

FOR SEEKERS OF GOD

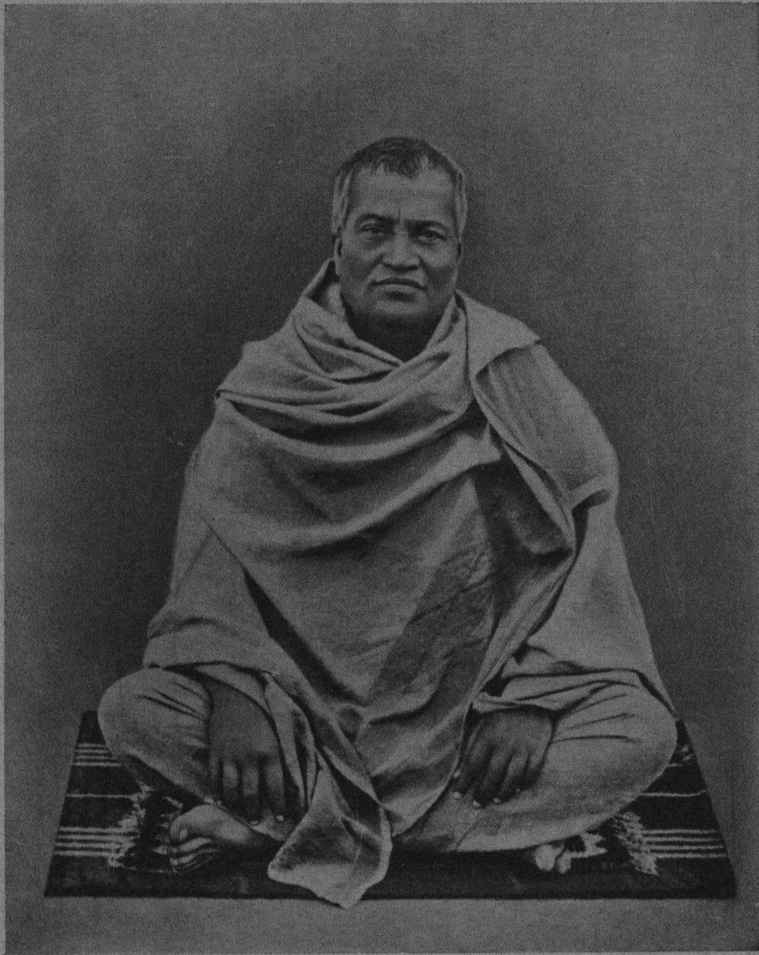
SPIRITUAL TALKS OF MAHAPURUSH
SWAMI SHIVANANDA

Translated by
SWAMI VIVIDISHANANDA
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ADVAITA ASHRAMA

**5, DEBI ENTALLY ROAD
CALCUTTA 700-014**



SWAMI SHIVANANDA

Published by
SWAMI BUDHANANDA
PRESIDENT, ADVAITA ASHRAMA
MAYAVATI, PITHORAGARH, HIMALAYAS

Fourth Edition November 1975

Printed in India by offset
by J. N. Dey at Union Press,
20A, Gour Laha Street, Calcutta 700-006

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

Shiva—the beloved and venerated of millions—is supremely unconcerned, and intensely concerned, about the world. In his illumined life Mahapurush Swami Shivananda evinced this Shiva disposition. Inclined to be indrawn and withdrawn, he was yet anxious for all and at the service of all. By nature of simple habits, he was by divine providence involved in, and for twelve years the guiding-light of, a growing, complex organization.

The conversations and descriptive matter of *For Seekers of God: Spiritual Talks of Mahapurush Swami Shivananda* bring us into close touch with a saint whose life was indeed hidden away with God in God, while all the time, owing to the circumstances of his presidentship of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, whatever was human in that life was, as it were, public property. The *Bhagavad-Gita*, in a few broad strokes, sketches the *sthita-prajna*, the man of steady wisdom. In the present book we see that sketch filled in, together with the refinements and the joys of living continuously in the state of illumination.

Some details of Swami Shivananda's life will be found in the Preface to the First Edition, which immediately follows, and others in the Foreword by Swami Vijnanananda, who, like Mahapurushji, was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. What is said in those pieces helps us to understand the person whose conversations are recorded in the book. Moreover in this book one can especially see the mind and feel the heart of the Ramakrishna Order in particular, and of the movement inspired by Sri Ramakrishna in general. Like other books of the same kind this one is abundant with wisdom and inspiration. Mahapurushji's extraordinary tenderness, even in the midst of his firmness, gives his words a rare heart-soothing quality.

The present volume is a translation of the Bengali *Shivananda Vani* published in two volumes by Udbodhan Office, Baghbazar, Calcutta. Part I is volume I of the Bengali publication. The first edition of *For Seekers of God* consisted only of this. It was translated by Swami Vividishananda, head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Seattle, U.S.A. Part II is volume

II of the Bengali book and was translated by Swami Gambhirananda, now General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Mission. It was originally published serially in *Prabuddha Bharata*, the English monthly of the Ramakrishna Order, from January 1961 to December 1962.

The glossary of the first edition has been expanded ; but explanations of most of what may be unfamiliar terms will be found in the text.

We hope that this publication of the complete spiritual talks of Mahapurush Swami Shivananda will be welcome by those seekers who cannot read them in the original Bengali.

Advaita Ashrama
Mayavati, Almora
Himalayas
23 March 1972.

The Publisher

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was the second President (1922-1933) of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. When he took up the task of that onerous office, he had not only to direct the various activities of the Mission, but also to solve the spiritual problems of innumerable disciples and devotees—young and old, lay and monastic. Wherever he might be, after meditation hours in the morning he would receive the members of the monastery who would gather to his room one by one. At that time he would talk informally about many things according to his own mood and also according to the nature of the inquiries of those who went to him. The topics of conversation varied from the domestic problems of the monastery to high philosophical and spiritual subjects. Sometimes on such occasions, when in a high mood, he would say *things which remained indelibly impressed upon the minds of the listeners and afterwards became the sheet anchor of their spiritual lives. But there was no fixed time when he would talk on spiritual problems. At all hours of the day and*

far into the night anybody could approach him, in private or in company, if he was not otherwise busy, and ask questions pertaining to the inner life. Usually in the afternoon or evening on Sundays and holidays many devotees would sit round him and discuss with him many things. The Swami was never formal ; he could make his hearers feel at ease, and that would embolden them to broach very freely any question they liked. Those who had the privilege of sitting at his feet on such occasions—they very often squatted on the floor like happy children—remember how elevated they felt during those periods. Perhaps the problems that were exercising their minds for years together would be solved in a moment—sometimes without their having definitely asked them, in answers to questions put by others. Perhaps someone had come stricken with grief at some mishap or bereavement ; he would feel lightened of his burden. Some one would get inspiration the effect of which was to last many years, if not throughout his whole life. When all visitors had gone away, and he was alone, he would sometimes be so absorbed in deep thoughts that one dared not approach and disturb him. Some one might have a pressing problem which could only be asked in private. With halting steps he approached the Swami, who would immediately receive with so much affection that half his trouble was over instantaneously. And when the question was put, the answer would touch the very depth of his heart and clear all doubts. Such was the experience of many who had the opportunity of coming into contact with the Swami.

Many put down in writing for their future guidance and help the reports of their conversations with him. Swami Apurvananda, who had the privilege of being the attendant of Swami Shivananda for a long time, collected these reports in Bengali in book form for the benefit of the general public. Here in the following pages is given the English translation of that book. Much is naturally lost in translation, and it is not possible for a reader to put himself in the setting in which the conversations were held and which enhanced the value of the utterances. But still we hope some at least among the readers will derive some benefit from these English reports, which is our reason for this publication.

Most of those who would go to the Swami were persons who sought to realize God in their lives, and the main trend of their conversations was in respect to that. Therefore we thought it appropriate to name the book *For Seekers of God*.

Swami Vijnanananda, who was kind enough to write a Foreword (the English translation of which is given in this volume) to the original Bengali book, was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission from March, 1937 till his passing away in April, 1938.

ADVAITA ASHRAMA
MAYAVATI, ALMORA, HIMALAYAS

THE PUBLISHER

FOREWORD

Mahapurush Swami Shivananda was one of Sri Ramakrishna's blessed direct disciples who dedicated their lives at the feet of the Master and served as his principal aides in carrying out his divine mission. I came to know the Swami intimately first at Dakshineswar and later in other places. It was in Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar that I first met him, sometime in 1884, fifty-two or fifty-three years ago. Tall and slim, he impressed me as being fearless. The Master said to him : 'Look here, many people, young and old, come to this place. I seldom ask them anything about their home and family connections. But I feel like making an exception in your case. Tell me where you come from and what your father's name is.' In reply, Mahapurush told the Master about his father and family. After hearing him Sri Ramakrishna rejoined : 'Oh, I see, you are the son of Ram Kanai. I know your father very well. He is a highly developed soul. You will certainly make progress along spiritual lines.' That day the conversation touched on several other topics as well.

After this incident, owing to a strange combination of circumstances, I did not see Swami Shivananda for a period of several years. Later, in 1897, about forty-one years ago, when I was serving as an engineer, I happened to meet him again. On my way from Bankipore to my place of employment, as I was walking up and down the platform of the Buxar railway station, from a distance I saw a *sadhu*, intelligent and energetic, who, I thought, might be a monk of the Ramakrishna Order. Coming near I discovered that it was Swami Shivananda. I greeted him. He recognized me and said that he was on his way to Benares where he would be stopping at Banshi Dutt's place. He asked me to meet him there, which I did. He was very pleased to see me and entertained me in many ways, telling me all about the monastery (the headquarters of the Order).

Some time later, when I joined the monastery at Alambazar, Swami Shivananda was in South India, living as an ascetic. Reticent and restrained in his words, he was known to be of a serious demeanour. Very soon he returned to the monastery at Alambazar.

Swami Shivananda spent many years in Almora, Kankhal and other places, devoting his time exclusively to contemplation and meditation, occasionally coming down and visiting the head monastery for brief periods. Swami Vivekananda commended his spirit of renunciation and self-control and called him Mahapurush (Great Soul), as a mark of esteem. Once during their stay in Bodh Gaya (the place where Buddha attained illumination) Swami Shivananda became so much absorbed in deep meditation that Swami Vivekananda marvelled at him and remarked, 'You are like Lord Buddha.' That was one of the reasons why he called him Mahapurush.

In 1918 Swami Premananda¹ passed away. About two years prior to Swami Premananda's death Swami Shivananda was placed in charge of the monastery at Belur and from then on he started mixing closely with people. In 1922, after the death of Swami Brahmananda, he became the president of the Rama-krishna Math and Mission—the second president. With the new position came a decisive change in the trend of the Swami's life. Tirelessly he would meet countless seekers and aspirants and give them spiritual instructions. Treating all in a genial and sweet manner, looking after the physical and spiritual well-being of everyone, and attending personally to the management of the monastery—all these became, as it were, his daily occupation. No one would leave him empty-handed and dispirited. Invariably he would fill every heart with peace and hope. Thousands of men and women had the blessed privilege of being initiated into spiritual life by the Swami. He was deeply venerated by many, but he did not have the least ego in him. He used to say that it was the Master himself who, seated in his heart, was blessing people and that Sri Rama-krishna and the Holy Mother were all in all in his life. Very often one would hear him repeat, like a child, the words 'Mother, Mother'.

During the last few years of his life we saw him suffer very much owing to many physical ailments. But the unperturbed way he bore pain gave us the impression that the Swami did not have any body-consciousness at all. Even in those trying days many devotees from far and near would flock to him seeking his guidance and blessing. He would not disappoint any-

¹ A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

one by refusing spiritual help. Ungrudgingly he would bless one and all. Human suffering would move him and open the flood-gates of his boundless compassion. One would hardly expect anything of the kind in an average man. The Master, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda used Swami Shivananda as a vehicle to redeem countless souls, as it were. Mahapurushji merged his identity in that of the Master to such an extent that he seemed to have no separate individual existence. Those who were blessed by the Swami surely had the Master's blessings and his teachings were verily the Master's teachings.

If anyone asked him where he would be after his physical death he would invariably reply that his rightful place would be in the *Ramakrishna-loka*¹ with the Master and he would be reborn in every age at the advent of the Master as one of his apostles. It is my belief that Mahapurushji, since the disintegration of his gross body, has been living in his spiritual body with the Master, doing spiritual ministration.

The precious teachings gathered in this volume will surely be a means of bringing incalculable good to many a seeker and devotee. That this book may arouse their spiritual consciousness is my earnest prayer.

SRI VIJNANANANDA

¹ The spiritual realm where Sri Ramakrishna abides in his subtle body.

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FOR SEEKERS OF GOD

PART I

I

PEACE HARD TO ATTAIN—SINCERE, INTENSE LONGING NECESSARY
—SELF-SURRENDER—DIVINE GRACE—LIVING PRESENCE OF SRI
RAMAKRISHNA IN THE ORDER, ADMONISHING AND GUIDING.

*Place : Monastery at Belur—Headquarters, Ramakrishna
Math and Mission, India. Time : Thursday, October 28, 1920.*

In the morning, according to their custom, the monks of the monastery at Belur gathered upstairs in Swami Shivananda's room, where he was seated, looking very serious and indrawn. Presently a monk, who had come from a branch centre a few days previously, unburdened his mind, saying : 'Maharaj, though I have been practising meditation to the best of my ability, I find hardly any joy in it. Most often I find I go through my practice as through a routine. That does not satisfy my heart nor does it give me any peace.'

Swami Shivananda said very quietly : 'Look here, my boy, peace is not such an easy thing to attain. The way to peace is very difficult—full of thorns. "Sharp as the blade of a razor and hard to cross is the way to Self-knowledge—so the sages have described it." These are the actual words of the illumined seers. The path is indeed extremely difficult, however easy it may seem to those who have not entered it. Great effort is required to make progress in the realm of the Spirit. But if one sincerely wants to realize God, it is certainly true that he will receive His grace. You must have read in the life of Sri Ramakrishna that even he had to go through tremendous spiritual discipline before gaining the vision of the Mother. .

'Spiritual efforts without sincere love for God are fruitless. Sincere love is what counts. The Master used to say that when the three attachments—that of a devoted wife for her husband, of a mother for her child, and of a miser for his wealth—become

one, then one realizes God. If anyone feels the same intense longing as would result if these three attachments were united, only then does he have God-vision. Sincere love brings God-realization and in that alone is genuine peace and joy.

'Of course, without the grace of God one cannot have such love overnight, and that is why regular practice is necessary. One should cry to God, laying bare the heart. "O Lord, be merciful to me. I am an ordinary man. How can I hope to realize Thee unless Thou vouchsafest to appear before me? Have mercy on me, O Lord; have mercy on this weak being!" Pray this way to Him every day. The more you cry to Him the more your mind will be cleansed. The Lord will reveal Himself to the pure transparent mind.

'Pavhari Baba said to Swami Vivekananda: "Remain lying at the door of your *guru* like a dog." Swamiji repeated this remark to us many times. As a dog never leaves his master's home to go elsewhere, whether he is fed or not, whether his master beats him or is kind, in the same way one must be completely resigned to the Lord. He who can take refuge at His feet and stay resigned under all conditions and circumstances till the last, will indeed obtain divine grace. You have no reason to worry, because you have taken refuge in him and found shelter in his Order. As the Master used to say: "The child whose hand is held by the father has no fear of falling." Know for certain that the Master will save you as long as you remain in his Order.

'Though you did not see Sri Ramakrishna in the flesh, you see us—his devoted servants, and through us you hear his words. It is indeed unusual good fortune, because the next generation of monks will not see even us. It was with this in mind that Swamiji founded the Order. In the body of the Order the spirit of the Master is manifestly present and will be so for many centuries for the good of the world. From now on he will do his work through the instrumentality of the Order. Constantly bear in mind that loyalty to the Order is loyalty to the Master. Swamiji founded this monastery in direct obedience to the wish of Sri Ramakrishna. Our words, also, are for the good of the world and for your good. We say what is true. We have not come to the world to mislead people.

“Those who are here in the Order are certainly making spiritual progress, and so are you. Be convinced that our Master is gracious to those who take refuge in him. He protects those in every way who are wholly resigned to him with their body, mind and soul. You have given up worldly attachments in order to realize God and find peace. Look up to the Master for everything. He will certainly bless you and bring you peace.

‘You are expected to live his commandments and pursue the path he chalked out. Being a monk, you should, above everything and by every means, avoid the lust of the flesh and the greed for wealth. Purity and guilelessness should be your watchword. The Master forgives all failings except hypocrisy and self-deception. Those who play false and take to hypocritical ways, do not belong here. The Master does not allow them to remain in the Order; he removes them. Only those who are genuine can stay.’

Monk : ‘Please bless me that I may always remain in his fold. Sometimes I feel very unhappy because of the many undesirable thoughts which cross my mind. Please instruct me how to be rid of them.’

Mahapurushji (Swami Shivananda) said with great tenderness : ‘My boy, I bless you with all my heart. May you remain in his shelter and attain the consummation of your life! Just ignore the bad thoughts. Don’t you know Sri Ramakrishna is the very embodiment of radiant purity? If you meditate on his blessed form and repeat his holy name, impure thoughts will hang their heads in shame and disappear in no time. The moment an impure suggestion comes to your mind, cry to Him fervently and pray : “Lord, I am weak. Protect me. Unless thou savest me, who else will do so? Am I not thy servant and have I not taken refuge in thee?” Talk to him in this way about your weaknesses. He will certainly listen to your prayers.

‘Are you in the habit of getting up from your bed quite early? Do so. After 3 or 4 in the morning, a monk should sleep no more. Eat very lightly at night, and you will awaken at 3 or 3.30 without difficulty, feeling much refreshed. The Master used to say : “Night meals should be only light refreshments.” Ever since we first visited the Master we have made this a habit.’

At that time the monk in charge of the monastery ménage came in, saluted Mahapurushji and said that a certain devotee had given money to be devoted to the worship of Sri Rama-krishna in memory of the man's recently deceased wife. Swami Shivananda said: 'Since the Master couldn't accept offerings in connection with anyone's funeral service, how can we knowingly use this money in his worship? Tell the devotee about it. Our Master is not a figment of the imagination but a veritable living presence. If ever anything improper is done in connection with his service, he is sure to let us know of the transgression immediately.'

2

REGULARITY IN SPIRITUAL PRACTICE—AIMLESS WANDERING OF SO-CALLED ITINERANT MONKS USELESS—LORD IS WITHIN—AWAKENING OF THE KULA-KUNDALINI—GENERAL SPIRITUAL AWAKENING BY THE PRAYERS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Saturday, December 25, 1920.

The evening descended slowly upon a hushed world. It was a full moon night. The bells and gongs of distant temples and of the Belur monastery started chiming, announcing the hour of evening service. When the monks and devotees of the monastery, in a spirit of devotion, started going to the chapel, Swami Shivananda also went, as was his daily custom. After bowing before the altar, he sat upon a deerskin in the south-east corner of the chapel. His hands were folded and his eyes indrawn.

The evening service began. Its solemn music and the serene presence of the Swami helped the concentration of all who were present. The offering of lights to the Master was followed by the singing of hymns, in which the Swami joined. After the singing the monks bowed before the Master and one by one moved to their respective seats for meditation. Swami Shivananda closed his eyes and became absorbed, his peaceful face bespeaking the depth of his meditation. He remained in that condition for a long time.

At about 8.30 the Swami arose and returned to his room, humming a devotional song indicative of inward joy. His voice was unusually sweet and full of divine love. Some monks and devotees had been waiting in his room to pay their respects to him. After the exchange of greetings, all took seats. There was comparative silence in the room; no one felt inclined to break it by speaking. Then slowly a conversation began which turned upon spiritual practice.

Swami Shivananda, still in an abstracted, meditative state, said : 'Night is the ideal time for spiritual practice. Meditation and *japa* should be performed regularly with great devotion. They purify the mind. Continued for some time, regular practice of this kind is conducive to the establishment of a constant spiritual mood, giving one a taste of inner joy. A person should not leave his seat immediately after meditation, but should sit for a while thinking about the object of his meditation. Then he may recite prayers and hymns along similar lines to intensify and stabilize the meditative mood and inner joy. Even after leaving his seat he should not talk with anyone, but should rather be contemplative and remain by himself for some time. Practice like this fosters a continuous undercurrent of meditation, helping to keep the mind on a high level and bringing to the heart great joy.'

A monk of the Order said: 'Maharaj, should we not sometimes leave the monastery and go somewhere else for the practice of austerity and meditation? Are not visiting holy places and wandering as itinerant monks also favourable to the monastic life?'

Swami : 'My child, in common parlance it is said that a rolling stone gathers no moss. Aimless wandering by itself cannot be beneficial in the spiritual realm, nor can it help one towards God-realization. But with the aim of getting rid of the ego and fostering a spirit of full reliance on God, one may periodically subsist on food gathered from many places, or live a life of total seclusion without any possession, or wander about a little. Undoubtedly such courses can be helpful, but there is no necessity for pursuing them year after year.

'Swami Adbhutananda¹ used to say, "Where would you roam? Children of Sri Ramakrishna should stay in one place."

¹ A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

is why we see symptoms of a great spiritual upsurge everywhere. The Mother, the Primal Energy, is sporting for the good of the world, using the body of Sri Ramakrishna. We need have no worry this time.'

3

THE NON-CO-OPERATION MOVEMENT—MAHATMA GANDHI AND OTHER NATIONALIST LEADERS—THEIR SELF-SACRIFICE EXEMPLARY AND PRAISEWORTHY—THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION—ITS PLAN OF WORK AND SERVICE DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE NATIONALIST LEADERS.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Monday, November, 1922.

At that time India was swept by the Non-co-operation Movement and numberless people were courting imprisonment. The whole country was awakened by Mahatma Gandhi's appeal. Men and women by thousands, who considered the motherland's political independence the highest ideal, were ready to dedicate their lives at her altar.

It was Monday. The evening service was just over at the chapel of the monastery at Belur, and there was great silence all around. The *sadhus* (monks) and *brahmacharins* (novices) were engaged in devotions and meditations, while Swami Shivananda, absorbed in meditation, sat on a couch in his room. The dim light made his serene face the more serene and radiant. Time slipped away till at last the Swami began reciting Pushpadanta's hymn describing the glories of Shiva. His mind seemed steeped in the ocean of bliss.

Just then a devotee from Calcutta came from the chapel, and after due obeisance to the Swami, sat on the floor. After a while Mahapurushji greeted him, affectionately saying, 'Is it K.? When did you come?' The devotee replied reverently, 'Yes, Maharaj, I arrived at the time of the evening service.'

Swami: 'I believe you were in the chapel all this time.'

Devotee: 'Yes, Maharaj.'

Swami: 'Tell me why you look so sad and worried. Are all well at home?'

Devotee: 'Yes, Maharaj, by your blessing all are well, but for the past few days I have been mentally upset over a certain question. It has made me extremely unhappy. I am here with the idea of unburdening my heart to you. If you permit me I shall do so.'

Swami: 'Very well, tell me.'

The devotee spoke with great earnestness. He said: 'Maharaj, at this hour the whole country is stirred to its very depths by the Non-co-operation Movement of Mahatma Gandhi. Countless men and women are rotting in jails. Many have already laid down their lives, and Mahatmaji himself also has plunged into the sea of danger. But why is the Ramakrishna Mission silent in this immense countrywide movement? Haven't you any contribution to make? The entire nation is wondering at the ways of the Ramakrishna Mission. Has not the Mission some duty in this national struggle for freedom?' Finally, in a tone of grievance, the devotee added: 'Don't you feel for the country at all? Are you powerless to do anything in the matter?'

Swami Shivananda's calm face assumed a serious aspect. After a while he broke the silence, saying: 'Well K., the doings of a divine Incarnation are beyond the reach of the average intellect. How would you or the nation understand the way of divine action? When God embodies Himself as man, He does so for no particular race or nation, but for the good of the whole world. The manifestation this time is of the highest *sattvika* aspect of the Lord. The Incarnation, Sri Ramakrishna, is the embodiment of perfect *sattva*. Containing within himself all the six divine powers, he lived in the body assuming only pure *sattvika* moods. Consider the way he spent his entire life in a temple court on the bank of the Ganga. How would you understand the deep spiritual significance of all this?'

'It was in order to spread his *sattvika* spiritual thought that Sri Ramakrishna brought with him as his assistant such a powerful soul as Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji could certainly have stirred the country to political revolution, had he so chosen. Who is more patriotic than he was? How many hearts bleed for the downtrodden masses, as his did? Swamiji did not start

a revolution. Had he known it would really help India, he would surely have done so.

'Aside from Swami Vivekananda, even we, by the grace of the Lord, have such power within us that we can revolutionize the country if we so wish, but the Master would not permit us to do so. He brought us here to assist him in his work, and he is constantly leading us by the hand in all that we do for the good of the country and its people. Believe me when I say our only desire is to advance the good of the world. How can I explain to you the depth of our feeling for the miseries of the people? Only the Lord who dwells in every heart knows it

'Before passing out of his body, the Master vested his whole power and the responsibility of his mission in Swami Vivekananda. Only after travelling over the globe from one end to the other and scrutinizing it closely did Swamiji found this Math and Mission to carry on activities beneficial to the world and particularly to India, according to the directions of the Master. One by one, Swamiji engaged us all in these activities. If we had so wished, we could very well have lived a life of exclusive contemplation and meditation in mountains and forests. As a matter of fact, most of us had been away from the monastery in different places, doing that to some extent. It was Swamiji who called us together and engaged us in works of service—the service of God in humanity. Even in our old age we have been carrying on that work.'

Devotee: 'Maharaj, do you mean that Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders have not been doing genuine national service? Their unique spirit of service, fortitude and sacrifice cannot be ignored. How much ill-treatment and persecution are they suffering for the sake of the country!'

Swami: 'No, I do not mean that. Their renunciation, fortitude and national service are indeed very praiseworthy. Their lives are surely great and exemplary, and they have done much good for the country working for what they sincerely believe to be beneficial to India. However, our plan of work is different. Do you know what we think about the nationalist leaders? They are doing these services inspired by certain particular thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. There is no doubt about it that Mahatma Gandhi is really endowed with great powers. It is also true that there has been a special

manifestation in him of the Primal Energy, the Mother of the Universe. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the Lord Sri Krishna said to Arjuna:

“Whatever glorious, prosperous or powerful being there is, know thou that he has sprung from a portion of My splendour.”

‘Whoever manifests special power and is held in high esteem and reverence by many, undoubtedly represents a special divine manifestation. The Mother of the Universe who was wakened by Sri Ramakrishna for the good of the world is obviously working in various ways through the instrumentality of different persons. Many times in his lectures Swami Vivekananda stated what constitutes India’s true well-being. Solutions he proposed for the regeneration of the country twenty-five or thirty years ago—the abolition of untouchability, the elevation of the depressed classes, the spread of education among the masses, and so on—are now being preached by Mahatma Gandhi.

‘Though we may not voice our ideas and sentiments loudly in newspaper articles, we are actually accomplishing things, not through politics, but in our own way. Mahatmaji is working out similar ideas through politics. Just as we are doing things at home because we are interested in India’s welfare, so we are doing things abroad because we are equally interested in other races and countries. Of course, in view of peculiar circumstances and conditions, our plan of activity varies in different places. Every monk of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission established by Swamiji is dedicated to the ideal “For one’s own salvation and for the good of the world” and is engaged in service according to the injunctions of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.’

Devotee: ‘But, Maharaj, the national awakening caused by the Non-co-operation Movement of Mahatmaji would have received an added impetus if the Ramakrishna Math and Mission had co-operated with it. This opinion, far from being just my own, is held by many thoughtful people of the country. Why don’t you co-operate with Mahatmaji in his national campaign?’

Swami: ‘Well, I told you at the outset that we are working in our own way in accordance with our own ideal—an

ideal formulated and left us by the far-sighted sage Swami Vivekananda. Before his illumined vision was revealed the picture of the next thousand years—not merely of India but of the entire world. He saw everything clearly and chalked out a definite policy for us to follow. He was not throwing stones in the dark. He could see even the distant future clearly.

'The manifestation of divine power we see in Sri Ramakrishna in this age is unique. There has not been such a manifestation in many centuries. The wave of spirituality will roll on unimpeded over all the world for a long time. This is just the beginning, the prelude. The spiritual sun which has appeared on the horizon of India will illumine the entire world with its undimmed pure rays. That is why Swamiji said, "This time India is the centre." Spiritual power will be manifested with India as the centre. Who can stem the tide of this divine power? The regeneration of India is absolutely certain. India's advance in art, science, philosophy and education—in every field, secular and spiritual—will be so great that it will astonish the whole world. Compared with her future achievement, her glorious past will pale into insignificance. Then you will realize why the Master and Swamiji came and how much they contributed to the well-being of India. What can the limited mind of man understand about the doings of those divine beings? Don't you see that they have awakened the national *kundalini* of India?'

4

DRY PERIODS IN SPIRITUAL LIFE—TENACITY—JAPA AND CONSTANT REMEMBRANCE OF THE LORD—SELF-CONTROL AND DISCRIMINATION.

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Saturday, September 1923.

Swami Shivananda was seated in his room at the monastery at Belur, his face beaming with spiritual fervour, his eyes radiating love and compassion. There was profound peace in the room. Since it was Saturday, several devotees came from Calcutta for a visit. Most of them were young men working in

offices who made it a custom to avail themselves of every holiday to come to the monastery to see Mahapurushji and listen to him. From his precious words of wisdom they drew much inspiration. That day the conversation turned upon spiritual practice.

A devotee said: 'Maharaj, on some days I enjoy my meditation, but on other days I do not. What accounts for this?'

The Swami replied: 'Yes, truly it happens like this. For some days we enjoy meditation, but other days come when we don't. In the initial stage all aspirants have to go through this experience, but one should not stop practice for that reason. Did not the Master speak of the hereditary farmer? Even as he sticks to the family profession, so you must stick to your spiritual practice, and in trying periods pray fervently to the Lord. Say: "Lord, we are in the world: we are weak and devoid of spiritual discipline and practice. We have neither time nor energy. We have none else to call our own. Do Thou graciously set our mind right that we may call upon Thee properly. Feeble as we are, unless Thou givest us strength, how shall we think of Thee?" Pray to God thus, my boy. Prayer, earnest prayer, is what is necessary. Cry to Him as you pray. Then He will be gracious, and respond.

'Don't you remember how the Master used to pray to the Mother? He would rub his face on the ground, crying, "Another day of this life is gone and I have not seen Thee!" How ardently did Sri Chaitanya say, "O Lord, I find no joy in repeating The name!" Crying thus he too would rub his face on the grass. One should take the name of the Lord in this way with great earnestness. His name, my child, is the very essence. Repeating it brings strength to one's heart. Never forget to repeat His name and pray to Him constantly.'

Devotee: 'Can one take His name always, as for instance, while walking?'

Swami: 'Certainly. *Japa* is not bound by temporal considerations. You can repeat His name whenever you find time. While walking repeat it mentally, you cannot then count the repetition on your fingers or rosary without being conspicuous. The repetition of the Lord's name must be practised very secretly so that no one knows anything about it.

'Practise constant recollection and contemplation of God. One has to form the habit. Remember and think of Him continually, while walking, eating, lying down and even when you are actively busy. Let it be as if an undercurrent is all the time flowing. If you practise in this manner for a while, remembrance and contemplation of Him will go on unconsciously within you; you will be repeating His name even while asleep.'

Devotee: 'It is so hard to control the mind! Sometimes when I am telling my beads, uttering His name orally, my mind wanders here and there, indulging in ideas I never before thought of.'

Swami: 'That is true. The rascal mind causes all the trouble. You must control this mind, or it will take you here and there. However, sincere efforts will bring self-control. When disciplined, this wicked mind behaves right; it functions as the *guru*, repeats His name, guides the aspirant along righteous ways and gives him inspiration in noble undertakings. Practise self-control constantly, pray sincerely to the Lord and discriminate between the real and the unreal. My child, self-control cannot be accomplished in a day. Rightly has the Lord said in the *Gita*:

"Doubtless, O mighty-armed, the mind is restless and difficult to control; but, O son of Kunti, through practice and dispassion it can be conquered."

'Practice, continual practice, and discrimination are what is needed. God alone is the one eternal substance, the abiding reality. It is necessary to be fully convinced of this in one's heart.'

As the conversation progressed Swami Shivananda gradually became indrawn. Very soon he fell silent, with eyes closed in meditation. After remaining a while, one by one the devotees started leaving for devotions in the chapel or on the bank of the Ganga.

**PILGRIMAGE TO HOLY PLACES—LIFE OF AN ITINERANT MONK—
PRACTICE OF DEPENDENCE UPON THE LORD—RULES OF MONASTICISM
—RAMAKRISHNA MONKS, A NEW TYPE—ESSENTIAL OF MONASTI-
CISM, RENUNCIATION OF LUST AND GREED.**

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Tuesday, September 14, 1923.

About 7.30 this morning Swami Shivananda had just returned from the chapel of the monastery at Belur. Nowadays he meditates long in the morning. At the very hour of dawn, when Sri Ramakrishna is first offered worship the Swami goes to the chapel with a deerskin and sits there meditating. Sometimes it is quite late in the morning when he returns to his room. Today after coming from the chapel he was seated in his chair. The intoxication of meditation lingered, and he seemed still very much absorbed. The monks and novitiates of the Order as well as the lay devotees came to pay their respects to him. He greeted them and made inquiries about their well-being very briefly, as if he were in no mood to carry on conversation.

A monk of the Order returned only yesterday from a pilgrimage to Rameshwar, Dwaraka and other places. The moment this monk entered and saluted him, Mahapurushji, with folded hands, bowed to God, saying, 'Glory be unto Lord Rameshwar, glory be unto the Lord of Dwaraka!' Addressing the monk, the Swami continued:

'Meditate upon these subjects. When you meditate, try to think of what you saw in holy places. This is certainly the object of going on pilgrimages. If one undertakes them like a tourist, he gains nothing from them. Genuine devotees purify their minds by recalling and meditating on such things. It is the Lord who has become everything. The holy places are indeed His glories. While thinking of Him one should also think of the manifestations of His power. In holy places there is a special manifestation of Him. He is not seated in our chapel only. He, the Lord of the Universe, is all-pervasive and exists everywhere, but He is specially manifest in holy places and in his saints and devotees.

Monk: 'After my little wandering this time, the conviction has become deep-rooted in my mind that He is specially manifest in holy places and I have truly understood that at every step He holds us by the hand and protects us. I remained for three days at Kanyakumari (Cape Comorin) and enjoyed my stay very much. I used to spend considerable time in meditation, *japa*, worship and reading. So exquisitely beautiful was the place, that it was difficult for me to leave. Through the grace of the Lord, in an unaccountable way, excellent arrangements were made for my lodging.'

Swami: 'Once in a while one should go out and live the life of an itinerant monk, depending solely on the Lord. That is how genuine resignation is acquired. Without this resignation to God, nothing can be accomplished. All the spiritual practices and disciplines have one aim, to develop resignation. He who seeks refuge at the feet of the Lord with undivided mind is fully taken care of and protected by Him. That is why in the *Gita* the Lord promises:

"Those who worship Me and meditate upon Me without any other thought—to these ever steadfast devotees I carry what they lack and preserve what they have."

Gradually the conversation turned upon monasticism and the life of a monk. A newly initiated *sannyasin* said: 'Maharaj, please tell us the rules and codes that we should observe as monks. While conducting works of service it is not practicable to abide by the orthodox monastic rules and regulations mentioned in the *Paramahansa* and *Narayana Upanishads*. Last evening we had a discussion on this subject with Swami Suddhanda.'

Swami: 'Yes, there are many monastic rules of the kind you mention, but since they are not meant for you, it is not necessary for you to observe them. You represent a different type of monk, a combination of *karma-yogin* and *sannyasin*. Swamiji has left a new ideal for you. You are expected, in addition to your spiritual practice, dispassionately to carry on activities conducive to spirituality. Naturally it is not practical for you to observe the rules of which you speak, literally. They are meant for *sannyasins* who do not believe in any activity other than exclusive contemplation, self-analysis and discrimina-

tion. But you know, my child, if one is true in the essentials, the rest will take care of itself.'

Monk: 'Maharaj, what are the essentials?'

Swami: 'They are renunciation of lust and gold. If one can renounce lust of the flesh and greed for wealth everything will be all right. What counts is not the mere renunciation of external attachments; inner attachments must also be given up. Remember that at the time of your monastic vow you offered oblations in the sacred fire, symbolically making a holocaust of desires. At the base of all desires are lust and greed. Above everything else a monk should observe the vow of chastity and poverty. Be sincerely resigned to the Lord. He will give you all knowledge. In time everything will be revealed through His grace.'

Monk: 'But Maharaj, so long as the body lasts should one not have some desire for self-preservation?'

Swami: 'Yes, he should. The scriptures contain injunctions to that effect. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* there is a passage which says: "Realizing the Self and renouncing desires for progeny, wealth and popularity, the knowers of Brahman take to the life of itinerant monks subsisting on alms." One can have that much desire as is absolutely necessary for self-preservation. Begging for alms should provide only bare necessities. Nowhere do the scriptures say that a monk should have sumptuous meals or live in luxury. The main object of self-preservation is to be able to call on the Lord whole-heartedly and to do works in His service that is all.'

Monk: 'Well, Maharaj, is it possible for dualists to practise renunciation?'

Swami: 'Why not? Renunciation means doing away with the three foremost desires. A devotee accepting the dualistic view renounces all desires except the desire for God. He alone is to be desired in life. The desire to realize Him is not really a desire at all.'

DEATH IN VARANASI—ITS SPIRITUAL ADVANTAGE—A DEVOTEE IS UNCONCERNED WHERE HE DIES.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : October, 1923.

Swami Suddhananda was going to Varanasi from Belur. In that connection, while discussing the spiritual advantages of living in the holy city, Mahapurushji said: 'So-and-so wrote me, pressing me to come to Varanasi. Swami Satchidananda also wrote, apprehensively: "We hear you have not been very well. You have had enough activity; so do come to Varanasi. Let the younger generation manage things now. It is for you to come and retire in Varanasi."

'Swami Satchidananda fears my body will not last very long and wants me to spend my last days in the holy city. But with us every place is the same as Varanasi. Wherever and in whatever state we die, it is equal to dying in Varanasi. As long as the Master wants us here in the flesh, death cannot touch us. "If the Lord protects, who can kill?" When the summons for release comes from the Lord himself, nobody can keep us here.

'We are ever ready to depart from this life. It is worldly people who in old age think of retiring to Varanasi for its spiritual advantages. We belong to a different category. The Master has graciously given us everything. Where and under what condition his devotees give up their bodies, is immaterial. Their future is insured, even as is the future of one dying in Varanasi. Swami Trigunatita gave up his life in San Francisco. Did this affect him? He was certainly united with the Master after death. The heart of a man in which God the Lord of the Universe is enshrined, is as good as holy Varanasi. Such a man has no reason to be afraid.'

THE SELF IS AGELESS WITHOUT BEGINNING AND END—THE WORLD AN ILLUSION—THE MONASTERY CHAPEL A VERITABLE KAILASH—THE EARLY MORNING AN IDEAL TIME FOR MEDITATION—DAYS OF ECSTASY WITH THE MASTER.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Sunday, October, 1923.

It was Sunday, about nine in the morning. Mahapurushji was seated on a couch in his room. Many devotees were assembled and interesting things were under discussion. Becoming inquisitive, a devotee asked, 'Maharaj, how old are you?'

Swami. 'You ask the age of my body? I don't know exactly. Most probably it would be about seventy or seventy-two years.'

Devotee: 'In that case, you would be three times older than we.'

Swami: 'Possibly. Three times! Why three times? I have existed through eternity. The Self, unaffected by disease and old age, is beginningless, endless, eternal and immortal. Pure, illumined and free, It dwells in every being as Consciousness itself. This counting of age by years—ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred, and so on—is a figment of ignorance. The immutable being whose nature is truth, exists eternally without undergoing any change at any time.

'This world fashioned by ignorance is illusory and our whole trouble comes from mistaking the illusory for the real. Deer often mistake a mirage for water and jump into it in a body. From a distance the sand appears a vast expanse of water with a play of waves. Duped by this appearance, the deer run and run for the water and finally lose their lives in the sand. In a similar way a man who considers this ephemeral world real, causes himself endless sorrow. He is scorched here, as it were. Not for a moment does he think he will some day have to leave this world. He wants, foolishly, to arrange his affairs on a permanent basis. Perhaps he buys a brick house, a large estate, and does other things of that sort. Yet however he tries to make things permanent, how long will they last?'

Addressing an elderly gentleman, the Swami said: 'Now please go to the chapel after washing yourself in the Ganga. We have made our chapel a veritable Kailasa or Vaikuntha (abodes of Shiva and Vishnu, respectively). There in the chapel is the living presence of Sri Ramakrishna, and also of the Holy Mother, Swamiji and other disciples of the Master. Whenever I enter the chapel I feel that I am in Kailasa itself. Often I go there and sit for meditation, and my heart is filled with joy.'

Addressing a monk who was seated near, the Swami asked, 'When do you go to the chapel?'

Monk: 'In the morning about nine or ten, and again in the evening.'

Swami: 'Don't you go there early in the morning?'

Monk: 'No, Maharaj, early in the morning I meditate on my bed.'

Swami: 'Why on the bed? Get up early, wash yourself, and go to the chapel to meditate there. Why, of all places, do you meditate on the bed? It is not a good practice. Of course when sitting elsewhere is inconvenient, it is different. We have learned from experience that the moment you sit on the bed you feel lethargic and sleepy. The bed and its pillows have a tendency to pull you down and make you go to sleep. If possible, I try to avoid sitting on the bed. At the early hour of dawn when the chapel is not open, I may sit for a while on the bed, but later I go to the chapel and enjoy my meditation there.'

'The morning is the ideal time for meditation. It is silent and quiet all around. Nature is peaceful. With little effort the mind becomes absorbed in meditation. Invariably I awaken when the clock strikes three, whatever be the time of my going to bed.'

'We noticed that the Master would not sleep at all after three o'clock. He was in the habit of sleeping lightly; an hour or two sufficed him. Arising from bed he would start taking the name of the Lord. Sometimes he chanted *Om*, sometimes he clapped his hands and repeated the name of the Mother, or perhaps he walked up and down taking the name of Hari. He would awaken those of us who were sleeping in his room.'

Approaching us one by one, he would say: "My boys, are you awake? Get up and take the name of the Lord." His ecstatic chanting of God's name would be going on all the time. Having no consciousness of the outer world, he would, while chanting, sometimes go out on the adjoining porch—nude like a child.

'Some days he would start *kirtana* accompanied with drums and cymbals, and we would join him. Mostly he would sing only the names of God, occasionally improvising words and phrases. Sometimes he danced in ecstasy. Ah! how graceful was his dance! He would then be transformed beyond recognition. It is impossible to describe his unique spiritual raptures! He had an unusually sweet voice, the like of which we have never heard anywhere. The *kirtana* would continue till the late hours of the morning. The Master's ecstasies were contagious, making all ecstatic. The ceaseless repetition of the Lord's name made the place a heaven. In what joy did we pass our days with the Master!'

Thinking of his association with Sri Ramakrishna Swami Shivananda became deeply absorbed, as if unable to speak any more.

8

DAKSHINESWAR TEMPLE GARDEN—ITS UNIQUE HOLINESS—SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S MAHASAMADHI IN THE COSSIPORE GARDEN—MASTER'S RELICS—FOUNDING OF THE ORDER—THE BARANAGORE MONASTERY—INTENSE AUSTERITIES OF THE MONKS.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Sunday, March 23, 1924.

It was Sunday. In the afternoon many devotees assembled in Swami Shivananda's room at the Belur Monastery. He made inquiries about the physical well-being of some and answered the questions of others, but his mind seemed constantly indrawn. About three o'clock a group of devotees came from Dakshineswar and entered the Swami's room. Seeing them, he appeared beside himself with joy and said, 'Come in! Where have you all come from?'

When they had reverently saluted the Swami and taken seats, one devotee said: 'We went to Dakshineswar today. After

visiting the temples we partook of the food offered to the Mother. The whole day passed in great joy. As we went into the Master's room, to the Panchavati (grove of five trees) and the site of the bael tree, we remembered that these were the very places where the Master practised so many spiritual disciplines.'

Swami: 'Of course! Sri Ramakrishna lived there about thirty years. How many different kinds of spiritual disciplines did he not undergo there, what ecstasies and transcendental realizations did he not have! And that room of the Master—is it an insignificant place? I feel Dakshineswar is Varanasi itself—nothing else. That is why I go there from time to time. As I cannot visit it often I salute it from here every day. Is there any other place like Dakshineswar? Even as Varanasi, it doesn't belong to this mundane world.'

Devotee: 'Maharaj, when was it that you went to Cossipore garden, and how did Swami Vivekananda organize the Order? We wish very much to hear of those incidents from you.'

Swami Shivananda was silent for a while as if he were gradually bringing down his consciousness to the outer world. Then he said softly: 'When the Master's throat trouble took a serious turn he was moved to the Cossipore garden in order to facilitate his treatment and nursing. We, too, gathered there in order to serve him. Later, the Master gave up his body there.'

Devotee: 'Did you realize that the Master had actually breathed his last?'

Swami: 'No, at first none of us realized it was actual death. We thought it was *samadhi*, for sometimes the Master used to have such deep *samadhi* that he would remain in that state for two or three days at a time. Thinking it was deep *samadhi*, we started chanting loudly the name of the Lord. The whole night passed in this way without any change in his condition. Next morning we sent word to Dr. Sarkar. He came and examined the Master in detail and said he had given up the body; the doctor found no symptoms of life in it. Dr. Sarkar suggested we have a photograph of the Master taken, and this we did. At about two or two-thirty in the afternoon the Master's body was cremated at the Cossipore cremation ground.'

Devotee: 'Most probably those were days of great strain and hardship for all of you.'

Swami: 'No, we never felt any strain and hardship. In those days we used to spend our time immersed in a certain mood. We were so absorbed in doing personal service to the Master, in practising meditation and austerity, that most often we had no consciousness of the passing of day and night. Those were indeed unique days. After the departure of Sri Ramakrishna most of the boy disciples, except myself and Swami Adbhutananda, went back home. Though Swamiji, too, returned home, he used to visit the garden at intervals and was in close touch with us all the time.

'The last remnants of the Master's body were preserved there at the Cossipore garden and were daily worshipped by us. We were still at the garden because, having paid the rent for the month, we could stay there the remaining days. Swamiji and a few of us decided that the relics must be preserved and buried somewhere on the bank of the Ganga, as this had been the Master's wish, but we could not find a suitable place.

'Meanwhile Ram Babu was arranging to take the relics to his garden house in Kankurgachhi. We all felt very bad, especially at the thought that in such an event the Master's wish would not be fulfilled. A message was sent to Balaram Babu requesting him to come with an earthen jar. He came at once. That very night we removed all the bones from the ashes, put them in the earthen jar, sealed it with clay, and sent the jar to Balaram Babu's house in Calcutta where the tutelary deity of the family used to be regularly worshipped, and the relics began to be worshipped there daily. Ram Babu took the remaining ashes to Kankurgachhi in the meantime. As we did not tell him anything about our removing the bones from the ashes, he was quite in the dark concerning it. The relics we kept then are now worshipped daily at the monastery here. Swamiji brought the casket containing the relics to the monastery grounds, carrying it on his head. He used to call it the casket of *Atmarama* (One rejoicing in Himself). We also call it by the same name.

Devotee: 'Did you ever see the Master after his death?'

Swami: 'The Holy Mother had a vision of the Master in Vrindavan. Be that as it may, I, too, went to Vrindavan in the meantime. Only Swami Adbhutananda and somebody else

remained in the Cossipore garden. Swamiji used to go to Balaram Bose's house every day and was thinking and discussing with others how to organize us all into the Order. One day unexpectedly Suresh Babu came there and said to Swamiji: "Brother Naren, last night the Master appeared before me, saying, 'Suresh, my children are roaming about; what have you done for them?' I have been very unhappy since I heard his words. Think and do something. I shall abide by whatever you do.'

'Finding his wish fulfilled in such a strange manner, Swamiji was immeasurably delighted. He said: "For some time past I myself have been thinking about this. Very well, it would be well if we can decide on a house. What do you say?" Suresh Babu readily welcomed the idea. They started looking for a house and in Baranagore finally discovered a two-storeyed building available for rent at ten rupees a month. The house was very old and in the neighbourhood had the reputation of being haunted, so that it was scrupulously avoided by all. Those who were at the Cossipore garden now moved to this new place. I, too, came down from Vrindavan. Seeing me, Swamiji said, "Tarak-da, I am glad you are here; I was just thinking about you. We have rented a place in Baranagore; let us go there."

'From that time we all started living there. In those days all of us had intense longing for God-realization. Spiritual practice, austerity, worship and study went on uninterruptedly, day in and day out. We lost even the sense of hunger and thirst. We used to have *kirtana* (group devotional singing often with dancing). We would have such dancing sometimes that the janitor downstairs would be frightened lest the house collapsed. We were so happy in those days! Thus was laid the foundation of our Order through the practice of spiritual disciplines, renunciation and austerity.'

RIGID SPIRITUAL PRACTICE—DISCIPLINARY PENANCE IN THE
EVENT OF FAILURE.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : August, 1925.

It was about 8.30 in the evening. Mahapurushji was seated on a couch in his room, talking with a monk belonging to the ashrama at Jamtara.

He said: 'Today I received a letter from So-and-so. In the letter he wrote specially about himself. He mentioned that one evening he had come to the railway station to see you off, and returning to the monastery after 10 o'clock he had had his supper and gone to sleep without finishing the daily routine practice of *japa*. Later at night when he awakened and remembered his mistake, he felt very bad. He consulted the *sadhus* of the ashrama and asked what amends he should make for the mistake. Nobody could give him a satisfactory answer. Being much disturbed and repentant, he wrote to me for advice, requesting that I write my opinion of what he should do, that I prescribe some penance. I shall write to him accordingly.'

A *brahmacharin* asked: 'Maharaj, what penance would you prescribe?'

Swami: 'Not much of a penance. Let him fast a day—twenty-four hours—and practise *japa* all he can during the fast period. Of course, it doesn't have to be a complete fast in which one is not supposed even to drink water. He may eat one or two pice worth of puffed rice. At night, too, as far as practicable, he should do some *japa*, counting his beads not less than ten thousand times. Such rigid adherence to spiritual practice is very good.'

A monk: 'Swami Brahmanandaji also asked me to do something similar. He said, "Repeat the *mantra* ten thousand times every day; it will do you immense good; and continue this at least for a year." But I couldn't keep up the practice for a year at a stretch. Nowadays the duties of the ashrama keep me so busy that I hardly find time for spiritual practice.'

Swami: 'It can so happen that owing to the pressure of work a person may once in a while not be able to do his usual

amount of spiritual practice, but he should not omit it altogether. Of course, work at the monastery is also a form of service of the Lord and makes one think of him, but one should not, therefore, totally neglect the practice of meditation and *japa*.

'How long can a person do work? A time will come when he will lack the physical energy to do it. How will he then occupy his time? Besides, unless work is accompanied by meditation, *japa* and other spiritual practices, its very spirit is lost. Then one forgets it is the Lord's work and not his own. Egotism and pride come and instead of being purified by the work, the heart becomes defiled. The object of one's life is not work; it is the realization of God. The work that makes one forget God is highly degenerate. In the midst of a hundred and one activities a person should keep up his regular spiritual practice. That alone can bring genuine serenity of the mind; that alone can make a person fit to engage in work in the right spirit.

10

'TRUTH ALONE TRIUMPHS, NOT FALSEHOOD'—SRI RAMAKRISHNA WON HIS DISCIPLES BY HIS INEFFABLE LOVE—HIS INQUIRIES ABOUT MAHAPURUSHJI'S FAMILY—MAHAPURUSHJI'S REMINISCENCES OF HIS FATHER AND MOTHER—SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S EATING HABITS.

Place : Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bombay. Time : January 18, 1927.

It was only a few days ago, in compliance with the earnest invitation of the local monks and devotees, that Swami Shivananda came from Madras to the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama in Bombay. All were delighted to have him among them. Spiritual discussions and devotional singing went on every day; joy and spiritual fervour reigned supreme at the monastery. The Swami had visited Bombay once before, in 1924, when the ashrama was located in rented quarters. It was the same year that the Swami in the name of Sri Ramakrishna laid the foundation-stone of the Ashrama on the newly acquired grounds. Within a period of three years the construction of the chapel and the quarters

for the monks was complete. Mahapurushji was staying in the new Ashrama.

It was the month of January. Winter had set in. Late in the morning when the sun was up, the Swami used to go for a walk towards the ocean beach in the neighbourhood of Juhu. Sometimes he would visit the Shiva temple that the fishermen of the locality had built on the beach. Every one of them, whether young or old, would be immensely happy to see the 'Old Father' and would make much of him. How devoted they were!

This morning Mahapurushji was sitting in his room. A *sannyasin* of the ashrama entered and took a seat after saluting the Swami. Addressing him, the Swami referred to certain institutions and said: 'My boy, it is natural for things of that sort to happen. Only through such experiences can people know what is genuine. Those who seek truth sincerely will surely hold on to it. "Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood!" Truth will be crowned with victory and what is false or counterfeit will be blown away by the wind of truth. Know for certain that those who are sincerely seeking God, the embodiment of Truth, will undoubtedly be led by Him along the right path. They have no reason to be afraid.'

In the course of conversation, while discussing Sri Ramakrishna, one monk asked, 'Maharaj, when you used to visit Sri Ramakrishna, what did you think of him?'

Swami: 'When we visited him, the thought of whether or not he was a divine Incarnation never came to our mind. We could not foresee that he would create such a superhuman movement in the whole world. Who could then know that the whole world would become intoxicated with this man, only three and a half cubits tall? He loved us very much. It was because of the attraction of his love that we used to go to him. How shall I describe his love? It was ineffable! In childhood we had the experience of parental affection and did not think there could be anything greater. But when we came to the Master and realized his love, we found the affection of our parents to be insignificant and most unworthy. After coming to him we felt that we had arrived home, that all these years before we had been roaming in a strange country. Whenever

I came to Sri Ramakrishna, that was my feeling. I do not know how others felt. The Master won me over at the very first meeting.

'One day Sri Ramakrishna said: "Well, so many people come here. I seldom ask anyone about his home and family connections, or desire to know anything about these. When I first met you I felt that you belonged here; that I would like to know the particulars of your home, parents and the like. Can you tell me why? Where is your home and what is your father's name?" In reply I told him that I came from Baraset and that my father's name was Ramkanai Ghoshal.

'Hearing this, the Master said: "Indeed! You are the son of Ramkanai Ghoshal? Now I understand why the Mother aroused in me this desire for information about your home. I know your father very well; he is the attorney to Rani Rasmani's estate. The Rani and her family think highly of your father, and whenever he happens to visit the garden at Dakshineswar they do everything to make him comfortable, arranging carefully for his residence, meals, servants and the like. He is certainly a highly developed *sadhaka*. Whenever he came here, after having his bath in the Ganga and putting on a red silk garment, he would enter the Mother's temple. He would look like a veritable *bhairava* (celestial attendant of Shiva). He was tall, stout and fair-complexioned, and his chest was always red. He meditated long at the Mother's temple. He would have with him a musician who would sit behind him singing many songs symbolically describing the human body and its nerve centres, and also songs about the Mother Kali. Your father would be absorbed in meditation, tears streaming down his cheeks. After meditation, as he left the temple, his face would be flushed with spiritual emotions and nobody dared approach him. I was at the time suffering from an unbearable burning sensation all over my body. After meeting your father, I said: 'Well, you are a devotee of the Mother, and so am I. I also have a little meditation, but can you tell me why I have such a burning sensation all over my body? Look! The burning sensation is so intense that the hairs of my body have been burnt. This burning sensation is sometimes excruciating!' Your father recommended that I wear an amulet bearing the name of my Chosen Deity. Strange as it may seem, with the

wearing of this amulet the burning sensation diminished at once. Would you ask your father to come once and see me?"

'In those days I used to live in Calcutta, visiting home occasionally. My father was very much pleased when I told him about Sri Ramakrishna, and he came to see the Master once. On another occasion the Master said: "Your father's spiritual practices were attended with some desire for worldly objects. As a result of his spiritual practices he amassed plenty of wealth and also spent it nobly."'

In connection with his childhood, Mahapurushji said: 'I recall little of the days when I was very young. But I do remember well that my father used to support many in his home. My mother would do the cooking for the family and serve the meals. She was fond of feeding people. In those days my father was in a position to engage cooks and servants, but my mother would not allow that. She used to do almost all the housework herself. She was an ideal woman, very simple in her ways. Seeing her work hard my father would be pained and express sympathy. To that she would say: "To be able to feed people is a great blessing. They are all my children." When I was nine years old my mother passed away. It was her custom to wear a heavy sari with a wide red border. Other than this, I do not remember much. My uncle used to say that my mother would not ask for anything, not even for her own clothes.

'In the course of time, as a result of my frequent visits to the Master, I made up my mind to give up all connection with the world and went to say good-bye to my father. He burst into tears, which began to trickle down his cheeks. We had a chapel. He asked me to salute the Deity in the chapel, and then blessed me. Placing his hand on my head, he said, "May you realize God! I myself tried hard to renounce the world and to realize Him, but failed. Therefore I bless you that you may attain to God!" I repeated this to the Master. He was very pleased to hear it and said, "It is very well that it has happened so!"'

Monk: 'In these days parents of this type are very rare. It would be in no sense an exaggeration to say that they are almost non-existent.'

Swami: 'Yes, you are right. My father was of that type because he had undergone some spiritual practice. Although he had a sincere longing to realize God, the embodiment of Truth, he didn't succeed in his attempt. Besides, he had acquired a lot of experience of the world. That is why he could let me go so easily.'

Swami Shivananda was having his supper in the evening. In connection with the eating habits of the Master, a monk asked, 'Maharaj, is it true that the Master's hands were so very soft that one day while breaking a *luchi* (thin bread fried in butter) he cut his finger?'

Swami: 'Yes, his hands were very tender. But why speak just of his hands! His entire body was so. Don't you know there is a kind of *luchi* with a hard crust? It was that kind of *luchi* which cut his finger.'

Someone inquired as to the quantity of food the Master would eat at night. To this Swami Shivananda, pointing to the *luchi* on his plate, replied: 'At night he would perhaps eat one or at most two small *luchis* like this, with a little porridge. Because he could not digest milk by itself they would add water and cook it with cream of wheat, making a sort of pudding. He would take a little of it. In the cupboard there would be sweets made of fresh cheese. When hungry he would eat one or two pieces of them or perhaps half of one piece, giving the rest to others who were there. His ways were like those of a child. It was as if he were a child himself.'

After supper when Swami Shivananda was seated in his room smoking, a monk asked: 'Maharaj, during the Master's last illness, you, Swamiji and Swami Abhedananda went to Bodh Gaya without letting the Master know anything about it. After your return from that pilgrimage, did the Master say anything to you?'

Swami: 'Yes, of course he said something. Moving a finger in a circle and shaking the thumb, he said: "No spirituality anywhere!" Then pointing to himself, he said: "This time all is here. You may roam wherever you please, but you will not find anything (spirituality) anywhere. Here all the doors are open!"'

DISCUSSION OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S REMARK: 'THIS IS THE LAST BIRTH OF THOSE WHO COME HERE.'

Place : Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bombay. Time : January 28, 1927.

At night after supper Swami Shivananda was seated in his room in the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bombay. Most of the monks and novices of the ashrama were present. One monk said: 'Maharaj, we have heard that the Master used to say, "This is the last birth of those who would come here." Did you yourself ever hear him say it?' Mahapurushji remained silent for a while and then replied: 'Why, it has been mentioned in the books that have been written about him.'

Monk: 'What is the meaning of this saying of the Master? Does it refer only to those who had seen the Master and had attained devotion and faith through his grace? Or does it mean that this is the last birth of whoever has reverence for him?'

Swami: 'His words meant both. Whoever has deep regard for him, is sincerely devoted to him, and has surrendered himself fully to him, whether he has seen him in the flesh or not, will attain liberation and not be reborn. But self-surrender there must be.'

Monk: 'Maharaj, will those also be free who have taken refuge in him and have joined his Order?'

Swami: 'Yes, of course, but true liberation calls for complete self-dedication. Even to belong to his fold—is it a mean fortune?'

Monk: 'Why, we don't seem to be making much headway or progress!'

Swami: 'My child, what you have done so far and are doing now, is not negligible. Without his grace even that would have been impossible. How gracious is the Master to you! Not for nothing has he snatched you away from your parents and made you renounce hearth and home. It is because

he has been unusually gracious that he has brought you to his fold and given you the opportunity to attain the *summum bonum* of life.'

Monk: 'But, Maharaj, we do not feel that the works we are engaged in have been very conducive to the development of the spirit of renunciation and dispassion.'

Swami: 'Whatever you are doing here is certainly his work, and you are doing it all for his pleasure. You are not actuated by any selfish worldly desire. These activities of yours will undoubtedly foster a spirit of renunciation and dispassion. Don't think that a life of mendicancy in Rishikesh alone will give you dispassion. For shame! You are certainly on the right track. At present you may not have this consciousness, but in the fullness of time it will grow and you will be established in it. You will realize that everything is his and that you have nothing to regard as your own.'

Monk: 'Maharaj, we don't seem to have that realization. One cannot know peace unless there is total destruction of the ego in deep meditation. We hardly have good meditation.'

Swami: 'Everything will come in good time, my child. Believe me when I say this.'

12

REFERENCE TO SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S TRAVELS ON THE WEST COAST OF INDIA—HIS DEBATE WITH CHHAVILDAS, AN ARYA SAMAJIST, AND OTHER INTERESTING EPISODES—REFERENCE TO SWAMI SHIVANANDA'S EPITHET 'MAHAPURUSHA'.

Place : Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bombay. Time : January 29, 1927.

In the evening after supper the monks and the novices of the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bombay were assembled before Swami Shivananda to avail themselves of the benefit of his holy company. There was silence in the room. The conversation turned upon Swami Vivekananda.

The Swami said: 'Swamiji stayed for a long time at the home of Chhavildas here in Bombay. It was then that he

visited many places in this part of the country. Chhavildas belonged to the Arya Samaj and was against the worship of God with forms. He had much discussion with Swamiji concerning it. One day he said to Swamiji: "Well, Swamiji, you say that worship of God with forms, idol-worship and such other doctrines are true. If you can prove these doctrines by arguments quoted from the Vedas, I shall leave the Arya Samaj, I promise you."

'Swamiji replied emphatically, "Yes, surely I can do that." He began explaining the Hindu doctrine of image-worship and such other doctrines in the light of the Vedas, until Chhavildas was convinced. Chhavildas made good his promise by leaving the Arya Samaj. Swamiji was such a genius, he could do that.

'It was at this time that Swamiji visited Poona, Malabar and other places. Usually he avoided travelling by train, but when he took the train, he would travel first-class. Ordinarily he did not accept money from anyone, but if a person insisted on giving him something, he would say, "You may buy me a first-class train ticket, if you wish." Because of his weak stomach he had to have the facilities of a lavatory, which are available in a first-class compartment.

'Once he was going to Limbdi, being invited by the Thakur Sahib. Plainly dressed, he was resting on a bench in a first-class compartment when some distinguished passengers entered there by another door. Finding a *sannyasin* occupying an entire bench, they became much annoyed and gave vent to their feelings in English. "It is these, *sannyasins* who have been responsible for the downfall of India," they said. Swamiji remained lying down and listened unconcerned to their criticism. But later, when they went to extremes he lost patience, sat up and started arguing the issue with them. He said: "What do you say! Instead of ruining India the *sannyasins* have kept her alive. Just think for a moment how great were Buddha, Shankara, Chaitanya and others! Think what they did for India!"

'In this way Swamiji proved from history that it is the monks who have kept India alive. He answered these people's arguments so beautifully that they were very much surprised.

The foremost of the critics was so pleased with Swamiji's flawless English and scholarly arguments that he invited him to his place. Of course, Swamiji could not accept his invitation at the time, because he was proceeding to Limbdi as the guest of the Thakur Sahib, who had great regard for him. Once Swamiji stopped in Poona, too.'

After a while a monk asked: 'Maharaj, who gave you the name "Mahapurusha"?'

Swami: 'It was Swamiji who started calling me Mahapurusha.'

Monk: 'Why, was there any special reason for it?'

Swami: 'Yes, there was. In those days when we used to visit the Master I frequently had to go home, because I had been married. It was distasteful to me. Somehow or other I would spend the night at home repeating the name of the Lord. My wife was very unhappy and would cry. I spoke about it to the Master and prayed that my worldly bondage be destroyed. After hearing my story, the Master asked me to perform a certain ritual and said in a tone of assurance: "Have no fear. I am there to protect you. Think of me and perform this ritual. Nothing adverse will happen to you. I am telling you that even if you sleep in the same room with your wife, you will be free from danger. You will see it will rather intensify your spirit of renunciation."

'The Master prescribed the same ritual for Swami Brahmananda. I went through the ritual as instructed and didn't have any trouble. In the course of conversation I once mentioned this incident to Swamiji. He was very much surprised and remarked: "What do you say! It is the characteristic of a Mahapurusha (great soul). You are certainly one." After that he started calling me by this name, and others did the same. Previously, Swamiji used to call me "Tarak-da". One day at Balaram Babu's house, as Swamiji called me Mahapurusha, Swami Premananda's mother remarked: "What did you say? Is not a Mahapurusha one who lives in a tree? (She meant a monkey.) What kind of Mahapurusha is he?" Swamiji explained that I was a genuine Mahapurusha (great soul). It pleased her very much.'

IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL STRENGTH—NEED OF EXERCISE—
CONTINENCE—THE MESSAGE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SWAMIJI—
HOW IT IS SPREADING IN THE WEST.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : June, 1927.

It was afternoon. Swami Shivananda was standing downstairs on the eastern verandah of the Belur Monastery. On the front lawn some young men belonging to a gymnastic club of Calcutta were displaying feats of physical strength and skill. The Swami was watching the performance with great enthusiasm and interest, as were the *sadhus* and devotees of the monastery. The Swami asked a monk to go and get some sweets for the young men from the stores.

Commending one boy's performance of muscle control, he remarked: 'Ah, this boy did very well! Bravo, my child! Go ahead! Practice of continence is essential even for these physical feats. Whatever line of work a person may undertake, the secret of success is continence. It is the lack of continence that accounts for the degeneration of our country.' After entertaining the boys with sweets and *prasada*, the Swami went upstairs.

Highly pleased with the various displays, he said to some monks of the Order who were close by, 'I hope you all take physical exercise.' Two among them replied in the affirmative. The Swami remarked again: 'One must have regular physical exercise every day. Our scriptures say: "A good physique is the first requisite of spirituality." For spiritual advancement one must first make the body strong. "*Mens sana in corpore sano*—a sound mind in a sound body." Don't you see how strong the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were! Swami Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Niranjanananda, Saradananda and others were all very good athletes. Swamiji and Swami Brahmananda had actual training in wrestling from an expert. Among us, only Swamis Yogananda and Premananda were not very strong physically.

'How can one stand the strain of austerities and spiritual disciplines without a good physique? You are young, you should take regular physical exercise. You do not have to be champion athletes, but you should exercise for good health. It is not enough if one becomes a monk. The Upanishads say, "An aspirant should be youthful, energetic, good-natured, studious and efficient." If one has these qualities one may aspire after the knowledge of Brahman. Swamiji used to say, "A feeble-bodied person with no fire and mettle can hardly make any spiritual progress." It is too true.

'When one is sick, so much time is spent in treating and nursing the body! How will there be time for meditation, devotions, study and work? Besides, unless the body is sufficiently strong, it would not be able to stand the reaction of a deep spiritual experience. A mental derangement or a total physical breakdown may result. Further, my children, you monks are the soldiers of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. You have so much to do in this world! Swamiji liked young men with good physiques. He himself, because of his splendid and robust health, was able to stir up the world in a short time.'

After a while Mahapurushji went downstairs. Walking to the south-eastern part of the monastery grounds, he stood at a certain place, affectionately patting the cows that were grazing there. By the orders of the Swami the cows were having a treat of molasses and barley flour. When he saw their joy, his happiness knew no bounds. Later he began strolling on the grounds, accompanied by some devotees.

Addressing them he said: 'All must accept the message of the Master and Swamiji. Swamiji was born to preach the Master's ideas of peace and harmony. You will see how in course of time the Western countries will take to these ideas. This is just the beginning—the prelude. The western people are intellectual and are bound to accept the broad, universal principles of the Master's teachings which alone can establish peace in this world.'

'In different countries many people are being influenced by the ideals as lived by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and are giving them out with a stamp of their own.'

Let them do as they please. Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji never cared for name or fame. They came for the good of the world. So long as that purpose is served and their teachings are spread, they are satisfied. Don't you know it is very hard to digest fame? Those who do not have Self-realization, can hardly rise above the desire for name and fame. How many Avataras are cropping up these days! After acquiring a little devotion or spiritual fervour, people declare themselves to be Avataras in no time! Well, there it ends. Because of egotism and pride they cannot make any progress. On the contrary, they lose what they have acquired.'

14

REFERENCE TO A MUSICAL PRODIGY, A PROOF OF REINCARNATION—INTRODUCTION OF THE WORSHIP OF MAHAVIRA AND SINGING NAMES OF SRI RAMA—THE CASTE SYSTEM.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : June, 1927.

It was five in the afternoon. Mahapurushji was sitting in his room. Some devotees were seated near him and the conversation turned upon a four-year-old child who could play the *tabla* (drum) excellently. The Swami said: 'One cannot help accepting reincarnation after meeting cases like this. A person couldn't have such talents at that early age unless he brought them from past lives. How wonderfully the child plays the *tabla*, in perfect timing and rhythm! Who taught him this music?'

After the vesper the singing of the names of Sri Rama was begun. Many *sadhus* and devotees joined. Swami Shivananda, occupying his usual seat, listened to the singing with rapt attention. Gradually the music came to a close. After partaking of the *prasada*, the devotees came, one by one, to salute the Swami before going home.

Addressing them, the Swami said: 'Swami Brahmananda first heard the singing of the names of Sri Rama in Southern India. He enjoyed it very much and introduced it here at the Belur Monastery. Now every fortnight, on the eleventh day

of the dark as well as the bright phase of the moon, we have this singing. In no time this singing of the names of Sri Rama has spread all over the country, bringing peace and joy to so many! It was the earnest desire of Swamiji to see the worship of Mahavira (the worship of Mahavira, the greatest devotee of Sri Rama, is a special feature of this singing) established in every Indian home. Mahavira was a perfect example of absolute continence. With his worship the sleeping energies of the nation will wake up!

Most of the devotees departed. Swami Shivananda was preparing to have his supper, when a devotee brought up the question of caste restrictions, saying, 'Maharaj, many criticize Swami Vivekananda for not observing caste rules at the feasts held at the monastery in connection with the Master's birthday; they charge that he thus ran counter to the caste system.'

The Swami replied: 'See how narrow-minded they are! Here at the time of the birthday celebrations we engage brahmin cooks to do the cooking and the food is offered to the Lord. The huge quantities of *khichudi*, vegetables, and so on, cooked for the feasts, are first offered to the Lord and then served to the people. Those who eat here together, do so of their own free will. We never force them to eat together. If people object to eating food cooked by brahmins on the banks of the Ganga and offered to the Lord, what can we do?

'If I were to be frank, I could say much. Where is caste purity in this country? It is declared that if a person serves a Shudra for twelve years, he is degraded and becomes a Shudra. Why twelve years? We know from experience that people have been slaves to the Mlechchhas for twenty-four years—and yet they brag about caste purity! They themselves would not do anything—simply this chatter about caste! Where are the practices of rituals, austerities, charity, meditation and renunciation? They have become things of the past. That is why Swamiji, in a tone of disgust, said, "Your religion has got into your 'cooking pots and pans—you who are afraid of being defiled by touch.'"

'DO NOT FORGET GOD'—SPELL OF MAYA—RESIGNATION AND PRAYERFULNESS.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : July 10, 1927.

It was Sunday. Among the many devotees present in Swami Shivananda's room was a group from Barisal, seeking spiritual instruction. An elderly gentleman, as representative of the group, said: 'Maharaj, please give us some advice. Living in the world and having many ties, we are scorched day and night. Please bless us that we may find peace in life.'

Seeing the earnestness of the man, Mahapurushji answered with great compassion: 'What advice shall I give you? We have only one piece of advice—do not forget God. This is the essence of all teachings. We ourselves try our best to practise this in life and advise those who seek our counsel to do the same. You are in the world, but what does it matter? Tell me if anyone is out of the world! But see that you do not forget God. Perform your duties, but at the end of the day do not fail to call on God with great yearning at least once. Duties and responsibilities there are, of course. I do not ask you to neglect them; but in the midst of everything think of the Lord, pray to Him, repeat His name and do similar spiritual practices.

'In the Vaishnava literature there is this advice, "Repeat the Lord's name with your lips as you perform your work with your hands." It is indeed an excellent advice. Just as every work has its purpose and time, you should also have an appointed time for calling on God. At that time you should think of God and commune with Him even though you may have a hundred and one things to attend to. He, the Lord, dwells in every heart and judges a person by what he has in his heart. Whenever you call on Him, even though for a short while, do so whole-heartedly. This is a great secret. It is the only way to enjoy peace in the world. The moment one forgets this, one is in trouble.'

A woman devotee: 'Maharaj, why do we forget God? What is it that drives us away from Him?'

Swami: 'You ask me why you forget Him, my daughter? This is what is called Maya. Under the spell of Maya a person forgets God and remains attached to sense objects which are impermanent. Do you love God as much as material things? Must I tell you that the world as well as this body of yours and the relatives to whom you are so inordinately attached are short-lived? You see before your eyes that things existing today do not exist tomorrow. What is here this moment ceases to be the next moment. A person born today may die tomorrow. Sorrow comes soon after happiness, yet people find joy and are deeply engrossed in this world!'

Woman devotee: 'Maharaj, how shall we be saved? How shall we be free from Maya? Please do bless us.'

Swami: 'One cannot realize the unreality of the world without the grace of the Lord. There is no way to lift the veil of Maya other than self-surrender to God. My daughter, the Lord says in the *Gita* (VII. 14):

"Verily this divine illusion of Mine, composed of the *gunas*, is difficult to surmount. Those who take refuge in Me alone cross over this illusion."

'There is no other way than to call on the Lord wholeheartedly. You are in the world and have many things to attend to. I realize that you do not find enough time for spiritual practice. Resign yourself and cry to Him. Pray to Him sincerely, "O Lord, be gracious unto us!" Crying will wash away the impurities of the mind, and He will reveal Himself to you with the brilliance of a million suns. Then you will realize that He, the Lord, is within you. Do cry to Him and exercise discrimination between the Real and the unreal. God only is real; the world with its birth and death, pleasure and pain, is false. Such discrimination accompanied by prayer will certainly earn for you His grace. You will be disgusted with the world and your mind will turn towards God.'

Woman devotee: 'Please bless us that we may cross over the ocean of relative existence.'

Swami: 'Other than blessings we have nothing to offer.'

That people may lift the veil of Maya and transcend the round of birth and death, is what we sincerely wish. This is our only prayer. I pray whole-heartedly to God that you grow in love and devotion to Him. What more can I say, my daughter?'

The devotees saluted the Swami with great reverence and left the monastery with hearts full of peace. After a while a monk attendant read out to the Swami the letters that had arrived by mail. One devotee expressed sorrow that he had no opportunity to do personal service to the Swami. In reply Mahapurushji said: 'Write to the devotee, conveying my sincere blessings, and tell him there is very little service he could do. Through the grace of the Lord I seem to need nothing. I would be supremely happy if he would pray to God and think about Him. That alone will gladden my heart!'

16

SWAMI SARADANANDA'S LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH—HIS UNIQUE LIFE—ASHWINI KUMAR DUTTA OF BARISAL—SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S METHOD OF INITIATION—HARMONY OF RELIGIONS AS TAUGHT BY THE MASTER—HOW HE IS BEING ACCEPTED BY MANY AS A DIVINE INCARNATION—REFERENCE TO SOME OF HIS MOHAMMEDAN DEVOTEES.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : September 3, 1927.

It was only a few days ago that Swami Saradananda, who had been like a mother to the Order, passed away and was united with the Master. The *sadhus* and devotees were all overwhelmed with grief at his death. Swami Shivananda was especially so.

Mahapurushji became unusually serious when he received the news of Swami Saradananda's apoplexy. He had great anxiety written on his face. He was restless all the time, and constantly made inquiries about Swami Saradananda's illness. If anyone would approach him for initiation or in connection with other matters he would quietly say, 'Not now—I am not in a good mood because of Swami Saradananda's illness.' When

he would speak he would do so mostly about Swami Saradananda.

Shortly before the cremation of Swami Saradananda's body, Mahapurushji once softly said: 'Swami Saradananda was fond of bathing in the Ganga. Bathe his body in the waters of the Ganga.'

It was Saturday. In the afternoon a crowd of devotees assembled in Swami Shivananda's room. Although the Swami was grief-stricken, he made inquiries about the well-being of everyone. Very soon the conversation turned upon Swami Saradananda. Mahapurushji said: 'Alas, Swami Saradananda had visited the monastery at Belur about a week before he became ill on Saturday. There was a meeting of the Governing Body of the Mission the day he visited the monastery. He said to me: "See, my body is getting worse. I am afraid it will not last many days." I never thought then he would pass away so soon.

'He was indeed a blessed soul. The Holy Mother was unusually gracious to him. That is why he had such a glorious death. Just as throughout his life he did good to many—moulding the lives of some and bringing the light of the Spirit to others—so during the last few days of his illness he fulfilled the desires of many devotees by giving them an opportunity to serve him. Ordinarily he would not allow anyone to do any personal service for him, but think what service the boys rendered him when he was sick! They would not attain as much benefit by twelve years' spiritual discipline, as they did by this service. He remained in that state only to fulfil the desires of the devotees to serve him. How many from how many places came to see him and had the opportunity of serving him! He did not leave anyone disappointed.

'He was a great *yogi*. Giving up the body in *samadhi*, he went straight to the Master and the Holy Mother. It does not at all matter in what way the body dies. The scriptures say it does not in any way affect the inner consciousness of a knower of Brahman, even if he passes out of the body in coma or swoon, or in any other way. After the first attack of apoplexy he seemed for some days to have no external consciousness, but inwardly he was fully conscious. I went to see him only once.

I didn't go again because I couldn't stand the sight of his sickness.

'When Swami Akhandananda addressed him, saying, "Brother, Brother!" he opened his eyes and then again closed them. When Dr. Ghosh called him by name he looked at him. Dr. Ghosh said, "Sarat (Swami Saradananda), would you drink some tea?" He expressed his unwillingness by shaking his head. When asked if he would have *charanamrita* (holy water), he showed consent by nodding his head. The holy water was given to him and he drank it.'

After a brief silence Mahapurushji continued: 'During the last few years of his life Swami Saradananda especially practised intensive meditation and spiritual discipline. After bathing in the Ganga he would sit for meditation and not move from his seat until one or one-thirty in the afternoon. He would have an interval during which he would drink a cup of tea, sitting right there on his meditation seat.

'He was unusually kind to the devotees. To women devotees especially he was a haven of peace. A little after four in the afternoon they would start coming and he would give them advice untiringly until late in the evening. Later there would be a crowd of men devotees who would stay until late at night. The door of his compassionate heart was ever open, Ah, what a wonderful life he lived—serene, peaceful, patient and profound! We never saw Swami Saradananda lose his temper. He had only love and compassion for all. Now that he is united with the Master and the Holy Mother he is enjoying supreme blessedness and from that realm is constantly helping the devotees.

'He and others like him were in Sri Ramakrishna always, but for some time, for the purpose of doing good to the world, they embodied themselves and lived here on this earth as men. As a matter of fact, they do not exist apart from the Master. Those who think about them are actually thinking about the Master himself. Many did not have the privilege of seeing Sri Ramakrishna. Perhaps they have seen Swamiji, Swami Brahmananda and Swamis Premananda, Turiyananda or Saradananda. Perhaps they have seen some one of the inner circle of the Master's disciples and are devoted to them. This love and devotion will surely reach the Master.'

It was about eight o'clock at night. Some devotees came to Swami Shivananda's room, and one of them was from Barisal. As the conversation turned on Ashwini Babu of Barisal, the Swami said, 'Ashwini Babu was a man of great influence in Barisal—your part of the country. We saw his father Braja Mohan Dutta visit the Master. He was a sub-judge. He came to the Master and begged for his blessings when he was planning to found a college. He was a fine man.'

A devotee: 'Maharaj, did the Master give his blessings in secular affairs like this?'

Swami: 'Of course he did. He was a man of great compassion. He would certainly give his blessings to anyone who sought them earnestly for a noble undertaking.'

Devotee: 'Did the Master initiate people?'

Swami: 'Yes, of course he did, but in rare cases. However, his initiation was not of the ordinary type which consists in just whispering the *mantra* in the disciple's ear. He would rouse the spiritual consciousness of a disciple by a touch or by writing the sacred *mantra* on his tongue, or perhaps he would transform the disciple's mind by mere will. Being a world teacher his ways of initiation were unusual. "A world teacher gives the *mantra* in one's heart and an ordinary teacher gives the *mantra* in one's ear." Sri Ramakrishna would quicken the spiritual impulse and awaken the Divinity within by prescribing different forms of spiritual disciplines to different aspirants. He was not one-sided. Whatever one's path might be, he would receive help from the Master.

'With the passing of days we realize why the Master practised various forms of spiritual discipline. All religions are true and through all of them people can realize God, the embodiment of Truth. He did not practise different religions in order just to discover and realize the harmony of religions. His spiritual practice had a deeper meaning. That is why men belonging to different sects of Hinduism have made him their ideal. He is also the ideal of many Christians. They worship him as Jesus and you must remember this was not the result of somebody's preaching. Tell me who can preach Sri Ramakrishna? Who can reveal the one who is Truth itself? The Lord says in the *Gita* (xv. 6), "Him the sun cannot reveal, nor the moon, nor the fire."

'You would be surprised to hear that many Mohammedan men and women in these days worship him as Mohammed, the messenger of God. One year I visited the Nilgiri hills. The devotees there arranged for my residence in a bungalow at Koonoor. Learning that I was there, a Mohammedan doctor and his family came all the way from Bombay to see me. After inquiry I found that he was a famous physician of Bombay who had been educated in England and had a very good practice. He was accompanied by his wife and also two sons, who were very handsome in appearance.

'In the course of conversation the doctor said to me, "We have come to see you, but my wife is especially eager to speak to you." Saying this, he moved to the adjoining room. His wife saluted me with great devotion and disclosed many intimate things relative to her spiritual life. Since childhood she has been a devotee of Krishna. She worships Krishna as a child and occasionally has visions of him. After reading the Master's life and teachings she has become very much devoted to him. It is her conviction that her Chosen Deity Krishna has been born again as Sri Ramakrishna.

'I noticed that she had profound love and devotion for the Master. She was quite intensive in her spiritual practices and the Master had blessed her in many ways. When taking leave of me, she knelt down and bowed to me, saying, "Please bless me by touching my head with your hand. You had the blessed privilege of associating with Sri Ramakrishna and you were blessed by him. Please touch my head with the hand that once touched Sri Ramakrishna!" And how she wept! I felt in my heart again and again: "Glory be unto the Lord! Blessed is Thy power! Who will understand Thee?" The hymn describing the greatness of Shiva came to my mind.

O Lord, I do not know Thy nature nor what Thou art.

Whatever Thou art, Mahadeva (Great God), my salutations to Thee again and again.

'Actually, we have to say the same thing regarding the Master. Who will understand him? I have met several other Mohammedan devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. One I met in Kaddpa—he is highly esteemed and has received the title Khan Bahadur from the British Government. He belongs to the

Sufi sect of Islam, but is very devoted to the Master. In Kaddpa is a little ashrama dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna. The Khan Bahadur, the local collector (also a Mohammedan) and several others were responsible for the founding of this ashrama. We stayed there for a few days. Almost every morning and evening I would find the Khan Bahadur seated in a corner of the shrine in deep humility, intently looking at the picture of the Master on the altar. He is convinced that the prophet Mohammed was born as Sri Ramakrishna for the good of the world. It is beyond our comprehension how the Master is blessing people in different ways.'

A devotee: 'Maharaj, we are attached to the world. We can hardly think about him, let alone do spiritual practice. What will happen to us?'

Swami: 'My child, if you cannot perform spiritual practice, you can at least think of him and sing his glory. The world has not bound you day and night. If you cannot do even this much, how can you expect any result? In any event, one should feel drawn towards God; somehow or other one should be devoted to Him. Without some longing for God spiritual progress is impossible. As the Master used to say, "So long as the child is busy with his lollipop, he is forgetful of his mother and she attends to her duties; but the moment the child tires of the lollipop, throws it away and begins crying for the mother, she drops everything, runs to the child and takes him in her arms." So long as you too remain attached to the lollipop of this world, you will not see Him. It will be most unfortunate if you do not avail yourself of the blessed privilege of being born a human being. In order to bring home this idea, the Master would often sing this song:

O my mind, you do not know cultivation.
The field of the human mind remains untilled.
If only cultivated, it would have yielded a golden harvest.

'In the song is this line:

A harvest that will not be forfeited today or even a century
hence—

O my mind, gather the harvest to your heart's content,
by all means!'

Devotee: 'We hardly comprehend the Master; rather, we like association with you. If we have not met you for some time, we feel a yearning; that is why we come. We often think about you and long to see you. That is as much as we can do.'

Swami: 'We do not know anything other than the Master. It is he who abides within and outside. He is all in all. Remember this, that we are his children, sheltered at his feet. By thinking about us you will be thinking of the Master.'

17

DOL PURNIMA FESTIVAL AT THE MONASTERY—RAMLAL DADA'S PRESENCE—SRI RAMAKRISHNA IS GOD HIMSELF—SWAMIJI'S HYMN TO SRI RAMAKRISHNA.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : March 6, 1928.

It was the day of Dol Purnima (an ancient spring festival commemorating the fertility of the soil, but later associated with an episode of Sri Krishna's life—celebrated by worship and merry-making and popularly known as the Holi festival). Since early morning an intensive *kirtana* had been in progress. The *sadhus* and *brahmacharins* of the Belur Monastery as well as the devotees were beside themselves with joy, participating in the Holi festival. While devotional music was going on, Ramlal Dada, the Master's nephew, arrived from Dakshineswar. Spiritual fervour and enthusiasm waxed a hundredfold because of his arrival. He too joined in the *kirtana*. Dressed in a sari (impersonating a female part), he started dancing. The song said:

We have discovered Thee in the seclusion of the grove of
Nidhuvana!

We shall have the sport of Holi with Thee, Shyama
(Krishna)!

All encircled Ramlal Dada and began dancing. After a while Ramlal Dada, still dressed in the sari, went upstairs to see Mahapurushji.

In the afternoon a devotee took his little son to Maha-

purushji, saying, 'Maharaj, please bless the child so that he may become good and upright.'

Swami: 'You yourself should first try to be good and upright. Then the child will be good and upright.'

It was about dusk. Mahapurushji was strolling on the balcony of the monastery building. Preparations were being made for vespers when Ramlal Dada came to the balcony. Seeing him, Mahapurushji smiled and said: 'Hello, Dada, you did splendidly in the morning. I could hardly recognize you at first. I was wondering who this woman might be. Later I discovered that it was you, Ramlal Dada!'

Both had a good laugh. Ramlal Dada remarked, 'I understand that many had initiation to-day.'

Swami: 'Yes, Dada.'

Dada: 'It must be quite strenuous to remain seated in one position for such a long time.'

Swami: 'No strain to speak of. On the contrary, it gives me joy—great joy—to tell people of the Lord. So many come here with such yearning for spiritual instruction! I am overjoyed to see the earnestness and sincere longing of these people. It is the Master who draws them here. So long as this body lasts I shall certainly tell people of God and give them His holy name. That is why I am spared by the Master.'

Dada: 'You are so compassionate! That is why you do this at such a sacrifice.'

For a while both kept silent. Then Mahapurushji in a tone of seriousness said softly: 'Yes, Dada. As the days pass, I am becoming more and more convinced that Sri Ramakrishna is God Himself. At first we used to visit him frequently, being attracted by his love. Now we realize to our amazement that although he looked and behaved like an ordinary man, he is of cosmic proportions. How many universes are within him.'

Dada: 'I, too, at first had a wrong notion of him. But once in a while, like a flash of lightning, I would glimpse his greatness; then the next moment my mind would be veiled by doubts and misgivings. One day I asked the Master, "Why does it happen that way?" He replied, "Otherwise, how would works of service (meaning his personal service) and worship at

the temple in Dakshineswar go on? And who would look after your relatives?"'

Swami: 'Yes, yes! Otherwise the *lila* (sport) of the Lord cannot go on.'

* Dada: 'Now the number of his devotees has grown. During the last few years his ideas have spread so much! How many people from distant countries, speaking strange languages, come and worship the grounds of the Panchavati grove! They pick up some sacred dust of the place or leaves from the banyan or bael tree, and carry them home!'

The vespers began. The *sadhus* and devotees started singing the vesper hymn composed by Swamiji, which is as follows:

Breaker of this world's chain,
 We adore Thee, whom all men love;
 Spotless, taking man's form,
 O Purifier, Thou art
 Above the *gunas* three,
 Knowledge Divine, not flesh:
 Thou whom the Cosmos wears,
 A diamond, at its heart.

Let us look deep in Thine eyes—
 They are bright with the wisdom of God,
 That can wake us from Maya's spell.
 Let us hold fast to Thy feet
 Treading the waves of the world
 To safety. O drunk with love,
 God-drunken Lover, in Thee
 All paths of all *yogas* meet.

Lord of the worlds, Thou art ours,
 Who wert born a child of our time,
 Easy of access to me.
 O Merciful, if we take
 Any hold upon God in our prayer,
 It is by Thy grace alone,
 Since all Thine austerities
 Were practised for our sake.

How great was Thy sacrifice:
 Freely choosing Thy birth
 In this prison, our Iron Age,
 To unchain us and set us free!
 Perfect, whom lust could not taint
 Nor passion nor gold draw near;
 O Master of all who renounce,
 Fill our hearts full of love for Thee.

Thou hast finished with fear and with doubt,
 Standing firm in the vision of God:
 Refuge to all who have cast
 Fame, fortune and friends away.
 Without question, Thou shelterest us,
 And the World's great sea in its wrath
 Seems shrunk to the puddle that fills
 A hoof-print in the clay.

Speech cannot hold Thee, nor mind,
 Yet without Thee we think not, nor speak.
 Love, who art partial to none,
 We are equal before Thy sight.
 Taker-away of our pain,
 We salute Thee, though we are blind;
 Come to the heart's dark cave
 And illumine, Thou Light of the light!

Dada: 'I like this hymn very much. Whenever I hear it I feel the Master standing, absorbed in *samadhi*, and his devotees surrounding him, chanting it. Well, Maharaj, I will now go to the shrine.'

After Ramlal Dada left, Swami Shivananda said: 'In the early days of the monastery a different hymn, as for instance, "Om, Glory be unto Shiva! Worship Shiva! . . ." used to be chanted at the time of vespers. Then Swamiji composed this hymn to Sri Ramakrishna and put it to music, introducing it at the monastery. He himself would play the *pakhoaj* (drum) and lead the singing. That was a wonderful sight! He was so divinely handsome and would put so much spiritual fervour into his singing!'

MAHAPURUSHJI'S ILL HEALTH—'I AM NOT THE BODY.'

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: April, 1928.

Swami Shivananda had not been very well since his return from Varanasi. Often he felt dizzy. He could not walk much, and when he tried to walk, his feet trembled. If anyone asked about his health, he would say: "The body is not in good condition: there is always some complaint or other. All this indicates a summons for the final departure. I am ever ready to be gathered into the Mother's lap. By the grace of the Master I am wholly convinced I am not the body. He has graciously given me that knowledge to the fullest extent."

**RELIGION IS REALIZATION—INTELLECT CANNOT REACH THE SELF
—THE NASADIYA SUKTA OF THE RIG-VEDA.**

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: July 7, 1928.

Swami Shivananda was seated in his room talking with a monk of the Order. Several *sadhus* and *brahmacharins* were also present. In the course of conversation the monk said: "Emotion is all in all in spiritual life. Reason shows merely a small portion of the way. Swami Turiyananda used to say that emotion draws one to spiritual pursuit, that intellect helps only a little. One cannot comprehend religion through reasoning and intellect alone."

Swami: "Religion is, as Swamiji said, a matter of realization and experience. Before realization the intellect rules. This the Master explained in his simple way, "The vessel makes a gurgling sound when being filled with water, but once full, it is completely quiet." What an apt illustration! Even his simplest utterances had such a deep meaning! The Upanishads also say: "This Self is not to be realized by scholarship, reason-

ing or an extensive study of the scriptures." It is too true. How can man understand the Self by his limited intellect? It is impossible.

'The Master used to sing: "Who knows what the Mother is? Even the six systems of philosophy have not been able to fathom Her."'

Saying this, Mahapurushji sang the entire song with great fervour. He repeated one line again and again: 'Only Mahakala (the Absolute) and no one else knows all about the Mother.' After a while, like one aroused from sleep, the Swami said: 'How can man understand the Absolute through the intellect? Comprehension is possible only if the Mother is gracious enough to lift the veil. In the *Nasadiya-sukta* of the *Rig-Veda* there is a beautiful description of the Absolute in its undifferentiated state.' With these words Mahapurushji started chanting the *Nasadiya-sukta*:

Nor Aught nor Nought existed; yon bright sky
Was not, nor heaven's broad woof outstretched above.
What covered all? What sheltered? What concealed?
Was it the water's fathomless abyss?

'Ah, how profound it is! There on that table you will find a copy of this hymn, which I often read. It describes the state of deep meditation. Would you please read the rest of it?'

The monk read the hymn, and Swami Shivananda joined in the reading.

There was not death—yet was there naught immortal,
There was no confine betwixt day and night;
The only One breathed breathless by Itself,
Other than It there nothing since has been.
Darkness there was, and all at first was veiled
In gloom profound—an ocean without light—
The germ that still lay covered in the husk
Burst forth, one nature, from the fervent heat.
Then first came love upon it, the new spring
Of mind—yea, poets in their hearts discerned,
Pondering, this bond between created things *

And uncreated. Comes this spark from earth
 Piercing and all-pervading, or from heaven?
 Then seeds were sown, and mighty powers arose—
 Nature below, and power and will above—
 Who knows the secret? Who proclaimed it here?
 Whence, whence this manifold creation sprang?
 He from whom all this great creation came,
 Whether His will created or was mute,
 The Most High Seer that is in highest heaven,
 He knows it—or perchance even He knows not.

(Max Müller's translation)

The hymn filled everyone's heart with profound feeling. A Bengali translation of it was then read, as requested by the Swami, after which he said: 'You see here a description of some of the loftiest states of realization that are reached by yogis in the course of deep meditation. A level of consciousness beyond the reach of ordinary speech and mind, is mentioned here. Swamiji was fond of the *Nasadiya-sukta* and would chant it so rhythmically, in the right Vedic metre, that one would feel as if a Vedic seer were repeating his own spiritual experience.

Darkness there was, and all at first was veiled
 In gloom profound—an ocean without light . . .

Swamiji would repeat this portion of the hymn and say that nowhere in any language would you come across such poetic beauty. In one of his writings he brought out this idea nicely.'

Monk: 'Yes, Maharaj. In *Vīravānī* (a compilation of Swami Vivekananda's poems) there is the line: "At first in darkness hidden darkness lay . . ."

Swami: 'Yes, yes, how well expressed! In this poem is a description of the involution of the cosmos. Everything emerged gradually from that unmanifest state.'

**MEDITATION AND PRAYER ESSENTIAL IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN
THE RIGHT SPIRIT IN HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES.**

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : December 7, 1928.

At 5.30 in the afternoon Swami Shivananda was seated on the eastern verandah of the main building of the Belur Monastery. It was winter and the Swami had a light-weight flannel jacket on. Because of high blood pressure he could not stand heavy clothes. At night he used a light-weight bed-cover.

Some young devotees, all of them teachers in a school, had arrived. After saluting the Swami, they took seats. The Swami inquired about their health and asked several questions concerning their school. How was instruction carried on? Were there arrangements for sports and games? For an interval he sat silent, seeming to be in an indrawn mood. Sometimes he gazed at the river Ganga and sometimes his eyes were half closed in meditation. Then he said softly, 'Well, do you practise meditation for a while every day?'

A devotee: 'Yes, I do.'

Swami: 'At what time?'

Devotee: 'In the afternoon following school work I take a little rest and then go to the shrine room and meditate. When there is not much to do in the morning, I meditate then also. If I cannot make time for meditation in the morning, I at least salute the Lord, before going to school.'

Swami: 'Salute the Lord, of course ; but that is not enough. You should also try to meditate a little. Night is the ideal time for meditation. When you meditate, though for a short time, try to detach yourself completely from your work. Shaking off all worries and withdrawing yourself from everything, seek to be established in your own Self. You should practise this at least once a day, even if only for a short while. Naturally you have your duties and responsibilities in the world, your pains and pleasures there; but all these are transient. This world is unreal: there can be nothing more certain than that.

Though the work you are carrying on is no doubt good, for a while you will have to abstract your mind from even this and offer it at the lotus feet of the Lord, at the same time being absorbed in the thought of Him, who is the Supreme Father, the embodiment of Truth and Goodness. The Lord will then occupy your whole heart and there will be no thought of this world, no thought even of your individuality. Pray to God thus: "O Lord, give me faith and devotion, knowledge and discrimination. See that I do not get entangled in the snares of the world-bewitching Maya." When you pray, pray with all your heart and soul. When you meditate, try to be one with God, to have the consciousness of unity and identity. One should by all means practise like this.

'My children, I repeat: At the end of the day, even if for a short while, lay aside everything and commune with God. In the beginning you may have some difficulty in practising meditation in this way, but there is no reason to stop trying. Pray to Him, and He will give you peace. Out of His compassion He will strengthen your heart and make you one with Him. With the practice of meditation peace of mind will grow, and then alone will you be in a position to undertake humanitarian activities in the right spirit. Know for certain that this world and all living beings are His. He is the creator, you are His servants. You are blessed to the extent that He, in His grace, allows you to serve His creatures. Meditation on God will obliterate the ego, and He will then be all in all. Only when your mind reaches this state, will you be able to do genuine philanthropic work.'

FORMAL VOWS OF MONASTICISM ARE EASY—BUT KNOWLEDGE AND DEVOTION ARE WHAT COUNT.

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: March 16, 1929.

Only three days ago the worship connected with the birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was performed with great solemnity and splendour at the Belur Monastery. On that occasion as many as seventeen *brahmacharins* took the vow of monasticism and twenty-one young men were initiated into *brahmacharya*. Swami Shivananda was present when the *homa* (fire-ritual) took place. That morning he had a chill and developed a bad cold, but today he felt somewhat better.

Although physically he was not well, he was in a cheerful mood this morning, and many things were discussed. Suddenly, addressing a newly initiated monk, he smilingly asked, 'What name did you receive?' Another monk gave the name of the newly initiated one, after which the Swami said in a solemn tone:

'My child, the next thing that happens in your life must come through the grace of God. It is easy to take the vow of monasticism, but a person cannot have supreme devotion and knowledge without God's grace. The Lord is sure to grant the desire of one who sincerely yearns for devotion and knowledge. What shall it profit a man to have the ochre cloth if he does not possess knowledge and devotion? I know from my experience in northern India—for instance in Varanasi, Hardwar and other such places—where there are many monasteries and people approach the abbots with presents of flour, cloth, money or similar things, pleading for the *viraja homa* (the fire-ritual performed in connection with monastic vows). They do not have even the education to pronounce the words *viraja homa* correctly. They say 'Vija Homa.' The abbots go through the ceremony, and, lo and behold, they become monks! From that time they subsist on alms and often start some business of their own. Though there are thousands of such *sannyasins*, how many are there, my child, who crave

genuine spiritual emancipation? If one would have as much longing for the realization of God as for the monastic vows, the fire-ritual, and so on, one would be immensely blessed. Most fortunate is he who renounces everything for the sake of God-realization! The number of such seekers is very small. They do not pay much attention to external dress and the like. My child, whether your dress is white or ochre, direct your attention to the essential thing in life—the realization of God.'

On the previous day some of the newly initiated *sannyasins* had gone out with their begging bowls for *madhukari*. (This is the custom of begging a little food from many houses until a full meal is obtained, even as the bee collects honey from many flowers). In that regard Mahapurushji remarked, 'It is not the general custom to practise *madhukari* in this part of the country.'

After remaining silent for a while, the Swami said with great fervour: 'O Lord, all these seekers have come to Thy feet. Give them faith and devotion! Fill them!'

22

MAHAPURUSHJI'S ILL HEALTH—THE BODY IS SUBJECT TO SIX-FOLD CHANGE, BUT THE SELF IS ETERNAL.

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Sunday, March 17, 1929.

It was the grand public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday at the Belur Monastery. Swami Shivananda had not been very well, as he had a bad cold. The previous night he slept fairly well. Many devotees, wishing to see the Swami started coming in quite early in the morning, because it would not be very convenient for them to see him later in the day. An elderly devotee saluted the Swami and made inquiries about his health. The Swami, in a cheerful mood, said: 'The body is not at all well.'

Devotee: 'What is the matter, Maharaj? Didn't you sleep well last night?'

Swami: 'Yes, I slept fairly well, but you know this body is old. That is why I always have some complaint or other.'

The body is subject to sixfold change (birth, existence, growth, transformation, decay and death). That is the nature of the body. Now it is proceeding towards the last change, death. Of course, these changes pertain to the body only; the self which dwells within remains eternally the same. These changes do not affect it at all. The Self which dwells within the body is all right. The body cannot be the Self. The Master out of compassion has given me that knowledge. Now it does not matter whether the body lives or goes.' After keeping his eyes closed for a while, the Swami burst out laughing and said: 'Yes, the Master has given me full knowledge within. Now if he wishes, the body will stay; otherwise it will go. Let his will be done! This body has lived many years, hasn't it?'

23

'BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN ME BUT HAVE FAITH IN ME.'

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Wednesday, March 20, 1929.

In the morning a monk from Madras came and saluted Swami Shivananda at the Belur Math. The Swami said: "'Blessed are those who have not seen Me but have faith in Me.'" You are really blessed; though you have not seen the Master, still you have faith in him.' In the afternoon a devotee saluted Mahapurushji and with folded hands said: 'Please bless me.' The Swami replied: 'Of course I bless you. We have blessings only—no curses. We have nothing but blessings, my child.'

WHY GOD INCARNATES HIMSELF AS MAN.

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Tuesday, March 26, 1929.

It was past five in the afternoon. Feeling uncomfortably hot in the room, Mahapurushji came out and occupied an easy chair on the eastern verandah of the monastery. He was resting in a half-reclining position. Swami Abhedananda, who happened to be at the monastery that day, was accompanied by an attendant monk. When the attendant had saluted Mahapurushji, he stood aside and Mahapurushji started talking with him about Abhedananda. After a while the attendant asked, 'Don't you feel a little better these days, Maharaj?' Mahapurushji smiled and said: 'No, this old body will hardly get well. It does not matter. Let the body run its course as the Master wills it.'

Attendant: 'Gradually, one by one, almost all of the direct disciples have passed away. Now you and a few others are all that remain. Your body is so feeble. When you go, who knows when you will be back again? Of course, you wouldn't return unless the Master does.'

Swami: 'Who can be sure of it, my boy? The Master has so many other devotees, who knows that he will bring us with him?'

Attendant: 'You belong to the inner circle of the Master's direct disciples. Of course, you would come with him when he incarnates again.'

Swami: 'Who can tell? These individualities are impermanent. This world is also impermanent, though as an endless series it may appear eternal. God alone is permanent. He exists eternally and from age to age embodies Himself as man for the good of the world. That is because of His pure compassion. He is self-sufficient, pure, intelligent and free by nature. He does not have any purpose to serve in this world. Being complete in Himself, He has nothing to attain or not to attain. When the world becomes burdened and there is prevalence of irreligion, the all-merciful Lord by His own free

will incarnates Himself as man to save the fallen and ameliorate the lot of the world. The Lord says in the *Gita* (III. 22):

I have, O son of Pritha, no duty, nothing that
I have not gained, and nothing that I have to gain,
In 'the three worlds; yet, I continue in action.

'Why does He engage Himself in activity? If He is inactive, men also will be the same. The result will be confusion and indiscriminate mingling of castes, which in turn will lead to evils of all kinds and final destruction. Though the Lord knows that the world is unreal, He undergoes all this suffering simply for the good of the world. For illustration, look at the Master's life. He used to behave in every way like an ordinary man, yet within his small frame sported the infinite Lord. Externally he had the form of a man, but within was the all-pervasive God.'

25

BLESSED PRIVILEGE OF SERVING A DIRECT DISCIPLE OF THE MASTER—'HE WHO WAS RAMA AND KRISHNA IS RAMAKRISHNA IN THIS AGE.'

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Wednesday, March 27, 1929.

Swami Shivananda had not been very well. Addressing an attendant, he said: 'I have all kinds of complications now. Which shall I attend to? If I attend to one, another develops. If I try to remedy my cold, it affects my nerves. The body should not stay like this very long; and I am putting all of you to so much trouble.'

Attendant: 'No, Maharaj, you are surely no trouble to us. You are our father, mother—everything. Now that your body is old, should we not serve you? It is a great blessing that we have the privilege of serving you a little.'

Swami: 'I know very well you serve me out of love. But I feel I shouldn't drag on like this, always ailing. Everything

depends on the will of the Master. His will be done under all conditions.'

Attendant: 'Maharaj, we did not see the Master. You are here and it brings us great joy. You are a direct disciple of the Master. Is it a small privilege that we can be with you? Because of your presence, all of us—the *sadhus*, *sannyasins* and devotees—are very happy. When I think how many people from distant places spend so much money and travel all the way here to see you only once, I realize how fortunate we are to be able to stay with you all the time.'

Swami: 'The Master is specially merciful to you. That is why he is making you serve his devotee (meaning himself). You are blessed; I too am blessed because I am with you. Who knows where I would have been, otherwise! Of course, the Master is protecting us all the time. Shortly before his death Swami Brahmananda said to his attendants: "You have served me: what shall I say? May you all have the knowledge of Brahman!" I too say: My children, may you all have the knowledge of Brahman! May you grow in devotion and faith, and may you live in bliss!'

Swami Shivananda, because of his ill health, could not always go to the chapel when he initiated people. Usually he initiated them right in his room, seated on his cot. In the afternoon, at about 4.30, a devotee from Madras saluted the Swami and expressed the desire for initiation. The Swami replied: 'Yes, you will surely have your initiation tomorrow. Is that all right?'

Devotee: 'As you wish, Maharaj.'

Swami: 'I could initiate you even now. I can give the name of the Lord whenever I wish. I do not have to consider whether the time is auspicious or inauspicious. Our Master is the protector and redeemer of the lowly. He was born as man to redeem the lowly. We are his servants—his children. So long as the body lasts we shall surely give people his blessed name with its power to save. Our initiation is not like that of so-called priests. We do not know anything other than the name of the Master. We know that He who was Rama and Krishna is Ramakrishna in this age. Our Master is the veritable embodiment of all ideals and of all divine manifestations!'

NARAYANA SHOULD BE SERVED FIRST—MADHUKARI—THE ONE ABIDING REALITY IS GOD—HOW A HOUSEHOLDER SHOULD LIVE.

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Monday, April 8, 1929.

It was about 11.30 in the morning. Swami Shivananda had finished his bath and was returning from the bathroom. Kedar Baba (Swami Achalananda¹) was waiting to salute him, and did so when he had returned to his room. Mahapurushji smiled and said: 'Glory be to Kedar Baba! Glory be to Swami Achalananda!' The next moment he became serious and said: 'Glory be to the Lord! Glory be to our Master—the refuge of the lowly!' With these words on his lips, he sat down to eat. Later he said: 'O Lord, give us pure devotion; not sham devotion: what shall we do with that? Infinitely gracious, is He! Whatever a person desires, He grants him.'

Addressing Kedar Baba, the Swami said: 'Let me offer the food to Narayana (God). Here is *prasada* for you. You are Narayana; you should be waited upon first.' As he said it, he took some of the nicest preparations from his plate and gave them to Kedar Baba. He repeated: 'This is food offered to the Master. One should partake of it, sharing it with Narayana first. Swamiji used to cook sometimes. He had a small water-pot such as men use in northern India, and in it he would cook lentils and rice. He would offer all food to the Master first, and after distributing it among us, he himself would eat. He would say, "Narayana should be fed before one eats."' After Kedar Baba had partaken of the *prasada* and left, Mahapurushji sat down to eat.

An attendant was seated near by. The conversation turned upon a monk who was practising *madhukari* (begging food from many homes) in the adjoining village. Swami Shivananda said: 'Once we also practised *madhukari*. That was long ago. At that time Swamiji made a rule that all should get up at four o'clock in the morning, when the bell rang, and after

¹ A senior monk of the Order.

finishing ablutions go to the chapel for meditation. Swamiji himself would also go there for meditation. If anyone missed it, he would not be allowed to have his meal at the monastery, but would have to beg his food by *madhukari*. Though all of us got up early and meditated, once in a while it so happened that we slept on and did not hear the bell. In the morning Swamiji would say, "If we ourselves do not abide by these rules, how can we expect the boys to do so?" That is why he would tell us to go and beg our food by *madhukari* (as a penance). I myself once or twice practised *madhukari* in this way.'

It was 5.30 in the afternoon. Mahapurushji was seated in his room when a young devotee came. He saluted the Swami and took his seat on the floor. After asking him his name, Mahapurushji inquired, 'Did you have initiation from here (meaning himself)?'

Devotee: 'Yes, sir, I had my initiation last July.'

Swami: 'That's very good. Do you practise meditation regularly? Whether you had initiation from here or not, you should take His name. Then alone will you have peace. You should fervently pray to Him, saying: "O Lord! Give me devotion and faith. Let me not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching Maya!" Repeat His name and pray to Him with great sincerity for as long as possible.'

Devotee: 'Formerly I used to do that (meditate and pray) a great deal, but of late I have not been able to find the time. So I do it for just a little while.'

Swami: 'That is fine. But however little time you devote to meditation, do it with great earnestness and love. Even if you practise only five or ten minutes, do it with your whole heart and soul. God is *antaryamin* (the Inner Controller) dwelling within. He judges by your heart. He sees how much devotion you have, not the amount of time you spend on meditation. Towards the end of the day, whenever you get the opportunity, call upon Him with great ardour, praying, "O Lord, let me not forget Thee in the whirlpool of this world!" The world is short-lived; don't forget Him in this world of Maya. You may attend to a hundred and one duties, or earn crores of rupees, but know in your heart of hearts that all these are impermanent and some day will have to be left behind. The

one abiding reality is God. Do call upon Him and take refuge in Him. All your bondages will be destroyed, my child.'

Devotee: 'Please bless me. Then everything will be all right.'

Swami: 'Of course I bless you. I bless you very much. What do we have other than blessings? I am saying all these things because I bless you. Call upon the Master and take refuge in him. Our Master is living and is bound to respond if you pray to him earnestly. For the good of the many, God—the Universal Spirit—incarnated Himself in this age as Sri Ramakrishna. You have nothing to worry about, as you have come under the shelter of Sri Ramakrishna, the Incarnation of the age.'

Devotee: 'Out of shame and fear, I have not told you one thing. I married some time ago. I had to in order to please my parents who were insistent and cried, though I myself did not want to at all.'

Swami: 'What of that? Birth, marriage and death—over these three events man has no control. Marriage is a matter of divine dispensation. There is no reason why you should be attached, even if married. Very well; you attend to your duties and perform your spiritual practices to the best of your ability, and let your wife also do the same; she, too, has a purpose in life. This is not for enjoyment. Just as you are created by God, so is she. You are a part of God, and she is a part of the Mother of the Universe. Teach her the kind of life you are living. She too will take the name of the Lord, pursue spiritual studies and devotions, attend to the duties of the world, and serve the elders. Train her along these lines. That is what you should do. Instead of this, if you use her for the enjoyment of the body, I shall say, Fie upon you! Do not be attached, my child. Lust and gold destroy the manhood of man.'

Devotee: 'I have the hope that everything will be all right so long as I have your blessings and am under the shelter of the Master.'

Swami: 'Above everything else, do not forget the ideal of life. Life is short and impermanent; it is not for enjoyment. Bear this in mind. Now go to the chapel for a little while. Salute the Master, meditate upon him and pray to him fervently. He will certainly give you peace!'

JUST AS MEDICINE RELIEVES SICKNESS, SO DOES FOOD ALLEVIATE HUNGER.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Wednesday, April 10, 1929.

In the course of dinner Mahapurushji said, 'I like rice and vegetables plain. That satisfies me. All these dishes you see here (pointing to a bitter soup) I eat as medicine.' While eating boiled *patal* (a tropical vegetable) the Swami said, 'As a matter of fact, eating is just like taking medicine. The great teacher Shankara said: "The sickness of hunger should be doctored. Every day take the medicine of food obtained by begging." Hunger is a kind of ailment. Just as medicine relieves sickness, so does food alleviate hunger. One should bear this in mind when eating. Shankara was a great illumined soul. That is why he gave this advice. The Atman is free from hunger and such other limitations. It is pure intelligence, unaffected by anything. Hunger, thirst and so on are characteristics of the body and not of the Atman.'

BE RESIGNED TO GOD—NOTHING CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT HIS GRACE.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : April 18, 1929.

It was about five in the afternoon. A monk saluted Mahapurushji, who inquired, 'Well, do you have anything to ask?' He asked the monk this question because the monk seldom came at this hour.

Monk: 'Yes, Swami, yesterday I went to see M. He spent much time telling us some of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings.'

Swami: 'Ah! he is a great devotee of the Master. You would not hear of anything but the Master from him.'

Monk: 'Maharaj, my mind is very much disturbed. I have not been able to do much spiritual practice. Time is passing fast. What will happen to me?'

Swami: 'My child, be resigned to God. Nothing can be accomplished without His grace. Can man realize Him by spiritual practice alone? If He reveals Himself out of compassion, then alone can one realize Him, otherwise not. Who is competent to reach Him? How long can a man pursue spiritual practice? Say, two hours, four hours or at the most eight hours. Not only that; it is the Lord who is responsible for the desire for spiritual practice. He is the Fountain of all forces! Unless He is gracious and gives us the strength, how can we pursue spiritual practice? That is why I am stressing that you should be resigned to God. Fervently pray, "O Lord! Be merciful to me." Then alone will He be merciful. It is mercy that counts—mercy, mercy. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "One should say 'Thou and Thine' and not 'I and mine'" What can we do unless He graciously reveals Himself? Grace—grace is what is necessary. Be gracious to us, O Lord!'

Monk: 'Maharaj, I can hardly pray. My mind is so restless! I find it hard to concentrate at times.'

Swami: 'No, you will have to pray and pray very earnestly. Do not be depressed; do not be disheartened. Be in a happy mood and pray. He will give you everything, my child, everything you want. There is nothing He will withhold from you. He will give you faith, renunciation, purity, discrimination, dispassion and all. Whatever He has He will give you. He embodied Himself as man because He wanted to give you all these virtues. That is why He has brought you here and given you shelter in His Order. Do not think you are here as a result of your own efforts. Never for a moment cherish that idea! Out of compassion He has drawn you all here. He is the very Ocean of selfless compassion. My child, be resigned to Him. Everything will come in time. I say, you will have everything. He will fill you with devotion and faith.'

Saying this, the Swami started singing:

Stay by yourself, O mind! Why wander here and there?

Look within—in the inner chamber of your heart—

And you will find, right there, whatever you desire. . . .

'You belong to the Master's fold. You have nothing to be afraid of.'

29

IT IS INNER SEEING THAT COUNTS—SHRADDHA CEREMONIES ARE UNNECESSARY FOR HIGHLY DEVELOPED SOULS—BOTH HAPPINESS AND SORROW ARE IMPERMANENT—HE ALONE IS PERMANENT—IN HIM IS PEACE—HOLD FAST TO HIM.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Tuesday, April 30, 1929.

In the afternoon Srijut Gangacharan Mukherjee, a lawyer from Monghyr, accompanied by his daughter and some devotees of his family, arrived at the monastery. After saluting Swami Shivananda, Gangacharan Babu said: 'Your body seems to be in very bad condition, Maharaj. It is much worse than when I saw you last year.'

Swami: 'Yes, my body is in a very bad condition. Every day it is getting worse. The body is subject to six changes. Now it is the time for the last. This is but natural. The nature of the body is like that. All bodies are bound to disintegrate some day.'

Gangacharan Babu: 'In every letter I have received from the monastery there has been news of your failing health. I had a great desire to see you; so I am here.'

Swami (smiling): 'Tell me, what is there in outward seeing? It is inward seeing that counts, and the Lord is within everyone. He is the source of everything in this universe. "From Him are born energy, mind, all the senses, ether, air, fire, water and earth, which is the support of everything." He is the controller of everything. "Through fear of Him the sun gives heat." Again, in Him will everything dissolve. "From Him this world has come and to Him it will go back." He is the source of this universe. In Him it will dissolve. Again, in Him it is active. Birth and death are just a matter of course. Nobody can stop them. God alone is immutable and immortal—pure, enlightened and free by nature. To realize Him within

is the ideal of life. Everything is accomplished when one realizes Him. After that it is immaterial whether the body lives or goes. He is ever present within us. He, the Soul of every being, the Heaven of immortality, is within everybody: one must realize that.'

Gangacharan Babu: 'Maharaj, I have a question in my mind. Does everyone have to be in a disembodied state after death?'

Swami: 'Not necessarily. Why should devotees of the Lord who have genuine devotion have to be in the disembodied state? They become one with God and obtain liberation.'

Gangacharan Babu: 'Then what is the meaning of Shradha¹ and such other funeral rituals prescribed in the scriptures? Doesn't everyone have to perform those rituals annually or at other prescribed times?'

Swami: 'Yes, one has to. It is, of course, the general rule and everyone abides by it. But there are exceptions, as for example, in your wife's case you may perform these rituals, but there will be no harm done if you do not. She was unusually devoted. Her case was different. After her death I vividly saw her going to the abode of Shiva. You may rest assured that she has reached a highly spiritual state.'

Gangacharan Babu suddenly burst into tears and prostrated himself before Mahapurushji's feet, saying: 'Maharaj, please grant this prayer of mine. May I have faith and devotion at the lotus feet of the Mother and at the end of my life may I find refuge at Her feet!' Saying this, he started crying like a child.

Mahapurushji placed his hand on Gangacharan Babu's head and blessed him saying: 'My child, may you have that. Already you have faith and devotion and you will have more. I bless you very much. You will grow spiritually, my child. The Mother is very gracious to you.'

Gangacharan Babu: 'If you say so, it will surely come to pass. The Mother will certainly listen to you. You are my strength, my faith and my all.'

¹ Post-mortem rituals to release the departed one from the disembodied state, and help him forward on his journey.

Swami: 'Of course the Mother will listen to me. She will listen to you also. She certainly listens to the person who prays to her sincerely. Grace! Grace! Nothing can be accomplished without Her grace. Glory be to the Lord! Glorified be our compassionate Master!'

Being consoled by the Swami's blessings, Gangacharan Babu, after exchanging a word or two with him, made ready to leave. One by one the others saluted the Swami. Gangacharan Babu's daughter saluted the Swami and begged for his blessings.

The Swami said in a very tender voice: 'May you live in peace, my daughter! May your husband, son, daughter, relatives and all be happy! Happiness is so rare in this world! Compared with pains and sorrows there is very little happiness. But those who are devoted to God know some peace in this world. They are not disturbed by whatever pains or sorrows may come to them, because they know that everything comes from God. It is the same God who gives us happiness and again trials and difficulties. That is why they can patiently bear everything as a blessing from God. They are never elated by happiness, nor are they upset by sorrow. Just as happiness is impermanent and short-lived, so is sorrow. It comes and goes; for nothing in this world is permanent. The one abiding Reality and the only Abode of peace is God. Hold fast to Him, my daughter; then alone will you have peace in life.'

One young unmarried girl saluted the Swami, who touched her head and remarked: "They are all manifestations of the Mother. "All women are various expressions of Thee."

Shortly before dusk a woman devotee saluted the Swami and asked: 'Maharaj, how is your body?'

Swami: 'My daughter, my body is not well. Old as it is, how can it be in good health?'

Woman Devotee: 'You eat so little.'

Swami: 'Yes, I eat just a little rice and soup at noon and a little milk at night. More than that I cannot digest, and, besides, I do not have the inclination to eat this or that. Eating is necessary for the sustenance of the body. Therefore I eat a little, so that my body will last for some time and I can think about God. I have no other desire except to think and medi-

tate upon God. If I see the Lord in my heart I am happy. This world is temporary; parents, brothers, friends and companions are all temporary. At death one will leave behind this world and it will remain as it is. Only the Lord, who is the Soul of our soul, exists at all times and will ever exist. He alone is eternal.'

Woman Devotee: 'Maharaj, what will happen to us? Engrossed in Maya, we are so much attached to this world and cannot shake off this attachment. We have so much sorrow and yet we cannot rise above it.'

Swami: 'God alone is our goal: take refuge in Him. He is our all in all. "Thou art our father and mother. Thou art our friend and companion. Thou art our knowledge and wealth. Thou art our all in all, O Lord!" He is father, mother, brother, friend, companion and all. Call upon Him earnestly. He will certainly be gracious. In this sorrowful world He alone is peace. The Master used to speak of the camel's habit of eating prickly grass. The happiness of a worldly man is just like that of a camel. Without the grace of God, my daughter, nothing can be accomplished.'

After remaining silent awhile the Swami continued: 'It is not an easy thing to realize the unreality of the world. One cannot have that realization without the grace of God. Cry to Him and pray and you will have His grace. He is right inside. You will realize Him the moment He lifts the veil of ignorance. It is grace and grace alone that we need. There is no other way.'

THE MIND HAS A WAVE-LIKE MOTTON—GENUINE DEVOTEES EVER REMAIN CALM.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Wednesday, May 1, 1929.

Inspired by the ideal of renunciation, a young man left home to perform spiritual practice without appearing for his B.A. examination. His guardians brought him home and advised him to carry on his meditations on God at home. Since

then he had been carrying on his spiritual practices at home, according to Mahapurushji's instructions. This young man came to the monastery and saluted the Swami, who inquired: 'Hello! how are you?'

Young man: 'My body is all right, Maharaj, but my mind is very restless. I do not have any peace of mind. I am very disturbed mentally.'

Swami: 'The fact that you have this restlessness of mind shows that the Mother is gracious to you. The earnestness to realize Her and the lack of peace because you have not been able to do so are symptoms of Her grace. As a result of good deeds performed in many incarnations and through the grace of God, one has this desire for liberation. Now sincerely cry and pray: "Mother, reveal Thyself to me. I am weak, devoid of spiritual discipline and devotion! Be gracious and appear to me!" Do not pay heed to anything else and continue calling upon Her. Whether the mind is concentrated or not, do not give up calling upon Her. Be steady and hold to the ideal even as a hereditary farmer. If you do that you will certainly receive Her grace. Therefore, I say, where would you be roaming about? Call upon the Mother staying at home. Right there the Mother will vouchsafe to you the realization of the unreality of the world and will snap your worldly ties.'

Young man: 'Sometimes I enjoy my meditations; at other times I cannot control the mind at all.'

Swami: 'That is how the mind behaves. It has a wave-like motion. Haven't you seen waves? Here comes a high wave followed by a deep hollow, and a wave comes again. The fact that sometimes you lose control over your mind signifies that a big wave will come and you will have great peace. But genuine devotees will not lose their balance because of joy or be depressed by sorrow. Everything depends upon the will of the Mother. Knowing that the Mother is ever merciful, continue to call upon Her. Let the Mother keep you in whatever state She pleases. In this way eventually you will have unmixed bliss and a full vision of the Mother! My boy, do not be disturbed under any circumstances. The Mother has been gracious to you and will be even more gracious, I assure you.'

'Why have you let your hair grow so long? Have a hair-

cut. To be unkempt in the name of religion is a pretence. Behave as others do, with no external difference. Inwardly call upon the Mother. Is She outside yourself? Go to the shrine for a while and pay your respects to the Master. Then have your *prasada*¹

31

TO BE ABLE TO RENOUNCE IS A GREAT PRIVILEGE.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Tuesday, May 7, 1929.

A devotee had a strong desire to be a monk. He communicated his wish to Mahapurushji, who said: 'What do I know about that? If you have a sincere desire to be a monk, all right, renounce the world! If you have realized the unreality of the world, well and good. Go somewhere and plunge into contemplation and meditation. For that you do not need my approval or disapproval. One is indeed fortunate to be able to renounce the world, relying solely upon God. This is possible only through the grace of the Lord. It is not necessary for you to join the Order now. First of all, plunge into spiritual practice, and later, if you have the command from within, you may join the Mission and engage in works of service to the Lord.'

32

DEVOTION IS ESSENTIAL

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Thursday, May 9, 1929.

A devotee wrote a letter begging for a pair of slippers used by Mahapurushji. It was his heart's desire to worship the slippers. Swami Shivananda remarked in that connection:

'Whether he worships the slippers or whatever else he may do, the most essential thing is devotion to God. God looks at

¹ Food offered to the Deity considered sacred and conducive to devotion.

one's sincerity. He dwells within every heart. Whatever is done with devotion pleases the Lord. Don't you see how people fashion images of Shiva with clay and worship them, thereby gaining in faith and devotion and attaining enlightenment and liberation? Although it is only a clay image of Shiva, if it is worshipped with love and devotion, the Lord is pleased and accepts the worship. What is made of inert clay becomes conscious and living. The essence of everything is devotion. Wherever there is devotion, know for certain that the grace of the Lord is there. External worship and things of that sort are just means to an end.'

33

THE RULES FRAMED BY SWAMIJI FOR THE GUIDANCE OF THE ORDER—SWAMIJI A SEER—HIS INTRODUCTION OF WORKS OF SERVICE FOR SELF-PURIFICATION.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Monday. May 13, 1929.

It was morning. Mahapurushji was seated in his room. Many *sadhus* of the monastery were present, and the conversation turned on various topics. For the last few days a class was being held late in the evening, attended by almost all the monastic members. The rules formulated by Swami Vivekananda for the guidance of the Order were being studied at this class. One by one the rules were read and discussed. Swamis Suddhananda,¹ Virajananda¹, and others present answered questions on difficult points. With regard to the class Mahapurushji said: 'To hold a class like this is very good. This is a monastery. Here worship, study, meditation, *japa* and things of that nature should continue all the time.'

A monk: 'Nowadays the rules for the guidance of the Order are being read.'

Swami: 'That is very good. The words of Swamiji are those of a seer, expressed aphoristically. How many ideas are contained in each of his utterances! Many new things will be brought to light by discussing these rules. The more discussions of this kind you have at the monastery, the better.'

¹ A senior monk of the Order.

'Everyone should direct his attention to the ideal of his life. Devotion to God, faith, love, sympathy, fellow-feeling, purity—all these one should strive after. We have renounced our hearth and home and joined the Order. What is the meaning of this? Why are we here, living this organized life in the Order? We should pray earnestly so that we grow in the spirit of renunciation.'

A monk was standing near by. Addressing him Mahapurushji said, 'Well, do you attend this class?'

Monk: 'No, sir. After the day's hard work I feel extremely tired in the evening. That is why I cannot attend the class.'

Swami: 'No, it is good to listen to these discussions. Swamiji was a seer with distant vision. He knew what would happen in the future, and therefore formulated these rules for the guidance of the Order. The more we discuss his words and try to practise them in life, the better for us. We are monks and the realization of God is the whole object of our lives. This world is a dangerous place. Here it is very difficult to pursue the ideal in the midst of multifarious activities. Sometimes there is the danger of one's having lapses. As the Master used to say: "Children's feet slip while walking along the high pathways across fields. The child who holds his father's hand may sometimes lose his balance and fall down. But the child whose hand is held by his father is not in danger of falling." Similarly, we too are treading the narrow and crooked path of this world and there is great danger of our falling down. But there is no danger of our falling if the Master holds us by the hand. The Master is certainly holding us by the hand; otherwise who knows where and when we would have fallen? One should therefore earnestly pray: "Lord, may you hold our hand! Weak as we are, we are in danger of having lapses at every step, but we shall be safe if you hold us by the hand." He is the life of our life dwelling within. Sincere prayer will certainly bring response from him. He is the prophet of this age, born as Sri Ramakrishna for the establishment of religion. He will certainly be gracious to us. He is already gracious; otherwise he would not have brought us here. "He, the Lord of the Universe, born as the prophet of this

age"—these are Swamiji's very words. He is the prophet of this age.

'It will certainly be for a person's good to take refuge in him in this age. Let us surrender ourselves to him and pray (with folded hands): "Master, may we grow in renunciation and dispassion! Make us pure! May we grow in love and sympathy! May you hold us by the hand!"

'Calumny, gossip and things of that nature are very bad. They drag the mind down. As long as one can, one should practise meditation, worship and study; the rest of the time one should keep silent, thinking about God. It is a good practice. Organization has its necessity and usefulness. That is why Swamiji founded this Order and introduced works of service for self-purification.'

34

THE ANNIVERSARY OF BUDDHA'S BIRTH, THE THRICE BLESSED DAY—BUDDHA'S RENUNCIATION—THE MIDDLE PATH—DISCUSSION OF BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY AT THE COSSIPORE GARDEN—SWAMIJI'S EXPERIENCE UNDER THE BODHI TREE.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Thursday, May 23, 1929.

It was the full moon day of the month of Vaishakha, the anniversary of the birth of Buddha. In the afternoon there was discussion of the life of Buddha. Several monks spoke. The image of Buddha had been decorated with flowers, garlands and greens. Devotional songs were sung, followed by the reading of the biography of the Blessed One. The life and teaching of Buddha were discussed.

After supper Swami Omkarananda¹ came to Mahapurushji's room and in the course of conversation remarked: 'It is a great day. Here at the monastery we have been observing it. If the afternoon we had lectures.'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, it is indeed a great day—the thrice blessed day! Well, did you have that song—"For peace I seek;

¹ A senior monk of the Order.

but where can peace be found? Whence have I come, and whither shall I go?"'

Swami Omkarananda: 'No, we didn't have that song because nobody knew it very well.'

Mahapurushji: 'That is an excellent song composed by Girish Babu.'¹

Saying this Mahapurushji sang the song. Then he remarked: 'How beautifully Girish Babu worded it! He got the idea from the *Lalitavistara* which describes this feeling nicely. Buddha, then Prince Siddhartha, was making merry with his wife, Gopa, when some angels flying through space sang this song. Hearing it unexpectedly, Buddha was startled and an awakening came to him. He said: "Who is singing that song? I know it very well. 'For peace I seek; but where can peace be found?'"—that is a song I have always known." After hearing that song the trend of Buddha's mind suddenly changed. He could not give his heart to enjoyment any more, constantly remaining in a state of dispassion. King Shuddhodana, Buddha's father, coming to know of this, tried various means to divert Buddha's mind, and by placing many temptations before him hoped to draw his mind to the pleasures of the world. But Buddha being fully awakened, all efforts in this direction proved futile. Then one night he left the palace. About the middle path also, Girish Babu composed a song containing ideas found in the *Lalitavistara*:

My lovely *vina*, strung with care
 With many a strand,
 The rarest melodies will yield
 Beneath a master's hand;
 Let it be but rightly tuned—
 Not high nor low—
 And from it in a hundred streams
 Enchanting songs will flow.
 • But over-slack, the strings are dumb
 And the music dies;
 While overstretched, they snap in twain
 And away the music flies.

¹ A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

'That was indeed a time. What renunciation, dispassion and austerity we had! When God comes to this world as a man, then flows a current of spirituality. Many are blessed by getting the light of knowledge; many attain emancipation.'

Swami Omkarananda: 'In the hills of Paresnath as many as twenty-five monks attained illumination. Out of that number fifteen or sixteen were Jain monks, the rest Buddhists.'

Mahapurushji: 'At one time we too discussed Buddhist philosophy a great deal. That was long ago. At that time we, including Swamiji and others, were living with the Master at the garden house at Cossipore. Swamiji was well versed in Buddhism. We too read a little. We used to have hot arguments. In those days we didn't believe in the existence of God. Some of the devotees felt very much hurt to note this tendency in us. Swamiji himself would not say much. He would egg me on. I would argue my point vigorously. Swamiji would listen quietly and enjoy the fun. Sometimes I would even say that it was harmful to have body-consciousness, for it would be a handicap in meditation. Even the thought of God would not allow the mind to be free from modifications. It was not that we only expressed ourselves that way; our meditations and experiences also were of that nature. We couldn't think otherwise in those days; we were so absorbed in those ideas. Some devotees brought the matter to the notice of the Master who remarked: "What they say is also true. There is a stage in spiritual life when the seeker does not admit the existence of God." This tendency of ours lasted quite long. Even after we moved to the monastery at Baranagore, after the death of the Master, these ideas continued. We were still atheistic. One day the Master appeared to me and said: "Well, the Guru is all in all. There is no one higher than the Guru." The moment I had that vision these ideas left me and did not return. Sri Ramakrishna was a divine incarnation born to establish religion. Why should he allow a narrow or one-sided idea in us?'

Swami Omkarananda: 'Didn't you once slip off to Bodh Gaya during the Master's lifetime without telling him anything about it?'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, we went with Swamiji. There we sat for meditation under the Bodhi tree. We became quite absorbed

in meditation. Suddenly Swamiji burst into tears in a state of spiritual ecstasy and embraced me. I was seated by his side. Later he came down to the normal plane and became absorbed in deep meditation again. The next day, in the course of conversation, I asked Swamiji about this matter. He replied: "I felt a deep pang in my heart. Everything here is as it was before. Here in Bodh Gaya we have Buddha's ideas in an intensified form. His renunciation, his dispassion, his great compassion and deep spirituality—all these are here; but where is he, the living embodiment of those ideas and ideals? I so keenly felt the absence of Lord Buddha that I couldn't control myself. That is why I burst into tears and embraced you." The few days that we spent in Bodh Gaya we were in a very blissful mood.'

Swami Omkarananda: 'In Bodh Gaya they have put white marble lotuses to mark the place where Buddha walked up and down (after attaining illumination).'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, after illumination Buddha experienced so much joy that he walked up and down the whole night. He walked around in an ecstatic mood, enjoying the bliss of Self-realization.'

That night we had long discussions about Lord Buddha.

35

MAHAPURUSHJI'S COMPASSION—INITIATION—PILGRIMAGE.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Sunday, July 21, 1929.

It was Sunday, the Guru Purnima¹ Day. Since early morning many devotees had been coming to see Mahapurushji. His health had not been very good. When a devotee saluted the Swami and inquired about his health he remarked: 'My body is not at all well. How can it be well, my child? From now on the body will become feeble. That is the nature of the body. The body is subject to a sixfold change.'

Devotee: 'You can be well if you only will!'

Mahapurushji: 'No, my child, that cannot be. All bodies are bound to disintegrate some day. "To-day or after a century

¹ An auspicious day observed in honour of the guru.

it will be confiscated"—don't you know that? The body has its death; that is certain. This body of mine has lived a long time—seventy-six or seventy-seven years. How much longer can it live? If the body dies, what is that to me? I am certainly not the body. The Master has been kind enough to reveal this to me. The body made of the five elements will go back to the five elements, and I myself will pass on to that divine realm, the abode of immortality, where there is neither old age nor death, neither happiness nor unhappiness. The Master has been gracious enough to reveal that knowledge to me and he continues to give me more and more of it.'

At about 9.30 in the morning Mahapurushji went to the shrine and initiated two devotees. After returning from the shrine he was sitting calmly in an easy chair when a devotee came and in an aggrieved tone asked: 'Did you initiate some devotees today also?'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, I have given them the name of the Master.'

Devotee: 'Your body is in such a bad state; it will be worse if you initiate people, Maharaj.'

Mahapurushji: 'Tell me, what can I do? When people earnestly ask for initiation I cannot refuse them. I cannot control myself when I see their earnestness. As long as the body lives it will have its pleasures and pains, and this body will, to be sure, perish some day. Therefore so long as it is permitted to live, let it do something for the good of people. It is good if this body perishes while doing good to others. It is enough compensation if a single soul is helped by this body.'

After a while a devotee came in, saluted the Swami and stood by his side. He had just returned with his parents from a pilgrimage to Puri. When he mentioned this, Mahapurushji said: 'That's good. Your parents were blessed by this pilgrimage and you too had the privilege of seeing Jagannath (The Lord of the Universe),' Saying this he started laughing.

Devotee: 'I made this pilgrimage once before, too, but it was at an inauspicious time. Many have expressed the opinion that pilgrimages at an inauspicious time do not bring good fruit.'

Mahapurushji: 'Well, my child, we do not believe in those things. To see the Lord (i.e. inside a temple) does not require an auspicious time. All times are good. The moment you see the Lord even an inauspicious time becomes auspicious. God is the Supreme Good always. How can harm ever come to one by seeing the Lord?'

Saying this he started singing:

Blesséd is Thy name, and blesséd Thy abode;
Blesséd are Thy actions, blesséd Thy dispensation.

He repeated the song several times and said, 'Swamiji often used to sing this 'song.'

36

IN AN ORGANIZATION WHERE MANY LIVE TOGETHER FRICTION MAY OCCUR—PATIENCE AND FORGIVENESS NECESSARY.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Friday, July 26, 1929.

It was afternoon. Mahapurushji had just finished his shave. Seeing a monastic worker of the orphanage at Baranagore, he called him to his side. In the course of conversation the Swami remarked: 'How can you leave now? Let S. return; then perhaps you may go. And why do you want to go at all? Even here, after attending to your regular work, you will have plenty of time for spiritual practice. It is simply a matter of mental attitude. If the mind has a natural leaning towards God, one can make time and opportunity for spiritual practice. What is essential is earnestness. If you cannot carry on your spiritual practice here, you won't be able to do so anywhere. The Master used to say, "He who has it here, has it there too." That is a statement full of truth, my child. Call upon God and pray to Him with great sincerity. He will give you an abundance of devotion and faith. Why should you go? You are doing the Lord's work. Is it a small matter?'

Monk: 'In season and out of season, K. says whatever comes to his mind.' Saying this, he started crying.

Mahapurushji: 'I had a feeling there was a misunderstanding between you two. Why does he use abusive language? I

know very well that you do not deserve that treatment. You are a gentle, good-natured person. Why don't you ask K. to come and see me some time? I will explain matters to him. Do not take it to heart, my child. You know, when pots that are together are moved, friction is inevitable. Do not take it seriously. Misunderstandings are bound to occur sometimes and they are straightened out eventually. It takes two hands to clap. Let him say whatever he wishes. Just endure it all quietly. That will prevent misunderstandings. You will have to be a little humble. You will have to sacrifice a little. You have dedicated your body, mind and soul to the Master's work. You have renounced everything for his sake. You will have to do this much also for his work. You should practise forbearance, you should sacrifice—for his work. The Lord will bless you abundantly.'

Monk: 'Please bless me so that I can do it.'

Mahapurushji: 'Certainly you will be able to. You have my hearty blessings, my child. But you must pray to the Master sincerely, too. He will give you greater strength. You have come here renouncing everything for his sake. There is nothing that he will withhold from you. How will his work go on if you all do not live at peace in one place? Be patient for his sake, paying no attention to what people say, good or bad. You are all *sadhus* and have come here with the idea of improving yourselves. You do not have any other desire or wish in your life. You want him alone. Temporary misunderstandings are inevitable when several work together. They aren't something to be blamed for; it is quite natural. Such misunderstandings come and go; they cannot touch your inner Self, because the main objective of your life is the realization of God. Such petty matters as attachment and aversion cannot deeply affect you. This is what we feel. The work that you are carrying on is being done in a spirit of service. This work is purifying your mind day by day. You have no selfish motive in your work. You should carry on your spiritual practices along with your works of service. Whenever you can, practise *japa*, meditate upon God and pray to Him sincerely. The moment you have a feeling of weakness or of lacking in anything, tell the Master about it. If you pray very sincerely, you are bound to get a

response. Repeat his name often. The repetition of his name will purify your body and mind, washing away all impurities. You have renounced everything in order to be *sadhus*. The realization of God is the aim of your life, my child. Your ideal is "to remain unaffected by praise or blame, to be silent and contented with a little". Balance in praise or blame, silence and being satisfied with whatever comes—this is the state at which you should aim. You should be absorbed in God. What does it matter to you what people say about you?'

After hearing these words, the monk burst into tears and caught hold of Mahapurushji's feet, saying: 'Maharaj, please bless me that I may be unaffected by praise or blame, that I may remain absorbed in Him.'

The more Mahapurushji tried to pacify him, the more disconsolate he became, crying like a child. Mahapurushji said: 'You will certainly reach that stage, my child. The Master has brought you to him because he is gracious to you.' After a while Mahapurushji said with great affection: 'Go to the shrine for a little while. Practise *japa* and pray to God; that will lighten the burden of your heart. Then take a little of the food offered to the Master. In future, whenever you have the leisure come here. There are so many *sadhus* and *brahmacharins* at the monastery. Do you mix with them freely?'

37

THE MONASTERY AT BELUR IS STEEPED IN SPIRITUALITY WITH MANY HOLY ASSOCIATIONS—DOUBTS WILL BE SOLVED FROM WITHIN—AUSPICIOUS AND INAUSPICIOUS DAYS ACCORDING TO ASTROLOGY—THE DAY ONE TAKES THE NAME OF THE LORD IS A GOOD DAY.

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Friday, August 2, 1929.

In the morning the *sadhus* and *brahmacharins* of the monastery started coming one by one to Mahapurushji's room to salute him. A *brahmacharin* belonging to the ashrama at Jandi, who had been at the Math for some time, saluted Mahapurushji, whereupon he remarked: 'At Jandi you have many

activities. Now that you are at the monastery at Belur I hope you are practising *japa* and meditation. Early in the morning, at dusk and at night you should meditate intensively. This place has a tangible spiritual atmosphere. Swamiji brought the relics of the Master on his head and installed him here. Here there is a special manifestation of Sri Ramakrishna. Besides, Swamiji, Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda) and others performed so much spiritual practice here. Swamiji even laid down his body right here. How holy this place is! Nowhere will you find another place more favourable for spiritual practice. This place is steeped in spirituality. How much meditation, study and singing of the names of the Lord has been done here and is still being done! How many devotees visit this place! How many times *homa* (fire ritual) has been performed here, and what other ceremonials have also been performed! The few days you live here be sure to enjoy the bliss of meditation and *japa*. The more you meditate, the more you will appreciate the holiness of this place. You are devotees of the Master. Call upon him; you will certainly get a response and your heart will be filled with joy.'

Brahmacharin: 'Often questions arise in my mind which I intend to refer to you, and sometimes I even have doubts; but the moment I come into your presence I forget them. I feel as if I have no doubts at all, and everything is settled. In your presence I feel wholly satisfied.'

Mahapurushji (affectionately): 'Why don't you tell me the doubts that arise in your mind? You are welcome to speak to me about any questions that arise in your mind. But you know all your doubts will be solved from within. The Lord is within us. He is the inner Self of us all. He solves all doubts from within. Of course, you will have to let Him know your problems.'

Saying this, he began singing this song:

Stay by yourself. O mind! Why wander here and there?
Look within—in the inner chamber of your heart—

And you will find, right there, whatever you desire. . . .

'You have everything within you, only you have to seek, my child.' After a while another *brahmacharin* came to salute Mahapurushji. Noticing the short tuft of hair on the top of his head, Mahapurushji scolded him, saying: 'How is it that

your tuft of hair is so short? You are a *brahmacharin*, but you have almost got rid of your tuft of hair. What does this mean? Most probably you think that by shaving your head you will become a *sannyasin*. My child, *sannyasa* (monasticism) is a matter of inner growth; you cannot attain that by cutting the tuft of your hair.'

Later Swami Yatiswarananda¹ came and saluted Mahapurushji, who greeted him saying, 'Hello, Yatiswar. When are you going to Madras?'

Swami Yatiswarananda: 'I am thinking of going on the ninth. Before that time there is no auspicious date. There are only inauspicious days like Ashlesha,² Magha,² Tryahasparsa,² Thursday afternoon² and so on. That is why I made up my mind to go on the ninth.'

Mahapurushji: 'That's fine. But you are men of action. It won't do for you to look for auspicious days. Those who have nothing to do can afford to consult the almanac at every step. The Master also used to say, "Only those who believe in such things are affected by them; others are not." Besides, you are devotees of the Mother. She is protecting you under all conditions and will always do so. If one takes the name of the Lord and starts on a journey, one will not come to grief. By the strength of His name even distress is transformed into a blessing.'

Saying this he sang :

Whoever starts upon a journey taking
the name of Mother Durga,
Shiva, with His almighty trident,
surely will protect him.

'In a couplet composed by Tulasidas there is the same idea :

Every phase of the moon is auspicious ;
every day an auspicious day.
An inauspicious day affects him only
who has forgotten the Lord.

The day one takes the name of the Lord whole-heartedly
is a good day!'

¹ A monk of the Order.

² According to Hindu astrology, these days, with certain planets and stars being in the ascendant, are inauspicious.

'IF IT SERVES HIS PURPOSE HE CAN MANAGE HIS WORK EVEN WITH THIS BROKEN VESSEL'—EXTRORDINARY REVELATIONS REGARDING THE GREATNESS OF THE MASTER.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Wednesday, August 7, 1929.

It was about 7.30 in the morning. Mahapurushji wanted to have his body massaged and so he was getting ready to lie down, when Swami Sharvananda came, saluted him and asked, 'Did you sleep well last night, Maharaj?'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, I slept fairly well.'

Swami Sharvananda: 'How is your body?'

Mahapurushji (smiling): 'It is all right as long as it takes the name of the Lord.'

Later, in a serious mood, he remarked: 'On the whole, the body is not well. Day by day it is decaying. It will live as long as the Lord wishes it to live. If it serves His purpose He can manage His work even with this broken vessel. Everything is possible if He so wishes it, and He is managing things too. He is having His work done even with this broken body. Don't you see, although I can hardly move around, His work is being accomplished by means of this body?'

Swami Sharvananda: 'Certainly, Maharaj. As long as your body lasts it will be for our good and for the good of the world. Real service is possible only through men like you. One word from you will be more effective than great efforts put forth by us.'

Mahapurushji: 'Everything depends upon the will of the Master. One can do only as much as the Master graciously permits one to do. Blessed is the person whom the Master selects as an instrument for his work. The Master is God Himself born as a world teacher for the establishment of religion in this age. Is it an ordinary privilege to be an instrument for his work? What can an ordinary man understand about the Master's sublime ideas? Unless the Master graciously reveals

himself, who is capable of understanding what stuff was in that little frame of his—what great power functioned in him!

Who indeed, can know Thee unless
 Thou revealest Thyself?
 Veda and Vedanta grope in the dark,
 failing to fathom Thee.

Everything becomes clear if he graciously reveals himself; otherwise who will understand him? Apparently he was like an ordinary man—eating, sleeping, walking around and doing things of that sort— but within that frame of his there was so much power. How can people understand it? With the passing of days people will see the play of the Master's tremendous power. There will be a great revolution in the realm of the Spirit. Whom shall I tell how much the Master is showing us? Whom shall I tell, and who will understand? I cannot explain to anyone how many things are going on inside here (placing his hands on his chest) about him. Nobody would understand them. I cannot even tell you. Even you would not understand. So long as Swami Brahmananda was alive I could unburden my heart and have a feeling of relief. We would both enjoy discussing those things. Those were the most intimate experiences, and we would discuss them privately. He too would often tell some of his experiences. Now we cannot do that any more. Now we have to treasure those experiences within—not finding anyone with whom to discuss them. Everything is his will. I earnestly pray: May good betide the world! May you all be blessed and may you all live in peace!

39

PRACTISE REMEMBRANCE OF THE LORD—JAPA AND MEDITATION.

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Thursday, August 15, 1929.

Mahapurushji was very fond of a devotee who was a lawyer by profession. This devotee came to see the Swami and after saluting him inquired about his health. He took a seat near him and then started talking about his own spiritual practices.

Devotee: 'Maharaj, I seldom have peace in my heart, and feel a constant unrest within.'

Mahapurushji: 'Continue repeating His name, my child. Gradually you will find peace. If you can't do much spiritual practice, try to meditate every morning and evening regularly.'

Devotee: 'I do that, of course, but that cannot satisfy my heart's desire. I wish I could do more, but I cannot make time. Every morning and evening when I try to meditate I have a feeling of great joy, so much joy that I do not feel like leaving my seat. The pressure of work forces me to do so.'

Mahapurushji: 'That is something which is beyond your control; but mentally practise remembrance of the Lord. He dwells within and knows the earnestness of your heart. He is gracious to you and will be more so. He will certainly satisfy your unfulfilled desire. He is the divine Wish-fulfilling Tree. He gives a devotee whatever the devotee asks of Him. Sincerely repeat His name, meditate upon Him, and whenever you find time, practise remembrance of Him. Remembrance of the Lord can be practised at all times and places. Pray to Him very sincerely: "O Lord, have mercy upon me, be gracious to me. You have been gracious to so many people here and elsewhere. Will You not be gracious to me also? One of Your sons (meaning himself) has taught me how to call upon You, and so I am calling upon You for Your grace. It is Your son who taught me this way." Pray in this way and He will certainly bless you. We are His servants and have dedicated our bodies, minds and souls at His feet. I assure you, He will certainly bless you.'

Devotee (with tears in his eyes): 'Please bless me and speak to the Master about me; then all will be well.'

Mahapurushji: 'Of course you have my blessings, my child! Otherwise I would not say so much. The Master came to redeem souls. We are his servants; we do not have any other desire than this. Whatever spiritual practice we perform we do for the good of the world. We ourselves do not need anything. He has made us full in every way. He has not withheld anything from us and yet for the good of people he is making us perform spiritual practice.'

Devotee: 'How shall I meditate? I find it hard to visualize the full figure of the Master in my meditation.'

Mahapurushji: 'If you cannot do that, meditate upon parts of his form separately. At first you meditate upon his feet, and then on other limbs. Finally try to meditate upon his full figure. It is better if you can meditate upon his full figure at one time.'

Devotee: 'I can't meditate upon the form of the Mother. It frightens me. I can meditate upon the Master a little.'

Mahapurushji: 'That's fine. You can meditate upon the Master, can't you? That is sufficient. It doesn't matter if you can't meditate upon the Mother separately, because everything is within the Master, including the Mother herself. The Master is the crystallized embodiment of all gods and goddesses. All the divine manifestations that have been in the past and will be in the future are within the Master. Therefore if you meditate upon Sri Ramakrishna it is as good as meditating on all divine forms. Of course, one should have that consciousness.'

Devotee: 'Maharaj, how shall I practise *japa*?'

Mahapurushji: 'The best form of *japa* is to repeat the Lord's name mentally. "To repeat the name of the Lord over the rosary is good; repetition of the name on the fingers is better, but mental repetition of the name is the very best." The mental repetition of the name is indeed the very best. When one repeats the name over the rosary or on the fingers one keeps track of the number of times to a certain extent and cannot give undivided attention to the *japa*. It stands in the way of concentration. Repeat the Lord's name with great devotion. What does it matter if you cannot keep track of the number of times? Is spiritual practice a kind of commodity to be bought at the market—you pay so many rupees and get what you want? The Lord looks at your mental attitude—your heart's longing. If one has devotion for Him, nothing else is necessary. If one could repeat His name with sincere devotion even once, that would fill one's heart with joy. That would be of more value than repeating His name a hundred thousand times mechanically. Have you been to the shrine today?'

Devotee: 'No, Maharaj. I shall go now.'

Mahapurushji: 'Be sure to go. You have come to His place, you should see Him first. Do go to the shrine and practise *japa* a little. You will find joy. Our Master is a living presence. Here there is a special manifestation of him. Of course, he is present everywhere; yet here and amongst his devotees he is more manifest. Do not forget to take a little of the offered food.'

40

VISITING HOLY PLACES IS EASY—DEVOTION AND FAITH ARE RARE
—SRI RAMAKRISHNA IS GOD INCARNATE.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Sunday, August 18, 1929.

The conversation was about pilgrimages. A monk had just returned from Badrinarayan and such other holy places and some of the monks of the monastery were talking about this pilgrimage.

Mahapurushji: 'Visiting holy places is an easy thing. It requires just a little hardship. But to have devotion and faith in God is a rare achievement. You will come across many *sadhus* who have made pilgrimage on foot to the four *dhamas* (holy places located at the four corners of India) or have done similar things, but how many of them are genuine *sadhus* with devotion and discrimination? Of course, it is not that there are no such *sadhus*, but their number is very limited.

'It is very difficult to make progress in the realm of the Spirit. In the first place, it is practically an impossibility with those who do not have any living ideal. Fortunately, if they come in touch with an ideal personality it becomes somewhat easy to make progress; otherwise they can hardly make any progress. Once the ideal of life is determined one can advance slowly towards that ideal through the grace of God. Of course, everything depends upon God's grace.

'We were very fortunate that we came in touch with such a great personality. We have seen in our life what one should do in order to realize God and what happens to a man after God-realization. He was born as a divine Incarnation (mean-

ing Sri Ramakrishna) and he graciously brought us with him. Is this a small matter? We came in direct touch with God Himself. We saw him and shaped our lives in accordance with his ideal. The path to realize God was made very easy for us. Blessed are we! On the other hand, those who have not seen Sri Ramakrishna and have not had the blessed privilege of his holy association are seeing us and are trying to reach the Master and understand him through us. They are more fortunate than thousands of men and women in this world. What would you say to this? God Himself came down as man: it happened only the other day. The whole drama was enacted right in front of our eyes! What a fire of intense spiritual discipline did he ignite! Even now people can feel the warmth of that fire. Is this age to be slighted? It is indeed a holy age! In this age, whoever will take the name of Sri Ramakrishna and try to advance spiritually, modelling his life after that of the Master, will find it easier to make progress. If one patterns one's life after the Master's life, casting his life in the mould of the Master, it will be easy for him to realize God. But where are the people who can do that?

Monk: 'Maharaj, is it very easy to realize God?'

Mahapurushji: 'It is not.' Saying this he started singing:

In the world's busy market-place,
 O Mother, Thou art flying kites;
 High up they soar on the wind of hope,
 held fast by Maya's string. . . .
 Out of a hundred thousand kites,
 at best but one or two break free;
 And Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands,
 O Mother, watching them!

'"One out of a million strives after spiritual emancipation, and out of those who strive, only one or two know Me in reality." It is very difficult to realize God and it is impossible unless one has His grace. Through His grace, light may flash in a room that has been steeped in darkness for thousands of years. He is the Ocean of Mercy. He embodied Himself as a man, feeling compassion for souls in bondage; otherwise, what purpose would He have had for embodiment? He is complete. Tell me, what does He lack?'

SHIBU DADA AT THE MONASTERY—MOTHER KALI AT DAKSHINESWAR—DEVOTION MAKES THE IMAGE LIVING.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Friday, September 27, 1929.

Today, shortly before noon, Shibu Dada (Sri Ramakrishna's nephew) arrived from Dakshineswar. He gave Mahapurushji some *prasada* and vermilion that had been offered to Mother Kali. In the afternoon, after his rest, Shibu Dada came to see Mahapurushji again. Mahapurushji asked him to sit down and said: 'Yesterday, I was thinking a great deal about you. While thinking about Dakshineswar I was reminded of you. You perform the Mother's worship with so much devotion; that is why you were specially in my thoughts.'

Shibu Dada: 'That's it. It is you who attracted me here. You have drawn me here.'

Mahapurushji: 'Dada, you certainly do the worship of the Mother with great devotion. Without devotion and faith, worship is meaningless. It is faith and devotion that make the earthen image living and conscious. Don't you see that it was the Master's devotion that awakened the Mother at Dakshineswar? Temples with images of Mother Kali installed in them are plentiful; but is the Mother's presence vividly felt in all those temples? If you, too, perform the Mother's worship with great devotion, She will remain awake there. You belong to the same family in which Sri Ramakrishna was born; you cannot be slighted! In your veins flows the blood of Sri Ramakrishna. The Mother is specially gracious to you. Mother Kali at Dakshineswar is very much awake. There is a special presence of the Mother there.'

Shibu Dada: 'Through your blessings and the grace of the Mother I understand that a little. When I first started performing the worship I was somewhat afraid, because I knew very little about worship. I didn't know the details of worship—what followed what. But as I would sit for worship, after praying to the Mother I would distinctly hear a voice saying:

"Do this after that. Now perform the worship of the divine Manifestation of the Mother." In this way someone would tell me everything. I would hear the voice so distinctly that I would look around to see where the voice came from and who it was that spoke.'

Mahapurushji: 'That's it! You won't find anywhere another image more awake than that of the Mother Kali at Dakshineswar. The Master, by his devotion, made the Mother come to life. You have seen the drama of the Master's life, Dada. Whenever you perform the worship, try to feel that the Mother is living.'

Shibu Dada: 'I have had ample proof of that. When I started worship as a boy, I used to tell Mother before I would go to sleep every night: "Mother, I am going to bed and shall fall asleep very soon. Who knows if I shall wake up early in the morning? Please wake me up in time for the worship at dawn." Invariably, the Mother would wake me up every morning by giving me a push and saying: "Get up: It is time for the worship at dawn." How many more things the Mother has revealed to me!'

After a long conversation like this Shibu Dada saluted Mahapurushji and left for Dakshineswar. After he had left, Mahapurushji remarked: 'Ah, how guileless Shibu Dada is! The Mother is very gracious to him. She reveals Herself in a guileless heart.'

42

LOVE BINDS US TOGETHER IN THE ORDER—MOTHER ALONE KNOWS HOW AND HOW LONG THAT LOVE WILL WORK—WAYS OF THE MASTER ARE BEYOND OUR COMPREHENSION—THE LIGHT IS WITHIN.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Saturday, August 28, 1929.

It was afternoon and it was raining very hard. Mahapurushji was sitting in his room. Two devotees who were workers of a well-known organization of Bengal had long been waiting to see the Swami. Because of ill health he was not able to see very many people. Finally, conducted into the Swami's

presence, the devotees saluted the Swami and one of them said: 'Maharaj, we have come to have some instructions from you. You are one of the foremost disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Please bless us. With your permission, we should like to ask you a few questions.'

Mahapurushji: 'All right, tell me what you have to ask.'

Devotee: 'God manifested Himself as Sri Ramakrishna for the good of the world. While he was living in the flesh, Sri Ramakrishna formed an Order or group consisting of his intimate disciples, to whom he transmitted the entire power he had acquired by his lifelong spiritual practice. That Order is still going on. Our question is, how did he organize his disciples and by what tie did he bind them together?'

Mahapurushji: 'Love alone was the tie by which he kept all of us together. Drawn and fascinated by his love, we came to him and little by little formed a group. His love for us was so great that in comparison with it the love of parents and relatives seemed trivial. Even now his Order is being conducted by love. Here, love alone is the common cord that binds all of us together into an Order.'

Devotee: 'That love by which the Master gathered you together, and which he transmitted to you, is diminishing and will continue to diminish with the passing of time. How can it be preserved intact? By what means can that stream of love be kept flowing unimpeded for a long time, for the good of the world?'

Mahapurushji: 'Look here, in this transient world nothing is permanent. No force whatsoever is uniformly effective for good. Do you know how a force moves? Just like a wave. A force plays in a wave-like motion. Sometimes it rises very high with great intensity, and sometimes it goes down slowly. That has always been the characteristic of force. It is this slow motion which is indicative of the future rapid motion. How will man know how to keep this force intact? Only the Mother knows. The Supreme Energy from whom originate all forces in the world—She alone knows how to keep intact this force of love. Mahamaya, the Primordial Energy who manifests Herself for the good of the world—She alone knows in what way and for how long She will keep this force active. We, for our part, have no alternative but to depend wholly upon Her.'

Devotee: 'We have made Sri Ramakrishna our life's ideal, trying to shape our lives according to his ideas. We pray for your help in this matter. You are one of Sri Ramakrishna's foremost disciples. Please give us some light.'

Mahapurushji: 'My child, you are blessed that you have made Sri Ramakrishna your life's ideal. He is certainly the Lord of this age. Whoever takes refuge in him is bound to prosper. I bless you with all my heart so that you may gain in strength and become blessed. May you attain the consummation of your life's ideal! Then the light to which you referred, my child, will come from within. The more you try to enter within, reaching the inner and inmost recesses of your heart, the greater the light you will receive. Light cannot be found anywhere outside. It is all within. The Mother, the Embodiment of Light, is within every heart. She is within me; she is within you. She is everywhere from Brahma to the smallest insect, in the movable and the immovable. Pray to Mahamaya, the First-born. She holds the key in Her hands. The realm of light will be opened to you if She graciously unlocks the door. That Primordial Energy, who is Consciousness Itself and regulates everything, is the creator of the mind, intellect, ego and the like: She alone is the source of the entire universe. We have all come from that Mother and will eventually merge in Her. "From This are born life, mind, all the senses, ether, air, fire, water and earth which is the support of everything."

"That Primordial Energy, the power of Brahman, is beyond the reach of this mind and intellect of ours. She manifests Herself in a pure mind. Man cannot reach or understand Her through spiritual practice. She is self-luminous: it is Her consciousness that makes this world conscious. "The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings, not to speak of this fire! He shining, everything else shines after Him; by His light all these are lighted." You hold on to that Mother: She is within yourself. It is She who will open the way to the light.'

Devotee: 'Please tell us a little of what you learned by your lifelong spiritual practice and open the way to light by blessing us.'

Mahapurushji (affectionately): 'I told you, my child, this

light is within yourself. Dive deep within and you will discover the light.

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the ocean of God's beauty!
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the pearl of love.

'With the passing of the days this conviction is becoming firmly established in me. There is no other way than this. Everything is within. That is why Sri Ramakrishna used to sing:

Stay by yourself, O mind!
Why wander here and there?
Look within—in the inner chamber
of your heart—
And you will find, right there,
Whatever you desire.
God, the priceless Treasure,
the true Philosopher's Stone,
Who dwells in you, will answer
your heart's most fervent prayer.
You cannot know, O mind!
how many gems lie strewn
About the outer courtyard of the
dwelling of the Lord.

'That is why I say, my child, seek in the inner chamber of your heart. That is the essence of all teachings. Be resigned to the Mother. Pray to Her earnestly, crying like a child, and you will discover the light. Whenever we asked the Master, he told us also: "Pray sincerely to the Mother, and She will straighten the path." He gave us this advice again and again. I, too, tell you, my child: cry and pray, "Mother, reveal Thyself to me." You will see that the blissful Mother will give you joy and peace. She will certainly do so.'

Devotee: 'It is absolutely true that this light comes from within; but in order to attain that light, does not one need external help? There is need of the power of the *guru* also. We beg of you that assistance.'

Mahapurushji: 'I bless you heartily so that you may have peace in your heart, and I have told you the way to reach that abode of peace; but you will have to do everything. From

outside will come only suggestions; the rest has to be accomplished by one's own efforts. The power of the *guru* is the suggestion. The more you advance towards Him, the clearer you will see the way.'

Devotee: 'Maharaj, will you kindly answer another question of ours? In *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* by Swami Saradananda we have read that the Master attained *nirvikalpa samadhi* by tremendous spiritual discipline. After he had attained the supreme knowledge, when he was doing works of spiritual ministration in accordance with the injunctions of the divine Mother, he kept his wife by his side as enjoined by the scriptures. Just as he initiated and gave the necessary training to the intimate disciples, he initiated her and trained her so that she was firmly established in spiritual understanding. That the Master associated with his devotees and had by his side his wife—what does that indicate? Sri Ramakrishna was the divine Incarnation, born to establish religion in this age. He pointed out by the pattern of his own life the religion of this age. Did he not indicate the trend of the life of future generations by his own life?'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, when Mother (Saradamani Devi) came to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, he did not drive her away. On the contrary, he kept her by his side, gave her advice on spiritual matters, and encouraged and helped her in every way with great care. But the Master did so after attaining *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

'You will understand if you hear what the Master told us about it. The Master said: "The Mother who is there in the temple—the same Mother is within this (referring to his own body). Again, it is the same Mother in the form of the Holy Mother who is with me.' We never wished nor tried to understand why the Master acted that way. If you think you can understand his ways, you are welcome to do so. The Master acted that way; this is as much as we know.

'God Himself was born as Sri Ramakrishna. To understand the reason for his actions is beyond the power of our small intellect. Besides, we never had the inclination to understand it. When Swamiji returned to this country from America after his triumphal preaching, one day Girish Babu said to him:

"Well, Naren (Swamiji), you will have to do one thing in compliance with a special request of ours." Girish Babu was very fond of Swamiji, that is why he spoke that way. Swamiji with great earnestness said: "Why do you talk that way? Just tell me what you want me to do." Girish Babu replied, "You will have to write a biography of the Master." Suddenly Swamiji fell back several steps and said in a serious tone: "Well, Girish Babu, please never make a request like this to me. I shall very gladly do whatever you ask me other than this. I would not even hesitate to revolutionize the world at your request; but I shall not be able to do the work you have suggested. He (the Master) was so profound, so great, that I have not understood him at all. I have not been able to know even a fraction of his life. Do you advise me to fashion a monkey while trying to mould an image of Shiva? I can't do it!"

'Swamiji was such a genius, and even he did not understand anything of the doings of the Master—not to speak of us at all! We never tried to understand those things. How can man understand him (the Master)? See if you can understand him. Every man tries to understand things in accordance with his intellect. We say: "O Lord, we don't ask to understand You. Only bless us that we may have firm faith and devotion at Your feet!" He graciously listens to our prayers.'

Devotee: 'Maharaj, bless us that we too may have that faith and devotion—that we may have peace in our lives.'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, my child, I bless you indeed. May you grow in knowledge—may you live in peace, and may you promote the national welfare to the best of your ability. (Closing his eyes) I sincerely pray for you. May you make progress! May you make headway towards God!'

The two devotees took the dust of Mahapurushji's feet again and again and bade him good-bye. The expression on their faces showed that they left fully satisfied.

THE WORLD IS FULL OF SORROW—A DEVOTEE BEING RESIGNED TO GOD IS NEVER OVERWHELMED BY SORROW.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Tuesday, August 29, 1929.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Mahapurushji was sitting in his room. He had not been well, suffering for some days from cold and asthma, with an intermittent slight temperature. It was painful for him to talk much, but his heart would be touched at people's earnestness and sorrows and he found it difficult to control his emotions. He was ever eager to give people consolation and peace, forgetting his own physical sufferings.

A retired judge came to the monastery accompanied by his wife, son and widowed daughter. When they stood up, after saluting the Swami, he asked them affectionately to sit down. They sat on a mat which was spread on the floor. After a little conversation the gentleman pointed to his daughter and said: 'This is my daughter. Recently, her husband passed away. She is very much grieved and has not yet been able to get over it. That is why I have brought her to you.'

Hearing this Mahapurushji expressed his sympathy. Remaining quiet for a moment he said gently: 'That is the way of the world, my child. Sorrow, bereavement, pain and anguish—this is what the world consists of. Real joy or peace is very rare in this world, and this round of birth and death that is ours, no one can check. Man has no hand in it. God alone is responsible for the creation, maintenance and dissolution of this world, and it is by His will that all beings are born into it. He keeps them as long as He wants, and He takes them away whenever He wishes. We should know for certain that God is the Lord of birth, maintenance and death. It is He who sends souls here to become parents, wives, children, friends and relatives, and He keeps them entangled in some relationship or other, taking them back whenever He wishes. So long as man is not fully convinced of this, he will be subject to grief; but

the moment he is firmly established in this knowledge, he is no longer subject to grief, having no reason to grieve. Only we should see that we do not neglect to serve our relatives with whom we have been connected by God. If we neglect to do this we shall be sorry for it. Man has other things to do besides grieving. He has his worldly duties to attend to. Above everything else, he should progress towards the ideal of life. What does it profit a man to cry over his grief? Life is not meant only for grieving. We shall have to transcend birth, old age, and death and realize God, the object of our supreme love. Then alone there will be an end of all sorrow. "By attaining which, all other attainments pale into insignificance; and being established in which, one is not shaken by the heaviest of sorrows."

'We shall have to court sorrows also as blessings from God, our Beloved. Unless a person is wholly resigned to God he cannot endure these sorrows and griefs undisturbed. It is very difficult for an average person to stand the actions and reactions of this world. A genuine devotee, because of his faith in God, is never overwhelmed by these. The object of human life is to attain that pure devotion and love and be in possession of the supreme bliss. Advance towards God, my child; the more you go towards Him, the more peace you will get. There is no peace in anything in this world. At the feet of God alone does one find the abode of peace.'

44

THE BODY HAS ITS PAINS, BUT HE WHO DWELLS IN THE BODY IS NOT AFFECTED BY THEM—DIVINE GRACE IS EVER PRESENT—ONE MUST MAKE EFFORT TO DESERVE IT.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Sunday, February 2, 1930.

It was afternoon. As it was Sunday there had been a crowd of devotees at the monastery. Mahapurushji's room was full of people. He was conversing joyously with all. A gentleman saluted the Swami devotedly and asked: 'How are you, Maharaj?'

Mahapurushji: 'I am fine.'

Devotee (concerned): 'But by looking at your body one doesn't get that impression. Your body seems to be in very bad condition.'

Mahapurushji: 'Oh! You are asking about the body? The body is not at all well, but I am fine. Talking about God with people, repeating the name of the Lord and being engaged in similar ways, I am in excellent spirits. "As long as Janaki (Sita)¹ takes the name of Rama she feels well." As long as I can repeat the name of the Lord, I should say I am fine. The object of being born is to take the name of the Lord. It is enough if we can do that. Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda)² used to say: "The body knows its pain; O my mind, be at peace!" What a beautiful statement! Pain and anguish belong to the body. He who dwells within the body is not affected by them: He is Bliss itself. He dwells within every body. Everyone is in essence That. We shall have to realize our essential nature. All this confusion is due to our ignorance of Him.'

Devotee: 'Our understanding does not go that far. We see you and what we want is that your body should keep well.'

Mahapurushji: 'You may wish that, but I know that I am not the body. The relationship I have with you is not a physical one and it will not be destroyed with the destruction of the body. My child, the body is short-lived but the Spirit is eternal, and the relationship with the Spirit is also eternal. However much you may try, this body cannot last always. Ram Mohan Roy expressed it beautifully:

Preserved with care, straw or wood may last even for a cycle;
But care cannot arrest the body's dissolution.

Who is yours? To whom do you belong?

Whom can you call your own?

'This ignorance must be eradicated. Man suffers so much by ignorantly identifying himself with the body. Do you know the way out? The way out is to know Him. He is Purity, Knowledge and Freedom itself. He is the Indwelling Spirit of

¹ Sita was the devoted wife of Rama who is worshipped as a divine Incarnation in India. Rama and Sita form the subject-matter of the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*, written by Valmiki.

² A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

all. By knowing Him, man goes beyond pain and sorrow. That is why the Lord said in the *Gita* that the worst of sorrows cannot disturb a person if he once knows Him truly. After attaining illumination, man can remain unshakable and immovable under all conditions, like Mount Sumeru.'

Devotee: 'How can that illumination be attained? Please bless us so that we may attain that state.'

Upon hearing this question, Mahapurushji's mind travelled to an altogether different realm, as it were. In a serious but gentle tone he said: 'My child, we do not have anything other than blessings. I am blessing you with all my heart. How shall I explain to you how it gladdens our heart when we see someone advancing towards God? He who is progressing in the realm of the Spirit and worships the Lord sincerely is very dear and close to us. We constantly pray that people may develop spiritually and make headway towards God. It is our sole endeavour to help people realize Him by transcending the illusions of this transitory world.

'The Master used to say: "The breeze of divine grace is ever blowing. Simply hoist the sail." The grace of God is ever present but one must make an effort to deserve that grace. Of course we are blessing you. You also sincerely call upon the Lord. You will see how great His mercy is. He is ever ready to shower His grace. Take His name, worship Him, remember Him constantly and call upon Him very earnestly. You will see how gracious He is. So much grace will descend upon you that you will be overwhelmed; your life will be blessed. Nothing can be accomplished without His grace. It is He who has kept this world enchanted by His Maya. That is why one should also pray: "O Lord! Do not keep me ignorant with your world-bewitching Maya. Give me pure devotion to your lotus feet. May my life be glorified!"

'Unless the Lord casts His compassionate glance upon a soul, how can he cross this illusion? In the *Chandi* there is a line, "The Mother, the Giver of all boons, being pleased, bestows emancipation upon souls." That is to say, being pleased with the prayers and devotions of men, the Mother gives spiritual emancipation as a boon. Being freed from Maya, they realize their divine nature. It is very difficult to snap the bonds of

Maya without the grace of God; but it is also true that if a person sincerely prays to Him He listens to that prayer and lifts the veil. He will listen to your prayer all the more because you are in the world. He is especially gracious to you householders because He knows that you carry a heavy load on your shoulders. You are being scorched by the sorrows and bereavements of this world. That is why, if you pray a little, He will be pleased and come to your rescue, quickly removing the load from your shoulders. But that prayer should be sincere and earnest.

'You have, of course, your worldly duties and responsibilities. As long as this creation lasts duties and responsibilities will exist. But in the midst of all these you will have to make a little time to call upon the Lord in seclusion; otherwise you will come to grief. There is not so much danger if one can hold on to God. It is very necessary to remember Him. With one hand hold on constantly to His lotus feet, and with the other perform the duties of the world. When all your duties are over, you should hug the lotus feet of God to your heart with both hands.'

45

MAHAPURUSHJI'S DEEPER REALIZATION—'I AM THAT ETERNAL SUPREME BEING, EVER PURE, ILLUMINED AND FREE'—'THERE IS NO JOY IN THINGS FINITE; THE INFINITE ALONE IS BLISS ITSELF'—SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERIES—THE ATTITUDE OF A DEVOTEE—'MOTHER, I DO NOT WANT TO KNOW YOU'—DIVINE GRACE.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Friday, May 23, 1930.

It was the month of May and the weather was quite warm. Mahapurushji often suffered from insomnia at night. He felt worse during the early hours of the morning; for this reason he would talk to people seated right on his bed. Finishing his breakfast that morning, he walked a little on the verandah upstairs. It was painful for him to walk; still he was trying to walk in order to keep up the practice. After a while, becoming exhausted, he sat down on a chair. Then he started for his

room so that he could have a little rest. He walked slowly and said, with a smile, to those who were near, 'Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!'

Returning to his bed, he said: 'See to what a pass the body has come! It is difficult for me to move even a few steps. I have been reduced to an invalid. This is all the Mother's play. This body of mine at one time did so much mountain-climbing and walking on foot! This body performed so much austerity! Now you see it is painful to walk even a few steps. It is long since I stopped going downstairs. Formerly I roamed around so much and visited so many places! By the will of the Master I have had enough of wandering and I don't wish to go anywhere. The Master has effaced from my mind the desire to travel back and forth. I do not have any desire now. I am happy in whatever condition the Master places me. With the lessening of outer activity, the inner activity is growing. The more the mind is becoming withdrawn from the outer world, the more it is making headway in the realm of the Spirit. The Master is graciously revealing to me the Principle which is beyond the body, the mind and the intellect. Now the play of the vital energy is going on intensively within. The Master is graciously letting me experience the realizations which are mentioned in the scriptures.

'I am not the body, and the sixfold change belongs only to the body. I am that eternal Supreme Being, ever pure, illumined and free. The Master has given me that knowledge in the fullest measure. That is why it does not make any difference whether the body is well, sick or old. The body will certainly follow its nature. The realizations and experiences which I used to have as a result of much effort are coming to me naturally without effort; the Master is graciously bestowing upon me those high experiences. He has made clear to me the way to the abode of immortality. Time, place and person are categories that belong to the world of phenomena. When the mind becomes absorbed in meditation one has no consciousness of these categories.

'When I used to live at Almora I visited several beautiful places in the Himalayas. Those places are ideal for spiritual practice and the natural scenery there is without parallel.

while meditating in those places I found that the moment the mind was directed within, that very moment I would be oblivious of plants and trees, hills and dales, and heat and cold as well. Not to speak of these external things, I would not even be conscious whether the body existed or not.

‘How can the mind find joy in external beauty once it becomes absorbed in the feet of the Lord the Beloved, the source of infinite beauty? Having once tasted of the joy of the Infinite, earthly pleasures seem trifling. “That which is infinite is alone bliss; there is no joy in things finite. The Infinite is bliss itself.” Only a portion of that infinite God has manifested Itself as this universe with its suns, moons, stars, and countless spheres of existence. The rest remains unmanifest. “One-fourth of that principle has resulted in this universe, whereas three-fourths remain undifferentiated.” No one has ever been able or will be able to know Him. How can man with his limited understanding comprehend the infinite God? That is why the Lord says in the *Gita*: “O Arjuna, what need is there for you to know these details? I alone exist, sustaining this whole universe by a portion of Myself.”

“By a portion of Myself.” Man cannot comprehend what there is in this portion, not to speak of the rest! Of course, in modern times, with the advancement of western science, many new laws are being discovered. Scientists, with the help of their profound researches, have invented new machines by means of which how many new planets and stars are being discovered. But there are so many other things yet to be known that the minds of the scientists are becoming confused in an attempt to fathom those principles. What they have discovered by means of apparatus is not infallible. What they said ten years ago they are changing now. That is why the Master said: “Mother I do not want to know You. Who has ever known You or will ever know You? Please keep me from being deluded by Your world-bewitching Maya, and may I have pure devotion at Your feet!” The sole object of life is somehow or other to keep our minds directed towards the lotus feet of God. Once the mind becomes absorbed in His lotus feet there is no fear any more. “By attaining which, all other attainments pale into insignificance; being established in which, one is not shaken by the heaviest of sorrows.”

'One cannot have that pure love and knowledge without the grace of the Lord, and He graciously gives that devotion and knowledge. If one is sincerely resigned to the Lord, He certainly becomes gracious. You may wander all over the world, you may visit all the holy places, but without His grace nothing can be accomplished. That is why I say to the boys at the monastery when they insist on going here and there: "My children, where would you roam? Be resigned and stay at the threshold of the Master's mansion. Nothing else will be necessary. What is needed is sincere resignation." We, too, are resigned to him. He has graciously given us enough and is still giving us more and more of that knowledge. I sincerely pray that you may have full knowledge and devotion. (Closing his eyes and raising both hands) "That is My Supreme Abode, by reaching which there is no return."'

46

HOW ONE SHOULD PRACTISE JAPA—PRANAYAMA—SANDHYA AND THE GAYATRI MANTRA—A DEVOTEE'S CONFESSION AND MAHAPURUSHJI'S WORDS OF COMFORT.

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Thursday, July 10, 1930.

After three or four days' ceaseless downpour the sun was up for a while today. It was Guru Purnima. Many devotees came to the monastery and several had been initiated. In the afternoon Mahapurushji was sitting on a chair in his room. Many of the devotees came and saluted the Swami, and he, too, affectionately made inquiries about their well-being. The newly initiated devotees dropped in and took their seats. They had some questions to ask. One of them asked 'Maharaj, is there any definite rule as to how many times we should do *japa* every day?'

Mahapurushji: 'No, there is no definite rule regarding that. The more you repeat the name of the Lord, the better. Of course, if someone wishes to repeat the name five or ten thousand times, he can do so with great devotion, keeping track of the number, and that would be very beneficial.'

Devotee: 'If I feel like doing the *japa* while walking, can I do so?'

Mahapurushji: 'Surely you may. *Japa*—taking the name of the Lord—is something you can do whenever you wish. Under all conditions and circumstances one can repeat the name of the Lord. *Japa* is not restricted as to time and place. Of course, one should repeat the name with devotion. Then alone will one have joy and peace in one's heart. Whenever there is a genuine desire from within, one can do *japa*, whether for ten minutes, half an hour, an hour or more. Do not force yourself. Forced practice will not do much good. It is all a relationship of love. The relationship the devotee has with God is one of love. It has nothing to do with force. Pray very sincerely: "O Lord, make me Thy own. I am lacking in understanding, I do not know how to love Thee. Graciously draw me to Thee and teach me to love Thee."'

Another newly initiated devotee: 'Maharaj, do we have to practise *pranayama* (breathing exercises)?'

Mahapurushji: 'We seldom advise anyone to practise *pranayama*. Neither is it necessary.'

Devotee: 'In your article on *pranayama* you mentioned that while repeating the name of the Lord one has suspension of breath.'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, it happens. If one repeats the name of the Lord with devotion, the mind gradually becomes quiet and there is spontaneous control of the breath. If you wish you can hold your breath within while doing *japa*. It is not at all necessary to breathe in and out or suspend the breath and do things of that kind as mentioned in *Raja-yoga*. The essential thing is devotion and sincerity. God is Truth itself—the Inner Controller. He dwells in every heart as Consciousness. He is the Ocean of pure mercy. Without His grace, my child, nothing is possible. You may practise *japa*, meditation, *pranayama*, rituals, ceremonials or similar things—nothing will help you unless you have His grace. It is true, if a person wants the Lord badly, He graciously reveals Himself to him.'

Devotee: 'Shall we practise *sandhya*¹ and repeat the *gayatri mantra*?'

¹ Spiritual practices enjoined by the Vedas.

Mahapurushji: '*Sandhya, gayatri* and things of that nature come under the category of Vedic rituals. It is very good to practise them. If it is not convenient to practise *sandhya* you may omit it, but you should certainly repeat the *gayatri mantra*. It is a spiritual practice of a very high order. It is a prayer to that Primordial Being who produced the three worlds of *bhu, bhua, and sva* so that He may give us right understanding.'

Gradually all the devotees left the room with the exception of one newly initiated devotee who remained seated. He wanted to discuss some personal matters with the Swami. Finding Mahapurushji alone, the devotee gently said what he had in his mind: 'Maharaj, I have done many awful things in my life. I am a great sinner. Kindly accept me as a disciple and be gracious to me; otherwise, what will happen to me? I am afraid, you too, will condemn me if I tell you all the sins that I have committed in my life.'

Saying this he stopped for a while. He was about to say more when Mahapurushji, in a serious tone and with great feeling, said: 'My child, you need not be afraid. From today you are free from all sins. Have faith in this. So long as Sri Ramakrishna has drawn you to him, you have no reason to be afraid, my child. Now you have become his. The Master is the Ocean of selfless mercy. He is kind to those who are lowly. He is the Redeemer of souls. You have taken refuge at his feet. From today you have a new body—you are reborn. You are no longer a sinner, my child. From today you are one of his children and servants. Do you understand me, my child? The Master has taken you in his arms, shaking the dust and dirt from your body. From now on forget all your past misdeeds. Never cherish those thoughts in your mind any more. Repeat his name joyously and with great devotion. Your life will be sweetened.'

Devotee: 'I cannot change the tendencies of my mind yet. Please bless me so that I can control my passions.'

Mahapurushji: 'Of course you have my blessings. But you will have to exert yourself too. You have children. From now on practise a little self-control and change the course of your life. You have had enough of enjoyment; now stop. Of

course, force alone will not help; but if you struggle sincerely, in time he will make your body and mind pure.'

47

HINDU-MUSLIM RIOTS—AT THE BACK OF THESE THERE IS THE HAND OF THE MOTHER—MOTHER KALI IS A PERFECT MANIFESTATION OF GOD.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Tuesday, August 5, 1930.

Arrangements had been made by the Ramakrishna Mission for the relief of the needy affected by the Hindu-Muslim riots at Dacca. Appeals for funds had been made in the newspapers. Many had assembled in Mahapurushji's room to pay their respects to him. When one of the monks saluted him, the Swami inquired, 'Are you getting contributions for relief?'

Monk: 'No Maharaj, not much.'

Mahapurushji: 'Gradually funds will come. Don't worry about funds. It is His work and He will procure the necessary money.'

Monk: 'There is a difficulty. It is hard to keep oneself calm in these activities. What inhuman persecution these scoundrels have practised.'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, indeed. Well, my child, our work is to serve others and purify our minds by service. As Swamiji said, "By doing good to others we do good to ourselves." The object of our service is to promote our own well-being by helping others. While carrying on works like this, one can examine oneself. Whatever external trials and difficulties may come, you should carry on the work undisturbed. "For one's own salvation and for the good of the world"—this is your life's ideal. Your vision should be directed high. Just as your ideal is noble, so your heart should be big.

'At the back of these communal riots and dissensions I see the hand of the All-beneficent Mother. It is according to Her beneficent will that all this is taking place, and ultimately it will result in good. It will pave the way for unity among the Hindus and they will learn to organize themselves. They will

then try to feel for one another. Unity, organization and fellow-feeling, these are very much needed these days. Above everything else, the Hindus should organize and have unity among themselves. Will lethargy and narrowness of such a long duration come to an end unless there is pressure from outside? Have faith that all this is happening because of the will of the Mother, and it will promote the well-being of the Hindus as a race. It will bring about a new awakening in the entire nation. The Hindus will prosper in every way because Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji were born amongst them.¹

At about five o'clock in the afternoon Swami Vijayananda¹ came from Calcutta. Entering Mahapurushji's room, he said: 'Maharaj, a gentleman has donated five hundred rupees for relief and promised to give more if necessary.' Hearing this news Mahapurushji was very pleased. With folded hands he said, closing his eyes: 'Victory be to the Mother! Who can understand Her play? It is She who in one form is giving pain, and again it is She who in another form is arousing sympathy in people's hearts. "The Goddess who is present as compassion in every being—salutation to Her!" With one hand She is killing, with the other She is giving boons and bidding men "Be fearless!" Swamiji used to say, "Mother Kali is a perfect manifestation of God." Creation, preservation and dissolution—She is the doer of all these. On one side She is destroying with the sword; on the other side She is granting boons and bidding men "Be fearless!" This is all the sport of God. In one form He is bringing pain to so many people, persecuting them with famine, sickness and grief; in another form, again, it is He who is inspiring people to remove the distress of humanity. "Glory be to Thee! Glory be to Thee, Mother! Who will understand Thy ways?" So far no one has been able to understand the Mother, nor will anyone ever be able to. Since the dawn of creation no *yogi* or *rishi* has been able to comprehend Her. Infinite is the sport of the Mother.

Who, indeed, can know Thee unless Thou revealest Thyself?
Veda and Vedanta grope in the dark, failing to fathom Thee.

That is why the Master used to say: "Mother, I don't want to know Thee. Who will know Thee? No one has ever

¹ A monk of the Order.

known Thee, nor will anyone ever know Thee. Grant that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching Maya and graciously give me pure devotion and faith at Thy lotus feet. (With folded hands) Mother, give us faith and devotion; endue us with faith and devotion.”’

48

MAHAPURUSHJI'S REMINISCENCES OF THE OLDEN DAYS—
SWAMIJI'S APPEARANCE AT THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS IN
CHICAGO AND HIS UNIQUE SUCCESS—THE MASTER WORKED THROUGH
HIM.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Wednesday, August 6, 1930.

In the morning the *sadhus* of the monastery gradually gathered in Mahapurushji's room to pay their respects to him. When Swami Vijayananda stood up after saluting him, Mahapurushji inquired, 'Well, what have you been studying these days?'

Swami Vijayananda: 'The *Shrimad Bhagavata*¹ is being studied.'

Mahapurushji: 'What particular section of the *Bhagavata*?'

Vijayananda: 'The section dealing with the twenty-four *gurus* of Avadhuta (an illumined sage) is being read. Omkarananda reads; I listen. Sometimes he studies the lesson beforehand and narrates it in story form. It is because of his enthusiasm that I have been reading the *Bhagavata*. He insists on my studying the Vaishnava philosophy. That is why I am doing it.'

Mahapurushji: 'We too had similar studies and discussions with Swamiji. At different times he would be in different moods and would inspire us accordingly. Sometimes we would discuss the path of knowledge, at other times the path of devotion, and so on. There were times when we would remain absorbed with one idea for a month at a stretch. We would be engrossed in the same mood day and night without interruption. While eating, lying down or sitting around—at all

¹ One of the eighteen Puranas and an authoritative book on Hindu philosophy and religion.

times we would have the same discussions and arguments, and we would also perform spiritual disciplines appropriate to those moods.

'Swamiji was very fond of the ideas of Lord Buddha and he was well-read in Buddhist philosophy. He was not one-sided in any way. From those days on, Swamiji had ideas, language and reasoning of a unique kind. Even his ordinary conversation would be full of lofty ideas expressed in scholarly language. He liked the style of Milton, and he would carry on his discussion and arguments in that style. Before going to America, Swamiji wandered as an itinerant monk from one corner of India to another, and during those wanderings he met the Dewan of Junagad. By talking with Swamiji the Dewan was so impressed that he said to him, "Swamiji, you have a very bright future before you." His prediction came true. While in America, Swamiji became a little nervous at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. It was but natural. It was such a huge gathering: thousands of people—the very best, the cream of society. Swamiji didn't know what he would say, because he hadn't gone there with a prepared lecture. Dr. Barrows called upon him to speak but he kept putting him off. Suddenly he was reminded of a certain verse: "I salute the all-blissful Krishna, whose compassion makes the mute become eloquent and the cripple scale mountains." The moment this verse came to his mind, all nervousness left him. Saluting the Master mentally, he stood up; and what followed you must have read. The world heard a new message from his lips. His lecture was the very best. My child, it was all the play of the power of God! Swamiji was a direct instrument of the Master. All the scholarly speakers who came prepared to establish the greatness of their denominations paled into insignificance before Swamiji.

'Noticing his success, the people of America collected large funds and sent Dr. Barrows to India and such other countries to preach Christianity. Dr. Barrows visited different places in India and gave lectures with very little result. Swamiji started preaching the message of Vedanta in the West and we received reports of his lectures here. At first we could hardly believe that these were lectures by Swamiji when we read them. He didn't use the language nor the ideas we were familiar with. Everything became changed. He had a new message

and a new language. Before going to America, in his conversations here he had a leaning towards the path of knowledge and his language was quite philosophical and scholarly. But in the lectures which he gave in the West his language was simple and direct and his ideas were full of life and love. Returning to India, he remarked: "Do you think I gave those lectures? It was the Master who spoke through me." In reality it was so.'

49

GREATNESS OF THE HOLY MOTHER—GOD IS SPECIALLY GRACIOUS TO HOUSEHOLDERS—MANTRA.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Monday, August 11, 1930.

It was afternoon. The sky was overcast with clouds. Mahapurushji was seated in his room in an easy chair, reading attentively an article on Swamiji written by Romain Rolland in the *Asia Magazine*. An attendant introduced a devotee saying, 'He has been blessed by Holy Mother and is here to pay his respects to you.' The devotee saluted the Swami with great devotion, and as he stood up with moist eyes and folded hands, Mahapurushji affectionately inquired, 'Well, my child, did you have the grace of the Mother?'

Devotee: 'Yes, I did.'

Mahapurushji: 'You are very fortunate that you had the Mother's grace. You shouldn't worry any more. Is our Mother an ordinary mother? For the good of the world, the Mother of the Universe embodied Herself to give liberation to souls.'

Devotee: 'Please bless me so that my faith and devotion at the lotus feet of the Mother may become firm.'

Mahapurushji: 'May it be so, my child! May it be so! Do you practise *japa*? Be sure to do your *japa*, prayer and similar devotions regularly every day.'

Devotee: 'We have become engrossed in the world. Our time is spent in thoughts about money and similar things. We hardly take the name of the Lord. Please bless us so that we can overcome these handicaps.'

Mahapurushji: 'My child, will you spend the whole twenty-four hours of the day doing worldly things? Will you think about money day and night? Won't you repeat the name of the Lord a little? Do a little spiritual practice regularly every day, for ten minutes, five minutes, or even only for two or three minutes. Practice must be regular and systematic; but whatever you do, do it with sincerity, from the heart. That will do you good. Tulasidas said, "An hour, half an hour, or even half of that." What is necessary, my child, is earnestness. The Mother dwells in every heart and She does not take into consideration how much time you put into your practice, but only how sincerely you do it. She only takes into account how much love and devotion you have for Her. In whatever condition you find yourself, pray very sincerely: "Mother, be gracious to me. Have mercy on me. Give me devotion and faith at Thy lotus feet." The Master used to say that the Lord responds quickly to the prayers of householders. If they call upon Him, He blesses them because He is the Indwelling Spirit. He knows very well what a heavy load has been placed on their shoulders and He is quick to feel compassion for those who are in the world. "Ah! A load weighing several thousand pounds, as it were, has been placed on their shoulders, and yet they want to see Me!" That is, God is very easily pleased with householders. Therefore I say, my child, call upon the Lord every day regularly, no matter for how short a time.'

Devotee: 'Yes, I do practise a little every day, a little of *japa*, meditation and prayer; but that cannot satisfy me. I wish I could do more but I cannot make time.'

Mahapurushji: 'Continue what you have been doing but do it with sincerity. That will help you.'

Devotee: 'I have one more question to ask; but your body is not well and so I am hesitant to state it.'

Mahapurushji: 'Well, why not state your question?'

Devotee: 'The Mother gave me the *mantra*. I repeat it, but I do not know its meaning, nor did she tell me the meaning.'

Mahapurushji: 'You repeat the *mantra*, don't you? That is what is important. What meaning would the *mantra* have? It is the name of the Lord, and the little mystic syllable attached

to it is expressive of the particular aspect of the Deity. The name, together with the mystic syllable, comprises the *mantra*. The *mantra* primarily refers to God. Repetition of the *mantra* is as good as calling upon God. What would you gain by knowing more of the meaning? Repeat the great *mantra* with simple faith. That will be conducive to your spiritual welfare.'

Devotee: 'Please bless me so that I may be free from the bondage of this world.'

Mahapurushji: 'I bless you heartily, my child. May it be so.'

50

JANMASHTAMI DAY—THE MASTER'S SPIRITUAL ECSTASIES.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Sunday, August 17, 1930.

It was Janmashtami day (the birthday of Sri Krishna). Since dawn Mahapurushji had been reciting at short intervals the many names of Sri Krishna. Often he repeated in a sweet voice: 'Govinda! Govinda!' He would also chant hymns to Sri Krishna and sometimes he would sing his many names. Gradually the *sadhus* and *brahmacharins* of the Math came to see and salute the Swami. Some of them remained standing in the room after saluting him. The conversation turned upon various topics.

Later, addressing Omkarananda, Mahapurushji said: 'Today is a great day. Thousands of years ago, on this day, the Lord God came down to this earth as Sri Krishna for the good of the world. Even today millions of men and women draw inspiration and peace from his name. Devotees of the Lord are filled with spiritual fervour and joy on such a special day.'

'We have seen how the Master would have an excess of *samadhi* on a day like this. In spite of his efforts, he would not be able to control his spiritual fervour. The natural trend of his mind was high. By sheer force he would bring his mind down to this earthly plane. For the good of the world the Mother would keep his mind on a lower level. Ah! What a sight it was! He would be so beside himself with spiritual

emotion that he could hardly speak. How great was his love for God! Tears would roll down his cheeks in streams. We never saw anyone shedding such tears of love and devotion. In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, here and there, we find brief descriptions of that love. Can it be described in any way? Only he who has seen it understands it. Spiritual emotion, *samadhi* and experiences of that kind were daily events with him. Master Mahashaya¹ (M.) could not be present every day. He would visit the Master at Dakshineswar or elsewhere on Saturday, Sunday or some such holidays and he tried to keep a record of whatever happened in his presence.'

51

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA'S BIRTHDAY—MAHAPURUSHJI'S REMINISCENCES OF HIM.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Monday, February 8, 1932.

It was the birthday of Sri Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda). As he woke up at dawn, Mahapurushji saluted Sri Maharaj, after saluting the Master, the Holy Mother and Swamiji and repeated at intervals: 'Glory be to Raja Maharaj!'

In the shrine devotional songs appropriate for the dawn were being sung after the 'dawn worship' of Sri Ramakrishna. It being Monday (Shiva's day), songs in praise of Shiva were being sung; but Mahapurushji sent word that they should sing songs on Krishna because it was the birthday of Sri Maharaj. Accordingly, songs such as 'Awake Krishna! Enchanter!' were being sung. Finally they sang the song, 'O Lord, Thou who movest about the forest groves, be gracious unto this wretched soul.' Mahapurushji was delighted with the songs.

Gradually the morning became brighter. The crowd of devotees in Mahapurushji's room became larger, the *sadhus* and devotees of the monastery assembling there. Joyously Mahapurushji talked with all. He remarked: 'Today is a great day—the birthday of Sri Maharaj. Men like him belong to the

¹ Mahendra Nath Gupta, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

category of the knowers of Brahman. For the good of the world, at long intervals, great souls like him, endowed with deep spiritual realizations, are born. The entire world becomes blessed at the touch of their feet. Maharaj was not an ordinary person. He was an *ishwarakoti* (a soul born perfect): he was a direct associate of the Lord—the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna.

'We have heard from the Master that a few days before Maharaj came to Dakshineswar for the first time, the Master had this vision: The Mother brought a child and placed him on his lap, saying, "Here is your child." The Master was startled and said to the Mother: "How can I have a child? I am a monk." The Mother smiled and said: "He is not a child in the worldly sense. He is your spiritual son." Upon hearing this the Master felt relieved. Later, when Maharaj came to Dakshineswar, the Master at once recognized him (as the child in that vision). From the very beginning of his acquaintance with the Master, Maharaj also behaved like a child five years old. Like a petulant child he would make many demands upon the Master. Sometimes he would even climb his shoulders or sit on his lap, and how many other childlike things would he do! Those were unique sights to behold—divine phenomena. From the ordinary human standpoint one cannot understand these things.'

In the forenoon many kinds of food of which Maharaj had been fond were offered in worship at his temple. With great devotion Mahapurushji took a little of the offered food with the tip of his finger and said: 'Maharaj himself liked many kinds of food and enjoyed feeding others. Ah! When he would visit the monastery at Belur it would be a mart of joy. How many people would gather! Meditation and *japa*, worship and study, devotional singing, feasting and merry-making would become the order of the day. There would be waves of joy at the monastery. Those were indeed blessed days! Only a knower of Brahman like Maharaj could give joy to people in so many ways.'

In the course of the conversation Mahapurushji asked someone to bring him a picture of Maharaj. When he was given the picture, Mahapurushji touched it to his head and placed it over his heart. Later, looking intently at the picture, he said:

'See what a regal appearance he has! How unusual is the expression of his eyes and face! Whether seated or standing, he has the bearing of a king. That is why Swamiji¹ used to call him "Raja" (King). Swamiji would say: "Here is Raja", "Give it to Raja", "Call Raja", "Tell it to Raja", "Raja's monastery", and so on. It was Swamiji who gave this name to Maharaj. It is Maharaj who owns this Math; who are we? How much he has done and how hard he has laboured for this monastery! Maharaj's memory is associated with every brick of the monastery. He shed his life's blood to build up the monastery. Even now he is doing the same. I am only his servant seated here, bearing his sandals on my head. Even as Bharata ruled the kingdom, placing Rama's sandals on the throne, so am I conducting the work of the Order, bearing Maharaj's sandals on my head. I do as he guides me. Ah! What regard and affection Swamiji had for Maharaj! His attitude was: "Respect the sons of the *guru* as the *guru* himself."'

After remaining silent awhile, he said to those who were there: 'Do you know who Maharaj was? He was the cowherd of Vrindavan (the playmate of Krishna). The Master used to say that at the last moment Maharaj would have experience as to his real nature. What the Master said actually happened. Shortly before his death Maharaj began to speak of the many experiences he was having: "I am the Rakhali (cowherd) of Vrindavan. Let me have my anklets! I will dance holding Krishna's hand. Alas! You do not have eyes to see. You do not see my Krishna standing on the lotus." The moment he started describing those experiences we realized that this time he would not recover—he would depart from his body.'

Mahapurushji was beside himself with thoughts of Maharaj. He continued: 'What austerities Maharaj performed! Although he was the beloved of Sri Ramakrishna he underwent the severest of spiritual disciplines. All their activities are for the education of others. At one time Hari Maharaj² and Maharaj lived together performing austerities. They used to live in cabins side by side but were so absorbed in their spiritual practices that they would hardly exchange words with each other. Once in a while they would meet, but they were so

¹ Swami Vivekananda.

² Swami Turiyananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

absorbed in their own spiritual fervour that they would not be in a mood to talk. They would not say anything to each other sometimes for twenty or more days, although they were so friendly to each other.'

52

SHIVA. THE LORD OF YOGIS—HOW SRI RAMAKRISHNA WOULD BE LOST IN NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI, WHEN HE WOULD HEAR SONGS ON SHIVA FOR SOME TIME.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Monday, February 18, 1932.

It was the hour of dawn. The entire world was absorbed in meditation, as it were, in the midst of quiet, placid Nature. Under the wide canopy of the sky the temples also were wrapped in the silence of meditation. Close by, the sacred Ganga was flowing gently and a soft breeze was blowing. In the faint light of dawn the monks at the monastery were quietly wending their way to the shrine for meditation. They seemed to be indrawn. Mahapurushji had been awake for some time and was seated on his cot. Who could know to what realm of blessedness his mind was soaring?

Time slipped by. With the benign touch of dawn the eastern horizon became bright with a tinge of rose. The birds started singing the praise of God, as it were. In the temple of Sri Ramakrishna the blowing of the conch-shell announced the hour of 'dawn worship'. After the 'dawn worship', devotional songs appropriate for the hour began.

It was Monday, so songs of Shiva were being sung. (Monday is the day on which Shiva is specially worshipped.) A *sadhu* of the monastery sang two songs composed by Devi Sahaya, a devotee of Shiva: 'O Lord Shiva, Thou who bearest the Ganga on Thy head, listen to my prayer!' and 'O Lord Shiva, take my boat across!' Mahapurushji was especially fond of these two songs. Finally the song beginning with the line 'Shiva, the Lord of yogis, seated in the *yoga* posture, is absorbed in meditation' was sung. The sweet music of the songs spread

all over the monastery grounds. Mahapurushji became deeply absorbed in meditation while, listening to them. He became motionless and remained with unblinking eyes. Gradually Mahapurushji came down to the normal plane, although his mind still seemed to be steeped in the ocean of the bliss of Shiva. Sometimes he repeated softly: 'Om! Salutation to Shiva!' or 'Om! The Lord God is that Reality.' Sometimes he repeated, 'Bom! Bom! Mahadeva!' By this time many *sadhus* and *brahmacharins* had assembled in Swami Shivananda's room. He gradually came down to the normal plane and started talking a little.

The conversation was about the last song composed by Girish Babu. Mahapurushji said, 'Ah! What an excellent song Girish Babu composed!' He began singing the song. Later he remarked: 'Without the grace of the Master he couldn't have written that way. He composed the song, having a vision of Shiva, so to say. How beautiful and profound the idea is! "Time remained static in the present while Shiva was absorbed in meditation." It describes the state of deep meditation. When meditation is very deep one loses all sense of past and future. There is simply consciousness of the present, and that vaguely. That is why Girish Babu wrote, "Time remained static in the present." Then all sense of past and future is obliterated, there remaining only consciousness of the present. Of course, when the mind is lost in *samadhi* there is no consciousness of the present either. It is a state beyond past, present and future. That state cannot be described. That is why Swamiji said: "It is beyond speech and thought. Only he who has the experience knows it." It is not an ordinary state. Coming down from it one cannot find words to express the joy of *samadhi*.

'We have seen how Sri Ramakrishna would try, without success, to describe the *nirvikalpa samadhi*¹ while coming down from that state and still under its influence. Eventually he would say: "I wish very much to tell you about it, but I cannot. Somebody presses my mouth." Really, that state cannot be described. "Only he who has had the experience understands it."'

¹The highest mystic experience in which the individual soul is merged in the Absolute, beyond all relativity, beyond speech and thought.

When the *sadhu* who was singing at dawn came to salute Mahapurushji, Mahapurushji remarked: 'Listen. Whenever you sing songs about Shiva in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, be sure that you conclude with one or two songs about the Mother—one or two songs describing some aspect of the Mother. Make a point of remembering this. You do not know; that is why I am telling you. When you sing songs, try to feel that you are singing for the Master's entertainment and he is listening to you. The Master could not bear to hear songs of Shiva continuously. One day a great musician came to Dakshineswar with the idea of entertaining Sri Ramakrishna. He was a finished musician and used to sing splendidly. From the very start he began singing songs about Shiva. After hearing one or two songs the Master became absorbed in *samadhi*. It was altogether *nirvikalpa samadhi*. We never saw the Master absorbed so deeply in *samadhi* before. His face became flushed; he was pulsating with a divine presence; his figure appeared larger than usual and his hair stood on end. How can I describe that sight to you? In this way considerable time passed and the Master would not come down to the normal plane. The singing continued; all were speechless with wonder. We seldom saw the Master in such deep *samadhi* nor did we see him having such a large figure. After some time, suddenly the Master exclaimed, "Oh! Oh!" as if he were suffering unbearable pain within. With great difficulty he said, "Sing about the Mother." We understood that he wanted to hear songs about Her. Then and there the singer was requested to sing about the Mother, and songs about the Mother continued. Slowly the Master's mind came down to the normal plane. Later on he stated that that day his mind was plunged into a very deep *samadhi* and he had had a hard time to bring it down. The Master did not like to stay long in *nirvikalpa samadhi*. He came for the good of the world. If he remained in the *nirvikalpa* state it would not be possible for him to work for the good of the world. That is why he wanted to maintain the attitude of a devotee and be in the company of devotees. Meditation on Shiva represents the *nirvikalpa* state. In that state there is neither creation nor this world of living beings. The natural trend of Sri Ramakrishna's mind was towards the *nirvikalpa* state. So he would cherish some trivial

desire in order to bring his mind down. Everything about him was unique!

After remaining silent awhile, Mahapurushji asked an attendant: 'Today is Monday. Are we not supposed to have a recitation of "The Hymn on the Greatness of Shiva"? When shall we have it?' 'We shall have it now, Maharaj,' answered the attendant, and taking a book of hymns from the adjoining table, he started chanting the hymn. Mahapurushji sat with folded hands and eyes closed. The chanting continued, Mahapurushji joining in.

If praise of Thee by one who is ignorant of the extent of Thy greatness be unbecoming, then even the praises of Brahma and others are inadequate for Thee. And if all remain blameless by praising Thee according to their intellectual powers, then even this attempt on my part to compose a hymn is free from blemish.

Thy greatness is beyond the reach of mind and speech. Who can fittingly praise That which even the Vedas describe with trepidation, by the method of 'Not this, not this'? How many qualities does That possess, and by whom can It be perceived? Yet towards the form taken later, whose mind and speech do not turn?

Different are the paths of realization enjoined by the three Vedas, Samkhya, Yoga, the Pashupata doctrine, and the Vaishnava Shastras. Persons following different paths—straight or crooked—according as they consider that this or that one is proper, owing to the difference in their temperaments, reach Thee alone, just as all rivers reach the ocean.

O Lover of solitude, my salutation to Thee, who art very near and also far, far away! O Destroyer of the God of Love, my salutation to Thee, who art the minutest as also the largest! O Three-eyed One, my salutation to Thee,

who art the oldest and also the youngest. I offer my salutation to Thee, who art all and who transcendest all.

Salutation to Brahma, in whom *rajas* preponderates for the creation of the universe. Salutation to Rudra, in whom *tamas* preponderates for the destruction of the universe. Salutation to Vishnu, in whom *sattva* preponderates for giving happiness to the people. Salutation to Shiva who is effulgent and beyond the three attributes.

O Lord, if the blue mountain be the ink, the ocean the ink-pot, the branch of the heavenly tree be the pen, the earth the writing-leaf, and if, taking these, the Goddess of Learning writes for eternity, even then the limit of Thy virtues will not be reached.

O Lord, I do not know the true nature of Thy being, of what kind Thou art. O Great God, my salutation again and again to That which is Thy true condition!

Mahapurushji recited the last few verses in a loud voice. For a while all were silent. Then Mahapurushji softly remarked: 'We observed that the Master could not listen to the entire Hymn on the Greatness of Shiva. After hearing one or two verses he would be absorbed in *samadhi*. He himself would recite the two verses which begin: "O Lord, if the blue mountain be the ink" and "O Lord, I do not know the true nature of Thy being." He would burst into tears as he would repeat the last verse, and say, weeping: "O Lord, who wants to know Thy nature? Who knows who Thou art? I do not want to know Thee or understand Thee, O Lord! Give me pure devotion at Thy lotus feet! Who can know Him?"'

Then the Bengali translation of the above verses were read, as desired by Mahapurushji. Mahapurushji remarked: 'Shiva, the Lord of *yogis*, is the *guru* of monks. That is why Swamiji was fond of meditating on Shiva from his very childhood. Unless one renounces everything, as exemplified by Shiva, the mind will not be absorbed in *samadhi*.'

'THIS BODY IS NOT MINE'—'IT IS THE MOTHER'S'—'WHATEVER SHE WILLS WILL HAPPEN.'

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Tuesday, March 29, 1932.

For some time Mahapurushji had not been well, running a slight temperature. He had high blood-pressure and heart trouble. Because of difficulty in breathing, often he could not even lie down at night. His diet consisted of just a little liquid. He had been under the treatment of Dr. Ajitnath Roy Choudhuri, who visited him almost every day. Mahapurushji, however, did not take his sickness very seriously. He was always cheerful, discussing spiritual subjects with all. By looking at him one would not have had the impression that he had any physical ailment.

Today the doctor came shortly after dusk. Mahapurushji, with a smile, inquired about his health. After replying to his inquiry, the doctor examined him and found his temperature to be 100 degrees F., blood-pressure 230 and heart very much enlarged. The doctor inquired, 'How do you feel, Maharaj?'

Mahapurushji: 'I am fine. So long as I can think about God, take His name and sing His praise, I am very well.'

Doctor: 'But this sickness has made you very weak.'

Mahapurushji: 'What can I do about it? And there is nothing that you can do either. This body is bound to perish. No physical body can last for ever. I know very well that this body is not mine. It is the Mother's. Whatever She wills will happen. If She wants to keep this body it will stay; otherwise it will go. Do you understand? I am unconcerned whether this body stays or goes. Everything, my child, depends on the will of the Mother. Her will be done! Do whatever you please—I am not objecting to it; but I know very well that what is to be done will be done by the Mother. You will not be able to do anything. With Sarat Maharaj's¹ passing away, this body of mine is on its way. From that moment, my entire heart has been wholly given to the Master. This body is alive

¹ Swami Saradaranda.

in name only. Only the Master knows how this body is living and why.'

After exchanging a few more words Ajit Babu said: 'Maharaj, I have a request to make. We wish very much to send for Nilratan Babu; I had a talk with him. When I mentioned the matter of the fee he was a little mortified and remarked: "How can I take a fee from the President of the Mission? Please do not mention it again. I would feel blessed if I could serve him."''

Mahapurushji: 'He is a noble soul. That is why he expressed himself that way. Let him come; I have no objection. But the question is, what is the use of unnecessarily troubling him? He is such a busy person that I hesitate to bother him. What is to be done will be done by the Mother.'

Ajit Babu was very pleased that Mahapurushji gave his approval to call Dr. Nilratan Sarkar. Ajit Babu then talked at length on the subject of treatment. Mahapurushji listened to the discussion with great interest. In the course of the conversation, in reply to a remark by Ajit Babu, Mahapurushji said: 'I am going to tell you a secret. Those who have experienced *samadhi* never suffer from any troubles of the head; they do not feel dizzy or even have headaches.' Incidentally Ajit Babu remarked, 'The heart never stops. For some time you can suspend the action of the lungs, but the heart never rests.' To this Mahapurushji replied: 'The heart also rests under certain conditions. With *samadhi* the heart enjoys a very good rest.'

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M.'S DEATH, A GREAT LOSS—M. WAS FILLED WITH THOUGHTS OF THE MASTER—HIS VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION, THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA.

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Saturday, June 4, 1932.

Mahapurushji had not been at all well. He had high blood-pressure and did not sleep very well the previous night. The morning brought very bad news. Revered M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta, author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) left his

mortal body at 6.15 A.M. and was united with the Master. He was seventy-eight years of age when he passed away. Upon hearing this news Mahapurushji was grief-stricken and sat silent. Unable to control his feelings any longer, he gently remarked to the *sadhus* and devotees who were close by: "The Master placed me in such a position that I could not even go and see M. (before his death). One by one the Master is taking away his devotees, leaving me here to bear the brunt of the grief. He alone knows what he wills. Ah! M. lived in Calcutta, illumining the entire city, as it were. How many devotees would visit him and hear from him the Master's words, and be filled with peace! This loss will never be made good. He had nothing else to discuss but the words of the Master. His life was filled with the Master. How dearly the Master loved him! He spent many days at Dakshineswar.

'M. was very simple as regards his food, living mostly on milk and rice. The Master himself arranged, through the maidservant, for a pint of good milk for him every day. M. had a very strong body. That is why he could do so much of the Master's work. Whatever he would hear from the Master he would note down in his diary after going home. Later from those notes he wrote that wonderful *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. He had a prodigious memory. He jotted down just meagre notes and later from those notes, by exercising his memory through meditation, he developed the *Gospel*. He belonged to the group of Sri Ramakrishna's intimate disciples. The Master brought M. with him for that particular work, so to say. M. would visit him every Saturday and Sunday or any holiday. He would also see him when the Master would come to Calcutta or wherever the Master would be visiting. When interesting subjects were being discussed and there was a big crowd, all of a sudden Sri Ramakrishna would say to M.: "M., did you understand? Note that point well." Sometimes the Master would repeat certain points. We did not realize then why the Master spoke to M. that way.

'The Master's words were so impressive that I too started making notes. One day at Dakshineswar I was listening to the Master, looking intently at his face. Many beautiful things were being discussed. Noticing my attitude and divining my intention, suddenly the Master said: "Look here! What are

you listening to so attentively for?" I was taken by surprise. The Master then said: "You don't have to do that. Your life is different." I felt as if the Master had divined my intention to take notes and that was why he spoke that way. From that time on, I gave up the idea of making notes of his conversations and whatever notes I had I threw into the Ganga."

The next morning some devotees came to the monastery from Calcutta. All of them had associated with M. and served him devotedly for a long time. They were all grief-stricken over his passing away. Upon hearing from them the details of M.'s death, Mahapurushji affectionately remarked: 'Ah! It is a great blow to you. This bereavement is fresh. No words from anyone will assuage this grief. Where is Benoy? It must be a great blow to him also. He stayed with him for a long time and served him very devotedly. What is to be done? No one has any control over this. Sri Ramakrishna himself is taking away his devotees; but we know the relationship of M. with us and with the Master is eternal. Do you understand? This relationship is imperishable. Never think for a moment that M. passed away and that there has been an end of everything. Never!'

After a long conversation in this vein, Mahapurushji consoled the devotees, and while bidding them good-bye blessed them and said: 'What fear is there, my children? The Master is living (in a spiritual sense)! And we are still in the flesh. Whenever you find time, do come to the monastery.'

When the devotees had left, Mahapurushji said, 'Ah! M. was like a refuge to devotees—a haven of peace to many. Specially after Sarat Maharaj's passing away many devotees used to go to M., and he would give peace to the hearts of many by speaking untiringly to them about the Master. This loss cannot be filled! He was a holy soul. What great work of the Master he accomplished! Even if he had written only one volume of the *Gospel* it would have immortalized him. His work is imperishable.'

THE WORSHIP OF MOTHER DURGA AT THE MONASTERY—MAHAPURUSHJI'S SPIRITUAL FERVOUR—ANIMAL SACRIFICE—THREE KINDS OF WORSHIP ACCORDING TO TEMPERAMENTAL DIFFERENCES.

Place: Belur Monastery. Time: Thursday, October 6, 1932.

The worship of Mother Durga was being celebrated at the monastery. Since the day the sculptor had started fashioning the image, Mahapurushji had been beside himself with spiritual fervour, thinking about the Mother. Like a child he would say over and over 'Mother! Mother!' Sometimes out of sheer joy he sang songs describing the Mother's coming; at other times he taught some of the *sadhus* of the monastery to sing one or two new songs describing Her coming. The joy in his heart was flowing like a fountain with a thousand streams.

Yesterday the ceremony preliminary to the worship of the Mother had been performed. In the morning Swami Tapanda¹ sang a song with great feeling. Mahapurushji at intervals exclaimed 'Ah! Ah!' in appreciation. Controlling his emotions with difficulty, he said to the singer: 'Go! Go! Leave me alone! You have caused me to break the pot right in the market-place (meaning he was embarrassed because he could not restrain his spiritual emotions before others)! My condition is just like that of a dry match-stick. The Master used to say, "The slightest stroke is enough to ignite a dry match." And so it is with me.' He became self-conscious because he could not control his feelings.

It was the seventh day of the moon, the first day of the Mother's worship. Since four o'clock in the morning the musicians had been playing a melody describing the coming of the Mother. In the shrine songs of the same kind were also being sung. One of the songs began:

The autumn dawn of the seventh day
of the moon burst upon the horizon;
The ten-armed Mother appeared,
illuminating the ten directions.

¹ A monk of the Order.

Mahapurushji joined in this song and later he sang by himself:

Do not awaken her, Jaya. Uma is disconsolate and has just gone to sleep.

Presently the worship began in the hall erected for the purpose. The *sadhus* of the monastery and many devotees, men and women, came in groups to see Mahapurushji. He blessed all, saying: 'The Mother is here. May you have great joy! Now we should have nothing but joy.' At frequent intervals Mahapurushji made inquiries as to the progress of the worship. At the time the ceremony of invoking life into the image was being performed, he could not stay still any longer and expressed great eagerness to come down to the worship hall. Accordingly, attendants carried him to the worship hall in an easy chair. Mahapurushji, the child of the Mother, stood before Her with folded hands. Who can describe that sight? When the invocation ceremony was over, Mahapurushji with great devotion bowed before the Mother and went upstairs. He was in a sublime mood, his face radiant with a divine glow.

The entire day there had been a large crowd of people at the monastery. Today everyone was welcome. Mahapurushji whole-heartedly blessed all. The devotees took the *prasada* and left filled with peace.

After the vesper service the *sadhus* of the monastery were singing *Kali kirtana* (songs about Mother Kali). A few *sadhus* assembled in Mahapurushji's room. Today he didn't feel the least bit tired, being filled with joy. Addressing the *sadhus* he said: 'I tell you, the worship of the Mother at the monastery is without parallel. Here it is a worship of pure devotion. In our worship of the Mother we do not have any other motive than to please Her. Our only prayer is this, "Mother, be pleased to give us faith and devotion, and do good to the world." There is nothing to wonder at. So many pure *sadhus* and *brahmacharins* are sincerely worshipping the Mother whole-heartedly that She is bound to be pleased. They have renounced the world and are seeking spiritual enlightenment; the Mother

is bound to respond to their fervent invocations and prayers. Here the Mother is more manifest than anywhere else. I say this emphatically, my children. People may spend thousands of rupees in worship, but such faith and devotion is rarely met with. Our worship is of the purest kind. Ah! A. does the worship with great feeling. The scriptures say that when the image is beautiful, the worshipper devout and he who assists in worship pure and selfless, such worship evokes a special manifestation of the Deity. Here all the conditions are fulfilled. That is why the Mother is so manifest here. All the minute details of worship are meticulously observed here.

'Our Master came for the establishment of religion. Before his advent, worship and things of that sort had been neglected and almost died out. The Master infused a new spirit in everything; that is why all these things have come back to life. Now many perform worship again. Swamiji introduced the worship of Mother Durga at the monastery at Baranagore. Of course, the worship used to be performed in a vessel in those days. Once a he-goat was sacrificed there. This goat was purchased by Suresh Babu. Then they performed *homa* (fire ritual) with the entire goat. M. and other devotees felt very much disturbed because of the sacrifice and they brought the matter to the notice of the Holy Mother. She replied, "So long as the sacrifice disturbs them why not omit it?" After that the sacrifice of a goat was discontinued. Later, at this monastery, it was Swamiji who first worshipped the Mother in the image. For this occasion the Holy Mother came and spent the few days of worship at the adjacent house. She remarked that Mother Durga would come here every year.'

A monk: 'Maharaj, isn't worship possible without the sacrifice of a goat?'

Mahapurushji: 'Why not? It is the Mother who has come down as *vaishnavi shakti* (Saving Power) in the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. In our monastery we do not have any animal sacrifice. Our worship is *sattvika*. Our scriptures prescribe three kinds of worship, in accordance with people's temperamental differences: *sattvika*, *rajasika*, and *tamasika*. In *sattvika* worship there is no external pomp and show. It is a worship of devotion—selfless worship in order to please the Mother. We perform worship in that spirit here. Those who are *raja-*

sika or *tamasika* perform their worship in accordance with their natures. In worship performed with a selfish motive there is a great deal of pomp and show. For such worshippers the scriptures prescribe animal sacrifice and things of that kind. The most important thing in life is to attain pure devotion at the lotus feet of the Mother. That is also the purpose of worship. Once one is able to install the Mother in the temple of the heart, one does not need external pomp and ritual. Now that the Mother is here, let us rejoice! In our worship we do not have the immersion of the Deity. Where could the Mother go? She is ever present here! The expression, "Please come again at the end of the year" and similar expressions refer to externals and concern average people. We know that the Mother is ever present in the temple of our hearts.'

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SWAMI SUBODHANANDA'S SERIOUS ILLNESS AND DEATH—MAHAPURUSHJI'S GRIEF AND REMINISCENCES OF HIM.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Friday, December 2, 1932.

For some months Swami Subodhananda, a direct monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, had been staying at the monastery at Belur. He had been suffering from a serious type of tuberculosis. Mahapurushji was looking after his treatment and nursing. In spite of everything, his illness was becoming worse from day to day. Mahapurushji could not accept the fact that Swami Subodhananda's condition was so serious. If someone would inquire about his illness, he would say: 'There is nothing serious about the condition of Khoka (the name by which he was affectionately called by his brother disciples). He is gradually improving. We have to stay as long as the Master needs us for his work. That is the truth of the matter. Whatever people may say, this is what I feel. It applies in Khoka's case as it does in mine. For our part, we do not have much faith in physicians. Who can kill you if the Lord protects you? So long as the Lord protects Khoka no harm can come to him.' Later, as he learnt from the physicians of the seriousness of

Swami Subodhananda's illness, he became very much concerned, saying: 'What do they say? No, I cannot believe that it is so serious! Is Khoka's condition so bad?' It would be difficult for anyone other than those who were actually there to realize the depth of feeling that the Swami expressed in these few words.

It was Friday, the second of December. Swami Subodhananda felt much better that morning. When Swami Suddhananda went to see him he said: 'Well, Sudhir (Swami Suddhananda), are you well? Is everything all right?' Mahapurushji felt more optimistic when he received the report of Swami Suddhananda's visit. He said repeatedly: 'Khoka is doing well today, isn't he? He talked with Sudhir at length.' As the day advanced, Swami Subodhananda's condition became worse. It looked as if the life would depart from the broken cage of the body.

Mahapurushji had not been informed of this, but for some unknown reason he had been quite disturbed. He did not have his usual rest at noon that day. He paced his room and as he stood near the window he saw a monk walking across the yard of the monastery. He inquired, 'Who is that?' An attendant who was near informed the Swami who it was. Mahapurushji remarked, 'How is it that Bharat (Swami Abhayananda) is going for his dinner so late?' Later he said, 'Bharat has an excellent spirit. Like the mistress of the house, he takes his meal after seeing that all have been served. In the monastery if devotees are served properly it pleases the Master. He used to say, "The scriptures, the devotee and the Lord—these three are identical." He is more manifest in *sadhus* and devotees.'

Shortly after three o'clock in the afternoon Swami Subodhananda left his body and became united with the Master. A shadow of sorrow spread over the monastery. For a moment Mahapurushji was shocked to hear this sad news. Controlling his emotions, he made inquiries about the Swami's death. He was in a solemn mood.

The next morning Swami Vijnanananda¹ arrived from Allahabad. Upon meeting him Mahapurushji burst into tears. No one realized that he was grieving so much. For some time he

¹ A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

wept like a child. Controlling his emotions somewhat, he made inquiries about the health of Swami Vijnanananda and began talking about Swami Subodhananda.

Mahapurushji said: 'From his very childhood Khoka was a person of dispassion and austerity, and by nature very guileless. At one time I stayed in Banshi Dutt's garden-house in Varanasi. Khoka came there in a palanquin. Although sick, he was quite unconcerned. He was delighted to see me after such a long time. He laughed so much that he developed a temperature. I took him to Brahman Mother (a lady acquaintance). When his condition improved a little I took him to Dr. Govinda. Gradually he recovered from this sickness. That time we lived together for some time in Varanasi. Khoka was just like a child. He was just a little boy when we went to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was very fond of him, and so was Swamiji.'

After remaining quiet awhile, Mahapurushji hummed this song, 'I am certainly surprised at Thy sports, O playful Mother . . .' Later he remarked, 'This song was sung by Trailokyanath Sanyal at the Cossipore cremation ground after the Master's passing. It is very difficult to understand the Mother's play. Didn't you see how splendidly Khoka left the body and became united with the Master? When the Master calls us we shall have to go. The Master is taking away his children one after another; he alone knows why he keeps me here. He can sacrifice his animal wherever he pleases, either at the neck or at tail. Everything depends upon his will. He has placed me in such a condition that I can hardly enjoy even a hearty laugh. I have no one with whom I can discuss past incidents. And yet I have to stay here.'

In the afternoon the devotees who waited upon Swami Subodhananda during his illness were conducted to Mahapurushji. They had not eaten any food since the previous day and had been crying a great deal. Looking at them, Mahapurushji's eyes became filled with tears. Controlling his emotions with difficulty he tried to console them, saying: 'Well, tell me, where has Khoka Maharaj gone? He is within the Master. Have faith in my words. What good will it do to grieve only? It is ignorance that causes grief. Go to the shrine, meditate there and pray, "O Lord, give us knowledge, give us devotion." He

will surely give you strength. If you meditate upon him this lack of faith and ignorance will go. Crying will do no good. It is not that I myself do not feel like crying. I too have cried. I have my knowledge too. It is already there. The Master has kept me in spite of this. Listen to me, my children. Go and eat something. How much grief do you feel? How long have you known Khoka Maharaj, and how much of him do you understand? I have to bear the brunt of the bereavements, one after another, and I am bearing them silently. What can I do? The Master is withdrawing his powers to himself. Who can stem this tide? They (the Master's disciples) are leaving one after another and I am being put upon the rack. I feel as if a rib were being torn out of my chest.'

Keeping quiet for a while, Mahapurushji tried to console the disciples of Swami Subodhananda and pressed them again and again to eat something. Being comforted a little, they left. Mahapurushji remarked: 'Ah, it has been a great blow to them! It will take a little time to get over it. But the Mother, the Giver of peace, is within everyone. She will in time bring peace to all.'

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MAHAPURUSHJI'S MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS, NOT FOR HIMSELF BUT FOR OTHERS—HIS RESIGNATION TO GOD.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : November-December, 1932.

The weather was growing slightly cold, indicating the approach of winter. It was dusk. After the vesper service the *brahmacharins* and *sannyasins* of the monastery were engaged in meditation. An indescribable peace and serenity prevailed everywhere.

Silence pervaded Mahapurushji's room. A green light^o was burning there. Mahapurushji was seated cross-legged facing the west, absorbed in meditation. An attendant was gently fanning the Swami, driving away mosquitoes. Time passed in this way. The silence in the room gradually deepened. Maha-

purushji's serene countenance became all the more radiant. The *sadhus* of the monastery came as usual to his room and, finding him absorbed in meditation, saluted him from a distance and left. It was nine o'clock at night, but still the Swami did not come down to the normal plane from his meditation. After a while Mahapurushji softly chanted 'Om', later repeating more distinctly, 'Hari Om'. He inquired what time it was. The attendant hesitantly replied in a low voice, 'Maharaj, it is already nine o'clock.'

Mahapurushji: 'Has the bell been rung for the offering of food to the Master?'

Attendant: 'Long ago. It has been long since food was taken to the shrine, and it is nearly time to bring the offered food back.'

The attendant was very much disturbed to find Mahapurushji practising so much meditation. It was the special instruction of the doctors that he should not practise too much as it was harmful for his health. The attendant therefore took courage to ask: 'What need have you to meditate so much? You can see the Master with your eyes open and talk to him. Why do you have to meditate so much?'

Melting with affection Mahapurushji remarked softly: 'Yes, my child, you have rightly spoken. Without any effort on our part, the Master graciously appears to us and, if necessary, talks to us too. The Master, the Holy Mother, Swamiji and others are all very gracious. There is no doubt about it. We do not have to meditate to see the Master. I do not meditate for that purpose, but for this: many have had initiation from me, but not all can keep up their spiritual practice. There are still others who, although they keep up their practice, do not make much headway because of certain obstructions in their individual lives. For them I have to pray separately. When I concentrate a little, their faces flash across my mind and I pray for them individually. I have to remove the obstructions that stand in the way of their spiritual progress. Besides, in this world many have trials and tribulations. I have to help them in that respect also. It is the Master who inspires us from within to do these things. In this world there is no end to trials and tribulations. Therefore our only prayer is that there may be

peace in the entire world, and a lessening of pain and sorrow, and that men may advance towards God. We do not perform any spiritual practice for ourselves, my child.

Every word of Mahapurushji bespoke the earnestness of his heart, the fountain of his love overflowing, as it were. In a trembling voice he said: 'It is He who makes us do all these things. That loving Lord seated within is playing various roles. I do and say what He prompts me to. I am simply an ordinary instrument in His hands—a broken instrument at that. But He is an excellent player; He can win the game even with a broken dice, and He is doing just that. Otherwise, tell me, what power do I have? I have neither scholarship, nor the gift of speech, nor anything else; neither am I handsome to look at. Old and feeble in body, I cannot always even go downstairs, and yet He is managing His work. How many people come to us! I can hardly speak to all—so many come. They say: "You do not have to speak. Just by seeing you the afflictions of our hearts are assuaged and all our doubts vanish." I do not know anything. Glory be to Thee, O Lord: Blessed be Thy name; Who can understand Thy glory? I am surprised at the doings of the Lord. In how many ways is He functioning within this body! To whom shall I disclose it and who will understand? Within me as well as outside, it is He who is playing.

'The other day Sudhir (Swami Suddhananda) asked: "So many people have had initiation from you; do you keep track of them? Can you recognize all?" I said: "No, I do not remember all." What need have I to remember how many have had initiation, where they come from, or what they do? I simply repeat the Lord's name. I think about Him. I do not know anything else. And about initiation, it is He who is responsible for bringing people here and it is He, seated within, who blesses them. Otherwise, why would so many people come if they were attracted by me alone? It is He who has taken hold of this body and is playing His game. I am being blessed. Whoever come here I dedicate at His feet. I say, "O Lord, here are your people; have them!" Just as people worship the Lord's feet with many kinds of flowers, in the same way I offer different types of men at His feet. I see clearly that He accepts all. He takes their responsibility. He is responsible for their

good as well as for the opposite; but they have my best wishes at all times. Every moment I think about their well-being and I pray for them.'

58

THE GANGA IS SACRED—MAHAPURUSHJI TELLS ABOUT HIS AUSTERITIES AND EXPERIENCES AS AN ITINERANT MONK—THE MONASTERY AT BELUR, RICH WITH MANY HOLY ASSOCIATIONS—THE INFLUENCE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA IN THE REALM OF IDEAS.

Place : Belur Monastery. Time : November-December, 1932.

Mahapurushji had been sick with high blood-pressure. He had been under the treatment of doctors and had to be very careful not to over-exert himself. These days he had not been able to come downstairs and have his usual walk. In the afternoon he would walk back and forth, sometimes on the small veranda to the west side of his room and sometimes on the veranda facing the Ganga. Today, shortly before dusk, he went to the veranda facing the Ganga and, saluting the sacred river with folded hands, repeated: 'Glory be to Mother Ganga! The Master used to call the Ganga water Brahmavari (water of Brahman). The breeze blowing from the Ganga purifies everything it reaches.'

Mahapurushji then saluted Mother Kali at the Dakshineswar Temple garden and also the spot on the other side of the Ganga where Sri Ramakrishna was cremated. Leaning on a cane, he started walking slowly. Coming near the room which had once been occupied by Swamiji, he bowed in reverence. He had with him an attendant and while walking slowly he remarked: 'Just see to what a pass the body has come! Now it pains me to move even a few steps, and yet it is this body that did a lot of mountain climbing, visited so many countries, and practised so much austerity! There were times when I did not have more than one piece of cloth with me. Half of this piece I would wrap around me as a skirt and the other half I would wrap around the upper part of my body. While journey-

ing along I would bathe at a well and would dry the cloth after my bath, wearing simply the *kaupina* (loin-cloth).

'Many nights I slept under a tree. In those days I had a feeling of great dispassion and would never think about physical comforts, finding joy in austerity alone. I have wandered a great deal, having no possessions, but I was never in any difficulty. The Master stayed by me and protected me from all dangers and difficulties and I never went hungry. Of course, there were days when I had very little to eat. I remember very well one experience. One day, on my way to Bithur to see a *sadhu*, I was resting at noon under a tree and had not eaten anything. There was no human habitation in the neighbourhood. All of a sudden from a near-by bael tree a ripe bael fell down on the ground with a thud and broke open. I looked around to see if there were anyone near and then picked up the fruit and satisfied my hunger with it. It was a big bael.

'In those days I had great longing and restlessness to realize God. While walking I would practise remembrance of God and pray to Him earnestly. I disliked the company of men and would avoid roads ordinarily frequented by travellers. Towards evening I would find shelter somewhere and spend the night absorbed in my own thoughts. Night is the ideal time for spiritual practice. There being no external noise and bustle at night, the mind naturally becomes quiet. I wandered like this for a long time. If one lives this way, having no possessions, one develops full resignation to God. One becomes established in the idea that God alone is our protector in prosperity as well as adversity.'

Mahapurushji now sat down on a chair and the conversation continued. He said: 'Now the Master has graciously kept me here for his service. I don't feel like going anywhere now. The *guru* and Mother Ganga are on two sides; between them I am in great peace. This place is verily Vaikuntha (the heaven of Vishnu)! The Lord of the Universe Himself is here for the good of the world. A perfected soul like Swamiji lived here. How much spiritual rapture and ecstasy has been experienced here! Our Master, who is self-contained, is here and all his apostles live in this place in their subtle bodies. And sometimes we see them.

'If a spiritual aspirant attains illumination in any place, that place becomes holy, and this is the holiest of holy places. How sacred is the very dust of this place! It will take a long time for humanity to know and realize what Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji were. The world has not seen such spiritual giants manifested for the good of the world in thousands of years. Buddha came, and after several hundred years people understood a little of him, and his liberal message spread throughout the world. Just think, what a furore was made over a tooth of Buddha that had been carried somewhere! What a big temple was built to commemorate that tooth! And here we have the relics of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Swamiji and the others. When I think about these things my hair stands on end. How many people will come from distant countries to worship the ground of the Belur Math! There is already an indication of that. It is not yet fifty years since the Master's passing away and yet what a spiritual revolution is taking place throughout the world, because of his personality. We are blessed that we can see these things. You will see even greater things.

'The Master's work was in the realm of ideas—in the realm of the Spirit. The ideal that he lived will soon bring about a wholesale transformation of religious ideas in the entire world. There are already signs of it. Yogin Maharaj (Swami Yogananda¹) used to say: "There have always been various religious paths and countless scriptures and holy places in every country. In spite of that, why is there a decline in religion? The reason is because in course of time all those ideals become lost. Therefore God incarnates Himself so as to explain the subtleties of religion and to show the ideal." The Master came this time as the living embodiment of all religious paths. That is why he practised many religious disciplines and obtained illumination through them. The Master's life is the living embodiment of every religious ideal. Now you will see that the votaries of every religion will derive new life, hope and inspiration from his divine life, moulding their own religious life in accordance with his life.'

Gradually it became dark. Mahapurushji slowly walked to his room and sat on his cot, facing the west, with folded hands.

¹ A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

In front of him on the wall was a good-sized photograph of Sri Ramakrishna. There were also other pictures of gods and goddesses in his room. Mahapurushji bowed again and again in reverence to Sri Ramakrishna and the other holy ones and then sat silent. The vesper service began. In sweet tones the *sadhus* and devotees started chanting the vesper hymns. Finally they chanted the salutation to the Divine Mother. Mahapurushji joined in and repeated:

O Auspicious One, Thou art the source of all auspiciousness. Thou art the accomplisher of all cherished desires. Thou art the giver of refuge. Thou possessest the eye of wisdom and a beautiful form. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee!

O Eternal One, Thou art the energy of creation, maintenance, and dissolution. Thou art the abode of all the qualities, and yet art beyond them. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee!

O Mother, Thou ever savest those in poverty and pain who take refuge in Thee. Thou art the remover of the misery of all. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee!

Gradually complete silence pervaded the monastery grounds. Mahapurushji sat in the same position, with eyes closed, absorbed in meditation.

59

'WHEREVER MY DEVOTEES SING OF ME, I AM THERE'—SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S SUBTLE INFLUENCE IN THE WEST.

Place : Belur Monastery.

A monk, after staying for a few days at the monastery at Belur, was planning to go back to a branch centre, the field of his activity. In the morning, when he came to salute Mahapurushji, Mahapurushji affectionately remarked: "Today Y. is leaving. This time you stayed for some days at the Math.

Your centre is also the Master's place: return there. You are devotees; wherever you go, the Master will go with you. Wherever his devotees live, he also lives with them there. He is very fond of his devotees. "Narada, wherever My devotees sing of Me, I am there."

'Now almost everywhere there are devotees of the Master; in time there will be more. Don't you know? It was only forty-two or forty-three years ago that he passed away. Just see what has happened during that time! With the passing of the days people are realizing his greatness, and the number of his devotees is growing, too. Whenever God incarnates Himself as man, it happens this way. Truth will reveal itself. Does the sun need some other light in order to reveal itself? Such is the case with Sri Ramakrishna, too. He is making himself known. He is not a spurious prophet. He is God Himself born as man, eager to relieve the suffering of souls and to do good to the world. All will have to bow their heads before him. The name Ramakrishna is the *mantra* of this age. Whoever will take refuge in the Master will be benefited.

'Nowadays, in every country, thoughtful minds are being imbued with the Master's ideas. Even in England there are many who have great regard for Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. Of course, they are a little hesitant to express it outwardly, because India is a subject country, a country under England. That is why they hesitate to accept Indian ideas and Indian personalities openly; but in course of time they will overcome this hesitancy. The Master is a world teacher. All will have to accept his ideas. It doesn't matter whether people accept him openly or not. Nowadays, many in the West are of the opinion that the ideas of Vedanta originated in their own country and are not foreign to them.'

MAHAPURUSHJI'S GREAT COMPASSION—HOW HE BLESSED A WOMAN WHO HAD GONE WRONG.

Place : Belur Monastery.

The compassion of great souls floods the world with its mellowed sweetness, even as the moonlight does. It is no respecter of persons, nor does it make any distinction of caste or nationality. The river of their compassion flows freely, satisfying all—rich and poor, high and low, good and bad.

One morning, Mahapurushji, after lying down for a while, was seated on his cot. He seemed solemn and indrawn. All of a sudden he said to the attendant standing near: 'Will you go and see if there is someone who wants initiation?' The attendant looked here and there and then went downstairs, where he found a woman who wanted initiation. After inquiry, he was startled by the information she gave about herself. The woman was young and had come from a village, accompanied by a man. She told the story of her sinful life and said that although she had been born in a brahmin family, she went astray in bad company and was living with a man of low caste, he being the man who had accompanied her here.

In a remorseful tone she said: 'May I not see him (Mahapurushji) once? Would he not be gracious to a fallen woman like myself?' When the attendant returned to Mahapurushji, looking disturbed, Mahapurushji inquired very earnestly, 'Tell me, is someone there?' The attendant reluctantly replied: "Maharaj, a woman is here who wants initiation, but . . ." Before the attendant could finish what he was trying to say, Mahapurushji remarked: 'What of that? Ask her to bathe in the Ganga and come to me after visiting the shrine. Sri Ramakrishna is the redeemer of the fallen. He came specially to uplift them. What will happen to them if he does not come to their rescue? Otherwise, one would not call him the redeemer of the fallen.'

Mahapurushji was ready to shower his blessings upon her, and later, when she came for initiation after her bath, he said, as if he knew everything about her: 'What fear is there, my

daughter? You will certainly be blessed since you have taken refuge in Sri Ramakrishna, the redeemer of the fallen. Say this: "Whatever sins I have committed in this life and in lives past, I offer them here (i.e. to the Master) and I will not sin any more." After initiation the woman appeared to be an altogether new person.

Mahapurushji remarked later that day: 'Do you know why there is so much sickness in this body, so much suffering? The sins of others are being worked out in this body; otherwise, why should it suffer so much?'

61

HOW MAHAPURUSHJI CHANGED HIS IDEA ABOUT GOD AND HIS MEDITATION AFTER MEETING SRI RAMAKRISHNA—THE WORSHIP AT THE MONASTERY IN THE OLDEN DAYS WAS SIMPLE, AN AFFAIR OF DEVOTION—SWAMIJI'S WORSHIP CHARACTERIZED BY HIS LONG MEDITATION—THE BEST SYMBOL OF GOD IS ETHER—GOD CANNOT BE REALIZED WITHOUT HIS GRACE—DURGA PUJA AT THE MONASTERY—MAHAPURUSHJI'S DEVOTION.

Place : Belur Monastery.

One evening, after meditation, some of the monks of the Order were assembled in Mahapurushji's room. He was talking to them. Every word of his conveyed his joy in meditation. And what a sweet smile he had! In connection with his own life he said: 'From my very childhood I liked the formless aspect of God and I used to meditate accordingly. However, after coming in contact with the Master I developed faith in God with forms and derived much joy in worshipping Him that way.'

Another day, when the conversation was on worship, Mahapurushji remarked: 'Look here! In those days our worship was a worship of devotion. We didn't have so much elaborate ritual. On sitting for worship, we would think the Master was visibly present here, just as he used to be seated on the small cot at Dakshineswar. With that attitude we would wash and wipe his feet, bathe and dress him, decorate him with flowers

and sandalwood paste, and give him fruits and sweets to eat. Later we would offer him cooked rice, curries and so on. When he had finished eating, we would give him betel leaf and tobacco. After the smoke, we would lay him down, stroke his feet and fan him, and when he would be asleep we would softly close the door and go back to our room and rest. All these rituals used to be performed with profound love, thinking that he was living and visibly present there. Although we repeated some of the *mantras* according to rules, we didn't like it so much. Our worship didn't have any pomp or show. The Master is the Lord of our hearts—he wants genuine devotion and self-surrender. But now, with the passing of days, there is an increasing stress on external forms, the result being a gradual decrease in the depth of devotion.

'Swamiji's worship was also like that. He would enter the shrine, take his seat and meditate for a long time. It would be deep meditation. After meditating for an hour and a half, he would begin the worship. Meditation was very important in his worship. He would then bathe the Master and, adding sandalwood paste in the entire tray of flowers, would offer those flowers with both hands at his blessed feet again and again. His worship was indeed a sight to see. Finally he would prostrate himself, get up and leave the shrine. Someone else would go and offer the food. In his worship meditation was the major feature.'

Later, in the course of the conversation, Mahapurushji said: 'We, however, are monks. We do not need so much worship and ritual. We can very well do without these external forms. But rituals and forms are mostly necessary because all classes of people, men and women, young and old, from all parts of the world, will be drawn to this great centre, and will slowly become purified and be blessed by receiving the Master's most liberal message of harmony.'

One morning, after meditation, many *sadhus* of the monastery were gathered in Mahapurushji's room. The conversation turned on various topics. Swami Yatiswarananda asked: 'Maharaj, can we think of the ocean as a symbol of God?' In reply Mahapurushji said: 'Why the ocean? The ocean has an end and it does not exist everywhere. Ether is the symbol of God. Ether is endless; it is present in every atom. This universe is

wholly pervaded by ether. Outwardly, wherever we turn our eyes in this universe we have ether. Far away—far, far away in infinity—there are countless solar systems, each of which is a thousand times larger than ours. Countless stars in the ocean of space rise like tiny bubbles, stay there and then vanish. Likewise, in God we infer the origin, existence and dissolution of infinite universes. It is God who has projected these infinite names and forms and exists interpenetrating everything as one indivisible substance. "Projecting the universe, He entered into it."

One day a monk, finding Mahapurushji alone, said to him earnestly. 'Maharaj, day by day the body is becoming more feeble; so I cannot perform spiritual practice as before. I am frightened as to what will happen.'

Mahapurushji: 'Cry! Cry! Can He be realized through spiritual practice? How much power has man? What can he do in order to be worthy of the grace of God? Nothing. Be at peace by surrendering yourself to Him. Take refuge in Him. He will certainly accept you at His feet. It is impossible to realize Him without His grace.'

Monk: 'Maharaj, what you say is of course true. But the ego is obstinate and I find it difficult to get rid of it. What can I do? The more I try to convince my mind, the more it refuses to be convinced. It appears to us that we can accomplish things through effort. Yet it is as impossible as it would be for a dwarf to reach the moon. Please bless me a little, so that I may get rid of the ego and pride, and can surrender myself at the feet of God.'

Mahapurushji: 'You will achieve that, my child. I say, through the Master's grace you will be blessed by surrendering yourself to him. You will attain the consummation of your life.'

The worship of Mother Durga was being celebrated at the Math. It was the third night of the worship—the ninth phase of the moon. In past years on a night like this the monastery grounds would reverberate with devotional songs, but this year because of the serious condition of Mahapurushji's health it was rather quiet at the monastery. Late that night, not hearing any devotional music, Mahapurushji sent for the *sadhus* and said to them: 'Tonight is the great night of the ninth phase of the moon, a time of great joy. How is it that you are keep-

ing quiet and not having any devotional songs? What is the reason?’

A monk: ‘Maharaj, your body is in such a bad state. How can we have devotional songs? Loud music may aggravate the condition of your heart; that is why we are not having any devotional songs.’

Mahapurushji: ‘Why, what of that? I am fine. I keep well if I listen to devotional music. Because this body is unwell, should you not entertain my Blissful Mother with devotional songs—should you not rejoice? It will cause me no pain. Go and sing some devotional songs.’

62

THE KNOWLEDGE OF BRAHMAN IS NATURAL—LIVES OF ILLUMINED SOULS ARE UPANISHADS—THE MASTER IS THE VEDA, SWAMIJI ITS COMMENTARY—ONE SHOULD NOT BRAG ABOUT ONE’S SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AND REALIZATION—THOUGHT-READING—MEDITATION OF A VETERAN—VARANASI IS THE BODY OF SHIVA—MAHAPURUSHJI’S EXPERIENCE IN VARANASI AND ITS AFTER-EFFECT.

One noon, at the monastery at Belur, Mahapurushji was resting in his room. A monastic disciple was standing near, quietly fanning him. There was no one else in the room. All of a sudden Mahapurushji said: ‘Look here! Men of the world think that the knowledge of Brahman is something impossible to attain, but a knower of Brahman thinks, on the contrary, that it should be impossible for a man to remain ignorant, being attached to the world.’ These words—quiet, solemn and full of love—impressed the disciple so much that they were imprinted in his memory for all time.

Another day, addressing a monk, Mahapurushji said: ‘What kind of scriptures are you reading, L.? Can you read our lives? Our lives are the Upanishads. You will find there (within our lives) the essence of the scriptures.’ The *sadhus* present in the room took these words literally. As a matter of fact, if one reads the life stories of illumined souls, which are verily Vedas, one will automatically understand the spirit of the scriptures.

One day, the same monk went to Swami Saradananda with a copy of the rules and regulations formulated by Swami Vivekananda for the guidance of the monastery at Belur. The monk wanted to know how much of this booklet containing the rules was Swamiji's personal opinion and also if Swami Saradananda had anything different to say about the rules. One by one all the rules were read and Swami Saradananda explained clearly that each rule was based upon the experience and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna. Finally he remarked that he had nothing different to say in regard to them, and he asked the disciple to approach Mahapurushji with his questions. The moment the disciple asked Mahapurushji, he simply repeated what Swami Saradananda had remarked, saying: 'Look here! The Master is the Veda and Swamiji is its commentary. We have nothing to say other than what they have said.'

Several times this disciple wanted to go elsewhere, leaving the branch of the Ramakrishna Mission with which he had been connected. Each time Mahapurushji dissuaded him from doing this by earnestly pleading with him. The last time the disciple begged Mahapurushji's permission to leave the centre, Mahapurushji appealed to his heart, saying: 'This centre will be the means of doing good to many people. Even if it means some loss to you by staying there, your loss would be nothing serious. Only perhaps you might be delayed a little in realizing your ideal. Most probably you would not be delayed. Even if you are delayed a little, can you not make this small sacrifice for the good of so many people?'

Once, in Varanasi, in the course of a conversation Mahapurushji said to the *sadhus* of the monastery there: 'One should not brag about one's spiritual practices. Even if you have attained *nirvikalpa samadhi*, what of that? You would simply have become what you already are. There is nothing to brag of in that.' What wonderful spiritual power and absence of ego are contained in those simple words!

Once, at the Belur Math, Mahapurushji said: 'In those days we were living at Almora with Swamiji. When a devotee asked us if we could do thought-reading, Swamiji called me to one side and taught me how to do it. He said, "If you want to read someone's thought, first make your mind a blank, and then whatever thought arises in your mind, know to be the

thought of your inquirer." Upon hearing Swamiji's explanation, I said to the devotee: "Well, shall I tell you what you have in your mind?" Saying this, I made my mind a blank by meditation and then I became aware of a particular thought arising in it. I said to the devotee: "Was this your thought?" He admitted that it was.'

Once Mahapurushji, accompanied by many *sadhus*, *brahmacharins* and devotees, went to Deoghar to dedicate the Rama-krishna Mission Vidyapith (school) and he stayed there about a month. During that time the *sadhus* and *brahmacharins* of the Vidyapith had the benefit of his holy association and instruction. Those days passed very happily. One day, all of a sudden he had a chill which developed into a very bad cold and an attack of asthma. One morning a monk, while paying his respects to the Swami, found that he was having difficulty in speaking because of the aggravation of his ailment, and yet smilingly the Swami inquired, 'How are you?'

Monk: 'I am, of course, well. How did you feel last night?'

Mahapurushji: 'I suffered a great deal last night. I felt almost suffocated. The passages of my nose became stopped up because of my cold and the asthma was very much aggravated. I didn't feel at ease either sitting, reclining or lying down. I surrounded myself with pillows, as you find me now, and leaned my head against them. Even that did not relieve my suffering. Gradually I felt as if all my senses would stop and my life would leave the body. Being at a loss what to do, I started meditating. It being the meditation of an old man (that is to say, one with many years of experience in meditation), my mind soon became absorbed within. I noticed then that there was no pain or suffering and the mind became quiet and placid. The storm and stress of the outer world could not penetrate there. After remaining in that state awhile, my mind came down to the external world and I noticed that the pain had become very much less.'

Monk: 'What is this state?'

Mahapurushji: 'That is the Self.'

When Mahapurushji went to Varanasi for the last time, once in the course of conversation he remarked: 'The entire city of Varanasi is the body of Shiva. We are living in Shiva.'

On another occasion he said: 'Varanasi is the great cremation ground. It is not proper for householders to live a worldly life here. Only those who call upon the Lord and take His name should live here.'

On returning from Varanasi he suffered from an ailment which seemed to have affected his nervous system. Noticing that the medicine was doing no good, one day the monk to whom he had spoken the above words, asked Mahapurushji privately: 'The doctors have diagnosed your case as a nervous disease, but I feel this is a symptom of a *yogic* state, because you had this ailment immediately after your return from Varanasi. Did you have any spiritual experience in Varanasi?'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, in Varanasi I had a vision of a white-complexioned figure and since then I have had this ailment.'

PART II

63

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S NAME THE MANTRA FOR THIS AGE—JAPA AND MEDITATION—SPIRITUAL YEARNING—THE DIVINE MOTHER HAS INCARNATED HERSELF AS THE HOLY MOTHER.

Place : Belur Math, Time : October 1918.

A young man, having seen Mahapurushji Maharaj in a dream, had informed him about it in a letter. Now he was at the Belur Math for a few days with his permission. One morning, when Mahapurushji had just returned from the shrine, the young man saluted him with all reverence and said: 'Maharaj, you were kind enough to reveal yourself to me in a dream; now it is my sincerest desire that you should very graciously initiate me with a *mantra*.' As he spoke, he broke into tears and held Mahapurushji's feet with both hands.

The boy's eagerness touched Mahapurushji's heart, and he said with affection: 'My son, I bless you heartily that your devotion, faith, and love for Sri Ramakrishna may be ever on the increase; and that you may advance towards him apace. As for initiation, I know nothing about it, nor do I give initiation to anyone.¹ The Master has not implanted the *guru-consciousness* in my mind. I am simply his servant, his slave, his son. Besides, I have not yet received from Sri Ramakrishna any mandate to give initiation. This much only I know, that the name 'Ramakrishna' is the greatest *mantra* in this age; whoever will take his name with faith will have devotion and liberation, as accomplished facts. 'Ramakrishna' is the glorious Name of this age. To have liberation, it is enough if one makes *japa* (mental repetition) of his name. To me, it does not appear that there is any need for initiation over and above that. There cannot be the least doubt that anyone who will take refuge in the Master with all his being will be liberated. 'He who is Rama, he who is Krishna, has in this age incarnated himself as Sri Ramakrishna for the liberation of living beings.'

¹ He started giving initiation only after becoming President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1922.

The devotee: 'I call on Sri Ramakrishna as much as I can with all sincerity, and I pray to him as well. Also, I fully believe that he is God Himself who has incarnated for fulfilling the needs of this age. You are one of his intimate apostles. I firmly believe that, if your grace descends on me, my life will be wholly fulfilled.'

Mahapurushji: 'It goes without saying that I have your good at heart. Else why should I talk so much? I earnestly pray that you may have the highest good. Now that you believe through his grace that Sri Ramakrishna is God incarnate on earth, you need have no more worry. You are indeed blessed, for it is only as a result of the good deeds of many past lives that one comes to believe in God's incarnation. You have that faith already; why should you worry any more? Believe me when I say that you will certainly get freed from the bondage of this world. Go on calling on him from the bottom of your heart, and pray to him in all humility. He will make your faith all the more firm, and your heart will be filled with faith and devotion.'

The Devotee: 'How should I make *japa*? Is there any rule for this?'

Mahapurushji: '*Japa* is but mentally uttering God's name again and again with love. Go on doing so, and that practice will bring you joy. There is no set rule for *japa*; you can do it at all times and under all conditions—while walking, eating, lying down, sleeping, or dreaming. The one thing that matters is love. The more earnestness you have in your practice, the greater will be the joy. He dwells in our hearts and adjudges everything in accordance with how the heart acts. If the heart has the true craving, if you call on Him with sincere longing, the result will be directly perceptible. Like a child demanding things from its father with tearful eyes, crave for faith, devotion, and love from Him; you are sure to get them. He is living and wakeful God, the saviour of the fallen, the remover of the sins of this iron age, full of the supreme compassion, the lover of His devotees, and full of love. Go on calling on Him all the time. In addition to this constant remembrance, it is very necessary to sit for *japa* regularly in the morning and in the evening every day at a fixed place and at a fixed time. Go on doing so.'

The Devotee: 'How shall I meditate, Maharaj? I try to meditate, but I don't know what meditation really is, and I don't succeed much in concentrating the mind.'

Mahapurushji: 'It is a bit difficult to have concentration in the initial stages. Meditation becomes more natural when one gets real love for God as a result of His grace and one's constant prayer and *japa*. Instead of starting with meditation, it is much better, in the first stage, to sit before the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna like a tearful child with a persistent demand, and pray with earnestness to him who is ever holy, free from passion and lucre, pure, untouched by sin, full of compassion, the prophet of this age, and the teacher of the world. Pray thus: "Lord, you incarnated yourself to save the world, and you suffered all kinds of pain for the good of humanity. Here am I, a lowly poor creature, without spiritual practices, adoration, knowledge, devotion, faith, and love. Be gracious, and fill me with faith, devotion, knowledge, love and purity; make my human birth fruitful. Be gracious enough to reveal yourself in my heart; grant me your vision. One of your own spiritual sons taught me to pray like this. Take pity on me."

'If you go on praying like this, his grace will descend. Then the mind will be calmed, and it will remain fixed in *japa* and meditation. You will be filled with love and joy, and hope will dawn in you. Pray earnestly in this way, and then make *japa* just as I have told you. If you go on making *japa* of his holy name, meditation will gradually become natural to you. As you go on repeating his name, try to visualize with the fullest conviction that he is looking at you affectionately. When this kind of thought continues for a long time, it becomes meditation. When you make the *japa*, pray thus: "Lord, help me to have deep meditation." He will grant the prayer; have no doubt about that. He is the *guru* in everybody's heart. He is the Guide, the Lord, Father, Mother, and Friend.

'Meditation consists in lovingly thinking of his gracious form or his auspicious qualities in whatever way you can. For the present, you go on practising thus. As you progress, he himself will tell you from within, whenever the occasion arises, how you are to proceed further in your meditation. Pray with the greatest yearning, and weep. Tears will wash away the

dirt from the heart, and he will reveal his true nature there out of his own grace. All this does not come in a single day, all of a sudden. Continue in your effort diligently, and call on him. The response is bound to come, and with it bliss.'

The devotee: 'But the trouble is that I do not have that yearning itself. How can this yearning for realizing him be increased, Maharaj?'

Mahapurushji: 'As for yearning, my son, nobody can teach it to another; it comes of itself when the time is ripe. The more you feel the want of the Lord within you, the more intense will be the yearning in the heart. If it does not come, you should know that the hour has not struck as yet. The mother knows best which child has to be fed when. If there is any delay, it is because the mother thinks that the child should have its food later. Her reason is best known to her.

'The Lord is our Mother. One has to take refuge in Her with the fullest confidence and in a spirit of self-surrender. She is not just like an earthly mother; she knows our internal feelings. She knows perfectly well when a particular child wants the vision of Her earnestly and She does oblige accordingly at the right moment. Go on earnestly calling on Her, go on repeating Her name. Take refuge in Her with complete self-surrender. She will ordain all that is necessary, and that at the right moment. Purity is the foundation of a spiritual life. God reveals Himself soon in a pure heart. Try to remain pure in body, speech, and mind. You are a student now; a student's life is very pure. Sri Ramakrishna used to love very much boys who had pure hearts which were free from worldly hankering. A mind that is untainted by worldliness will be soon enlightened.

'The other things necessary are faith and conviction. With your heart full of sincerity and faith, accept the instructions I have given you, and start practising them accordingly. You will see that the Lord will be gracious towards you, and you will be filled with joy. The main point is that one has to practise the disciplines. The Master would say: "If one wants to be intoxicated, it won't do simply to go on uttering the name of the intoxicant. One has to procure the drug, diligently prepare it, and drink it. Then only can one become inebriated." Similarly, repeat God's name, meditate on Him, and pray to

Him from the bottom of your heart; then only you will have bliss.'

The devotee: 'I came to you with the great hope of being initiated by you. Be kind to me, Maharaj.'

Mahapurushji: 'I told you, my son, that I have not received any mandate so far from the Master about giving initiation. But you need not worry about initiation. Go on calling on him sincerely; he will hear your prayer and fulfil your wish. Know it for certain that, when the time for your initiation arrives, he himself will arrange everything propitiously. I also add my prayer that you may have the fullest faith in, and complete reliance on, the Master. May your heart be filled with love and holiness; may God increase your faith, devotion, and love every day. I earnestly pray for this.'

As he uttered these words, he sat for a while with closed eyes. Then he laid both his hands on the head of the devotee and blessed him, with his vision still drawn inwards. The devotee also began shedding tears out of the fullness of his heart. As he became a little calmer, Mahapurushji gave him with his own hands some *prasada* (consecrated food) which had been offered to the Master.

At that time the Holy Mother was staying in the 'Udbodhan' office in Baghbazar, Calcutta. Swami Saradananda also was there, while Swami Brahmananda and Swami Turiyananda lived in the house of the late Balaram Bose in the same locality of the city. After staying at the Belur Math for some days, the devotee expressed a desire to go to Calcutta to see the Holy Mother and the other intimate associates of the Master. When he asked for Mahapurushji's permission, he said: 'You must go, most certainly. To think that you should miss seeing them when you are so near! It is your great good fortune that they are all in Calcutta at this time. One hardly gets such an opportunity.

'First, go to Baghbazar to see the Holy Mother. She is the Mother of us all, none other than the Mother of the Universe Herself. She incarnated herself to fulfil the mission of the Master. The world is blessed by her very presence. None of us can understand her. Who, indeed, can understand her, since she is so guarded in the expression of her divine moods? She eludes everybody's mental grasp. She lives like an ordinary

housewife, attending to her chores and meeting the needs of the devotees. Who ever can divine that she is none other than the Divine Mother herself? The Master told me one day: "The Mother who is there in the temple (of Kali) and this Mother in the concert tower are the same."

'Make your obeisance to the Mother and pray earnestly for faith and devotion. One can get devotion or liberation only when the Mother is pleased. There is Sharat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) also at the 'Udbodhan' office, a most devoted attendant of the Holy Mother; you must see him as well. If you request him, he will arrange for you to see the Mother. After being blessed by the Mother, go to Balaram Bose's house, where you will find Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) and Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda). On reaching there tell them that I have sent you from the Belur Math to be blessed by them, and they will bless you.

'Maharaj is none other than the mind-born son of the Master. When you get his blessing, know that it is as good as the Master's. The world is now deriving the spiritual power of the Master through him. Hari Maharaj is, as it were, Shukadeva himself—a veritable manifestation of Vedanta in human form, a knower of Brahman. So long as they are on this earth, humanity is getting immense benefit by seeing them and having holy association with them, and from their blessing. After this, they will reveal themselves only during meditation, and one will have the vision of them in one's mind only, with great effort. This is a very auspicious time. Go and see them with deep reverence. When you return home, meditate on the days you have spent in this monastery on the holy river Ganga, amidst so many monks of great spiritual attainments. That will make your mind holy. You are blessed.'

THE MONK'S PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN—ALL SPIRITUAL PRACTICES ARE FOR ACQUIRING SELF-SURRENDER—RIGHT ATTITUDE TO WORK, PREACHING AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES IN MONASTIC LIFE.

Place : Dacca, Time : 1922.

Mahapurush Maharaj visited Dacca at the beginning of 1922. While staying at the monastery there, one evening he joined in the Gauravasa, the assembly of devotees, at their earnest request. As the news of his coming visit spread, many devoted men and women, monks and *brahmacharins* assembled at the place. In accordance with the practice of the assembly, a devotee first sang a religious song beginning with the words, 'Lose yourself, O black bee of my mind, at the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna' etc. Next, the *Kathamrita* (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) was to have been read. But the devotees were eager to hear Mahapurushji. He, however, insisted on the *Kathamrita* being read; and so the reading started.

At one place, in connection with the strict rules of a monk's life, the Master says: 'For a monk, it is incumbent to give up lucre and passion. He must not even look at the picture of a woman.' In this context, a *brahmacharin* asked Mahapurushji: 'Maharaj, the Master says that a holy man should not so much as look at the picture of a woman, whereas we have even to speak with them in connection with the various duties we undertake. How are we to acquit ourselves under such circumstances?'

Mahapurushji kept silent for a few moments, and then said: 'Look here, my son, did you not live with your mother and sisters at home? When you have to talk with women in connection with your duties, have the same unsophisticated mind and the same childlike attitude as you had at home with the women of your family. Have the idea in your mind that they are your mothers and sisters. But it goes without saying that, unless a special necessity arises, it is best to avoid conversations with women, even though they be devotees, and particularly so when alone. You can talk about the necessary matters in public. You have to embrace the monastic life; you should always keep your vows intact and your ideal before you whenever you take

a step in any direction. You should look upon all women as the veritable manifestations of the Mother of the universe. This is spiritual discipline for you.'

The *brahmacharin*: 'Even so, if the mind becomes affected by degrading ideas, what shall we do, Maharaj?'

In answer to this, Mahapurushji said in rather a stern voice: 'People in whose hearts passion stirs up under all circumstances at the very sight of women, are not only not fit to be monks at all; they are not even fit to live in human society. The remedy for them is to retire to a solitary place that is entirely free from women, where they may not even have sight of women. They should return to society after totally eradicating those beastly propensities through hard spiritual practices. Society, too, has its own rules, its own discipline.'

When the reading of the *Kathamrita* had progressed a little further, one of the members of the audience asked: 'What is the best path for realizing God?'

Mahapurushji: 'The scriptures contain various instructions for realizing God, but the final word is self-surrender. One can be free from all worries only by surrendering oneself at the blessed feet of God, and continuing there with absolute reliance. In the *Gita* the Lord instructs Arjuna about *Yoga*, devotion, knowledge, and all other things, and then says: "Relinquishing all *dharma*s (duties), take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate you from all sins; grieve not." That is the quintessence of the *Gita*. The Lord promises: 'Free yourself from all ideas of merit and demerit and everything else, and take refuge in Me; I shall save you from all sins.'

'But it is true that complete self-surrender and taking refuge in God do not come in a day. It is an uphill task. All the practices you undertake—worship, study, *japa*, meditation, hard austerities—all that is meant for leading you to take refuge in Him. And above all, God's grace is needed. If one goes on meditating and reflecting on God and praying to Him with undivided attention, He becomes compassionate and grants this extremely rare self-surrender.'

On another occasion, a monastic member of the Dacca monastery said to Mahapurushji with a heavy heart: 'Raja Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) told me, "Whatever else you

may do, you must not forget to make *japa* in the mornings and evenings." And yet the nature of my work is such—holding religious classes and conducting religious songs in groups—that I have to go out in the evenings at least five days a week. I have no time to sit for *japa* in the evenings. This upsets me very much.'

In answer, Mahapurushji said: 'Look here, these classes and songs that you conduct should be looked upon by you as being on a par with spiritual practices, like *japa* and meditation. To sing the glory of the Lord, or to read or discuss about Him, is as good as any religious practice. Keep this idea ever present in your mind, that you are doing His work alone. It will bring immense benefit to you, if you should think of these duties as service to Him. After returning from your work of songs and classes, you should sit for *japa* and meditation whenever you have a little time in hand—you must practise *japa* regularly, even, if necessary, just before going to sleep. You have got to obey Maharaj's order properly.'

A devotee asked him: 'The Master used to say that one cannot realize God so long as one has the least vestige of desire for worldly things, just as a thread cannot pass through the eye of a needle so long as even a single fibre juts out. But our minds are full of innumerable passions and desires. What is the way for us?'

Mahapurushji kept silent for a while and then said: 'There is a way. To your mind, which is the thread, apply a little oil and water in the form of faith and devotion, and carefully twist in the loose fibres of your passions and desires. Then the mind will easily merge at the blessed lotus feet of the Lord. Call on Him with all earnestness, and tell Him of the extreme misery you feel in not being blessed with the vision of Him. He is very kind to those who take refuge in Him, and He never betrays the trust one has in Him.'

MAHAPURUSHJI MANIFESTS HIS SPIRITUAL POWERS AND COMPASSION AS GURU—HOW TO MEDITATE AND MAKE JAPA—HOW TO LIVE IN THE WORLD—THREE METHODS OF PRACTISING JAPA—HOW TO BE FREE FROM DOUBTS.

Place : Belur Math, Time : 1922.

Some four or five months after the passing away of Swami Brahmananda, a high government officer came to see Mahapurushji at the Belur Math. He made his obeisance at the feet of Mahapurushji with great reverence and, taking his seat on the floor, introduced himself to the Swami. Then he said: 'I first met Raja Maharaj about three years ago, and from that day I had been visiting him off and on, whenever I got an opportunity. He was very kind to me, and guided me with his instructions. Mentally, I had selected him as my *guru*. When I expressed the idea to him one day, he held out great hope by saying: "Initiation will come in due course; there is no need to be in such a hurry. Follow the instructions I give now. Let the mind be prepared, and everything will follow." That day he told me much about spiritual practices etc. From that day on, I had been practising *japa* and meditation a little; I had also been visiting him now and then. But so unfortunate am I, I could not get initiation from him. Now it is my heart's most earnest desire that you graciously give me initiation. You represent him; you are on his seat. His power now works through you. Please do take pity on me and do not disappoint me.'

Mahapurushji had never seen this devotee before. Still, he said to him with the sweetest words, as though speaking to a very intimate person: 'You are really very fortunate to have had the blessings of Maharaj, who gave you instructions out of his mercy. Know what he said as nothing but the *mantra* itself; that itself will bring you the desired result. I do not feel that you have need of any fresh initiation. Call on him with the sincerest yearning; pray to him with tears and you will certainly be blessed with vision of him. If need be he will grant you initiation as well. His grace is infallible. He was not like any

one of the ordinary perfected souls acting as a *guru*. He was none other than an immediate associate of God Himself. A merciful glance of such a one destroys the worldly bondages of a man; to the aspirant, it brings the highest perfection. When God incarnates on earth for the good of the world, these associates embody themselves and come down with Him to fulfil His mission, to preach the spiritual path best suited for the age. They seldom come separately. Besides, where could he have gone? All that he has done is to discard the physical body. Now he is with the Master in a supersensuous world with a supersensuous body; from there he is doing infinite good to the devotees. Take it from me, you will certainly be blessed with the vision of him.'

The devotee : 'Maharaj, what you say is exceedingly true. I have received direct proof of its truth. When Raja Maharaj passed away, I was filled with great sorrow because, though I had the good fortune of coming in contact with such a highly gifted *guru*, I could not get his blessing. The mind was very much upset. I prayed earnestly to Sri Ramakrishna and he heard my prayer. Three days ago I had a vision of Maharaj in a dream, and he granted me initiation with a *mantra* as well. But when I woke up, I could not recollect the *mantra* fully. I tried hard to remember it, but failed. From that moment I have been feeling very miserable. Finding no way out, I have come running to you. You have to take pity on me and find a way out for me. I have the conviction that he will remove this want from me through you.' As he spoke these words, he burst into tears.

Mahapurushji was listening to the devotee with all attention. Now, witnessing the yearning of the devotee, his face became radiant with compassion. He again consoled him, saying: 'Since Maharaj has shown so much kindness to you, you need have no fear; his grace will make everything all right. Don't be despondent. When the proper time arrives, he will reveal himself to you again and bless you. Go on calling on him with all earnestness.'

But this did not bring solace to the devotee. He pressed Mahapurushji again and again for initiation. Then Mahapurushji seemed to have partially agreed. He asked the devotee to wait for a while, entered the room where Maharaj had lived,

and closed the door behind him. (The present temple of Maharaj had not come up then). The things that Maharaj had used remained arranged in that room as of old; and offerings were daily made before a picture of his placed there. After about half an hour, Mahapurushji opened the door and motioned the devotee to get in. As the devotee did so, the door was closed behind him again. A little later Mahapurushji came out alone and sat down quietly on his bedstead. The devotee came out after an hour and, prostrating himself before Mahapurushji, said: 'My life is blessed today. You have given me the very same *mantra* that Raja Maharaj gave me in my dream. This has delighted me very much. I have directly perceived that he resides in you. Kindly bless me that I may realize my Chosen Deity even in this life.'

Mahapurushji: 'You are indeed very fortunate. Maharaj is so kind to you, and he is helping you in so many ways, just because you earned so much merit in your previous life. Now engage yourself in spiritual practices with the help of the valuable gift you have received; you will have your desire fulfilled. A true devotee relies on the Lord under all circumstances, like a kitten on its mother. He calls on Him with tears and prays to Him with all humility. He alone knows when to grant the vision of Himself to the devotee. Take refuge in Him and keep waiting at His door, praying all the while with heart and soul for full faith, devotion, and love. He will fill your heart to the brim.'

The devotee: 'Please teach me a little how I should meditate and make *japa*. I have to remain ever engrossed in my worldly duties. Besides, the responsibilities of my post are no less exacting. Kindly bless me that I may become free from these bondages, so as to be able to call on God.'

Mahapurushji: 'As for our blessing, it is always there to be sure. You, too, have to engage yourself in spiritual practices with determination. Go on making regular *japa* of the *mantra* you have received today; and along with *japa*, pray with all humility: "Lord, bless me so that I may meditate on You and so that my mind may lose itself at Your lotus feet." And He is sure to do so, rest assured. He is the *guru* in everybody's heart—the Guide, Master, Father, Mother, Friend, in fact everything, to a man. All for whom people cry in this world, thinking

they are their own, will live for a few days only; the eternal companion is He alone.

'Go on repeating His name with full sincerity, and you will find that meditation will follow as a natural development. When one goes on repeating the name of the Chosen Deity with intense love, one becomes gradually filled with an ineffable bliss. When that bliss becomes continuous, it is also a kind of meditation. Meditations are of various kinds. Go on meditating on the blessed, effulgent form of the Lord with the greatest love, and imagine that every recess of your heart shines with the light emanating from His form. As you go on thinking thus, you will feel that your whole being becomes suffused with inexpressible joy. Gradually the form also will get dissolved, and you will have the feeling of a kind of bliss associated with consciousness. This also is a kind of meditation.

'There are innumerable other kinds of meditation which you will yourself come to know by stages. The main thing that counts is to call on Him with all sincerity. As you go on calling on Him and weeping for Him, all the dirt in your mind will be washed away, and it will become purified. Then, that pure mind itself will act as *guru* to you. You will get all the answers from within yourself to all the questions that you may have—about what you need at a particular time, how you should meditate, how you should call on Him, and all such things. You must have read what the Master used to say: "The breeze of divine grace is blowing all the time; it is for you to unfurl your sail." This unfurling of the sail means undertaking spiritual practices with sincere diligence. He is ever eager to bestow His grace, just as a mother keeps her hands always ready to take up the child to her lap. Do try a bit, and then only will you feel how compassionate He is.'

The devotee: 'I cannot always understand how I should live in the world. It is a terrible task ever to be pandering to everybody's whims.'

Mahapurushji: 'Have you read the *Kathamrita* of the Master? Read it very carefully. You will get beautiful solutions to these problems in the very words of the Master. This world is neither yours nor mine. It is God's creation. Those whom you think to be yours really belong to God. You have to live in this world with this belief as the background. Wife,

son, daughter, relatives, friends—all are but so many creatures of God. Whatever you have to do for them, do so with the idea that you are serving Narayana in those forms; then you won't get attached too much. And along with all this you must have your power of discrimination wide awake. The discrimination between the Real and the unreal gives rise to detachment.

'You are leading a householder's life; very well. But that is no reason why you should lose yourself in the world. Do your duty by all, but do so with the idea of it as service to God. The Lord is infinitely kind to you. Thousands there are who have to run madly after food and raiment; they are so much occupied with the thoughts of the bare necessities of life that they hardly get any time to think of God. But you do not have to worry about these physical needs. This is no inconsiderable mercy of God. God creates all the necessary opportunities for those who are sincere devotees.

'When all fall asleep at dead of night, rise up to call on Him with your whole being, and become one with Him. Tell Him of the yearning of your heart with tears in your eyes. Midnight is the best time for spiritual practices. You have the auspicious signs of a man of spirituality; you are bound to succeed. That is why I am talking thus to you. Be up and doing at the beginning, and you will find that your whole being will be filled with an ineffable joy; you will lose yourself in the current of that inebriating bliss. Can there be any comparison of that with the hollow joys of this world? Worldly pleasures appear insipid to one who gets even an inkling of that divine joy.'

The devotee: 'Should I keep count when making *japa*? Kindly tell me what should be the number of times I should repeat that *mantra*, and how I should do it.'

Mahapurushji: '*Japa* can be performed in three ways—with the help of a rosary, counting on the phalanges, or mentally. Mental *japa* is the best. Tulasidas said: "One who tells his beads is vulgar; one who repeats the *mantra* with the help of his fingers is commendable; but the highest praise goes to one who does it all mentally." If one cultivates the habit of making *japa* mentally, one can go on doing it at all times and under all circumstances—even while moving about, eating, or lying down in bed. When this becomes a firm habit, it will

continue even during sleep and generate a current of joy in the mind. But in the beginning it is good to fix a definite number for the daily *japa*. You should sit for *japa* with steadfastness at least twice a day—morning and evening—and repeat the *mantra* for a definite number of times. It should not be less than a thousand each time in your case; if you can increase that number, it will be still better. You can keep count with the help of a rosary or on your fingers.' Saying this, he showed how to keep count on the fingers.

'The Master used to say', he continued, 'that the name and the Being named are one and the same. As you repeat the *mantra* of the Chosen Deity, think of His form as well; thus you can have both *japa* and meditation simultaneously. God dwells in the heart, and He sees how earnest one is in calling on Him. He does not care for either the number or the time. To call on Him even once only with a sincere mind is more effective than making the *japa* of the *mantra* for a hundred thousand times with an unsteady mind. What is wanted is intensity, yearning and sincerity. Once you have the yearning in your mind, success is near at hand. All this does not happen in a single day. Persist in your efforts with determination, and everything will come about in due course. And come to the monastery now and then. Many monks live here; you should associate with them. Even the sight of holy men generates thoughts about God in one's heart.

'If, in the course of your spiritual endeavours, you are beset with any doubt, you can refer to me. That is exactly why the Master has kept us here. However, the truth is that if one has sincerity one is seldom beset by doubts; or even if a doubt arises, God Himself gets it solved from within. Sincerity, earnestness, purity—these form the main foundation of a spiritual life. I hope you have read the story of the highway robber Ratnakara, who attained perfection by repeating the words "Mara, Mara."¹

¹ The divine saint Narada met the highway robber Ratnakara and persuaded him to give up his evil ways. He also asked him to repeat the name of the Lord, 'Rama'. But so depraved had the robber's mind become that he could not remember the name or pronounce it accurately. So he went on repeating the word *mara*, which in Bengali means 'dead'. It contained all the letters of the Lord's name, so that when repeated continuously, it amounted to uttering the Lord's name itself (*ma-rama-*

'One must have faith in the *guru*—the faith of a child. All doubts have their lodgement in things outside. The more the mind becomes indrawn, and the more it approaches the innermost core, the more free it becomes from doubts. Then pure bliss reigns supreme; the mind becomes suffused with divine love. Of course, it is true that all doubts cannot be dispelled till one is face to face with God Himself. "When the Self, which is both high and low, is realized, the knot of the heart gets untied, all doubts are solved, and all one's actions are dissipated."'

66

MANTRA RECEIVED IN DREAM CONFIRMED AT INITIATION BY MAHAPURUSHJI—THE LORD IS THE GURU—TAKE REFUGE IN HIM—HOW TO LIVE IN THE WORLD—RECEPTION OF MANTRA BY RIPE SOUL—THE ILLUMINED GURU AND HIS POWERS.

Place : Belur Math. Time : May 1923.

A devotee from Sind was initiated today by Mahapurushji. The devotee had received a *mantra* in his dream while at home; but as he could not understand what it all meant, his mind had become extremely restless since receiving the *mantra*. So he wrote to Mahapurushji explaining his predicament, and begged for an interview. When permission was granted, he hurried from that distant place to Belur Math to be at the feet of Mahapurushji.

It was about 10 o'clock in the morning. Mahapurushji washed himself with Ganga water, put on a piece of new cloth, and entered the shrine, where he initiated the devotee after worshipping Sri Ramakrishna duly. After this, as he returned from the shrine to his own room over the connecting terrace, one could notice a divine aura on his face. Instead of sitting on the chair in his room as usual, he moved about with a tottering gait under divine emotion, clapping his hands as he

rama-ra and so on). The robber had a sincere heart, and hence the wrong pronunciation did not debar him from being blessed by Sri Ramachandra. This Ratnakara, the robber, became Valmiki, the great sage and poet.

sang: 'When one is blessed by a true *guru*, one is taught how to discriminate between right and wrong, and what true knowledge is; for then alone does coal get rid of its blackness when fire enters it.'

It is impossible to express that divine absorption of his in human words. His eyes were only half open; his mind seemed to have wandered to some supersensuous plane; and he moved about in the room singing those two lines alone. His face was flushed, and he seemed to open his eyes with great effort just to have a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna in the picture which was on the western wall. He had no consciousness of the world around. His naturally sweet voice sounded still sweeter, being mellowed by his inner feeling—it fell in cadences of nectar. Thus it went on for a long while, till at last he sat down in his chair almost unwittingly and remained there with his eyes closed. Only now and then, these words issued forth indistinctly from the bottom of his heart: 'Victory to the Lord! Refuge of the afflicted! Gracious Lord! Victory to the Mother!'

The initiated disciple had been meditating so long on the veranda of the shrine, according to Mahapurushji's instruction. He now came to his room, prostrated himself with great devotion at Mahapurushji's feet, and then, taking his seat on the floor, said with folded hands and tearful eyes: 'Your grace has brought peace to my mind today. I had no peace of mind from the day that I got the *mantra* in the dream. I could never make my mind calm, I was almost losing my balance. After receiving that very same *mantra* from you today, I am convinced that whatever I saw in my dream is true, and the person who blessed me in the dream is none other than yourself.'

Mahapurushji: 'It is the Lord Himself who appeared in the dream, just because He was merciful to you. It is the Lord Himself who blessed you today in another form. He is merciful; He is the ocean of unreasoned compassion. He has incarnated Himself in this age to help all creatures. I am a mere slave of His. He is the only dispenser of mercy. The Lord alone can confer mercy on others—this is all that I know. The scriptures also say that when a true teacher initiates a disciple the Lord reveals Himself in the heart of that teacher, and from there He inspires the disciple. The Lord Himself is the real *guru*; man can never be the *guru*. It is owing to the

merit you had earned in your past lives that you are able today to take refuge at the feet of the Lord, who saves all lost souls. Today I dedicate you to His feet; I offer you at His feet. From today onward the Lord has accepted the entire charge of you here and hereafter.

The disciple: 'Maharaj, I cannot see the Lord; I only know that you have blessed me.'

Mahapurushji: 'You may feel that way about it. But I know that it is the Master (Sri Ramakrishna) who has shown his grace to you today. From today, you have become his. From now on cling to him all the more firmly. Try to see him within and outside yourself. Always believe that he is your nearest and dearest one. This world, after all, is transient. Father, mother, wife, son, daughter, relatives—all these are mere illusory relations, and last for a few days only. But the relationship that we have with the Master lasts for ever; it is not destroyed with the death of the body. The invaluable seed that is sown in your heart today will sprout and grow day by day when watered by love and devotion, and it will gradually develop into a huge tree of ambrosia, making your whole life a blessing and bringing you all the fourfold end of human life (spirituality, virtuousness, prosperity, and enjoyment). All your desires will be fulfilled.'

The disciple: 'I am an erring human being, lost in the many bondages of the world. Kindly bless me that I may not forget your gracious feet through worldly delusion. Please tell me how I should live in the world, and give me some guidance so that I may not sink in worldliness for good. You must save this lowly one by all means.' With these words he caught hold of Mahapurushji's feet, while tears were dropping from his eyes.

Mahapurushji was visibly moved by his earnest entreaty. With a voice full of love and emotion, he said: 'I have already told you, my son, that I have offered you at the feet of the Master, who has accepted you and taken up your responsibility. It is precisely because he would accept you that he inspired you to come here. Today you are born to a new life. If the Master is true, then what we say is also true. Take refuge in him heart and soul; throw all your responsibilities on him; and go on calling on him with earnest humility. That is all that is needed.'

You have nothing more to do. He will take care of you under all circumstances. As for your desire to know how you should live in the world, that you can learn from the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna himself. You must perform all your duties, but you must keep your mind fixed on the Lord. It is just like a maidservant in a rich man's house, who does all her work, but whose mind is in her own home in the country. Similarly, one should live in the world without any attachment. You must serve all the members of your family—wife, children, and other relatives—but you must know in your innermost being that God alone is your nearest and dearest. Apart from Him there is none whom you can really call your own. That does not mean, however, that you must neglect your family; you must serve them to the best of your capacity, considering them to be the children of God, or to be so many parts of God Himself, entrusted to your care. You must talk with them about God and try to instil in their minds a true love for God.

'You may be in the world, but your mind must not be tied to it. The Master used to say: "It is very necessary to have discrimination—to consider that the world is evanescent and that God alone is real and eternal. What can money give you? It can give you food, clothing, and a habitation. That is all; it cannot lead you to God. So money can never be the goal of life. Considering things like this is called discrimination." Do not cherish in your mind too much of worldly ambition. You have already provided for the bare necessities of life. Be content with them. The mind has a natural proclivity towards the low and the vulgar—towards lust and lucre and towards name and fame. The task of the aspirant is to gather together that scattered mind and fix it on the lotus feet of the Lord. The highest ambition in life should be the realization of God. Keep that ambition ever awake in the mind, and try heart and soul to reach that goal.'

As he was speaking thus, the bell rang for all to partake of the *prasada*, and Mahapurushji asked the disciple to go and have it. A little later an attendant brought some *prasada* for Mahapurushji. He sat for his meal. But from the moment he had come from the shrine that day, he seemed to be in a state of *afflatus*. His mind was indrawn; his eyes were half closed; and he hardly paid any attention to what he was eating.

He just put a few morsels into the mouth as a matter of habit. Thinking that some conversation might bring his mind down to food, the attendant broke silence with the words: 'Maharaj, you had to spend quite a long time in the shrine today for the initiation.'

Mahapurushji started, as though from sleep, and said: 'Ah yes, the man is really very devoted; the Master has bestowed his special grace on him; or else one does not have so much devotion. One can well know the potentiality of a disciple at the time of initiation. Those who are of a high spiritual calibre become spiritually overpowered as soon as they receive the *mantra*, and there appear such signs as shedding of tears, shaking of the body, standing of the hair on end, and so on. One's power of *kundalini* is roused, and one easily gets merged in deep meditation. I noticed this disciple to be of that kind. No sooner did he hear the *mantra* than his body began shaking, his hair stood on end, and gradually he lost himself in meditation. And what tears of love he shed! Streams of tears rolled down from the corners of his eyes, and that delighted me very much. It makes one very happy to initiate a real devotee, and the imparting of the *mantra* becomes fruitful. Anyone whose time for receiving the *mantra* is ripe has the lotus of his heart opened, as it were, to accept it; and as soon as he gets it, his heart enfolds it with the greatest care. All this while, I was thinking of the grace of the Master and nothing else. Ah! in how many ways, and how many people, he is blessing! Nobody can keep count of the innumerable persons receiving his grace here and in other countries. Glory to the Lord!'

The attendant: 'But, Maharaj, not all people have that kind of elation at the time of initiation. Will not those also, who do not have this kind of fervour profit by your blessing and progress in the path of spiritual attainment?'

Mahapurushji: 'Why should they not? They too will progress, though the advance may be slow. A realized soul has the power to mould the disciple's mind; and in a few days he can turn his mind towards spirituality. The power of a *mantra* that has brought success to anyone is irresistible when imparted to another, and particularly is it so when it comes through a *guru* who is himself a realized soul. The Master used to say that when the *guru* is perfect the disciple's egoism vanishes

after only three croaks.¹ But if the *guru* is not perfect, the disciple's bondage is not removed, and he does not attain liberation.'

67

GREATNESS OF DAKSHINESWAR—CAUSES OF GROWTH AND DECLINE OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS—DEDICATED WORK—SPIRITUAL CURRENT SET FLOWING BY SRI RAMAKRISHNA—BELUR MATH—IDEAL LIFE THE BEST PREACHING—THE MASTER HIMSELF DOES THE PREACHING.

Place : Belur Math. Time : September 8, 1923.

Mahapurushji had just returned from the shrine in the morning. Absorbed in his spiritual mood, he was singing in a low tone. As he walked over the terrace connecting the shrine with his room, he turned towards Dakshineswar and saluted with folded hands. Then he saluted Mother Ganga and returned to his room. The *sannyasins* and *brahmacharins* of the Math now came to him one by one, after finishing their own meditation and *japa*. They saluted him and went out. He had not as yet spoken to anyone, but sat silently with his mind absorbed in God. A little later, an elderly monk came, saluted him, and inquired about his health. The monk used to look after the day-to-day work of the monastery. After a little talk about the Math work, he raised the topic of the Dakshineswar temple and asked: 'Maharaj, now that the temple and its properties have been taken over by the receiver, will that bring any good?'

Mahapurushji: 'I think it will do some good. Recently, the Mother's worship etc. was being sadly neglected. So, maybe it is by Her will that this arrangement has been made. Is Dakshineswar just an ordinary place? God Himself incarnated

¹ The reference is to Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the snake and the frog. If the frog is caught by an ordinary snake, it goes on croaking for a long time; neither can the frog escape, nor can the snake swallow it soon. But when caught by a poisonous snake, the frog has hardly time to croak even three times.

for the good of the world, and it is there that He undertook hard austerities and spiritual practices such as the world had not seen before, and, maybe, will not see again. Dakshineswar is the epitome of all the holy places of the world; every particle of its dust is holy. It is a great place of pilgrimage for all aspirants of all sects, be they Hindus, Mohammedans, Christians, or again Shaivas, Saktas, or Vaishnavas. As for the other sacred places of the world, it is either that an aspirant has attained realization through a certain spiritual path in one, or that a realized person has cast off his body in another.

'But Dakshineswar has witnessed the spiritual practices undergone by God Himself. Who indeed can tell of the infinite spiritual moods that found expression there? In the course of time people will realize the greatness of the place; then they will be eager to get the very dust of that sacred spot. The intense spiritual atmosphere of the place can never be destroyed. From the day that I heard that the Mother was not being properly served and worshipped, I have been invoking Her here daily and offering worship mentally. To Her I say: "Mother, have thy offerings here itself; accept our service instead." I shall be saved from all worries when the temple services and worship are suitably arranged for. . . . In a way, Mathur Babu made a gift of the whole property to the Master, in all sincerity; but the Master did not accept it then. Now that his work is spreading on all sides and in many ways, it has become specially necessary to preserve that place. Mother willing, all that will come under the Math.'

The monk: 'But, Maharaj, it is very risky to come in close contact with money and all such worldly affairs; and to add to the difficulties, there is an estate to manage and protect. History records many instances of the fall of great religious organizations as a result of getting wealth and getting involved in worldly dealings, which deflected them from their ideal.'

Mahapurushji: 'What you say is quite true from one point of view. But do you know how it strikes me? Whenever a religious organization fell, the root cause was the absence of spiritual practices, renunciation, austerity, and so forth. In this organization also, we have nothing to fear and it will all run smoothly so long as detachment and dispassion shine bright;

and so long as each member of the organization believes that God-realization is the only goal of life and accordingly engages himself in spiritual practices and austerity. Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) used to depict the true outlook of a holy man with the help of a beautiful illustration. He used to say that a monk should think that he is living under a tree even while dwelling in a palace; and even when being supplied with the best food, he should remember that he is after all living on alms that is free from all impurity. This means that the monk should remain detached under all circumstances and keep the attitude of austerity flaming within for ever. One need have no fear so long as the ideal remains unadulterated. It is only the inner consecration to ideal that counts. Besides, whatever you do, you do for God alone, and nothing for yourselves. So, work also becomes a spiritual practice for you. When one performs work as service to Him, one gets rid of the impurities of the mind; there can be no doubt about that. Of course, you have to undertake other forms of spiritual practice along with this, and that intensely.

'Troubles arise only when there is any slackness in spiritual practices. You have to do His work without any attachment. Know it for certain that, if one goes on performing one's duties under the sincere belief that one is doing God's work, one can never suffer spiritually. God protects such a one for ever. But the fall comes as soon as egoism and attachment creep in. The Master used to say that there should be no self-deception in the matter of sticking to the ideal. One need have no fear so long as one clings to the idea "I am thankful that I am able to do His work, to serve Him through this." One should keep strict vigilance over one's mind, analysing it at every turn. Whenever you notice that the course of the mind is altering even slightly, you should at once start praying to Him with all humility, and you should apply yourself more intensely to your spiritual practices. Not that one has to work all the twenty-four hours of the day. And even while working, one has to maintain a constant current of thought about Him.'

The monk: 'Unless one has a living ideal before one, one can hardly keep one's life oriented towards the ideal. I think all will go well so long as you all (i.e. the disciples of Sri Rama-

krishna) are here; but the Master alone knows what will follow afterwards.'

Mahapurushji: 'Why should it be so? Know it for certain that the Master himself is the living ideal. We are also there to be sure. It is a mistake to think that everything ends with the dissolution of the body. When the mind becomes purified by spiritual practices, it feels the living and divine presence of God. That experience is what really counts; and its effect lasts through one's life. Besides, you too are not so insignificant as you think. You have been blessed to see the really ideal lives led by the direct disciples of the Master before your very eyes, and you have lived with them. This too is a result of past merit. You have nothing to fear. Those who have real dispassion and sincere detachment have nothing to fear at any time. God will reveal Himself in their hearts; He will fulfil their life's goal by His blessed vision.

'The main factors that count are renunciation, detachment, purity, and sincere hankering for God-realization. This is a very propitious time; in this age, even a little practice will serve to rouse a man's spiritual consciousness. The Master's advent has now made the path of spiritual progress very easy. The spiritual current that has been set flowing by him will run for many centuries—there can be no doubt about that. A few days before his passing away, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) declared, standing in this very courtyard of the Math, that the current that has been released will run unimpeded for seven or eight centuries—nobody will be able to stop it. This spiritual current of the age will flow on out of its own inner strength; it will not depend on any person. This has been ordained by divine power; what can a puny human being do?

'But the man who will help in fulfilling the need of the age will be blessed. It was at the instance of the Master himself that Swamiji organized this religious Order to keep intact the spiritual power with which the Master came to this world and which he bequeathed. Swamiji started that work with this Math as its main centre. This is the power-house of that spiritual energy. It is from here that the spiritual current will rush forth to deluge the whole world. That is why he carried the Master on his own head and installed him here

'The Master had told Swamiji: "Wherever you place me,

carrying me on your head, I shall live there." On the day that this monastery was inaugurated, Swamiji carried the *Atmarama* (i.e. the vessel containing the holy relics of Sri Ramakrishna) on his head and established it here. There was elaborate worship, sacrifice (*homa*), and offering of food. I cooked the milk-pudding for offering to him. Installing the Master in this monastery Swamiji said: "Today the heaviest responsibility on my head in this world is off. Now it matters little even if I leave this body." Thereafter all our spiritual practices centred round this *Atmarama* here.

'Swamiji, Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda)—all have undertaken intense spiritual practices here. They are all as good as incarnations themselves, the very apostles of the Master. They hardly come down unless it be in the company of a divine incarnation. So many great saints have undertaken their spiritual practices here. Now, think how great a place this holy monastery is. The Mother (i.e. Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother) herself came here. I heard it said that, even before this Math came into existence, the Holy Mother saw Sri Ramakrishna here (in a vision), while passing over the Ganga in a boat.

'Of course, we went away now and then for solitary meditation in hills and forests, even after the founding of this monastery; but our minds remained ever pinned to this vessel of *Atmarama* here. As the immediate companions of the Master are returning to him one by one, it is now your turn to shoulder the task. You have the duty of keeping intact the influence of this Math with the help of your renunciation, spiritual practices, prayer, and meditation. Your lives have to be moulded in such a way that when people come in contact with you, they should feel that they are meeting the Master himself and his immediate companions. To sum up the Master's message in a few words: the only aim of human life is to realize God, and true life consists in renunciation, intense spiritual practice, and the harmony of all religions.'

A monk, proceeding to a centre of the Math in South India to preach the message of Sri Ramakrishna, now saluted Mahapurushji and sought his blessings, saying: 'Bless me, Maharaj, that I may realize God in this very life. I have been near you all so long, and now I am leaving for distant Madras far away

from you. That pains me very much. Hereafter I cannot meet you at will; you will be present in my meditation only. Please instruct me how I should live there.'

Mahapurushji blessed the monk heartily and then said with great affection: 'My son, you have taken refuge in the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna; he will take care of you for ever. No matter where you are, have this faith ever in your mind that the Master is with you. You are very dear to him. You are well educated, pure in heart, and have renounced everything for his sake. Does he not know all that? Ah! at times I think within myself that, if Swamiji were here physically, how glad he would have been to see all these boys. The Master has many devotees even there where you are going. You tell them exactly what you have seen and what you have learnt from us. What really matters is to live the life of an ideal monk, full of renunciation and spiritual fervour. The Master's life was a living embodiment of blazing renunciation. You belong to his sacred Order, and you are going out to spread his message. The most eloquent preaching is to live an ideal life, so that through your lives people may understand and take refuge in the Master. So it comes to this that the more you can build your life after the pattern of the Master and Swamiji, the more will their message speak out through you.

'Whenever you feel you are at a loss, pray to him with heart and soul; he is there within you, the very soul of your soul. He will throw light from within; he will let you know what exactly is to be done. Never harbour such an idea in your mind that you are going out to preach something. The Master himself preaches his message. What can you and I preach about him? Who can understand him? His spiritual moods are infinite. Is it possible to draw any limit to them anywhere? Even so great a person as Swamiji said that he could not comprehend what Sri Ramakrishna was. What to speak of others? The goal of life is to have faith in him and devotion to his lotus feet. Go on with your usual spiritual practices and scriptural studies and discussions, as you were having them here; nay, more. That will be for your own good. This is the time for you to practise the spiritual disciplines; you must lay the greatest emphasis on them. I pray sincerely that you may be filled

with devotion, faith, love, purity, and so on. May your human birth find its truest fulfilment.'

68

HINDUS HAD LOST FAITH IN THEMSELVES—SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S ROLE IN RESTORING IT—HE IS AT ALL TIMES THE KALPATARU—THE KALPATARU-DAY INCIDENT—GRADUAL DEVELOPMENT IS NORMAL, YET DIVINE GRACE IS UNCONDITIONAL—THE INFINITE GRACE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA.

Place : Belur Math. Time : January 1, 1924.

It was the first day of the year, and they were observing the *kalpataru* day at the Kankurgachhi Yogodyana. At the Math also, there was arrangement for the special worship of the Master and offering to him. From early morning, devotees were streaming in, and more so as it was a public holiday. They assembled in Mahapurushji's room, after saluting the Master. He, too, talked with them on various subjects with evident delight. A devotee saluted him and said: 'Happy new year!' Mahapurushji replied smilingly: 'Happy English new year; for our own new year is on the first of Vaishakha. Today is the new year according to the English calendar. See how our minds work under the influence of English education for a hundred and fifty years! We are almost losing our distinction, our national traits. This is not just because we are a conquered nation; that we have been for quite a long time. The Moham-medans could not destroy our national life even after a long rule of seven or eight centuries. But such is the magic power of the western civilization, and such are the skilful ways adopted by the western people in instilling their ideas into us, that we cannot even perceive that they are out to uproot our culture and religious beliefs! That is how this great nation has become so westernized in such a short time, and that in every respect. Gradually, our way of thinking also has radically changed.

The worst evil is that by and large the Hindu race has gradually lost faith in its Vedic religion. The idea that pre-

vails among the common people is that all that is contained in our *sanatana dharma* (eternal religion) is false and imaginary, and that whatever the standard-bearers of Christianity say is gospel truth. They were out to convert the whole Hindu race to Christianity, but God willed otherwise. Had this eternal Vedic religion been wiped out, then spirituality itself would have been banished from this world. That is why the Lord Himself incarnated as Sri Ramakrishna to protect this eternal religion. He started his spiritual practice with that very worship of God in the image which the Christians and others in our country who had been influenced by the western ideas derided as idolatry. His practice of the spiritual disciplines of all the faiths and his success in all of them have struck the whole world with wonder. As a result, even the great savants of the West now humbly acknowledge the greatness and the grandeur of the Vedic religion of India. Consequently, the attention of even blindly imitative Indians has been drawn to the life of the Master, and with that to their own religion.

“The atmosphere in this country began to change from the very day of the advent of Sri Ramakrishna. Indians are gradually regaining faith in themselves, which they had lost. As a result of the wonderful work of the Master in the spiritual field, the soul-power of India has been reawakened. You will find that India will make wonderful progress in every direction. Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) declared that religion forms the backbone of India. That backbone had been broken, as it were; and consequently India became weak in every respect and lagged behind others. The Master’s advent has set right that backbone again and reinvigorated it. Now India will make the world wonder at her achievements not only in religion, but also in all other spheres.

“The Master has roused the power of the Spirit that moves the whole universe. The world will, in the course of time, realize what he has done for it. Ah! what good fortune it was for us to have been in close association with God Himself—to have seen, touched, and served the Master! His touch has made our lives blessed. Those also will be blessed who have not seen him, but who have accepted his message, and are moulding their lives accordingly—who have accepted him as their life’s ideal. He is the epitome of all spiritual endeavours; he is the

Lord of the three worlds; his grace knows no limit; he is the fulfiller of all desires. He bestows all things according to the sincere desires of his devotees—be it virtue, prosperity, enjoyment, or liberation. How can I speak of him fully?’

The devotee: ‘On this day¹, he assumed the role of the wish-fulfilling tree (*kalpataru*) and showered his grace on quite a number of devotees.’

Mahapurushji: ‘Why should he have been a *kalpataru* on this day alone? Why should it be so? Truth to tell, he is a *kalpataru* for ever. His only work is to shower his grace on all creatures. We have seen it with our own eyes how he blessed innumerable people in so many ways every day. Yes, it is true that on that particular day, in the Cossipore garden-house, he blessed quite a number of devotees all at a time. In that sense this day has a special significance; for it was on this day that the devotees felt palpably his infinite grace through that one incident.’

The devotee: ‘Maharaj, were you present there on that day?’

Mahapurushji: ‘No, I was not. As a matter of fact, none of the monastic disciples of the Master was present there at the time. The Master was then seriously ill; our hearts were then full of the spirit of renunciation. He was then passing through such a critical period of illness that we kept vigil by turns all the twenty-four hours of the day. The lay devotees would come during the daytime according to their convenience, and they would arrange for the medicines, diet, and all other necessary expenditure. But we shouldered the entire responsibility of nursing him. And along with that proceeded our intense spiritual practice. The Master also encouraged us very much in this. He would call us individually and guide us on the right path of spiritual disciplines; he kept himself informed about the progress made in our meditation and the kind of visions each of us was having. At night Swamiji would sit with us in meditation round a blazing fire under the sky, and sometimes we would also sing devotional songs. The whole night passed thus in divine ecstasy while serving the Master by turns.’

¹ The day (1st January 1886) on which Sri Ramakrishna blessed the devotees at the Cossipore garden-house, fulfilling their spiritual hankerings like the mythological *kalpataru*, the wish-fulfilling tree.

'Since we had to keep awake at night, most of us used to have a nap after our lunch. On that day too, after lunch we were having a nap in the small room adjacent to the hall below, when, for the first time at Cossipore, the Master came down in the afternoon for a stroll in the garden. It was a holiday, and many devotees were present in the garden. Seeing the Master come downstairs, they followed him joyously. He was walking slowly towards the gate of the garden, when Girish Babu, after prostrating himself at his feet, began to hymn his glory with folded hands. These words, replete with sincere devotion and faith, sent the Master into a deep *samadhi* even while he was standing. Finding him in such a divine mood, the devotees started exclaiming in great joy: "Victory to Sri Ramakrishna! Victory to Sri Ramakrishna!" and saluted him again and again.

'Gradually, the Master's mind regained outer consciousness to some extent. He turned his benign eyes on them and said: "What else shall I say? May you all have your spiritual consciousness awakened!" No sooner had he uttered these words than the devotees felt an upsurge of ineffable bliss within themselves. They exclaimed repeatedly: "Glory to Ramakrishna! Glory to Ramakrishna!", and saluted him in doing so. He, too, still in that state of divine absorption, touched almost all of them one by one, saying: "May you be enlightened!" As a result of that divine touch all the devotees felt wonderful spiritual stirrings inside them. Some of them were lost in meditation; some danced with joy; some wept; and some shouted his glory like people gone mad. It was all an unimaginable sight, and there stood the Master looking at them all with great joy.

'Their uproar of joy roused us from our sleep. We rushed out and saw the devotees all around the Master behaving like a group of lunatics, and he himself was looking at them graciously with a smiling face, full of affection. When we reached there, the Master's mind had returned to the human plane, but the devotees were still in their ecstatic mood, intoxicated with divine bliss.

'Later on, we learnt about the whole incident by asking the devotees. All of them acknowledged that the Master's touch had brought them wonderful spiritual realization, and that that experience had lasted quite a long time. And why should

not his touch be as effective as that? Was he not God Himself? Even that day the Master did not touch one or two, but said that they would have it later. From this it is clear that nothing happens unless the time is ripe. One has to wait for the right moment.'

The devotee : 'Maharaj, he can surely turn people's minds Godward by his mere wish and make their hearts pure. Why does he not do so? If his grace be contingent on one's spiritual effort, then how can one say that his mercy is without limit?'

Mahapurushji : 'Yes, what you say is true. I talk thus, because it comes this way in the speaking. In reality God is not to be attained through any effort. Or to be more correct, we cannot even assert that He is attainable at all, for He is the very Self of everybody, He is the Soul of all souls. Spiritual practices merely serve to remove the coverings over the inner vision, and (when they are removed) the soul knows its own reality and becomes one with the inmost Self. It is precisely because He frees creatures from the bondage of ignorance that they become blessed with a longing to realize Him : this is His grace. But it is true that everything occurs according to some rule and order. To expect otherwise would be like the vain effort of trying to make a man of a child all of a sudden. It is through the gradual development of the body and mind that the child reaches and transcends the stages of boyhood, youth, manhood, and decrepitude ; similarly, the divine experiences come to a man in an order and by stages. The development that comes naturally is the right one, and its effect alone is good. It goes without saying that God can, of His own mercy, liberate all souls in the twinkle of an eye, for He is all-powerful. As a matter of fact, however, He does not do so. He rules the whole world under the same law, and He hardly allows any exception to it unless there be some very special reason.

'At the same time, His mercy is unconditional ; there is no doubt about that. Had you but the slightest idea of His infinite mercy and love for His creatures, the very question as to how He can be an infinite ocean of grace could never have arisen in your mind. That He incarnates Himself out of compassion for His creatures is the greatest proof that His love is limitless ; that shows that He is an infinite ocean of kindness. He is ever

full (*purna*); He has nothing to find or seek; and yet, out of mercy, He engages Himself in the task of saving creatures. He has only one mood and that is mercy—love. Can anybody ever explain how merciful He is? It is a thing to be realized. The Master used to say: "If a man but tries to proceed one step towards God, He comes nearer to him by ten steps." Such is His mercy!

'Never have any doubt about His grace; never allow even such a thought to cross your mind. Go on calling on Him with love; His grace will make your heart and mind full. Can such a realization come in a day or all of a sudden? It will all come in time; you will get all this in due course. Even we could not have got any idea of how kind God is to us, if we had not seen the Master. He would be all eager, he would shed tears, to bestow his mercy on others. Who indeed craves for His mercy with all sincerity? Men are mad after worldly enjoyment. Anyone who earnestly wants divine joy surely gets it.

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SWAMIJI'S WANDERINGS—SRI RAMAKRISHNA DREW HIM INTO INTENSE ACTIVITY—DOING GOD'S WORK IS ALSO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE—THE MASTER CHOOSES HIS OWN INSTRUMENTS—HE WILL SEE THAT EGOTISM DOES NOT GAIN A HOLD.

Place: Deoghar (Baidyanathdham). Time: 1926.

Mahapurushji went to Deoghar with some *sadhus* and *brahmacharins* for the opening of the buildings of the Rama-krishna Mission Vidyapith on its own new land there. His august presence there was a source of continuous joy and festivity, and the holy contact with him kindled new spiritual hope and inspiration in all hearts. Great indeed was his joy also to stay in that sacred place of pilgrimage. One day, when several *sadhus* and *brahamacharins* had gathered before him, a monk requested: 'Maharaj, please tell us something about your pilgrimages; we are very eager to hear about them.'

With a smile, Mahapurushji said : 'What will you gain by listening to those old anecdotes ? There was a time when we did all that a great deal ; but now the Master has dragged into this current of work. This is what is required for the propagation of his message in this age. That is why the Master is getting some of his work done by us even in this old age. What we had planned for ourselves and had actually been following, was a life of austerity and spiritual practice ; but would the Master leave us to do that ? See how Swamiji himself (Swami Vivekananda) had to depart prematurely owing to incessant strenuous work. Many a time did he go away to the Himalayas for intense *tapasya* (spiritual practice and austerities); but each time somebody dragged him down from the lap of the mountains. He started moving through Rajasthan and other places, and had contact for work with quite a number of Rajas and Maharajas. In the course of his wanderings, he reached Porbunder. That princely state was then without a ruler and it was in a chaotic condition. So the British Government appointed Sri Shankarrao (Pandurang) administrator of the state. He was a very learned, intelligent, able, and honest man. He had travelled extensively in Europe, and had learnt French and German quite well. In his house he had a big library of his own ; he was very studious by nature. This library attracted Swamiji very much. When he expressed his feelings to Sri Shankarrao, the latter said with great delight : "You can stay here as long as you like and study".

'So Swamiji stayed there for some time. Sri Shankarrao was a master of Sanskrit. One day he said to Swamiji : "To tell you the truth, Swamiji, when I first read the scriptures, it seemed as though they contained no truth, as though it was all a figment of the brains of the writers of those books—as though they had written as the fancies fledted across their minds. But after seeing and keeping company with you intimately, my idea has changed ; now it strikes me that our religious literature is all true. I noticed in the West that the thinking people there are very eager to be acquainted with our philosophies and scriptures. But they have not yet come across anyone who can explain our scriptures to them properly. It would be a real achievement if you could go to the West and explain to

them our Vedic religion." Now, see how the Master's work starts !

'In reply, Swamiji said : "That is a good proposal. I am a *sannyasin* ; to me there is no difference between this country and that. I shall go when the need arises." Sri Shankarrao added: "If one wants to mix with the élite there, one has to learn the French language. Please learn it ; I shall help you." And so, Swamiji learnt that language well enough. I was then at the Alambazar Math. Swamiji had been travelling for about two years without giving any news about himself. Nobody knew his whereabouts, and he had not even seen the Alambazar Math. One day, all on a sudden, a letter of full four pages came from him. None of us could make out in what language it was written. Shashi Maharaj (Swami Ramakrishnananda) and Sarada (Swami Trigunatananda) had a smattering of French. After a close examination, they said: "It seems to be a letter from Naren (Swami Vivekananda) written in French." Then we had to run with that letter to Aghore Chatterji in Calcutta. He had been the principal of the Hyderabad State College, and knew French very well. He read the letter and translated it into Bengali for us. Only then did we come to know Swamiji's whereabouts and that he had learnt French.

'Well, I told you at the start that Swamiji had planned to spend his life in meditation, *japa*, and other spiritual practices. But the great power that descended as Sri Ramakrishna did not allow him to do so ; it yoked him to the work of propagating the message of the age that would save the world. The master *yogin* that Swamiji was, he could easily have spent his days in *samadhi*, total absorption in God, if he had only wanted to do so ; but the Master drew him into the midst of intense activity. He has engaged all of you as well to give shape to his message. Blessed are the men whom he has chosen.'

A monk : 'But, surely, are not austerities and spiritual struggles also necessary ? You, too, have undergone a lot of them.'

Mahapurushji : 'Yes, spiritual exercises are very necessary, and so also are austerities. The only means of keeping the course of one's life directed towards God is spiritual effort. But why should one think that this spiritual struggle and austerity can have only one form ? Look here, for instance : what

suffering you undergo, and what a fight you have to wage against adverse circumstances, to carry on God's work ! This too is a kind of austerity and spiritual struggle. The one idea that you always have to keep burning in your heart is that whatever you do is for His sake, for His service—nothing for yourselves. This, too, is a kind of spiritual practice. Out of His grace, He has chosen you as His instruments ; and that has made your life blessed. Know it for certain that for establishing the religion of the age (*yuga-dharma*), he does not depend on any particular person. The fortunate ones alone are able to work for him. I have seen quite a number of people with sterling qualities, but the Master does not choose them. There are others, again, who to all outward appearance are good for nothing, and yet the Master makes them work wonders.

'Anyone who gets an opportunity to do his work is a blessed person. That is why Swamiji would say that if it pleases him he can create a hundred thousand Vivekanandas. Have this idea ever bright in your mind that by doing his work we ourselves become blessed: Be assured: When you engage yourself in this work you will, as a matter of course, get devotion, faith, and other such things. There can be no doubt about that. As compared with the spiritual struggles of those who roam about in hills and forests and live on alms, your struggles are in no way inferior. "For one's own salvation and for the good of the world"—that is the message for this age.'

A monk: 'In the midst of work one is often assailed by pride and egotism.'

Mahapurushji: 'So long as you have this idea clear in your mind that you are doing God's work, you cannot have pride or anything like that. If you have the correct attitude, you need have no fear. Along with work you should practise meditation and *japa* regularly ; that helps in maintaining a balance. And a little intrusion by pride and egotism is not a thing to be worried about ; for God Himself will put you under the circumstances necessary for the wiping out of that little defect. As for pride and egotism, these can come even to the man engaged in austerities in solitude, who may then think that he has become a big ascetic. What matters, you know, is sincerity of purpose. If one is false to oneself, one can have neither

true spiritual practice nor true service. If you are true to yourself, if your thoughts and actions are in accord with each other, pride and egotism can never assail you, whether you are engaged in spiritual practice or service to God. You must be ever watchful about the goal ; you must never forget the aim of life.

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SPIRITUAL ATMOSPHERE OF THE NILGIRIS—‘THE MASTER IS MY PARAMATMAN’—THE CONDITION REQUISITE FOR HIGH SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES—‘I AM HIS SLAVE’—RENUNCIATION ESSENTIAL.

Place : Ootacamund. Time : 1926.

Mahapurushji reached the Nilgiri Hills from Madras on the 4th June and stayed there at Sri Hatiramji Math, the summer residence of the head of the temple of Balaji at Tirupati. The climate of Ootacamund is very salubrious, and the scenery charming. The altitude of the place is about eight thousand feet above sea level. In those days it was also the summer residence of the Governor of Madras. Mahapurushji had visited it once before in 1924, when he had stayed for some months at Coonoor, about ten miles from Ootacamund. At that time, he had laid the foundation-stone of the Ramakrishna Ashrama at Ootacamund.

After coming here, Mahapurushji spent his time mostly by himself ; he did not much like to mix with people. All the same, the local devotees came to him every afternoon, heard him talk on spiritual matters, and returned home with his blessings and their hearts full of joy. His spiritual disposition began to attract more and more devotees. Apart from such spiritual ministration, he remained absorbed in his own Self, merged in the infinite Brahman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. His mind seemed to be getting gradually more and more withdrawn from the things of the world, and he became more reserved and indrawn. The only expression of life on the ordinary human plane that one could notice in him in those days was when he talked and kept company with the simple

hill boys and girls. When he went out for his walk in the morning and evening, he used to have in his pockets a few sweets and coins, which he distributed on the way among those innocent children; and he mixed with them whole-heartedly as though he was one of themselves.

When he sat alone in his room in Sri Hatiramji Math, he closed his eyes, or he looked at something far away with vacant eyes, as if his mind travelled in some supersensuous plane. One felt awed when approaching him at such moments. Often he would say that he would free himself from all the responsibilities of the head of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and spend the rest of his days in the deep solitude of the Nilgiri Hills. His mind remained completely detached from everything—above all mundane entanglements.

One day, he was sitting quietly in his room after his morning walk, with his face towards the wide glazed window; his eyes seemed to be fixed on the blue hills spread before him like huge waves. One of his attendants, who happened to enter the room just then, noticed him sitting thus in an abstracted mood. Feeling rather alarmed, he asked: 'Maharaj, do you feel unwell?'

It looked as if the question did not enter his ears fully, though it disturbed the current of his thought. He opened his lips and said as if in continuation of the thought running through his mind at that time: 'Listen. The spiritual atmosphere of this place is very elevating; the mind naturally runs after the Infinite. I had no idea before that this place was so full of high spiritual inspiration. Now as the days roll on, more of it is being revealed to me and making me mute with wonder. I now think of the infinite grace of the Master that he should have brought me here for the very purpose of giving me the bliss of such divine realization. I had the same kind of feeling when I was in the Himalayas many years ago. The mind has a natural tendency towards meditation, and it soon becomes quiet and serene. It takes some effort to bring it down. Many saints and *rishis* must have undertaken deep spiritual practices here; they have left the place surcharged with great spiritual power. It is very conducive to spiritual practices. C. and others remarked the other day that the forests here abound in fruits of

various kinds. Maybe the *rishis* lived on those fruits and spent their days in spiritual practices.'

He kept silent for some time and then continued : 'The other day, when I sat thus looking quietly at the blue ranges, I noticed somebody coming out of this body and spreading over the whole world.' With these words he closed his lips. After a long while he drew a long breath and said : 'The Master is my Paramatman, the supreme Self ; it is He who pervades the whole universe : "A quarter of His is this whole universe ; His other three immortal quarters are in the bright region."'

Struck with wonder, the attendant kept silent for a moment and then said with folded hands : 'Shall we never have any of these realizations, Maharaj ? I cannot even slightly perceive what speciality there is in the spiritual atmosphere of this place.'

Mahapurushji : 'Look here, my son, it is He alone who can bring about any realization. Hold fast to Him. Weep and pray to Him ; out of His grace He will grant you everything at the right moment. He is the master of our minds—He is the supreme Self that has come down as our Master. If He, out of His grace, but turns the mind even a little, then this very restless mind, mad as an elephant as it is, becomes calm and gets lost in *samadhi*—it gives up all attachment to worldly things once for all. How can one reach high spiritual states unless the mind becomes very fine ? Again, can the mind rise to the supersensuous plane all of a sudden ? It requires long spiritual practice. One can have the higher spiritual realizations only when the mind becomes finer than the finest and attains a high level of consciousness. The spiritual moods become manifest through a mind that is purified. As the mind reaches higher levels of consciousness, spiritual realities of greater order become reflected in it. What is essential is to have faith in and devotion to His lotus feet ; when that is there, everything is achieved.'

As the news of Mahapurushji's stay at Ootacamund spread, many devotees from all over Madras State gathered there to have his blessings and to be in his holy company. They all returned to their homes with their expectations fulfilled and with fresh inspiration for higher endeavour. Many devotees came from Malabar (Kerala) as well, and they were all initiated by Mahapurushji. One of them prayed for Mahapurushji's

blessings on the eve of his departure, and said : ' I had not the good fortune of seeing the Master. You are my master ; you are my highest refuge.' At this, Mahapurushji affectionately said : ' You should not speak like that. He alone is the supreme refuge of all ; he is the Lord. You must have read in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna how he would say that the wave belongs to the sea and not the sea to the wave. I am a mere slave of his, having taken refuge at his feet. In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna says that He is "the goal, the supporter, the lord, the witness, the abode, the refuge, the friend, the origin, the dissolution, the substratum, the storehouse, and the seed immutable" of all.

'God is everything ; He is the basis of everything. It is only by virtue of merit earned in many previous lives that you have come under the protective care of Sri Ramakrishna, the incarnation of this age. And an insignificant servant of his has dedicated you at his blessed feet. Your life is fulfilled, and it gets a fresh lease by this dedication at the feet of God. Shankaracharya has said : "Three things, namely a human birth, a longing for liberation, and the blessings of a great soul, are rare indeed, and can be had by the grace of God alone." They are, indeed, difficult to obtain, and can be had by divine dispensation alone. By your good luck, you have got all the three treasures ; now get merged in the ocean of God's love, and you will become immortal. In the Vaishnava scriptures, they have a beautiful saying : "One has the grace of all the three—the *guru*, Krishna, and the Vaishnavas ; and yet, in the absence of the mercy of one alone (one's own self), one goes to rack and ruin." One may have the grace of God, the mercy of a *guru*, and the benign help of a great devotee who has known Vishnu ; yet everything comes to nought without the favour of one, that is, one's own sincere effort ; and so the poor creature cannot get liberation. In your life also, you are lucky to have all these factors. Now, with the help of what you have received, be absorbed in your spiritual practices, attain immortality—become immortal yourself. You will then be free for ever from this endless circle of birth and death.'

The devotee : 'Kindly bless me, so that I may lose myself in my spiritual practices, and never more be entangled in the net of this worldly life.'

Mahapurushji : 'I tell you all this only because you have

my blessings. I bless you from the bottom of my heart that you may devote yourself heart and soul to the thought of our Master. Really speaking, my son, blessing is the only thing we have. How can I express the joy we feel when we come across somebody who wants to reach God or even makes the slightest effort in that direction? Those who want to become free from the bondage of this world and make a sincere effort towards that end are very dear to us. The Master came to liberate bound souls from their bondage. We too are his servants, clinging for ever to his feet. The only task in our life is to draw people towards God, to help them to proceed towards Him. That is why the Master brought us with him, and still keeps us here. Until our last breath, we shall be teaching that alone—telling people how they can attain God.

'This world is ephemeral ; it lasts for a few days only. What a trouble it is to be here ! And still, how strange it is that people become so engrossed in this momentary existence ! They become so mad after the fleeting happiness of this world that they entirely forget the real aim of life. Such is the play of Maya that deludes the whole world. Mind you, my son, you are still a young man ; your mind has not been stamped with worldliness as yet. I tell you the essence of it all—the one thing that we feel in the inmost recesses of our heart. Nothing can be achieved without renunciation. That is why the Upanishad declares : "It was through renunciation that some rare souls attained immortality." It is through renunciation alone that one can become immortal. *Yoga* and *bhoga*—union with God and sense-enjoyment—cannot go together. One cannot get any taste of the bliss of Brahman unless one gives up the happiness of this world. The Master drew a true picture of the world in a few simple words : The world consists of lust and lucre (or "woman and gold", in his own homely phrase). It will not do to have mere external renunciation ; one must eradicate from one's very mind any desire for "woman and gold" Tulasidas also says : "Rama cannot be where *kama* (passion, lust) is." One must give up the desire for all worldly enjoyment if one would realize God.'

REMINISCENCES OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

Place : Bombay. Time : January 30, 1927.

The sixty-fifth birthday anniversary of Swami Vivekananda was observed in the local Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama with élat. The main features of the celebration were worship, reading from scriptures, devotional music, and feeding of the devotees and Daridra-Narayanas (the poor). The joy of the occasion was increased a hundredfold by the presence of Mahapurushji.

After the evening services, the *sannyasins* and *brahma-charins* gathered in his room and expressed their desire to hear from him about Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda). He related briefly about his first contact with Swamiji, how they had spent their days together at the Cossipore garden-house in the service of the Master, about the establishment of the monastery at Baranagore, and other such events. Then a monk asked him : 'Maharaj, were you and Swamiji together during the days of wandering ?'

Mahapurushji : 'Yes, sometimes I was with him ; and sometimes we met by chance during those days. Once, I set out with Brahmachari Haran of Varanasi to visit the places of pilgrimage in the Western Himalayas. When we were at Hathras on our way to Vrindaban, we heard that Swamiji was there at the house of a railway officer. Swamiji was then suffering from fever. So we went to see him. He was greatly delighted at this unexpected meeting. I cannot give you any idea of the way he cut jokes with us, related many incidents merrily and full of humour, and expressed great joy at everything, in spite of his high temperature. The fever left him after three days, but it made him very weak. He asked us to finish our pilgrimage to Vrindaban. It was planned that after this we should go with Swamiji to Rishikesh, for we expected that he would be all right by that time.

'Haran and myself went to Vrindaban, where we spent a few days happily. Is Vrindaban just an ordinary place of pilgrimage ? It is the place where the Lord Himself disported. The spiritual atmosphere of the place is unique. From Vrinda-

tion in full. Then the monk came to Swamiji, examined him thoroughly, and said : "You need not worry. I shall give you a medicine which you should grind with a little pipal powder and honey, and apply it to his tongue. You will soon find him reviving." Saying this, he returned to his hut and gave some medicine that looked like ash. The other ingredients were also procured, and after pasting these properly as directed by the old monk, the medicine was applied to Swamiji's tongue. Strangely enough, soon after it was administered Swamiji's body began to warm up, and he felt much better. When Swamiji heard the whole incident from others, he complained : "Why did you take the trouble of administering that medicine ? I was in a state of great joy."

'When Swamiji had recovered a little, it was decided that it was not proper to stay on at Rishikesh during the rains, when malaria was so rampant. So it was settled that they should shift elsewhere. But Swamiji was still so weak that it became a problem how to remove him from there. At that time, the ruling prince of Tehri-Garhwal came down there on some business. Sri Raghunath Shastri, brother of Sri Haraprasad Shastri, the well-known historian, was then the private secretary of the ruler of Tehri. When he was told of this predicament, he arranged for a bullock-cart from Rishikesh to Hardwar.

'After spending some days at Hardwar, Swamiji came down to Meerut, where also his brother-disciples gathered round him. Meerut is a very healthy place. Swamiji regained his health after staying there for two or three months. There he said one day : "I have had a valuable experience this time. Henceforth I shall not live with my brother-disciples ; I shall live alone. How very worried you all were at my illness ! You had all gone there for spiritual practices ; but in fact my illness kept you all busy. Next time, if any of you falls ill, I shall have to serve you all the more. Love for brother-disciples is also a kind of bondage ; I have to cut asunder that as well." He actually did what he said. From then on he moved about the whole of India without any companion : nobody knew his whereabouts till he left for America.'

Then a monk asked : 'Were you present at the Belur Math when Swamiji left his body?'

Mahapurushji : 'No, I was not then at the Math. Some

ten or twelve days earlier, Swamiji had very earnestly persuaded me to go to Varanasi to start some Vedanta work there. I reached Varanasi at the end of June for that work. When Swamiji went to Varanasi for the last time, I was also with him. At that time the Maharaja of Bhinga placed five hundred rupees at the disposal of Swamiji for starting an institution for the propagation of Vedanta at Varanasi. The Maharaja loved and respected him very much. In his old age, having renounced his princely state, he built a garden-house at Varanasi and lived there as a *vanaprastha*. He would not stir out of his compound. When he heard of Swamiji's stay at Varanasi, he sent a messenger to him with fruits and sweets, to invite him very respectfully to his house. He informed Swamiji through that messenger that, as he had taken a vow not to move out of his house, it would not be possible for him to pay his respects personally to Swamiji. The Maharaja's humility pleased Swamiji very much, and he said: "We are monks; why should I not go when he invites? I shall certainly go."

'Accepting the Maharaja's invitation, Swamiji went to his house. I, too, accompanied him. The Maharaja received him very respectfully and took him inside the house. In the course of the talk, he said: "I have been following your activities for a long time. And this has given me great joy. Your ideal is very high. I think you have come down to this world like Buddha, Shankara, and others to establish *dharma* on this earth again. It is my heart's prayer that your plan should succeed fully." In order that some such activity might be started in Varanasi also, he offered to pay five hundred rupees to Swamiji, but Swamiji did not accept it at that time. He said that he would think over the matter and would do the needful in due course. Nevertheless, the Maharaja sent the amount to Swamiji after a few days and requested him to start some work in Varanasi. And Swamiji accepted the gift.

'After his return to the Math at Belur, Swamiji first asked Swami Saradananda to proceed to Varanasi. But he would not agree. He said: "Varanasi will not suit me." So Swamiji kept on pressing me to go to Varanasi. Swamiji's health was very bad at that time. His diabetes had increased; I used to arrange for his medicines and take general care of his health. Because of

this, I could not make up my mind to leave that task and go there. When he recovered a little, he sent me to Varanasi.'

A monk : 'About the Home of Service at Varanasi, Master Mahashay (Mahendra Nath Gupta or "M") used to say, "Just see how much of a push the Home of Service has got from the spiritual endeavour of Swami Shivananda".'

Mahapurushji : 'Oh no, not at all. All is achieved through His will and through His grace. The Master's message will spread more and more as days roll on. That is the inevitable course that the message for this age will take. For instance, look at Bombay, where there was nothing in the beginning, and now things are proceeding apace. Much more is bound to be accomplished in due course. It is all His *lila* (play).'

When the topic turned to the devotional music of a Parsi lady who was a devotee, he remarked : 'It is really with great devotion that she sings the song. "Mere to Giridhara Gopala dusara na koi" ("Giridhara Gopala is mine alone and no one else's").' And saying this, he began to sing that song himself.

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INITIATION IN VARANASI—MAHAPURUSHJI'S VISION OF SRI RAMA-KRISHNA AS VISHVANATHA.

Place : Varanasi. Time : 1927-28.

During his stay at Varanasi, Mahapurushji initiated about fifty people—both men and women. Varanasi being the place of Shiva, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Saradananda, and other intimate disciples of the Master had refrained from giving initiation at this place. Hence, a few monks and also a few of his attendants had some doubt in their minds as to the propriety of his breaking that rule. To have this doubt removed, an attendant asked him one day : 'Maharaj, a doubt has arisen in our minds. Please enlighten us on this point. We have heard that Raja Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) and others refrained from giving initiation at Varanasi. But how is it, may we ask, that you have been initiating disciples here ?

At this question of the attendant, he remained very grave and quiet for a while, and then said slowly : 'Look here, my son, I never entertain the idea that I am initiating anyone. The Master, out of his mercy, never instilled the idea of a *guru* in me. Shiva is the *guru* of the whole world, and the Master is so in this age. It is he who inspires the devotees to come here, and I tell them as he prompts me from within. He is the soul of my soul. . . .'

Mahapurush Maharaj lived in a corner-room on the first floor of the Advaita Ashrama. It was winter. Both the Ashramas (the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama and the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service) were full of *sadhus* and *brahmacharins*. Many of them had come there to live in the holy company of Mahapurushji. Besides, the devotees came crowding there every day, so that it seemed like a festival and was an occasion for rejoicing. One morning, as the inmates of both the ashramas were saluting him and departing one by one after receiving his blessings, he said to one of the monks : 'Look here, I had a very delightful experience last night. It was dead of night, and I was in bed, when I suddenly saw a person of white complexion with matted hair and three eyes : he came and stood before me. His divine effulgence lighted up the whole place. Ah, what a beautiful and lovely appearance he had, and how compassionate was his look ! The vision pressed all my spiritual energy upward, so that my whole being soon became stilled in divine absorption and full of bliss. Just then, I saw that form vanishing and the Master standing there instead, with a smiling face. Pointing to me with his hand, he said : "You have to continue in this body, for you have still something more to do." As the Master said so, the mind started coming down to the normal plane and my body began functioning as usual. It is all his will. As for myself, I felt very happy all the time. The Master is none other than Vishvanatha (Shiva of Varanasi) himself.'

The Monk : 'Did you have the vision in a dream ?'

Mahapurushji : 'No, no ; I was wide awake.'

Saying thus, he started talking about other matters, as though trying to stop further discussion about it.

THE HOLINESS OF DAKSHINESWAR—THE MASTER'S EXPERIENCES
UNPARALLELED—MAHAPURUSHJI READY FOR FINAL RELEASE.

Place : Belur Math. Time : March 19, 1929.

Mahapurush Maharaj felt rather unwell today. Only two days back, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna had been celebrated on a grand scale and with great éclat. About a hundred and fifty thousand people had gathered on the occasion. That day, from early morning and till late in the evening, innumerable people had been blessed by touching his feet or seeing him from a distance. His door was always open for the devotees. He, too, was so very full of the thoughts of the Master that he paid little attention to his own body. It was as though he were divinely inspired. He talked unceasingly with the devotees about the Master and made them all happy, giving instructions about various spiritual problems raised by them. The strain had told upon his health very much ; yet he was ever smiling and blissful.

From early morning today, the *sadhus* and *brahmacharins* of the Math began to gather in his room, and saluted him with all devotion and respect. He also made affectionate enquiries about their health. Noticing that one of the monks was wearing a rather worn-out cloth, he asked his attendant to give him a new piece, and said : 'Can't you so much as keep an eye on the needs of the monks ?'

As soon as an old monk came to him, he greeted him with, 'Om, salutation to Shiva ! Glory to Mother !' Soon the talk turned to Dakshineswar. The newly initiated *sannyasins* and *brahmacharins* were to go to the Dakshineswar temple that day, where they would pass the whole day in meditation, devotional music, etc. The temple authorities had arranged to give *prasada* to thirty monks. On hearing all that, Mahapurushji was highly pleased and said : 'Dakshineswar is our heaven on earth ; it is our Kailasa, our Vaikuntha. Is that an ordinary place ? The Panchavati is a great seat of spiritual perfection, where the Master had innumerable spiritual experiences of a very high

order. For twelve long years he practised different modes of divine communion at Dakshineswar. The divine visions and spiritual realizations that he had there are without any parallel. The history of religion has no record of such intense and diversified spiritual practices and such high spiritual experiences in the life of any other incarnation. The Master used to say : "The experiences that occurred here (meaning in himself) have transcended all that has been recorded anywhere else." That is why Swamiji used to refer to the Master as "the greatest Avatara".

'The Master brought the dust of Vrindaban and spread it on the ground of the Panchavati. Every particle of dust in Dakshineswar is holy. Blessed by the touch of the holy feet of God Himself, Dakshineswar has become a great place of pilgrimage. It is a great place of spiritual inspiration to people of all denominations—be they non-dualists, or dualists, Shaktas or Vaishnavas, Shaivas or Tantrikas ; for the Master practised all those modes of divine communion and attained perfection in them. This time, God manifested His greatest *sattvika* aspects. It was that Primordial Power, the great Mother of the universe, the source of all creation, who expressed Herself freely and playfully, as it were, through the body of our Master. The intense spiritual *sadhana* that the Master went through will exert its influence not only on this earth, but also in the regions higher up, even up to heaven. Ah, what a play of divine power it was !' As he spoke thus, his whole face became flushed, and he sat silent with his eyes looking down.

Just after he had sat for his lunch, Swami Suddhananda came and inquired : 'How are you today, Maharaj ?'

Mahapurushji kept on looking at him vacantly for some time, and then, as if awakened from sleep, slowly said : 'You enquire about this body ? The body is tottering, and nobody knows what will happen to it the next moment. Now it is the turn of you and others to take up the responsibility of doing the Master's work. It seems the Master will grant me release this time. It is all hollow inside the body ; I do not feel any strength. But he is increasing the power of the mind day by day. I now stand on the brink of *nirvana* ; and in front, I notice the vast abode of infinity. Out of his grace, the Master has freed me from all bondages ; he has cleared the way to

nirvana. Well, that is enough ! The Master has shown me all ; he has granted me self-fulfilment. (With eyes closed) Now I have no more worries ; it does not matter whether the body goes or stays.'

Swami Suddhananda : 'How is that, Maharaj ? As for ourselves, it is our conviction that, for the good of the many and for the welfare of this Order, the Master will keep you for a long time yet. You are now passing through a great strain ; that is why your health is affected. We are all sincerely trying to see that this strain is avoided. Innumerable people are being benefited by your mere presence ; and we too feel secure.'

Mahapurushji : 'I know that you all love me deeply, and I too am very happy in the company of monks and devotees like you. Further, I know that the Master will get whatever possible done through this body ; before that he will not release me. Now and then I think : "Why does the Master still retain this body ? He must have some inscrutable purpose to serve. Else why should he make this frail body work in this manner ? I have neither scholarship nor intelligence ; I cannot talk or speak well ; yet he is having so much work done through this broken instrument of his."'

Swami Suddhananda wanted to change the topic, and said : 'Three persons have gone to bring Gangadhar Maharaj (Swami Akhandananda).'

Mahapurushji : 'Yes, it will be really good if Gangadhar comes. It is delightful to see the people that belong to the Master. He does not easily move out unless he is earnestly prevailed upon to do so. Khoka (Swami Subodhananda) is also coming today. Ah, Khoka Maharaj is very much pulled down in health ! Have you finished your lunch ?'

Swami Suddhananda : 'No, not yet. From early morning, I have been trying to come to you, but I could not get an opportunity, for the devotees are always crowding round about you.'

•Mahapurushji : 'Ah, so it is ! Don't delay any further ; go and have your meal.'

At this, Swami Suddhananda left the place. Then Mahapurushji closed his eyes and prayed : 'O Master, be kind to all ; bring enlightenment to all.'

After lunch, an attendant helped him carefully out of his seat, for it was difficult for him to rise by his own effort. Slowly, he sat down in his chair. In front of his room a monk was pouring some water from an earthen pot for drinking. Noticing him, he said : 'Hullo, so you are going (for *tapasya*) now ?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'I am thinking of leaving next Thursday.'

With a deep sigh, Mahapurushji said : 'Yes, so you have to go. Well, all have to go. That is the world. We meet only for a couple of days, and then nobody knows the whereabouts of others. Only the ever-blissful Mother is real ; everything else is ephemeral. Creation goes on eternally like a current ; there is no break in it. The eternally blissful Mother is beyond this creation, beyond speech and mind—"That, failing to reach which speech turns back together with the mind."' '

74

WHY THE MASTER SHAKES UP HIS ORGANIZATION NOW AND THEN
—DIFFICULTIES ATTENDANT ON DOING HIS WORK—THEIR INNER
MEANING.

Place : Belur Math. Time : March 22, 1929.

Mahapurushji was seated on a mat on the floor for his lunch, which he had almost finished, when he saw through the blinds the cobbler in the courtyard, mending the shoes of the monks. After finishing his meal he said to an attendant : 'Ah ! we all had our fill, while this poor man works here without food at this noon. Just go down and let him have plenty of fruits and sweets that have been offered to the Master.' After finishing that task, the attendant found Mahapurushji standing at the window with a half-rupee coin in hand and looking down at the cobbler. The cobbler started eating as soon as he got the *prasada*, noticing which Mahapurushji remarked : 'So you see, the man was hungry ; and that is why he started eating as soon as he got the *prasada*. Now see how I make fun.' With this the coin dropped to the cobbler. Finding the coin falling from above all on a sudden, the cobbler lifted up his face to

meet the eyes of Mahapurushji. He understood the whole thing at once, saluted him with folded hands, and went on expressing in words his gratefulness and joy. A little later, when Mahapurushji heard a monk higgling with the cobbler about the charge for mending the shoes, he felt very hurt and said : 'Ah ! he is a poor man ; why this higgling with him ? ...'

Mahapurushji used to eat very sparingly at night—sometimes, it used to be nothing more than a little milk or a couple of dry grapes or prunes in a little milk. This night, too, he was drinking a little milk, when Swami—came and stood before him after saluting him. After discussing several things, they began talking about the activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Mahapurushji said : 'It delights me very much to find you all gathered here. The Master gives a shaking to his order now and then to awaken its dormant power of collective effort and to show that his work cannot be carried on by anyone individually ; it must be performed by the monks of this Order in unison, and then only will it be well done. The more storms and stresses there will be, the more the power of the Master's Order (*sangha-shakti*) will be roused. All superior achievements have to pass through many tribulations. The more obstacles there are, the greater will be the love and faith in all hearts for the Master, and the more sincere will be the reliance on him. This organization came into being for setting in motion the religion of the age (*yuga-dharma*), and it is he who is working through every individual belonging to it. This work of ushering in a new order of things will continue to progress for centuries ; nobody will be able to arrest its course. These are the words of Swamiji himself, who was a *rishi* seeing the past, present, and future.'

The *sannyasin* : 'What Swamiji said and what you also repeat can never be untrue. But, Maharaj, the environmental set-up sometimes renders it difficult to keep one's faith intact ; one often loses one's enthusiasm for work ; some indescribable fear and disbelief seem to take possession of the mind.'

Mahapurushji : 'That is but natural. You will be beset with fear, dislike, etc. many a time ; and again they will all clear away. That is the nature of work. Can you tell me of any work that is wholly free from hindrance ? And the obstruction becomes great in proportion as the work is great. The

power of the soul is awakened as a result of that clash. That power is nothing but the Mother Herself. All the works are Hers, and so also are we. One must stick to truth and perform all duties with this firm undertaking ; for this is the work needed for establishing the religion of this age. That is why he has dragged us here along with himself. Otherwise, could we not have kept ourselves fully occupied with the practice of contemplation and so forth ? In fact, that was what we were doing ; but at the Master's behest, Swamiji introduced these activities and pressed us all into them as well. Just see how Swamiji himself worked untiringly till the end of his life ; this intensity of work told upon his health and destroyed his body. Could even Swamiji himself do all his works without obstruction ? Consider, for instance, the circumstances leading to his departure for the West. To do God's work, he had to fight against innumerable difficulties.

'Often enough the thought comes to me that I should no longer remain content with the qualified aspect of God, but should at once rush to His unqualified aspect, to get merged wholly in *samadhi*. Yet would the Master allow me to do so ? Still, I know that he is everything—he is the qualified and he is also the unqualified. "A quarter of His is this whole creation, and His other three immortal quarters are in the bright region." We can do nothing unless he wills it. We have to continue where and in whatever circumstances he is pleased to keep us. Nevertheless, he is revealing to me everything out of his grace ; he has opened for me the gate to that Immortal—"That, failing to reach which speech turns back along with the mind."

THE MASTER DOES NOT ALLOW MAHAPURUSHJI TO DEPART—LOVE IS THE LIFE OF THE ORGANIZATION—HOW DEPARTED SPIRITUAL LUMINARIES HELP FOLLOWERS—WORLD PEACE THROUGH ACCEPTANCE OF SWAMIJI'S IDEAL.

Place : Belur Math. Time : March 23, 1929.

For the last few days, Mahapurushji had been suffering from a bad cold. Today he felt a little better. He is never worried about his physical health—he is always blissful even in the midst of the worst ailment. Physical pain or dangers cannot disturb the equilibrium of his well-poised mind. An old monk had arrived at the Math from a branch centre in the morning. He came upstairs and, after prostrating himself before Mahapurushji, asked : 'How is your health, Maharaj ?'

Mahapurushji : 'You inquire about this transient body ? How can the body be well in this old age ?'

The monk : 'Yes, Maharaj, that is what one can easily see. In fact, your health has deteriorated so much that it pains me to look at your body.'

Mahapurushji : 'This body will not last long. The passing away of Swami Saradananda has paralysed my right side, as it were, and the mind seems vacant. I, too, was ready to depart. I fell seriously ill soon after Swami Saradananda's demise, and the mind became completely detached from work. I prayed to the Master to be relieved of this life, but he did not heed. He forced me back ; and so here I am. He knows best why he did not allow me to go. Everything happens according to his will. I must continue here as long as it pleases him.'

The monk : 'That is quite reassuring, Maharaj, that everything will proceed according to the Master's will. We pray to the Master earnestly that he may spare you for us for a long time to come. For your departure will mean an ebb in the spiritual current of the organization. You need not do anything personally ; your presence alone is enough for us. By your mere wish, everything will go on well, just as it is going on even now. You will only give us spiritual strength, inspiration,

and blessing. The actual work will be carried on by us. How can I express, Maharaj, the strength we feel from the mere thought that you are there behind us, no matter where we are ?'

Mahapurushji : 'I feel from the bottom of my heart how you love and respect me. The love, affection, and respect which the members of the Order feel for one another constitute the life-force of this organization. The spiritual power and unity of the organization will remain intact so long as this love for each other will remain untarnished, for this relationship of love centres round the Master. It has grown and expanded with him as the focal point. It cannot be wiped out with the death of the body. Nor will the power of the spiritual teachers of this organization that is actively at work be ever exhausted. See, for instance, how Swamiji, Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda), Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda), and Sharat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) left their bodies one by one. But is our love or respect for them any the less on that account ? Or, has their spiritual power been lost to any extent, or can it ever be so ? That is unthinkable. They are still there, and their power is working still through different instruments. They are still inspiring us and guiding us along the proper course. They are in their spiritual bodies now, and they are doing greater work in a subtle way. They can be seen even now. Just as they were advising us about different matters when they were in their gross bodies, similarly they advise us even now whenever the need arises. While in divine communion the mind reaches a high plane, where it comes into intimate contact with these great souls ; and one can, if need be, get from them indications as to the way to be followed. We too, when our physical forms vanish, shall merge in the Master ; so that when one thinks of the Master, one will be thinking of us as well, as a matter of course. We are his devotees, his servants ; we have no existence apart from him. Our personality has lost itself in him. The Master is none other than the eternal Brahman.'

The monk : 'But, Maharaj, we are on this gross plane ; and we want you here just as you are. Besides, our minds have not reached so high. We cannot see the Master. You are his companion ; you belong to his inner circle. You are before us as his representative. We are trying to understand the Master

through you. If we can but lay our prayers at your feet, we feel that we have spoken to the Master himself.'

Mahapurushji : 'As to that, the relationship that we have with you will not end with the body. I bless you heartily that you may progress ever more ; may your hearts be filled with devotion, love, purity, and so on. May many good things be done for the world by you. The Master will direct you properly, and he will fill you with great strength. The Master, Swamiji, and others came to this earth for the good of the world. They became embodied just for the sake of establishing peace in this world by letting in a flood of spiritual light. Swamiji set this organization in motion to fulfil that need of the age. The whole world will have to accept the ideal preached by Swamiji. There is no other way of establishing peace throughout the world.'

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MAHAPURUSHJI'S INSTRUCTIONS TO A GIRL—HOLY MOTHER IS NONE OTHER THAN THE DIVINE MOTHER OF THE UNIVERSE—SHE HAS AWAKENED WOMANHOOD—MAHAPURUSHJI VISITED HER AT JAYRAMBATI.

Place : Belur Math. Time : May 4, 1929.

Some devotees were present in Mahapurushji's room, with whom he had been talking joyfully. Just then a girl, who had received the *mantra* from Mahapurushji, came with her mother from Calcutta to pay her respects to him. She was only thirteen or fourteen years of age, and was reading in school. They both made their obeisance to him, asked for his blessing, and inquired about his health. Then the mother said with all humility : 'Please bless my daughter that she may have devotion to, and faith in, our Master. It is my wish that I shall not give her away in marriage. She will spend her days in repeating the name of the Master, and live blissfully. I confess, father, this world is full of sorrow ; I am myself a sufferer. I have the bitterest disillusionment about the happiness that the world

promises. So I would not knowingly throw my daughter into this conflagration that the world is. Do please bless her a little.'

Mahapurushji : 'I bless her abundantly, I bless her wholeheartedly.' Then he looked at the daughter affectionately, and said : 'Call on the Master with your whole being, and remain pure. The Master is the father, mother, husband, friend, and everything. "O Lord of lords, you are the father, you are the mother, you are the friend, and you are the constant companion ; you are my learning, you are my wealth, and you are everything to me." You are a student now. Read your books carefully, and along with that repeat mentally the *mantra* of the Master that you have received. You may study or you may do whatever you like, my child, but know it for certain that the ultimate goal of life is to see God. Keep your eyes always turned towards Him. This world is, after all, ephemeral : it lasts just for a few days. The only eternal reality is God. Live a very pure life. God reveals Himself to those hearts that are sincere and pure. Purity is the only basis of a spiritual life.

'You must have read the life of our Holy Mother. She is the ideal for the womanhood of this age all over the world. Her life is wonderful. She accepted a human body and lived like any ordinary housewife, though in reality she was none other than the Mother of the Universe, the primal divine Energy. She was one of those who are enumerated in the scriptures as the ten Mahavidyas—Kali, Tara, and others. She came down to earth as the counterpart of the Master to complete his spiritual mission in this age. How can ordinary mortals understand her ? Even we could not understand her in the beginning. She hid her divinity so completely that it was not possible to recognize her real nature. The Master alone knew who she really was ; and Swamiji knew a little. Before proceeding to the West, Swamiji revealed his plan only to the Holy Mother ; and with her blessing he crossed the ocean. The Holy Mother, too, blessed him from the bottom of her heart, and said : "My son, come back as a victorious hero ; may the Goddess of Learning sit on your tongue."

'That is exactly what happened. With the Holy Mother's blessing Swamiji conquered the world. He sometimes declared that the Holy Mother is even greater than the Master. So deep

was his reverence for her ! The Master also declared : "Should she who lives in the concert-tower (meaning the Holy Mother) become angry with anyone at any time, it would not be possible even for me to save him." The Holy Mother accepted a human body in order to awaken womanhood all over the world. See how soon after her advent an awakening has come among women in all countries ! They are now determined to build up an all-round and perfect life for themselves and to progress in all directions. Yet, this is not the end of it ; this is just the beginning. The Vedic age produced wonderful women, like Gargi, Maitreyi, Sita, Savitri, and others ; this age will see the birth of even nobler characters among women. A very striking awakening has come among women in all fields of life—in spirituality, politics, science, art, literature, and so on ; it is going to be more striking in future. This is all divine play. Ordinary mortals cannot grasp all this.'

The mother : 'I do not know much about the life of the Holy Mother. I have not read either her life or her teachings. Kindly tell me something about her. I am very much interested to hear.'

Mahapurushji : 'The Holy Mother was the mother of all. Her kindness, her forbearance, and her patience were wonderful. How little of her do we ourselves know ? But she has out of her mercy let me realize that she is none other than the Mother of the universe. None can understand her real nature, unless she in her mercy reveals it to us. First Yogen Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) and then Sharat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) attended to her needs. I had also the good fortune of cooking for her once, when on a visit to Jayrambati. That was many years back, a few years after the Master had left the body. The Holy Mother was then at Jayrambati. Swami Ramakrishnananda was with me and also another monk, I forget who it was ; perhaps it was Swami Subodhananda. We all went to see the Holy Mother at Jayrambati.

'In those days, the devotees seldom visited Jayrambati, and the journey, too, was extremely difficult. We had informed the Mother earlier. It pleased her greatly to have us there. Forthwith, she became very busy about feeding us properly and making us happy in every way. Jayrambati was a small village, where nothing could be had. Nevertheless, the Mother had

arranged for milk, fish, and various kinds of vegetables. She knew that the people of Calcutta were used to drinking tea; so she arranged for our tea as well. We spent the whole day in great delight. We had a fine bath in the Talpukur tank. The Holy Mother (being very bashful) would not come out in the open before us, nor would she talk with us. At night, when we had gone to bed after dinner, I planned with Swami Ramakrishnananda that we should cook for her on the day following.

'Next morning, when we broached the subject before her after tea, she at first laughed at the idea, and said: "How can that be, my sons? I am your mother; it is my duty to cook for you. And here you are wanting to cook for me instead! You will hardly be able to bear the smoke in the kitchen." With such words, she wanted to dissuade us. But we did not mind her objection, and were firm in our resolve. As a last argument, I said: "We come from Brahmana homes; so why should you have any objection to taking food cooked by us? The Master also accepted cooked food from us." Ultimately, she had to agree. Swami Ramakrishnananda and myself cooked, and the Mother was highly pleased with the food.'

The mother: 'Maharaj, so you cooked for the Master as well?'

Mahapurushji: 'Yes, my daughter. The Master, being very ill then, was staying at Cossipore for treatment. We all lived there with Swamiji, and served him (the Master) all the twenty-four hours by turns. We all had our food there, for which Suresh Babu made the necessary arrangement. There was also a cook. Once, when he (the cook) fell ill, we ourselves cooked by turns. The food was very simple—rice, pulse, vegetable soup, and so on. Our mind was then in such a state that we did not give much thought to food, and we were satisfied with what came to hand easily. On the one hand, the Master was seriously ill, and on the other, our own minds were afire with spiritual yearning.

'One night during that period, it was my turn to prepare *roti* (unleavened bread), pulse, and a vegetable curry. When I added the spices to the curry, the Master smelt it from his room above, and said: "Who is it that is cooking tonight? The seasoning smells so nice!" When he heard that I was

cooking, he said : "Oh, fetch some of it for me." He partook a little of this vegetable curry that night. He was then suffering from pain in the throat, so he could hardly take anything. A little bit of semolina boiled in milk would be given to him, which he ate with great difficulty. Sometimes, he could not swallow it at all. Over and above this, he was so constantly in divine moods and *samadhi* that he hardly had any external consciousness. What happy days we spent there at Cossipore when engaged in the service of the Master and in intense spiritual quest ! It seems as though the Master courted that disease in order to bring us all together and give shape to his future organization. How can ordinary mortals delve into the mystery of the acts of an Incarnation ?'

Saying this, he became absolutely speechless and sat still for some time. Then he resumed slowly : 'Yes, my daughter, I was talking to you about Jayrambati. We stayed with the Holy Mother for three days that time in great joy. Her affection was boundless. She was extremely busy from morning till night so that we might not have the slightest discomfort. As for myself, I had lost my own mother in childhood, and I had almost forgotten what motherly love is. But at Jayrambati, I got a taste of that affection. After a few days, one night, I had fever accompanied with shivering, and it increased as the night advanced. I had been feeling feverish since evening. Added to that I had my supper too, for I could not help taking food in the presence of the Mother. All night I passed in an almost unconscious state. In the early hours of the morning, I told Shashi Maharaj (Swami Ramakrishnananda) : "Brother, no more of this here. If I live here with my fever, I shall be only burdening the Holy Mother with greater worries. We shall bid farewell to the Mother in the morning and leave this place. After that, I do not care what happens." He, too, agreed to the proposal. As soon as the day dawned, we three saluted the Mother and left Jayrambati. At first, the Holy Mother would not agree to our departure so soon. But when she found that we were insistent, she kept silent.

'I walked with difficulty a little distance from the Mother's house, when we came across an empty bullock cart. We hired it up to Arambagh, and all the three of us got into it. In the cart, I was almost unconscious. At noon the cart was stopped

at a village, from where some hot water was procured. Finding me in that condition, a villager suggested that my fever would come down if I was given some juice of *bel* leaves. As we had no medicine with us, we had to act according to his advice. He brought some juice of *bel* leaves and gave it to me to drink with hot water. The other Swamis finished their lunch with some parched rice purchased from the village. After this, we resumed our journey, with my fever showing no sign of abating. When we reached Arambagh, a doctor was called, and he said after examining that it was malaria. I was struck with wonder at his diagnosis. From where could malaria have come? I had had no such fever for the last ten or fifteen years, though I had had it in my boyhood. As a matter of fact I had been living after that illness outside Barasat (the birth-place of Mahapurushji) for many years before I met the Master. At Barasat I had once a severe attack of malaria. When I recovered a little, I went out for a change to the north-western parts of India. I was then fourteen or fifteen years old. Later on, I seldom visited Barasat, particularly avoiding the malaria season. So when the doctor said that it was malaria, we concluded that the long bath in the Talpukur tank at Jayrambati might have activated the old malaria parasites in my body. Whatever may have been the case, we had to stay at Arambagh for some days for my recovery, and then we returned to Calcutta.'

77

THE MASTER LIVES AS THE SANGHA—HE CAME TO SAVE ALL—
HOLY MOTHER'S LOVE.

Place : Belur Math. Time : August 9, 1929.

Swami Y. was to leave for Madras today. So, when he saluted Mahapurushji in the morning, the latter said : 'So Y. is leaving today. He has been in this monastery—this place of the Master—for many days this time. Well, I bid you good-bye now. You are devoted to the Master ; he will be with you wherever you go. He lives among his devotees wherever they may be.'

At another time, in the course of a serious discussion with the Swami about the Math and Mission, Mahapurushji remarked : "Truth alone triumphs and not untruth." Truth has always been victorious, my son, and it always will be. This is all divine play. After leaving the gross body, the Master now lives in this *sangha* (this Order of monks). Now, he lives as the *sangha*. This is what Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) said. That you and all the devotees of the Master have gathered here from far-off centres will certainly bear some auspicious result. The Master is still protecting this *sangha*; and by creating a little stir now and then, he lets us know that he will protect it in future also. It was at the behest of the Master himself that Swamiji established this *sangha*; and he placed on it the onerous duty of spreading the Master's universal religious ideas throughout the world. Rest assured that nobody will be able to harm this organization. Even if somebody comes with hostile ideas, the Master will change his mind. He will make all understand the true spirit, maybe even through opposing circumstances. Men with their limited intellects are naturally liable to commit errors; but he is merciful to all. Sinner or sufferer, nobody is outside the pale of his grace. Has not Swamiji declared—"the current of whose love flows uninterruptedly down to the lowest pariah"? He forgives all. It is to save all, down to the pariah, that he came down as Sri Ramakrishna. You must have read about Jesus Christ. For the very people who crucified him, he prayed to the Father in heaven : "Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

"That supreme Brahman Itself has now come down as Sri Ramakrishna. We have seen with our own eyes how infinite was his forgiveness, how wonderful was his mercy. As for the Holy Mother, there can be no comparison with her—she is none other than the Mother of the universe. I have even heard it related that, when someone came and reported to her that somebody had committed the most unmentionable and damnable crime, the Mother heard the whole report very gravely. Then the reporter requested the Mother : "If you summon him and take him to task a little, it will be good." To this, she replied : "My son, it is all very well for you to talk like that, but I am his mother. To you he may be an offender and

so, detestable, but to his mother he is not so. Being his mother, can I hate my son?" So wonderful was her forgiveness! All these things have happened before our eyes. That is what we too have learnt. We have to learn all these from the lives of the Master, the Holy Mother, and Swamiji.'

As he spoke these words, his voice became choked, and he stopped suddenly. After some time, he sang :

Sing the glory of the Lord of the Universe, the One adorable to all ;

The one Deity who protects the three worlds, the ocean of love, the beautiful, the leader of all life ;

The charmer of the minds of His servants, the bestower of good, the giver of learning, wealth, and intelligence.

The devotee begs of Him with folded hands : "Do please fill my thirsting heart with love."

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THE WORSHIP OF THE DIVINE MOTHER—AT BELUR MATH IT IS DEVOID OF ALL ULTERIOR MOTIVE—THE BODY MUST DIE—CALL ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA—FOOD—ADVICE TO THE MARRIED—THE MASTER IS THE SELF—WEEP FOR GOD.

Place : Belur Math. Time : November 1, 1929.

The worship of Mother Kali was performed with great eclat at the Math last night. The whole Math was astir with worship, reading of scriptures, music, etc. Many devotees and monks had come from Calcutta to join in the worship. It started at half past nine at night and ended at a quarter to six in the morning. After the worship, the *saptashati homa* also was performed in the same sacrificial fire.

Mahapurushji was full of joy throughout the night ; and quite often he sent his attendants to the place of worship to get full reports of the progress made. When the worshippers started singing the praise of Kali, he, too, joined his voice to

theirs. When they sang, 'Who indeed cares for (all the places of pilgrimage like) Gaya, Ganga, Prabhasa, etc., if one's last breath is drawn in the name of Kali' etc., he remarked, 'Ah ! The Master sang this song quite often.' He himself sang the whole of it along with the chorus singers.

In the morning, he was seated in his own room. The *sannyasins* and *brahmacharins* came there one by one to pay their respects to him. He was still full of the joy of the previous night's worship. That joy expressed itself through his every word and act. A little later the Divine Mother's *prasada* was brought in for him ; at this he was exceedingly happy. But he remarked with some merriment : 'I can take nothing of this. The mere sight must be enough for me !' With this he just touched each thing with the tip of his finger, and then, tasting it thus, he said : 'Fine, the offering to the Mother has been well made.' When the attendant was removing the dish, he said : 'Mind you, keep something for the dogs, for nobody will remember them. They too expect something. It will give them great joy.' And he started calling his dog, 'Kelo, Kelo.'

When the talk turned to the last night's worship, he said : 'Ah ! The whole Math is still full of the smell of the ghee offered in the sacrificial fire. The smell of a sacrifice sanctifies wherever it goes. How sweet a smell it is !' Saying thus, he drew in some long breaths.

In connection with the worship, a monk said : 'Maharaj, it was a great joy last night. We did not experience such joy for quite a long time. The chorus songs also were excellent. They lasted till three o'clock in the morning.'

Mahapurushji : 'Why should it not be so ? For it was the Divine Mother's worship, to be sure. She, out of Her grace, vouchsafed happiness to all. She Herself was personally present to accept the worship. She is no ordinary mother ; She is the Mother worshipped by the Master. The Master himself worshipped Mother Kali. The Master called "Mother" that very Being which the Vedas declare as "Truth, Knowledge, Infinite Brahman", which the dualists call God, the Shaktas call Shakti, the Vaishnavas call Vishnu, and the Shaivās call Shiva. As a result of the worship of that Mother Herself, the Master was blessed with all kinds of realization. He attained perfec-

tion in all the modes of divine communion—dualistic, qualified non-dualistic, non-dualistic, and so on.

'The worship performed here has no parallel; here the worship is done by the monks and devotees through their devotion. Those who have wealth can perform their worship with great pomp by spending thousands of rupees; but such devotional worship as here, you will not find elsewhere. Here it was performed with heart and soul by pure-minded *sannyasins* and *brahmacharins*. How intense was their sincerity and how deep their devotion! Mother is much pleased thereby. Most people worship Her with some ulterior motive. How many are there who worship Her without any motive, out of pure devotion alone? Here, none has any selfish desire, any ulterior motive; the worship here is merely for the pleasure of the Divine Mother. And along with that how much of *japa*, meditation, reading from scriptures, and singing have been accomplished, while the pure-hearted *sannyasins* and *brahmacharins* themselves made all the arrangements for the worship! You cannot find such a thing anywhere else, my son. Such perfect and *sattvika* worship is rare in this world.'

It was now about ten o'clock in the morning. A woman devotee came; she was an initiated disciple of Mahapurushji. She bowed down at his feet and enquired about his health. In answer, he said: 'No, my daughter, my health is not good; in fact, it is very bad. It is becoming worse with the passage of time; for, after all, the body has its own law to follow, and this body has grown pretty old. Now it will gradually get destroyed.'

With tearful eyes, the devotee said: 'Father, to whom shall we go if you leave us? Where else shall we go to unburden the sorrows of our hearts?'

Mahapurushji: 'Why, my child? There is the Master, to be sure. He is residing in your very heart. He is your inmost Self, as also the inmost Self of all. Take refuge in him, pray to him. He will fill your heart with peace; he will remove all your wants. The body has to die one day or another; not a single body is immortal. It is as sure as anything that this body made of the different elements will again disintegrate into them. Hence take refuge in the Lord who is the eternal Truth, the everlasting, unchanging, conscious Self of every being.'

Hold on to Him. Then you will have no fear in the shoreless sea of this world ; you will easily cross it.'

The devotee : 'Father, you are my *guru* ; you have showered your grace on me. We are assailed with various kinds of doubt, questions, and despondency. To whom can we go to get these removed ? Here, while I am at your feet, I feel so much peace in my heart, so much joy. But when I think what will be my lot when you leave us, my heart begins to cry helplessly.'

Mahapurushji : 'Look here, my daughter, I have told you all there is to tell. God is the only *guru* ; He is the teacher of the whole world. It was God Himself in His fullness that incarnated in human body as Sri Ramakrishna to save His own creatures. He brought us along with him. He lived in a human body for fifty years, bestowed his grace on innumerable persons in several ways, and left a transcendental ideal of life behind for all to follow.

'The quintessence of the instruction imparted by him through his life, the only thing he revealed in his whole life, is that the world is false and ephemeral, and that God alone is true and eternal. Now he is doing good to the world through a fine body and in an invisible way. He reveals himself even today to those devotees who call on him earnestly, and he blesses them in a thousand ways. It is he who has kept us in these physical bodies. When these bodies die, we too shall get united with God in our fine bodies, and shall live in union. We have to take the responsibility here and hereafter of all those whom we have accepted as our own. If the devotees pray with pure hearts and earnestness, they will get the visions of us as well—in a more clear and vivid way than you see today. So, my daughter, from now on, try to have this vision inside. How long, after all, can these external meetings last ?'

The devotee : 'Bless me accordingly, father, that I may see you inside and outside, everywhere.'

Mahapurushji : 'That you will do ; if you pray earnestly and, with tears in your eyes, you will get such a vision. But you cannot have this unless there is the deepest yearning.'

The devotee : 'Father, I have a question to ask. The scriptures declare that one cannot realize God unless one observes strict *brahmacharya*. The mind does not become pure unless

there is *brahmacharya*. Now, please tell me how I can observe this. Should I be very strict about food and such other things ?'

Mahapurushji : 'No, my daughter, you need not be very strict about these matters. Only use your discrimination a little more when following the usual routine. You may well avoid those things that excite the nerves too much. Food is not meant for the mere gratification of the sense of taste ; it is meant for the maintenance of the body. And the maintenance of the body is meant for God-realization. It is better to avoid those kinds of food that create mental disturbance and prevent the mind from concentrating on God. *Brahmacharya* does not mean the mere control of food. The real *brahmacharya* is the control of all the sense-organs. Unless one can do that, the realization of divine bliss is a far cry. Is it possible to get the bliss of Brahman unless one can forsake the pleasures of this trifling body ? You are in the householder's stage of life. The Master has made the path of God-realization easy for householder's. He used to say that after the birth of two or three children, a virtuous couple should live like brother and sister ; they should forget their physical relationship, and talk about God, as though they were both servants of God.

'Life is not meant for the pleasure of the body. Realization of God alone is the goal of life. Now that you have attained this rare human birth, do not allow your life to be spent in vain. Realize the nature of the Self. The Master is your inmost Self ; try to realize him. He is not just a man three and a half cubits in length ; he is God Himself ; he is the very Self of all creatures. Once you can realize him, your worldly bondage will be cut asunder for ever ; you will not have to undergo the round of birth and death any more. The *Gita* says : "That is My supreme abode, going whither they return not." Realize that supreme Being ; and then you will be free from this delusion of birth and death, my child. Then only will you attain the highest state. It is only by realizing Him that one gets rid of all passions and desires, attains fullness, and becomes the Self Itself. "Having obtained which, a man regards no other acquisition as superior to that."'

The devotee : 'How shall I be able to realize Him ?'

Mahapurushji : 'The Master used to say God can be realized when all the three types of longing become united in

one—the longing of a chaste wife for her husband, the affection of the mother for her child, and the attachment of a miser to his wealth. If one can combine all these three kinds of longing into one and direct it to God, then God can be realized. Call on Him, repeat His name, meditate on Him, and pray to Him with the sincerest earnestness. Say, “Lord, kindly reveal Yourself to me, reveal Yourself to me”, and weep, weep, weep disconsolately. Then only He will be moved, and grant you the vision of Himself. For He is very mindful of those who take refuge in Him. He never forsakes one to whom He has once granted refuge.’

79

PATH TO BRAHMAN VERY DIFFICULT—ABSOLUTE CONTINENCE NECESSARY—DANGER OF MENTAL DERANGEMENT—DIVINE GRACE—HOLY COMPANY.

Place : Belur Math. Time : December 7, 1929.

In the morning, as the talk turned to a monk's journey on foot to Kashmir in this extremely cold season, Mahapurushji said : ‘So P. has gone to Kashmir in this winter ! It appears that he walked all the way from Rishikesh. I have been feeling worried from the moment I was told of this. Ah ! Lord, do please take care of him ; he has taken refuge in you alone. I think he has become a little unbalanced in mind ; else why should he be so whimsical ? Does anyone go to Kashmir in this season ?’ (After keeping silent for a while) ‘This is a difficult path, my son. This pursuit of the knowledge of Brahman is very difficult. Not every brain can comprehend this, for it is subtler than the subtlest. It is easier to master secular knowledge. It is comparatively easier to become a great philosopher, a noted scientist, a great poet, a famous artist, or a well-known politician ; but it is extremely difficult to acquire the knowledge of Brahman. That is why the Upanisadic seer sings : “The wise ones describe that path to be as impassable as a sharpened razor's edge is difficult to tread on.” Those who do

not tread on this path cannot even guess how difficult it is. In the Upanishads, this knowledge "by which is realized that immutable Brahman" is called higher knowledge, while all other secular knowledge is called lower knowledge.

'One must practise absolute continence if one desires to have this higher knowledge. As a result of prolonged continence, practised heart and soul in all the planes of existence, the body and mind become fit for leading a divine life. For reaching the state of Brahmanhood, the brain develops a new nerve, and all the cells in the body become transformed. One must observe absolute continence. The Master used to say that one hesitates to pour milk in a vessel that has contained curds, lest the milk should get spoiled. That is why he loved pure-minded boys so much ; for it is they who can imbibe spirituality fully. These are all very subtle matters. Of course, above all, one must have the grace of God. Unless the Divine Mother is gracious, there is no hope of all this. It is only when She opens the door to Knowledge of Brahman out of Her compassion that the aspirant becomes able to attain it, and not otherwise. In the *Chandi*, we have : "This very graceful Mother becomes the cause of the liberation of men, when She is favourably disposed." It is She who grants the boon of freedom, when She is pleased with men.

"There are quite a number of fine nerves in the brain ; should any of these be deranged, man loses his balance. The Holy Mother used to say : "Pray to the Master that he may keep the head steady." To lose one's head is to lose all. "Shoot me," said Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda), "if my brain goes wrong." When P. first came to this Math, I could see from the very formation of his head that he would not have a steady mind, and that he would lose his balance. It was reported to me that he had been learning *hatha-yoga* at Rishikesh from an adept. I tell you, my boys, that is no good. Besides, he had been moving about from place to place for a very long time, keeping little touch with this monastery and its monks—he had been roaming about just as he liked. Now, you see, he has lost his head. Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) also used to say that it is not at all safe for a monk to live a solitary life in the early stages ; he should have at least one companion. Is that the way of practising austerities ? Does it mean merely moving about

in places like Rishikesh, Uttarkashi, and such other hill and forest regions?' After remaining quiet for a while, he said : 'Master, save him. He has taken refuge in you. Who indeed but you can save a man? Ah! He was a sincere boy after all.'

A *brahmacharin* : 'The *Uddhava-Gita* in the *Bhagavata* states that it is very difficult for an aspirant to progress in the path of spirituality, because celestial powers, planets, diseases, relatives, and others create all sorts of difficulties during the course of spiritual effort.'

Mahapurushji : 'All the difficulties can be surmounted when God becomes propitious. The Master has verily the power to set at nought all past *harma* ; all hindrances, whether they are on the material plane or on the divine plane, are removed if one but takes refuge in him. "When favourably disposed," says the *Chandi*, "Thou curest all one's diseases without exception ; but when Thou art angry, Thou destroyest all that one desires. People who take refuge in Thee have no fear, and those who take shelter under Thee can give shelter to others as well." They become one with Brahman ; as such, they grant asylum to others.

'And then, there is such a thing as the companionship of the good ; it saves men. It is absolutely necessary to live in the company of holy men. Thousands of people make the attempt, but only one or two among them succeed in realizing the truth. A devotee once asked Maharaj : "How can one get devotion?" In answer, Maharaj repeated the words "holy company" and then added : "The holy men lead one to God. One must have the companionship of holy men, my son, one must have holy association. All the scriptures are full of the praise of holy companionship."'

The *brahmacharin* : 'The *Ramayana* puts it thus : "Companionship of the *rishis* who are bright and holy like fire."'

Mahapurushji : 'You have rightly quoted. It was after receiving the boon and blessing of the *rishis*, "bright and holy like fire" itself for the killing of Ravana, that Sri Ramachandra prepared himself for the destruction of the *rakshasas*.' He then repeated the Sanskrit phrase '*satam sangah*' (companionship of the holy) several times, and then finally added : 'But I tell you, my boys, that nothing will avail unless the Divine Mother is propitious. One can be saved only when She takes pity and

and allows one to escape out of Her domain (of this cosmic Maya). There is no other way out. Grace, grace, grace ! To a sincere soul, She does become gracious.'

80

THE POWER OF THE NAME OF GOD—NEED FOR PURITY OF LIFE
—THE MASTER WILL GUIDE FROM WITHIN—CONDUCT AND INNER
AWARENESS OF THE AVATARA—THE AVATARA HARD TO UNDERSTAND.

Place : Belur Math. Time : December 8, 1929.

In the morning, the *sannyasins* and *brahmacharins* had gathered in Mahapurushji's room. The talk turned to spiritual practice.

Mahapurushji : 'Self-control will come as a matter of course if one repeats God's name constantly, and is earnest in spiritual endeavours. The name of God has such intrinsic power that all the internal and external organs become naturally subdued by it. But then, one has to call on Him with sincere love. If one can somehow acquire love for God, one has nothing more to worry about ; one can then advance towards Him very quickly. If one somehow acquires the feeling that God is one's own, one can set one's mind completely at rest. One cannot, however, have real love for God so long as one's mind is pre-occupied with sensuous things. When the *kundalini* is awakened as a result of intense spiritual practice and prayer to God, and when the mind gradually rises above the three lower planes and continues to remain in the fourth plane, the aspirant gets visions etc. of God, and he gradually develops a love for Him. How can anyone have love for God, pure and untouched by sin as He is, unless one's own mind becomes purified ? For that, one needs intense spiritual practice and sincere yearning for God. You will have this, and that very soon ; for you are all lifelong celibates, and your minds have not been so much as touched by lust and lucre ; you are all fit and pure receptacles for spirituality. The purer the receptacle the quicker is His manifestation. Just try a little with determination, and

see whether it happens or not. You have to consider spiritual practice the chief aim of your lives ; as for the other work and activities, lectures, discourses, and so on—they are but secondary.

'It is good to have a fixed seat for one's meditation and *japa*, for that creates an atmosphere and helps the mind to become concentrated quickly. And whenever you meet a woman, salute her mentally as your mother, with all respect. That was the special instruction of the Master to us, and he himself did so all his life. A *sannyasin's* life is, as it were, a devotional fast, when even a drop of water is not taken. There must not be a single blemish—the whole life must be absolutely pure. Do not allow your mind to be polluted even by the slightest touch of lust and lucre. You will have to keep yourself always occupied with high thoughts, contemplation of God, *bhajan*, study of scriptures, prayer, etc. Yours is a spiritual life, a divine life. The Master used to say : "The bee sits on the flower alone, and it sucks the honey alone." A true *sannyasin's* life must be like that of a bee. He will enjoy divine bliss alone, and he will not allow his mind to wander about elsewhere.

'It is for the fulfilment of the message of the *avatara* of this age that you have taken refuge in this Order. The whole world is athirst and is looking to you to receive the message of the Master. As for ourselves, our earthly lives are all but ended. Now it is your turn to fill our places. Just think of this—what a great responsibility rests on your shoulders ! He alone is the source of all power ; he will transmit the power to you as the need arises ; and he will make you fit vehicles for spreading his message and his ideas. The more you can have him established in your heart, the more will you understand that it is he who sits in your inmost heart and guides you from behind, for he is none other than God Himself. He has taken you under his care ; he will grant you illumination, devotion, love, purity, and all else, to make your lives blessed.'

Referring to the *avatara*-hood of Sri Ramakrishna and his descent on earth for alleviating human suffering, a monk asked him : 'Maharaj, does an incarnation retain the fullest consciousness of his divinity all the time ?'

Mahapurushji : 'Well, he does, to be sure. Look at Sri Krishna's life, for instance. From his very birth onward, he gave proofs of his divinity. But it is true that the outer ex-

pression of that divinity is not the same in all the incarnations, though they themselves have the fullest consciousness of their Godhood. It is only for the spiritual good of the world that their power is manifested. All that they do is out of mercy, for an *avatara* is not born as the result of *harma*. And how can he have any ignorance? It is the eternal Brahman in His fullness, the Lord of Maya, who descends with the help of Maya; and He returns to His own real state after the need of the age is fulfilled. All the spiritual practice that the *avatara* undertakes, all the hard austerities he undergoes, are merely to set an example to others, to hold an ideal before men. For he is God, he is infinity itself. Where can he have any finitude?

'In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna says: "O Arjuna, I have no duty in all the three worlds; there is nothing unattained or attainable for Me. And yet, I keep Myself engaged in work." There is nothing that is not already achieved by him, for he is infinite. Yet he engages in work for the education of mankind. He adds further: "No duty can bind me; nor have I any hankering for the result of any work. He who knows me as such never comes under the bondage of work." He has no craving for the result of his own work, and work also cannot bind him. If this be not so, where else would you seek for his divinity or *avatara*-hood? As long as the *avataras* remain in their human bodies in this world, all their behaviour appears to conform to human norms; they are happy at things that make others happy, and unhappy at those that make men unhappy.' So much so, one comes to think that they do not retain their divine consciousness fully.

'Really, however, this is not so. Especially in the case of the Master, one comes across very little of the manifestation of divine glory; his life expressed itself mostly on the human plane. His was a descent with the purest *sattvika* qualities (of enlightenment, saintliness, kindness, etc.). That is why he said: "This is as though the king is on an inspection of his kingdom under disguise." It is extremely difficult to understand this mood of the Master. For instance, look how bitterly he wept at the death of Keshab Chandra Sen! "At Keshab's departure," he lamented, "I think one of my limbs has dropped off. Whom shall I talk to when I visit Calcutta hereafter?"

and so on. It was just like one sorrowing for the death of a near relative. This is what they call *lila* (mystic play); it is very difficult to comprehend this.

The *Adhyatma Ramayana* relates a fine incident in which one finds a beautiful harmony between knowledge and devotion. Ramachandra was none other than the supreme Brahman, who knew the past, present, and future. He had incarnated himself for the sake of destroying Ravana, with all his *rakshasas*, and to re-establish the reign of virtue. He knew well enough that Ravana would carry off his wife Sita. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* itself states how, even before Ravana in the guise of a mendicant came to carry her away, Ramachandra had told Sita: "Ravana will come as a mendicant to abduct you; so you just place here a shadow-form of yours and then vanish into fire, where you should stay for a whole year. You will join me again after Ravana is killed." Saying this, he made Sita enter into fire. And yet, at the same time, how bitterly he wept after Sita's abduction! He gave up food and rest; and with tears in his eyes, he wandered about day and night in search of Sita, inquiring of trees, creepers, animals, and birds as to her whereabouts. Stricken by the grief of separation, he was crying and went about the forest in search of Sita. All this looks so strange! Such lives are not easy to understand.'

81

IN THIS BODY GOD HAS BEEN REALIZED—WHY THE MASTER WOULD NOT ACCEPT PERSONAL SERVICE FROM MAHAPURUSHJI—INITIATION—THE MASTER THE INCARNATION FOR THIS AGE.

Place : Belur Math. Time : December 9, 1929.

An old monk came in to salute Mahapurushji and inquire about his health. Mahapurushji smiled at his inquiry, pointed to the attendant near by, and said: 'Put your question about this body to him. I care very little about all that. Often enough, I have little consciousness of having a body at all. This is the real truth. But when people ask such questions,

I answer them just as it occurs to my mind. What I know is that I have dedicated my body, mind, life, and everything at the feet of the Master—all these are his. Now, he will do with these just as it pleases him. Should he feel it necessary to maintain this body longer, he will do so. Else, I am ready to depart at his first call; I am only waiting for his call. But that does not mean that I neglect this body. I try to keep it going, just as you all and the doctors desire. And think of the trouble I put my attendants to for the sake of this body.

‘Do you know why I do all this? This is not just an ordinary body; it has its own distinction. God-realization has been attained in and through this body; this body has touched Divinity, lived with it, and served it. The Master has made this body a vehicle for the propagation of his message for this age. That is why I bestow all this care. Otherwise, this body is nothing but a bundle of flesh and blood. As a matter of fact, the Master would not easily allow me to render personal service to him. This often pained me very much. Then, from an incident one day, I came to learn why he was so unwilling. Who, indeed, can understand his motives easily? One day, I stayed at Dakshineswar; there were other devotees as well. After spending a long time in his room in talk about religious matters, he got up and proceeded towards the casuarina grove to answer the call of nature. Generally, one of the devotees would carry his water vessel and follow him on such occasions to pour water on his hands when he wanted it. Most often, he could not touch any metal vessel. When he proceeded towards the casuarina grove that day, I carried the water pot and waited at the proper place for his return.

‘On his way back, when he found me standing there with the water-pot, he said: “Now, look here, why did you do such a thing? Why did you come with the water-pot? How can I accept the water from your hand? Can I accept services from you? I honour your father as a *guru*.” That struck me with wonder; and then only did I realize why he would not allow me to render all kinds of service to him. The Master had infinite moods. How can we gauge them? The little that he vouchsafes others to understand can alone be grasped by human beings.’

Afterwards, the conversation turned to initiation with *mantra* etc. In that connection, Mahapurushji said : 'No, I never feel any discomfort while initiating others ; rather, I feel happy. As the devotees come, I make them hear the name of the Master, and I talk with them about the Master. In this process of initiation that I follow, there is nothing of priestcraft. I do not know much of their *mantras* and mystic rites, nor do I care to know them. All that I know is the Master, and he is all in all to me. His is the name imparted and his is the power transmitted. It is through his will that I initiate all with his name ; and as I do so, I pray : "Master, do please accept these ; fill them with love and faith ; and take pity on them."

'As a matter of fact, he does fill all with love and faith. The Master is my all in all in life. "Thou art my father, and Thou my mother ; Thou art my friend, and Thou my companion ; Thou art my knowledge, and Thou my wealth ; Thou art my all, O God of gods." He grants virtue, prosperity, enjoyment, and liberation, just as one prays to him. Herein lies the greatness of the Master that his name brings peace, his service ensures peace, and his thought bestows peace. All this is true, because he is the incarnation for this age. All this must necessarily be true. And such is his power of attraction that people are naturally drawn to him, no matter to what community they may belong.'

MAHAPURUSHJI HAPPY ANYWHERE—HIS EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY.

Place : Belur Math. Time : December 18, 1929.

The talk was about South India and Ceylon. Mahapurushji said : 'Yes, I have been to Ceylon. A few months after Swamiji's (Swami Vivekananda) return to India, he sent me there to preach Vedanta. I was in Colombo for seven or eight months, living at a charity house, where I held religious discourses and regular classes on the *Gita*. Several people attended these. I was quite happy there, and visited the local temples etc. They have a

tooth temple, where it is claimed that Buddha's tooth is preserved. What a grand structure they have raised there ! One is struck with wonder at the magnificence of the temple.

'When Swamiji was on his way back from America to Madras, I reached the city earlier to meet him there. Of course, I had visited those parts once before, and had been to Rameswaram and almost all the other important places of pilgrimage in the South. From the mere dimensions of those huge temples, one can very well realize how very religious the Indians are. All their activities centre round God alone ; it is Him that they want to enjoy in every way. The devotees want to serve God in various ways, and in that alone they find satisfaction.'

A monk : 'How did you like Ceylon, Maharaj ?'

Mahapurushji : 'I like all places ; I never feel dissatisfied with any place. I feel happy wherever I am. One feels happy everywhere when one is enwrapped in thoughts of God. Yes, I liked Ceylon and South India very much.'

The monk : 'Was there any special reason, Maharaj, for your boyhood name of Taraknath ?'

Mahapurushji : 'Yes, I heard that my parents had no male issue for a long time ; and so they made a vow to Tarakanatha (Shiva of Tarakeswar temple, thirty miles north-west of Calcutta) and prayed to Him for a son. Tarakanatha appeared before my mother in a dream and promised her that she would have a good son. After that, I was born, and so they named me Taraknath. My mother's name was Vamasundari ; she was very pious, and brought good luck to our family ; she was very beautiful, too. I imbibed my religious tendencies from her in my childhood. My father also was very pious ; and he had a large income. He used to maintain some twenty-five or thirty poor boys in his own house. They all read in the Barasat school. I, too, lived with them. My mother used to cook for us all ; and though my father wanted to engage a cook, she would not agree, but said : "It is a great fortune for me that I can cook for and feed so many boys."

'She did not bestow much personal care or affection on me ; she was ever so busy in her chores. I was just one among those twenty-five or thirty boys. She would not prepare anything special for me ; I just sat for food with all. Some neighbours would protest : "She does not so much as take the

slightest care of her own child." But my mother would say : "It is His (i.e. Tarakanatha's) child, and not mine. He has given it to me out of His mercy, and He will look after it." When I was about nine years of age, my mother died, so that I do not remember much about her. My father Kanai Ghosal was a very pious man of many excellent parts. He was a great devotee. At night he would cry, saying : "Mother, how hard do You deal with me ! I am still denied the vision of Thee."

'My mother was really the most lucky member of the family. With her death, the income of my father dwindled considerably. He was a very charitable person, though he had to curtail his charities when his income dwindled. I was very fortunate to have been born of such virtuous parents. Children can be good when the parents are good. My father was a very self-sacrificing man. He earned so much, and yet he would not build even a good house to live in. He spent his money in the service of the poor and the needy. He practised the Tantrika mode of worship. To him came a Brahmana spiritual aspirant from Kamakhya. What an attractive personality he had ! He was short in stature, and had a very fair complexion, almost reddish. They both spent whole nights in worship etc. In our own house there was a seat made with the skulls of five creatures, called the *pancha-mundi-asana*. It is said that once they had placed a green coconut on the sacrificial pitcher for the worship ; from that coconut, a complete tree grew up to almost the height of the roof.'

SWAMIJI'S FERVOUR IN SPEAKING OF CHRIST AT ANTPUR—WHY MISSIONARIES' EFFORTS IN INDIA HAVE ACHIEVED SO LITTLE—THE BASIS OF SOCIAL SERVICE MUST BE SPIRITUAL EARNESTNESS—MIRACULOUS POWERS A HINDRANCE TO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS—CHRIST'S MIRACLES—THE MASTER'S SPIRITUAL POWER—CHRISTMAS EVE AT BELUR MATH.

Place: Belur Math. Time: December 25, 1929.

Christmas Eve had been appropriately observed the night before. In the visitors' room downstairs, the picture of Virgin Mary with the divine Child in her arms was tastefully decorated with leaves, flowers, and garlands; and cakes, sweets, etc. were offered. In addition to the monastic members of the Math, many lay devotees also had joined in the function. After the portion that dealt with the advent of Jesus and with his message had been read from the Bible, some senior monks spoke impressively about him. Mahapurushji could not be personally present there, but he had a very detailed report of the ceremony, and expressed great delight. As the *sannyasins* and *brahmacharins* began to gather in his room this morning, he greeted them all one by one with 'Happy Christmas!'

In connection with the Christmas Eve celebration the previous evening, he remarked: 'This ceremony started from the old Baranagore days. A few days after the Master had passed away, the mother of Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda) invited us to her village home at Antpur. Swamiji took us all to Antpur. Our hearts were then afire with renunciation; we felt great agony of sorrow at the loss of our Master; and all were engaged in intense spiritual practices. The only thought we had during those days, and the only effort we made, was for the realization of God and the attainment of peace. When we were at Antpur, we applied ourselves much more intensely to spiritual practices. We would light a fire with logs under the open sky, and spend the nights there in *japa* and meditation. Swamiji would talk with us fervently about renunciation and self-sacrifice. Sometimes, he would make us read

the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata*, the Upanishads, etc. and hold discussions on them. Thus we spent some days.

'One night we sat near the log-fire absorbed in meditation. After a long time Swamiji broke silence all of a sudden ; and, as though in an inspired mood, he went on talking about Jesus Christ with the utmost devotion. He spoke about the intense spiritual practices, burning renunciation, and message of Jesus, and, above all, his realization of unity with God. This he did with such spirit, enthusiasm, and lucidity of expression that we were all struck dumb. It seemed to us for the time being that it was none other than Christ himself who spoke to us through Swamiji's mouth. And as we heard, we floated on a current of bliss, as it were. The only idea that reigned supreme in our hearts was that we must realize God, however hard the struggle might be, and must become one with Him ; for all else mattered little. It was Swamiji's habit that, whenever he took up a topic, he would follow its implications to their utmost.

'We came to know later on that that was the Christmas Eve, and yet we had no idea of it earlier. So we were convinced that it was none other than Christ himself who, through Swamiji, made us hear that glorious life and message of his, so as to intensify our spirit of renunciation and our quest for God-realization. While at Antpur, the firm determination grew in us to take the vow of monasticism and organize a collective life. As a matter of fact, the Master himself had made us monks ; that idea took firmer roots at Antpur.

'Jesus was a prince among monks, a shining star in the firmament of renunciation. One cannot fully appreciate his wonderful life and unique message, so distinct from common life as they are, unless one is a monk oneself. We can understand the Master just a little, because we had the good fortune of seeing him and living in his company. But how can ordinary people appreciate him ? Even the immediate followers of Jesus Christ could hardly understand him ; and as for the Christian priests today, they have scarcely any idea of him. They can hardly realize the distinctive contribution of his life. For most of the Christian preachers today lack that spirit of renunciation and intense spiritual struggle, that power of discrimination, and that longing for freedom from the meshes of

this world. As for Indians, they know what true religion means and how to live a religious life. As a result, you can judge for yourselves the degree of success attained by the missionary attempt at conversion during the last one hundred and fifty years. It is almost nothing. How many, indeed, have attained true spiritual life as a result of their preaching! Selflessness, renunciation, holiness—these form the basis of a true religious life. Christ himself said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." This seeing of God is the goal of religion. Bereft of this, it does not lead to any real advancement of religion if one merely organizes big churches and registers a million persons as followers of those churches. All these may have some worth in the political field, but they are of little consequence in the domain of religion. "If I can succeed in transmitting spirituality to even ten people," said Swamiji, "I shall feel my endeavour amply rewarded." The real significance of this utterance is that it is extremely difficult to lead a truly spiritual life. Religion is realization. Among the Christian preachers, there are great intellectual people who are well read and well informed; but all these would only have been a real acquisition if they had been associated with the spirit of renunciation and sincere spiritual effort that Christ preached.

'You have come to this holy Order of Sri Ramakrishna; you have accepted the Master, who was a prince among the *sannyasins*, as your ideal; and you are trying to realize that ideal in your lives. You are sure to be blessed; you will achieve that bliss of Brahman—there can be no doubt about that. So long as this organization believes in the realization of God through selflessness, renunciation, and spiritual practice as the primary aim of life; so long as it accepts the Master with his diverse spiritual moods as the highest ideal, and acts accordingly; so long shall its spiritual power remain intact—there cannot be the least doubt about it. It is very easy to expand activities and gain fame; the really difficult task is to spend one's whole life in a continuous stream of hard spiritual practices for the sole aim of God-realization. "Our motto shall be: 'For one's own salvation and for the good of the world'", said Swamiji. The first thing that matters is the knowledge of the Self, and then comes good of the world. The Master himself

demonstrated the same thing in his own life ; and his instruction to Swamiji and other intimate disciples was also the same. Service and such other activities that Swamiji has introduced in this organization have to be pursued in association with daily spiritual practices, as part and parcel of the latter ; only then will service itself be properly done. Instead of this, if one is carried away by the current of social work, one will find it difficult to maintain one's balance. Sometimes success in social services brings in a sort of infatuation. That is no good. It only makes one forget the ultimate goal of life and leads one astray. From the Master we never heard any talk except about God. His only instruction, and the burden of all his talks, was simply this : "Somehow realize God first."

A monk : 'Maharaj, the Master used to say that mystic powers are an impediment to spiritual progress, whereas the life of Jesus Christ is seen to be full of supernatural events. He brought dead men to life, cured diseases, and showed many other miraculous powers. He transmitted those powers to his twelve disciples and sent them out with his permission to use them. I cannot quite understand this.'

Mahapurushji : 'What the Master said is quite true. If a spiritual aspirant pays attention to mystic powers, he cannot progress any further towards God ; he ends with them alone. The Mother of the universe also showed it to the Master that these mystic powers are to be shunned like the most obnoxious thing. However, the incidents that happened in Christ's life were not at all meant to demonstrate his supernatural powers ; all that he did was to remove people's misery out of compassion for them. For the Bible itself says that, after granting sight to the blind and curing the lepers with a mere touch, he warned them not to divulge all this to others. He did not do all that to gain popularity or public applause. The scriptures also state that perfected souls continue in this world even after the fullest enlightenment, simply out of compassion for others. They have no other desires or craving.

'Besides, Jesus was not just an ordinary aspirant. He was an incarnation. He had his whole being in God, the Father of the whole universe. Hence it was not unnatural or wrong for him to have done so. Such activities, which ordinary people consider to be amazing and impossible, are quite as natural to

the incarnations as inhalation and exhalation. They do not have to get all that as a result of long and strenuous practice. Supernatural things happen at their mere wish. In certain places, Jesus demonstrated those supernatural powers in order to win back unbelievers to the path of religion. It is often very difficult to understand the hidden motives of their actions.

'As for curing some disease by a mere touch, it is not after all so very supernatural. All this is an easy affair. The Master demonstrated the greatest of wonders—he gave the vision of God to men by his mere touch; he sent men into moods of profound divine absorption (*samadhi*). The greatest mystic power is to efface in a trice all the results of work accumulated in hundreds of past lives and to turn the mind completely towards God. No other incarnation had done such a thing before. Ah, what wonders have we not seen the Master perform! One's hair stands on end even to think of such things. He played with people's minds and removed all their angularities; and all their mental diseases were healed at his mere touch. What a great dynamo of spiritual power was the Master! To all outward appearance, he was just like an ordinary mortal; and yet, it was none other than the omniscient God Himself who manifested through his body.'

A German lady devotee came in and saluted Mahapurushji with great reverence. As she stood up, Mahapurushji asked her: 'How did you like the Christmas Eve celebration last evening?'

She replied: 'Oh, I enjoyed it immensely. I had never before experienced such joy during Christmas. In our Western countries, they observe the occasion mostly with merriment, feasts, fine dress, dance, songs, etc. The worship follows some set routine. One misses any touch of the heart in all that. They spend millions in enjoyment; but all such external ceremonies cannot satisfy the hunger of the soul. So I earnestly prayed to Jesus last Christmas at about 1 a.m.: "Lord, please grant me at least once in my life the real bliss of Christmas." He heard my prayer. I have got the real bliss of Christmas here this time; my heart is now full.'

Mahapurushji: 'Our worship proceeds from devotion. The Christmas celebration here is an outpouring of pure hearts. The chief factors in this celebration are love, devotion, faith,

and sincere prayer. This is what the real Christmas should be.

The lady devotee : 'Was the Lord really a Jew ?'

Mahapurushji : 'He was neither a Jew nor a Gentile. He was far above all that—a true Incarnation of the divine power. He came to this world in a human body to save mankind.'

84

'LET THEM ENJOY : YOU STAY ON HERE'—THE MASTER MANAGES HIS OWN AFFAIRS—GRACE.

Place : Belur Math. Time : January-March 1930.

A devotee who wanted to renounce the world and join the monastery, had been living here for some days. Mahapurushji asked him : 'Have they (i.e. your friends and relatives) come to know that you will not return ?'

'Yes, sir', said the devotee.

'That is good', said Mahapurushji. 'They have a craving for enjoyment ; so let them enjoy to their heart's content. But, by the Master's grace, you have got over such desires ; you stay on here. Let them enjoy this bitter world as long as they like.'

* * * *

It was the occasion for the public celebration of the Master's birthday ; the sky was overcast with clouds, and there was a little rain as well. The celebration was planned on a grand scale. An attendant came in to say : 'Maharaj, we shall carry you down in a chair, so that you can see for yourself the arrangements made for the celebration.'

Mahapurushji : 'No, I do not like to create a scene. I pray that all may be granted happiness, devotion, love, and peace. May the Master vouchsafe happiness to all ; in that alone I shall feel happy. It pleased the Master to gather clouds and pour down a little in order to cool the earth ; otherwise the people gathered here would have suffered much. He manages his own affairs.'

In the afternoon, he enquired about the cattle of the Math : 'Alas ! I think the cattle cannot come out today. It will be very difficult for them.' In the evening too he enquired about the cattle again, whether they had been given fodder. The attendant went out to see for himself and returned to report : 'Yes, they have been given.' At this, Mahapurushji felt very happy.

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They were talking about a woman devotee of East Bengal. She was much given to spiritual practices, and had made considerable progress. 'This is all through His grace', said Mahapurushji. 'In the *Devi-Sukta* (of the *Rig-Veda*), it is said : "Whoever I want to, I make great—I make him Brahma, I make him a *rishi*, and I make him full of wisdom." Her grace is the main thing—no matter whether it finds expression in a woman's body or in a man's body.'

85

NAME AND NAMED ARE INSEPARABLE—KNOWLEDGE AND DEVOTION THE SAME—A CASE OF SUICIDE ; BUT 'SHE WILL REACH THE MASTER'—DACCA RIOTS—THE MOTHER DANCES ON SHIVA—REPETITION OF 'OM'—THE MASTER HIMSELF IS PRESENT IN BELUR MATH—NEED OF DEVOTION AS WELL AS MEDITATION—TELLING THE BEADS.

Place : Belur Math. Time : April-September 1930.

It was the Ramanavami day, and the talk was about Tulasidas. Mahapurushji said : "Tulasidas popularized the greatness of the Lord's name. The name and the person named are inseparable, as, for instance, Hari and his name, or Rama and his name. Tulasidas was a very great devotee of the Lord. Sing the name of Rama today from the bottom of your hearts. "Rama, Rama, Sita-Rama."'

* * * *

A certain monk had made an amulet with the dust taken from the Master's feet and had inserted it into the rosary which he wore round his neck. 'Let me have it, give it to me,' said

Mahapurushji, 'that is what one should have round one's neck. Come here, place it on my head.'

* * * *

The talk turned to his health. He said : 'The body is now unwell. It is all hollow now. The Master has been keeping it going according to his will, and he will do so as long as it pleases him. It helps in the expansion of his blessed work a little if this body lives ; that is all that matters.'

* * * *

A monk returned to the Math after visiting his ancestral home. There nearly a thousand people had gathered to see him. 'That was good for them', remarked Mahapurushji. 'They had the good fortune of seeing a man of renunciation ; it will do good to them. A real monk is rare indeed.' And he blessed the monk : 'May you have pure devotion. May you have pure knowledge. Both these are the same.'

* * * *

A woman devotee had committed suicide. Mahapurushji was talking of the incident with an attendant. 'I heard that she killed herself with opium', said he. 'She did so, because she could no longer bear the pain she was suffering from her disease. In any case, her soul will reach the Master, for she was devoted to him. She had great reverence for the monks of this monastery, as also for us. Her *prarabdha* (accumulated results of past works) had that fruit in store for her, and hence she had to do so. But her future course will certainly be good, though, in such a case, the soul has to remain for some time under a cover of something like darkness.'

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A letter came from a certain Parsi devotee. Mahapurushji said to the attendant : 'Write to him in the most expressive terms that what he is doing is quite all right. It was God Himself who came as Zoroaster, and it is God, again, who has come as our Master.' Then he spoke about a Prussian gentleman, who was a Jew, and remarked : 'The man was a scientist. He discovered some food during the war, which did not require any cooking. He said : "If I had wished, I could have made a fortune for myself." He was a very good man. At first, he lived at the Adyar Theosophical Society. He did not

like Judaism, and he could not like Theosophy. Then he came to the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home at Madras ; and lastly, he came here to meet me. He had also been to Palestine, Jerusalem, and other places, which, however, he did not like. And he said : "No, there is no spirituality in those places." Now he is in America.'

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The talk turned to some letters that had to be written to America. 'Some amount of love expresses itself through the exchange of such letters', remarked Mahapurushji. 'But, of course, when the inner vision opens, one sees everything as Brahman. "What can a man see and through what, when he has realized unity?" At the same time, it is necessary to have human dealings that stem out from the empirical idea of variety.'

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In connection with the communal riot at Dacca, Mahapurushji said : 'Why did the Mother dispense things in this way ? The Master is our only hope ; he will save us. Dacca never saw a holocaust on this scale before. It is the Mother's power of destruction let loose. Out of evil cometh good ; some good will come out of this even. May he be merciful ! May he grant peace to all ! What we want is that nobody should suffer.'

* * * *

A monk came up to pay his respects to Mahapurushji, after having been bed-ridden for about a month. Mahapurushji, greeting him with the words 'Come, come' with great delight, said : 'Look here, N. has come upstairs. Very good, my son ; it is the Master who has brought you round. Glory to the Master ! You need have no misgiving ; the Master will be merciful to you all. You have offered your body and mind to the Master, and you have taken shelter under him. He will protect you. The Master will take care of everything—your health, enlightenment, devotion, liberation, and all that. Well, my boy, you now return to your bed, for it will be difficult for you to keep standing. Alas, see how anaemic he looks ! You will gather strength again when you start taking your normal

food. Glory to the Master ! He has saved you out of his mercy.'

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The prickly weeds had been cleared to a considerable extent from the spacious lawn of the Math. Mahapurushji noticed this from the window of the office-room upstairs and said, 'Fine, the lawn is being cleared ; the cattle will be able to feed on the grass and they will bless you.'

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On another day, when a letter from a devotee reached him, Mahapurushji said : 'He is praying to the Master heart and soul. He will be firmly set on the spiritual path when he feels a little joy in this. If one but has love for the Lord's name, one need have no more worry. Troubles there are galore, and they will always be there. Let him call on the Master heart and soul, and he is sure to be blessed. He carried on the worship till 3 a.m. on the night of Janmashtami. That is well done !'

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Mahapurushji now lay down in his bed ; and in that reclining posture he read the names of the various aspects of the Divine mother and recited some Vedantic sayings, as also the *Devi-Sukta*. Then he sat up, saying, 'Fine, wonderful ! I was having such a charming current of thoughts. There lay Shiva without any motion, and the Mother danced on Him. Shiva is, of course, eternally motionless, while the Mother has Her eternal dance. There is this eternal inaction inside, and this playful activity of the Mother is outside.'

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A *brahmacharin* asked him one day : 'When one feels a strong pull towards the path of knowledge, can one repeat merely the word *Om*, without repeating the *mantra* of one's Chosen Deity ?'

'Yes, there is no harm in that,' replied Mahapurushji, 'for that *Om* is nothing but Brahman. One can think of the Master as *Om*. 'There is no harm in it.'

A few days later he asked that *brahmacharin* : 'Well, are you practising your *Om* ?' When the *brahmacharin* replied 'Yes', he said encouragingly : 'That is fine ; that is fine.' 'But, Maha-

raj,' put in the *brahmacharin*, 'as I keep on repeating *Om*, the body becomes stiff, and that produces some fear.' 'When you feel that way,' said Mahapurushji, 'you should pray to the Master thus : "Master, you yourself are this *Om*. Kindly lead me along the right path. Do please ordain it in such a way that I may attain the truth—be it knowledge or devotion" (for both are the same). Pray thus with all earnestness.'

* * * *

A monk had been suffering very badly of late. Mahapurushji said to one of his attendants : 'I wish very much to see him. Can you carry me down to him in a chair? Proximity will help the patient. Sympathy is very much needed. The sympathy of people around can cure a disease.'

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As one of the attendants of Mahapurushji had fallen ill, another monk had been fanning Mahapurushji for two hours every night for the last two days. (Belur Math had no electricity in those days.) On the third day, Mahapurushji told him : 'You had better take rest, for it gives you trouble ; I do not need any more fanning.' 'No, no, Maharaj,' said the monk, 'I feel no difficulty at all. How can we achieve any good unless we can serve you ?' 'Yes,' replied Mahapurushji, 'that is true enough ; for we are old monks, besides being the servants of the Master ; it will do you good if you serve us. There can be no doubt about that.'

* * * *

One day a monk asked Mahapurushji with great feeling : 'Maharaj, will it all end in seeing the Master in the picture alone in my case? Shall I have no realization?' 'No, no,' replied Mahapurushji with the utmost encouragement, 'why should it be in the picture alone? You will have his living vision here itself'; and he pointed to his own heart.

* * * *

It was the birthday of Sri Krishna. A monk asked Mahapurushji : 'Did the Master have any special spiritual mood on such a day?' 'How can I remember so much?' said Mahapurushji, 'The fact was that the slightest suggestion sent him into states of divine absorption. You can get some glimpses of this in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, though that is not

a complete picture. Master Mahashay (its author) did not visit the Master every day; nor did he record all that he saw. He had of course, a wonderful memory. Even so, how much can anyone put in writing from memory ?

The monk : 'Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) had a wish that all the instructions that the Master had imparted personally to his close disciples should be collected and kept on record.'

'How can you get all that now ?' inquired Mahapurushji, 'For most of them have already departed.'

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In the evening, Mahapurushji said to a devotee : 'Go and attend the evening service of the Master. The Master himself is present in the Belur Math, for Swamiji installed him here. Know this as a truth.'

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When the monk who performs the daily worship at the (Sri Ramakrishna) temple saluted Mahapurushji one morning, Mahapurushji was in his own spiritual mood, uttering, 'Glory to Guru Maharaj, Glory to Guru Maharaj !' Then as his eyes fell on the monk after a while, he said with affection : 'It is very good that you are performing the worship of the Master. May you be filled with devotion and faith. At the end of the worship, you should pray thus : "Master, may it please you to have your worship performed by me in the way that pleases you. For what do I know of your worship ?" Those who are working here in connection with the Master's service will all be blessed. Many assert : "The Master is present everywhere." That is quite true, but his manifestation is greater here. For Swamiji installed him here. Do you not know that *Atmarama's* vessel (the vessel containing the ashes of the Master installed at the Belur Math by Swamiji) ?'

Another day, he asked that monk : 'Do you practise a little *japa* after opening the shrine in the afternoon ?'

'Yes, Maharaj,' he replied.

'Yes, you have to maintain a current of spiritual ideas flowing there always, so that whenever anyone goes to the shrine, he will have the feeling of being in the presence of God Himself. He likes His devotees and their devotion. What else can be the idea behind a personal God ? Doing a little medita-

tion?—that alone will not help much. One must have devotion—in fact, one must have both.'

Many monks had gathered in Mahapurushji's room in the morning, and the talk turned to the telling of beads. 'It is people with gross ideas alone', remarked Mahapurushji, 'who think that the more one tells beads, the more propitious does God become. Does He really look at the number? He only watches how much the heart is dedicated to Him. If the proper divine mood prevails, what does it matter whether you keep count or not?'

A monk : 'Yes, Maharaj, sometimes it seems that the telling of beads is itself a sort of distraction.'

'Yes, it is really so', said Mahapurushji. 'I never take to telling beads or such things. As a saint has put it : "He that tells beads is rather an ignoramus." But then, one needs must have a rosary, for one has to show that one is a holy man !' He laughed as he said so, and then added : 'I have kept a rosary there (pointing to the rosary placed round his own photograph on the wall). Telling of beads does not occur with me ; all that is done by this one (pointing to the picture again, and laughing as he spoke). The Master used to say : "The telling of beads comes first, then comes meditation, and after that divine moods, divine absorption, etc."'

In the afternoon, Mahapurushji was pacing up and down the upper verandah of the Math overlooking the Ganga, while Khoka Maharaj (Swami Subodhananda) sat at the other end in an easy chair, reading the *Bhagavata*. Turning to an attendant present there, Mahapurushji remarked : 'Khoka Maharaj is poring over the *Bhagavata*.'

'Yes, Maharaj,' replied the attendant, 'he has finished many other Puranas ; he has read the *Shiva Purana*, for instance.'

'Yes,' added Khoka Maharaj, 'one has to keep oneself engaged in something.'

'Why something?' remarked Mahapurushji, 'Is the *Bhagavata* an ordinary book? The *Bhagavata* and the other Puranas speak to us of that Truth alone.'

In the evening, as he watched the moonlit river from that same verandah, he said with folded hands : 'Glory to Mother

Ganga, glory to Mother ! Please grant me devotion, Mother Ganga.'

As his blood pressure had gone up, and as the doctors had forbidden too much talk, the attendant reminded him of this, to which he said : 'I am a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, to be sure. Even when suffering excruciating pain from such a dangerous disease as cancer (of the throat), how he felt for all who visited him, and how he talked to them ! And am I to keep quiet ? The body is not well, what of that ? Does it look nice that you should come and depart silently after saluting me ? What will you think of me ? You may well think : "So, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna is like this after all !"'

86

SEEING GOD IN ONE'S OWN HEART IS FIRST NECESSARY—MORAL LIFE NOT ENOUGH—GRACE IS THE SECRET—THE PLACE OF EFFORT —LIVE WITH GOD ALL THE TIME.

Place : Belur Math. Time : May 11, 1930.

At night, a monk from South India saluted Mahapurushji and, by way of disclosing his heart's desire to him, said : 'Maharaj, I want to see God in everything. Kindly tell me how this can be possible.'

'My son,' replied Mahapurushji, 'you will have to see God in your own heart first. How can it be possible to see Him in all things outside unless you can see Him first within yourself ? When one is firmly established in one's realization of Him as the Self, one can see Him everywhere inside and outside ; then only will attain one the state described as "the whole universe is full of Brahman".'

The monk : 'Can this state be reached through the perfection of moral qualities, like truthfulness, kindness to all, love, endurance of all suffering without a murmur, etc. ?'

'Yes,' confirmed Mahapurushji, 'the mind becomes purified when it is disciplined through morality ; and the divine vision dawns on that pure mind. But I cannot accept the view that

the divine vision comes as the result of attaining excellence in moral behaviour. It is through constant devotion and meditation that God becomes gracious and reveals Himself in the heart of the devotee. What is needed is meditation—constant remembrance of Him. By constantly thinking of Brahman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, which is truth, infinity, love, omnipotence, and consciousness, a man becomes Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Itself.

'All that one has to do is to establish God in one's heart by any means. Then, one need make no separate effort to build up a moral character. All such divine qualities as truthfulness, kindness, love, etc. then come to one as a matter of course. The Master used to say that a boy who is led by the hand by his father has no fear of falling down. Do you know what the most essential thing is, my boy? It is grace, grace. Men can see Him only when He grants His vision out of His own compassion. Spiritual practices and such other things are meant merely for turning the mind to God.' Saying this, he sang in a sweet voice :

Whoever can see Thee unless Thou vouchsafest the vision ?

Can the heart ever run to Thee unless the call be from Thee ?

Infinite, higher than the high, Thou art shoreless and inaccessible ;

O Lord, who can ever grasp Thee through meditation ?
Often do I tell my mind that Thou art beyond speech and mind ;

Still is the heart athirst for Thy vision.

Do grant me the vision of Thee and assuage my heart's thirst.

O remover of discomfiture, do please calm my heart.

He finished the song in a state of deep absorption, and then added slowly : "The Master used to say : "The breeze of grace blows on freely for ever ; it is for you to unfurl your sail." This unfurling of the sail means personal effort, spiritual practices, and all that. Through spiritual practices, one must make oneself fit to receive God's grace. All else He does out of His own mercy. Through constant thought of Him and meditation on Him, the mind and heart become purified ; and

to that pure mind a divine revelation occurs spontaneously and God's grace is realized.

'Besides, you have become monks ; you have taken shelter under Him after renouncing everything. God-realization is the one aim of your lives. You have to live with Him alone at all moments. Have you not heard the Master's words : "A bee sits on flowers only, and sucks honey alone" ? So your one enjoyment will be with God—in sleep, in dream, in the waking state, and under all circumstances. You have to spend your time in meditating on Him, repetition of His name, recollection of Him, reading about Him, reflecting on Him, and prayer to Him. Then only will you get real bliss and peace in life, and your taking refuge in Him will be fruitful. God sees one's mind. He becomes gracious where He sees sincere craving. There is no injustice in His domain.'

87

MOTHER IS THE ONLY TRUTH'—'LIE DOWN AT HER DOOR'—
'STRUGGLE'.

Place : Belur Math. Time : June 24, 1930.

Mahapurushji sang this song with deep feeling :

What a machine has Mother Shyama made ; what a
machine has Mother Kali made !

What wonders She works through this machine, only
three and a half cubits high !

Living inside the machine, She moves it with strings She
Herself holds ;

The machine says : 'I run', not knowing who makes it
run. . . .

He repeated the song quite a number of times, and then sat silent. Finally, he said, speaking to himself : 'All that we know is that Mother is the only truth ; Mother is kind. We know nothing else ; we understand nothing else ; nor do we feel any need for more.'

A little later a *brahmacharin* spoke to him about his failure to progress in the path of spirituality and of his consequent

want of peace. He prayed for Mahapurushji's blessings in all earnestness. Moved by this, Mahapurushji said with great feeling : 'May Mother bless you fully ; may She remove all the disquiet from your mind. Wait steadfastly at Her door, my son ; lie down at Her door. She will fulfil everything in due course. Never be dispirited. Call on God with all earnestness and pray : "Master, be kind to me. I am an ignorant person ; I do not know how to pray to You. Be gracious to me. Grant me full love of and full faith in Your lotus feet ; and grant me full knowledge. To whom else can I turn but you ? Take pity on me, and reveal Yourself in my heart."

'Remain occupied with your own spiritual practices and duties. Why should you worry about what others do ? Whoever struggles will surely succeed ; for him is happiness in store. Thinking about God is very helpful in life. If one but takes to meditation and *japa* and prays to Him constantly, one's mental tendencies get the proper direction, and one's senses come under control. Engage yourself in spiritual practices with all earnestness. Struggle, struggle, my son ; call on Him with all sincerity. His name has in it all the requisite powers in a latent form.'

88

MERELY HEARING REPEATED INSTRUCTION WILL NOT HELP—ONE MUST SINCERELY FOLLOW IT—RESTLESSNESS—SHOWING OFF IN SPIRITUAL MATTERS HARMFUL—DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT COME IN A DAY.

Place : Belur Math. Time : July 15, 1930.

Many monks have been coming to the Math today from early morning, as though to witness some celebration, till quite a crowd has gathered round Mahapurushji. He, too, has been talking with them about God and spiritual matters without respite, thus satisfying all inquirers. At about half past three in the afternoon, an attendant announced, 'Maharaj, Y. wants to come to meet you. He is extremely eager for the interview ; and so he telephoned to us seeking permission.'

'He came here only the other day, and had a long talk,' said Mahapurushji. 'What disquiet could he have developed in the meantime? What is the use of a man's receiving basket-fuls of instruction? He must understand it and act accordingly. Otherwise, nothing will avail, my son. They go on repeating, "The mind is very restless." Yet, they will not act up to my advice. Can restlessness be removed thus? The scriptures are full of instructions, to be sure; but can anyone make any progress by merely reading the scriptures? One has to fulfil those instructions in life. "The weather forecast promises plenty of rainfall," said the Master, "but you will not get a drop by wringing the chart that gives this information." So also, you may associate with holy men and study the scriptures; but unless you practise spiritual disciplines, nothing will avail. And I do not like anyone to sit so close to me while talking; I cannot bear their breath. At times I have perforce to keep sitting there. That is why I often stand up when it becomes unbearable.

'Besides, my boy, I cannot go on talking endlessly like that. My mental make-up is of a different sort. I talk because I have to; but they have no idea how much mental fatigue all this causes me. I like keeping to myself; that's bliss. But even so, do I forbid anyone to come? That is not so. I know that they are staunch devotees, though rather emotional. They think that it is all so easy. But is it really so? One has to undergo long hardship for that. Mere verbal assent will not do. It requires quite a lot of self-control, and intense spiritual struggle. One wavers and moves from one altitude to another, only when one's own conviction is not firm.

'Do you know the real meaning of all this? They lack true love for God, real hankering. Can anyone run about searching for the best water all his life, if he has a real thirst? He has come to the Master, and taken shelter with him. But he does not consider that enough; he must have something more! Neither has he love, nor steadfastness. Stick to the Master and follow him in your own way; and you will get everything in time. That's why the Master often sang:

"Keep to yourself, O my mind, run not to others' houses;
Search within your heart; whatever you want shall be
yours without much ado.

This indeed is a priceless philosopher's stone ; it grants all desires.

What a number of gems lie scattered at the portals of the dancing hall that my mind is !”

‘One should stick on with such conviction. God is the blissful Self of all, and He is inside every heart. He lets everyone know whatever is needed. It is He who fulfils all desires if one but prays with earnestness. He is the ordainer of all the desired results of everybody. It is He who vouchsafes all the fruits that people want—be these virtue, secular prosperity, enjoyment, or liberation. One has to tread steadily the path indicated by a perfect *guru*. This is a difficult path, my son. One must needs have steadfastness, faith, and above all untiring diligence. As a man can never get water if he goes on shifting his site for a well as soon as he strikes hard ground, so also an aspirant can never succeed in his spiritual quest if he cannot continue in the same path with perseverance. Such a man can never reach God. I feel sorry for him, because I know so much about him. What a fickle-minded man ! He has no depth ; he takes everything so lightly ! It is no good frequenting all sorts of places and mixing with all sorts of people without having become firm in one's own attitude. That shatters one's own conviction. “Say yea, yea, to all, but sit tight in your own place.” (This he repeated several times). “One's own place”—that is to say, what the Master called “one's own spiritual attitude”. One must get firmly established in one's own spiritual attitude, one must get that attitude fully matured. And yet one must live in harmony with all.’

Then, as though addressing the devotee of whom he was talking, he said : ‘I tell you, my son ; you will get the highest joy from the Master's name itself ; you will get everything from his name—be it spiritual ecstasy or God-absorption. But everything takes its own time. Besides, you are a householder ; and you have your own worldly duties. Well, I understand you go to some solitary place now and then. Solitary living is very fruitful, as the Master pointed out. But this does not mean that you will not make any spiritual progress at all without that. One has to obey the directions of somebody with all sincerity. That is why the scriptures speak of placing oneself

under a *guru*. A perfect *guru* informs the disciple of the correct path ; he sets him on the road.'

He continued : 'What do they understand of spirituality ? We have seen quite a lot of such so-called paroxysms of divine impulse. That is not what the Master taught. All that is a sort of stunt for popularity. That is rather a source of evil. The Master would say, "When you meditate, do so (secretly) within your mind, in a solitary corner, or in a forest." Those who belong to a lower grade of aspirants, are given to showing off their spiritual attainments ; they seek popularity. Why is anybody so eager for external expression ? That only betrays that such a man is not fully established in his own special path. It will not do to be restless. One has to get deeply absorbed in spiritual exercises ; one must strengthen one's spiritual attitude in one's own mind. One may get a temporary enthusiasm by noticing somebody else's spiritual fervour ; but then one must remember that all such men had to pass through hard struggle. All had to practise for long with diligence, and then only had they the grace of God.

'As a matter of fact, God does become gracious when one is sincere. There is no injustice in His domain ; He is just to all. He who seeks gets Him. His compassion is on all ; in fact, He is only too eager to help all. Call on Him earnestly, and He is there for you. But they have neither the desire, nor will they make any attempt. Instead, there is only so much of restlessness, and complaint that they are not getting anything, that they are not making any progress. It does not all come in a day. It needs introspection, and along with that regular practice. One need have no worry if one but does regular spiritual practice ; peace is bound to come. Let them but make some effort to see if the result is a fact or not. Tell him that he need not come to me now. I told him everything necessary on that very day. Let him now act accordingly if he would have peace.'

The attendant kept on thinking, 'Ah ! How very solicitous he is for every devotee's welfare ; how deeply he feels and thinks for them !'

GITA EXTOLLED—NAPOLEON AND OTHERS COULD NOT CUT THROUGH MAYA—ONE WILL BECOME FREE BY TAKING THE NAME OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA—HE IS NONE OTHER THAN GOD HIMSELF.

Place : Belur Math. Time : December 21, 1930.

Tomorrow is the birthday of the Holy Mother, when some young men of renunciation will be initiated into the vow of *brahmacharya*. In that connection Mahapurushji said : 'It is excellent to study the scriptures as a matter of daily duty ; for it constitutes a form of spiritual exercise. At the first instance, the *brahmacharins* should study the *Gita* carefully. What other book can compare with the *Gita* ? How exquisite ! It sets forth all the spiritual paths of knowledge, devotion, selfless work, and *yoga*. What I like most in the *Gita* is where the Lord Himself holds out the promise to His devotee by saying : "O son of Kunti, boldly may you announce that my devotee shall never perish." Ah ! What an encouraging promise ! He is very solicitous for those who take shelter with Him. One who takes refuge at His feet with all sincerity can have no more misgiving ; He protects him in every way. Ah ! What compassion ! But such is the cosmic illusion woven by the Great Mother that man cannot understand even this incomparable compassion ! And unless God is gracious, nobody can escape out of this illusion, be he ever so learned or wise. It is only when He removes a little this covering of *maya* that a man can understand how great this grace is.

"This Self cannot be known through much study, nor through the intellect, nor through much hearing. He is attainable by him to whom He becomes gracious ; to him, He reveals His true nature" (*Katha Upanishad*, I. 2. 23).

'What great heroes were Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and the Kaiser, who had the power of breaking the world to pieces, as it were ! From the worldly point of view, they were great heroes, no doubt. And yet, they were mere bubbles in this stream of creation that has been flowing eternally. They cannot cut through the meshes of this Maya, no matter how

great their power is. And till that can be done, nothing in this world avails; this human birth remains unfulfilled till then. For that, one needs God's grace. And the Lord Himself has pointed out the secret of getting that grace: "Consecrate your mind to Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, and salute Me. Devoting yourself to Me, and acting in this way, you will reach Me alone. Giving up all other rites and ceremonies, take shelter in Me alone; I shall save you from all sins. Free yourself from all misgivings" (*Gita*, XVIII. 65-66).'

When a certain devotee requested him for initiation, he said: "There is nothing esoteric about my process of initiation. All that I know is that a man will become free if he but takes the name of Sri Ramakrishna, the Incarnation for this age. Any one who takes shelter with him, will surely be saved by him. This is what is ordained for this age. The Master said that the coins of the age of the Moghul emperors do not pass current now. The name of Sri Ramakrishna is the *mantra* for this age. What else can initiation mean? The Master himself is the initiation. I tell you, my son, I know nothing of the initiation according to the Tantras that the priests resort to.

'Simply make *japa* of his name; and pray whole-heartedly, "O Lord, be kind to me." If the prayer proceeds from the heart, he will surely hear. The Master himself said: "He who came as Rama, and he who came as Krishna, has descended here again" (and with that, he pointed to his own body). Well, my son, this is a declaration from the lips of God Himself, this is the message of the Incarnation for this age. We also repeat the same message. One will attain freedom in this age by merely calling on the Master.

'If you are ready to live with this blind faith, I am also ready to teach you whatever I know without any reserve. Otherwise, you can depart and have your logic-chopping to your heart's content; and then come when the time arrives. This is not fanaticism; this is a felt truth. We know it for certain that the Master is none other than the eternal supreme Brahman Itself. One must have this faith. You are a good boy; you are intelligent, as well as learned; you are energetic and enthusiastic, too. You have read much, and you may read more. But along with all that, you have to get your mind fixed. Develop a love for God in your heart, be earnest, and call on

Him. Then you will find that everything will be fulfilled in time. Make your mind ready. "When the flower blooms, the bee comes of itself," said the Master. This is why I ask you to open out the lotus of your heart first, and the *guru's* grace will come of itself. He knows everybody's heart; He is within your own heart, as the Soul of your soul. He will reveal everything when the time is ripe.

'It is good to have high worldly aspiration. But you had that for so long. Now, should you not try to acquire the knowledge of the Self? This is the highest aspiration in life—to know God. Be up and doing. Concentrate all your energy and direct it to that end with all your might, so that you may be blessed with true life.'

As the devotee was eager for initiation, Mahapurushji agreed to this.

90

THE GREAT MOTHER WAS BORN TODAY AS HOLY MOTHER—GOD'S
PLAY HARD TO UNDERSTAND UNLESS HE MAKES ONE UNDERSTAND
—PURE KNOWLEDGE AND PURE DEVOTION THE SAME.

Place : Belur Math. Time : December 22, 1930.

It was the birthday of the Holy Mother. From early morning Mahapurushji had been calling on the Mother, as though he was a little child dependent on his mother. With folded hands and closed eyes he prayed : 'Mother, Mother, O Thou Great Mother, glory to Thee ! glory to Thee ! Mother, grant us devotion, faith, full faith, knowledge, detachment, love, concentration, and God-absorption. Do good to this organization of the Master ; do good to the whole world ; grant peace to the world.' He sat silent for a while, and then added : 'We have no devotion, and so we cannot fully realize the greatness of days like this. Is this an ordinary day ? This is the birthday of the Great Mother. It was the Great Mother Herself who took birth on this day for the good of the world and its creatures. It is hard to understand how God plays by accept-

ing human bodies. How can one understand unless He makes one do so out of His grace? How commonplace a life she led! How hidden remained her spiritual stature, as though She were in disguise! How little can we understand her! The Master alone understood her properly. He told me one day, "The Mother that is in that (Kali) temple, and the mother who lives in the concert tower are the same." The next one who knew her was Swamiji. Ah, what a deep reverence he had for the Holy Mother! He said that it was because of the blessing of the Holy Mother that he could go to the other shore of the sea and be victorious.'

As the monks came in one by one to salute him, he kept on asking most of them, 'Did you see the Mother?' The number of devotees was rather great, it being a Sunday. About three thousand devotees, both men and women, had *prasada* at noon. When it was very cloudy in the morning, many had feared that it would rain and mar the celebration. When an old monk expressed some concern on this score, Mahapurushji kept silent for a while and then said: 'No, there is no fear. By the Mother's grace, there will be no trouble. She is the maker of good, and she will do good to all.'

'Gangadhar Maharaj (Swami Akhandananda) came to join the celebration in the afternoon. Mahapurushji was very glad to meet him. A party was singing *Chandi-kirtana* at the Holy Mother's temple. This was the first performance there of this kind, and Mahapurushji kept on enquiring every now and then how it was progressing. Lastly he said: 'The name of our Holy Mother is Sarada (which means Sarasvati, the goddess of learning). The Mother is none other than Sarasvati. It is she who grants illumination out of her grace. Illumination means the knowledge of God. One can have true and firm devotion only when one is vouchsafed this knowledge, and not otherwise. Pure knowledge and pure devotion are the same. And all that comes from the grace of the Mother alone. Knowledge is dispensed at her bidding.'

THE BIRTHDAY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA—A MOMENTOUS DAY—IT WILL TAKE CENTURIES TO REALIZE WHO THE MASTER IS—MOTHER IS ACTING THROUGH HIM.

Place : Belur Math. Time : February 19, 1931.

It was the auspicious birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. The whole monastery was in the midst of a joyous, day-long programme of worship, chanting, music, group-singing, offerings, distribution of *prasad*, and so on. Both men and women devotees gathered in their thousands to participate in that bliss.

From early dawn Mahapurushji had been in a high state of spiritual elation, talking in soliloquy : 'Glory to Ramakrishna, glory to the Lord, glory to God ! This is a very auspicious day when He Himself descended on this earth out of His own compassion. This is a unique event. The whole world is saved by His grace. Yes, this is unique indeed !' There was a steady flow of devotees, both men and women, who came in to bow down before him, and he, too, blessed them all out of a heart full of divine fervour. The prayer was constantly on his lips : 'May all be blessed whoever and wherever they be ! Be compassionate to all, O Lord : be propitious to the *sangha*, be merciful to all creatures !' On that day, he initiated many with *mantras*.

At mealtime at noon, when the attendant came with some *prasad* of Sri Ramakrishna for him, he showed no inclination to eat anything. He just took up a little bit with his fingers, placed it in the mouth with the words, 'Glory to the *guru*, glory to the Lord !' and then told the attendant : 'Take all this away ; remove all this. Does one feel like eating all this on such a day ? There is no need to eat all this today. The Master descended on this day. It makes me speechless to think how blessed the day is. Is this just an ordinary day,? The Lord of all the worlds and all the creatures, nay, of infinite creation itself, incarnated on this day. Is this an everyday occurrence ? The same Reality that came down one day as Sri Krishna, Buddha, or Gauranga descended again as Sri Rama-

krishna after centuries. Oh, my imagination fails, my thought comes to a standstill ! What a momentous day it is ! Aha ! My speech, body, and mind have become sanctified by speaking of the Master on his birthday. It will be really grand if one can die on such a day ! It will be a real blessing to die on this birthday of the Master, at his own place, while talking to his devotees about himself !'

The rush of devotees continued even in the afternoon ; and as they came in his presence, they stood still, fascinated by his divine mood. And then they departed with grateful hearts filled with his blessing and inspiration for a spiritual life. As soon as the Raja of— and his wife departed after paying their respects to Mahapurushji, he said : 'I don't much care who is a prince or a princess. Narayana alone is true, and it is He alone who exists for ever. The Master is all this. He came down for the good of the world and its creatures. It is to spread his message alone that this body still lives. Else, why should it be alive ? For I have no other desire or want. The one vow of my life is to preach his message as long as this body lasts. And it will last as long as there is need to do his work.'

Two American ladies came to see him and enquired about his health. 'I am very fine today', he replied. 'Ah ! The whole earth is full of bliss this day ; for the Master came down to earth on such a day. I cannot express to you the elation I feel within myself. What a blessed day it is ! Never before did such a great spiritual force descend on this earth. The whole world will be saved. It will take centuries to realize who the Master is, and what his gift to the world has been.'

Mother Kali was to be worshipped at night. When the worshipper came to pay his respects to Mahapurushji and ask for his permission and blessing in order to start the worship, Mahapurushji said : 'Yes, my son, perform the Mother's worship with the fullest devotion. This is the day when Mother makes a special revelation of Herself. It is through Mother's power that everything is done. In the present age Her power is acting through the Master's personality. For the Master is none other than Mother Kali Herself, who descended on this earth as Sri Ramakrishna. Every time I think of him, I am struck with wonder at the greatness of the personality with whom we lived. He was none other than God incarnate,

Mother Herself. Our life has been fulfilled. Those who have not seen the Master but see us will also be blessed, for we are part and parcel of him.'

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SANNYASA—OMNIPOTENCE OF THE DIVINE MOTHER—NEED TO GET ONE'S INNER BEING COLOURED WITH OCHRE.

Place : Belur Math. Time : February 20, 1931.

The Master's birthday celebrations went off yesterday amidst great joy. The intense God-absorption that one noticed yesterday in Mahapurushji continued even today. The whole night had been spent in the worship of Mother as well as in recitation and music. The *homa* was performed after the worship in the small hours of the night. In the very same fire were then performed the *homas* for *sannyasa* and *brahmacharya*, during which Mahapurushji initiated seven *brahmacharins* into *sannyasa* and three others into *brahmacharya*. But though he had had a strenuous time of it all through, he did not seem to be tired today. The divine bliss within lit up his whole countenance.

In the morning they brought to him all kinds of food offered to Kali at night. With eyes shut and with folded hands he showed his extreme regard for that *prasada*, and then tasted from each kind with the tips of his fingers, praying all the while with extreme humility, 'Mother be gracious, Mother, Mother, be kind to the world, Mother !' That earnest supplication touched everyone's heart deeply.

Now came the newly ordained *sannyasins* and *brahmacharins* to salute him. He asked everyone of them the new name he had got, and as they told him their names, he expressed keen delight. Then, all of a sudden, he became very serious and said : 'Names and forms—all these are very superficial, external things ; all these are ephemeral—they last for just a little while. All this is vain. One has to go beyond name and form, one has to attain that highest Bliss, to realize

the soul which is the supreme Reality. *Sannyasa* consists in that alone, to be sure. It is an easy affair to perform the *viraja homa*, discard one's tuft of hair and sacred thread, and then wear the ochre cloth and become a monk. That is monasticism of merely the most rudimentary form; but it is very difficult to become a real *sannyasin*. You have to meditate on the great Upanisadic sayings every day. Go, my sons, now, and be merged in meditation, and realize the Self. Then will your joining this Order of the Master and your life of renunciation have any meaning. If you would pay heed to my words, this is all that I can say.'

When the newly initiated *sannyasins* begged for his blessing, he blessed them with all his heart and said: 'You have taken refuge with the Master who was the foremost among the men of renunciation; you have dedicated your body, mind, heart, and everything at his feet. You are very dear to us. I pray sincerely that you may have constant and unshakeable love for and faith in God. Keep the ochre cloth that you have worn in the name of the Master unsullied till the last day and go on doing his service all the while. He is verily a wish-fulfilling tree. Pray to him fervently for love and devotion; pray for the knowledge of Brahman. He will grant everything, he will fulfil everything. He has nothing that he will deny you. We have this in the *Devi-Sukta*; "It is I Myself who, having been entreated by men and gods, speak of this secret about Brahman. I make great all those whom I wish to save. I make someone Brahma, someone a seer, someone intelligent, and someone else a realized soul." It is She Herself who, out of compassion, revealed this knowledge about Brahman that is hankered after by men and gods alike. And by a mere wish of Hers, She can make anyone Brahman, or a seer, and so on, just as She wills. She is ever ready to bestow Her favour just for the mere asking.'

Next he repeated the following verse several times: 'O Lord, I do not long for wealth, retinues, a beautiful wife, or even all-knowingness. My only prayer is for absolute devotion to you in all the lives that I may have.' Then he talked about the places the new *sannyasins* would visit for their alms, and remarked: 'In any case, one looks fine in ochre clothes. But the outer colour will not suffice; it will have some meaning

only if you can have your inner being equally coloured in ochre, my sons. That is the only thing that matters.'

At about eleven in the morning he said to an attendant : 'Ah, what a great occasion it was yesterday ! The Master came down in this age just as Sri Krishna did at Vrindavan, Buddha at Kapilavastu, or Sri Chaitanya at Nadia. One has to admit some efficacy in such august moments. Ah, look at the description etc. of the birth of Sri Krishna as given in the *Bhagavata* ! Everything then is charming, everything is so joyous ! Everything is auspicious—the various directions, the sky, the town, the village, the group of cowsheds, the trees, creepers, and herbs ! All is quiet around. What a captivating description !' With this, he asked the attendant to read that passage from the *Bhagavata*.

93

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AT NIGHT—JAPA—DEALING WITH A RESTLESS MIND—THE MASTER IS SAMADHI INCARNATE—GRACE—BUDDHA'S DETERMINATION—STRUGGLES OF THE MASTER'S DISCIPLES—HANKERING—TAKING REFUGE—'FOR ONE'S OWN SALVATION AND FOR THE GOOD OF THE WORLD'—PROPER CONDUCT FOR A MONK.

Place : Belur Math. Time : 1931.

Mahapurushji was physically so weak that it was difficult for him even to get down from his bed without somebody's help. At night he gets little sleep. So the attendants keep vigil by turns at night. All that time he would remain absorbed in thought of God. Often enough he would ask the attendant at his side to read certain passages from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the *Gita*, the Upanishads, the *Bhagavata*, or some such book, while he listened with full attention. At other times he would sit quietly or would pray with folded hands to the Master for the good of the world. How appealing the language would sound then ! At times, again, he would lie down with the picture of some deity on his chest. All the while he lived in a divine inebriation. When the attendant put the question, 'Sir,

will you not sleep a little ?', his answer would be, 'What sleep can I have, my boy ?' and with that he would sing :

'My sleep is gone ; shall I sleep any more ? I now keep awake through the power of *yoga*.

Now have I offered the sleep of *yoga* to Thee, my Mother, and laid sleep itself to sleep.

Now have I come on an excellent mood—the mood have I learnt from one who is an adept.

I have met a man of that country, my Mother, which knows no night at all.

To me days and nights are now all the same, and all practices futile.'

Once, in connection with sleep, he said : 'It is said in the *Chandi* that sleep is no other than a form of Mother Herself—"The Goddess who lives in every being as sleep." She is the substratum of everything ; She pervades everything moving or unmoving. There is nothing beside Her. "Thou art the only repository of the whole universe." That Mother Herself is the very essence of this entire creation. Mother is ever in the inmost core of my heart, illuminating it all the while. A mere vision of Her can alone remove all fatigue, and no more will there then be need of sleep. Whenever I feel a little tired, I just try to have a glance at Mother. That is enough. That brings bliss ; all the fatigue is removed.'

It was about 3 a.m. Silence reigned all around. The whole world lay quiet in the lap of slumber like some tired child. The entire monastery seemed to be merged in meditation. A small electric lamp burned in Mahapurushji's room. Noticing the attendant near him, he said : 'Look here, my son, you should make intensive *japa* at dead of night. That is the best time for *japa* and meditation. When you start making *japa*, you may feel sleepy, but you must not give in. After some time, you will find that, although you may feel drowsy at the time of *japa*, the process of repetition of the *mantra* will proceed automatically in the subconscious. You should fix your posture in such a way that you can sit upright. If you feel very sleepy at any time, you may leave the seat and continue your *japa* while standing or sauntering about.

"Work with the hand, and have Hari's name on the lips"—that is to say, you should repeat God's name under all circum-

stances, no matter whether you are walking or working. If you continue making *japa* in this way for some time, you will find that a part of your mind will always be engaged in *japa*—an undercurrent of *japa* will continue in your mind under all circumstances. If you can practise *japa* with determination for two or three years, both day and night, you will find that you will become your own master. I hope you are aware of what is called *maha-ratri*, dead of night, in the *Chandi*; that dead of night is the most suitable time for spiritual practices. A spiritual current keeps on flowing during that period. You will understand the influence of that current as your mind grows finer. Why should a monk sleep too much at night? A little sleep for one or two hours should be enough. When will he practise his *japa* and meditation if he spends the whole night in sleep? Nature becomes absolutely calm at dead of night, so that the mind becomes quiet with only a little effort, and higher thoughts and higher moods come to it very easily.'

The attendant said with great hesitation: 'I cannot concentrate my mind for long in *japa* and meditation. Whenever I sit for meditation, I find that all kinds of thoughts come crowding into the mind and disturb it. But when engaged in your service or in other duties, I notice that the remembrance of God comes more easily, and I find joy in it as well. But when I sit for meditation or *japa*, the mind seems to become rebellious. Fighting thus with the mind, I suffer from loss of mental composure, and I soon leave my seat. It is a new trouble; I did not have it before. This has got hold of me for some time, particularly from the time I began serving you.'

Hearing of this restlessness of the attendant's mind, Mahapurushji kept quiet for a time, and then added slowly: 'Yes, some minds are rebellious like that, but there is a way for bringing even such a mind under control. Even such a restless mind can be trained gradually and made to concentrate on God. Do not begin meditating or making *japa* as soon as you sit down on your seat. First, start with a calm prayer to the Master. The Master is *samadhi* incarnate. If you can pray to him sincerely and think of him, the mind will become concentrated. Pray thus: "O Lord, make my mind calm; fill me with peace." Pray like this for some time, and then think of the *samadhi* of the Master. The picture that you see of him is that of the state

of very high *samadhi*. Ordinary people cannot comprehend the meaning of this picture. Then sit quietly and watch the wanderings of the mind ; notice where it goes. You are not the mind forsooth ; the mind is yours. You are separate from the mind ; you are the Self itself. Sit quietly like a witness, watching the ramblings of the mind. After wandering for a time the mind will get tired ; then take hold of it and make it think of the Master. Whenever the mind wants to escape, catch hold of it and make it meditate on the Master.

'If you go on trying continuously like this, the mind will gradually become calm. Then repeat God's name with intense love and meditate on Him. Do as I have told you for some days, and you will find that the mind has come under your control. But one thing I tell you, that is, you have to do this daily and regularly and with sincere steadfastness.'

'In view of the state of my mind,' said the attendant, 'I think I cannot do much of spiritual practices. My only hope is your blessing.'

'There is plenty of blessing my son', said Mahapurushji with great affection. 'You have renounced everything and made the Master the be-all and end-all of your lives ; if blessings are not showered on you, then on whom should they be ? But along with that, you, too, must be up and doing. For this is what the Master said : "The breeze of compassion is blowing there all the time ; it is for you to unfurl your sail." This unfurling of the sail is self-exertion. One must make the sincerest effort and exert oneself—especially when engaged in a good work—in spiritual exercises. One has to put forth a lion's strength to secure the knowledge of the Self. Nothing can be achieved without diligence and self-exertion. Once you unfurl your sail, it will be filled with the breeze of grace as a matter of course.

'One must have diligence so long as one has the notion of ego. Why have you become monks and why have you cut off all family ties ? It is all for the realization of God. It is as a result of the merit earned in your previous lives, and out of the grace of God, that you have entered this Order of the Master and found shelter under him ; especially, it is the Master who has arranged for your stay in close proximity to us. Nothing can be more regrettable if, even after getting all these facili-

ties, you should miss the chief aim of life. Make your mind very strong. With his name on your lips—he who is the saviour of all sinners—you have started to cross this ocean of the world ; now it will not do to be disconcerted by the sight of a rather high wave and take your hand off the rudder. These are but terrors conjured up by the cosmic Maya. With these She tests the sincerity of aspirants. When such things cannot disturb the aspirant's mind, when he remains, like Mount Sumeru, uncompromising in his determination in spite of such disturbances, then the great Mother becomes propitious and opens the gate of liberation. When She is pleased everything is attained.

'In the *Chandi*, it is stated : "It is She Herself who becomes the cause of people's liberation, when She is favourably disposed." Have you not read in the life of Buddha what kind of terrors She faced Buddha himself with in the form of Mara ? But Buddha remained in his seat with unflinching determination, and he made the resolve : "May my body shrivel up on this very seat ; may my skin, bones, and flesh be reduced to nothing ; but my body shall not move away from here without attaining that enlightenment which seldom comes to a man during innumerable births." What a strong resolution it was ! At long last Mother became propitious. She opened the door of *nirvana*, and Buddha had his wish fulfilled. He became Buddha, the enlightened One. The same thing occurred in the life of the Master as well.

'That is why I say, my son, that you should be up and doing ; engage yourself in spiritual practices with firm determination. It will not do to give up *japa* and meditation under the simple excuse that your mind does not settle down to these. Look at our own lives. The life of each one of the Master's disciples is an ideal of strenuous spiritual endeavour. Just consider what hard struggles had to be gone through by Maharaj, Hari Maharaj, Yogin Maharaj—each one of them. And yet they had untold blessings from the Master, who was none other than the Incarnation for this age. He had the power to grant the knowledge of Brahman by his mere wish ; and he could merge one into *samadhi* by a single touch ; yet, what hard spiritual practices he made us go through ! When God is favourable, the path of spiritual practices itself becomes easy ; all obstacles are removed. God looks at one's heart ; He takes

note of one's sincerity. He reveals Himself whenever one supplicates Him with earnestness and tears in the eyes. This revelation of Himself out of pity is His grace. He is ever free and independent. Can He be under the dictates of any man's spiritual practices, that He should reveal Himself as the result of a certain amount of *japa*, or a certain period of meditation, or a certain measure of voluntary hardship? It cannot be so.

'Spiritual practices actually mean a hankering for Him alone—a longing for Him alone by discarding this world, forgetting all thoughts of name and fame, physical comfort, and even one's own existence, and having no anxiety about lives here or hereafter, or about anything else. God will reveal Himself out of His mercy to one who wants Him in such a way. Man can see Him, just because He condescends to reveal Himself out of His infinite mercy; this is His grace. Had He not revealed Himself out of His mercy, how could man ever have seen Him? Not only does He love His devotees, but He is a very ocean of compassion.'

'Our only hope is that we have been blessed by you', said the attendant. 'You will certainly do whatever conduces to our real good. Now that you have granted shelter, you can never deny us.'

'The Master is a great lover of those who take shelter in him,' said Mahapurushji. 'He protects those who take refuge in him. One has no fear of getting drowned in this sea of the world if the Master takes one by the hand even once only. In the *Chandi*, it is stated: "People who have been granted shelter by Thee have no danger or fear; for those who take refuge in Thee become themselves a refuge for others." Hold on to the Master with all your being; he will snap the bondage of the world. Those who have taken refuge in the Master believing him to be the only resort, those who have been taken under our care, should entertain no doubt about liberation; they will have it as a matter of course. That is our responsibility, and we shall see to its fulfilment. There can be no doubt that the Master will lead everyone by the hand at the last moment. But spiritual practices are not meant for the sake of mere liberation. Realize God through spiritual practices even in this life, and be free even while in this body. Call on Him with the utmost earnestness; repeat His name with all

sincerity ; and get absorbed in Him through and through. Then you will enjoy the bliss that belongs to one who is free even while in this body. Besides, the organization set up by Swamiji has a meaning of its own. He has entrusted a very heavy responsibility to each one who has found his place in this Order: Each monk and each *brahmacharin* here has to mould his life of renunciation and spiritual practices in such an ideal way as to make each life a fit instrument for the propagation of the holy life that the Master led, so that the whole world may come to know this holy Order of his, nay, so that it may recognize the Master through each member of the Order. Swamiji's declaration was, "For one's own salvation and for the good of the world". Real good will be done to the world when the liberal and universal message of the Master is propagated everywhere. And that task he has entrusted to this whole Order.'

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Talking about the life of a monk, Mahapurushji said one day : 'A monk must leave his bed very early ; he should not sleep after 3 or 4 a.m. Why should a monk sleep after that ? We have seen the Master waking up at 3 a.m. and repeating the names of God. A monk should bathe early and engage himself in meditation and concentration of mind after the bath. He should not sit for his meal just after the bath. Eating just after the bath is a practice followed by ordinary people. Why should the monk also behave that way ? His demeanour, his talk, and every other thing should be different ; they should all be simple and sincere, charming and divine. Why should a monk have money ? He must depend entirely on God. The Master is there to look after him. A monk should have everything neat and clean about him ; but that does not mean that he should be luxurious. Those who tread the path of renunciation can ill afford to be luxurious. A monk should not eat much at night. The Master would say : "One's night meal should be very light." A monk should not neglect learning ; he should read the scriptures. He should maintain good health. He should be sweet in his talk ; calm and steady and gentle in his behaviour. He should keep himself away from lust and lucre for ever, and should not even come near these.'

FAITH IN THE MASTER—WEEP FOR GOD—PURE DEVOTION IS RARE—THE NET OF MAHAMAYA—ITS INCOMPREHENSIBILITY.

Place : Belur Math. Time : March 4, 1932.

As Mahapurushji was not in good health, he could not always deal with his correspondence personally. In the afternoon an attendant was reading his letters to him, and he was listening to them with full attention. A devotee had written a pitiable letter expressing the sorrows of his heart thus : 'I am having great restlessness of mind. I am following my spiritual practices ardently ; but that does not bring any peace. Kindly let me know how I can have His mercy, how I can have the vision of Him, and how I can have peace of mind. It is my firm faith that, if you take pity on me, God will also become merciful, and my life on this earth will be fulfilled,' and so on.

Hearing all this, Mahapurushji said : 'Ah, these people have real longing. They will be blessed. There is only one way out, and that is faith. If one has the sincerest faith that the Master is the Incarnation for this age, that he is none other than God Himself, and that one has been blessed by one of his sons, then one need have nothing more to worry—one has already reached the goal of life. One must have full faith in his being the Incarnation of God. It is the Master himself who sits in my heart as the *guru* and blesses the devotees. Write to him : "Weep, my son, weep. I know of no other method but weeping. Weep with the prayer : 'O Lord, be merciful to me ; reveal yourself to me ; grant me the vision of Thyself.' Pray and weep for ever more. The more you weep for Him, the more will He be revealed in your heart. Weep with intense love, weep with the utmost longing." We heard the Master sing :

Hari, the day is over and evening has come ; do please
take me across.

I have known that Thou art the one who can ferry me
across, and hence I call on Thee.

I have heard that Thou ferriest to the other shore even
 those who have no fare to pay ;
 I am a poor beggar, without a single copper in hand.
 Hence do I call on Thee.

'It is he alone who can take us across. If he does not ferry us out of his own mercy, how can any mortal ever cross this sea of the world ? Master, you are limitless, you are fathomless. Who can ever know you ? Nobody can find your limits. Be kind to me. Reveal your true nature just a little out of your own compassion ; and then alone will people's bondage fall off for ever.'

Another devotee had wanted to know the process of the spirit's way up through the six plexuses. Mahapurushji said in that connection : 'Write to him that he has no need to know all that. "Weep, only weep ; weep piteously like a simple boy with all earnestness and pray : 'Master, do grant me faith and devotion ; protect me, Mother, and free me from this bondage of *maya* that Thou hast spread around me.' To tell you the truth, my son, I know this much alone. Weep in the name of Mother, my son, weep. Lie down at Her feet, take refuge in Her, and weep. She will certainly take pity. I, too, pray earnestly that you may progress in life and advance rapidly in your spiritual endeavour."

Then, looking at the attendant, he added : 'Did you not say that he has some defect ? I care little for all that ; I do not want to know what a man did in his past days. Let the dead past bury their dead. Now that he has come here and taken refuge under the Master, everything will be forgiven, and he will be saved. The Master has the power to undo everything. It is no small matter that he has taken refuge in the *avatara* of this age. He could not have done this unless he had sufficient merit to his credit. The Master will certainly save him.'

A little later, a certain devotee saluted him, offering some money at the same time. Mahapurushji said : 'Why should you have saluted me by offering money ? I have no need of money. We are monks, after all, my son ; what have we to do with money ? I have no want by the Master's grace. I am a servant of the Lord ; He grants me two pieces of bread out of his compassion.' With this, he started singing :

I am Thy servant, Thy servant, Thy servant :

Thou art my Lord, my Lord, my Lord.

From Thee have I got two pieces of bread and a loincloth.

In addition, kindly grant me devotion and spiritual fervour,

And make me sing Thy name.

'As to that, He has kindly been giving me two pieces of bread, as a matter of fact ; what need have I of money etc. ? Take away that money, my son. You are householders, you have need of money.' But as the devotee kept on entreating him with great humility, he ordered the attendant to pick up the money and spend it on offerings to the Master.

The attendant started reading the letters again. An initiated disciple of Mahapurushji had done many evil deeds before his initiation. So he was very repentant and had written many facts about his own life, craving piteously for forgiveness. After hearing the letter, Mahapurushji sat silent and thoughtful for a while, and then remarked : 'This one has got true repentance. He is penitent. Such devotees alone will succeed. Write to him : "You need have no fear ; the Master will save you. No sin is too great in his eyes. It is just because he would save you all that he came down at all. He knows the inmost secret. He has blessed you only after the fullest knowledge of your past, present, and future. Lie down at his feet taking refuge under him with the fullest sincerity. From now on, it is he who has taken hold of your hand ; never more will he allow you to take a false step. You need have no fear, my son. Go on imploring him piteously with all earnestness ; he will save you. And the very fact that you have confessed all your sins to me absolves you of all of them ; from now on, you are a devotee of the Master, free from all sins. You have taken shelter under him and have been accepted and granted refuge. Entreat him only for purity, devotion, and love."''

Then, in connection with devotees and their devotion, Mahapurushji remarked : 'The Master used to say that pure devotion is a rare thing ; it hardly comes to ordinary souls. He would sing with very intense feeling :

Salvation I can grant with little hesitation ;

But in granting pure devotion, I hesitate.

One blessed with devotion to Me becomes honoured by
all,

And victorious in the three worlds.

Listen, O Chandravali, I speak of the secret of devo-
tion....

Pure devotion one can find in Vrindavan, where the
cowherds and cowherdesses know it.

It's because of devotion that, in Nanda's house,

I shoulder all his responsibilities as though he were a
real father.

Ah, with what feeling would the Master sing this song !'
So saying, he started singing the song himself.

Again, after a little pause, he said in a sort of soliloquy :
'It is to save sinners and the afflicted that the Master incarnated.
If someone takes shelter under him with all sincerity, he just
passes his hand of mercy over the supplicant and wipes away
all his sins. By his divine touch, one becomes sinless then and
there. What is wanted is sincere love for him and absolute
surrender to him. Girish Babu had done all sorts of things.
But the Master was impressed by his devotion, and so accepted
him as his own. That's why Girish Babu used to say at the
end of his life, "Had I known that there was such a huge pit
in which to throw one's sins, I would have committed many
more." He is full of compassion, a veritable sea of mercy.'

One woman devotee, being completely overwhelmed with
grief at the loss of her husband very recently, had written a
letter full of incoherent wailing. As Mahapurushji heard the
letter in hushed silence, he remarked now and then, 'Alas !
I can bear it no longer.' When the letters had all been read,
he kept his eyes shut for some time and then remarked : 'It
is the great Cosmic Mother (Mahamaya) having Her play, and
as a consequence people suffer pain and sorrow. Who can
ever understand all this ? Men can be saved only if they take
note of all this for a while and think of the transitoriness of
worldly things. They rather remain merged in *maya*. It's
good to think of death now and again. One can hardly enu-
merate the infinite ways in which the ephemeral nature of the
world becomes revealed before people's very eyes. Still, they
are not awakened. And this is *maya* ! Here is a song that the

Master would very often sing to the devotees.' And he sang with a plaintive voice, as though trembling with sorrow :

Such is the Maya of Mahamaya ; what an illusion She has woven around !

When even Brahma and Vishnu remain ignorant, how can an ordinary mortal know ?

A fisherman lays a trap and the fish enter it.

Ways are open for the fish to move in or out ;

And yet, the fish can't escape.

The silkworm spins its cocoon from which it can escape at will ;

But, caught in the net of Mahamaya, it dies in its own trap.

'Men are exactly like silkworms ; they spin their worlds out of their own illusions, get entangled in them, and suffer sorrows and bereavements. They won't understand that the people they call their own are not really theirs. Embodiment itself is a source of sorrow in the first instance ; and, over and above that, they would spin these illusions ! But how can men help that ? They suffer because they are shrouded by the veiling power of Mahamaya. None can penetrate Her mystic play. It's all a play of Her power of destruction. That's why the Master used to say, "Mother, who, indeed, can comprehend Thy Maya ? Nor do I care to comprehend. My only prayer is that Thou mayest out of compassion grant me pure devotion at Thy feet, and pure knowledge." Often he would talk like that ; and what I say are merely his own words. He behaved just like a child after he fractured his hand by tumbling down. One day, he toddled along slowly like a child and complained. "So, Mother, You had no occasion to become embodied ; hence You never understand the sufferings that result from embodiment."'

After a little pause, he ejaculated, 'Alas, alas ! the fresh agony of widowhood !' And with this, he began shedding tears profusely. Then he shut his eyes and sat absorbed in meditation.

HARI MAHANTY'S DEATH—ANYONE WHO LOVES THE MASTER WILL GET LIBERATION AT DEATH—RASIK'S DEATH—BALARAM BOSE'S DEATH—THE DEATH OF NAVAGOPAL GHOSH'S WIFE.

Place : Belur Math. Time : March 18, 1932.

An attendant was reading out letters to Mahapurushji in the afternoon. One letter from Bhubaneshwar brought the news of the passing away of Hari Mahanty who had been blessed by Swami Brahmananda. It was a wonderful death. Just before departing from the body, Mahanty saw that Swami Brahmananda had come to him with a flower in hand which he wanted to give him. At the very sight of the Swami, Mahanty became elated with joy, and tried to get up to make obeisance to him ; but his weakness prevented him from this. Then Mahanty said to another who was by his side, 'Take the flower from Maharajji's (i.e. the Swami's) hand and give it to me'. But no one else could see the Swami. Then Mahanty said, 'How strange it is ! There stands Maharaj with the flower in hand ; and still, you don't see him-!' He went on talking in that strain ; and thus, having the vision of Maharaj till the last moment and saluting him with folded hands, Mahanty left the body.

Hearing this letter, Mahapurushji said with tears in his eyes : 'Aha, aha ! Hari Mahanty revered Maharaj very much, and loved him deeply. He was a fine man, a very devoted soul. Maharaj, also, blessed him profusely ; and that's why he granted him the vision of himself (Maharaj) at the last moment, freed him from this world, and took him away along with himself. Blessing from Maharaj means blessing from the Master himself. It goes without saying that those who had been blessed by the Master had their liberation as a matter of course ; nay, even those who have been blessed by his^o sons are liberated as well. If they get nothing more, they will at least be granted the vision of the Master at the last moment, and he will lead them by the hand. Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda),

Maharaj, and others like them are not ordinary mortals, to be sure.

'Anyone who takes shelter under the Master with all sincerity and with his whole being, anyone who loves the Master, will inevitably get liberation. Have you not heard the anecdote of that sweeper named Rasik who lived at Dakshineswar? He used to call the Master "Father". One day, the Master was returning from the direction of the Panchavati, absorbed in a spiritual mood. At that time, Rasik, the sweeper, knelt down before him and prayed with folded hands, "Father, why don't you bless me? What will be in store for me?" The Master then assured him, "You need have no fear; you will have your wish fulfilled, you will see me at the time of death." And that's what exactly happened. A little while before his death, he was carried near the *tulasi* plant. And, as the moment of death approached, Rasik cried out: "Here you are, you have come to me, Father! You have really come, Father!" And thus he breathed his last.

"The passing away of each of the devotees of the Master is a wonderful event in itself. The departure of Balaram Babu was equally wonderful. His disease had taken a serious turn, and all were anxious. One day he went on repeating, "Well, where are my brothers?" When this news reached us, we hurried to his house at Baghbazar (in Calcutta). We ourselves stayed by him and nursed him. For about two or three days before his passing away, he would not allow any of his relatives to come near him; he wanted only us to be near at hand. The little that he talked was about the Master alone. One day, before the final departure, the doctor came in and declared that he was beyond cure.

'At the last moment we were seated around him, while his wife stricken with unspeakable grief, was in the inner apartment with Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma, and others. Just then she noticed something like a piece of black cloud in the sky, which became denser by stages and began to descend. Soon it assumed the shape of a chariot and alighted on the roof of Balaram Babu's house. The Master came out of that chariot and proceeded towards the room where Balaram Babu lay. Soon after, he issued forth, taking Balaram Babu by the hand, and entered the chariot again, which then ascended and vanished

in the sky. This vision raised her mind to a very high plane where there could be no touch of grief or sorrow. When she returned to normal, she related this to Golap-Ma who came to apprise us of the fact. Balaram Babu had passed away just a little while ago.

'Such wonderful phenomena do occur. Even today we hear of supernatural ways in which the devotees leave their bodies. It is reported that they get divine visions at that time, and that some leave their bodies with the Master's name on their lips. All the devotees of the Master will have a higher state hereafter ; there's no doubt about that.'

Two days later, that is on the night of Saturday, the 20th March, the wife of Navagopal Ghosh of Ramakrishnapuram passed away while hugging the Master's picture to her bosom and repeating his name in a state of deep inwardness. Both she and her husband had visited the Master several times and were intensely devoted to him. When the news reached Mahapurushji, he remained silent and sombre for a long while, and then said : 'They are not just ordinary mortals ; they are the companions of the Master. They come in all the ages with the Incarnations of God to play their respective parts.

'When the Holy Mother was in Vrindavan (1886-87), she went one day to witness *arati* at the temple of Radhakantaji and saw Nirode's mother (i.e. Navagopal Babu's wife) waving the *chowri* (yak's tail) before the deity. Later on Mother said to her women companions, "At the time of the evening service, I saw Navagopal Babu's wife fanning the deity with a *chowri*." Ah, what love and what devotion she had for the Master ! She was, as it were, like one of the *gopis* (cowherd girls of Vrindavan). Once her sons told her, "Mother, you talk now so much of the Master ; enough of it ! Don't run after him any more. Just see what straitened circumstances he has brought us to".

'To this she replied : "How strangely you speak ! It's because I love him, I have dedicated my heart once for all to him ; and yet, look at the strange way you talk !". Mahapurushji repeated this several times with much feeling, and exclaimed : 'Aha, Aha !, Then, in a choking voice, he quoted from the *Bhagavata*, 'His handmaids were bought without any price,' and continued : 'They were bought with His love ; they

dedicated themselves at His feet. Ah ! the more I think of her love for the Master, the more I feel a strange stirring within my heart. Passion is that which centres round oneself ; and love is that which centres round God. Nirode's mother once told somebody, "You may do all kinds of spiritual practices ; but your real success lies in knowing how to die". Well, she died a perfect death ! Hugging the Master's picture to herself, and repeating his name, she has gone to the Master himself.'

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PLANS FOR SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS—
MONEY WILL COME—MAHAPURUSHJI'S ABSENCE OF BODY-CONSCIOUS-
NESS—'THE MASTER HAS KEPT YOU BEHIND TO GUIDE US'.

Place : Belur Math. Time : April 24, 1932.

Today being Sunday, the devotees have been pouring in almost in a continuous stream since morning, allowing Mahapurush Maharaj not a moment of rest. Yet he carried on conversation on spiritual matters with all in a happy mood. All returned with their hearts full.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon, a monk came in with a prominent devotee of Calcutta, and the talk turned to matters related to the coming birth-centenary celebrations of the Master in 1936. To give a rough idea of the celebrations, the monk said that it would last for a long time and would be performed in various ways throughout India at hundreds of places. Arrangements would be made for celebrations outside India as well—in Europe, America, and other places. The main aim of the celebration would be the propagation of the message of the Master throughout the world. Along with all that, a plan had also been drawn up for an exhibition of Indian culture, arts, etc. And a scheme was under discussion for holding a Parliament of Religions by inviting representatives from all countries. Besides, there was a scheme for preparing a memorial volume which would contain articles on various subjects by one hundred Indian scholars. He concluded by say-

ing that the work, to begin with, would start thus, and would be gradually expanded in accordance with public response and directions from elders like Mahapurushji.

Mahapurushji was very delighted to hear the plan of the centenary celebrations and remarked : 'That's a fine idea ; it will all lead to an excellent result. The message of the Incarnation for this age will be spread in various countries, and many people will be benefited thereby. Now, plunge into the work wholeheartedly with prayers to the Master.'

'It will require a great amount of money,' said the monk. 'The greatest worry is about the money ; I don't know where it will come from.'

'As to that, my son, the money will come of itself,' assured Mahapurushji. 'You need have no worry on that score. This is the work of God Himself. Does His work wait for anything ? Have full faith in Him, unshakable faith. He will have His own work accomplished ; we are mere tools. You will see that every scheme will be perfectly accomplished in unseen ways.'

'Maharaj, you please bless us a little that this scheme may succeed,' implored the monk earnestly.

'How can you speak of blessing ?' intervened Mahapurushji, in rather an excited mood and emotional tone. 'For isn't it my father's work ? How can you talk of blessing ? As for ourselves, we are merely his servants, his slaves. I assure you, it will all work out excellently, all will be successful—rest assured as to that.' Speaking thus, his mind seemed to have taken flight to an unknown domain ; he looked very thoughtful and remained speechless for a while. His words of firm assurance spread a spell of silence over all and the whole room became hushed.

After quite a while, when the spell had become less intense, the monk and his companion rose, saluted Mahapurushji, and prepared to depart, when Mahapurushji said softly : 'Take some money from me as an opening contribution to the Centenary Fund.' He directed one of the attendants to bring ten rupees, which he took in his own hand, and then, making the money over to the monk, said : 'Good-bye ; be at ease. There will be no dearth of money by his grace, everything will be all right.'

When they had all left, Mahapurushji sat silent, deep in his own mood. A little while before evening, he looked at the attendant and, speaking as if to himself, said : 'The centenary celebration of the Master will be a very grand affair, even grander than what they are expecting. I have thought over the matter and am convinced that the whole country will be astir with his message. This body will not last till then ; but you will see what a tremendous affair it will be. All this is coming to pass according to his own wish.'

At about half past eight at night an old monk of the Order entered Mahapurushji's room, made obeisance to him, and said : 'The crowd today was really great. I attempted twice or thrice to come to you, but drew back at the sight of the people rushing in. It must have been very strenuous for you. How do you feel now ?'

'You ask me about the body ?' asked Mahapurushji. 'But to tell you the truth, often enough, I have not the slightest idea that I have a body. But when you come and make enquiries about my health, I feel that I have to say something, and hence speak out impromptu whatever comes first to mind. Besides, who indeed cares so much for all that ? All that I find delight in is to see you and the devotees come, with whom I can talk about the Master ; and the rest of the time I spend in thoughts of his grace. I am fully ready to return to him ; but he alone knows why the call is deferred as yet.'

'Now and then I am struck with wonder at this strange divine disport of his. How great, for instance, was Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) ! But him he took away so prematurely ! Just think of the great amount of good Swamiji could have done if he had been spared. And then think of Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda). Him also he took away. But me he has left behind for his work. I am nothing in comparison with them. He alone knows his own plan. He has left me alone, and I have to face so many situations. When the direct disciples of the Master leave one by one, I feel as though the ribs on my chest fall out one by one. But I have to bear it all ; for there's none with whom I can share my grief.'

'The longer you are with us, sir,' put in the monk, 'the better is it for us. Hundreds of devotees are coming to you to get solace ; and we, too, live a care-free life just because you

are with us. The power of the Master's organization is now working with you as its centre. Now that many of his sons have departed, the Master has kept you behind to guide us.'

97

THE RISE OF THE LABOURING CLASSES—SIGNS OF DEVOTION DISCERNIBLE FROM BODY-CONFORMATION—PERSEVERING PRACTICE NECESSARY—PEACE DOES NOT COME EASILY—EXAMPLE OF THE HEREDITARY FARMER—THE CRY FOR HELP WILL NATURALLY BURST FORTH WHEN A REAL WANT IS FELT.

Place : Belur Math. Time : April 27, 1932.

While reading the magazine *Asia*, published from the U.S.A., Mahapurushji came across the news that unemployment had been abolished by law in Russia. This delighted him very much, and he said : 'Bravo, well done ! Such news gives one real delight. Alas, just look at the sorry plight of the labourers in India ! Who ever thinks of the poor in a dependent country ? Will they never have better days ? Master, please do something for them ; for you came for the poor and afflicted, to be sure.' As he spoke, he became overwhelmed with feeling and remained silent for a while. Then he added : 'But it will surely come to pass, some way out will surely be found. Swamiji declared that this was the age of the rise of the Shudra power. And one can notice the symptoms already.

'A new consciousness is stirring the labouring classes all over the world ; India, too, will not be left behind. No external force will be able to hinder this power ; for behind this lies a divine power—the spiritual struggles undertaken by the Incarnation for this age. It was Swamiji alone who foresaw the innumerable ways in which the power of the Master would find its outlet through diverse channels in diverse modes ; few others could visualize them. Just before his passing away, the Master communicated his spiritual power to Swamiji and declared : "I now become bankrupt by transferring all that to you." And he entrusted Swamiji with the mission of propagating the

message for the age. Strengthened by that force, Swamiji too worked for the good of the world. The ideas he left behind will work themselves out in various countries through various channels and through various persons. As a result, all countries will have all-round development.'

When an initiated boy-disciple of his came in and saluted him, he affectionately told him to sit in front of him. After enquiring about his health, he asked : 'Do you practise *japa* regularly? You must do so with all earnestness. Never forget to make your *japa*, do you understand? The Master is the Incarnation for this age. When you go on repeating his name, your mind will be filled with untold joy. Pray to him with all your heart ; "Master, I am a boy ; I know nothing. Be kind to me ; fill my heart with faith and devotion, and reveal to me your own reality." That will bring you full success. Call on him unceasingly and with sincere imploring. When you meditate, you should think that your *guru* is looking at you with affection and you are looking at him with love. Success doesn't come in a day. Go on practising like this with a simple heart, and everything will come all right.'

Then he offered the boy some sweets and fruits that had been offered to the Master and had him eat these in front of him. When he went out to the terrace to wash his hands and mouth, Mahapurushji remarked : 'The boy has promising signs ; he will succeed. We can study people from their very look. The Master taught us such things. It is not enough to have merely a nice outward expression ; the true signs of devotion are different.'

A certain devotee saluted him and told him of his difficulty thus : 'Sir, I have been practising *japa* and meditation ; but I fail to derive any joy from these. I am also not able to concentrate my mind. Kindly bless me, and instruct me so that I may derive joy.'

'Is it so easy, my son, to derive such joy from *japa* and meditation?' intervened Mahapurushji. 'It comes from long practice. You have to practise hard. The mind must be pure. The more intimate the relation you can have with God, and the more you can love Him, the more joy you will get from His name. God's name and God Himself are non-different. He is full of love, full of bliss ; the more you can think of Him, the

more blissful you will be. But nothing can be had with a restless mind. Go on practising *japa*, meditation, and prayer intensively; and you will find that you have acquired a fresh energy in body and mind. Gradually you will have a stronger liking for His name. The mind generally remains scattered over many objects. That scattered mind has to be gathered together and concentrated on the object of meditation. Pray earnestly; prayer is very helpful. When you feel that you cannot engage yourself in *japa* and meditation, you should then pray earnestly and sincerely.

'You should also come here now and then and associate with the monks; that will strengthen your mind greatly. When you come to the monks, you should talk with them about God, and that with sincere devotion. If, on the contrary, you talk of other things, you gain nothing thereby; on the other hand, you waste the monks' time on trivialities. The main thing that matters is to live with God in various ways, and for ever, with the help of *japa*, meditation, prayer, spiritual thought, study of scriptures, and discourses about God. Well, can you do one thing? Go immediately to the shrine and with your gaze fixed on Sri Ramakrishna pray to him. Say: "Master, you save me; I am helpless and ignorant. Lord, be merciful to me; take pity on me; make me strong. One of your sons himself has sent me to you." Pray piteously like this, and he will take pity; he will fill your heart with joy.'

In the afternoon, his letters were being read out. When a letter from a certain devotee was read, he remarked: "That's just as it should be. If one has that kind of true earnestness, one need have no more uncertainty. Write to him: "Weep sincerely, call on Him ardently and piteously; feel the sorrows of the world as deeply as you can; be on fire as it were; and then only will realization come." The Master used to say: "Worldly people cry ever so much for their wives and children; but how many really weep for God?" One that weeps because of the thought that he has not been vouchsafed the vision of God is a really fortunate man. He has already been vouchsafed the mercy of God; there can be no doubt as to that.

'Is it so easy to attain peace? How can peace come so long as one does not become enlightened? The real peace comes only when the mind becomes absorbed in Him, not

earlier. This is not a thing to come all of a sudden ; one has to persevere diligently like any born farmer (who does not become dejected by repeated failures, but sticks to his farm, come what may).'

One disciple had prayed to him that he might be granted pure love for the lotus feet of the Master even in this life. In answer he directed it to be written : 'I am very delighted to learn, my son, that you feel a sincere desire in your mind to acquire true love and faith at the lotus feet of the Master. Pray to him most fervently. He knows one's heart. He knows what he should give to his devotee and when. Continue to remain at his feet, taking refuge in him. A true devotee does not worry about this birth or that. That's all a very low idea. Rather pray to the Master for full faith, devotion, and love. Don't talk to him about this birth or that. May you be filled with faith, devotion, and love—that is all that I pray for. A true devotee's prayer will be this :

O Destroyer of hell ! Wherever I may dwell—

In heaven, hell, or this earth, according to Thy wish—

This is the prayer I most want to offer,

That in birth after birth

I may have unshakeable devotion at Thy lotus feet.

If one has unshakeable love at his feet, every place becomes heaven to one, everything is then full of bliss. You may have this by his grace.'

In answer to another disciple's letter, his reply ran thus : 'Anyone who longs for the Lord gets Him : but the longing must be genuine. The call must be earnest and unequivocal ; then only does He reveal Himself. The Master used to say : "God is like Uncle Moon—an uncle (or a near one) equally to all children. Anyone that wants Him gets Him." Nobody can teach another how to lament his separation from the Lord ; that comes only when the time is ripe. . . . The cry for help will naturally burst out of the inmost core of one's heart when one feels the real want, when one feels in agony just because one has not seen God, when the whole world appears as void in His absence. No one can say when that blessed moment will come. That state will come only when He is gracious, and when you feel it in your own heart. Go on calling on Him

with earnest supplication ; pray incessantly : "Lord, take pity on me, be gracious to me." He will hear your prayer—I give you that assurance. He is the fulfiller of all the wishes of His devotees. I pray from my heart that the Lord may fulfil your desire.'

98

LIBERATION CAN BE HAD ANYWHERE—SAMADHI IS NECESSARY—SAMADHI IS DEPENDENT ON DIVINE GRACE—IT IS NO GOOD ROAMING ABOUT SO MUCH—FOR LASTING RESULTS, CONTINUE STEADILY IN THE MONASTERY—WHAT BEAUTY IS THERE IN THE EXTERNAL WORLD?—HUMAN LIFE IS VAIN UNLESS ONE SEES HIM.

Place : Belur Math. Time : April 28, 1932.

A monk who had gone to Uttarkashi for spiritual practices and then fallen ill there had written a letter to Mahapurushji telling him of the various kinds of hardships and inconveniences one had to suffer in that remote Himalayan retreat. Mahapurushji wanted the reply to be written thus : 'Rather than suffer there, come back here immediately. Can there be any hard and fast rule that one will have liberation only at Uttarkashi ? Liberation or *samadhi* can be attained anywhere, if it so please Him, if such be His dispensation. And you have been at that place long enough to know what it is. Now come back and continue your spiritual practices here itself, just as you had been doing before. The main thing that matters is to acquire devotion to His lotus feet. As to that, one can have it here as well. The climate of those places does not suit many of the monks ; either they suffer continuously, and then die prematurely ; or they lose their mental balance on account of forced hardships.

'Well, my son, all depends on His will. Take refuge in Him and continue to be at His feet. Call on Him constantly, pray to Him. Gradually you will feel His grace in your heart. One cannot have true enlightenment without *samadhi* ; that *samadhi*, again, is dependent on His grace. The chief aim of

life is the realization of God. That does not depend on any particular locality. Why, consider even the life of the Master himself. Did he ever go to Uttarkashi or roam about in the Himalayas to practise austerities? One has to strive by accepting his life as the ideal. Every act of his life is an ideal for the present age. That is the most dependable example.'

Impelled by a spirit of renunciation, one *brahmacharin* had gone straightway to the Himalayas to do spiritual practices. With regard to that Mahapurushji said: 'Well, my son, it's no good roaming about so much like that. That brings no good result. Not that it is absolutely useless; some result does, of course, accrue. But it is all temporary; it doesn't last long. The fact is that, if one would have a lasting result, one must continue steadily in the monastery of the Master and Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda), and undertake his spiritual practices there itself. That's why Swamiji established this monastery with the very blood of his heart, as it were. And such an association of monks! Where, indeed, can you find such monks? It is difficult to get the companionship of such saintly, pure, dispassionate, learned, and spiritually inspired monks. Besides, you have here knowledge, devotion, and selfless service, and *yoga*—in fact all the spiritual paths. No other place can be compared to this in suitability for spiritual exercises.

'Can those who are possessed of real renunciation afford to roam about from place to place in search of a suitable spot? They quietly sit down somewhere. In the Himalayas, now and then, you can come across only a few really saintly and dispassionate monks who are engaged in spiritual practices with diligence. They live in very solitary places. As for the rest, they somehow while away their time. That's why Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda) used to say: "As for ourselves, we are as bad as thieves (i.e. stealing our time). Can we spend all our time in spiritual efforts? Much of our time is wasted uselessly. In comparison with that, it is much better to undertake a little selfless service and carry on spiritual practices along with that." As for roaming about and undergoing hardships, our experience, too, in that line is not a little. We had enough of that experience in life. Wherever I went in the Himalayas, in hills and forests, I engaged myself fully in *japa* and meditation.

'I have some experience as to how long the appeal of natural scenery etc. lasts. Not for long, to be sure. When my mind lost contact with external objects and merged in the object of meditation, I had no consciousness of my environment. When the ideas of time and space are eliminated then all that remains is Bliss alone—Existence-Consciousness-Bliss intensified. Inside you it is all uniformly like that. What beauty, after all, can there be in the external world? Nothing at all. The mine of all beauty is inside. All that is manifest outside is finite; you can chalk out its limits. But that which is not manifest is infinite. The more the mind enters inside, the more does it get absorbed there. "A quarter of Him constitutes the whole universe; His three immortal quarters are transcendent." Just imagine how vast He is! It's enough, if the mind gets merged in Him even once only. Then the mind can no longer derive any happiness from things outside. He is, in fact, the mine of all peace. Human life will have been spent in vain unless one sees Him. Nothing matters at all unless one has the vision of God.'

99

PERSEVERANCE NECESSARY—VALUE OF DEVOTION TO THE PERSONAL GOD.

Place : Belur Math. Time : May 21, 1932.

It was afternoon. A certain disciple, who had become very dejected owing to his failure to fix his mind during his regular spiritual practices, told Mahapurushji : 'I make my best effort, sir; but the mind does not get fixed. Kindly instruct me what am I to do. Should I be denied all success?'

Mahapurushji replied with some firmness : 'Well, my son, you have still one and a half months of your leave in hand. Now, why don't you try to do just as I tell you, and then watch the result. Certainly, it won't do to be dejected so soon like that. You must have faith and patience. You have to be persistently up and doing. What will you gain by dejected

tion and moaning just because you cannot achieve anything with a little effort? I tell you frankly, my son, I know of no artificial trick by which the mind can be fixed or divine bliss attained. The only means I know, the one that I learnt from the Master, I have already told you. I warn you further that no speedy result can be expected in this path. One has to go on persevering in the path, day after day, month after month, year after year, with the same determination—one has to make spiritual efforts. The mind that has remained scattered so long has to be gradually gathered together with patience, and then fixed at the feet of God. Call on the Master, and persevere steadfastly. The mind will gradually become steady and fixed, and you will get bliss. Don't you believe in a Cosmic Power? For you it is best to think of God as possessed of qualities and having a form. That will help the mind become concentrated easily. At first, I used to frequent the Brahma Samaj. At last, when I met the Master at Dakshineswar, he asked me: "Do you believe in Shakti (Cosmic Power)?" I replied: "No Sir, I like formlessness better. And yet it strikes me that some Power pervades everything." Then, he went to the Kali temple, and I followed him. As he proceeded towards the temple, he was caught up in a divine mood; and when he reached the temple, he prostrated himself before the Mother, full of great devotion. I was in rather a fix. I hesitated at first to bow down before the image of Kali. But along with that, I thought that, after all, Brahman is all-pervasive; and if so, He must be in this image as well; and so, I could have no hesitation in bowing down. As soon as this thought arose, I too bowed down. Later on, as I began to visit the Master more frequently, my faith in God with form became stronger. It was good fortune for me that I was vouchsafed such association with the Master, that I could get his grace.'

NO HAPPINESS IN THE EPHEMERAL—‘THE INFINITE ALONE IS BLISS’—DESIRE CAN NEVER BE SATIATED—SPIRITUAL PATHS VARY—THE GURU HAS TO ASCERTAIN THE NEEDS OF EACH ASPIRANT—TOO MUCH ROAMING ABOUT IS NOT BENEFICIAL.

Place : Belur Math. Time : May 30, 1932.

The talk was about the progress of science in the West and the consequent increase in physical comfort and enjoyment in various forms, in which respect western people were much better off than Indians. In this connection, Mahapurushji said : ‘All that happiness is ephemeral, after all. What substance do you find in all that ? They can become inebriated by such momentary happiness, just because they have not tasted the bliss of God. I tell you, my son, there is no happiness in lust and lucre, whatever others may say. There is no happiness in lust and lucre, there’s not a bit of it, none at all, no matter where you are, in heaven or elsewhere—and whether you are a man of learning or anything else. This is the declaration of God Himself. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* also, it is said : “That which is Infinite is Bliss, there is no happiness in the finite. The Infinite alone is Bliss. But this Infinite Itself has to be sought for.” True happiness lies in that infinite Reality. That alone should one know. Science has failed to inform people of that Infinite. It is concerned only with the things of this world, with material substances. The enjoyment of worldly things merely sharpens the appetite for more enjoyment. How can one find any contentment there ? How can peace result from that ? For the seed of trouble lies buried within enjoyment itself : “The desire for pleasurable objects can never be satiated through enjoyment ; it increases evermore like a fire in which clarified butter is poured.”’

Then, in connection with attaining peace in life, he said : ‘There’s no contentment in the non-Self ; true contentment comes from knowledge of the Self. And one has to seek that contentment within oneself. Peace is within, it is not outside. Knowledge, devotion, love of God—all that lies within. Carry

on your spiritual practices, call on God. He will grant you peace within yourself, my son ; there's no doubt about that.'

At night, speaking about initiation, he remarked : 'Initiation is of many kinds. There is no such hard and fast rule that all should have some *mantra* for mental repetition. For all do not have the same kind of spiritual attitude, nor are all equally qualified. It is true, of course, that the ordinary *gurus* cannot make these distinctions. Someone may like God with form, while someone else may stick to God without form. Then, there are degrees of belief both with regard to the Personal God and the Impersonal. Someone likes meditation ; he should meditate. Someone else likes *japa* ; he should undertake *japa*. Someone, again, may have to undertake both *japa* and meditation. One has to instruct an aspirant after ascertaining the category to which he belongs and the spiritual attitude he prefers. If, on the contrary, one huddles them all together and shapes them according to one single mould, the aspirants will only be delayed on their way to the fullest realization. That's what is bound to happen.'

In connection with the habit of roaming about that some monks have, he said : 'Well, it is not good for the devotees of God to roam about too much ; that hinders the growth of true devotion. Hence one should sit down somewhere after seeing some holy places ; and then one should occupy oneself fully with one's spiritual efforts. That helps the development of spiritual intensity and love for God. Too much moving about hither and thither dries up spiritual intensity. But I am not referring to the itinerant monks who take up a vow for such a purpose for a limited time.'

THE MASTER SLEPT VERY LITTLE—MAHAPURUSHJI'S EXALTED MOOD—HE VIVIDLY SEES GOD IN ALL—I ACT JUST AS THE MASTER WANTS ME TO.

Place : Belur Math. Time : 1932.

Nowadays Mahapurushji is in a state of unspeakably elevated divine mood. The mood is so intense at times that he spends the whole night without sleep, merged in his spiritual depth. He has no thought of the body. If anyone talks about that, he smiles sweetly like a child, and says : 'Well, "Whom can anybody kill when Krishna protects him?" This body will somehow continue so long as the Master wants to preserve it for his own work.' If anyone argued that prolonged sleeplessness would tell upon his health, he would reply : 'What need for sleep has a *yogin* ? When the mind is in *samadhi*, there is no need for sleep. Besides, meditation has such efficacy of its own as to eliminate the need of sleep ; when a particular state of it is reached, it removes all the fatigue of the body. The body seems to be more fresh and vigorous in that state of *samadhi* than even after a deep sleep ; and an inexpressible joy fills the body and mind. As for myself, whenever I feel physically tired, I raise up my mind from the physical state to merge it in *samadhi* ; and then there is bliss alone.

'We have seen how, often enough, the Master never used to sleep. Now and then he might snatch an hour's or half an hour's sleep at the most. Most of the time he would be absorbed in *samadhi* ; and the remaining time he would spend in spiritual moods. These moods became very pronounced at night. He would spend the whole night repeating the name of Mother or of Hari. Whenever we stayed with the Master at Dakshineswar, we were always filled with awe. He had no sleep at all ; and whenever we awoke from sleep, we heard him talking with Mother in a state of divine inebriation ; or we saw him pacing up and down the room, muttering something inaudibly all the while. Sometimes he would wake us up in the middle of the night itself. "Hullo, my dear boy," he would say, "have

you come here to sleep? If you spend the whole night in sleep, when will you call on God?" As soon as we heard his voice, we would sit up in a great hurry and start meditating.'

For some days Mahapurushji was in a specially exalted mood. He would salute one and all with folded hands and with great respect whenever they came in to pay their respects to him. It did not matter whether the visitor was an old monk of the monastery or a novitiate, a grown-up disciple or a little boy or girl; as soon as the visitor came in view, he would be the first to raise his folded hands and touch his forehead with them as a token of respectful greeting, and then only would he inquire about their well-being. That nonplussed and overwhelmed one and all. Besides, he would not allow anyone to depart without taking something to eat; he felt uneasy until the visitor had had something. Especially, the little boys and girls had to be fed sumptuously with sweets and fruits.

One night, it was about two o'clock. Nature was absolutely calm and quiet. A green light faintly glowed in Mahapurushji's room, and he sat on his bed with his legs folded in. Two attendants at a time used to keep vigil in his room for the whole night by turns and attend to his needs. Two o'clock was the time for change of duties. As one of the attendants for the new turn approached him, Mahapurushji asked in a solemn tone: 'Who's that?' As soon as the attendant responded, Mahapurushji saluted him with folded hands. The attendant was an initiated disciple of his; so he was greatly hurt in being greeted thus by his own *guru*. With tears in his eyes and full of emotion, the disciple said with folded hands: 'Sir, why did you salute me? I am only a servant of yours and I have taken refuge at your feet. This won't augur well for me.'

This aggrieved complaint of the attendant moved Mahapurushji very much, and he said in a slow, deep voice: 'Don't be sorry, my son. I assure you that this will do you no harm. Believe me when I say this. I can well realize that you are much upset. But how can I help it? For I see Narayana Himself in you. Do you think that I saluted you? I salute God Himself whom I see clearly in you. You may think that I salute you all; but the fact is otherwise. How can I explain to you the various ways the Master is blessing me and the

diverse visions he is granting me?' With this, he became absolutely silent.

On another occasion, when asked by an attendant about the reason for his saluting one and all, Mahapurushji said : 'As soon as people come in front of me, I get visions of different gods and goddesses ; and so I salute those deities. When somebody approaches me, first of all I see that particular effulgent form of God through which He reveals Himself in that particular personality. The persons themselves appear indistinctly like shadowy beings, while the divine aspect itself appears vivid and living. That's why I make my obeisance. The divine forms disappear after my salutation, and then only can I see the human figures distinctly and recognize them as well.'

'Sir, you salute each and all as a result of your divine vision ; but how can we understand that ?' protested the attendant. 'To us it appears as a very odd affair. It is but natural that everyone should salute you first ; instead, you yourself salute them. That fills the monks and devotees with grief and they begin fancying many things.'

'Let them fancy what they like', said Mahapurushji. 'Do you think that I do all this of my own accord ? I myself often don't understand why I act like that ; I am struck with wonder. So how can others understand ? There's nothing else but the Master within this frame. I act just as he wants me to, and I speak just as it pleases him. To whom can I explain and who, indeed, can understand the various ways in which the Master is playing through this body ? You all are, after all, too immature—mere boys. Had Maharaj, Hari Maharaj, Sharat Maharaj, and others been here now, they would have understood all this ; and I, too, would have derived some solace by opening out my heart to them. In any case, it will be just as the Master wills. He can play with his pet animal as he pleases. As my days advance, I now find that the mind becomes more active in proportion as other activities lessen. He alone knows for how many days more this body will pull on like this.'

**MAHAPURUSHJI HAPPY ON ACCOUNT OF RAIN—HOLY COMPANY
GENERATES LOVE OF GOD—INTIMACY IN ONE'S RELATION WITH GOD—
EFFECT OF MASTER'S COMPANY—HIS MERE LOOK COULD GRANT SAMADHI—THE MASTER WAS NONE OTHER THAN MOTHER KALI.**

Place : Belur Math. Time : June 23, 1932.

It has been raining from early morning. Mahapurushji was in a very happy mood. With folded hands, he prayed to the Mother of the Universe : 'How can Thy creation be saved, Mother, unless Thou Thyself save it ?' All was, in fact, being destroyed for want of rain. Then, according to his direction, some grains were scattered on the adjacent terrace for sparrows, pigeons, and other birds. He was highly delighted to find the birds sweeping down in flocks on the grains and helping themselves to these. And he said : 'I can't move out ; so this alone gives me much delight.'

After a short siesta following the midday meal, he sat quietly on his bed with his mind indrawn. Then he asked an attendant to read from the *Bhagavata*. The portion dealing with Sri Krishna's talk with Uddhava was read. At one place, in connection with the efficacy of association with saintly people, the Lord says to Uddhava :

Yoga cannot bind Me, nor Sankhya, nor religious duties,
Nor study of scriptures, nor charity, nor rites and rituals,
nor even gifts ;

Nor vows, nor sacrifices, nor the Vedas, nor pilgrimage,
nor control of body and senses—

But association with the holy snaps all worldly ties.

Hearing the last line, Mahapurushji was visibly moved, and he said : 'Aha, aha, what a fine sentence ! Do you mark that the Lord Himself says that holy company is incomparable ! As a result of association with the holy one reaches the state of being freed from all worldly attachments. All wants and desires are then destroyed root and branch, and one feels the nearness of God. How much of spiritual practice can a

man undertake with the little strength that he has? Besides, can one really comprehend God by spiritual practices and austerities? God is a lover of His devotees; He is satisfied with love and devotion alone. He reveals Himself wherever there are yearning and love. That's why the Master said: "The devotee's heart is the parlour of God."

"The mind becomes purified by spiritual practices, renunciation, and austerities; and in that pure heart, the love for God finds expression, and God reveals Himself there. The thing that matters is to love God, thinking Him to be one's own. The *gopis* knew "Krishna is ours." Just think of that idea of intimacy! In that, there is no idea of Godhood, no hankering even for salvation; only love absolute reigns supreme, only pure devotion remains.

'And holy companionship has the wonderful power of generating love for God. Who is a really holy man? The man in whose heart sits God Himself. It is only as the result of merit earned in a succession of lives that one has the good fortune to associate with holy people and be blessed by them. It must be the result of your merit earned in many lives that you have been able somehow to enter this holy Order of the Master.

'The whole course of a man's life becomes reoriented as a result of holy association; and its effect, too, is very lasting. In our own lives we noticed that we might have been in the Master's company, perhaps for an hour or two, during all of which we might not have talked with him much; but its effect lasted for days. We would be then in a sort of God-intoxication, as it were, and we would be absorbed in thinking of God all the time. He is an exception to be sure; for he was none other than God Himself, the Incarnation for this age. A mere kind look of his could grant a man *samadhi*; and a mere touch of his could bring about the revelation of God.

"The contact with perfected souls will most certainly stimulate love for God in others. That's a unique phenomenon; that's also a test for knowing whether one has seen God. One imbibes thoughts of God as soon as one comes near a realized soul. In a book of the Vaishnavas, they have a fine saying:

At whose sight one is reminded of Krishna spontaneously,
Know him to be chief among the Vaishnavas.

'Just as one feels the heat of fire when one approaches it, so also one's heart and soul are afire with thoughts of God when one comes in contact with a truly holy man.

A worm is placed on the head of a deity along with the flower it sits on ;

So also does companionship of the saints save the fallen ones.

'It should not be thought that only those who suffer from the afflictions of the world and fall on bad days should visit holy men. Even if those who are born with a silver spoon in their mouth, those who are steeped in luxury and enjoyment, even if they get the companionship of holy people by some past merit, then from their minds also is wiped away for ever the hankering for this ephemeral, so-called happiness ; their minds also turn towards the everlasting bliss, and their lives become fulfilled by tasting that unsurpassable joy, that highest joy of God-realization. To the Master, also, came quite a number of rich and highly placed people. And he turned their minds Godward out of his mercy. Then they became filled with the bliss of God.

'Could we ourselves ever have become what we are unless we had seen him and been blessed by him ? How can I express his compassion in words ?... The Master was, after all, none other than Mother Kali, who in the form of the Master is saving the world even now. Ah, how kind he was ! How limitless was his compassion ! We were extremely fortunate to have been granted the companionship of an Incarnation of his stature. Our lives have become fully blessed. To you also, I declare that he is the Incarnation for this age ; he is the saviour of all creatures, the protector of all—God Himself. Take refuge in him, lie down at his feet ; you will have everything fulfilled. You will be blessed with devotion and salvation and whatever else you need. This is all I have to say.'

THE MASTER'S SONG AND DANCE—SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AT NIGHT.

Place : Belur Math. Time : July 27, 1932.

As Mahapurushji's room was being cleaned in the afternoon, he sat in the adjoining room facing the Ganga, and started teaching a *brahmacharin* the song, 'I stand here firm with the magic ring of the name of Kali drawn around me' etc. At times his voice became choked with coughing ; so he cleared the throat now and then, and said : 'My voice is gone ; how can I sing now ?' And yet the voice was really fine !

Next the *brahmacharin* asked him : 'Did the Master used to sing the song "Who indeed took away Thine own name, O Kanai (i.e. Krishna) ?"' 'Yes, he used to sing it', said Mahapurushji, and he started singing :

Who indeed took away Thine own name, O Kanai, Thou stealer of butter at Vraja ?

Where's Thy yellow garment, and who took away Thy charming diadem ?

Coming to Nadia Thou wearest a shaven head, and puttest on a loin-cloth with string.¹

What mood art Thou in, O Kanai, and for what want is this ?

Renouncing Thy power and majesty in all the six forms, Thou hast assumed the loin-cloth and string.

With tears, tremulous body, faltering voice, and all limbs throbbing with divine joy,

Thou hast lost Thyself in the name of Hari, in the company of Thy followers.

The song finished, he sat silently for a while and remarked : 'Ah, how charmingly the Master would sing ! And he became lost in spiritual moods as soon as he started singing. I have never since heard such charming and soul-enchanting song from anyone else. My heart and soul have been filled up with his

¹ The belief is that *Krishna* incarnated as Sri Chaitanya at Nadia. The former was a cowherd boy, the latter a monk.

songs. And how beautiful was his dancing ! This was because he danced out of the ecstasy of divine communion ; that's why it looked so beautiful. His body was very well-proportioned and supple. He danced out of the fulness of his divine mood. Those scenes are still very vivid to me. That charming dance of his would stimulate us also to dance ; and he, too, would force us to join in. "Why should you feel shy?" he would say at times. "You have to dance in the name of Hari. Certainly that's not a matter to be ashamed of. Nothing can be achieved so long as one is not rid of three things—shyness, hatred, and fear. One who cannot become mad in the name of Hari and dance, lives a vain life indeed." He would talk to us like that. In that dilapidated house at Baranagore (in the suburbs of Calcutta, where the first Ramakrishna monastery was started), we danced so madly that at times, we were afraid, lest the house should collapse. Ah ! blessed be the name of Mahaprabhu (Sri Chaitanya) ! What an invaluable thing he did for the good of men ! The whole locality, as far as this loud sound of the singing of Hari's name (introduced by him) reaches, becomes sanctified by that holy music. Girish Babu's composition of this song is very fine :

Call on Hari, my mind, call on Hari !

O Keshava, Thou who roamest in gardens and forests,
be kind to me ! . . .

And so on.'

A little later Mahapurushji slowly moved out to the verandah overlooking the Ganga. It was difficult for him to walk. He stood there holding the railing, and looked at the beauty of the Ganga. When a disciple expressed his mental anguish at his failure to have realization so far, Mahapurushji said : 'Weep before the Master, call on him ; all will be granted in time. My son, does peace come to the mind without any effort ? Call on him and weep with all sincerity.'

A boat was gliding on the river in full sail. Pointing to this, he told the disciple, 'Just see how finely the boat glides upstream with the help of the southern breeze. Do you understand that ? The *guru's* blessings help one in one's spiritual endeavour. By Mother's grace you have it already. Now dive deep into prayer, meditation, etc. Eat very little at night, and

engage yourself in *japa* and meditation. Night is, in fact, the best time for *japa* and meditation. Over and above that, you have the bank of the Ganga, the monastery of your *guru*, and the association of holy monks to help you ; you will succeed very soon. Now and then, you should forego a night meal altogether and spend the whole time from evening to sunrise in *japa*. Call on him with heart and soul. Perform your duties, but keep your mind fixed at the lotus feet of Hari.' Then he sang in a very low voice :

O monk, drink the cup filled with the juice of Hari's
name

And be fully inebriated. . . .

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THE MAN OF REALIZATION IS NEVER DISTURBED BY DESIRES—PEACE FOLLOWS RENUNCIATION—'I SEE EVERYTHING AS CONSCIOUSNESS'—SERVICE OF THE GURU MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY SPIRITUAL PRACTICE—DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING THAT THE MASTER IS GOD HIMSELF—DOING THE MASTER'S WORK COMPARED WITH SERVING THE GURU—'HE NEVER DISAPPOINTS A SUPPLICANT'—'THIS WORLD HAS NO EXISTENCE FOR ME'—MAHAPURUSHJI'S VISION OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AS SHIVA—OTHER VISIONS OF MAHAPURUSHJI—HIS DIET—HIS REQUEST FOR A MANGO—'CONSIDER THE MASTER HIMSELF AS YOUR SON'—IGNORING OTHERS' FAULTS—'WE CAN UNDERSTAND A MAN AT A SINGLE GLANCE'—MAHAPURUSHJI KEEPS HIS MIND DOWN WITH TRIFLES—RENUNCIATION THE GREATEST ADORNMENT OF A MONK—THE MOTHER WILL ARRANGE FOR EVERYTHING—MANTRA GIVEN BY A PERFECTED GURU IS IMPREGNATED WITH NEW POWER—DIFFICULT TO SERVE PERFECTED SOULS—MAHAPURUSHJI'S IDENTITY WITH THE MASTER.

Place : Belur Math. Time : 1932.

Mahapurushji Maharaj had hardly any sleep in those days ; he was all the time merged in bliss in one or other of various divine moods. From his talks with the numberless devotees and inmates of the monastery, who visited him during the day-

time, one could get an inkling of the blissful state he was in. At times he talked of such high states of realization that most people failed to grasp their meaning. This state became more manifest at night. He would then sometimes sing religious songs in a very low tone, and at other times he would intone verses of the Upanishads, the *Gita*, the *Chandi*, or the *Bhagavata*. Often enough he would suddenly stop in the midst of his chanting and sit silently, absorbed in his own mood. Very often he would become unaware of the outer world and his surroundings.

One night he sat on his bed with eyes shut. It was about two o'clock. The whole monastery was perfectly silent. After long meditation in this way, he intoned softly from the *Gita* two verses beginning with, '*Apuryamanam achalapratishtam*' etc. Then he asked the attendant there : 'Do you know the meaning of these ?' The attendant kept silent, and so he said : 'Just as the sea, always full and steady, remains undisturbed by the entry of water from the rivers etc., similarly, although thoughts of desirable things may rise as a result of past tendencies in a man of realization, still his mind is not disturbed at all, just like the full, unagitated sea. Having realized the absolute state of peace, he remains contented in his Self. But people running after enjoyment can never attain peace. True peace comes to one who renounces all kinds of desire, becomes passionless, egoless, and devoid of the idea of possession.

'Eternal peace cannot come so long as passions and desires persist ; and those passions and desires cannot be wholly uprooted without the grace of God. As for myself, the Master wiped off all passions and desires from me out of his own mercy ; I have none at all. This body continues by his will and for his work alone ; for I 'am none other than the pure, intelligent, free soul. As for this body itself, I often forget that it exists at all, though it is true that the Lord is having much of his work done through it ; hence it is that he preserves it. But I myself have no desire. Do you understand that ? I am the Bliss Itself that is Brahman.'

With this he sat silent ; his countenance seemed to have changed wholly for the time being—as though he were a new man altogether. One felt afraid even to look at him. At long last he said, in a sort of soliloquy : 'Mother has granted me

all that I may need out of Her mercy. She has filled me up fully with all She had in Her store. I have nothing else to desire. By Her grace I have everything. "*Yam labdhva chaparam labham manyate nadhikam tatah*"—getting which, one does not think any other gain to be greater." She alone knows why She still preserves this body.'

On another occasion also, it was dead of night. Mahapurushji was seated on his bed, deep in meditation. After a long while he started opening his eyes at times and closing them. Just then, a cat entered the room and mewed. He looked in that direction and saluted the cat with folded hands. The attendant nearby could not at first understand that he was saluting the cat. So he looked inquiringly at Mahapurushji, who then explained : 'Look here, my boy, the Master has now brought me to such a state that I see everything as nothing but Consciousness Itself. That same Consciousness is at play through everything—houses, furniture, beds, bedsteads, and all creatures ; the difference is only in names, but there is oneness behind all. I can see that very clearly, so that I cannot check that mood however much I may try. That Consciousness shines even through this cat in all its brilliance. This is the mood in which the Master now keeps me fully absorbed. Men and women come in and go out ; and I talk with them because I have to. I also eat and move about as in common life, because I have to. All that proceeds as though out of past habit.

'But whenever I lift my mind even a little from all these, I come face to face with this play of Consciousness everywhere. Names and forms and all such things belong to a very low order of existence. When the mind transcends names and forms you come to the acme of realization ; then everything is full of Bliss, everything is full of Consciousness. Such things cannot be explained through word of mouth. He alone can know, who attains that state.' He seemed to be in a mood to talk of many things more ; but he became silent all of a sudden. The attendant stood stock-still, wondering at what he had heard.

Mahapurushji used to warn his attendants that it would not do only to be engaged in serving the *guru* ; they would have to undertake spiritual practices as well. And he used to warn them that anyone who neglected his spiritual practices and spent his time merely in the service of saintly people and

living in association with them, might often become puffed up with pride and egotism, thinking himself superior to others, just because of these advantages he had over them. One day, at dead of night, he said to an attendant : 'Look here, it is good that you are serving me. It is only out of the inestimable mercy of the Master that he has been making you serve one of his sons. But mind you, my son, you must carry on spiritual practices along with this.

'You will understand what the Master really was, only when you carry on your *japa*, meditation, prayer, etc. regularly. You will court failure by thinking of us as mere human beings—have this fully in mind. To make this idea of divinity fully effective, you have to undertake strenuous spiritual exercises. One is vouchsafed the divine mood when one's mind becomes purified through meditation on God. Though we have seen the Master, lived with him, and have been blessed by him, still what a series of difficult spiritual practices he made us undergo ! Could even we ourselves, understand in the first instance that he was God and had come down to this world to save it ? Could we recognize him as such ?

'Gradually, through spiritual practice and insight, that knowledge has become permanent. At the same time it is true, of course, that nothing has been achieved without his grace, though it is a fact that his grace does descend when one implores him piteously and seeks him earnestly. I have realized by stages that he is God Himself, none other than the Lord of all the gods and of the whole universe ; he has revealed to me his real nature out of his own grace.

'Undertake *japa* at dead of night. If you make your *japa* at dead of night, you will have the result very soon, and your whole being will be filled with joy. The bliss will be so deep, indeed, that you will feel no impulse to leave your *japa*. You have to keep awake at any rate, for my service. Sit down during this time for your *japa*. After all, you have not to work for me all the time, it's once in a while that I want help. So here is a great opportunity ; engage yourself fully in *japa*. Do you understand that ? Don't let your time pass idly, my son. You have to be fully absorbed in calling on him ; it won't do to be half-hearted. Whatever you do in this respect, you must do with your whole mind ; then only you will get joy. That's

why the Master sang : "Dive deep, my mind, with the name of Kali, into the fathomless water of the sea of your heart, which is the repository of jewels." One seldom derives any joy from a work, unless one can become fully engrossed in it. God looks at the heart, at the sincerity of a man ; He does not keep count of the time. Besides, when one undertakes *japa* and meditation regularly, one gets one's mind purged of impurities thereby, and that mood becomes fixed in the mind. One has to practise daily and constantly. In the *Gita*, the Lord declares : "The mind can be controlled, O Arjuna, through practice and dispassion."

'Go on calling on him daily with piteous imploring and tears ; and you will find that the Power of Brahman, the coiled-up energy in you, will be awakened—the road to the Bliss that is Brahman will be opened. If once that Mother, one with Brahman Itself, becomes propitious, one has nothing more to worry about. In the *Chandi*, it is said : "It is that Blissful Mother Herself who, when favourably disposed, becomes the cause of people's salvation." It is She Herself who, having become propitious, grants the boon of freedom to men. She is but ever ready to grant ; but who, indeed, is eager to accept ? She grants everything—devotion, freedom, and all—if only one prays earnestly.

'You left home aspiring to realize God. That's the aim of life ; and you must not forget that main purpose. Have the Master installed in your heart through strenuous effort, constant *japa* and meditation, continuous prayer and remembrance ; then you will be granted pure joy, and you will have great fun. All bodies have to die. Our bodies, too, are not everlasting, after all. It's already old enough, and it may fall off any day—then you will see darkness all around. But if, through *japa* and meditation, you can see your Chosen Deity, you will find that the *guru* is not different from the Deity, that he is seated for ever in your own heart. The *guru* does not cease to exist even when this gross body is no more. I tell you all this because I love you. My only prayer is that you may be vouchsafed all that is really good. . . .'

* * * *

'Now that I am ill, you live near me, serving me day and night. That's good enough. But you will be greatly deluded

if you come to think that you alone are serving me and thereby achieving something very great ; do you understand that ? Do you think that you do something extraordinary by fetching something for me and nursing this body a little ? That's not it. Somebody may be very far away, doing the Master's work with all sincerity ; that, too, is a service to us. For the Master is the Soul of my soul. Even those who live thousands of miles away, working heart and soul in the Master's cause and have established the Master in their hearts with the help of spiritual practices, are very dear to me ; they are serving me only. I am happy when the Master is happy through service. "The whole universe becomes content when He is content." By doing the Master's work, they achieve greater results than by serving their *guru*.'

* * * *

In the morning, when most of the inmates of the monastery had left after making their obeisance to Mahapurushji, a monk told him of the restlessness of his mind and the consequent dejection. His imploring moved Mahapurushji, who said : 'Why should you be afraid, my son ? Continue at His door taking shelter with Him ; He never disappoints a supplicant.'

'All my time has been spent in vain,' moaned the monk. 'I have not yet seen God ; I haven't got peace of mind. At times complete loss of faith assails the mind ; I begin to doubt even the invaluable instruction I have received from you and others.'

This made Mahapurushji's face turn red. With great warmth he said : 'Look here, my son, if the Master is true, we too are true. Whatever I say is nothing but the truth ; we have not come to cheat people. If we sink you too will sink with us ; but by his grace we have realized that we shall never sink, nor will you.'

* * * *

As Mahapurushji remained confined to his room, an attendant had the duty of keeping him informed of everything concerning the monastery, after personally moving about the precincts and inquiring about the health of the inmates, the cattle, and other matters of importance. Mahapurushji used to receive his reports in the afternoon. One day, when the atten-

dant came to him with the report, he found him seated alone in a very grave mood. His eyes were half-closed, as though it was an effort to keep them open to see the outer world. Even though the attendant stood in front of him, he did not make the usual inquiry; it seemed as if he was not aware of his presence. Noticing him in such an abstract mood, the attendant moved aside. After a long interval had passed thus, when Mahapurushji began casting his look around, the attendant moved in front of him and began giving the report as usual. Then Mahapurushji said: 'Look here, this world has no existence for me at all; Brahman alone exists. It is only for the sake of keeping the mind on the normal plane that I talk and inquire about things.' With this he resumed his former mood, and did not care to hear any report that day.

One day he told us of a vision he had had about Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) when living with the Master at the Cossipore garden-house. 'Well, a very strange phenomenon occurred while living with Swamiji at the garden-house,' he related, 'in those days we all slept together side by side, in a room downstairs; for we had not enough beddings worth mentioning. We had a big mosquito-curtain which we put up, and all took shelter under it. One night I slept near Swamiji; there were Shashi Maharaj (Swami Ramakrishnananda) and some others as well. Suddenly I woke up to find the inside of the whole curtain flooded with a brilliant light. Swamiji had been by my side; but now I could not find him there. Instead, there slept a number of Shivas—all of the age of seven or eight years, without clothes and white in colour, and their heads covered with matted hair. It was the light emanating from their bodies that lit up the place. As I looked on I was dumbfounded at the sight. I could not understand anything at first. I thought it was a hallucination; so I rubbed my eyes and again looked at it—there slept the Shivas, sure enough, just as before. So I was in a fix and sat up with wonder; I did not lie down again. Besides, I was afraid that I might touch them with my feet unconsciously during my sleep. So I spent the whole night in meditation. When the day dawned, I found Swamiji sleeping just as before. When I told him everything, he laughed heartily.

'Long afterwards, while reading a hymn to Vireshvara Shiva, I discovered a *mantra* about meditation on him that contained a description just like that; and then I knew that my vision was quite true. Swamiji was nothing but that in reality. He was born as a part of that Shiva, and that's why I saw like that.'

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Mahapurushji's health was declining steadily. He could not even move near about his room upstairs, let alone walk in the monastery grounds. When walking about upstairs, he needed somebody's help. At that time he said one day, 'As the activity outside diminishes, the activity inside increases. For the mine of the supreme Bliss is nowhere else but within. For the present it will go on like that; that's how the Master has ordained.' Often enough he would sing: 'The path of death is obliterated; my mental doubts are gone' etc. Now and then, he would also talk about visions etc.

It was just evening one day; the evening services in the shrine had not yet commenced and the lamps had only just been lighted in the rooms. Mahapurushji had been sitting silently in his room facing the Master. Suddenly, he said: 'Quick, give me some holy ashes brought from the Vishvanatha temple (of Varanasi); and spread a silken sheet on my bed. For here is the Master, and here also is Mahadeva.' Saying thus, he entered into deep meditation which lasted long into the night.

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On another afternoon he said: 'Swamiji and Maharaj came just now and they said: "Come along, brother Tarak (i.e. Mahapurushji)." Did you not see them? They were standing here just in front.'

Some inscrutable meaning underlies even the smallest actions and utterances of the saints who have realized the Self. When ordinary mortals judge their actions by their own standards and arrive at some conclusion on that basis, more often than not it is incorrect. From about the year 1912 onward, when Mahapurushji had an attack of dysentery, he had been very strict about his diet. His lunch consisted of some rice, ordinary vegetable soup, and boiled vegetables. Swami Sarada-

nanda called this soup 'Mahapurusha's soup' humorously. The night meal was equally simple and small in quantity.

But for a whole year before he was attacked with paralysis in 1933, he would often be asking his attendants for some special kinds of food. This created a surprise in the minds of the inmates of the monastery. This seemed all the more odd when the doctors also wanted him to live mostly on liquid diet.

One morning he said, after a long silence, that he felt a hankering for a particular dish of which the Master had spoken. As the dish was rather rare, it was obtained with some difficulty from the other side of the Ganga from a Calcutta market. After tasting just a little bit, he remarked with a slight smile : 'The desire came ; so I tasted a little. The Master used to say that one should finish one's petty desires by actual experience.' And then he added with a hearty laughter : 'Who, indeed, knows my boy, that he will not have to be born again to fulfil such a petty desire ?'

Just a few days before his paralytic stroke, he expressed a desire for a ripe mango. Mangoes of a good variety had not come to the market even then. So after a long search in Calcutta, a few mangoes were brought for him. He sent all the mangoes except one, for offering to the Master. Then he ordered the attendant to squeeze out the juice of the remaining one and give it to him at mealtime. He was then suffering from asthma, and the attendants were very apprehensive of the the bad effect the mango juice would have on his health. So, after great deliberation, the chief attendant made bold to remind him of the warning of the doctor. But in spite of requests to the contrary Mahapurushji said with some determination : 'I say I will have it.'

However when the mango juice was offered to him, he just tasted it by dipping his finger into the juice and remarked : 'Here, I have tasted it. I had a desire to taste mango juice, so I just put a little bit in the mouth. Do you think I eat out of greediness ? How can anybody else understand why I ask for diverse things to eat ?' Then he said with some warmth : 'He comes to caution me about food ! You know, I can leave this body this moment if I will, what to talk of this petty food ! Was it for nothing that Swamiji gave me the name Mahapurusha ?'

In this vein he talked of many things that day. For the whole day he remained in a high and serious mood. It seemed as though his mind had been roaming in another world.

* * * *

The only son of a woman devotee was seriously ill. When all kinds of treatment had failed and the doctors had declared that the case was hopeless, the woman came to Mahapurushji in despair, and prayed piteously : 'Father, kindly take pity and just say that my son will recover.' Mahapurushji heard everything in silence. In reply to the woman's repeated supplication he said : 'The boy will come round if the Master wants it to be so.' But the boy died a few days later. The woman came again and wailed before him thus : 'You said, sir, that he would recover. But he is gone. With whom shall I live now ?' It was a piteous and unending lamentation.

At last Mahapurushji consoled her : 'Look here, my daughter, I knew that the boy would not live ; but you are his mother. How could I tell a mother that her son would not survive ? That's why I was forced to say that he would recover, if the Master wanted it to be so. But don't wail, my child. I assure you that the Master will take pity on you and will wipe away the sorrows of your heart. From now on you should consider the Master himself as your son. He will remove all your wants out of his mercy ; he will grant you heavenly peace.' The hope and consolation brought solace to the woman. She departed with peace of heart, and later on her life was spiritually transformed.

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One day at the Belur Math, K--Maharaj complained to Mahapurushji about a certain *brahmacharin*. After hearing it all, Mahapurushji remarked : 'Look here K—, the Master used to talk of "Looking for the sea in a drop of it." Not only did he talk like that, his whole outlook also accorded with that. Were it not so, could we ourselves have found shelter under him ? We found refuge with him just because he drew us to himself out of his mercy, by ignoring all our faults. And who, indeed, is entirely free from fault ? All who have come here have done so with a view to becoming entirely faultless ; it is not that they have come without any fault at

all. As for those little defects, they will be cured by the Master's grace. If one but somehow continue under his care, he will set everything right out of his own mercy.'

Not convinced by this, K—Maharaj suggested again : 'It will be good if you call him to you and reprimand him. What you might have heard about him before may not be true after all. What I tell you is as a result of a thorough enquiry.' That made Mahapurushji suddenly very serious and he said with firmness : 'Well K—, do you assume to have greater insight than myself ? By the Master's grace, we can understand a man at a single glance, we can see him through and through—inside and outside. The Master trained us variously. How can I tell you of all that ? These things cannot, in fact, be told to anybody. We know well enough what sort of a man a certain person is, and when he will have perfection or not. A man is not cured simply by advice or rebuking. Change the man's mental tendencies through your spiritual force, if you can.' Noticing the seriousness and demeanour of Mahapurushji, K—Maharaj folded his hands in supplication, and laying his head at his feet, said : 'Sir, I was ignorant ; please don't be offended with me ; kindly excuse me.' Then Mahapurushji added : 'If you would cure anybody, you pray earnestly for him ; pray to the Master for him. A man's mental tendency can take a turn for the better in a trice, if only he is pleased to have it so.' When K—Maharaj left, Mahapurushji went on talking in soliloquy : 'None who has taken shelter under the Master, is so insignificant. All are children of high parentage—be they senior monks or new probationers. It is as a result of merit earned in many previous births that one finds shelter here.'

* * * *

Mahapurushji's love was for all without any distinction, and he was ever thoughtful of the good of all. It was noticed that he piteously prayed to the Master individually for everyone by name, even for those who had wanted to disrupt the Master's organization by adopting all kinds of foul means. One also found various kinds of manifestations of the diverse spiritual moods of the Master in his sons (disciples), the Master himself having been the perfect repository of all such moods. Those sons also delighted in enjoying the divine sport through various moods. Often enough (in 1932), Mahapurushji would

be found sitting on his bed with a collection of such things as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the *Gita*, the *Chandi*, *Hitopadesha*, *Grandma's Bag*, cymbals and a picture-book, as if he were a boy of five. He would pick up these things according to his fancy. Now he would sound the cymbals, now read a little from *Grandma's Bag*; and then again he would smilingly lift the stick and threaten his attendants. What he one day casually said by way of explanation was this: 'The fact is that the mind has a natural tendency to merge into the Absolute; hence I try to keep it down with the help of these things. Just as a mother keeps the child engaged with dolls, so I try to keep the mind occupied with such a medley.'

During the last three or four years of Mahapurushji's life, the rush of candidates for initiation with *mantras* was great indeed. He, too, blessed them all without caring for his own physical comforts. During those days one could see him getting ready at nine o'clock in the morning to accept people into discipleship. He seldom refused anyone. One day, after initiating a good number of disciples, he said: 'The Master used to say that a rare soul or two should be accepted as a disciple after careful examination; but now all the restrictions are off. He himself knows why he inspires so many people and leads them here. It's all his will; how can I help it? He alone knows how long I can carry on with this old body under such a strain.'

* * * *

Addressing an attendant at Belur Math one day, he said: 'Well, my boy, the ideal of your life is the Master; and he was the emperor of all renouncers. You have taken shelter under him; this you should remember for ever. It is very lucky for you that you have found a place in this holy Order of his. You must, also, be conscious of the great responsibility that rests with you. Our days are numbered. Hereafter, people will learn by seeing you. Renunciation is the greatest adornment of a monk's life. One progresses towards God in proportion as one renounces. It is difficult to be a true monk; it won't do merely to perform the *viraja homa*¹ in order to take the vow of monasticism, and then put on the ochre robe. He,

¹ The ritual of formal renunciation which the Hindu monk goes through.

indeed, is a true monk who has given up from his very heart all kinds of desires. Renounce as much as you can. You will find that the Mother will supply you with all your needs at the proper moment to such an extent that you will hardly know what to do with all that. You should not accumulate. Not only that ; a monk should not even have the idea of accumulation. It should all come and pass away like the water flowing under a bridge ; but once you start accumulating, the inflow will stop ; and then, the water will stagnate. Besides, you should never ask for anything.

'Stay where you are, depending fully on Him and taking shelter under Him. The Mother will arrange everything for you when the need arises. Just look at the number of articles—sweets, clothes, and other things—flowing in here, and that so abundantly, that I can hardly manage them. That makes me ponder over what the Master has in mind. For we passed through days at the Baranagore monastery, when we had only one piece of cloth among us to wear when going out during the day-time. And now, I cannot finish with the clothes if I put on a new piece of silk every day. But I tell you, my boy, that, by his grace, my mind is even now just what it was in those days. I had no sorrow on account of the lack of clothes to put on, nor had I any idea of want. Out of his grace, he vouchsafed me full bliss. Look, for instance, at the soft bed you have arranged for me ! But I still remember those days when I used to sleep on straw during the winter in Varanasi. That happiness can hardly be equalled by what I get from these now.'

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One day the attendant was leaving his room after arranging everything for the ceremony of initiation. But noticing him depart, Mahapurushji said : 'You may as well stay on ; it makes little difference ; for who, in fact, does not know the *mantra* for initiation ? Besides, these *mantras* have been printed in books. But one thing you should know, my boy, that when that very *mantra* comes out of the mouth of a perfected *guru*, it becomes impregnated with a new power. Otherwise it is nothing but a sound. The *guru* makes the *mantra* alive by his own spiritual energy ; and he rouses the coiled-up energy of the disciple. That's the whole secret of it.'

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'The ever-perfected souls are, as it were, the living emblems of God. Association with them and service rendered to them carry one to God. But it is most difficult to serve them or live with them. The worship of images is comparatively much easier. It is not possible to serve the great saints in the real sense, unless one has one's mind purified through spiritual efforts. And the other thing necessary is absolute earnestness. Should one start serving a saint without being devoted to the fourfold discipline of Vedanta, one is liable to be guilty of faulty service.'

One attendant of Mahapurushji once felt himself guilty of failure to serve him in the proper manner, and so asked him : 'Sir, when serving you, I make mistakes quite often, which displeases you, and you also express your disapproval. Your words all come true. Whatever comes out of your lips will certainly be fulfilled, and so your displeasure will, certainly, bring misery on us. I am in a fix to decide what I should do in such a predicament.' Hearing these words, Mahapurushji looked at the attendant silently for a while, his whole face lit up with divine love and compassion. Then he said with great feeling and in a voice full of affection : 'Look here, my boy, the Master came for the good of the world, and we, too, came with him. We have no other thought but the good of all creatures. We cannot think of any harm to anybody, even in dream. Besides, the Master will also see to it that no harm is done to anybody through us. You are living with me, and you are serving me all the time. The Master has entrusted me with your welfare. That's why your faults and failures have to be corrected by me. I scold you, even bitterly at times, for your own good alone ; but all that is merely on the surface ; at heart, I am all love, affection, and kindness. Otherwise, why should I keep you near me ? Know this for certain that I do everything for your good. At times, I feel it necessary even to be harsh, just for the sake of correcting you, to make the current of your life wholly directed towards God ; and I am conscious of what I do and for what purpose. I never do anything out of anger. Such a doubt would not have crossed your mind if only you knew even a little of the fervent prayer I make to the Master for your good. Besides, "even the anger of God is

comparable to a boon". You should remember that our anger, also, is like a boon.'

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A few months before his paralytic stroke, Mahapurushji expressed a desire to perform the worship of the goddess Vasanti in the image, at the Belur Math. But this was not possible as the time was short. In connection with that, an attendant said one day, 'Sir, since the desire for the worship of Vasanti has arisen in your mind, it will certainly be accomplished.' The attendant said so just in the course of ordinary talk. But the word 'desire' startled Mahapurushji, and he said : 'Ah ! what did you say ? Desire ? I had a desire ? By the Master's grace, I have no desire, not an iota of it.' The attendant then realized his mistake, and he corrected himself : 'No sir, I mean, "when the beneficent wish is felt in your mind".' 'Yes, that's it,' Mahapurushji added, 'when a beneficent wish is felt in our minds, everything can be accomplished by God's grace. As a matter of fact, however, I have no existence separately from the Master, nor have I any separate wish. Everything will happen just as he wills.' It was a small incident ; but it reveals how fully he had sunk his own identity in the Master, how free from egotism he was, and how deeply he relied on the Master.

105

THE STORY OF AJAMILA—THE POWER OF THE LORD'S NAME

Place : Belur Math. Time : December 7, 1932.

In the afternoon, Mahapurushji said to an attendant : 'Will you bring the *Bhagavata* for me ? I want to hear a little of the story of Ajamila.' So the book was brought and the reading of the passage began :

'King Parikshit asked Shukadeva : "O blessed one, how can a man desist from sin, and how can he be saved from the hellish suffering of various kinds coming to him as a result of his sins ?" In answer to this, Shukadeva said : "Just as fire can destroy a big cluster of bamboos, so also all the sins committed

by a man in thought or speech can be destroyed by a man of faith with the help of austerity, *brahmacharya*, control of body and senses, purity, well-regulated life and behaviour, etc." But, since this kind of expiation for sins is very difficult, Shukadeva refers to devotion to God at the conclusion and says : "As the sun dispels mist, so also some people destroy sins fully through devotion alone and their complete dependence on Vasudeva."

In illustration of this, the story of Ajamila is introduced. Ajamila was a brahmin performing sincerely his caste duties. But the latter portion of his life was spent in the company of a slave woman, addicted to drinking, whom he preferred to his own chaste wife ; and he remained engrossed in playing dice, cheating others, lying, robbing, and other such heinous sins. He had ten sons, the youngest of whom was called Narayana and whom he loved the most. When Ajamila was on his death-bed, at the age of eighty-eight years, he was startled to see the terrible messengers of Death, and in consternation he cried out : 'Narayana, Narayana,' meaning his own beloved son. But that was also the name of God Himself. Thus, when Ajamila uttered God's name with his last breath, the messengers of Vishnu came down to snatch away the soul of Ajamila from the clutches of the messengers of Death and carried it to Vaikuntha, the place of Vishnu (or Narayana).'

Mahapurushji heard it all through with rapt attention. Last of all was read the verse : 'When even Ajamila reached the place of Vishnu by uttering the name of the Lord, by which his own son was called, it goes without saying that one who utters the name with faith and reverence will go there as a matter of course.' Mahapurushji was greatly overwhelmed by this and said : 'Just notice the wonderful power of the name of the Lord. Fine, fine, it is so very charming ! That's why the Master used to say : "The name and the person named are non-different." That's veritable truth itself. Everything is contained in that name itself. Name is Brahman. He dwells in the name. God is ever present where His name is sung. The Lord said to Narada : "I do not stay in Vaikuntha (My abode), nor even in the hearts of *yogins* ; I stay, Narada, where my devotees sing of Me." The Master used to ask us very often to sing the name of Hari. He said : "As the birds sitting on a tree fly away when somebody claps his hands below, so also

all the bodily sins take flight when one sings of Hari with clapping of hands." He would himself sing of Hari with clapping of hands quite often. Once he would start singing the name, he would continue uninterruptedly in that mood for pretty long. Everything about him was so unusual.'

The story of Ajamila pleased him so much, that for the whole day he went on telling with great pleasure about this reading of the *Bhagavata* to all the visitors who came to him that day.

106

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE—ONLY ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS EVERLASTING.

Place : Belur Math. Time : December 28, 1932.

It was a crowded day with a steady flow of devotees and visitors. A gentleman from Dacca came of his own accord after discovering a photograph of Mahapurushji and a rosary in the box of his departed son. He came in the afternoon, and expressed his great sorrow as he related the incident. Mahapurushji heard everything in silence and then remarked : 'Your son was a devotee of the Lord ; blessed be his soul. He was very fortunate ; you should not grieve for him. He was born with very noble tendencies ; and that's why his mind turned to God even at an early age. He fulfilled the purpose of his life and then returned to the world that is his own. Besides, nobody has any control over birth and death—all these happen according to the will of God. He alone knows how long He will keep anyone in this world. All bodies die ; there's no exception to this rule. Your son is gone ; you, too, have to go some day. Your wife, son, daughter, in fact, all whom you consider to be your very own—all have to depart ; none can live eternally.

'In the *Gita*, the Lord says : "Anyone born must surely die, and anyone dead must surely be reborn. So you must not lament for something that is inevitable." Death being inevit-

able for anyone coming to this earth, He forbids us to lament. Can you tell me what is the purpose of human life? The only purpose of life is to realize God—no matter whether sons and wife remain or go. Each soul reaps the result of what it had done. Your son had good deeds in store; so he has achieved a virtuous destiny. Now, it is your turn to act in a way that will ensure your own high destiny. Tell your wife, also, to do accordingly. Mere talk will not do; one has to act. With firm determination, one has to strive for God-realization. Make a start from this very day; for life is fleeing every moment. Nobody can say when one will have the call for departure; so don't waste a single day. Those who think that these things can be put off for the future never do anything. They will be tossed in this current of birth and death for infinite ages.'

Then he sang with much feeling :

Just consider, my mind, that none belongs here to anyone else ;

You wander after a mirage in this world.

Caught in the net of delusion, forget not Kali, the Gracious Mother.

Will she, for whom you are so anxious, accompany you (after your death) ?

That very wife will sprinkle holy water (on the place you occupied) lest some misfortune befall her.

It's for a couple of days or so that people obey one as their master here ;

That master they will throw overboard, when the Master of all time comes.

'None in this world is really your own whom you think to be so. Only God is truly your own. He keeps company in life and death; He is the Soul of one's soul. The relationship with Him is eternal.'

GLOSSARY

Ajna : see *Kundalini*.

Anahata : see *Kundalini*.

Avatara : an Incarnation of God.

Bhajan : devotional music.

Brahma : the Creator God ; the first member of the trinity of Shiva (the Destroyer and Transformer). Not to be confused with Brahman, God the Absolute.

Brahmacharin : a novice in a monastery.

Brahmacharya : the vow of celibacy.

Chaitanya : a great spiritual teacher born in Bengal in A.D. 1485 ; also known as Gauranga, Gaur, Gora, or Nimai. The word also means spiritual consciousness.

Chamara : a kind of fan used in temple worship.

Daivdranarayanans : poor people looked upon as forms of God (Narayana).

Dharma : lit., that which holds up or holds together. Has various meanings : righteousness (and as such is one of the four ends of life), 'religion', duty, etc.

Gopi : a cowherd girl. The *gopis* of Vrindavan were playmates of the youthful Krishna, and were intensely devoted to him.

Guna : three types of *guna* (see *Sattva*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*) form the primal constituents of the universe, mental and physical. A *guna* is both substance and quality.

Guru : a spiritual guide.

Hatha-yoga : a form of Yoga chiefly concerned with improving the condition of the body.

Holi : also called Dola Yatra or Dol Purnima ; a spring festival associated with Sri Krishna.

Japa : repeating the name of God.

Kailasa : a mountain in the Himalayas and the abode of Shiva.

Karma : action in general ; the effect of previous actions ; duty ; ritualistic worship.

Kaviraj : one skilled in the ancient Indian system of medicine.

Khichudi : a cooked preparation of lentils and rice.

Kirtana : a kind of congregational music.

Kula-kundalini : same as *kundalini*.

Kundalini : the spiritual energy which, according to Yoga philosophy, lies dormant at the base of the spinal column. It is said that when one's spiritual powers are awakened, the *kundalini* rises and, passing through six mystic centres (namely *muladhara*, *svadhishthana*, *manipura*, *anahata*, *vishuddha*, *ajna*) in the spinal column, reaches a certain point in the cerebrum, and the aspirant gets the highest illumination.

Maharaj : a term used in addressing a monk.

Mahavidyas : among the forms which the Divine Mother, or Divine Power, assumes are ten celebrated ones known as the Mahavidyas. They include Kali, Bhuvaneshvari, Tripurasundari, and Tara.

Manipura : see *Kundalini*.

Mantra : a sacred text or prayer ; also, a mystic name of God.

Maya : a philosophical term denoting the power by which God creates the universe ; the Cosmic Illusion on account of which the One appears as many ; the ignorance that obscures the vision of God.

Mlechchha : a term of contempt for foreigners.

Muladhara : see *Kundalini*.

Nirvikalpa samadhi : a state of deep meditation when one becomes merged in the Absolute.

Om : the most sacred word of Hinduism. The Word out of which the world was produced. It signifies both Brahman and God.

Panchavati : a grove of five holy trees.

Pipal : a kind of tree noted for its capacity to sprout when cut back.

Prasada : sacramental food.

Rajas : the tendency of the mind which prompts one to action.

Rajasika : the state of *rajas* (q.v.).

Rakshasas : demons.

Rishi : a sage.

Sadhaka : a spiritual aspirant.

Sadhu : a monk.

Samadhi : the state of deep meditation when one becomes oblivious of the external world.

Sandhya : prayer at stated times.

Sangha : a band of people, especially a monastic brotherhood.

Sari : a kind of cloth worn by women.

Sattva : the tendency of mind which makes one calm, self-controlled and balanced.

Sattvika : the state of *sattva* (q.v.).

Shudra : a member of the fourth caste whose vocation is labouring and service.

Sushumna : a Yogic term denoting a particular nerve in the spinal column passing from the base to the brain. See *Kundalini*.

Svadhishthana : see *Kundalini*.

Tabla : a musical instrument.

Tamas : the tendency of mind which makes one feel dull and lazy.

Tamasika : the state of *tamas* (q.v.).

Tantrika : a follower of Tantra, a religion and philosophy in which the Divine Power, or Divine Mother, is realized as identical with Brahman.

Tapasya : religious austerities and spiritual disciplines.

Vaikuntha : the abode of Vishnu and heaven of the Vaishnavas.

Vanaprastha : a recluse ; one who belongs to the third of the four traditional stages of life, those belonging to the other stages being *brahmacharin*, *grihastha*, and (the fourth) *sannyasin*.

Vishuddha : see *Kundalini*.
