

THE LIGHT THAT LEADS US

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To
His Holiness
Shrimat Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj
my spiritual guide and the source of my unflinching inspiration.

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PREFACE

It is a common belief that the philosophy of Advaita does not accept the theory of incarnation. The theory of incarnation postulates the existence of a personal God and in monism God with form has no place. But according to Sri Ramakrishna, God is both with and without form.

In the first part of this small brochure an attempt has been made to show that the theory of incarnation need not necessarily be opposed to or be incompatible with the idea of monism. This stand has been reasoned out in my own way and the arguments used may not be on all fours with the opinions of traditional scholars or writers on philosophy. They are mine. I am of the firm opinion that it is impossible for the expounder of any philosophical system or thought to satisfy all. It is not my aim, therefore, to convince the implacable critic of my stand. For, if one so chooses, one may find any number of arguments and counter arguments for or against any theory. I have nothing to do with a confirmed dissenter, but I shall feel highly gratified if this small book can be of any help to one who is really eager to know the Truth as *it is*.

In the second part of the book I have tried to show that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the saint of Dakshineswar, is an incarnation of this age that he is God within us, the light in us that leads us to the heaven of peace.

In the third part, a few of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna dealing

with the most important topics viz. Brahman, Maya and means to God realization are given. Each new thought in these teachings is introduced by some pithy verses in the hope that they may serve the reader as memory aids. These sayings, if reverently studied, must, I trust, infuse into the heart of the reader both a zest for spiritual life and a hope for its final fulfilment.

I must thank Sri. A. R. Nadkarni, B. A., Managing Director of the Karwar Electric Supply Company for writing out, according to my directions some portions of the second part of the book and Sri. N. S. Telang of the Jayant Art Printery, Bombay for supplying art paper for the jacket and printing thereon the block free of all costs. My thanks are also due to Sri. D. T. Wagh of Diva Printers, Bombay for supplying me free the pictures of Shimat Swami Virajanandaji and to Sri. Ramrao Aras of the Bombay Municipality for giving the design for the block on the front page of the jacket.

Swami Prabhananda.

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A Prelude

1

Types of Great Men

Of great man, Shakespeare has said, there are three kinds: Men who are born great, men who achieve greatness and men who have greatness thrust on them. Among those who are born great, there are again three kinds according to Hindu seers. They are: (1) the incarnations of God (*Avataras*), (2) the eternal companions of such incarnations (*Ishvarakotis*), (3) and others who are perfect even from their very birth (*Nityasiddhas*).

The incarnation of God come down to us from time to time, mostly in human form, to wean men from vice to virtue and thus to promote peace on earth. Whenever God comes to us, He brings with Him a band of His chosen men who help Him in His divine mission. They are as though the part of His own being and armed with His own power. They are called the *Ishvarakotis*. The everperfect (*Nityasiddhas*) are those who having reached perfection in their past births seek nothing for themselves and are yet anxious to lead men out of the labyrinth of pain and ignorance on to the haven of Peace. All these three types of men no doubt serve as beacon lights to those groping in darkness, but then there is a difference in the sphere of their influence and the degree of the manifestation of their divine power.

It is said that Sri Ramakrishna is an incarnation of God. Unless we know what God means we shall not be able to grasp the full import of the phrase 'Incarnation of God'. By the term God we generally mean that Being which creates, preserves and destroys this manifest universe; that Being which knows everything and controls everything.

God and His Incarnations

'Why should we posit the existence of a creator of this universe?'- it may be objected. This universe may as well be selfcaused. This contention cannot be easily dismissed. But, however, if we believe that this world is caused, we shall have to admit that it must have at least material cause though not an efficient cause such as Ishavara or God. We shall, therefore, see what the ultimate material cause of this universe can be. Some say that there are many basic principles or substances from which this universe is evolved. Some opine that there is only one such principle of which this world of duality is an evolute. Before we try to trace the ultimate cause of this universe, we must needs ascertain the nature of this universe.

If we know the nature of the effect, we shall have a clue into the nature of the cause; for an effect, it is believed, is not essentially different from its cause. Some orthodox Hindu schools of philosophy hold that this world is constituted of the five great elements, each with its own distinct quality. What led these philosophers to conclude that there are only five such elements?

Whatever knowledge we acquire is primarily gained by us through sense stimulations. Though we have so far discovered eight senses, only five of them bring us sensations of the outer world. The organic sensations, such as hunger and thirst, or the static sensations wherein one feels the loss of one's bodily equilibrium, or even the kinesthetic sensations that helps us have knowledge of bodily movements or if its resistance to other bodies, etc, are just stimulations received from things that can be perceived through other five senses. Any object, therefore, to come within our ken must be capable of being smelt, tasted, seen, touched or heard. It is our common experience that we cannot perceive a substance unless through its qualities, and we cannot think of a quality without a substance in which it inheres, Since there are only five qualities smell (*Gandha*), taste (*Rasa*), form (*Rupa*), touch (*Sparsha*) and sound (*Shabda*) that can be sensed, there can be only five substances, each with a quality distinctly its own; because

one substance cannot be expected to have two or more qualities unless it is a compound or an evolute, nor can two or more substances be presumed to possess the selfsame quality, for then it will be impossible to distinguish between them. In Hindu philosophic parlance these five elementary substances are called the Pancha Mahabhutas (the great elements). These great elements in their rudimentary state are, it is held, indiscernible and only their compounds or evolutes can come within the ken of our senses. The element in which smell inheres is *Prithvi*, that in which taste abides is *Ap*, that in which form resides is *Teja*, that which has touch as its quality is *Vayu*, and that which is the abode of sound is *Akasha*.

We have now to see whether these elements are mutually indepent and exclusive or whether they are the evolutes of the selfsame primary principle. We generally believe that an effect is but a reproduction of the cause, that is to say, the effect is nothing substantially different from the cause. For example, a pot is fashioned out of clay; the clay is the cause and pot an effect. Even after the pot is made, the clay abides therein. Such a cause is called the material cause. We can, therefore, analyse the world thus: In this universe there are only five substances as stated above. The first of them, viz., the earth, (*Prithvi*) has all the five qualities : sound, touch, form, taste and smell. Water (*Ap*) has only four sound, touch, form and taste. We can, therefore, see that water resides in the earth and may hence be called the material cause of the earth. The third element is light (*Teja*). In light we find three qualities: sound, touch and form. So this can be safely presumed to be the material cause of water which has all the qualities of Teja in it. Some may be prone to object that we do not find the quality of sound in light. But it may be noted here that we do hear the sound while the fuel is burning in the kichen. It is only because the sound of the fire burning or the ray travelling is subliminal that we do not hear it. Even as water is the material cause of earth, and light of water, air (*Vayu*) is the material cause of light, since air has only two qualities: sound and touch. We hear a breeze blowing and feel its warmth. Similarly ether (*Akasha*), which has only sound as its quality, is said to be the material cause of air. Although we can not perceive Akasha, we have to postulate its existence as a substance having sound only as its quality. Akasha is the abode of air.

From the above discussion it becomes clear that *Akasha* is the material cause of all the other elements and of the universe. It is the most

subtle of all the elements and pervades them all.

*Knowledge, the ultimate cause
of the universe*

Let us now see whence Akasha has come, or in other words let us try to find out a substance which is subtler than Akasha and the one that permeates it. On probing into this question a little deeper, We shall find that knowledge alone can both pervade it and be subtler than it. Since knowledge is immaterial, it must be allpervasive. It has no form of its own and is not therefore bounded by space.

We have seen above that sound is the quality of Akasha and in the case of knowledge too, we find that it is expressed or conveyed only through words or sound symbols. Some may argue that it is not only through sound symbols that we communicate or receive our ideas- we may do it through other signs too. This objection cannot stand, for, any sign that is employed for communicating an idea must first be interpreted by the receiver and such an interpretation is possible only through words. Therefore words are the only vehicle of knowledge. This shows that knowledge is potentially there in all sounds and also in all things. Even as Akasha is the material cause of this seen universe, knowledge may be claimed to be the material cause of Akasha for it is subtler than Akasha and resides in it. This world of matter, therefore, that is presented to us is none other than Knowledge itself.

The psychologists tell us that knowledge does not enter into us readymade but we only receive certain sensations and attend to them and interpret them, when alone knowledge of any object results. Whenever we perceive an object and gain knowledge about it, we only read our own interpretations of the sensations presented to us. That is to say, the whole world that we perceive consists of the meaning that we attach to our sensations and this meaning is nothing but the knowledge within us that manifests itself in different forms. Therefore, it is absolutely clear that the content of the universe seen by us is only knowledge. When we pass into an unconscious state such as deep sleep or swoon, we find that the whole world disappears therein. The world exists only so long as we perceive it. Our philosophers, therefore, hold that it is knowledge from which this creation has issued, in knowledge alone it has its being and in knowledge only will it finally dissolve. That knowledge within us unobjectified and absolute is

God. God is in other words the seer in us; all else is the seen. The seen universe has emerged out of the Seerthe Consciousness Absolute. How can this Absolute consciousness become the unconscious universe?

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*Apparent and the real nature of
this Creation*

That knowledge alone is the substance of this creation is made clear in the discussion we have had so far. Though reason leads us to this conclusion our experience contradicts it. To say that creation with form evolves out of a formless God is like maintaining that light issues from darkness. How can this universe of dull dead matter come out of the formless and immaterial Spirit? That an effect is always a reproduction of the cause itself is an unailing law of nature. How can we then posit that this world of insentient matter has come out of Knowledge Absolute or God? If we accept the rule that an effect cannot be essentially different from the cause, it is impossible to believe that this creation of blind matter has come out of Knowledge. Hence, either the rule that the cause and the effect are essentially the same should be wrong or our regards this world of matter as dull and unconscious must be erroneous; for, the selfsame thing cannot be at once conscious and unconscious. When we are confronted with such a problem, it is but meet that we ask ourselves the question: "Is our perception always infallible? Is the world that we see as of dull dead matter truly so?"

It is our experience that our senses are not at all trustworthy. They often dupe us. Such occurrences as mistaking the rays of the sun for water, a piece of rope for a snake and a mother- o'- pearl for silver are not uncommon. The reason for this is that our intellect depends for its judgment on the senses and seldom can they be relied upon as unerring guides. Our senses have their own limitations and our judgment too is naturally vitiated by these limitations. Not only the senses, even the mind has its own weaknesses. Sometimes even the sanest of counsels falls flat on us and we dismiss it as just foolish prattle. It, therefore, follows that any predication about the nature of the universe made by confiding in such misleading senses is liable to be erroneous. How then, one may naturally ask, can one acquire right knowledge of this world, if one is not to depend on one's senses and the mind?

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Three ways of knowing

Our Seers of old say that there are three ways of knowing things. The first is a gross understanding of things (*Sthoola Darshana*), the second is the subtle (*Sukshma Darshana*), and the third divine (*Divya Darshana*). The vision that perceives things only through the senses is gross. Looking at things through a scrutinising and evolved intellect comprises the subtle vision, and to understand things without taking recourse either to senseorgans or to the intellect but by identifying oneself with the objects sought to be known is the divine vision. For example, we listen to a song. Just to appreciate the sweetness of the tune and to understand the superficial or obvious meaning of it constitutes the gross vision. The vision that unravels the beauty of the phrases employed by the poet and probes into the subtleties of the meaning thereof may be styled as subtle. But there is yet another vision which is quite different from these two. Without merely depending upon either the intellect or the senses when we identify ourselves with the poet by getting into the mood and the spirit in which he wrote the poem, our way of looking at it is said to be divine. To develop the divine vision one has, therefore, to transcend all one's prejudices, and merge one's identity into the object sought to be known. The greater the identification we can have with the object sought to be known the more intimate and thorough will our knowledge be about it. Thus in the gross and subtle perceptions our identification with the object is only partial but in the case of divine perception it is more or less complete. Many of the defects that vitiate the gross and the subtle perceptions do not attend the divine perception. If we have to analyse this universe and determine its nature by resorting to this divine way of looking at things, we shall have to start not simply with the postulation but with conviction that this entire cosmos is essentially within us. We have already seen that the world we perceive is but an extension of the knowledge that is within ourselves. It appears only so long as we perceive it. In the state of deep sleep it does not exist for us. We may even assert that what does not already exist within us we cannot see outside. For, why is it that we hear only with the ears and not with the eyes? It is because sound inheres in the sense of hearing and not in the eyes. That sound which is already within us is aroused on getting a stimulus from outside and is made to come within the range of our perception. In fact we hear the sound within us and not the one that is outside. Similar is the case when we perceive things through the other

sense-organs. It may thus be seen that the entire universe that we perceive as existing outside, must be within us, perhaps in a subtler form.

Suppose a thief enters our house; he opens our safe and steals our money. A two years old baby who happens to be there sees him and yet remains unconcerned and continues its play. The child does not see anything wrong in the thief's stealing. It sees in him just a man but not a thief. But instead, if we happen to be there in the place of the child, we shall cry out, 'Thief, thief! Seize him' and so on. We shall be violently disturbed. The thief that we see will not be seen by the child for the simple reason that the thief is there within us, but not in the child. This shows that the world we see is a construction of our own; it is no better than a dream.

.....
This world is but a dream

We generally feel that the things seen in the dream are unreal and those sensed in the waking state are real. The reasons for our feeling thus, we may say, are:

1. The dream objects are purely mental whereas the objects of the waking state are directly perceived by the senses.

2. The waking state endures for a longer time than the dream state. It is said that no dream lasts for more than a few minutes.

3. The dream objects are mostly queer and fantastic. They seldom tally with our experiences of the waking state.

4. Whatever gains we may make or losses we may incur in the dream, can no longer be enjoyed or suffered in the state of waking.

5. The world that we see in the waking state always persists. It abides in our experience. But we find that there is no conformity between one dream and the other.

6. The dream experience is restricted to the dreamer alone whereas the waking one is shared by the others too and can therefore be corroborated. Its validity and superiority over the dream experience is therefore established.

On a close scrutiny we shall find that none of these grounds for our regarding the waking experience as valid and the dream as invalid will stand the test of reason. It may be observed that:

1. The objects perceived in the waking state are as much a construction of the mind as those of the dream as has been made

clear in the foregoing discussion. Further to the dreamer also, as to a person in the waking state, the world that he sees in the dream appears to have been perceived by the senses. He never experiences that he has no physical body or the sense organs. Supposing a person dreams while lying in his bed that he is flying in an aeroplane and at such a time if someone who is in the waking state happens to ask him, 'Why are you still in bed? Is it not yet time to get up?' the dreamer will retort, provided he still continues to be in the dream, 'You fool! Don't you see that I am here in the aeroplane? Are you dreaming?' To the dreamer the dream itself becomes a waking state and the things therein absolutely real.

2. & 3. To the dreamer the whole of his waking life may appear to be just a dream lasting for but a few seconds. It is only when one uses the standards of the waking state for judging the validity of a dream state that one feels that dreams are short, that they are abnormal and divorced from reality. To the dreamer the things in his dream are as normal as the things of the waking state are to a waking man. Both the states, our seers say are conjured up by the mind and that they are made of the very stuff of which the mind is made.

4. Even as riches acquired in the dream do not avail us in the waking state, the things obtained in the waking state cease to be of any use to us in the state of dream. A beggar, for example, if he dreams that he has become a king he will no longer experience the pangs of poverty as long as his dream endures.

5. The dreamer never feels that there is any incoherence in his dream experiences however fantastic or inconsistent they might appear to the man in the waking state. In the dream too the dreamer feels that his dream is perfectly consistent with his life.

6. It is only while in the waking state that we regard the dream experiences as limited to the dreamer. The dreamer has to his dream-men whom he perceives as witnessing the things he sees. He too feels that whatever he sees is corroborated by experience of others. If waking man were to describe the world that he sees to a dreamer the latter would certainly say that the former's description is of an illusive or imaginary something which cannot be seen by anyone else. From this it becomes abundantly clear that virtually

there is no difference between waking and the dream states, in so far as they are both mental, and they cannot therefore be said to present to us the 'Reality' as *it is*. Even if there be a real world, independent of our mind, we do not and cannot see it. Be it in the waking state or in the dream state what we see are only the mental images. Even the so called most practical man amongst us spends a greater part of his life only in dreams. As Shelley puts it, 'We look before and after and pine for what is naught'. Be he a politician, a scientist, a poet or a businessman most of his time he spends in thinking either about the past or of the future. Any thought that relates to either the past or to the future is nothing short of a dream since it does not conform to the present or to the things that come actually within the gamut of our sense perception. Even the thing that is now perceived passes into the region of memory the next moment. Or in other words, the objects of the waking state become the very next moment the things of the dream.

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*Is there only one mind or are there
 many minds ?*

When it is asserted that the world we see is purely mental the question that confronts us is, 'In whose mind does the world I see exists in my mind'. Where is 'my mind'? Is it 'within me' or 'outside me' If the mind be 'within me' how is it that I perceive things like mountains, rivers, the sky and so on in my dream? When it is admitted that the things of the dream are in the mind, the mind should naturally be much bigger than the things it has in it. When things like mountains, etc., are perceived as being within the mind, how big should the mind be? And when the mind is so pervasive as to contain all these things how can it be within the body that is just six feet high? To think therefore that the mind is within the body is *prima facie* a self contradiction. Is the mind then outside the body? If the mind be outside the body how is that sensations are produced and experienced within the body? Again if the mind is not limited and is so pervasive as contain even the expanse of the sky, then how is that my experiences and the experiences of the man sitting next to me are not one and the same? We generally find that the things that occur to us are not seen to exist in the minds of others even though they are very near us. If our minds are so vast as to pervade even the sky and the seas, how then can

they co-exist in the same space and at the same time? If the mind be all-pervasive it can be only one. If the minds be limited they must necessarily be many.

We find that in certain matters our mind seems to be vast and all pervading while in certain others it appears to be limited; for, in respect of certain things our experiences (perceptions) tally, but in respect of others they do not. For example a person named Rama stands in front of me and my friend too who is with me witnesses him. So far our cognitions agree. But then, I entertain one sort of feeling about Rama whereas my friend adopts an altogether different sort of attitude towards him. We are both together, just within the distance of a span, and yet our minds are seen to possess mutually exclusive or even opposed views. So it becomes clear that my mind is not vast enough to contain all the things that I see. What is the nature of the mind then? Our seers say that there are two kinds of mind—the cosmic and the individual. The cosmic mind is said to be of God or Ishvara and the individual mind resides and works in a person. The individual mind is within the cosmic mind and every individual soul therefore who perceives through both these minds acquires two kinds of knowledge—the general and the special, or the public and the private. Supposing a company of five men happens to see a person named Rama. All are acquainted with him and know him as Rama. This knowledge about him is common to all of them and therefore public. And yet one of them regards Rama as a rogue while another as a perfect gentleman, the third as a saint and so on. Each individual has an impression of his own about Rama that is private. This shows that though our minds have certain characteristics in common with those of the others, we have certain other traits which distinguish us from every other individual. From this we can infer that we have two minds—the one cosmic and the other individual. That mind within us which sees uniformity is cosmic and the one that perceives diversity is individual. Both these are present in every person.

Are these, cosmic and individual minds separate and independent of each other? We find that whereas the cosmic mind is one and all pervading the individual minds are many and appear to have their seats in ego consciousness. In fact there is no essential difference between the two. There is just a distinction without a difference and this distinction lies in their respective limiting adjuncts. The mind or consciousness that identifies itself

with the ego expresses itself as the individual mind and has ego consciousness. It has its own idiosyncrasies and is responsible for the perceptions, notions and emotions which vary with each individual. The cosmic mind however being free from personal prejudices and predilections of the individual egos forms the means of the perception that is common to all.

Some say that mind is not an organ but just a function. If we accept that mind is a function of either the brain or of a sense organ, it shall naturally follow that even unconscious and dull matter is capable of conscious activity. Or in other words we shall have to say that the brain is both conscious and unconscious. This can never be. We have therefore to presume that the mind too is some substance which under certain conditions becomes capable of conscious activity due to its association with consciousness which is extraneous to it. The first and immediate effect of such association of the mind with consciousness is that it works and manifests itself as an ego.

.....
The nature of the Ego

What is the nature of our ego? Who is it that is referred to by us as 'I'? Is it the corporeal body or is it the mind? Or is it something different from these two? Obviously, we cannot just be this physical body, this case of flesh and bones; for none of us will say that he is just a lump of matter. Every man maintains that he is a conscious being and yet he identifies himself with the physical body. One does not easily realize the incompatibility of holding such mutually opposed views. One may contend that this body itself is conscious. But this contention cannot stand since were it conscious, it would never be unconscious. We often see that this body is at times conscious and at times it is not. How can the same thing be both conscious and unconscious? Consciousness, we are inclined to believe, cannot be the inherent nature of the physical body since such is our experience. Can it be then that consciousness that appears to exist in the physical body is only incidental and not natural to it?

When my leg is amputated I say, 'My leg is cut'. I do not say, 'I am cut'. When I cannot see things all right, I say, 'My sight has become dull', and not, 'I am dull'. This shows that I am aware of my senses being different from me. Even when my hands and legs are cut I do not experience any diminution in my existence as such. I do not ever refer to myself as, 'Half I' or

as 'Quarter I'. My body at five and my body at fortyfive though different, the 'I' residing therein continues to remain the same. It is said that every seven years our body undergoes a complete change, but we never experience any essential change in our existence. We do not feel that we are dying every seven years. This is an ample proof of the independence of the self from the body.

Thus we are something different from the physical body a conscious being, a spirit. How then can we reconcile the contradiction between our twin experiences viz. that we are the conscious self and that we are this physical body? A solution of this problem can rest in the fact that we may be falsely or erroneously identifying ourselves with this physical body though we are by nature consciousness itself. We shall have to examine this carefully. We have now the following propositions:

- (1) I am this body which is conscious.
- (2) I am this body which is both conscious and unconscious.
- (3) I am the spirit; and this body of insentient matter is different from me.
- (4) I am the conscious spirit and this body too is conscious. If the body appears to be unconscious, it is only because of my nescience or erroneous cognition.

That the first two of these propositions are unsound and opposed to reason is made clear in the foregoing discussion. The third seems acceptable but it does not answer the question, 'Why then do we identify ourselves with the body?'

The last proposition, however, commends itself to our reason as being the most probable solution of the problem. For example, if salt or sugar is put into a glass of water it soon dissolves into the water but we do not find sand or pebbles dissolving into it in a like manner. Since salt and sugar have been formed from liquids they dissolve into water which too is a liquid, but sand and pebbles are not the effects of water and hence they do not become one with it. Similarly, the body and all the things perceived by the mind are, we may say, made of the same stuff as that of the mind since the mind becomes one with these objects during cognition. Unless the mind identifies itself with the objects perceived it cannot know them. We have already seen that we do not perceive the objects as such, we cannot know the things in themselves, but we only see our own consciousness taking the forms of the objects. That is, when we perceive any object we see our own consciousness taking the

shape of that object.

All the things in this world, our seers say, are conscious. When they appear to be devoid of consciousness they are either sub-conscious or super-conscious. To us who are on the plane of relative consciousness they seem as dull matter.

.....
*How this material world has evolved
 from consciousness*

From the above discussion it follows that this universe with diverse forms is but a manifestation of the unmanifest (incorporeal) knowledge, Says Lord Krishna in the Geeta,

अव्यक्तादीनि भूतानि व्यक्तमध्यानि भारत ।
 अव्यक्तनिधनान्येव.....

'All beings have their origin in the unseen, they sink back into the unseen, and only in between, they appear to exist (in manifest form)...'. The things seen by us have really no independent existence as such and they are not essentially different from consciousness. The world we see has only an empirical reality. Says the Mandukya Karika,

आदावन्ते च यन्नास्ति वर्तमानेऽपि तत्तथा ।

'That which does not exist either before its birth or after its death, does not really exist even when it appears to exist'.

The unseen from which this creation proceeds is called *Prakriti* or *Maya*. This unseen primeval matter is said to possess three qualities: *Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Satva*. The quality which accounts for the weight of things is *Tamas*, the quality that is responsible for action is *Rajas*, and quality that conveys knowledge is *Satva*. We do not come across any substance in this world which does not have any of these qualities. We perceive things that are insentient, those that are active or those imbued with consciousness. In the other words, we do not see anything in this world which is neither dull, nor active or sentient. So it will be meet to postulate the existence of a primeval substance with these three qualities. We have seen above that this world has come out of consciousness and we have also now observed that the material cause of this universe must have as its qualities *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. We have, therefore, to infer that Absolute consciousness (*Brahman*) associated with some substance which manifests itself in the three qualities-*Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* must be the ultimate cause of this universe.

The primeval substance is said to possess three qualities. Do these all the three qualities abide in the self-same substance or in different substances? If it is affirmed that all these qualities reside in the same substance then it must be accepted that such a substance must be a compound; and if it is a compound it cannot obviously be the ultimate principle. It must be a combination of several substances. Let us suppose the substance in which the quality of Satva inheres is 'S', the substance in which Rajas resides is 'R' and the substance in which Tamas abides is 'T'. 'S' has the power of becoming conscious, 'R' of becoming active, and 'T' has a form and weight. In the words of a modern scientist, 'T' may be called matter and 'R' energy. 'S' is a substance not accepted by the Modern scientists. That energy and matter cannot be said to be mutually exclusive and absolutely independent is the verdict of modern science. Though 'S' is not known to it we have to posit its existence since we find some substances in this world which are imbued with consciousness, and consciousness must be distinguished from energy and matter. When we say that matter is a form of energy we tacitly admit that what we see is not the truth not the things as they are, and that we are under the spell of illusion. Indian philosophers say that consciousness (Brahman) associated with this illusion which subsists in it as its power is the author of this universe.

This can be explained by an analogy: if cosmic consciousness is the ocean, the individual

Consciousness is just a wave or a current therein. The ocean with the help of air within and outside it, creates waves, ripples, bubbles, foam, currents and so on. The ocean with the air is like Brahman associated with His Maya consisting of *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. Brahman with His Maya is the author of this universe. Absolute consciousness itself becomes Cosmic Consciousness *i.e.* *Saguna Brahman* or *Ishvara*. In reality there is no difference between Brahman with qualities (*saguna Brahman*) and Brahman without qualities (Absolute Consciousness or *Nirguna Brahman*). Our seers say that it is *Nirguna Brahman* alone who becomes *Saguna Brahman* in the eyes of a devotee When He is associated with His inscrutable power- *Maya*. This power of Brahman is inferred from its effects. Unless we postulate the existence of this *saguna Brahman* it will not be possible to explain this creation. Says Sri Sankaracharya in *Vivekachudamani* :

अव्यक्तनाम्नी परमेशशक्तिरनाद्यविद्या त्रिगुणात्मिका परा ।

कार्यानुमेया सुधियैव माया यया जगत्सर्वमिदं प्रसूयते ।।

'That great power of the Lord named Avyakta (the indeterminate) with its three qualities which dwells in man as beginningless nescience is to be inferred from its effects by the wise ones. It brings forth this entire universe.' The riddle of this creation cannot be solved unless we ascribe the authorship of this universe to Ishvara or Brahman armed with the power of Maya. Ishvara therefore is a logical necessity to explain creation. This illusive power is said to be neither different nor non-different from Absolute Brahman. We can neither assert nor deny its existence. We cannot also say that it has a form or that it is formless. Thus it is an inscrutable and mysterious power. Says Sri Krishna, "The Absolute Lord having recourse to His mysterious power, though He is formless, assumes forms. Whenever necessary, for well-being of the world, to protect the pious and to punish the wicked (see gita IV-6,7)." Even as icebergs are formed in waters of sea due to cold, God impelled by his love for the devotees assumes forms.

That the cause of this universe must be both consciousness and something having the three qualities- *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* is seen in the course of our discussion above. Now we have to see how these two, viz. Brahman and Maya or Prakriti are related to each other.

Our seers opine that Maya, or the creative power with the three qualities, has no existence independent of Brahman or Consciousness Absolute. If we accept that Maya is independent of Brahman we shall have to admit that there are two ultimate realities and their relation to each other will have to be explained. Brahman will be the conscious entity and Maya or Prakriti the insentient one. Brahman being consciousness itself and not a material thing is bound to be formless. Maya is material and therefore without consciousness. If it is affirmed that Brahman and Maya are independent and real then the relation between them must also be only external and real; and this relation will be a third term. It will also be another real entity and the relations of this entity with Brahman and Maya will again have to be explained. And if this process is pursued we shall have to posit an infinite number of other relations all of which will be real and external. Postulating any relation, therefore, between two real entities will land us in difficulty. There cannot really be any relation between two real entities. Any relation that appears to exist between two real entities which are necessarily independent of each other must be only imaginary or illusive. Suppose my

body receives a wound, I say, 'I am wounded I am pained'. In fact it is not I that am wounded, nor is it true that I am pained. I have nothing to do either with this body which I call mine or with the pain which I think is inflicted on me. Both the body and the pain are objects of my perception or knowledge. They are essentially different from my being. But due to some inexplicable and false identification with my body I feel that 'I am wounded' or that 'I am pained'. All our relations in this world proceed from such false identification of ourselves with the body that we call ours. The seer, the subject, can never be the seen the object. There can be no *real relation* between the two unless through superimposition of the subject on the object or *vice versa*. There are no two *real things* in this world. They can exist only in the eyes of those who are self-confounded. Neither can it be said that one of these two, Brahman and Maya, is the principal and the other the subordinate reality; for, a *subordinate* reality cannot be said to have an *independent* existence of its own. In fact a subordinate reality is a contradiction in terms.

It may be said that Brahman (consciousness) by itself acts on Prakriti (Matter) and thus brings forth diversity and that the existence of no other relation between the two need be posited. But such an assertion too cannot be accepted; for, it is only a person or a thing with form that can act. Brahman, being consciousness pure, has no such form. Neither can it be said that Prakriti acts on Brahman, since Prakriti being just material, will not be capable of any conscious activity. The only inference therefore that we are forced to draw is that Prakriti or Maya is not separate from Brahman. It is His power which, by casting a spell of illusion on the creatures, creates this manifold universe. This material world has no real existence. It is a construction of the individual mind working under the influence of the mysterious power of Brahman known as Maya.

Though we see that a man is under the spell of illusion and sees diversity in unity, we cannot make bold to say that he creates this world. Had he really been a creator there would have been as many worlds as there are men. But we see that there is only one physical world, though of course there may be many mental worlds created by individual minds. Further though it can be admitted that an individual creates his own world, which is private to him, under the influence of illusion, we cannot say that the one who creates this physical nature is also affected by ignorance or illusion. The creator is therefore described as the Lord of Maya or as one who weilds Maya as His

inscrutable power.

Though Brahman, being of the nature of pure Consciousness, is absolute, impersonal and without limitations, when we think of It as having relation to this world we must needs postulate that It is endowed with certain qualities. Again these qualities cannot be real. If they be real Brahman will cease to be impersonal, absolute and without limitations. We therefore are obliged to infer that these qualities are made to appear in Brahman due to Its inscrutable power Maya through which It creates, preserves and destroys this manifest universe. Again by resorting to this very Maya It assumes forms, though It is formless and comes on this earth to lead men out of encircling gloom of ignorance into the promised land of light or knowledge.

There is actually no difference between Saguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman or Brahman with qualities and Brahman without qualities since the qualities are only apparent and not real. To think that Brahman has taken up a form and has become a person is unwise (See Gita VII 24 and IX II). The Lord's becoming a person is not real. He does not become a person but only appears as a person. Just as Brahman creates this manifold universe without suffering any diminution or change in Itself, by Its mysterious power (Maya), It appears, using that very same power, as a Personal God. In fact Brahman alone exists; the world, the creatures and even the personal God Who is believed to create, preserve and destroy this universe has only an empirical reality- For a man who considers himself as an individual, and regards this universe as real, Saguna Brahman or Ishwara too must be real. God with form is the same as God without form. God is both these and even beyond these. He defies all description. All our descriptions about Him are made from the plane of Mayain the state of nescience. Brahman's becoming Ishwara is not truly a descent or a climbing down it is not His taking up an inferior position as it is commonly understood. A king's wearing the rags of a beggar for a time by casting off his royal robes does not make him a real beggar. Neither does Brahman suffer any diminution in Itself after bringing forth this universe since this creation too is not real.

(पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते । पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥).

Under the circumstances no such question as, "How has the impersonal Brahman become a personal God?" or, "How has this material universe sprung from Brahman the incorporeal Spirit?" can therefore arise. In the light

of these discussions we can clearly see that there is nothing wrong in believing that the impersonal God comes to us to instruct us in the path of virtue or to show us the path to peace.

Incarnations and Individual Souls

All this is verily Brahman. This creation is not real. The real nature of this universe- the substance of this universe is Brahman Itself. That the diversity in this universe is only apparent and therefore false, has been borne out in the foregoing discussion. This world appearance is the creation of the mysterious power of the Lord which cannot be described either as real or as unreal or even as both real and unreal. Maya cannot be real for reasons already noted above. It vanishes with the dawn of knowledge. Neither can it be said to be unreal since we see its effects. It cannot also be said that it is both real and unreal since it will amount to a selfcontradiction. It is therefore indeterminable, unknowable. And yet it is to be inferred from its effects.

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कार्यानुमेया सुधियैव माया यया जगत्सर्वमिदं प्रसूयते ॥

(विवेकचूडामणि)

The one who is the Lord of this Maya is God and the one who is a slave to it is an individual soul. The Lord of this Maya comes to us in this world taking up a form to show to men the way to light, peace and happiness. He is 'The light that leads us' through the clouding gloom of ignorance and pain on to the abode of abiding peace.

All this is Brahman. The Jeevas (the individual souls) too are Brahman; but the difference between an ordinary Jeeva and an Avatara (God coming to us in a human form) is that, if an Avatara is a reflection of the Absolute in pure Satva, an ordinary individual soul is Its reflection in impure Satva i. e. Satva mixed with Rajas and Tamas. To be more explicit, an ordinary man is a distorted reflection of Brahman whereas an Incarnation is a clearer reflection of It. In an incarnation we see the divine qualities like knowledge, dispassion, etc., manifested in a higher degree than in an individual soul. With the predominance of Tamas and Rajas in him an ordinary man, smitten with illusion and attachment, is subjected to the miseries of this world. On the other hand an incarnation, in whom the quality of Satva is the most pronounced, sees the falsity of this world and is never attached to it. He never regards this world as real and is consequently not swayed or affected by the rewards or punishments that the world brings him.

The denser the veil of ignorance over one's mind, the more will one be attached to this world and the more he is attached, the more will the pangs of his sufferings be. On the other hand the more one is dispassionate, the greater will be the power of one's understanding. An incarnation therefore which must necessarily be full of the spirit of dispassion will have a clearer knowledge of this world and will serve humanity as a guide on its onward march to light and peace. The main function of an incarnation is to live an ideal life emulating which men of lesser understanding may attain to supreme beatitude. 'A man can work out his salvation by constantly dwelling upon the life and deeds of an incarnation of God and by realizing their true significance (See Gita IV- 6).' By meditating on Saguna Brahman (Brahman with qualities) one may ultimately get the same benefits or results as one gets by contemplating on the formless aspect of Brahman. But a devotee does not ordinarily aspire to realize the formless Brahman or God without attributes. 'The Lord manifests Himself to his devotee in whatever form the latter desires to see Him (See Gita IV- 11).'

We see that even in an Avatara or an incarnation there are imperfections and limitations common to most of us. Why does an incarnation behave like a common man on most occasions?

Even Incarnations are not perfect

It is but natural for one to expect an incarnation to be free from all the defects, to be possessed of all excellences such as omnipotence, omniscience, etc. But one finds that none of the so-called incarnations has ever been able to rise above all human limitations. If at all God is to incarnate Himself, one feels, He must have in Him all the divine qualities and must be free from all human weaknesses.

It is said that the Lord bodies Himself forth to wean men from vice to virtue by living an ideal life so that men may emulate it and work out their salvation. When God comes among men to set before them an ideal, He must needs behave like a man and be clothed in all the necessary human limitations. If He be otherworldly with only the divine qualities in Him-without any human weaknesses He will cease to be an ideal for the ordinary run of men who will then think that thinks possible for Him will not be achieved by them. An incarnation of God is therefore like an actor who comes in this world to play the role of a man and it would be improper for Him to behave in any way other than that which is natural to human beings. A story is told to

illustrate the principle of an incarnation:

Long long ago there lived a famous masquerador who could play any role that he was called upon to act. Once he visited the capital of a certain king. News about the arrival of the masquerador was carried to the king who summoned him in his presence and asked him whether he would play any role the later wished him to. The masquerador said assuringly that he would. The king thereupon asked him to come in the form of a lion to his palace. The actor mildly objected, "O King, I would like to bring home to you that whenever I act any role I lose myself completely in it without being conscious of even my separate existence. I should therefore not be held responsible for anything done by me while enacting such a role though I may cause any injury or loss to any person." The king assured him that he would not mind any loss or injury if it was caused while playing such a role, provided it was in keeping with such a role.

A few days later, a lion was seen to advanced towards the capital with terrific roars. The citizens took to their heels in fright and reported the matter to the king. The lion by this time had reached the palace garden of the king. The king's only son was then playing in the garden. He happened to see the animal and with his childish inquisitiveness advanced towards the lion and took a stick and pierced it in the region below his tail. The beast was enraged and dealt a severe blow to the child and it was done to death. The king on learning about the incident was overcome with sorrow but he could not help it. The masquerador who had come in the form of the lion soon disappeared from the scene and returned to the king after a couple of days and questioned him whether the role of the lion that he played was satisfactory. He also expressed his deep anguish at the death of the only son of the king and begged for forgiveness. Since the king had already assured the masquerador that no action would be taken against him, he was helpless and had to pay the masquerador a huge reward as had been already promised.

Though the masquerador had fulfilled his promise and the king was fully satisfied with the former's performance, the incident of his son's death was haunting the king and his courtiers. They somehow wanted to wreak vengeance on the masquerador. After thinking over the question for some time, the wisest of the ministers of the king asked the king to summon the Masquerador once again and said that the actor should be asked this time to

play the role of Shukadeva, a great sage and an allrenouncing monk. The minister said that, animal propensities being already there in man to play the role of a lion was easy for the masquerador. To enact the role of a person like Shukadeva-a person who had risen above all human loves and hates would be for him well nigh impossible. Accordingly, the masquerador was summoned and ordered to play the role of Shukadeva.

A few days rolled by, and the news of the arrival of great a sage on a hillock nearby reached the capital. The minister could guess that the sage must be none other than the masquerador and asked the king to approach the sage with a request to come to his palace. The king saw the sage and invited him to his palace. The sage turned down the request. But the king implored again and promised him half the kingdom if he came and lived with him. Still the sage did not respond, whereupon the king surrendered the whole of his kingdom at his feet and said, "Holy Sir, I would remain as your disciple and render you all the service that I can if only you deign to accept my invitation and stay in my palace." The sage, paying no heed to the repeated importunities of the king, wended his way through the forest and soon disappeared. After a couple of days, the masquerador made his appearance in the court and asked the king whether he was satisfied with his role of the sage. The king was mightily pleased and gave him a huge sum, as a prize. But then, there was in the court the barber of the king who was very much annoyed with the actor and waited to avenge him for the death he had caused to the only child of the king. He came before the king and said, "My lord, I have a request to make to your Majesty. The two roles that the masquerador was asked to play were simple and they actually did not merit the prize that your Majesty gave him. I would like the masquerador to play the role of a widowed woman entering the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. If he can do this even a still bigger prize may be awarded to him." The king and his courtiers were very much pleased with the suggestion and the king thought, this time the masquerador will be helpless. The masquerador undertook to play this role too!

A few days later a rich lady decked in a number of gold ornaments was seen wailing with piteous cries on the bank of a river. Apperantly some one of her closest relations was dead. People in the nearby approached her and asked her the cause of her grief, whereupon she said that her husband was drowned in the current of the river when he had gone there for a bath.

She also requested them to arrange for the funeral of her diseased husband. The body was carried in a grand procession to the furnel ground and the lady too followed the procession. The news of death of a person and his wife walking to the funeral ground had already reached the court of the king. The king and his ministers could well surmise that the lady must be none other than the masquerador. They were anxious to witness the fun and hastened to the furnel ground. The body of man was laid on a hudge pile of sticks and as his wife was about to ascend the pile, clouds gathered in the sky and threatened an imminent shower. She, however, lay beside the body of her deseased husband and the sticks were ignited. But by this time there came a heavy downpour of rain and the king and his courtiers, thinking that the masquerador will soon be burnt, left the funeral ground for fear of being drenched.

Four or five days after the incident the masquerader came to the court of the king and demanded the prize that the latter he had promised him. He asked the king whether he was satisfied with his performance. The king was surprised and said, "How is it that you have returned from the funeral pyre? I thought you were burnt." The masquerador said that he was burnt no doubt but he had come from heaven as he had to carry a message to the king from the king's ancestors. He added that due to want of a barber the king's ancestors had grown long nails and heavy tufts of hair. They immediately wanted a barber whom the king would kindly send to them. The barber who was nearby could understand the whole affair and was shivering in his shoes. The king of course could not believe such a story and asked the masquerador to tell the truth. The masquerador in reply reported to the king all that had happened and said that as he always relied on God the Lord took mercy on him and helped him in his hour of need. The masquerador however received the prize that he was promised.

An Avatara God too, when he comes on this earth, behaves just like the masquerador in the story above. Whenever he takes up the role of man or any creator, he forgets himself in that role and behaves just as a man or creature would. And it is therefore that we see certain shortcomings even in the incarnations of God.

The two ways

The function of an incarnation, as has been said before, is to wean men from the path of voice on to the road of virtue. They come to show to us

the way to imperishable bliss by pointing out to us the countless miseries that attend the life that we usually follow. It is in the nature of a man to expect happiness from worldly possessions like wealth etc, but scarcely does he realize that his pursuits for happiness are no better than a wild goose chase. This natural tendency of a man to seek unmixed happiness through the gratification of the senses does not allow him to be at rest and keeps him whirling round and round in the whirlpool of his desires. Says the Vishnu Purana:

न जातु कामः कामानामुपभोगेन शाम्यति
हविषा कृष्णवर्त्मव भूय एवाभिवर्धते ॥

“Desire is not quenched through enjoyment but is only intensified even as the fire whose voracity is heightened on being fed with fuel.” The Vedas make it abundantly clear that the pursuit of the worldly desires can never bring us abiding happiness. Says the Chhandogya Upanishad: “The source of all bliss in Brahman, the all-pervading and undivided Reality. These limited and short-lived objects of our desire can never give us real peace.” Thus it is said:

“Wealth, while earning, causes vexation;
In its want it brings exasperation;
In affluence it strikes with infatuation
How then can wealth bring satisfaction?”

जनयन्त्यर्जने दुःखं तापयन्ति विपत्तिषु
मोहयन्ति च सम्पत्तौ कथमर्थाः सुखावहाः ॥)

Worldly possessions, beings themselves fleeting by nature cannot bring us abiding happiness. Before we get the things we long after, we are unhappy because we do not have them. After we get the things we desire for, we become restless with the fear of losing them, and when we actually lose the things we love, we groan under the pangs of their loss. Hungering after any worldly possessions therefore would mean only courting misery. But it is possible for one to give up all one's desire? Can one all at once eradicate or suppress them? Perhaps that may not be possible. Our seers say that one may wish to live a long life, to have progeny and the like, for these are desires common to most men. They do not advocate suppression of such desires for they well realize the repercussions that it will follow in its wake. On the other hand we find in the Vedas a number of prayers for long life, progeny, etc. In the Taittiriya Upanishad we find the following prayer

offered to Pranav (the Lord):

स मेन्द्रो मेधया स्पृणोतु । अमृतस्य देव धारणो भूयासम् । शरीरं
मे विचर्षणम् । जिह्वा मे मधुमत्तमा । कर्णाभ्यां भूरि विश्रुवम् ।
ब्रह्मणः कोशोऽसि मेधया पिहितः । श्रुतं मे गोपाय । आवहन्ती
वितन्वाना कुर्वाणाचीरमात्मनः । वासांसि मम गावश्च । अन्नपाय
च सर्वदा । ततो मे श्रियमावह । लोमशां पशुभिः सह स्वाहा ।

“May the Lord grant me intelligence, O Lord, may I be the receptacle of that spiritual wisdom which confers on us immortality. May I be fit in body. May I listen much through my ears. You are the sheath of Brahman covered by worldly intelligence. Please grant that I may not forget or lose what I have heard. Please vouchsafe to me that prosperity which will fetch me clothes, cattle, food and rain at all times. Let me also be recipient of furry animals like goats, sheep, etc.” The Vedas encourage those who are desire-bound to work for the fulfilment of their desires, but at the same time they point out to them the dangers underlying such desires and call upon them to gradually sublimate their wishes through constant discrimination between the good and the bad or the lasting and the fleeting.

We have therefore two ways lying open before us. Says the kathkoprishad:

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेतस्तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः ।
श्रेयो हि धीरोऽभि प्रेयसो वृणीते प्रेयो मंदो योगक्षेमाद् वृणीते ।

“The path of worldly enjoyment and the path to spiritual good, both lie open before a man. The wise man, after a careful examination of the two, chooses to walk the way leading to 'Supreme Good', whereas dull-witted one prefers to tread the path of ephemeral sense enjoyment.” The path of worldly enjoyment, though pleasing in the beginning, spells disaster in the end, while the path of self-control and right thinking confers on us permanent happiness or 'supreme good.' The way to supreme good is called Moksha-marga and it is according to the Vedic seers, the highest or noblest aspiration of mankind. One takes to this path after being convinced of the emptiness of this worldly life of ambitions and expectations.

Some of us who are under influence of western thought seem to hold that the Vedas are merely a body of theological doctrines and superficial rituals which are to be blindly accepted and ungrudgingly practised. This is an altogether mistaken idea. It may be noted here that no vedic theory is accepted as valid unless corroborated by reason (*Yukti*) and experience (*anubhava*). If any interpretation of a vedic verse by any *Acharya*

(a vedic exponent) does not stand the test of yukti or anubhava, it is at once rejected. It is believed that the vedic texts are based on the valid and direct experience of the seers which can under no circumstances be contrary to reason.

The subject of Moksha is treated in the later portion of the Vedas known as Vedanta, and around this have grown up several schools of metaphysical thought. The aim of all these schools is Absolute Bliss or Absolute Freedom. Although they differ widely among themselves as to details, they all are agreed upon certain fundamental points:

Firstly, all these schools accept that this world is not what it seems to be; that its essence is different from its appearance. According to Indian philosophers a reality is that which suffers no essential change at any point of time past, present or future. If we accept this definition of reality this world appearance which is changeful can only be unsubstantial and a myth. Our entire cognitive experience is limited to our three states of consciousness viz, waking, dream and deep sleep. The cognitions of waking state are sublated by those of the dream state and cognitions of dream dissolve in the state of deep sleep. And since, along with our states of consciousness our cognitions too change, it cannot be said that they present to us the Reality as it is. Hence an appearance cannot be of the essence of reality.

Secondly, all our philosophers agree that this imperical world being false, an attachment to it will bring us nothing but regrets. The way to permanent bliss and freedom can lie through dispassion alone. The spirit of renunciation is all through glorified by all the Indian philosophers and recognized as the most essential prerequisite of a spiritual life.

A total cessation of the miseries of this life, they say, can be brought about only after knowing the nature of Reality and of the Self. This knowledge of Reality deserves to be the quest of all men desiring freedom. The Reality underlying the entire universe is one, knowing which one goes beyond the fear of death. Say the Vedas:

इह चेदवेदीदथ सत्यमस्ति न चेदिहावेदीन्महती विनष्टिः ।

भूतेषु भूतेषु विचित्य धीराः प्रेत्यास्माल्लोकादमृता भवन्ति ।

“For one who has realized this Reality behind this phenomenal world there is true life i.e. a life worth living; but on one who has not realized It waits destruction. Wise men seeing It in every living being, rise above sense life and go beyond the fear for death.” This realization of the truth again cannot

be had through mere learning. It can dawn upon one who has undergone a probation of rigorous spiritual discipline and has been under the tutelage of one who is himself learned in the scriptures (*Shrotriya*), full of spirit of dispassion (*Akamahata*), and established in the realization of the self (*Brahmanistha*). A spiritual preceptor should be eternally wedded to Truth (*satyanishtha*) and must instruct men out of mere compassion. Mere learning has almost no place in the spiritual life. Says shankaracharya:

वाग्वैखरी शब्दझरी शास्त्रव्याख्यानकौशलम् ।

वैदुष्यं विदुषामेतद् भुक्तये न तु मुक्तये ॥

“Orations flowing in words of wisdom, skill in expounding scriptures and the display of scholarship can at best fetch one some material enjoyment but liberation from the wheel of the transmigration.”

To men of wisdom this world of the senses loses all its savour and incidents like birth and death seem uneventful. Even this very world of trials and travails becomes mart of joy and they tread the earth bringing strength and solace to the weak and weary. It is this state that forms the aim and the apex of a cultural and religious life according to the Vedas. 'Shake off the slumber of ignorance; be awake to the Reality and receive instruction from the worthy ones in the science of the self '(उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत 1), says the Vedas. They exhort us to expand our hearts in an all-embracing love. For, is not expansion life and contraction death? Having attained this knowledge of the self one should work diligently for the amelioration and enlightenment of the less fortunate and the ignorant. Whosoever spreads this scared wisdom, say the Vedas, among those who are fit to receive it, becomes an heir to endless bliss.

The need of an incarnation

This path of Moksha or the path to peace eternal though the oldest is yet unknown, though the biggest is yet unseen, and though ensuring supreme bliss is yet not sought after by most men. It is obscured from their sight by the walls of petty vanities of life which obstruct their approach to it. Constant discrimination between the real and unreal, absence of desires for all the worldly loves and gains, and an undivided devotion to Truth are the kit absolutely essential for those who choose to be the pilgrims of this path. Being untrod by the indulgent humanity, this lonely way is beset by robbers like Greed and Lust who hide themselves under the bushy growths of name, fame, infatuation and ignorance. Only such of the wayfarers as are armed

with discrimination and dispassion, can camp on it or traverse it with safety. And such ones are few indeed; too few to be known to the rest of humanity which allows itself to be easily trapped and robbed by the felons on this path. Those who resort to this path become heirs to immortal bliss and those that do not, wallow in ignorance and ramble in the labyrinth of endless miseries. At the sight of this sad state of the erring and unwary men, sage Pralhada, moved sorely by their woes, prays to God in these pathetic terms:

The thought of crossing the vaitarani (the river of hell), so difficult to get over, does not at all disturb me so long as my mind remains immersed in the divine ambrosia of singing Thy glories. But I pine away for those who, turning from the Thee, seek the fleeting pleasures of the senses and have consequently to carry the burden of this *samsara*. Generally O Lord, men meditate on Thee in silence and solitude for attaining their own salvation without caring for good of others. Leaving these ignorant souls in bondage, I do not seek liberation for myself. Alas! I do not find any other refuge but Thee for these forlorn wanderers.'

नैवोद्विजे परदुरत्ययवैतरण्यास्त्वद्वीर्यगायनमहामृतमग्नचित्तः ।

शोचे ततो विमुखचेतस इन्द्रियार्थमायासुखाय भरमुद्धहतो विमूढान् ॥

प्रायेण देव मुनयः स्वविमुक्तिकामा मौनं चरन्ति विजने न परार्थनिष्ठाः ॥

ज्रैतान् विहाय कृपणान् विमुमुक्ष एको नान्यं त्वदस्य शरणं भ्रमतोऽनुपश्ये ॥

(Bhagavata VII, 9, 43-44)

Even the persistent teachings of high- souled ones often remain a cry in wilderness. When men heedlessly straying away from this holy path, are caught in the vortex of ignorance and its attendant evils, God. Who is ever anxious to save them, issues himself forth as an incarnation or sends His trusted messengers on this earth. God always desires that discipline should be evolved out of chaos and that this path eternal be lighted up in the glow of earthly life and teachings. He fulfils Himself in many ways and in many forms. He alone is the light within us, and alone leads us to the haven of Peace and Freedom. His life on earth as it were an open scripture wherein one can read the ancient wisdom of India couched in the most modern language. Every act in His life becomes a sermon on the art of living, a pointer to Truth, a step on the ascent to perfection. In our present age the Lord has come to us

in the form of Ramkrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. An attempt is made in following pages to show how and why we should accept him as the highest manifestation of the Lord. The account that follows is not however a chronicle of all the events- not even of all important events- in Sri Ramkrishna's life. It concerns itself with only few of such facts as will mark him out as the highest expression of Divinity we have ever add in and through a human frame.

SRI RAMKRISHNA

We call Sri Ramkrishna the greatest of the incarnations, not in the sense that Rama, Krishna and others were of lesser mettle as compared with him, but in the sense that Sri Ramakrishna being a person of our own age is the best suited to be our guide. Each incarnation comes to fulfil the needs of his or particular times. All incarnations are no doubts the manifestations of the same Supreme Being and hence there may not be any difference between them. Sri Ramkrishna has himself said that. 'He who came as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna has now come as Sri Ramkrishna.' All incarnations are great, perhaps equally great; we need not to judge them and we do not want to judge them. But that the one that the closest, should appear the biggest to us in only natural. Further, the lives of the other incarnations, more or less, seem to us as legendary and for the most part are shrouded in obscurity, whereas in the account of Sri Ramkrishna's life we get a record of unimpeachable facts. He can therefore be the polestar of our lives in whose light we can wend our way to abiding felicity. He is both 'God within us' the Supreme Brahman 'God who has come' to deliver us from the fetters and the fears of this life.

The advent

The eighteenth century threw the globe in a boiling pot as it were. With improved means of annihilation, advanced European powers were raiding the Eastern hemisphere. By the middle of the 19th century, India, politically overthrown by the British, was under the sway of an exotic civilization. Dazzled by glamour of this western civilization, the Hindus became blind to their age- old ideals, and their faith, which had already become shaky, was gradually swept off its cultural moorings by the gushing inflow of the British ideas of civilization. A Hindu now hesitated even to own the religion he was born in lest he should face public censure India,

according to the thought of the day, could only hope to survive if its social and religious life could be cast in English moulds. Shining crest-jewel of her philosophy, which she so long prided upon, was now pitilessly plucked from her head and the regal robe of her religious lore, that adored her ages, was now replaced by rages. Her sons, who were once princes, were now either beggars or servants whose only delight was a servile imitation of the west.

Then came the reaction. The spell of western influence was thinning down and India was slowly rising from her coma. Indians, though dimly, were now becoming conscious of the serious inroads the western thought was making into their culture and were getting alive to their responsibilities. They felt their task now was to bridge the old ideals of the east with the new concepts of the west without of course swerving from the central ideas of their own distinctive culture. Challenge of the time could not be bypassed. To ensure a better future, socio-religious reforms were felt necessary. But this glorious future, it was decided, should be evolved out of our own cultural heritage. Our torch had to be carried on and had to be fed on our own spiritual oil. That was the final decision.

Raja Ramamohan Roy, the worthy son of India, founded the Brahma Samaj in 1828. He studied vedic religion, the Islamic religion and the Christianity. His was a monotheistic creed, open to persons belonging to any religion. Though the Samaj was started as a religious institution, it devoted itself mainly to social reforms like relieving women of their social inequities, spreading of education among the masses, abolishing the caste system, etc. The brahma Samaj initiated these vital social reforms and history records as its outstanding achievement, its success, in some measure, in pulling the Hindu mind away from the magnetic circle of Western influence. The mind yet not completely drawn out of this hypnotic circle; it was still lingering on the brink- the circumference. The Brahma Samaj did not unconditionally accept the authority of the Hindu scriptures. Neither did it totally discard their philosophy. It advocated free thinking and demanded reason in every sphere of life. The Brahma Samaj patronized English education, and the growing mind, especially in Bengal, stood on the brink of the East with its eager face turned to the West for inspiration. Still, attacks on Hinduism by Christian missionaries were vehemently countered, and at a later date a militant section of the Brahma Samaj even claimed the superiority of Hindu religion.

Thus in the fields religious and spiritual, such currents and cross currents were flowing. The Indian sky was overcast. Dark clouds, blinding dark clouds, were gathering over the Eastern horizon. Hindamata was, as it were, yearning for a saviour, sending silent prayers for son equal to this uphill task. The prayers were heard, and a saviour was sent. On the 18th of February, 1836, in a remote village of Bengal named kamarpukur, a child was born in a simple Brahmin family. Who could have then thought that this child was going to be the saviour of the world? He was named Gadadhar but later on he came to be known by a combined name of two of our greatest incarnations-Rama and Krishna.

The significance of his name

Rama and Krishna are the heroesnay, the very souls, of our great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata which have from the hoary past been the backbone of our religion and culture. Sri Rama holds out to us an exemplary moral character, which is the very core of Hindu religious life, and Sri Krishna vouchsafes to us the perennial philosophy which is best illustrated in his own person. Since Sri Ramkrishna had combined in himself both the things the ideal of a Sadhaka (a spiritual aspirant) as set before us by Sri Rama, and the state of a Siddha (a man of realization) as lived by Sri Krishna- he proved himself worthy of this significant appellation.

A paragon of moral virtues, Sri Ramakrishna by his unparalleled and unprecedented spiritual disciplines, stormed the citadel of heaven and brought it on earth within the reach of even the work-a-day humanity. In the glowing light of his life spiritual aspirants can easily wend their way to the Goal. With his manifold realizations and supreme spiritual fervour, he scaled such rare heights of spiritual life that, he elicited spontaneous reverence even from a person like Swami Vivekananda who salutes him with an inspired praise, in the following words:

ॐ स्थापकाय च धर्मस्य सर्वधर्मस्वरूपिणे

अवतारवशिष्टाय रामकृष्णाय ते नमः ॥

To thee, O Ramkrishna!

Essence of all faiths,

The founder of religion,

Incarnation greatest,

I offer my salutations

(Pray deign to accept.)

The name Sri Ramakrishna befitted him in another sense also. Sri Ramakrishna was receptacle of the central virtues around which the stories of the great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are evolved. The Ramayana says, 'Beware of lust.' It is his lust that recoiled on Ravana, the villain of the epic, and struck him down in the dust. The Mahabharata teaches, 'Greed begets grief.' It is their greed that levelled the Kourava chiefs to the ground and wrought ruin in their ranks. It was Sri Ramakrishna's glory that he was never defiled by either greed or lust. He was verily renunciation personified of this, we shall see later.

Child is the father of Man

Even from early childhood, the life and ways of Gadadhar were quite uncommon and mysterious. He was a bonny, beautiful babe, and it is said that, he was as big as a child of six months when he was born. Immediately after his birth he was not to be seen in the place where he was laid and to the surprise of those around him, he was found in an oven nearby smeared with ashes! That a babe just born, should have rolled off to such a distance is indeed a mystery! Was it an act of Providence to indicate what the child in future would be! People wondered! We, in India, regard the smearing of ashes to the body as a mark of renunciation a sign of a recluse.

The twin stars of renunciation and spiritual illumination, which were to shade their lustre in the life and teachings of Sri Ramkrishna, showed their twinkle even in his infancy. Surprisingly enough, this kid of five, not yet initiated into the three R's, used to take a special delight in being chatty with the wandering monks who frequented Kamarpukur and at times used to return home smeared with ashes. Once, when he was only seven, he stunned a congregation of pundits by offering them an apt solution of a knotty problem which was teasing them for long. Yet, with all his rare wisdom and power of penetration into even the most abstruse problems of philosophy, he showed little progress at school, where he often played a truant. Feeling concerned at this his elder brother, Ramakumar, who was then in Calcutta, took Gadadhar with him. Ramakumar had hoped that under his tutelage Gadadhar might improve and be made to take greater interest in his studies. But to his sheer disappointment he found that Gadadhar's aversion to studies had now developed into disdain for all secular learning, and there was naturally an end to his school life.

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The unfolding

When in 1855 the famous kali temple of Dakshineshwar was opened, young Gadadhar secured therein the first commission of his life as an assistant to his elder brother who was the chief priest there. Shortly after this his elder brother died and the duties of the priest devolved on young Gadadhar. But he was not to be the type of an ordinary priest, a mercenary, fulfilling his allotted hours of work every day. His feeling behind the worship, though formal to start with, gradually began to get intensified. During worship, which at times lasted for hours, he used to get so much absorbed that he would become totally oblivious of the outer world and behaved in a way which was at once strangely informal and highly unconventional. This made him a subject of vulgar gossip for the scamps and a matter of great concern for the gentle folk. Even those nearest to him feared that his conduct betrayed some sort of mental derangement. Few indeed could realize that the madness of Gadadhar was not the ordinary type of insanity, but it was a state of mind brought over by his impassioned urge for the vision of the Divine Mother.

With his emotions strung high he could hardly rest on this earthly plane of normal mundane existence and everything about him looked abnormal. Naturally, people, whose vision could not penetrate or go beyond the thick walls of worldliness, took him to be insane. But what appeared to these people as insanity, was really the flowering up of his supreme transcendental love for the Divine Mother. It was a state described in the Vaishnava scriptures as Mahabhava. Ever wrapped up in the thought of God and unable to bear with anything worldly, he now began to practise the various disciplines prescribed by different sects and religions.

He practised Dasyabhakti- a form of devotion in which the devotee regards himself as a servant of God. While doing this he looked upon himself as Hanuman, the paragon of this form of devotion. His identification with Hanuman was so complete and perfect that he actually behaved like a monkey jumped from one branch of a tree to another, his eyes became restless like those of an ape, and the most wonderful part of the thing is that, there was actually an enlargement of his coccyx which looked like a small tail! In this role of Hanuman he had a vision of Seeta.

While practising Madhurabhava- which is of the nature of the relation between a mistress and her lover and which is regarded by the

Vaishnava school as the highest rung in the ladder of devotion- Sri Ramakrishna identified himself with the Gopi of Vrindavana. The acute anguish of separation from Sri Krishna was then too much for him to bear. His devotional fervour became so intense that he felt a burning sensation all over his body and at times even blood would exude through the pores of his skin! With all the feminine traits and graces developed in him in their minutest detail, he looked like another Radha in the throes of her separation from Sri Krishna! His femininity then was so complete that he got even regular monthly menstrual discharges from near the groins which lasted for three days, as in the case of women!

After traversing the paths of the various dualistic schools, Sri Ramakrishna took to the high-road of the nondualistic faith. This too he covered in an incredibly short time. To rest in the non-dual plane, high above the world of duality, became for him as easy as it is for us to be on the normal physical level. When he went into such states even doctors could not discern any trace of life in him and they had to admit that science was powerless to explain such a phenomenon.

Not only did Sri Ramakrishna undergo the different forms of disciplines as laid down by the Hindu scriptures but he also practised other religions like Islam and Christianity and realized by his own direct experience that all forms of worship ultimately lead to the self- same goal.

When we bear in mind that for ordinary men many lives are required for realizing the Truth even through one Sadhana, it can be said that Sri Ramakrishna's achievements were the rarest on record. Thus his intense inborn spirituality helped him pass through all these ordeals and cover the paths in great and rapid strides. His intense soul- force, his unquenchable yearning and his spiritual practices vied with one another in their onward march that grand march towards the Infinite. Out of every fresh ordeal he emerged a refreshed victor, brighter and stronger than ever before. And after twelve years of strenuous spiritual strivings the tempest within him completely subsided. He had now sighted the unseeable, known the unknowable, and reached the unreachable.

He appeared a new man, a totally different person, his face blooming with the bliss of God- realization. His former meek self had now yielded place to a bold and yet pleasing appearance which, as it were, bore to those around him a message of hope and blessedness. He had met God

face to face nay, he had become God Himself.

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A Teacher by Divine Right

Sri Ramakrishna now understood the mission of his earthly life and betook himself to it with the zeal and devotion all his own. His deathless words were a spring of the nectar of devotion that soothed the aching hearts, a blazing fire of renunciation that burnt down all earthly cravings, and a light of knowledge that dispelled the last vestige of ignorance. The irresistible attraction of his honeyed words, drew to him a host of noted worthies of his time, who spontaneously poured forth at his holy feet their heart's adorations. With his rare insight he could probe into the peculiar idiosyncracies, temperament and spiritual potentiality of his disciples and accordingly prescribe for them the course of discipline they should follow. But it should not be thought that speech was the only medium through which he taught. His very presence was a sermon! It cost the sun no exertion to remove darkness. It cost no more for a great soul like Sri Ramakrishna to convey his quality to other men. A teacher by divine right, he could lead his disciple by his finger into the realms of the rarest spiritual realization! A rare type of a tutor who could teach without words!

Sri Ramakrishna had, in a way, studied all the religions-nay, with the rare intensity of his soul, he had lived them and directly realize that, whatever may be their philosophical approach to Truth, they all aimed at the same spiritual fulfilment. Every religion admits the existence of divine spark in man, and a reunion of this spark with the flame eternal, in some form or other, is its goal. But as the same coat does not fit everybody, the same religion may not suit all men. There can be any number of religions. In fact, every individual may have a religion of his own. There need be no quarrel about it. Never have religions asked us to fight. However much they may differ outwardly, the cardinal Truths underlying them, are same. Every religion says-

- (1) Love God and love the world seeing God in it.
- (2) Serve God and serve the world seeing God in it.
- (3) Sacrifice everything for God and sacrifice everything for the world seeing God in it.
- (4) Love, Service and Sacrifice are the means to Eternal Felicity and God Himself is that Felicity.

Sri Ramakrishna too taught these things, not by mere percept but by

the actual demonstration of these things in his own life. A reader of the biography of Sri Ramakrishna will see that 'Love' was his very heart, 'service' his body, 'sacrifice' his blood, and 'God' his soul. He was therefore the consummation of all the religions of the world.

By the present standards, or even by the then standards, it can be safely said that Sri Ramakrishna was uneducated. Still his sayings are a mine of intellectual, philosophical and spiritual wealth. What ever he uttered bore a stamp of authority and penetrated deep down into the listener's soul. His benign presence would effuse a magnetic halo whose radiance would fill the hearts of his disciples with both light and delight. Simply by virtue of their contacts with him, however fleeting they might have been, men have become Gods, sinners changed into saints.

An Ideal Yogi

Even a cursory glance at the biography of Sri Ramakrishna, will convince any one that he was a perfect Jnani, an ideal yogi, the greatest karmayogi and the foremost among the Bhaktas. With his mind ever attuned to the transcendental Reality he looked like a mass of consciousness unpolluted by the profane touch of mundane thought. Having ascended to the state of a '*Galitahasta*', where no rituals are possible, and all attachment to duty drops off like a sere leaf, he could hardly perform any formal worship. He would find everything the flowers, the sandal paste and all the accessories of worship throbbing with the all pervading consciousness! In such a state whom could he worship and with what? He was not merely a Jnani but Jnana itself since superconscious state was a state quite natural to him and only with an effort could he descend to the plane of relative consciousness.

Yoga is psychic control and concentration. In Sri Ramakrishna one sees these things developed in an amazing degree. Never in his life his senses disobeyed him. His mind was his slave, a perfect slave, who delighted in doing his behests. Concentration cost no efforts for him. The mere fact that he remained continuously for six months in a state of Nirvikalpa-wherein the whole world of duality vanishes and the mind merges completely in the Self or the Absolute shows how great his power of concentration was. While he was in this state he had to be fed artificially and somehow made to survive. Scriptures opine that a person cannot ordinarily remain in this state for over twentyone days, after which his body drops off

like a dried leaf. That Sri Ramakrishna lived in this state for six months, is indeed a miracle. How can he then be called a mere Yogi! He was 'Yoga' itself condensed in flesh and blood.

Sri Ramakrishna was as it were a physical expression of the ideal of Karmayoga. His only pleasure in the work, was the work itself. Today, the gigantic waves of his divine work are surging high, and they may soon engulf the entire globe. Raising the spiritual level of the human race, transforming the bitter ones into sweet, haters into friends and raw ones into finished products, was his sole concern. His creative spirituality knew no rest. He never stinted in giving what he had. During his last days, even when he was ailing with cancer in his throat, neither his physical pains nor persistent medical advice, could deter him from rendering service to those who needed it. He talked incessantly for twenty hours a day! Talking like this for six continuous months with an aching throat, he looked like another 'Christ on the cross', who, unmindful of his own agony, was aggrieved only by the affliction of others! Another Buddha, who sacrificed his flesh for the happiness of others! It was impossible for him to do anything for his own self. His ego-consciousness was completely rooted out. He could not even utter the word 'I'; instead, he said 'this' pointing to his own body. He did not even breathe for himself. His life had been a glorious sacrifice on the altar of service.

Sri Ramakrishna was a Bhakta (devotee) without a peer. In his matchless zeal he had undergone all the disciplines mentioned in the books on devotion. He had experienced the state of Mahabhava, which is said to have been attained only by Sri Radha and Gouranga Mahaprabhu, both of whom are considered to be the final word on the cult of Bhakti. The reader is already aware of the rare exuberance of divine emotion manifested in the person of Sri Ramakrishna while he was practising Madhura Bhava. Sri Ramakrishna always remained a Bhakta when he was not completely lost in God. In such states of divine absorption, into which he would frequently go, he would not be able to retain the least trace of his ego-consciousness, and hence the relation of God and His devotee, would not be possible there. He would then become God Himself. Thus we see he was like a ferryman, who plied his boat between the banks of relative existence and divine felicity. He was like an amphibion whose dwelling was in the ocean of divine bliss, but who often came on the shore of relative existence. While ashore, he would

always be thinking of his abode in the sea and with what an intense attachment! Bhagavata, the most authentic and famous treatise on Bhakti, describes the greatest Bhakta thus:

सर्वभूतेषु यः पश्येद् भगवद्भावमात्मनः ।

भूतानि भगवत्यात्मन्येष भागवतोत्तमः ॥

'One who sees in aught that lives

The Lord, his self, and thus perceives

All in Self and Self in all

Is the devotee best of all.'

A true devotee is he, says Bhagavata, whose devotion to God expresses itself as love for the entire humanity love that has no frontiers. To such a devotee a destitute in the street is as much an object of worship as the deity in the shrine. Viewed in the light of this description, Sri Ramakrishna, can be classed as the greatest of the devotees. We shall recall here a few incidents from his life in support of this statement.

Once Mathurbabu, the manager of the Kali temple, had arranged a pilgrimage to Banaras. Sri Ramakrishna was then in the party. On the way they camped in a village, the sight of whose destitutes was too much for Sri Ramakrishna to bear. Sorely distressed by seeing their condition, he asked Mathurbabu to clothe and feed them. But Mathurbabu, awed with the expenses involved, hesitated. Sri Ramakrishna was inexorable, and like an obstinate child left the company of the party, and took his seat among the villagers. It was only when everyone among the villagers was given a hearty meal and a piece of cloth, that Sri Ramakrishna resumed the journey.

On another occasion, Sri Ramakrishna saw two boatmen, quarrelling among themselves, on the bank of the Ganges. Soon, from words they came to blows. Sri Ramakrishna who was then witnessing the scene in a state of semiconsciousness suddenly began to shriek in utter agony. His nephew, who was then in the Kali temple, at once rushed to the spot and found that Sri Ramakrishna's back had turned red with the marks of lashes of a stick! Thinking that Sri Ramakrishna was actually caned by somebody, he

became furious and demanded that the culprit be shown to him. When Sri Ramakrishna regained normal consciousness he explained the whole thing to his nephew who beyond himself with surprise. Words are too inadequate to describe Sri Ramakrishna's love for humanity! He was verily a shoreless

ocean of love whose waves had swallowed up all differences, not only between man and man but also between animate and inanimate things and filled them all with his infinite kindness!

Not only living beings but even nature- dumb, dull, inanimate nature-had become a part of his own being. Once, while he was gazing at the luxuriant green grass in the garden of the Kali temple, he forgot himself and went into a semi-conscious state. Just then a person happened to walk over that grass. Sri Ramakrishna then felt as if somebody trampled over his own chest and it became red! We wonder whether we can find another instance of this type of love in the whole history of the human race!

We have to admit that all our miseries are due to our baneful attachment to sense-objects and the fleeting pleasures of this life. Dispassion alone can give us abiding happiness; and this dispassion can be best developed through devotion to truth. Truthfulness and renunciation always go hand-in hand. With the practice of one, the other is developed. Non-attachment and devotion to truth are therefore the twin virtues eulogized and preached by all religions. Both these virtues had reached their very acme of perfection in Sri Ramakrishna's life. Every limb of Sri Ramakrishna's body was saturated with the spirit of renunciation. He could not touch a coin and even if he unconsciously did so, he would writhe with pain.

Once, Sri Ramakrishna had been to a devotee of his who, while Sri Ramakrishna was about to leave, put a small packet of sweets in his *ghari*. The sweets were meant for a young relative of Sri Ramakrishna. But Sri Ramakrishna thought that carrying it would mean laying by for the future and returned the packet to the devotee. He would not keep the sweets with him even for a few minutes! He thought it was storing!!

Like his spirit of renunciation, Sri Ramakrishna's devotion to truth too was unparalleled. He was truthful to the nail of his little finger. He was truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Even unconsciously, he would not say or do anything that was opposed to truth.

Once, Sri Ramakrishna had been to a devotee of his who was a doctor. Learning that Sri Ramakrishna was suffering from chronic diarrhoea, the doctor offered to give him some doses of opium from his dispensary before he left. But in the course of the conversation, both forgot about it and Sri Ramakrishna left. After advancing few a steps, Sri Ramakrishna

remembered about opium and came back. Finding doctor busy he took the powders from one of the persons in charge. But surprisingly enough he found that, when he tried to go back to the kali temple with those powders, he fumbled and could not proceed further, however much he tried. He could very well see the way back to the dispensary but not the path ahead to the temple. Sri Ramakrishna started wondering and all on sudden it struck him that he was asked by the doctor to take the powders from him and not from any one else. Taking powders without his permission, from any other person amounted to falsehood and theft. Thinking thus, he returned to the dispensary and threw the powders back through a window, cring out as he did so, "Look here, I am returning the opium", and immediately after that the way to the temple was quit clear to him. By his whole-souled devotion to it, Truth expressed itself in every action of Sri Ramakrishna conscious or unconscious. Whatever he uttered was Truth, whatever he did was truth. Truth itself lived in the form of Sri Ramakrishna!

Sri Ramakrishna had a total abhorance for show and pomp. Handsome in features, golden in complexion and dressed in scarlet silk, he was once going in a palanquin because of his delicate health, when a huge crowd gathered to see him. Sri Ramakrishna could not at first understand why the people had thronged there. But when on close enquiry, he learnt that they had collected there to feast their eyes on his graceful person, he immediately returned to his room, tore off the robe, and refused to go out that day. Such was his inborn humility, and aversion to material grace and physical beauty! Scores of such instances can be cited from his life! Is he not then an object lesson in humility?

Philosophies of all existing religions can be roughly classed in three categories. One that advocates God as a person, entirely different from the worshippers, the second, that considers the worshipper as a part or limb of God, and the third, that regards God as one without a second. According to the Non-dualists (Advaitins), the third class of philosophers God alone is real, all else false mere appearance. All these three moods of devotion of these three kinds of philosophers, we see in Sri Ramakrishna. When he was on the ordinary sense-plane he looked upon the Divine Mother as a person-as his own mother. In the semiconscious state, he regarded himself as Her limb. He was then an instrument in Her hands, or She was the mind and he the body. In a still higher state, he became God Himself. Hanuman had once

said to Rama:

देहबुद्ध्या तु दासोऽहं जीवबुद्ध्या त्वदंशकः

आत्मबुद्ध्या त्वमेवाहमिति मे निश्चिता मतिः ।

'O Rama, when I am body-conscious, I feel I am Thy servant; when I regard myself as Jeeva, I feel I am a part and Thou art the whole; and when I rise above the consciousness of my body and mind, I become verily Thyself. This is my firm conviction.' And this phenomenon we have already witnessed in Sri Ramakrishna's life too. It proves to us that, even as all religions lead to the same goal, all philosophies too point to the same Truth. The self-same reality viewed from different standpoints appears differently.

Sri Ramakrishna was thus, the religion, the whole religion and nothing but religion. Rightly has Mahatmaji observed that, "The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of goodness Ramakrishna's life was an object lesson on Ahimsa. His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise".

It may be objected, 'how can an illiterate person like Sri Ramakrishna be called an incarnation of God? God is considered to be omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. Can one who is dull of wits-one who would by his very ignorance of the world evoke derision even from a boy in his teens-be called an incarnation or even a man of mature wisdom? How can one who baffled all the attempts of his teacher to make him understand even the simplest of the sums in arithmetic be venerated as God on earth?'

The reply is what we in common parlance style as knowledge is in reality only ignorance. When it is accepted that the entire universe itself is a construction of our own mind or nescience and therefore fictitious, all knowledge pertaining thereto can only be fallacious. He alone knows who knows things as they are. Our knowledge of the world is not of the things as they are but of the things as they appear. If the appearance be false any knowledge based thereon will naturally be misleading. One who therefore knows the changeless reality behind the changing phenomena is alone the man of wisdom. As has been already shown in the prelude, 'All this is Brahman'. One who has realized Brahman has in fact known everything. He is omniscient Sri Ramakrishna had realized Brahman and had therefore known everything that is worth knowing. Only those who wallow in ignorance will call him dull of wits.

True knowledge consists of being one with the object to be known. Knowledge obtained through anything short of such identification with the object to be known is bound to be partial and therefore misleading. We cannot know the noumenon or 'the thing in itself' simply because we have not realized our identity with Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna had experienced his oneness with Brahman. His frail ego-consciousness was retained merely to instruct men. This is amply evidenced by his frequent lapses into the superconscious state (Samadhi) inspite of his best efforts to remain bodyconscious. Having become one with Brahman he became everything and in fact he knew everything. He was therefore God on earth God who is omniscient and omnipresent.

The greatest enemies of man are his fear of death and his wayward mind and senses. He who has vanquished these is really the most powerful. A restless and uncontrolled mind is a perpetual source of worry. It is the one enemy we can hardly flee from. Sri Ramakrishna had outgrown the fear of death and had completely subjugated the all-conquering mind. Can he not be then called omnipotent? Can we think of any power on this earth greater than the one that can defy both mind and death? Not only did Sri Ramakrishna acquire such power for himself but he could transmit it even to others who sought it! Will it then be an overstatement, a flattery, to say that he was omnipotent? With the realization of Brahman, Sri Ramakrishna ceased to be a mere man identifying himself with his body and mind, and became the Supreme Spirit-the all-knowing, the all-pervading and the all-powerful Spirit. He became the Principle and did not remain a mere person. In him the Spirit, the principle, appeared in a physical frame just to supply the missing link between the real and apparent-just to lead men from the seen to the unseen. Sri Ramakrishna's body was like a glass-pane through which one could have a glimpse of the Absolute beyond this world of relative existence. He could easily lift the minds of those who came to him above body-consciousness high into the realm of spiritual consciousness.

Swami Vivekananda, the illustrious son of India, once when requested to write a biography of Sri Ramakrishna, shrank back and said that he was not fit for the task. How then can we give to our readers a true picture nay, even a dim idea of what Sri Ramakrishna was? If we attempt doing that we will be rushing in where angels fear to tread. We therefore only raise our voices and sing his praises and drink deep into the divine nectar

that he was:

O Founder of religion! nay, religion incarnate.
Our salutations to Thee, the greatest of the great.
Philosophies all and countless faiths,
To Thee alone do wend their ways.
With thy advent here is darkness gone,
The long night's past and the day is born.
India is now up on her feet,
She'll march ahead and never retreat.
O Ramakrishna! let's ever be Thine,
Discarding the thoughts of 'I' and 'mine'.
Ever and anon we bow to Thee,
With hearts all blissful and minds carefree.

.....
THE TEACHINGS III
OF BRAHMAN OR GOD

Though numerous stars do twinkle at Night
In the heaven of day they're out of sight.
So, in the days of ignorance, you
Perceive not God's existence too.

You see many stars at night in the sky but do not find them when the sun rises; can you therefore say that there are no stars in the heaven of the day? Even so, Oh man, because you do not see God in the days of your ignorance, do not say that there is no God.

Bow down and worship where others kneel
His presence there you'll surely feel
Wherever men pour heart's adoration
You'll find the kind Lord's manifestation.

Wherever others kneel, you should bow down and offer your worship; for where so many have been pouring their hearts' adoration the kind Lord must reveal Himself. For He is all merciful.

The Divine One resides in all
Like cotton in cushions big or small.
Of different colours the cushions may be

The same white cotton in them you see.

Man is like pillow case. The colour of one may be red, that of another blue, that of a third black; but all contain the same white cotton. So among men one is handsome, another is dark, a third holy, a fourth wicked, but the Divine One resides in them all.

In the hearts of only the holy and pure

The light Divine, to find you're sure.

On objects all the sun sheds light;

'Tis reflected but in objects bright.

The sunlight, wherever it may fall, is one and the same. But only bright surfaces like water, mirror, and polished metals can reflect it. So too is the Divine Light. It falls evenly and impartially on all hearts, but only the pure and the clean ones of the good and the holy can fully reflect it.

Both with form and formless is He.

Unnumbered forms His can be.

No one knows the end of His glory.

You'll do well to learn the chameleon's story.

Two persons were once hotly arguing about the colour of a chameleon. One said, "The chameleon on that palm tree is of a charming red colour." The other, contradicting him said, "You are mistaken. The chameleon is not red but blue." Not being able to compose their differences they both went to a person who always lived under that tree and had seen the chameleon in all its shades of colour. One of them said, "Sir, is not the chameleon on that palm red in colour?" The person under tree replied, 'Yes, Sir.' The other disputant intervened, "What do you say? How is it? It is not red but blue." That person again politely replied, 'Yes, Sir'. The person knew that the chameleon is an animal that constantly changes its colour; thus it was that he said 'yes' to both these conflicting statements.

Satchidananda too, similarly, has many forms. The devotee who has known God in one aspect only, sees Him in that aspect alone. But one who has realized Him in His various other aspects can alone say, "All these forms are of one God." He is both formless and with form; and many more are His forms which no one knows.

As one and the same water is called by different names by different

peoples, one calling it water, another eau, a third acqua, and the fourth pani, so too the self-same Satchidananda, the Existence-KnowledgeBliss Absolute, is invoked by some as God, by some as Alla, by some as Jehova, by some as Hari and by some others as Brahman.

A salt doll went to gauge the deep
And melted away as it took a dip.
So too the senses, mind and speech
Dissolve in Brahman as Him they reach.

Once a salt doll went to an ocean to measure its depth. It dived into its waters. But as soon as it did so melted away. Who was then to report the depth of the ocean?

Similarly when in Samadhi, which is beyond all relative consciousness, one realizes Brahman but is not able to describe It.

Brahman to describe, though you try,
As the girl to show her spouse was shy
And hung her head gracefully below
Without saying, 'yes' or 'no',
You'll be mute, you'll not succeed;
And only smile as the young girl did.

One who tries to give an idea of God merely through what he has read in the scriptures is like one who tries to give an idea of Kashi (Banaras) by means of a map or a picture.

The Vedas, the Tantras, and the Puranas and all the other sacred books of the world are as though defiled, even as food spat out of the mouth, because they are being constantly repeated by human mouths. But Brahman or the Absolute Lord has never thus been polluted, since no human speech has ever been able to describe it.

A young girl had once been to her father-in-law's house when some of her girl friends had come to see her. Her husband was then sitting in the drawing room along with some other friends of his who were of his own age. The friends of the girl asked her who amongst the young men was her husband. The girl was shy and would not reply. Then her friends, pointing to one of the young men, asked her, "Is that your husband?" The girl replied with a smile, "No". Then they pointed to another and asked the same

question. The girl again replied in the negative. This process went on for some time till her friends asked her pointing to her husband, "Is he the one?" The girl this time made no reply but only made a smile and hung her head down. Her friends could now see that he was her husband.

Like the girl in the story all scriptures and speech shrink in shame and fail to describe Him.

"God alone gives what you pine
For; others all are beggars",
Said a fakir in Akbar's shrine
As he heard the Moghul's prayers.

Once a certain fakir went to the palace of Akbar and found him saying his prayers. The fakir stood at a distance and heard the king saying, "O Lord, grant me that I may have more wealth, greater power and vaster territories." As soon as the fakir heard this he rose up to depart but the emperor requested him to be seated again.

After offering his prayers, the emperor asked the fakir the reason of visiting his palace and he also wondered why without telling him anything the fakir wanted to depart. The fakir said in reply, "Your Majesty, I had come to you to seek some financial aid but I saw that you yourself are praying for riches and power. I rose to return thinking it improper on my part to beg of a person who is himself a beggar. Instead of begging of you I shall beg of the Lord Himself, if at all I must."

Whom to pray if He saves not?
In peril or pain His help sought.
The frog when pierced by Rama's bow
Lay silent in the sands below.

During his travels, Sri Ramachandra once came to the Pampa lake and wanted to drink water from it. Before he went to it he stuck his bow and arrow into the ground. When he returned from the lake he rooted out his bow and found to his amazement that it was covered with blood. He just scratched the ground and found that he had injured a frog lying in the ground. He was very sad at heart and said to the frog, "Why did you keep silent when my bow pierced you? You should have made some noise." The frog replied, "O Lord, it is when I fall into danger that I call on you, saying, 'O Rama, save

me'. But now you are yourself killing me. From whom else shall I now seek protection?"

Will He whose consort is the goddess.
Of wealth be seeking earthly riches?
The gold you value so much, to God
Is no better than just a clod.
Ornaments to him aren't so dear.
Their loss He doesn't feel or fear.
If from His person stolen are they
'Tis wrong, "God is weak" to say.

Once a thief broke into the temple of Vishnu and took away the jewels. Mathurbabu and I went to the temple. Addressing the image, Mathur said with deep concern, "What a shame, Lord! You are so weak! The thief has taken away all the ornaments from your body, and you could not do anything!" Hearing this I said to Mathur, "How improper on your part to say this! Fie upon you! The jewels you make so much about are mere clods of clay in the eyes of God. Laxmi, the goddess of fortune, is His consort. Do you mean to say that Lord should spend wakeful nights just to save a few coins? You should not say such things."

....MAYA....

Strange indeed is this creation,
An artifice of the Great Magician.
Once 'tis said it happened thus-
An event quite miraculous-
A magician waved his wand in the sky
Chanting some words and birds did fly
As from his pot he removed the lid.
What wondrous magic that he did!
The magician alone's real, to be sure
His magic unreal; it does not endure.

God alone is real-all else is unreal. Men, universe, houses, children, all these are like the magic-appearances created by a magician. They are all Maya's play.

It is said that Lord Shiva was once seated in Kailasa with Nandi (his

bull) near him. Suddenly they heard a big noise. "Revered Sir," asked Nandi, "what does it mean?" Shiva replied, "Ravana is born". A few moments later, another such sound was heard. "Now what is this sound about?" asked Nandi. Shiva replied with a smile, "Ravana is dead". Birth and death are like magic. For just a moment you see the magic and then it disappears. Even so all things in this world are momentary. They appear and disappear. It is all Maya-magic.

Even Narada, by Maya lured,
Had endless sufferings to endure.
He went to fetch a cup of water
And sat weeping beside the river.

Once sage Narada requested Lord Vishnu to show him His Maya. The Lord agreed. A few days thereafter the Lord took Narada with Him and set out on a travel. After they went some distance the Lord felt very thirsty and asked Narada to fetch some water for Him to drink.

Finding no water nearby, Narada went to a river far away from the place. On the bank of the river Narada saw a very charming young lady and was at once captivated by her looks. As soon as Narada approached her, the young lady began to talk with him and before long both fell in love with each other. Narada married her and settled down as a householder. He also got a number of children through her. When he was thus living a happy wedded life, some epidemic began to spread in his village. Narada then thought of giving up the place and along with his wife and children came to the bank of the river. No sooner did he come the bridge to cross the river than there came a terrible flood and in it all his children and his wife were swept away and drowned. Overcome with his grief at the loss of his kith, Narada sat down on the bank weeping piteously. Right at the moment the Lord appeared before him and said, "O Narada, where is the water and why are you weeping?" The sage was startled at the sight of the Lord and he understood everything. He exclaimed, "My lord, salutations to Thee and my salutations too to Thy wonderful Maya!"

'How Maya works none can say'
Said Bhishma weeping as he lay
On his bed of pointed arrows
Thinking as Pandavas' sorrows.

As Bhishma lay on his bed of arrows during the great war between the Pandavas and Kouravas, the Pandava Brothers, along with Sri Krishna stood surrounding him. The great hero was then shedding tears. Arjuna, seeing this said to Krishna, " Krishna, how surprising! Even a person like our grandsire Bhishmatruthful, self-restrained, wise and one of the eight Vasus should weep at the hour of his death!" Sri Krishna asked Bhishma about it, and the latter replied, "O Krishna, you very well know that I am not grieving for myself. Even though God Himself is the charioteer, the Pandavas have no end to their sufferings. This thought makes me feel that I have not understood anything of His Maya, and that makes me sad.

This world's but an empty dream
However real it may seem.
The man who lost his only son
Had only smiles and tears none !

A man who was without employment for a long time was being constantly pestered by his wife to get into some work. One day when his son was lying in bed with a very serious illness he went out in search of some employment. Before the man returned his son expired and though a search was made to find the man out, he could not be found anywhere. At last, when late in the evening he returned home, he was severely taken to task by his wife for his heartless behaviour in leaving the house at a time when his son lay dying. The husband said with a smile, "Look here, I dreamt last night that I became a king and got seven sons. I lived with them happily. But when I woke I found none of them. It was just a dream. Well, tell me whom should I grieve; for those seven sons or the one that you have now lost?"

All you see's but a projection
Of your thought that is within.
A thief, a drunkard, a holy person
The selfsame sadhu had been.

A certain sage was lying on the roadside in a state of deep trance. A thief passing by that road chanced to see him and thought within himself, "This person must have gone somewhere last night to steal and is therefore now lying asleep. The policeman will soon be here to catch him. Let me therefore make good my escape from here." Saying this the thief fled away

from the scene. Soon after there came a drunkard who seeing the sadhu lying without consciousness said to himself, "O this man has drunk so heavily that he cannot even get up. Aye! I am steadier and can still be on my feet." Last of all a sage came by that way who seeing the sadhu lying in that superconscious state sat at his feet and massaged them gently.

What you see, therefore, is a projection of your own mind.

Vishnu when He came as sow
Fell forsooth in Maya's jaw.
From heaven then had Shiva to dash
Deluded Vishnu's body to smash.

Lord Vishnu who had incarnated Himself in the body of the sow, to kill the demon Hiranyakhsha, did not return to His divine abode for quite a long time. The sow had many young ones whom she was suckling and was living a very contented life. The gods in heaven entreated Shiva to go to the earth and to somehow bring Vishnu back to heaven. Shiva came on the earth and seeing the sow said to her, "Have you forgotten yourself? Why do you still remain in this body of a sow?" Vishnu replied, through the body of the beast, "Why, I am quite happy here." Shiva on getting this reply pierced his trident into the body of the sow, killed the beast, and took Vishnu back to heaven.

Everything here is under the sway of the Divine Mother-Maha Maya or the Primal Energy. Even God when He incarnates Himself, seeks the help of Maya to fulfil His mission. In His life on this earth, therefore, we often find that He worships the Divine Mother.

Maya flies once she's detected
As does a dream on waking.
The cobbler attendant of the brahmin fled;
"I'm found out. I go", he was crying.

A priest was once to go to the village of one of his disciples. He wanted some-body to accompany him. On the way, seeing the cobbler, he asked him to accompany him, promising him at the same time food and all the necessary comforts. The cobbler hesitatingly said, "Sir, I belong to the lowest of castes and cannot therefore accompany you to anyone's house." The priest said, "That does not matter. The only thing you need do is to keep

silent whenever any one speaks to you or seeks to make acquaintance with you.” The cobbler nodded assent. At sundown when the priest was offering his prayers in the house of his disciple, another brahmin happened to come there and asked the priest's servant (cobbler) to go and fetch his shoes from a certain place. The cobbler faithful to the instruction of his master, did not respond. The brahmin repeated his order a second time and yet the servant did not move. Seeing that no amount of requests would make the cobbler budge an inch from where he sat the brahmin got furious and said, “How dare you disobey a brahmin's command? What is your name? Are you a cobbler?” Hearing this remark the cobbler began to shiver with fear and said piteously to his master, “Sir, I am found out. I cannot stay here any longer.” Saying thus the cobbler made scarce from that place. Even so, Maya, as soon as she is found out, flies away.

From one who thinks of Rama's feet
Kama takes a swift retreat.
 Meditation on His from Divine
 Will banish passions all bovine.

Mandodari once told Ravana, “If you are so anxious to have Sita as your queen, why not assume the form of Rama and approach her. You can very well do that.” “My dear” said Ravana, “how can I both meditate on Rama and think of my sense pleasures at the same time? Without thinking of Rama, I cannot assume his form; and at the very thought of Rama my whole being is filled with joy and blessedness and it becomes impossible for me to entertain any idea of sense enjoyment.”

Rama or God is Knowledge Absolute, and *Kama*, or desire for sense enjoyment, is born of ignorance. Knowledge and ignorance can never co-exist.

Satva, Rajas and Tamas are Maya's Robbers three
 In the forest of illusion, they won't let you free.
 But Satva of them all is the kindest though he robs
 He leads you to the brink of Maya and he stops.

A certain person while going through the woods was caught by a band of three robbers, the first of whom thought of making short of the man

and drew out his sword. The second robber then stepped forward and stopped him saying, "What will we gain by killing him? It is enough if we have him tied to the yonder tree." Accordingly the man was bound hand and foot and tied to the trunk of a big tree. After the robbers left, the third one amongst them returned to the person and said kindly, "Are you hurt, brother? Let me free you." Saying this the third robber let the man loose and led him down the mountain to a place from where the high road could be seen. The robber told the man further that he could not come any further for fear of being caught by the police but asked him to follow the road he had pointed out.

The woods in the story stand for Maya, the robbers that bind and batter for Rajas and Tamas and the one that loosens the ties for Satva. The Satva quality in Maya sets us on the road to liberation though it cannot grant us liberation or the vision of God.

'I' and 'mine' is ignorance,
It alone binds thee.
So long as'tis not destroyed
Thou shalt not be free.
Thou shouldst say to God, "O Lord,
Thou alone art the doer.
I am but a mere machine,
Thou in truth its driver".

When shall I be free? When the 'I' shall cease to be. 'I' and 'mine' is ignorance (Maya). 'Thou' and 'Thine' is knowledge. The true devotee always repeats, "Oh Lord, Thou art the doer. Thou doest everything. I am only a machine. I do whatever Thou makest me do. All this is Thy glory. This home and this family are Thine, not mine; I have only the right to serve as. Thou ordainest."

If this 'I' be so dear to thee
Expand it indefinitely
And be one with the universe,
Else renounce it all at once.

Sri Shankaracharya had a disciple who served him for a long time but was not initiated by him. Once when Shankara was seated alone he heard the footsteps of someone coming from behind. He called out, "Who is

there?" The disciple answered, "It is I". The Acharya said, "If the word 'I' is so dear to you then either expand it indefinitely, that is know the universe as yourself, or renounce it altogether."

To renounce the 'I' if hard it be
 Let it remain as a devotee.
 The devotee's 'I' doesn't injure,
 Of mischief from it there lies no fear.

If you find that you cannot make this 'I' go then let it remain as the 'servant I'. There is not much to fear of mischief in the 'I' which knows itself as, "I am the servant of God; I am His devotee." Sweets beget dyspepsia but sugar candy is not such a sweet, for it has not that injurious property.

If you feel proud, feel so in the thought that you are the servant of God, the son of God. Great men have the nature of children. They are always children in the presence of God, so they have no egoism. All their strength is of God, belonging to and coming from Him, nothing of themselves.

The 'servant I', the 'I' of a devotee, or the 'I' of a child is like the line drawn with a stick on a sheet of water. It does not last long.

'To know oneself as lowliest
 Of the low is the wisdom best'.
 The man who sought some instruction
 From the sadhu learnt this lesson.

Once a man going to a sadhu said to him, "Revered Sir, I am indeed a low person. Tell me O Master, how I am to be saved." The sadhu, reading the heart of the man, came to know that the man was only affecting humility and said, "well, please get me something which you consider meaner than yourself." The man returned home and started thinking of what could be meaner than his own self. He could see that every person or thing that he saw around him had some or other virtue which he himself did not possess. At last he thought that his own excreta will be surely meaner than himself. And when he passed his stools the next morning he put out his hand to take them up to the sadhu when suddenly he heard a voice coming within the excrement, "Get away you sinner, I was a sweet and delicious cake, fit to be offered to God; but due to my ill-luck I was brought to you and through my contact with you I am reduced to filth. The very men who used to be delighted

to see me displayed in the shop are now turning away from me putting their handkerchiefs to their noses. Only once did I come in contact with you and has been my fate. What deeper degradation may I not sink into if you touch me again!" The man was thus taught true humility and all his vanity was smashed.

One may constantly remember this fable and thus efface any sense of pride that may possess him.

Means to God-Realization

Though men may weep rivers of tears
 For wealth, name, sons and daughters;
 None so yearns, His vision, to gain
 But only pines for things profane.
 Yearn for Him for just days three
 With all your heart and longingly
 Him you're then sure to find
 For, isn't He our Mother kind?

Men shed torrents of tears because a son is not born to them; others pine away with sorrow because they do not get riches; but how many are there who feel the pang for not having seen God? He finds who seeks Him. He who with intense longing weeps for God has verily found God.

Verily I say unto you, he who longs for Him finds Him. You can verify this in your own case, just try for three consecutive days and you are sure to succeed.

Call on the Almighty Mother and you shall see how She will rush to you. When one calls upon God with a longing of the heart, He can no longer remain unmoved.

God will rush to him, no doubt,
 Who cries for Divine help.
 It helps not merely, His name, to shout
If, you don't resign yourself.
 The devotee called on Hari earnestly
 And Hari hurried to him
 But as Hari saw that his devotee
 Was fighting, He turned from him.

Once a person who was being severely beaten by a washerman kept crying out, 'Narayana, Narayana. As soon as the cry was heard, Lord Narayana who was in Vaikuntha hurriedly prepared himself to rush to his devotee. Laxmi who was beside him asked him why all on a sudden he thought of leaving Vaikuntha. The Lord replied, "A certain devotee of mine is crying for help." But after going just a short distance Lord Narayana was seen to retrace his steps. At this Laxmi wondered and asked Narayana what made him return without going to his devotee. The Lord replied, "I thought the man wanted me to save him from the hands of the washerman but I now find that he is himself retaliating".

Unless one has faith in God and surrenders oneself completely to Him in a mood of absolute self-resignation one does not get His help.

Practise sadhanas for some time
A year, a month or just twelve days
Thinking of His form Divine
In solitude or some remote place.
None indeed is there for you
On whom depend you may
Whomsoever you hug to
Must surely pass away.

If you wish to live unattached to the world, you must first practise some spiritual exercises in solitude for some time-say a year, or six months or a month or at least twelve days. During this period of retirement you should meditate constantly upon God and pray to Him for devotion. You should always bear in mind the thought that there is nothing in this world that you can call your own; those whom you regard as your own will pass away in no time. God alone is your own. He is your all in all. How to attain Him should be the only concern of your life.

The mind alone leads one to heaven
Or to hell, indeed.
The one who went to hell had been
Where the sacred book was preached.
He who went to the public house
Though bodily present there

Struck with remorse thought of God
And escaped Yama's snare.

Two friends, while strolling about, chanced to pass by a place where the Bhagavata was being preached. One of them said, "Brother, let us go there and listen to the holy words for some time." The other replied, "No friend, what avails it to hear the Bhagavata. Let us spend some time in the yonder public house in amusement and pleasure." The first one did not agree to this. He went to the place where the Bhagavata was being discoursed upon and began to hear it. The other went to the public house, but did not find the pleasure that he anticipated there and was thinking all the time, "Fie on me! Why have I come here? How happy is my friend listening all the while to the divine life and deeds of Hari." Thus he meditated on Hari even though in a public house. The other man who was hearing the Bhagavata also did not find pleasure in it. As he sat there he blamed himself, saying, "Alas! Why did I not go with my friend to the public house! What a pleasure he must be having there!" The result was that he who was sitting where the Bhagavata was preached meditated on the pleasures of the public house and incurred the sin of visiting the public house because of his evil thoughts, while the man who had been to the public house earned the merit of listening to the Bhagavata because of his good heart.

The spiritual attainment of a person does not so much depend on his outward actions as upon his thoughts and his inner longings.

The mind alone makes one wise
Ignorant, bound or free
Virtuous, kind or otherwise
And even a man holy.
If you therefore keep your mind
On him always fixed
No practice then of any kind
Or penance will you need.

It is mind alone that makes one wise or ignorant, bound or free. One becomes holy because of one's mind, one is wicked because of one's mind, one is a sinner because of one's mind, and again it is the mind itself that makes one virtuous. Therefore one whose mind is always fixed on God requires no other practices, devotion or spiritual exercises.

As long as there's the least desire
The Lord you cannot see.
Therefore renounce desires bigger
By reasoning constantly
And have the smaller ones fulfilled
If at all you must
And then banish all completely
For they're the enemies worst.

As long as there is a trace of even the slightest desire one cannot see God. One should therefore have one's smaller desires satisfied and renounce the big ones by constant discrimination and right reasoning.

Lust is but a beast in you
For long with love nourished.
Give him just a lashes few
He'll leave when thus punished.

A certain Pandit once went to a wise king and said, "O King, I am learned in scriptures. If you allow me I shall teach you the holy Bhagavata." The king who knew that a person who had really known the import of the Bhagavata would never be after honour or wealth, said in reply, "I see, O Panditji, you have not yourself gone through the book thoroughly. I shall make you my tutor, but you have first to learn the scripture well yourself." The pandit returned thinking within himself, "How is it that the king said that I have not read the Bhagavata well when I have been reading it over and over all these years?" However he went through the book carefully once more and then appeared before the king. The king this time too said what he had told him before and sent him away. The pandit was deeply disappointed but thought there must be some sense in the king's behaving like this. He went home, shut himself up in his room, and applied himself to the study of the book deeper than ever. By and by the hidden meanings of the book began to open up before his mind. His craving for wealth and honour began slowly to diminish. He could now realize the empty vanities of wealth, honour, fame, kings and courts and decided to give himself up entirely in complete surrender to God. He never again returned to the king.

Some years later the king thought of the pandit and called on his

house to see what he was about. Seeing the brahmin radiant with the glow of divine lustre, he fell upon his knees and said, "I see Sir, that you have now realized the true meaning of the Bhagavata. Pray deign to accept me as your disciple."

Different though the religions be
The One they seek is only He.
Every religion, faith or creed
Must ultimately to Him lead.
May one a Christian or a Hindu be
A Buddhist, a Muslim or a Parsee
If he's sincere in his quest
His own faith to him's the best.

Different religions are but different pathways leading to the same Almighty. Varied are the ways that take one to the Mother Kali at Kali Ghat (Calcutta). Similarly, various are the ways that lead to the abode of God. Every religious faith is one of such paths leading to God.

As a mother while nursing her sick children, serves rice and curry to one, bread and butter to another and certain other dishes to a third, so the Lord has laid out the different paths for different men suited to their natures.

Every man should cling to his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity, a Mohammedan should follow Islam, and so on. For the Hindus the ancient path-the Sanatana Dharma- is the best.

Though God dwells in everything
A beast like tiger you won't cling.
In the wicked He may reside
Their company yet you must avoid.
It is true that God is even in a tiger. But we must not go and face the animal. So it is true that God dwells even in the most wicked, but it will not do to associate with them.

Men of this age want the essentials
Of religion, but not its rites or rituals.
May be, the husk of the paddy is thrown
But surely not when 'tis to be sown.

So too like husk are rituals needed
If religion is to be perpetuated.

People in this age want the essence of everything. They care only for the essentials of religion and not its non-essentials (the rites, rituals, ceremonials, etc.).

Although in the grain of paddy the germ is considered the only essential thing while the husk or the chaff is considered non-essential, still if the husked grain is sown, it will not sprout up and grow into a plant and bring forth rice. To reap a crop one must sow the grain with the husk on. But if a person wants to get at the kernel itself, he must remove the husk of the grain. Similarly are rites and ceremonies necessary for the growth and perpetuation of religion. They preserve the kernel of truth and consequently every man must perform them, before he reaches the central truth.

Honour both spirit and form- both sentiment within and symbol without.

श्रीरामकृष्णप्रातःस्मरणम् ।

भाते भजामि भवभावनभूततत्त्वं भासा हि यस्य निखिलं प्रतिभाति विश्वम् ।
आत्ताकृतिं प्रणयप्रेरितचित्प्रकाशङ्गाडेयगात्रसुगिरं हि गदाधराख्यम् ॥
प्रातः प्रणम्य प्रलयोद्भवगुप्तिहेतुं संभावयामि सुमनाः सुविनीतचेताः ।
श्रीरामकृष्णपदपङ्कजविष्टवृत्तेः स्यान्मेकदा न विषयानुगतः प्रपातः ।
प्रातर्नमामि तमशेषगुणैरुपेतमन्तर्बहिश्च सततं ह्यविभागतःस्थम् ।
हृत्पङ्कजेऽपि विलसन्तमुदाररूपं श्रीरामकृष्णममलं भुवि योगिगम्यम् ॥
ध्याननिष्ठं तपोनिष्ठं सत्यनिष्ठं निरन्तरम् ।

वैराग्यभास्करं वन्दे रामकृष्णं जगद्गुरुम् ॥

AMORNING PRAYER TO SRI RAMAKRISHNA

(A free rendering of the above hymn)

At the break of dawn do I offer my devotion
To that Principle which is the cause of creation
By Whose light alone are all things lighted
And but for Whom will all be benighted.
That Light of Consciousness by love impelled
Hast taken a form and is Gadadhar named.
My salutations to Him be on this morn
Who's of charming speech and golden form.
To that Cause of creation, dissolution and sustenance
Do I make on this morn my hearty Obeisance.

With a mind quite pure and a hear all humble
Do I make this prayer O, Lord Eternal !
May not my thought ever descend on aught
But Ramakrishna's feet that it has once sought.

At the break of dawn do I salute
The repository of all qualities good,
The One Who pervades within and without
And is yet enshrined in a heart devout,
The One Who's accessible to yogis alone
Who's pure, comely and as Ramakrishna known.

Beyond birth and death causeless and Eternal,
Of the entire world Who's the guide spiritual,
Devoted to meditation, austerity and truth
That sun of renunciation, Ramakrishna, I salute.

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

