Gopal is copying some songs into a music notebook.

It is afternoon. Rabindra enters like a madman, barefoot and wearing only half a black-bordered dhoti. His eyes are rolling like a madman's. They all ask, "What has happened?" Rabindra says, "Wait. I'll tell you everything in a little while – but I won't go back home. I will stay here with you. She's a traitor. What do you think of this? I had a drinking habit for five years, and I gave it up for her sake. That was eight months ago. Not a drop. She's betrayed my trust!"

The brothers of the monastery say, "Calm down, please. How did you get here?"

Rabindra: "I walked barefoot all the way from Calcutta."

The devotees ask, "Where is the other half of your dhoti?"

Rabindra says, "She tugged at it when I left and it got torn off."

1. Jagannath Puri, an ancient place of pilgrimage in Orissa state.

The devotees say, “Please go take a bath in the Ganges and cool off. Then we’ll talk.”

Rabindra belongs to a respectable Kayastha family of Calcutta. He is between twenty and twenty-two years old. He met Sri Ramakrishna at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar and received his special grace. Once he spent three nights with Thakur. He is a man of very gentle and sweet nature. Thakur showed him great affection but said, “It will take you some time. There is still some desire for sense enjoyments in you. Nothing is possible just now. The police can’t do anything the very moment a theft takes place. When it quiets down a little, the police come and arrest the guilty.”

Rabindra has become infatuated with a prostitute, but he has all the other virtues – compassion for the poor, contemplation of God, and so on. Learning that the woman was unfaithful to him, he arrives at the monastery in a torn dhoti and resolves not to return to the world.

Rabindra goes to the Paramanik Ghat for a bath in the Ganges. A devotee accompanies him, hopeful that the company of holy men will awaken the young man’s spiritual consciousness. After the bath he takes Rabindra to the cremation ground near the ghat and shows him a dead body, saying, “The brothers of the monastery come here alone at night to meditate. It is good for us to meditate here. Here one sees clearly that the world is transitory.” Hearing this, Rabindra sits down to meditate, but he cannot meditate for long. His mind is too restless.

Both men return to the monastery and bowed down to Thakur in the shrine. The devotee tells Rabindra that the brothers meditate in this room.

Rabindra sits to meditate for a while but cannot continue for long.

Mani: “How do you feel? Is your mind very restless? Is that why you got up? You probably couldn’t concentrate properly.”

Rabindra: “I am definitely not going back to the world. Even if my mind isn’t settled down.”

Mani and Rabindra stand in a quiet spot in the monastery. Mani tells a story from the life of Buddha: Buddha first attained spiritual awareness by listening to a song of some celestial maidens. These days the lives of Buddha and Chaitanya are continually discussed in the monastery. Mani sings:

We long for peace, but where can it be found?

Where we come from and where we go, we do not know.

Again and again returning, with laughter and tears without end,

We wonder all the while where our paths will lead.

That night Narendra, Tarak, and Harish return from Calcutta, where they had been invited to eat at a devotee’s house. When they arrive, they say, “Oh, what a feast we had!”

Narendra, the brothers of the monastery, M., Rabindra, and others are all sitting in “the room of the demons.”¹ Narendra hears Rabindra’s news.

1. Danas; the monastic brothers were nicknamed “demons.”

Grief-stricken man and Narendra's counsel

Narendra sings, as though to instruct Rabindra through the song:

Give up, O man, and cast aside any wrong advice.

You will be freed from your pain when you have known the Lord.

Narendra sings again as if advising Rabindra:

Aspiring soul, imbibe the bliss from Hari's cup of love, become intoxicated!

One's childhood is spent in play, and adulthood infatuated with woman.

In old age one falls prey to bodily ills and lies in bed from morning till dusk.

How can delusion be removed? As the musk deer roams the forest, not knowing

That the sweet-scented musk that draws it ever onward rests in its own navel,

So without the guru one's searches will be in vain.

After some time the brothers of the Math come into Kali Tapasvi's room.¹ Girish has just sent two of his new books to them, *Buddha Charita* and *Chaitanya Charita*. Narendra, Sashi, Rakhal, Prasanna, M., and some other devotees are present. Since coming to the new monastery (Baranagore), Sashi has devoted himself heart and soul to worshiping Thakur. They are all amazed at his devotion. In the same way that he served Thakur day and night during his illness, he now worships him single-mindedly with deep devotion.

1. Kali Tapasvi later became Swami Abhedananda. Tapasvi means ascetic.

One brother of the monastery reads from *Buddha Charita* and *Chaitanya Charita*. He reads *Chaitanya Charita* somewhat sarcastically. Narendra snatches the book away from him and says, “You spoil a good thing doing that!”

Narendra himself reads about Chaitanya Deva’s showering of love.

A brother of the Math: “I say that nobody can give love to another.”

Narendra: “Paramahansa gave love to me.”

Brother: “Are you sure you got it?”

Narendra: “What can you understand? You belong to the servant class.¹ All of you will serve me and massage my feet – even Sarat, Mitir, and Deso. (*All laugh.*) Don’t flatter yourself that you’ve understood everything. (*Laughter.*) Go and prepare a smoke for me.” (*All laugh.*)

Brother: “No... I will... not...”

M. (*to himself*): Sri Ramakrishna has infused mettle in many of the brothers of the monastery, not only in Narendra. Without such mettle is it possible to renounce “lust and greed”?

Spiritual practices of the monastic brothers

The next day is Tuesday, 10 May, the day of the Divine Mother. Narendra and the other brothers are going to offer a special puja to the Mother of the Universe. A triangular yantra (sacred diagram) has been drawn in front of Thakur’s shrine. They will

1. God’s servant class.

perform a homa,¹ followed by animal sacrifice. According to the Tantra both homa and sacrifice have to be performed. Narendra reads from the Gita.

Mani goes for a dip in the Ganges. Rabindra paces the roof all alone. He hears Narendra chanting melodiously:

Om, I am neither the mind, the intellect, the ego, nor the mind-stuff,

Nor I am the ears, the tongue, the nostrils, the eyes.

I am neither the sky nor earth nor fire nor air.

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

I am neither the life-breath nor the five vital forces;²

not the seven metals, not the five sheaths.³

Neither speech nor hands nor feet nor genitals nor anus am I.

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

I have neither attachment nor enmity, neither greed nor infatuation.

Neither vanity nor envy have I.

I have neither righteousness, wealth, desire, nor liberation.⁴

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

I know nothing of virtue and vice, nothing of happiness and sorrow.

1. Vedic sacrifice in which oblations are offered into fire.

2. The five "breaths": prana, apana, samana, vyana, and udana.

3. The five coverings of the atman: the physical body (annamayakosha), the life-force (pranamayakosha), the mental sheath (manomayakosha), the intelligent will (vijnanamayakosha), and the causal body (anandamayakosha).

4. Dharma, artha, kama, moksha – the four goals of human life.

I am neither mantra, nor place of pilgrimage, nor Veda,
nor ritual;

Neither the eater of food, nor eating, nor food.

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

Rabindra returns after his bath in the Ganges.
His dhoti is wet.

Narendra (*in a whisper, to Mani*): “He has just
taken his bath. It’s the right time to initiate him
into sannyas. (*Mani and Narendra laugh.*)

Prasanna asks Rabindra to change and gives
him a gerua dhoti.

Narendra (*to Mani*): “Now he’s going to wear the
cloth of renunciation.”

Mani: “What kind of renunciation?”

Narendra: “Renunciation of ‘lust and greed.’”

Rabindra puts on the ochre cloth and goes into
Kali Tapasvi’s room to sit there alone. Perhaps he
will meditate for a while.

Appendix II

Letter from Aswini Kumar to M.

Sri Ramakrishna with Aswini Kumar
and other devotees

Keshab Sen (1881), Devendranath Tagore,
Achalananda, Shivanath, Hriday, Narendra, and Girish
Beloved brother M.,

I received the fourth part of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* sent by you on the day of Kojagar Purnima,¹ and finished reading it today, the second day of the lunar month. Blessed you are. You have showered nectar on the whole country.

Some time ago you wanted to know what conversations I had with Thakur. I shall try to tell you about them. But I am not as lucky as M., to be able to write down the day, the date, the position of planets, of my visits with him, and to account for all the words that poured from his holy lips. I write what I remember. It is possible that I mistake the date of one conversation with another. Besides, I don't remember everything.

The first time I met Thakur was probably during the autumn holidays of 1881. Keshab Babu was expected on that day. I went to Dakshineswar by boat. When I reached the ghat, I asked someone where the Paramahansa was. Pointing to the northern verandah, to a person resting against a bolster, he said, "He's the Paramahansa." Seeing

1. The full moon day of Lakshmi Puja.

him clad in a black-bordered cloth and resting against a bolster, I said to myself, "What kind of a paramahansa is that?" But then I saw that he was half leaning against the big pillow with his hands holding his drawn-up knees. I said to myself, He doesn't know how to rest against a pillow like a gentleman. So maybe he is the paramahansa." I saw a gentleman sitting to his right very near the pillow and was told that he was Rajendra Mitra, who later became the Assistant Secretary of the Bengal Government. There were many others sitting on his right. In a few minutes he said to Rajendra, "See if Keshab is coming." Only a short time before someone had come to tell him that Keshab was not there. Hearing a sound, he again said, "Just go see. Check again." This time too a person came back and said, "No." The Paramahansa laughed and said, "Leaves rustle in the wind and Radha says, 'Here comes my beloved!' You know, Keshab has been doing this for a long time: he is coming; no, he hasn't come."

After some time, as evening approached, Keshab arrived with his group. He bowed low before Thakur and touched his forehead to the ground. Thakur did the same. When he raised his head, he was in samadhi. He said, "You have brought all the residents of Calcutta, as if I'm going to deliver a lecture. But I won't be able to do that. Do it yourself if you like. I can't do all that."

With a divine smile on his face, in the same state, he said, "I shall eat, I shall drink, I shall stay at your house. I shall eat, sleep, and defecate at your house. But I can't give lectures." Keshab Sen

gazed at him and was filled with emotion. He said again and again, “Ah, ah me.”

Seeing this state of Thakur I thought, Is he pretending? I’ve never seen anything like this before. And you know what faith I have.

After coming down from samadhi, he said to Keshab, “Keshab, one day I went to your place and heard you say: ‘Having dived into the river of God’s love, we will reach the sea of Sat-chit-ananda.’ Then I looked up [to where Keshab’s wife and other ladies were sitting] and said to myself: ‘Then what will happen to them?’ You are householders. How will you fall so suddenly into the sea of Sat-chit-ananda? You are like a mongoose with a brick tied to its tail. Hearing just a little noise, it climbs up into its niche, but how can it stay there? That brick pulls it and it falls down to the ground. You householders can practice a little meditation and so on, but the brick of a wife and children will pull you down to earth again. You may dive into the river of love for a while, but you’ll soon come up again. It will continue like this. How can you dive for good?”

Keshab said: “Isn’t it possible for a householder? What about Maharshi Devendranath Tagore?”

The Paramahansa Deva repeated “Devendranath Tagore, Devendra, Devendra” twice or thrice, bowed to him a few times, and said, “You know, there was a person who used to celebrate the worship of Durga and from morning till evening slaughtered goats as sacrifice to Her. Some years later there was not so much activity. Somebody asked the man, ‘Sir, why is there no longer great hustle and bustle of sacrifice at your house?’ He

replied, 'I've lost my teeth, you see.' Devendra now practices meditation and contemplation. That is natural. But there is no doubt he's a good man.

"Look here, as long as a man is under the spell of maya, he's like a green coconut. A piece of its shell comes off with the meat. But when delusion is gone, the shell and kernel become separated. Then they can easily be separated; the kernel sounds like a dry ball inside. When he is free from delusion, the soul and the body of a man become separate; there is no identification with the body.

"It is the 'I' that is the cause of all trouble. Will this rascal 'I' not go? In a dilapidated house an ashwattha tree sprouts. Even if you cut it down and throw it away, another branch shoots up the next day. It is the same with this 'I.' Wash the bowl an onion has been kept in any number of times. Can you ever get rid of its smell?"

While talking, he said to Keshab Sen, "Well, Keshab, your Calcutta gentlemen say there is no God. One of them is climbing up a staircase. He takes a step and as he takes another, he suddenly exclaims: 'Oh! What happened to my side?' and falls unconscious. His relatives call for a doctor, but before he arrives, the gentleman expires. Yet they say, 'There is no God!'"

After an hour or an hour and a half, devotional singing began. What I saw then I feel I shall never forget, even after many lives. Everyone began to dance, even Keshab. Thakur was in the middle and the others were dancing around him. While dancing, he suddenly became motionless, absorbed

in samadhi. He remained in this state for quite some time. After I saw him and heard his words, I felt, yes, he is truly a paramahansa.

One day, perhaps in 1883, I took a number of young men from Srerampore to see him. Looking at them Thakur said “What has brought them here?”

I: “To see you.”

Thakur: “What is there to see in me? Let them look at the buildings and temples.”

I: “They have not come to see the buildings. They have come to see you.”

Thakur: “Then they’re flints – there is fire in them. You may keep a flint in water for a thousand years, but the moment it is struck, it will generate fire. These young men must be the same. As for me, you may strike hard, but no fire will come out.”

We all laughed to hear these last words. I don’t exactly remember any other conversation that day. But there was some talk that the shell of “I-ness” does not disappear, and about the renunciation of “lust and greed.”

Yet another day that I visited him, after I had saluted him and sat down, he said, “Can you bring me some of that stuff that fizzes when you uncork it – a bit sour, but a little sweet?” I said, “Lemon soda?”

Thakur said, “Do bring some.” I remember bringing him a bottle.

As far as I can recall we were alone. I asked him many questions.

I: “Do you believe in the distinction of caste?”

Thakur: “How can I say I do? I ate curry at Keshab Sen’s house. But listen to what happened one day. Somebody with a long beard brought me some ice. I didn’t feel at all like eating it. But later, when another person brought ice from the same man, I ate it with gusto. You see, the distinction of caste falls off by itself, just like fronds fall from coconut and palm trees when they grow. Caste distinction also falls like this. Don’t pull them off; let them fall off by themselves.”

I asked: “What do you think of Keshab Babu?”

Thakur: “I say, brother, he is a saintly man.”

I: “And Trailokya Babu?”

Thakur: “He is a good man, sings very well.”

I: “Shivanath Babu?”

Thakur: “A good man, but he argues.”

I: “What is the difference between a Hindu and a Brahmo?”

He said: “There is no particular difference. In a serenade one person continues to play a particular note while another plays various melodies. One of the melodies is, ‘My Radha is sulking.’ Brahmos play just one note – the Formless. Hindus produce melodies of various kinds.

“Water and ice – one is without form, the other with form. That which is water becomes ice when it is cold. With the heat of knowledge, ice melts into water. In the cold of devotion, water turns into ice.

“The Reality is one and the same. Different people give It different names. It is like this: there are four ghats on the four sides of a pond. Some people take water from one and say they are taking *jal*. Those taking water at another place may say they are taking *pani*. At the third place they call it *water*, and at the fourth, they call it *aqua*. But it is the same water.”

When I told him that I had met Achalananda Tirthavadhuta in Barisal, he said, “The same Ramkumar of Kotrang?”

I: “Yes, sir.”

Thakur: “Well, what do you think of him?”

I: “I liked him.”

Thakur: “Well, do you like him better than you like me?”

I: “How can you be compared with him? He is a pundit, a learned man. Are you a pundit, a jnani?”

Hearing this, he was speechless; he remained silent. After a minute or so, I said, “He may be a pundit, but you are fun, full of joy. There is a lot of fun in your company.”

At this he smiled and said, “Well said. You are right.”

He asked me, “Have you seen my panchavati?”

I answered, “Yes, sir.”

He told me a little about what he used to do there. He told me about the various spiritual disciplines he had practiced, and also about Nangta

(the Naked one, Totapuri). I asked him, “How can I realize God?”

He: “You see, brother, He is pulling us the way a magnet pulls iron. But if mud covers the iron, it can’t be pulled. When it is washed clean by weeping (for Him), you will immediately stick to Him.”

I was recording Thakur’s statements as I listened to him. He said, “Look here, it is not enough just to shout, ‘Hemp, hemp!’ Get some hemp, grind it in water, and then drink it.” Then he said to me, “Since you live a householder’s life, live a little inebriated. Let that glow continue even when you’re engaged in work. You won’t be able to be like Sukadeva who lay naked with intoxication.

“Since you’re going to live in the world, you should write out a general power of attorney and give it to God. He will do whatever is necessary. Live like a maidservant in a rich household. How much she loves the children of her master! She bathes them, washes them, and feeds them as if they were her own. But she knows in her heart that they are not hers. As soon as her services come to an end, all contact is lost.

“Just as you rub your hands with oil before cutting open a jackfruit, cover yourself with the oil that will not allow you to become entangled in the world and affected by it.”

All this time that we were talking, we were seated on the floor. Now he got up on his cot and lay on his back. He said to me, “Fan me.”

I began to fan him. He remained quiet. After some time he said, “It is very hot, brother. Moisten

the fan with water.” I said, “Oh, you are fond of good living too, I see!” He smiled and said, “Why not? Why shouldn’t I?” I said, “Very well, then have as much as you want.” The pleasure I had that day being near him I cannot express.

The last time I visited him – a day you mentioned in the third volume (Section XVI) – I went with the headmaster of my school. It was just after he had passed his B. A. You met him the other day. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw him, he said, “Where have you found him? He’s a very fine fellow!”

Then he said: “Brother, you’re a lawyer. You are very clever! Can you give me some of your cleverness? Your father came here the other day. He was here for three days.”

I asked: “How did you find him?”

He said: “He’s a good man, but sometimes he talks nonsense.”

I said: “Knock off some of his nonsense the next time you see him.”

He smiled a little. I said, “Please give me some special instruction.”

He said: “Do you know Hriday (Hriday Mukhopadhyay)?”

I said: “Your nephew? I only know him by name.”

Thakur: “Hriday used to say, ‘Uncle, don’t say everything you have to say all at once. Why should you repeat the same things over and over again?’ I said, ‘What does it matter to you, you rascal? These

are my words. I may repeat them a million times. What is that to you?"

I smiled and said: "Quite right, quite right."

After some time he sat down and, repeating, 'Om, Om,' he began to sing:

Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty....

Singing a couplet or two, and repeating, "Dive, dive," he himself dived deep.

The samadhi over, he began to pace up and down. He was wearing a dhoti. With both hands, he pulled it up to his waist. One end of it trailed on the ground, the other hung loose. My companion and I began to nudge each other and whisper, "He's wearing his dhoti nicely!" But in a little while he said, "Away, away, you rag of a cloth!" He threw it away and began pacing up and down naked. Bringing an umbrella and a walking stick from the northern side of the room, he asked, "Are these yours – this umbrella and the walking stick?" I replied, "No, sir," and he immediately said, "I already knew that. Just by looking at an umbrella and walking stick I can judge a man. Surely these belong to that fellow who swallowed my words without understanding them."

After a while he sat on the northern end of his cot facing west, still naked. He asked me, "Do you consider me uncivilized?"

I said: "No, you're very civilized. Why do you ask?"

Thakur: “Well, Shivanath and others like him think of me as uncivilized. When they come, I have to somehow wrap myself in this dhoti. Do you know Girish Ghosh?”

I: “Which Girish Ghosh? The one who runs a theatre?”

Thakur: “Yes.”

I: “I’ve never seen him, but I know his name.”

Thakur: “He is a good man.”

I: “I hear he drinks. Does he?”

Thakur: “Let him. Let him. How long will he continue? Do you know Narendra?”

I: “No, sir.”

Thakur: “I’d like you to meet him. He’s passed his B.A. and hasn’t married.”

I: “Very well. I shall meet him.”

Thakur: “Today there will be a kirtan¹ at Ram Dutta’s house. You will meet him there. Please go there this evening.”

I: “All right.”

Thakur: “Will you go? You must definitely go.”

I: “Would I disobey your order? I will certainly go.”

He showed us the pictures in his room. Then he asked me, “Is a picture of the Buddha available?”

I: “I hear it’s available.”

1. Community singing of hymns.

Thakur: "Bring me one."

I: "All right, I'll bring one the next time I come."

I never saw him after that day. I was not lucky enough to sit at his feet again.

That evening I went to Ram Babu's house where I met Narendra. Thakur was sitting in a room, resting against a bolster, with Narendra on his right. I was in front of them. He asked Narendra to talk to me.

Narendra said, "I have a bad headache today. I don't feel like talking."

I said, "Never mind. We'll talk another day."

That talk we had in Almora in the month of May or June of 1897.

Thakur's wish had to be fulfilled, though it took twelve years. Oh, what a happy time those few days in Almora with Swami Vivekananda were. Sometimes it was in his house, at other times in mine. And one day I was with him alone on a hilltop. I didn't see him again after this meeting. It was to fulfill Thakur's wish that I was able to meet him that time.

Sri Ramakrishna also I saw only four or five times. But even during that short time, I felt we were as close as if we had been classmates. How frankly we talked! The moment I left him, I said to myself, Oh my God, what a man I've been with! Whatever I saw, whatever I got from him during these few days has sweetened my entire life. With enormous care I have treasured that soft smile, that showering of divine words in my heart.

Brother, it is the inexhaustible wealth of a poor person. A grain of bliss flowing from that smile has brought gladness even to distant America. Thinking of this, I am overwhelmed again and again. If it is so with me, how fortunate you are!

M. (Mahendranath Gupta): Short Life of the Author

Mahendranath was born on Friday, 14 July 1854, 31st of Ashadha, 1261 B.Y., on the Naga Panchami day on Shiva Narayana Das Lane of Shimuliya, a neighborhood in Calcutta. Mahendranath's father was Madhusudan Gupta and his mother, Swarnamayi Devi. Madhusudan was a devotee of God; Thakur was aware of his devotion.

Mahendranath was the third child of Madhusudan. It is said that this son was born after his father performed mental worship to Shiva twelve times in succession. For this reason Madhusudan had a special affection for this son and he was particularly careful that the child not come to any harm. The boy Mahendra was extremely good-natured and had great love for his parents. He could recall many incidents from his early childhood – for example, going with his mother to the Car Festival of Mahesh when he was five years old. On the journey home he remembered the boat touching the Dakshineswar ghat. While everybody was busy visiting the deities in the temples, M. somehow became lost and found himself alone in the natmandir in front of the shrine of Bhavatarini Kali. Not able to find his mother, he began to cry. At that moment someone found him crying and consoled him. Mahendranath used to say that this incident always remained vivid in his mind. The brilliant radiance of the newly constructed and dedicated temple was clearly

seen in his mind's eye, and he thought that the person who came to console him was probably Thakur himself.

As a boy Mahendranath studied in the Hare School. He was a very bright student and always held first or second position in his class. The shrine of Mother Shitala of Thanthania was on his way to and from school – the shrine can now be seen in front of the College Street Market – and he never forgot to salute the deity. By virtue of his natural intelligence, together with hard work, he won scholarships and honours in his entrance, F.A., and B.A. examinations. He won second place in his entrance examination, and though he missed one of his mathematics papers, he placed fifth at the F.A. examination. In 1874 he stood third on his B.A. He was a favourite student of Prof. Tawny in the Presidency College.

In 1874, while still in college, he was married to Nikunja Devi, the daughter of Thakur Charan Sen and a cousin of Keshab Sen. Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother had great affection for Nikunja Devi. When she lost her son and became almost insane with grief, Thakur would bring peace to her mind by stroking her body.

Before he became a teacher, Mahendranath served for some time with the government and then in a merchant's office. But he could not stay with those jobs. Thakur had already arranged a different way of life for him. He took up teaching in school and college. In Ripon City and Metropolitan colleges, he taught English, psychology, and economics. When he started going to Thakur in

1882, he was headmaster of the Shyampukur branch of Vidyasagar's school.

Rakhal, Purna, Baburam, Binode, Bankim, Tejchandra, Kshirode, Narayan, and some other intimate devotees of Thakur were all students of M.'s school. That is why they all called him Master Mahashay (revered teacher). That is why he became famous in Sri Ramakrishna's group of devotees as "Master," or "Master Mahashay." Thakur also called him "Master" or "Mahendra Master."

Mahendranath was inclined toward religion from his boyhood. When Keshab Sen came into the public eye as a famous preacher and the founder of the Navavidhan [New Dispensation] Brahma Samaj, Mahendranath became acquainted with him and would take part in the worship at the Navavidhan temple or at Keshab's home. At this time Keshab was his ideal. Later he would say that sometimes during worship Keshab would pray with such moving words that he looked godlike. Later, when he met Thakur and heard him speak, he realized that Keshab had derived his heart-warming charm from Thakur himself.

Mahendranath met Thakur at the Dakshineswar Kali temple on 26 February 1882. As soon as Thakur saw him, he recognized M. as a person eligible for divine knowledge. At the end of the first meeting, when M. was leaving, Thakur said to him, "Come again." But he expressed regret when he came to know that M. was married and had children. However, he also told him that there were very good signs on his forehead and eyes (fit

for a yogi). At the time Mahendranath liked to meditate on the formless Brahman. He did not like the worship of a deity in clay images.

M. was very well read in Western philosophy, literature, history, science, economics, and other subjects. He also was very well read in the Sanskrit Puranas and dramatic literature. He knew by heart verses from *Kumarasambhava*, *Shakuntala*, *Bhattikavya*, *Uttar Ramacharita*, and other dramatic works. He had studied Buddhist and Jain philosophies, as well as the Bible, particularly the New Testament. As a result, he considered himself a scholar.

But this pride received a blow on his first meeting with Thakur. Sri Ramakrishna showed him immediately the insignificance of the knowledge he had acquired and made him realize that real knowledge is to know God and that everything else is ignorance. Only a couple of blows from Thakur's words silenced Mahendranath. As Thakur would say, "A bullfrog is silenced forever after a croak or two when it falls a prey to a king cobra." So it happened with M.

During his very first meeting Thakur taught M. how to take care of both sides of life – the worldly and the spiritual – during one's life's journey. This is called "sannyasa in the household" or renunciation as a householder. The essence of it can be summed up: Do all your work but keep your mind in God; live with your wife, son, father, mother, and others; serve them, accepting them as your very own, but know in your heart that none of them is yours.

Just as an oyster floating on water receives a drop of rain when the Svati conjunction of stars is in the ascendant and then dives deep into the sea to make a pearl, M. followed this instruction of Thakur. He began to practice interior spiritual disciplines in solitude. He understood that the aim of human life is God-realization. He began his spiritual practices in solitude, and whenever he found time, he would go and sit at Thakur's feet. Lest he fall into the whirlpool of the world later, Thakur tested him from time to time and would ask him the reason if he did not come to see him.

Thakur knew from the very beginning that M. would narrate his story and teachings to people. If he became lost in the world and were to fall into the whirlpool of ignorance, he would not be able to tell it. He kept a keen eye on M. to see if some knot were forming within. When he made sure that M. had become careful, Thakur said to him, in January of 1884, "Now go and live at home. Let them know that you are their own, but be sure that you know in your mind that you are not theirs, nor are they yours." Throughout his life Mahendranath practiced this mantra of the renunciation of a householder. Thakur would often say, "Be in the world, but not of the world." He said to M., "Your eyes and forehead look like a yogi's come fresh from practicing spiritual austerity. You are an intimate companion of Chaitanya Deva. I recognized you from your reading of *Chaitanya Bhagavata*.

"You belong to the class of the perfect by nature. Do you know what you are? When Narada began to bestow the knowledge of Brahman on all (to Sanaka, Sanatana, and others), Brahma bound him

in maya with a curse. You will be able to recognize all people.

“You are my intimate companion. Were it not so, how could your mind be so interested in spiritual things when it lacked nothing worldly?”

“Mother, do reveal Yourself to him again and again. Otherwise, how will he continue to attend to both sides? Let him do both: life in the world and renunciation. What is the need for him to renounce everything all at once? Yet may Your wish prevail. You may make him renounce all if that is Your will.

“Mother, awaken him. Otherwise, how can he awaken others? Why have you put him in worldly life? What would have been lost...? Narendra and Rakhal would stay away from women. You also will. You also will not be able to associate with women... He is a deep soul, like the Phalgu river. He has real spirituality within.

“Your attitude is like Prahlada’s – ‘I am That’ and ‘I am God’s servant.’

“The Master (M.) is very pure. He has no pride.

“You are my own, of the same substance, like father and son.

“You are the inner as well as the outer pillars of the natmandir.”

A struggle continued to rage in Mahendranath’s mind during his days with Thakur: Why have I not embraced sannyas? If he had become a monk, his mind could have soared like a free bird in the

firmament of divine consciousness.¹ Thakur would assure him from time to time by saying, “He who has renounced in the mind is a person of renunciation. Nobody who comes here is a householder. The householder devotees of Chaitanya Deva also lived with their family with detachment. The work you do does not involve that much worldliness.”

Just as a weak child holds to his mother with all its strength when overwhelmed with fear, knowing that she is the main and a sure haven, Mahendranath held to Thakur in fear of the weaknesses born of family life – so much so that he absorbed himself in that feeling throughout his life. He talked of nothing but Thakur. He thought of Thakur as his only refuge, the most desirable goal, and the one aim in life. He had become one with Thakur. Thakur was his supreme attainment:

yaṁ labdhvā cāparam lābham manyate nādhikam
tataḥ |
yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate ||

[And having gained that, he can think of no greater gain; established in that, he is not shaken by even the heaviest sorrow.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:22

Day and night M. taught the means to save oneself in the Kaliyuga: “Keep the company of the holy, practice spiritual disciplines in solitude at times, and have faith in the words of the guru.”

1. Chidakasha.

Those who saw him in his old age felt that here was a yogi, or a rishi, living as a householder for the purpose of showering the love of Sri Ramakrishna on them. Morning, afternoon, or evening – whenever one went to see him – one would find him in the company of devotees, talking about the love of God. Talk of God flowed continuously, from the Vedas, the Puranas, the Bible, the Koran, the holy books of the Buddhists, the Gita, the Bhagavata, the Adhyatma Ramayana. No weariness, no pause – unceasing talk about Thakur, the embodiment of all faiths and spiritual practices. What an extraordinary way of serving Thakur! He had dedicated his body, mind, and wealth, his all, to the work. Is this what is called the ‘servant I’ of Hanuman”?

Who would not like to be fortunate enough to be the servant of Sri Ramakrishna? His intimate disciples were, of course, his servants. M. also was markedly a servant of Sri Ramakrishna. “You are my own, of the same substance, like father and son” – these holy words of Thakur indicate this. Thakur himself had said that Narendranath would carry out his mission. He had often hinted that Mahendranath would also do his work. We find it in the Kathamrita at several places: “Mother, I can say no more. Please grant power to Ram, Mahendra, Vijay, and others, that they may carry out Your work from now on.

“Mother, why have You given him (M.) only one-sixteenth of Your power?¹ Oh, I understand, it will be enough for Your work.” One day Sri

1. Kala Shakti.

Ramakrishna told him, “The Mother has kept the Bhagavata pundit (the preacher of the divine word) in the world, tying him with one bond. Otherwise, who would explain the Bhagavata?” Thus we see that, just as Narendranath had come for Thakur’s work and Thakur gave him the badge of authority, Mahendranath also was not deprived of inheritance – he too got power and love from Thakur.

To make him competent to work for the welfare of mankind, Sri Ramakrishna made him undergo spiritual austerities from time to time. For more than a month, from 14 December 1883 to almost the middle of January 1884, he practiced continuous spiritual disciplines in Dakshineswar under the care of Thakur. While he lived with Thakur, not only did M.’s heart open out, but his pride was vanquished. Thakur used to say, “His pride has gone.” Had he retained it, M. could not have accomplished the task assigned him by Thakur. This task was to disperse Thakur’s words to others. Having kept himself hidden in the five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, M. has expressed Sri Ramakrishna fully. He gave himself a number of pseudonyms – Mani, Mohini, Mohan, a particular devotee, M., Englishman, and so on. The writer’s own personality manifests nowhere at all. Only at some places does one come across his reflections. But even they are based on what Thakur had said and are merely an effort to explain Thakur’s greatness. These thoughts and reflections are nothing but the image of Sri Ramakrishna in the pure heart of a disciple. This is how M. hid himself and why, after reading the Gospel in 1897, Swami Vivekananda wrote, “I now

understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. Socratic dialogues are Plato all over. You are entirely hidden.” Sri Keshab Gupta wrote, “Renouncing the temptation of being a literary figure is the hallmark of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita. Like the spreading perfume of hidden tuberose is the great beauty of this spiritual book.”

That Thakur subjected M. to tests has been mentioned in the Kathamrita – 9 November 1884 – where it is obvious that this work of recording the Kathamrita had been reserved for him. Mahendranath had recorded his immortal words in his diary, while living in Thakur’s company, with year, date, day of the week, and the lunar date. Taking these notes as a foundation, the Gospel and the five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* were written. Such work is unique in history – the life of a divine personality, an avatar, recorded in this way. It is unique. N. Ghosh correctly said about the words of *Sri Sri Kathamrita* in the *Indian Nation*: “They take us straight to the truth and not through a metaphysical maze. The style is Biblical in simplicity. What a treasure would it have been to the world, if all the sayings of Sri Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Nanak, Chaitanya could have been preserved thus.”

Can anybody and everybody accomplish such a work? Even if they do, it cannot be with such pure fervour. It was possible only by the grace and desire of Thakur. That is why Thakur first rid the writer of his pride. Which is why Mahendranath hid

himself by taking up a number of pseudonyms found in the *Kathamrita*.

It is obvious from Mahendranath's words and attitude that he always felt himself to be a servant in Thakur's company. And he made of himself a sannyasin. He would often say, "We ought to have only one aim – to be as perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect."¹

After Thakur's passing away, M. used to visit the Baranagore monastery now and then to live with his brother disciples, to firmly root in himself the ideal of service and spiritual discipline, renunciation, and austere life that they all aspired to. With the aim of cultivating a spirit of complete dependence on God, he would sometimes spend nights in front of the University of Calcutta Senate Hall, just like an indigent. Other times he would go to Uttar Pradesh to live in a hut² and practice austerities like a sadhu.

Now and then M. would go to the Howrah Station to watch people return from pilgrimage and he would salute them. He would ask for prasad from them and share it with his companions, saying 'Prasad brings one in contact with God.'

Whenever he found time or the opportunity, Mahendranath would seek the company of Thakur in Dakshineswar or in the house of a devotee. Even during school recess, whenever Thakur went to a

1. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" – Matthew 5:48.

2. The hut where he practised austerities still stands in Swarga Ashrama at Hrishikesh. He lived there for several months in 1912.

devotee's house, M. would go there to be with him. Once the results of the Shyampukur school were rather low because of his frequent visits to Sri Ramakrishna. Vidyasagar said cuttingly about him, "Master (M.) is busy with the Paramahansa; he has no time to think of the school's affairs." As the remark involved his guru's name, M. immediately resigned his job. When Thakur came to know about it, he said, "You have done the right thing. The Divine Mother will take care of you."

Whenever Thakur was in need of anything, he would tell Mahendranath, adding at the same time, "I cannot accept from just anybody."

Mahendranath was very popular with Sri Ramakrishna's group of devotees for his goodness and simplicity of heart. When Narendranath was in straightened circumstances after the death of his father and was very anxious to carry out spiritual practices, Mahendranath arranged for his family's expenses for three months, thus enabling him to attend to his spiritual pursuit with a free mind, as directed by Thakur. At times Mahendranath would also go secretly to Narendranath's mother to render some help.

After Sri Thakur's mahasamadhi, his devotees established a monastery at Baranagore. In the beginning Suresh Mitra, Balaram Bose, and M. helped it financially. At the time Mahendranath was teaching in two schools. He donated his income from one school to the monastery.

Narendranath lived the life of a wandering monk from 1890 to 1893. Inspired by his example, some of his brother disciples went to the Himalayas

or to Uttarkhanda to carry out spiritual practices. During this time Mahendranath remained absorbed in his diaries day and night, and meditated on Thakur, taking refuge at the feet of the Holy Mother. Whenever a conflict arose in his mind, he would give himself up completely to the Holy Mother. He would also bring her to his house and serve her there. She would stay at Mahendranath's house for more than a fortnight, sometimes for more than a month. As directed by Thakur in her dream, the Holy Mother went to the house of Mahendranath to install the holy water vessel with her own hands and to arrange for its worship. Holy Mother performed much worship, repetition of the name, and meditation in this shrine.

Since 1889 and on a regular basis M. provided money for the service of the Holy Mother. Whenever she was in need of anything, she informed Mahendranath. When a piece of land was to be bought for worship of the Mother of the Universe (Jagaddhatri), she asked Mahendranath to send money. Upon receipt of the letter, he sent Rs. 320/-. Once, when water became scarce in her village and he was asked to send money to dig a well, Mahendranath sent Rs. 100/-. M. also used to send money to the monks of the monastery when they wanted to go on pilgrimage or to the hills for spiritual practise.

M. received a number of requests to publish this book. When more and more requests poured in and at Holy Mother's request, M. one day read it to her. She was extremely pleased to hear it. Blessing M.

she said, “Hearing it from your lips, I felt as if Thakur himself was talking.” And she directed M. to publish the book.

In 1897 Mahendranath published the first edition of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (According to M., a son of the Lord and Disciple)*. Thus the Gospel became known in English. Sri Ramchandra Dutta wrote in the *Tattva Manjari* published from Yogodyan, in the month of Agrahayana, 1304 B.Y. (November-December, 1897):

“Revered Mahendranath Gupta ... who has so much faith in the Lord that he is making as much effort as is humanly possible to spread Sri Ramakrishna’s words in a book for the good of the common man.... Our request to Gupta Mahashay is that, instead of bringing these teachings in separate editions, he publish them in one big volume. It would be of greater service to mankind.

“Our second request is that he not give up writing in the Bengali language, because the essence of the words is somewhat changed in several places by translation into English. Master Mahashay knows this very well. The ordinary man of this country will find it difficult to understand if it is in English.”

And that is how it happened later. Bearing the name of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by Sri M., it began to appear in *Tattva Manjari*, *Banga Darshan*, *Udbodhan*, *Hindu Patrika*, and some other monthly magazines of the time. They were collected and published as Volume I through the Udbodhan Press by Swami Trigunatitananda. The

second volume appeared in 1904, the third in 1908, the fourth in 1910, and the fifth in 1932. The work has been translated into many languages, both Indian and foreign. Everybody began to say, "An invaluable gem is being added to Bengali literature." The *Nava Bharat* wrote: "Except for M., nobody possesses this gem." The *Sanjivani* wrote: "*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* is truly a treasure of nectar." Romain Rolland, the savant, wrote: "The exactitude is almost stenographic."

With the publication of the *Kathamrita*, new and more devotees began to visit the monastery and Holy Mother's house. New and more sannyasins began to read the *Kathamrita*. The Ganges of peace began to flow in the world of trial and tribulation.

Swami Premananda wrote: "Thousands of people are finding new life from the *Kathamrita*, thousands are receiving bliss from it. Bent under the weight of the trials and sufferings of worldly life, many thousands of people are gaining peace in their family life of sorrow and attachment."

All recognized that Sri Ramakrishna, the incarnation of the age, had incarnated for the good of humanity and that man will attain peace and gain fearlessness by taking shelter at his feet.

Presiding at M.'s birth anniversary in 1955, Hemendra Prasad Ghosh said: "M. has presented Sri Ramakrishna to the world through his *Kathamrita* in a very short time. Had he not written the *Kathamrita*, it would have taken much longer for the world to know Sri Ramakrishna.

That God can be realized even while living in the household – the truth taught by Sri Ramakrishna – is clearly manifest in M.”

Many western devotees also used to meet M. at his house. M. would talk only of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, day after day, month after month, and year after year continuously. He would say, “I am an insignificant person, but I live by the side of an ocean, and I keep with me a few pitchers of sea water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but his words?”

He would speak in such a touching and affectionate manner that it appeared to the visitors that they were hearing these words sitting close to Thakur himself. It was as if a bridge had been built between the spot where he sat and talked about Thakur and the scenes of Thakur’s life itself. His narratives seemed real. Paul Brunton narrated his meeting with Mahendranath in his book *Search in Secret India*. Describing his first meeting with M., he writes, “A venerable patriarch has stepped out from the pages of the Bible and a figure from Mosaic times has turned to flesh.”

Swami Yogananda, in his book *Autobiography of a Yogi*, recorded how he was inspired by Mahendranath in the early years of his spiritual life: “Mahendranath was a sannyasin-in-the-household. His life is a shining illustration of renunciation. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by M. is not only an excellent piece of literature, but also the immortal words of a divine life.”

Many young men embraced monastic life by coming in contact with Mahendranath, and from

him they found new inspiration in religious life. Even those who saw him only once never forgot his yogi-like figure, his humility, and his simplicity.

When the translation of some chapters of the *Kathamrita* appeared as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Volume II – and was also published in the *Morning Star* without M.'s permission and consultation – how hurt M. felt. This is evident from his letter: “Dear Ayukta Babaji, My love and salutations to you all. The translation of the *Gospel* in the *Morning Star* is, I regret to say, not satisfying to me. Being an eyewitness, I naturally want the spirit to be kept in the translation. Moreover, the report of a meeting should not appear in a mutilated form. The translation should be done by myself. You may do the work after my passing away, which is by no means a distant contingency. I am 76 and my health is not at all good. It is painful to see the Gospel presented in this way. I do not approve the translation which has appeared as Volume II from Madras....”

Mahendranath never made disciples; he never initiated anyone. He tried to follow each and every word of Thakur literally. He was not a fanatic – in all religions he saw the “harmonizing image” of Sri Ramakrishna. He spent his whole life, as though a life-long vow, in spreading the divine words of Thakur.

Mahendranath Dutta¹ in his book *Master Moshayer Anudhyan* wrote:

1. Brother of Swami Vivekananda.

“He (M.) believed that the guru and the spiritual ideal¹ are one – the guru is the ideal and the ideal is the guru. They are one and the same. By discussing and meditating on Sri Ramakrishna, thinking of him, constantly remembering him and talking about him, M. was filled inwardly with Ramakrishna, though outwardly he was Mahendranath Gupta. He tried to be one with Sri Ramakrishna by giving up his own individuality and independent thinking. He retained no other thought, no ideas of his own. That which is called a fiery independent spirit or self-assertion in English, he gave up entirely. Within he was all Ramakrishna. His main objective in life seems to have been to live as a reflection of Sri Ramakrishna. So I say that having given up his independent thinking, his own individuality and personal views, he became one with his guru. The instructions of the guru, his words, were the only subjects of his thought. Of course, while attending to his worldly duties or teaching at the school – that is to say, work of a lower plane – he did retain his individuality and independent thinking. But even in such work, the impact of Sri Ramakrishna and his views were quite evident. So I say that Master Mahashay was Sri Ramakrishna within and Mahendranath Gupta without.”

During the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna, Mahendranath was first among the devotees to visit the native village of his guru. For him it became the holiest place of pilgrimage. Taking every spot there as holy, he lay prostrate on the

1. Ishtam.

ground. And he brought back some earth from this place as a sacred reminder. Hearing this, Thakur said, “Nobody asked you to do this, you did it of your own accord.” Shedding tears of joy and touching his head and body, he blessed M. and said, “Collecting earth shows love and devotion.”

Mahendranath felt unspeakable joy in touching the image of Jagannath in Puri and Tarakanath in Tarkeshwar as Thakur wished him to do. Hearing of it, Sri Ramakrishna touched Mahendranath’s hand and said, “You are pure.”

Whenever M. began writing *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* for the purpose of publishing it, he would observe acts of purity and take only one meal a day – boiled rice with clarified butter.¹ Until the very day of the publication of the book, he followed these practices. At the time of publication of the fifth volume, M. left his mortal frame.

Thakur used to say, “Bhagavata-bhakta-Bhagavan² are one and the same.” That is why, whenever the character of Mahendranath, the devotee, is discussed, it is mostly related to *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. The recorder of word lives forever along with the word. Thus has Mahendranath also attained immortality. As long as the name of Sri Ramakrishna remains alive in this world, his Bhagavata, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, will also live, and with it will live M.

1. Havishya.

2. Scripture-devotee-Lord.

It was during the night of 4 June 1932, the 20th Jaishtha that Mahendranath fell ill after completing the writing of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, Volume V. The following morning, a Saturday, at six o'clock, repeating the names of Sri Thakur and Holy Mother, and with this last prayer on his lips, "O Gurudeva, Mother, take me in your lap," this highest of yogis left his body. He was seventy-eight. It was like the departure of a great yogi, as if he had just fallen asleep.

The last rites on the holy body of Sri M. were performed in the cremation ground at Cossipore, to the right of the spot where Sri Thakur's body was cremated. Ever a servant of Thakur, and at the end Mahendranath found a place close to him. Many intimate devotees of Sri Ramakrishna had left this world of maya before the demise of Mahendranath, but this precious piece of land seemed to have been reserved by Thakur for this beloved servant-disciple.

At that time there was a platform of white marble where Thakur's body had been cremated. M.'s two worthy sons – Prabhas Chandra Gupta and Charu Chandra Gupta – bore almost all the expenses for building a common canopy over both Sri Thakur and Master Mahashay.

Bengali Publisher