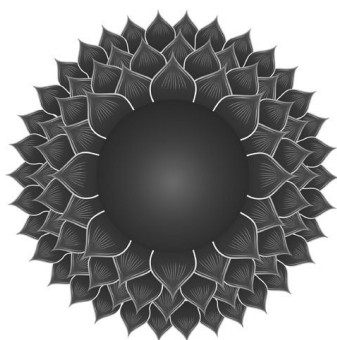




33
GURUS
of
Modern India

Spanning over 200 years of
Indian spiritual thought and practice

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of
Modern India



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*When you are helpless,
when you have nowhere to go,
When your body is
completely tired and broken,
when your mind does not function –
Then your soul becomes free
to unite with Him.
The bulb breaks and the energy returns
to the source of all power.*

– Swami Satyananda Saraswati

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Several social and religious commentators have drawn attention to the shocking events that are taking place in the world today. Religions back factions in war, the environment is in dire straits, and corporations plunder people's savings. Even with the wonders of modern farming, around one billion people go to sleep hungry every night. It seems that science, technology, democracy and liberal law, which were supposed to deliver a world free of hardship and disease, are letting us down.

Some would say that this situation derives from mankind's restricted level of consciousness, and the egoic thought system that has created a collective mind demon with little regard for the weak and infirm. Yet, there are examples of a different and more equitable thought pattern that can be seen in the seers and mystics of India. It was with this in mind that we undertook to look at the lives, actions and teachings of a number of such individuals from the modern era, whose words and presence have helped, and continue to help, to dispel this mind demon. These are some of the things they have said:

“Experience is the word. Knowledge implies subject and object but experience is non-terminous, eternal.”

– Sri Ramana Maharshi

“Mind is thought existing as subjects and objects. In life the first wave of consciousness is ‘I’, then ‘I am’, then ‘I am this’, ‘I am that’, and ‘this belongs to me’. Here the mind begins. Now keep quiet, and do not allow any desire to arise from the Source. Just for an instant of time don't give rise to any desire... You will find that you have no-mind and you will see that you are somewhere indescribable, in tremendous happiness. And then you will see who you really are.”

– Papaji (H.W.L. Poonja)

“My voice is your voice; no powers, kings, devils or gods can withstand it – inevitable is the order of Truth. My head is your head; cut it off and a thousand will grow... I shall shower oceans of love and bathe the world in joy. All societies are mine! Come, for I shall pour out floods of love. Every force is mine, small and great.”

– Swami Rama Tirtha

“Each and every drop of Mother’s blood, each and every particle of energy is for Her children... The purpose of this body and of Mother’s whole life is to serve Her children.”

– Amritanandamayi (Amma)

“In the strange stillness of that part of the world (the Rishi Valley in India), with the silence undisturbed by the hoot of owls, he woke up to find something totally different and new. This was in no way to be confused with the gods of ‘religion’: Desire cannot possibly reach it, words cannot fathom it, nor can the string of thought wind itself around it. The whole universe is in it, measureless to man... There is only a sense of incredible vastness and immense beauty... It is a world without image, symbol or word, without waves of memory. Love was in the death of every minute and each death was the returning of love. It was not attachment; it had no roots; it flowered without pause and it was a flame which burnt away the borders, the carefully built fences, of ego consciousness.”

– Jiddu Krishnamurti

“The nameless, formless Reality, the transcendent Awareness in which you will become permanently awake, is precisely the same Reality that you have perceived blossoming around you... The perfectly peaceful Absolute is not different from the playful relative universe.”

– Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

“To talk of God only is worthwhile, all else is verily pain
and in vain.”

– Anandamayi Ma

May their words help you find the Truth

FOREWORD

Here is a unique book containing biographical sketches of some great spiritual teachers of the 20th and 21st century who hail from India – the home of spirituality. The book contains fairly detailed life sketches and important teachings of renowned spiritual masters like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Rama Tirtha, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Paramhansa Yogananda, Anandamayi Ma, Swami Chinmayananda (famous for his *Gita Jnana Yajnas*), the venerable Dalai Lama, Swami Sivananda, Bhagawan Nityananda, Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba, Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma), and other sages.

The readers are introduced to 33 spiritual masters and teachers. They come from different backgrounds and it has been said that no saint is similar to the other. This is but natural, for they have come to this world to serve the cause of *Dharma* (eternal law of the cosmos) – from place to place, and time to time, as the situation warrants. They have different missions to perform. Yet the basic thrust of their different messages remains the same – *Satyam* (Truth), *Dharmam* (Righteousness), *Premam* (Love) and *Seva* (Service to others). These eternal principles are universal in nature. The messages are well-known; they are preached widely from every pulpit.

Many books have been written enumerating the virtues of these teachings. But unfortunately for us, those who are actually living these principles are very rare to come by. This compilation takes us to meet such great personages who have been accessible in recent times, or are still accessible today. We are indeed lucky that some of the great masters like Mata Amritanandamayi are still alive to guide millions of devotees. They can be approached and we can thus convince ourselves that the great truths spoken by the realized masters are still valid and relevant for the future of humanity.

The book also provides sufficient material for those who are interested in academic pursuits. I believe that it is a commendable work that will provide enough material to satisfy the reader's thirst for spiritual knowledge, and reveal

practical guidelines for those sincere seekers who want to tread the path laid down by the great masters. I would like to compliment the authors who have painstakingly researched and collated the material. I have great pleasure in writing the Foreword for an ennobling work, which should help many sincere seekers find their way to the presence of India's spiritual masters.

O. Rajagopal
Former Minister of State for
Defence and Railways, India

INTRODUCTION

“All your material plans and great achievements have gone by the wayside. You have spent your life trying to have good experiences and avoid unpleasant ones. You start to think what is life all about? What is its meaning? Who am I? Yet you have no idea what’s going on because no one has ever been able to explain these things to you. So you come to believe that life is just an accident: you were born, you have gone through prevailing conditions and experiences, and you get old and die.”

These are the words of a great *siddha* (perfected one) of modern times called Robert Adams, but, as he points out, this is not necessarily how it needs to be and there are those who know this and have found the Truth, capital ‘T’ Truth, who we say are enlightened.

This book introduces the reader to some of them. They tell us that the material world is a dream of separateness from God, being experienced by the egoic mind in an illusion of time – while *enlightenment*, in the sense used here, is the realization of union with the one Supreme Being – which brings unalloyed joy and happiness. But there are differences in understanding between the East and the West that need to be explained.

Consider these questions:

Is the world of matter, this universe of which we are a part, a reality? “Yes” says the West because the world of matter is the only reality that the senses and the intellect can perceive. And the religions of the West (the Semitic religions) seem to have embraced this view. But Eastern mysticism says “No”. The world of matter is finite and changeable, while reality is changeless, infinite and immortal when experienced by the inner man – the spirit or *Atman*. The mystics say that changeable matter cannot be real. It can only exist in time – and time is an illusion.

Is man separate from God? “Yes” says the West because God created the world including man. God is the creator and we are the created. There is duality: God and his creation. But “No” says the East, because God manifested *as* the universe. God is therefore in the world of matter, and the world of matter is in God. Godliness is in everything, and there is only One. This is non-duality. Even though the Bible proclaims that God created man in His own image, and Jesus exhorts man to, “Know thyself. The Kingdom of Heaven is within. The Father is in me and I am in the Father,” these and other sayings do not suggest the same concept of Unicity in the West, that occurs in the East.

One of the earliest Eastern sages to visit the West in modern times was Swami Vivekananda. In addressing the founding conference of the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago, he said:

“Each soul is potentially divine. The goal of life is to realize this divinity within. Do this either by work or worship, or philosophy – by one, or all of these, and become free... Doctrines or dogmas, rituals or books, temples or forms are but secondary details... Religion should be taught as a science of experience. There has always been a small group of individuals in any age who teach religion from experience. They are called mystics, and these mystics, who occur in every religion, speak the same tongue and teach the same truth. This is the real science of religion. As mathematics in every part of the world does not differ, so the mystics do not differ in this regard – and the book from which to learn this religion is your own heart.”

Mindstuff and the dilemma of the modern world

In the modern world, the ego personality is firmly in charge. It is driven by the pursuit of personal gratification, under which daily life too frequently becomes a grinding task focused on the perceived needs of pleasure and survival. Swami Tapasyananda summed up the situation cogently, “The mind, as it is constituted in the sense-bound man, may be quite ineffective in the spiritual field and may not grasp the Supreme Being. But it becomes a regenerated power when it is

refined through dispassion, concentration, discrimination and devotion. Such a mind becomes capable of giving the aspirant a clearer understanding of the Infinite Being.”

If this seems in doubt, read honest biographies and autobiographies of the rich and famous – and reflect on Emerson’s conclusion that “The majority of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

The writer Paul Zweig, at a time of transition in his life, gives us a good example of this dilemma. In his book *Three Journeys*, he wrote: ‘*Some recipe of wishes dating from the earliest mixture of my being had created an awful dish.*’ He had – he wrote – intended to be completely happy but something had gone wrong and he began to suspect, to his horror, that the demon was himself:

‘It shadowed me from within... loving when I loved, speaking when I spoke. Every spoonful of my existence went, somehow, into its mouth, and because of it everything went wrong. Food did not feed me, but it; success did not please me, but it; and the creature reclined in the sultriness of my inner being while I shivered and became thin.’

The Chinese writer and Nobel Prize winner, Gao Xingjian, makes a similar observation in his book *Soul Mountain*: ‘*I don’t know if you have ever observed this strange thing, the self (the egoic self) ... I once looked at a photo of me on the monthly bus ticket I had... At first I thought I had a charming smile; but (then) there was also an anxiety which betrayed acute loneliness and fleeting snatches of terror; certainly not a winner – and there was a bitterness which stifled the common smile of unthinking happiness and doubted that sort of happiness. This was very scary and I didn’t want to go on looking at the photo... The problem is the mind: this is the monster which torments me no end... Arrogance, pride, complacency or anxiety, jealousy and hatred all stem from it. The egoic self is in fact the source of mankind’s misery. So, does this unhappy conclusion mean that the self should therefore be killed? Is it just vanity? The Buddha said: “All the myriad phenomena are vanity, and the absence of phenomena is also vanity”.*’

And Aldous Huxley concluded that: *'Every man and woman, even the most healthy and well endowed individuals who have made what the jargon of psychology calls 'an excellent adjustment to life', may suddenly, or gradually with age, arrive at a feeling of damnation that is nothing more nor less than being confronted by one's own sweating egoic self: our common consciousness, generally dulled, but sometimes acute and naked, of behaving like the average sensual human beings that we are.'*

And all this, the mystics tell us, stems from our belief that we are the doers in a world of judging, rewarding, and punishing.

The subtle body

Another difference between East and West is that in Eastern philosophy there is belief in a subtle body, in which *gunas* (tendencies of behaviour) are stored. The subtle body persists after physical death and is believed to be the vehicle of out-of-body experiences that sometimes occur with ordinary people during their physical life. The subtle body has an 'anatomical' system comprising a spinal channel running from the coccyx to the crown of the head, interspersed with activity centers called *chakras* (centers of the subtle body) placed from the lower abdomen to the heart and throat, and between the eyes to the crown of the head. These attributes of the subtle body are known to yogis and are also important points of focus in Eastern medicine.

The *kundalini* is the psychic energy of the subtle body that can be awakened through yoga, to rise up through the spinal channel causing the 'turning' of the chakras and bringing both psychic and physical experiences. In Eastern philosophy, the subtle body also has a supracausal body which is devoid of all thought and where the state of deep sleep resides. Deep sleep is considered to be the closest that the worldly-bound individual can get to enlightenment and, although most of us forget the experience almost immediately on waking, it is said that if we are alert we may be able, for a moment, to discern a trace of its bliss that could change our lives.

In the East, the pure Self is called Atman and has been described as Consciousness Itself, which is not generally perceivable to the ordinary world-bound mind. It is the God-essence in all created individuals and has been called *Awareness* by some. It is the only thing that any of us can be absolutely sure of in the transcendental world, and gaining familiarity with Awareness, it is said, will show that it is the source of all phenomena.

Celestial experiences, miracles

Such happenings are mentioned briefly here because of their importance in supporting spiritual beliefs. Overall there is incontrovertible evidence for miracle-like happenings that are not explainable by present-day science. Good writers have expounded these matters in books like *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, *The Tao of Physics*, *A New Science of Life* and *The Self-Aware Universe*.

For example, there are individuals who remember other lives, or other worlds, in a phenomenon known as the Charles Bonnet Syndrome. In this, apparently normal and definitely not deranged individuals, have clear visions of what can only be described as other places, and other times: A woman sees cows grazing in a winter field and comments on the cruelty of this to others, who see the field as empty. Another is followed around by two children in Victorian dress; yet another sees bright flowers growing everywhere she walks (see *Hindustan Times* of 23rd October 2000). And such visions, though not often spoken of, are said to be experienced by literally millions of people.

Miracles are not necessarily about things like the parting of the Red Sea, yet they create a great stir and an outpouring of spiritual fervor when they occur – and as a matter of interest, miracle-like happenings often take place around enlightened persons such as those considered in this book. Commonly, they involve the generation of feelings in the heart and changes in spiritual comprehension and understanding, or they occur, against all odds, following intense wishing for things or happenings.

A good example of such a miracle of the heart type that demonstrates the energy that flows from a saintly being at such times, concerns the great yogi Swami Muktananda, whose ability to impart mystical experiences made him popular in the West through the 1970s. The account here is given by Paul Zweig. He is taken, somewhat unwillingly, to meet Swami Muktananda in New York by a friend and is listening as people are introduced and are asking questions or making comments.

He wrote: *'The sorts of questions rubbed me the wrong way; they seemed full of personal melodrama, but then a young woman began speaking to Muktananda. She explained that she had lived for several years in India and in a tremulous voice she said that she had a question to ask. I found myself paying attention suddenly, not so much to what she was saying as to the note of vulnerability in her voice. When she meditated, she said, the experience of silvery light was intense, but then nightmarish forms came between her and the light, and she was frightened. When she lifted her hand as if to describe the nightmares, it began to shake. Then suddenly, I (Paul Zweig) was shaking too. I felt as if I was rooted to the floor, yet trembling with intense feeling. I had to make an effort not to cry, but it wasn't grief, for my body had become buoyant and warm... Even after the hand was tucked away in her lap, and Muktananda's voice had begun to speak, I went on staring while the forms and colors of the room glided before my eyes like paper cut-outs. The words 'afloat in tears' repeated themselves over and over in my mind... I was aware that my mouth was hanging open, yet I couldn't seem to close it... My jaws felt like hinged gates into a cave of tears... And all the while I held my tears in by an effort of subtle attention. The tears seeped into my face anyway, a few at a time.'*

Yet there are physical miracles aplenty associated with great enlightened individuals. The most striking examples come from Sathya Sai Baba, but there are many others including the raising of the dead. Recently, in Singapore, an Indian couple came to Amma distraught over the death of their three-month-old baby. Amma comforted them and said, "Go

home now, your child will return in three hours.” And the child did return!

Enlightened teachers

Many religions are only comfortable with long-dead saints and prophets, but there are certainly many around in modern times – as will be seen in the following pages. And although it may be something of a digression, a short account is given here of a modern sage who lived to a great age. It was recounted by an indomitable guru researcher, Surjan Singh Uban, in his book *The Gurus of India*. Surjan Singh was an Indian Army surgeon and wartime hero of the Burma campaign, who studied gurus and wonder workers for most of his life, and one of them was Sri Bawa Hari Das Ji Maharaj, a forest sage. Surjan Singh, following a long series of unusual events, found himself climbing through the Himalayan jungle in a quest to meet this ancient sage. He writes: *‘The path was rough, uphill and full of tall grass amongst the pine trees, where, I was told, cobras were quite common. The orderly told me, however, that those cobras were harmless and were only there to protect the great yogi. There were panthers also, I presumed for the same purpose. But I had my own doubts about the capability of these wild animals to sift good men from bad; mistaken identity could spell a painful death.*

‘Sweating and puffing we arrived at the gate of the yogi’s beautiful cottage... Whilst my orderly shouted to the guru, who was reputed to be about 150 years old, to come out and open the gate, I was forming a mental picture of a very old man, bent down by age and hardly able to walk. Instead I saw a lean, erect and sprightly figure come quickly up to the gate... The yogi appeared rather curt when he asked me the purpose of my visit but after explanation his stern face became kind and charming...

‘Hesitatingly I broached the subject of this yogi’s guru, who was reputed to be even older. He replied: ‘My guru is over 400 years old and sits in that part of the Himalayas,’ – pointing a finger to snow covered peaks. He then explained how he had wandered for some twenty years along the coast of the Arabian Gulf and over the Tibetan plateau undergoing

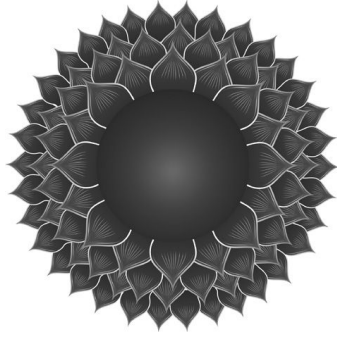
austerities and hoping to find his Inner Being, all without any result. After he had become considerably emaciated and had lost all hope of reaching his goal, he walked back into India, and settled down in a decrepit old temple. He started chanting God's name and some villagers would bring him milk or rice and join him in his devotional singing. One day a crazy fellow came from nowhere. He had a shoe on one foot and the other was bare. As he entered the temple with one shoe on the whole congregation shouted at him pointing out the sacrilege he was committing by entering the temple with a shoe on. He just laughed and said, "Which temple are you talking about? The whole world is God's temple. Anyway, I have come to take your miserable priest," and taking the yogi by the arm and marching him away, he said, "I have been sent by my Guruji, who says you are now fit to take up initiation with him. Accompany me and I will take you there in a moment".'

One of the characteristics of all enlightened individuals is that they exude a feeling of love. Paul Zweig talks about this form of love. He writes:

'Most of us would probably agree that love is our ideal emotion, and we would say it a little wistfully, because there have been only a few short times in our lives when we have known, personally, its dislocating power. The rest of the time we find it necessary to preserve certain limits: to have affection, to like, to feel tenderness, to 'love' with civility and constraint, expecting the same civility and restraint in the 'love' that others feel for us. The other, more extreme kind of love, we idealize by using only elevated language when we talk about it. We direct it towards beautiful objects, or Jesus whom we visualize with the aid of highly stylized images... Our reverence doesn't require that we change the way we live because the beloved ideal is hopelessly remote from our imperfect existences... Yet this ideal is marked by an almost forgotten trace of an undefined longing which can be overpowering, almost religious in its insinuating attraction. Even a pop tune has the power, sometimes, to make us feel like exiles wandering about in an empty world... We listen to the song and for a minute the ideal isn't rose-colored anymore. It sinks its teeth into us like something hungry that would break

apart our lives if we let it. And all the great legends of love and death mutter and turn over in our psyches... To experience the great dislocating power of bhakti, we must come before the true saints and gurus with humility and have our pressing minds put into neutral.'

A key factor in selecting the gurus featured in this book has been the importance and relevance of their teachings for all humankind. The profiles of Dayanand Saraswati, Sai Baba of Shirdi, Sri Aurobindo, Dada J.P. Vaswani and Sri Bhagavan have been obtained or compiled by Yogi Impressions.





Bhagawan Swaminarayan
(1781-1830)

Chapter 1

BHAGAWAN SWAMINARAYAN

And the BAPS Sanstha

'He has a heart wherein the whole world can live.'

Bhagawan Swaminarayan was an 18th century Indian saint who gave rise to a lineage in which authority has been passed directly from master to disciple up to the present day. The way of life that he introduced became known as the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, where the word *sampradaya* indicates that the principles of the movement have been maintained in their original form by an unbroken line of enlightened gurus.

Born in 1781 and given the birth name of Ghanshyam, he was later initiated as Swaminarayan by his guru Swami Ramanand who died shortly after the initiation. At that time he already had followers whom he instructed to chant *Sri Krsna smaranam mama* (Krishna is my soul's refuge). The *mantra* (sacred chant) spread far and wide as its spiritual power was felt, and it was said that anyone who chanted it, heard it, wrote it or even just thought of it, enjoyed the ultimate spiritual experience of *samadhi* (a state of intense concentration).

Believing that Ghanshyam (Swaminarayan) had been a direct incarnation of the Supreme Spirit, in the sense perhaps that Christians think of Christ, his successors have been merely vehicles for the Supreme Spirit, its abode, during their respective lifetimes.

It is said that he was gifted with enlightenment from an early age and his spiritual power was felt wherever he went. His life was short. He died in 1830, at the age of 49, but the lineage continued through five successive enlightened gurus that brought it to the present day. Although the gurus after Swaminarayan are not themselves considered to be pure manifestations of God but merely reincarnations, they may be

thought of as God's ideal devotees – individuals in whom God resides for the periods of their natural lives. Followers should feel no change when one guru succeeds another, except in those features of the physical change itself.

An explanation of BAPS

BAPS can be described as a socio-spiritual Hindu organization with its roots in the *Vedas* (the oldest and most authoritative body of sacred Hindu texts, composed in Sanskrit and gathered into four collections), that was started by Shastri Maharaj, the third successor in line following Bhagawan Swaminarayan. It is an abbreviation of Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha. Here, Purushottam is a name for the Supreme Spirit of God as represented by Bhagawan Swaminarayan, and Akshar represents the successors in the BAPS lineage, in whom the Lord resides successively during the periods of their lives. So up to the present time, every guru in the succession has been the incarnation of Akshar. They are: Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagati Maharaj, Shastri Maharaj (the architect of BAPS), Yogiji Maharaj, and currently Pramukh Swami Maharaj Shastri Narayanswarupadas.

It should be pointed out that Swaminarayan's philosophy, known as Navya Vishishtadvaita, is a form of pure Vaishnavism that upholds the existence of five eternal realities: *Jiva* (individual soul), *Ishwar*, *Maya*, *Brahman* and *Parabrahman*. The *jiva* is sentient, subtle, and the knower and enjoyer of worldly things. *Jivas* are infinite in number, indivisible and eternal, but bound by *vasanas* – impressions and desires from this life and past lives which manifest according to their *karmas* in each case. *Ishwars* are also infinite but are above *jivas* in spiritual evolution. Each *Ishwar* is a conscious spiritual being involved in the creation, sustenance, and destruction of the universe but bound by *maya* or *prakriti*. *Maya* is exemplified by the three *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*), which exist in all beings in different proportions. *Rajas* is involved in creation, *sattva* in preservation, and *tamas* in destruction. (*Sattva* is also

sometimes used to describe ‘spirituality’, with tamas being associated with sloth and laziness.)

Just as rajas, sattva and tamas are attributes of the jivas, the Ishwars also have gunas (*virat*, *sutratma* and *avrakrut*). Their nature is to interact with non-sentient, primordial matter out of which the whole universe is evolved. The gunas are difficult to transcend and are the cause of attachments that jivas and Ishwaras have for their physical bodies and their worldly, bodily relations.

In BAPS philosophy, Brahman, also known as Akshar, is the highest eternal reality beyond which stands only Parabrahman (or Purushottam) the Supreme Spirit. Brahman (Akshar) thus serves Lord Purushottam as His abode, wherein Lord Purushottam and an infinite number of other realized souls reside. The same Akshar also pervades an infinite number of universes and perennially manifests on earth to redeem the seekers of *moksha* (liberation or enlightenment). Akshar possesses an infinite number of redemptive attributes within its person.

Lord Purushottam (Parabrahman) transcends the states of jiva, Ishwar, Maya and Brahman, but is at the same time immanent within them. He is the cause, controller, sustainer, and redeemer of everything, and also the dispenser of all karmas and the fruits thereof. He alone is independent and eternally full of divine bliss – and in the world He has the shape of a human being. He is the primary goal of all meditational worship and is commonly known by the names Paramatman, Parameshwar, Krishna and Narayana.

In the case of jivas and Ishwaras, it is necessary to develop the knowledge that they are not the body but really Atman (the inner Self). But mere knowledge of this is not sufficient for liberation, for a higher knowledge needs also to be realized in which Atman identifies itself with *Aksharbrahma* (supreme being).

Bhagawan Swaminarayan’s life

Born in the village of Chapaya in North India in 1781, Swaminarayan (then named Ghanshyam), was proclaimed by

an astrologer sage to possess all the virtues of the great incarnations. They are austerity, righteousness, detachment, yoga, leadership, truth and the power of discrimination. “He will be established in *dhamma* (decree or custom) throughout the land,” the sage proclaimed. “He will lead people to the path of God.”

When he was five years of age, the family moved from their village to the ancient holy city of Ayodhya, the revered birthplace of Rama, which is now merged with the city of Faizabad. There he loved to visit temples and listen to the discourses of the priests and scholars. He was by then also recognized as a prodigy, for at the age of eight, he studied Sanskrit, mastering it by the age of 10. He was able to understand the Vedic scriptures and give brilliant discourses that convinced scholars of the soundness of his understanding.

It is recorded that many miracles occurred around him. In one case, he had forgotten to return home and the family sent his elder brother to find him. He saw him in a particular temple and then, passing another temple, saw him sitting there as well. Dashing between the two temples, he confirmed that he was in both temples at the same time.

In another case, he caused considerable disturbance to a king who was on a visit there. The king was supervising the slaughter of a goat, which horrified him. Witnessing the incident, he induced the elephants and horses of the king’s retinue to break tether and stampede to the slaughter site. The king and his attendants bolted while hearing a mysterious voice commanding them to beg forgiveness from the Lord for their intended slaughter of the goat. The excited animals then calmed down and the king promised to renounce animal slaughter and propagate non-injury in thought, action and speech towards all sentient creatures.

There are also many references to Ghanshyam, as he was then known, not eating for months on end.

Ghanshyam left home at the age of 11 to tour holy places of the Himalayas and other parts of India, and undertake his work of spreading Dharma. It is said that at each place he would ask priests the meaning of the five eternal realities: Jiva, Ishwar,

Maya, Brahman and Parabrahman. Some have said that the purpose of this was to ascertain the level of understanding of the religious authorities in each place. On that tour, which lasted several years, he adopted the garb of a mendicant wearing only a loincloth, and used the name of Neelkanth (the redeemer), a name that is associated with Shiva.

He first visited the holy city of Haridwar. Many shrines are located there and he was bent on visiting them all. Wherever he went he lived close to nature. In the forested area of Sripur, the head of the *mandir* (temple) there urged him to stay in a walled enclosure safe from wild animals. He declined, for he was not afraid of animals and nor was he afraid of death. As he sat in deep meditation under a tree, inmates of the *mandir* observed the extraordinary spectacle of a lion that licked his feet and then just sat before him in apparent supplication. Later, he also journeyed through Bengal and the forests of the Sunderbans where tigers abound. He survived and remained undaunted.

From Sripur, he climbed up mountain slopes to the city of Badrinath, which was about to become snowbound for the winter and was being vacated by some of the inhabitants. However, declining to return with them to the lowlands, he climbed further into the wild mountain terrain to visit the holy lake of Mansarovar at over 15,000 feet. The lake lies in a remote area of what is now Autonomous Tibet, and is still the goal of many pilgrims. It is believed to have been created by the mind of Lord Brahma and that the drinking of its water will wash away the sins of a hundred lives. The Swedish explorer, Sven Hedin, in the late 19th century, said of the lake, "Celebrated in grand hymns by the poets of remote antiquity, is a dwelling place of the gods, a mirror beneath the paradise of Brahma and the heaven of Shiva."

Wearing only a loincloth, this journey was made during the coldest period of winter and may be ranked as a superhuman feat. In the spring, he returned to Badrinath and from there proceeded to Ayodhya.

His next goal lay in the bleak valley of Muktinath in Nepal. There, King Mahadatt Sen experienced enlightenment from

his teachings and tried to make him stay there permanently. However, he was not to be enticed and explained that worldly things were worthless to him. He told the king that on closing his eyes in meditation the happiness that arises makes all material pleasures pale into insignificance.

In the forests of Nepal he met an aged yoga master called Gopal Yogi, who taught him Ashtang yoga (eight-fold yoga). There he also studied the Gita, concentrating on those parts associated with the Atman – a word used for a person with a spiritually stable consciousness. A year later, he journeyed to Kathmandu where he met King Run Bahadur Sen and cured him of a long-standing stomach illness. As a result of that, the king, who had imprisoned many ascetics for displeasing him by failing to affect a cure, changed his attitude and released them.

Leaving Kathmandu, he journeyed eastward to Kamakshi where he encountered a powerful *Tantra* (mystical ritual) practitioner named Pibek who cast an evil spell on him. However, the deities involved decided to transfer the curse back to Pibek himself who received a serious pounding at the hands of some thugs.

From there he journeyed southward to Jagannath Puri where the 11th century temple was presided over by the goddess Parvathi. There he uncovered deceitful and immoral behavior among the priests and admonished them severely. Much of his life was concerned with correcting measures of decadence that had affected the behavior and morality of the priestly caste at that time. As indicated before, he always asked the heads of monasteries and religious schools about the nature of the five eternal realities but nowhere had he received a satisfactory reply. He noticed instead that many so-called renunciate swamis and sadhus mixed freely with women and also consumed alcohol. But in a village called Loi in southern Kathiawad, he meditated next to a step-well (a water reservoir referred to as a tank in India), radiating a tremendous aura of Divinity that captivated the women drawing water there. There also, an aged sadhu named Sukhanand Swami became captivated and rooted to the spot by his mere presence. He was introduced to the sadhu's ashram and to his guru called Swami

Muktanand, and to him he posed his questions regarding the five eternal realities, and at last received a satisfactory answer. He stayed in the ashram for some time, performing humble tasks as well as teaching Ashtang yoga to the sadhus there. It was at this ashram that he met Swami Ramanand, a notable swami whom he was to encounter again later.

After that he traveled south to Kanya Kumari visiting shrines, monasteries and sacred places, and then returned to Gujarat in 1799. In the seven years of travels, he had walked an estimated 12,000 kilometers visiting sacred sites and checking on the level of dhamma among the religious classes. In that time, he bestowed his grace on countless yogis and aspirants for liberation.

In Gujarat, he met Swami Ramanand again and was initiated by him as a sadhu and given the name Sahajanand and, a year later in 1801, the aging Swami Ramanand appointed him as his successor and head of what became the BAPS Fellowship.

(It is said that Swami Ramanand had chosen Gujarat to locate his Fellowship following an experience of divine light as a child, bestowed on him by a sadhu named Atmasanand Swami, believed to be one of Swaminarayan's earlier incarnations. A few days after Ramanand's departure, Sahajanand presented the Swaminarayan mantra which had so enchanted people. It is from that time onward that Sahajanand became referred to as Bhagawan Swaminarayan.) As Swaminarayan, he began to create a band of renunciates with strong social leanings, who engaged themselves in setting up almshouses and digging wells and ponds for villagers. He physically contributed to the work and during the great famine of 1813, he carried grain on horseback from village to village. He also championed against animal sacrifice at religious ceremonies by arranging *yajnas* (fire ceremony) to which many Brahmins were invited. It was at these events that he explained that animal sacrifice is not allowed in the Vedic scriptures. Rather, it was being done because of the liking for meat by many sadhus – and they should stop it.

Bhagawan Swaminarayan's reformation activities are well recorded along with his strong support of the upliftment of women, both socially and in religion, and his opposition to the restricting influence of the caste system in religious teaching and rituals. Lower caste individuals and even Muslims were equally welcomed by him. He instructed Brahmins to take meals with untouchables, and told them to humble themselves by begging for alms from the lower sections of society. He was also equally opposed to certain Tantra practices in which sorcerers use their practice for harmful purposes. For him it was moksha for all.

He was also a strong opponent of *sati pratha* (the suicide of widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands) and of female infanticide, both of which were still widely practiced at that time.

Formation and spiritual succession of BAPS

In 1825, Swaminarayan established two seats of leadership: one in Ahmedabad and the other at Vadtal, and appointed *acharyas* (spiritual teacher) who were his blood relatives as their leaders. However, several decades after his death, divisions have occurred with different understandings of the succession which led to the formation of BAPS. The followers of BAPS hold that Gunatitanand Swami was the logical spiritual successor to Swaminarayan, and the acharyas should be regarded only as the administrative heads of the organizations, rather than figures of spiritual worth. During his life, Swaminarayan had several times declared that Gunatitanand Swami was Aksharbrahma incarnate – the abode of God. (Bhagawan Swaminarayan maintained that humans would not be able to withstand a direct meeting with God, hence He takes human form by simultaneously living in His abode – which people could approach safely and love in the form of an *Avatar* – incarnation of a god.)

During his lifetime, Swaminarayan ordered the construction of temples at Ahmedabad, Bhuj, Vadtal, Dholera, Junagadh, Gadhada, Muli, Dholka and Jetalpur, and the installing of images of various deities in them. Moreover, since ascetics played a major role in the faith by contributing to the growth

and development of the movement, he initiated many hundreds of them in his lifetime.

He also wrote many religious texts of which the *Shikshapatri* and the *Vachanamrut* are the best known. *Satsangi Jeevan* is his authorized biography.

Founders and successors in the BAPS lineage

As indicated, Gunatitanand Swami was the first successor within the BAPS Foundation lineage. Born in 1785, he was just four years younger than Bhagawan Swaminarayan. It is said that from childhood he would have inner visions of Swaminarayan's activities far away in Uttar Pradesh. He was given *deeksha* (initiation) by Swaminarayan and appointed as head of the Junagadh temple where he spent around 40 years propagating *satsang* (gathering of like-minded persons) in that region. Gunatitanand was responsible for producing the *Swamini Vato*, a set of sayings that is regarded as very important within BAPS. Gunatitanand passed away in 1867.

Born in 1829, the second successor in the BAPS lineage was Bhagati Maharaj. Through his spiritual discourses, he was instrumental in propagating the knowledge of Swaminarayan as the Supreme Being, with Gunatitanand as Akshar, the divine abode of God. As a low-caste householder, his spiritual attainment and devotion towards Gunatitanand Swami had set new precedents that opposed the idea that spiritual elevation was confined to the upper castes. He often explained that liberation could only be understood when a person had total control over all the senses of his body.

In 1873, Bhagati Maharaj met his eventual successor Shastri Maharaj who was only eight years old at that time. Just before his death in 1897 Bhagati Maharaj appointed him his successor, the third in the Swaminarayan lineage. As indicated before, Shastri Maharaj was the prime mover in establishing BAPS and distinguishing it from other cults that were following Swaminarayan's teachings. (His identification of Gunatitanand Swami as the first true Akshar of the Swaminarayan succession, had led to opposition and to his removal from the Vadtal diocese.) This was exacerbated by his repeated assertion that many of the Vadtal sadhus failed to

adhere to their monastic vows – so much so that several sadhus had plotted to murder him.

Though forbidden to preach there, he put some distance between himself and his detractors by preaching in far removed villages. He also undertook the consecration of the *murtis* (statues) of Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand in a newly constructed mandir in the village of Bochasan, by which he was further alienated. Finally, in 1907, after lawsuits and other altercations, he became the head of the BAPS movement that had succeeded from the Vadtal and Ahmedabad *gaddis* (spiritual seats). In 1910, he met the much respected Yogiji Maharaj, the eventual fourth successor in the lineage. The support of Yogiji Maharaj led to several of the younger swamis from Vadtal leaving to join Shastri Maharaj, for Shastri Maharaj and his small group of followers were revered by the people for their resourcefulness and their efforts to build temples. He died in 1951.

Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth successor in the lineage, was the second leader following the formation of BAPS. Born in 1892, with the birth name Jinabhai Vasanji, he was given deeksha by Shastri Maharaj at the age of 16 and received into monkhood with the name of Sadhu Gnanjivandas. He was highly respected for his humility and his diligent service to others. He became known within the BAPS organization led by Shastri Maharaj, who had insisted that he study Sanskrit rather than English – because the role of monks was to read and understand the scriptures. Although lacking a Western education, Yogiji Maharaj attracted many educated people including doctors and engineers, who sometimes renounced their worldly lives and became sadhus. Yogiji was also known for his efforts in spreading the BAPS Swaminarayan faith internationally.

Swami Maharaj

Born Shantilal Patel in 1921, Swami Maharaj is the current leader of the BAPS movement and the fifth successor in the Swaminarayan lineage.

Devotees believe him to be in constant communion with God, and under his guidance BAPS has developed into a

global spiritual organization with activities spanning religious, cultural, social, and humanitarian fields. When he was 17 years of age, Shastri Maharaj persuaded him to renounce the world and become a sadhu. In 1940, he was given deeksha and named Sadhu Narayanswarupdas (meaning the form of Narayana). Renouncing worldly pleasures, he committed himself to lifelong dedication and service to God and humanity. He showed outstanding administrative skills and was appointed as the head of the temple at Sarangpur. He had also gained broad knowledge of BAPS affairs by having been the personal secretary of Shastri Maharaj.

In 1950, Shastri Maharaj appointed him as administrative president of BAPS. At this he said, “I feel overwhelmed by the kindness and love showered on me so lavishly by my Guru and my mentor Yogiji Maharaj. Always will this day remain sacred to me, in that I am considered worthy by the two most noble souls of our fellowship.” He served under the guidance of Yogiji Maharaj after Shastri Maharaj’s death, and became the spiritual head of BAPS after the death of Yogiji Maharaj in 1971.

Under Shastri Maharaj’s leadership, BAPS had grown rapidly as a worldwide socio-spiritual organization, and since then Swami Maharaj has expanded it further by inaugurating hundreds of mandirs and spiritual centers around the world. He consistently emphasizes that it is what religions hold in common that is important – uplifting the moral and religious life of mankind. For example, his appeal for peace and forgiveness of Muslims following the September attacks in Mumbai in 2002 epitomizes non-violence. It has been frequently said that it is his selfless love that has influenced so many to become devotees and sadhus. He is viewed as having achieved the ultimate level of spiritual development. By living in harmony with all the spiritual tenets outlined by Swaminarayan, devotees consider Pramukh Swami to be a personification of the sacred scriptures themselves, and a great interpreter of their meaning.

Contact information

BAPS has centers and temples worldwide – in India, USA, Canada, Europe, Eastern Europe, Russia, Japan, Africa, South America, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

International HQ:

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Shahibaug Road,
Ahmedabad 380004, Gujarat, India.

Websites: www.baps.org • www.swaminarayan.org



Hazrat Babajan
(1806-1931)

Chapter 2

HAZRAT BABAJAN

A Perfect Master

*'It is I who have created all!
I am the source of everything in creation.'*

Born Gool Rukh in Afghanistan, the birth date of the woman who became known as Hazrat Babajan is not known and opinions range widely from around 1790 to the 1830s. She was the daughter of a high official of the Amir and came to be considered by her followers as an enlightened Satguru. She lived to what was believed to be a ripe old age, spending the final 25 years of her life in Pune, India, where she died in 1931.

She is now known mainly for her influence on the spiritual development of the well-known Avatar Meher Baba. As a child she was said to be introspective and, from an early age, it is said that she spent much of her time in prayer through which she developed mystical tendencies.

She was reared in the strict purdah tradition in which women are sheltered from the outside world. However, she was also highly educated and fluent in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, and resisted an unwelcome marriage by leaving home at the age of 18.

It is known that she journeyed to the city of Peshawar, at the start of the Khyber Pass, but nothing more definite is known of her life until she showed up in Rawalpindi. There she met a Hindu guru and following his instructions, went into seclusion undertaking severe spiritual austerities for around 17 years. At the age of 37, she met a Muslim saint in the Punjab, and is said to have attained God-realization or become enlightened.

After a further stay in Rawalpindi with her Hindu master, she journeyed to Syria, Lebanon and Iraq – and, disguised as a man for safety reasons, undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca. In Mecca, she gathered food for poor pilgrims and personally nursed some who had fallen ill.

After Arabia, she returned to India and stayed for some time in Bombay where her fame began to grow. In 1903, she made a second pilgrimage to Mecca and, back in India, visited the tomb of the *Sufi* (Muslim ascetic) saint Moinuddin Chishti, founder of the Chishti Order of Islam. After that she set up residence in Pune, not too far from Bombay.

Life in Pune

In 1905, very old by then and shabbily dressed, with white matted hair, she located to a slum area called Char Bawdi (Four Wells) in Pune, close to a British military cantonment there. After several months of exposure to the elements, she (reluctantly it is said) allowed her devotees to build a simple shelter for her out of sticks and gunny sacks under a large neem tree, where children sometimes pelted her with various kinds of missiles. But she remained indifferent to material things, and the gifts she received from her devotees were always shared with the poor and destitute around there. And slowly, out of curiosity or devotion, increasing numbers of people from Pune and elsewhere would come seeking her blessings. Moreover, surprising developmental changes took place in the slum area of Char Bawdi. Buildings arose all around and many street entertainers and beggars scrambled there for alms.

Meeting Meher Baba

In 1913, Meher Baba was a 19-year-old student who used to cycle past Hazrat under her neem tree, on his way to college. He was aware that she was regarded by some to be a Muslim saint and by others as a mad woman – even a sorceress. On one occasion she beckoned to him, and because he knew his father held her in high regard, he stopped before her and did *pranaam* (traditional greeting). He continued to visit her but they seldom spoke. But one evening, in 1914, he

was about to take his leave when she held his face in her hands and kissed him on the forehead. That left him in an enraptured state which lasted until his 27th year.

The writer Paul Brunton visited Hazrat Babajan in 1930, about a year before she died and penned the following lines: *'She lies in full view of passers-by, upon a low divan, her head propped up by pillows. The lustrous whiteness of her silky hair offers sad contrast to the heavily wrinkled face and seamed brow... Some deep psychological attainment really resides in the depths of her being, I am certain.'*

Miracles

There are many recorded instances of healings and other miracles associated with Hazrat. One outstanding one, which questions the meaning of time and other material things, concerns the report of her being buried alive by fanatical Muslim soldiers for what they said was blasphemy. But somehow she survived. After a lapse of many years following World War I, the same soldiers were transferred to Pune and came face to face with her again sitting under her neem tree. Then fanaticism became devotion for many of the soldiers who became her devotees.

Her death

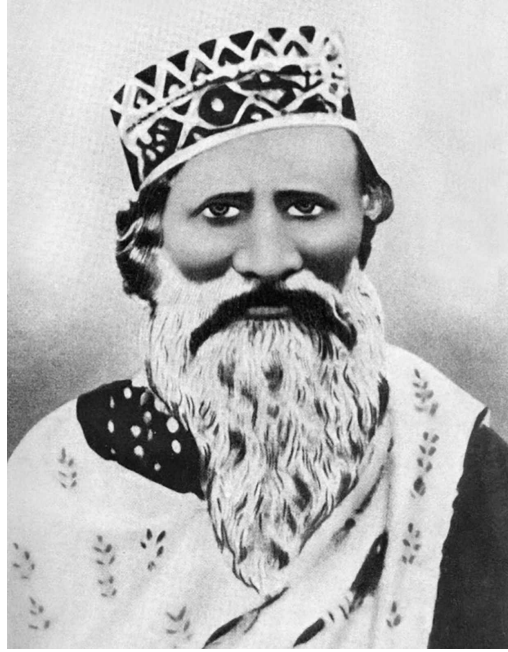
According to one report, a few days before her death, Hazrat said, "It is time... time for me to leave now. The work is over... I must close the shop."

A devotee present said, "Don't say that, we need you with us." But she replied, "Nobody wants my wares. Nobody can afford the price. I have turned my goods over to the Proprietor."

Contact information

A white marble, one-room shrine was built for Hazrat Babajan alongside her neem tree at Char Bawdi in Pune. It is frequented by people of all religions.

Website: www.babajandargah.com



Shiv Dayal Singh
(1815-1878)

Chapter 3

SHIV DAYAL SINGH

The Radhasoami Movement

*‘Understand the disciple as the oyster shell,
and the Guru as the seed of the pearl...’*

Radhasoami (Radha Swami) is a spiritual movement that started in the 19th century in India. It is said to follow the Sant Math path – the path of Saints. ‘Radha’ refers to the soul or spiritual essence of an individual or a group of individuals who are following the path, while ‘Soami’ (Swami) is the term that designates the enlightened master of that path – the leader or possessor of that soul or, in a universal sense, the master of all souls, God, who teaches through satsangs. In Radhasoami satsangs, the ‘sat’ means eternal, which never falls away, as God Himself; ‘sang’ means to come in contact with God’s power (*Naam*). So, satsang is meant to involve the discussion and explanation of the way to contact ‘Naam’ power. It is not to discuss worldly matters.

Like the Sant Math sects, Radhasoami emphasizes cognizance of inner sound and light, combined with personal reverence and loyalty to a living master who guides devotees into higher spiritual states. The master must be realized (enlightened) and never charge money for the teachings. Expenses should be paid for from unsolicited donations.

Shiv Dayal Singh (1815-1878) is considered by many to be the founder of the Radhasoami movement, being inspired by his Guru, Param Sant Tulsi Sahab. After the death of his master, Shiv Dayal practiced yoga for 15 years in almost total seclusion, and thereafter held satsangs for a further 17 years until his death. His teachings were said to describe the secret of the divine True Name (Sat Naam) which, published posthumously from his notes, comprised explanations and poetic renderings that generated the strong emotional and

spiritual appeal that is characteristic of many great spiritual writings and revelations.

Early growth of the movement

By the middle of the 19th century, Shiv Dayal had a handful of followers in Agra and, by the time of his death in 1878, the teachings had spread across India with some thousands of followers. Anyone who followed the teachings had to be vegetarian, lead a high moral life, refrain from alcohol and other intoxicants, and engage in over two hours of sound current yoga meditation (*Surat Shabd* yoga meditation) daily. Subsequently, and following his death, some of his prominent followers attracted followers of their own, leading to slightly varied interpretations of Radhasoami. Sant Kirpal Singh was one of the most prominent of these.

Sant Kirpal Singh

Kirpal Singh (1894-1974) was the spiritual teacher from the western part of the Punjab that now lies in Pakistan, who brought Radhasoami well into the 20th century. His mission was to *'Fill the human heart with compassion, mercy and universal love, which should radiate to all countries, nations and peoples of the world.'* It would create a true unity in the world, with the heart as the ruling factor in people's lives, and enable each to love and serve God and all beings, as God is immanent in all. In no way was there an intention to start a new religion and he would often quote his master's saying, "Plenty of wells have been dug. There is no need to dig another." His self-proclaimed intention was as follows:

"To revive the original knowledge, which is to be found in the core of all religions, which gives an experience of the true nature of man whose aim it is to return to the Source – God. By this experience every individual regains his inherent value and dignity, and can reach union, the highest goal of human life."

It is important to realize that Radhasoami is not a religion and, therefore, able to embrace any religious faith without exception. He said, "My goal is that of oneness. I spread the message of oneness in life and living. This is the way to peace

on earth. This is the mission of my life, and I pray that it may be fulfilled.”

He taught that this unity in faith was the birthright of all humankind, necessary to attain self-knowledge and God-knowledge. He said that through the methods of Radhasoami, and the grace of his master, he had experienced all that has ever been described in the world’s scriptures about God. His disciples claimed that he dedicated his whole life to this ideal of unity – the unity of humankind under the fatherhood of God.

Teachings

Apart from strict vegetarianism, attending satsang, avoiding intoxicants and the leading of a moral life, the Radhasoami teachings are based on Surat Shabd yoga that works with spiritual light and sound. It is to be carried out for one-tenth of one’s time – around two-and-a-half hours daily. ‘Surat’ refers to the outward expression of the soul (face) and ‘Shabd’ means audible life stream: the dynamic energy of God has been emitted as audible sound and light vibrations into the abyss of space from the dawn of creation; and yoga, of course, means the union of the two. To receive this, it is said that a practitioner of Radhasoami yoga requires initiation from an enlightened master who will thereafter guide the devotee both externally and internally.

The four techniques of Surat Shabd yoga are known as: *Manas japa*, *Manas dhyana*, *Drishti yoga* and *Light/sound yoga*. *Manas japa* is the mental reciting of God’s name. The form of the Name is usually given privately to a devotee as a mantra word or words and should not be divulged to others.

Manas dhyana is the mental visualization of a form of God as a point of light, sometimes blue, known as the *bindu*, or it can also be a visualization of the master. Sometimes, the fingers are placed lightly on the eyes and forehead above the nose. Flashes of light, or shimmering light, may be seen: lights of different colours, clouds of light, stars, suns, moons, sparks or twinkles – all being centered in the third eye, the eye of the astral body, above the nose.

As concentration develops, there comes an evolution from mentally-generated visions and sounds, to inner sounds and inner light seen by the third eye center. Meditation on the inner sound/light is considered to be a higher and more advanced state of meditation than the visualization meditation. In the sound technique, it is sometimes beneficial to use the thumbs to block out external sounds. The sounds may resemble rumbling like inner thunder, or may develop into an inner mantra that repeats by itself. There are many kinds of sounds, but certain ones are more attractive to the soul pulling it into higher states of awareness.

World Fellowship of Religions

Kirpal Singh's organization, the World Fellowship of Religions founded in 1950 under the direction of his master Hazur Baba Sawan Singh, was based on the spiritual getting-together of people with no denominational or sectarian beliefs of any kind standing in the way. He believed that all people, even though professing different faiths and religious beliefs, could be encouraged to practice common spiritual disciplines and techniques in order to gain salvation and peace in this world and beyond.

The formation of the organization was followed by the building of the Sawan Ashram at Shakti Nagar in Old Delhi, which attracted followers from all over the world, with different and diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.

The organization was strongly established by 1957 with Kirpal Singh holding the post of President. On three world tours in 1955, 1963 and 1972, he visited major cities and met important individuals to whom he stressed the need for a regular World Conference on the Unity of Man. In 1973, he met with the President of the Japanese Budh Dharma organization, Mr. Chidatsu, who participated in the organization of the World Conference. He convened the first Conference held in Delhi in February 1974. He was also invited to address the Indian Parliament – the first time a spiritual leader was given that honour.

On death

Sant Kirpal Singh explained that death is the greatest enigma in life. But the Saints know well the shadowy character of bodily death. They teach that death is a joyous birth into a life more beatific than was ever dreamed of here. They point out and demonstrate to us the way to conquer the seemingly invincible terror of death and thus become free of fear. This is the grand lesson that we can learn from the Saints.

Kirpal Singh died in August 1974.

Some successors

Sant Kirpal Singh died without naming a successor. However, there were others who assumed leadership even during his lifetime. Since the death of Kirpal Singh, Sant Darshan Singh Ji (1921-1989) assumed leadership. In 1976, Sant Thakar Singh was installed by Taiji Hardevi, as President in Kirpal's Sawan Ashram, while Sant Ajaib Singh was established at Sant Bani Ashram located at Village 16 PS in Rajasthan.

Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj (born in 1946) is recognized as the current spiritual master and head of the organization. He has devoted his life to helping others realize the power of the soul and to relieving human suffering. His message is a practical prescription for global peace. In a talk entitled 'Moral Dimensions of Leadership' given to the United States Coast Guard Academy, he had the following to say, "Within us is a divine spirit from which our intelligence and wisdom is derived. The process of accessing that inner divine spirit, intelligence and wisdom is meditation; if we transform knowledge to wisdom by meditating and experiencing the driving force behind all existence, then we have the key to human unity. This experience will transform our individual lives and the lives of those around us. These individual transformations will ultimately bring unity and peace at the community, national, and global levels."

His talks have been broadcast internationally on radio, television, and through the internet, and his books and articles on spiritual topics have been translated into over 50 languages.

As founder of Darshan Education Foundation, he has established Darshan Academies in schools throughout India, integrating both meditation and a spiritual curriculum into the traditional academic environment.

He also spoke at a ceremony honoring the UN Secretary, Kofi Annan, and was a featured spiritual leader at the 2000 Millennium Peace Summit of religious and spiritual leaders held at the United Nations. As head of Science of Spirituality (SOS) at the Sawan Kirpal Ruhani Mission, he inspires the organization's humanitarian efforts throughout the world.

Charities and current activities

The Mission organizes free educational workshops and seminars, publishes literature, makes video and audio recordings that highlight the virtues of non-violence, truthfulness, humility, non-attachment and selfless service. In the USA, there is a fundraising annual VeggieFest each August in Naperville.

To date, the Mission has raised funds and provided aid for tsunami victims by collecting and distributing food and clothing and building new schools in disaster areas; raised funds for victims of hurricane Katrina in New Orleans; rebuilt an entire village in India after the Gujarat earthquake; and sent financial relief to earthquake survivors in Central and South America. The Mission also participates in blood donation drives, free eye checkup camps, and other service projects providing food and clothing assistance to victims. Science of Spirituality provides free allopathic, homeopathic, and ayurvedic medicines and medical services throughout India to support the efforts of community and local hospitals.

Other projects include the establishment of over 50 free-of-cost Silai Centers in India that help women to develop sewing skills so they can become self-sufficient. Scholarships are also provided to needy students at schools established by the mission. In keeping with Sikh tradition, the free kitchen in Delhi feeds thousands of people each week and, during larger programs, feeds tens of thousands of people daily. Food and medicines are provided to the Shanti Avedna Center for terminally ill patients. Aid and appliances are donated to the

Department of Rehabilitation Hospital in New Delhi to be given to the poor and disabled. Clothes, blankets, bed sheets, and lunch boxes are distributed regularly to the National Association for the Blind in New Delhi, and every winter, warm clothes are provided for the inmates of Tihar Jail. Projects to help the environment and to educate people about the importance of ecology are also services that Science of Spirituality promotes.

Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj convenes two annual conferences in Delhi: The Global Conference on Mysticism in September, and the International Conference on Human Integration in February.

Mission centers

The major Mission centers in India are the Kirpal Ashram and the Kirpal Bagh, both in Delhi. In the USA, there are Mission centers in Naperville, Illinois; Bowling Green, Virginia; Birch Bay, Washington; Lake Mary, Florida; Amityville, New York. There are also Mission Centers at Richmond, BC; Canada, and in Munich, Germany. Other organizations have been established in Austria and Germany.

Contact information

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Dayanand Saraswati
(1824-1883)

Chapter 4

DAYANAND SARASWATI

The Firebrand of Hinduism

'I accept as Dharma... that which is not opposed to the teachings of God as embodied in the Vedas.'

Dayanand Saraswati was born on 12th February 1824 to a Brahmin couple living in Tankara village, near Morbi in the region of Kathiawad. He was named Mulshankar by his father Karshanji Lalji Tiwari, a tax collector of the district, a prosperous and influential person, and a staunch and devout follower of Lord Shiva. On the occasion of Shivaratri, the 14-year-old Mulshankar was made to observe the customary all-night vigil as a votive act for the God. Lying awake, he observed a mouse clambering over the *Shivalinga*, the symbolic form of the Lord, and picking up and nibbling at an offering of sweetmeats to the God. Seeing this, he was shaken to the core at what appeared to his mind to be an act of desecration. He wondered that if such a God could not defend Himself against a little mouse, how could He be regarded as the savior of the world? The willful young lad's faith in all forms of idol worship and rituals was at once torn apart. However, it did not turn him into an atheist.

The deaths of his younger sister and uncle from cholera made Mulshankar ponder over the meaning of life and death. He started asking questions which worried his parents. He was to be married in his early teens, as was then common in India. His family tried to marry him off in the hope that it would curb his rebellious behavior, but he ran away only to be caught and returned to the angry family-fold. When the pressures to get married became too much to bear, he made a bolt for it again and this time, in 1846, he succeeded. His instinctive chastity was unshakable and he kept a carefully pious distance from women throughout his life.

Life as an ascetic

From 1845 to 1869, he spent nearly 25 years as a wandering ascetic searching for religious truth. He lived in jungles, in retreats in the Himalayan mountains, and at a number of pilgrimage sites in northern India. He became a sadhu and learnt many things about the scriptures. During these years, he practised various forms of yoga including Hatha yoga. In 1860, he found his guru in Mathura, in an old, blind, grim-minded ascetic called Swami Virajananda Saraswati. This prickly guru refused to teach the young man anything until he had flung all his carefully accumulated treasures of religious scriptures into the river! He gave Mulshankar the name of Dayanand Saraswati and confirmed him in the belief that India had gone wrong in swerving from the original source of spirituality – the Vedas. Virajananda had no patience with the multiplicity of gods and endless legends that Indians delighted in. There was only one supreme God. The Vedas tell you all you need to know. Dayanand promised Virajananda that he would devote his life to restoring the Vedas to their rightful place in Hinduism. By now he was able to recite religious verses and also teach them to those who wanted to learn. He participated in debates with orthodox priests and gurus on religious matters. These debates were attended by large masses and soon Dayanand came to be a name to reckon with. His forceful rhetoric and aggressive debating style upset many and there were now attempts being made on his life.

Once a scoffing maharaja asserted that he had no time to waste with yoga and breath control, as he was a practical man and a warrior too. When the time came for him to ride away in his showy six-horse carriage, it just wouldn't move! Dayanand was holding back the carriage with one hand! Another time, a disgruntled critic threw a king cobra at him but Dayanand crushed the snake with his hands. When someone at another debate swung a sword at him, the infuriated Dayanand grabbed the weapon and splintered it. Several attempts were also made to poison him. Each time he would use his yogic prowess to either vomit the poison, or by rapid and furious breath control break down the poison before it could affect

him. Such experiences are not conducive to making a man mild mannered and Dayanand became more unyielding than ever. One of the remarkable debates ‘Do the Vedas uphold deity worship?’ occurred on 22nd October 1869 in Varanasi, which he won against 27 scholars and a dozen expert *pandits* (religious Hindu priests). The debate was attended by over 50,000 people.

In 1869, Dayanand was invited for a debate on the principles of the Hindu religion in the city of Varanasi. Here, 300 champions of the orthodox faith were gathered to debate against him but they were unable to refute his arguments. Finally, they played a low trick by handing him a long-winded question that ran into several pages. While he was still reading this, they began to shout that he could not answer the question. Dayanand protested that he needed to read the blessed thing before he could reply but they saw their slimy chance and took it. They proclaimed that he had ‘failed’. The newspapers, however, reported what had actually gone on and Dayanand became a national figure.

A meeting in Kolkata with Keshab Chandra Sen in 1873 gave his mission real relevance. It was pointed out to him that if he preached in the language of the people instead of depending upon Sanskrit, he would have a greater impact. This idea took hold of Dayanand and he set about implementing it. On 10th April 1875, he founded the Arya Samaj – the Noble Society. This organization would propagate his ideals to regenerate an India that had become dominated by religious dogma and therefore spiritually weak. Since the areas in which Dayanand seemed to be having the most influence was the Hindi heartland, he wrote his book in that language – the well-known *Satyartha Prakash* or ‘Light of Truth’.

He clearly states his belief that the only truth worth following is in the Vedas and everything else is a mistake. Aurobindo called this work a stroke of genius, an intuitive understanding of the true source and strength of the Hindu nation, and about the only thing that can inspire and support the rebirth of a nation and culture. But Dayanand was not satisfied in merely laying out this position. He proceeded to state in clear and forceful detail what was wrong with

everything else. Anything that did not rely on the Vedas was potentially suspect and ignored. The Christian missionaries were delighted at this assault from the inside, when Dayanand proved he was not just prejudiced against orthodox religion and ritual; he also dismissed the scriptures of all the non-Hindu faiths as well.

This was an unexpected turn of events. The missionaries were furious. Even as perceptive an author as Romain Rolland wrote: *'He alone hurled the defiance of India against her invaders.'* Dayanand declared war against Christianity. The historian A.L. Basham recognized it for what it was and called it 'the historic counterattack of Hinduism'. For the first time, a colonized people were fighting back in defence of the faith and their culture – and winning. He did not criticize the religions of Polynesia, South America, Africa, China and Japan. He did not know of them.

Dayanand asserted that the study of the Vedas is the first duty of all members of the Noble Society. The second is to diffuse knowledge and dissipate ignorance. He had no patience with theories of caste or the inferiority of women and some of his noblest writing occurs when he loses his temper on their behalf. Some of his ideas were so far reaching that even today India has difficulty in implementing them. Swami Vivekananda, even more brilliant and equally courageous, used to hold him in the highest regard and Dayanand is the only person that Vivekananda has described as 'great'.

His mission

Swami Dayanand's mission was not to start a new religion but to ask humankind for Universal Brotherhood through nobility as spelt out in the Vedas. For that mission he founded Arya Samaj – the Noble Society, and enunciated the Ten Universal Principles as a code for *Krinvanto Vishwaryam* – meaning that the whole world be an abode for Nobles (Aryas). His next step was to take up the difficult task of reforming Hinduism. It was his belief that Hinduism had been corrupted by divergence from the founding principles of the Vedas, and that Hindus had been misled by the priesthood for their personal gain and that they had willfully discouraged the

common people from reading Vedic scriptures. They had encouraged rituals such as bathing in the Ganges river and feeding of priests on anniversaries, which Dayanand pronounced as superstitions or self-serving practices. By exhorting the people to reject such superstitious notions, his aim was to educate the nation to 'return' to the Vedas. He urged them to accept social reforms, including the importance of cows for national prosperity, and the adoption of Hindi as the national language for national integration. In addition to discouraging idolatry in Hinduism, as may be seen in his book *Satyarth Prakash*, he was against what he considered to be the corruption of the true and pure faith in his own country. Unlike many other reform movements of his times within Hinduism, the Arya Samaj's appeal was addressed not only to the educated few in India, but to the world as a whole as evidenced in the sixth principle of the Arya Samaj. In fact his teachings professed universalism through his daily life and practice of yoga and *asanas* (yogic postures). Through his teachings, sermons and writings, he inspired the nation to aspire to *Swarajya* (self-governance), nationalism, and spiritualism.

His death

In 1883, Dayanand was invited by Maharaja Jaswant Singh II of Jodhpur, who was eager to become his disciple, to stay at his palace. One day Dayanand went to visit the Maharaja and saw him in the company of a dance-girl named Nanhi Jaan. The Swami urged the Maharaja to forsake the girl along with all such unethical acts and follow Dharma. Nanhi Jaan was enraged and decided to take revenge. She bribed Dayanand's cook and asked him to mix powdered glass in his milk. On 29th September 1883, while he was still the royal guest of the Maharaja, the cook brought him the glass of milk containing powdered glass, at bedtime. As he drank the milk, Dayanand knew that it had been mixed with glass and realized that his nerves and veins would be cut. He was bedridden and suffered excruciating pain. By the time the doctors arrived, his condition had got worse. On seeing Dayanand's suffering, the cook was overcome with guilt and remorse for his act. He confessed his crime to Dayanand. On his deathbed, Dayanand

forgave him and gave him a bag of money and told him to flee the kingdom lest he be found out and executed by the Maharaja's men. Later, the Maharaja arranged for Swami Dayanand to be sent to Mount Abu. After staying some time in Abu, he went on 26th October 1883 to Ajmer for better medical care. There was no improvement in his health and he died on the morning of 30th October 1883 at 6 a.m. chanting mantras. The day coincided with the Hindu festival of Diwali.

His legacy

Swami Dayanand's views and writings have influenced the works of various writers including Shyamji Krishna Varma, who founded India House in London and guided other revolutionaries, Subhas Chandra Bose, Lala Lajpat Rai, Madam Cama, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Lala Hardayal, Madan Lal Dhingra, Ram Prasad Bismil, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Swami Shraddhanand, S. Satyamurti, Pandit Lekh Ram, Mahatma Hansraj, Rajiv Dixit and several others.

He had a profound influence on Shahid Bhagat Singh who after finishing his primary school had joined the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic Middle school in Lahore.

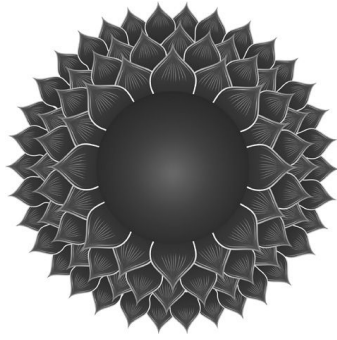
India's former president, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, said of him:

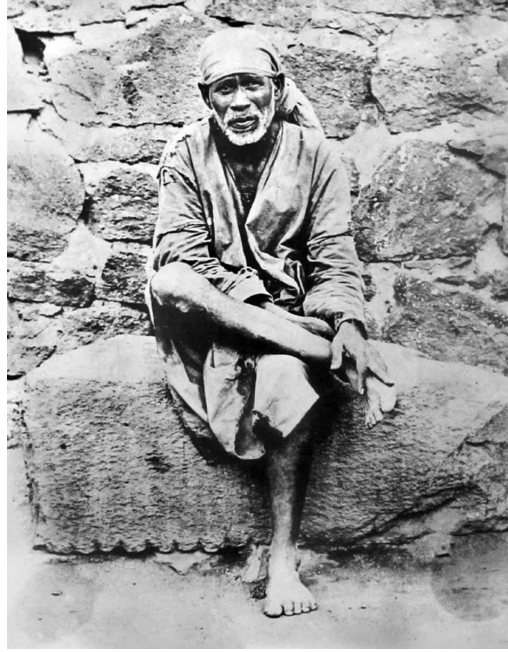
“Swami Dayanand ranked highest among the makers of modern India. He had worked tirelessly for the political, religious and cultural emancipation of the country. He was guided by reason, taking Hinduism back to the Vedic foundations. He had tried to reform society with a clean sweep, which was again needed today. Some of the reforms introduced in the Indian Constitution had been inspired by his teachings.”

Contact information

The Paropakarini Sabha located in Ajmer was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati to publish and preach his works and Vedic texts.

Website: www.thearyasamaj.org





Sai Baba of Shirdi
(1835-1918)

Chapter 5

SAI BABA OF SHIRDI

The Mystic Saint beloved to all Faiths

‘Sabka Malik Ek.’

Whenever he was asked about his past, the sage who came to be known as Sai Baba would always give elusive replies. The epithet ‘Sai’ was given to him upon his arrival at Shirdi, by a local Hindu temple priest, who thinking him to be a Muslim because he was dressed like a Sufi *fakir* (ascetic who lives on alms), greeted him with the words ‘*Ya Sai-n!*’ meaning ‘Welcome Sai’. In Sindhi and Urdu, the word ‘Sai-n’ is used as a term of respect for a fakir or a saint. The honorific ‘Baba’ means ‘father; grandfather; old man’ in most Indian languages.

Shirdi was then a small, dusty village of not much consequence, about 28 km from Nashik. It is today one of the fastest growing pilgrimage centers in India – all because of Sai Baba.

One of his well-known epigrams, ‘*Sabka Malik Ek*’ (‘One God Governs All’), is associated both with Hinduism and Islam (Sufism).

Early years

Sai Baba’s biographer, Narasimha Swamiji, claims that Sai Baba was born as the child of Brahmin parents:

‘On one momentous occasion, very late in his life, he revealed to one of his disciples, Mhalasapati, the fact that his parents were Brahmins of Pathri village in Aurangabad, which was then under the Nizam’s jurisdiction. Pathri is a Taluka in Parbhani district, near Manwath. Sai Baba added, in explanation of the fact that he was living in a mosque, that while still a tender child his Brahmin parents handed him over to the care of a fakir who brought him up. This is fairly

indisputable testimony, as Mhalasapati was a person of sterling character noted for his integrity, truthfulness and vairagya.’ (Narasimha Swamiji, *Life of Sai Baba*.) His father is said to be one Ganga Bavadia and his mother Devigiramma. As his birth neared, his father felt an irresistible urge to renounce the world. His wife followed him on this quest. She was overcome by labour pains in a forest close by, but her husband left her there and went his own way. His wife gave birth, wrapped the infant in a bundle of cloth and abandoning the child, hastened after her husband. A wandering Sufi fakir and his wife happened to pass through the forest, saw the abandoned infant, and in one of those miraculous coincidences, as they had no child themselves, kept the boy as a gift from God.

The young boy lost his foster father when he was five and his mother put him into a sort of an ashram at Selu, run by one Venkusha – who may have been Hindu or Muslim. An incident that is recounted of his stay at this ashram states that the young lad’s brilliance outshone that of the other students there and aroused their jealousy. A murderous assault was made upon him but his assailant immediately fell down, struck by divine retribution, and the young Sai (there is no name yet available for the boy) performed his first miracle by restoring him to life. However, there is no evidence for this tale and it has been passed down only through hearsay.

(The life of Kabir, a medieval saint, also has this abandonment by Brahmin parents and Muslim upbringing theme. Indeed, some even claim that Baba was a reincarnation of saint Kabir.)

Brief stay in Shirdi

The book *Shri Sai Satcharita* states that Sai Baba arrived at the village of Shirdi in the Ahmednagar District when he was about 16-years-old. He led an ascetic life, sitting under a neem tree and meditating. It recounts the reaction of the villagers to his presence in their midst:

‘The people of the village were wonderstruck to see such a young lad practising hard penance, not minding heat or cold.

By day he associated with no one, by night he was afraid of nobody.'

His presence attracted the curiosity of the villagers. The unruly village lads thought him to be mad and threw stones at him. Elders of the village, who were religiously inclined, like Mhalasapati, Appa Jogle and Kashinatha, regularly visited him. However, Sai Baba is said to have left the village of Shirdi within three months of his stay here. It is said he traveled to other pilgrimage centers in India but little is known of his whereabouts, that is, until we hear of his return to it after some years.

There are some indications that he met with many saints and fakirs, and worked as a weaver. He claimed to have been with the army of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. It is generally accepted that Sai Baba stayed in Shirdi for three years, disappeared for a year, and returned permanently around 1858, which suggests a birth year of 1838.

Return to Shirdi

It was around this time that he adopted the garb that consisted of a knee-length, one-piece Kafni robe and a cloth cap. Ramgir Bua, a devotee, testified that Sai Baba was dressed like an athlete and sported 'long hair flowing down to the end of his spine' when he arrived in Shirdi, and that he never had his head shaved. It was only after Baba forfeited a wrestling match with one Mohiddin Tamboli that he took up the kafni and cloth cap, articles of typical Sufi clothing. His mode of dress contributed to Baba's identification as a Muslim fakir and resulted in the initial indifference and hostility against him in what was a predominantly Hindu village.

For four to five years, Baba lived under a neem tree and often wandered for long periods in the jungle around Shirdi. His manner was said to be withdrawn and uncommunicative as he undertook long periods of meditation. He was eventually persuaded to settle down in an old and dilapidated mosque and lived a solitary life, surviving by begging for alms, and receiving itinerant Hindu or Muslim visitors. In the mosque, he maintained a sacred fire referred to as a *dhuni*, from which

he gave *udhi* i.e. sacred ash to his guests before they left. The ash was believed to have healing and apotropaic powers. He performed the function of a local *hakim* (traditional physician) and treated the sick by application of ashes. He also began delivering spiritual teachings to visitors, recommending the reading of sacred Hindu texts along with the *Qur'an*. He insisted on the indispensability of the unbroken remembrance of God's name (*dhikr, japa*), and often expressed himself in a cryptic manner with the use of parables, symbols and allegories.

After 1910, Sai Baba's fame began to spread. Many people started visiting him from far off Mumbai and the neighboring towns because they came to regard him as a saint with the power of performing miracles, or even as an Avatar. They built his first temple at Bhivpuri in Karjat.

His teaching

Sai Baba was opposed to all forms of persecution based on religion or caste and was an opponent of religious orthodoxy – Christian, Hindu or Muslim. He encouraged his devotees to pray, chant God's name, and read holy scriptures. He told Muslims to study the Qur'an, and Hindus to study texts such as the *Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita*, and *Yoga Vasistha*. He was impressed by the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita and encouraged people to follow it in their own lives. He advised them to lead a moral life, help others, and love every living being without any discrimination. He advocated *Shraddha*, devotion to the guru with *Saburi*, love and patience.

In his teachings, Sai Baba emphasized the importance of performing one's duties without attachment to earthly matters and of being content in life, regardless of one's situation. In his personal spiritual practice, Sai Baba observed worship procedures belonging to Hinduism as well as Islam. He shunned all regular rituals but allowed the practice of *namaz*, chanting of Al-Fatiha (first chapter *Surah* of the Qur'an), and Qur'an readings at Muslim festivals. Occasionally he would recite the Al-Fatiha himself, and enjoyed listening to recitations of *mawlid* (birthday of the Prophet) and *qawwali* (devotional songs) accompanied by the tabla and sarangi.

Sai Baba interpreted the religious texts of both Islam and Hinduism. He explained the meaning of the Hindu scriptures in the spirit of Advaita Vedanta. His philosophy also had numerous elements of *bhakti* (divine love). The three main Hindu spiritual paths – Bhakti yoga, Jnana yoga, and Karma yoga also influenced his teachings.

Encouraging the practice of charity and emphasizing the importance of sharing, he said, “Unless there is some relationship or connection, nobody goes anywhere. If anyone comes to you, do not discourteously drive them away but receive them well and treat them with due respect. Shri Hari (God) will be pleased if you give water to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, clothes to the naked, and your verandah to strangers for sitting and resting. If anybody wants any money from you and you are not inclined to give, do not give, but do not bark at him like a dog.”

Miracles attributed to Sai Baba

Sai Baba’s disciples and devotees claim that he performed several miracles such as appearing in two places at the same time. He also performed exorcisms. He would occasionally light lamps with water, perform Khanda Manda yoga i.e. he would remove his limbs or intestines and stick them back to his body. There were instances of him curing the incurably sick, appearing beaten when another was beaten, and preventing a mosque from falling down on people. He also ‘appeared’ to people in the form of Sri Rama, Krishna, Vithoba and many other gods depending on the faith of the individual. According to his followers, he appeared to them in dreams and gave them advice.

Worship and devotees

The Shirdi Sai Baba movement began in the 19th century, while he was living in Shirdi. A local Khandoba priest, Mhalasapati Nagre, is believed to have been his first devotee. To start with, Sai Baba’s followers were just a small group of Shirdi’s inhabitants and a few people from other parts of India. Because of him, Shirdi has become a place of importance and is counted among the major Hindu places of pilgrimage. The

first Sai Baba temple was situated at Bhivpuri, Karjat. The Sai Baba Mandir in Shirdi is visited by around 20,000 pilgrims a day and during religious festivals this number can reach up to 1,00,000 devotees. Shirdi Sai Baba is especially revered and worshiped in the states of Maharashtra, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.

The Shirdi Sai movement has spread to the Caribbean and to countries such as Nepal, Canada, United States, Australia, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, United Kingdom, Germany, France and Singapore.

Noted followers

Sai Baba left behind no spiritual heirs, nor appointed any disciples and, despite several requests from his followers, he did not even provide deeksha, the formal initiation of disciples. Some devotees of Sai Baba achieved fame as spiritual luminaries such as Upasni Maharaj of Sakori. He was revered by other saints like Beedkar Maharaj, Gangagir, Janakidas Maharaj, and Sati Godavari Mataji. Sai Baba referred to several saints as ‘my brothers’, especially the disciples of Swami Samarth of Akkalkot in Solapur District of Maharashtra.

Revered by Hindus

During Sai Baba’s lifetime, the Hindu saint Anandanath of Yewala declared Sai Baba a spiritual ‘diamond’. Another saint, Gangagir, called him a ‘jewel’. Beedkar Maharaj greatly revered Sai Baba, and in 1873, when he met him, he bestowed the title of *Jagad Guru* (World Teacher) upon him. Sai Baba was also greatly respected by Vasudevananda Saraswati (known as Tembe Swami). He was also revered by a group of Shaivic yogis, to which he belonged, known as the *Nath-Panchayat*.

According to B.V. Narasimhaswami, a posthumous follower who was widely praised as Sai Baba’s ‘apostle’, this attitude was prevalent up to 1954 even among some of his devotees in Shirdi.

Revered by Zoroastrians

Sai Baba has been referred to as the Zoroastrians' most popular non-Zoroastrian religious figure.

Meher Baba, who was born into a Zoroastrian family, met Sai Baba once, during World War I, in December 1915. Meher Baba was a youngster named Merwan Sheriar Irani, when he met Sai Baba for a few minutes during one of Sai Baba's processions in Shirdi. This event is considered as the most significant in Meher Baba's life. Although *Shri Sai Satcharita* makes no mention of Meher Baba, but in *Lord Meher*, the life story of Meher Baba, there are numerous references to Sai Baba.

Meher Baba credited his Avataric advent to Upasni Maharaj, Sai Baba, and three other Perfect Masters: Hazrat Babajan, Hazrat Tajuddin Baba, and Narayan Maharaj. He declared Sai Baba to be a *Qutub-e-Irshad* (the highest of the five Qutubs, a 'Master of the Universe' in the spiritual hierarchy).

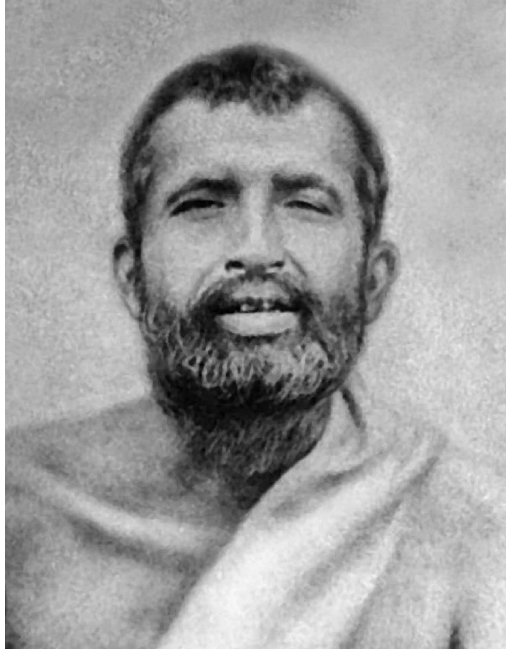
Sai Baba – in art and culture

Besides the main temple complex at Shirdi, there are many Sai Baba temples in India. There are also temples located in countries outside India, including the United States, Netherlands, Kenya, Cuba, Pakistan, Australia, United Kingdom, Germany and Japan. In the mosque at Shirdi, in which Sai Baba lived, there is a life-size portrait of him by Shama Rao Jaykar, an artist from Mumbai. Numerous monuments and statues depicting Sai Baba, which serve a religious function, have been made. One of them, made of marble by a sculptor named Balaji Vasant Talim, is in the Samadhi Mandir at Shirdi where Sai Baba is buried. Sai Baba's representations on postcards and stickers are now found all over India and nearly every taxi and auto rickshaw in Maharashtra and elsewhere carries a small image or photo of him as a talisman.

Contact information

The pilgrimage town of Shirdi is 28 km from Nashik and about 100 km from Pune.

Shri Saibaba Sansthan Trust (Shirdi),
Shirdi, Rahata, Ahmednagar 423109, Maharashtra, India.
Websites: www.shrisaibabasansthan.org • www.sai.org.in



Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa
(1836-1886)

Chapter 6

SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHANSA

And His Disciples

*'With the blue mountain for her ink,
With a branch of the heaven tree for her pen,
With the earth for her writing leaf,
Let the goddess Sarada describe your greatness,
She could not – though she wrote for ever.
"Oh great Lord God," Ramakrishna cried:
"How can I tell them of your glory?"'*

– Mahimna Stotra

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was one of India's great mystical saints. Although he was almost illiterate, his influence was so powerful that it created several generations of disciples who not only established but also continue to operate the highly regarded and internationally recognized Ramakrishna Order of Monks, and the Ramakrishna Mission and Institute, which have centers in many parts of the world. Both the Order and the Mission have their headquarters in Kolkata (Calcutta), close to the temple where Ramakrishna served as a priest. The Ramakrishna Order of Monks constitutes a residence and a training facility for monks and visitors belonging to the worldwide Vedanta Societies. The Ramakrishna Mission, unlike the Order, which has a purely spiritual function, is largely devoted to philanthropic and cultural activities in India and overseas.

Ramakrishna was born of a poor Brahmin family in a small village of West Bengal in 1836. His father was a pandit and the young Ramakrishna showed spiritual leanings from an early age. His first significant mystical experience came to him when he was seven. It occurred just before a heavy tropical storm when the sky was filled with brooding blue-black clouds. Suddenly he saw a flight of pure white cranes,

stark against the somber background. He was stunned by the beauty of the sight and fell into a mystical trance in which he lay unconscious for several hours. From that time onwards, and even to the end of his life, he remained precariously poised between normal and trance-like states. At the age of nine, while appearing as Shiva in a school play, he was carried away by the exalted role and fell into an ecstatic, God-enraptured state for three days. The school play was canceled.

Later, Ramakrishna trained as a Brahmin priest and at the age of 20, because it was proving difficult to get a more experienced incumbent, he was appointed to the position of chief priest in a newly constructed Kali temple at Dakshineswar, on the banks of the Ganges river in Kolkata. His worship then became centered on the image of Kali in the temple. It took the form of an intense desire to receive visions of, and identify with, the Divine Mother. In these God-intoxicated states, he would dance almost naked at night in a nearby burial site and beat his head on the ground, weeping in his longing for union with Kali – Mother of the Universe. These *bhavas* (spiritual emotions) were pursued with such intense devotion that they alarmed the temple authorities who relieved him, temporarily, of his duties.

Concerned about his excessive zeal, and believing that marriage would help him to settle down, his parents agreed to a marriage contract that he had proposed – only to discover that the ‘bride’ was just three years old – so that many years passed before she moved into the temple. The marriage was never consummated but, later, the wife came to be called Sarada Devi – an object of intense devotion herself. For many years, Ramakrishna worshiped her as an incarnation of the Divine Mother, as did the disciples that followed.

Following the marriage, he was allowed to return to the Dakshineswar temple where he continued, though in a somewhat abated manner, to experience God-intoxicated raptures. Any reference to God could send him into the trance-like state of samadhi and because of this he was regarded with some measure of contempt by some of the temple servants.

Another of his bhavas was to the god Rama and to attract him he took the part of Rama's favorite general from the Ramayana, the monkey-god Hanuman. Then he went through a period of longing for Krishna and would dress as a woman to attract the deity. His appearance was so woman-like that it was said to convince the closest observers.

At this period of his life he was often regarded as strange. It seems that sometimes, when he saw drunkards, he would go into the street and dance with them – because the sight of their reeling made him think of the way holy men sometimes reel about in God-intoxicated ecstasy. He had a friend, G.C. Ghosh, who was a well-known dramatist of those times, with whom he sometimes danced when Ghosh was drunk and called at the temple after escapades of debauchery. Unquestionably however, as witnessed by his closest disciples, some of whom became enlightened masters themselves, Ramakrishna remained celibate and temperate throughout his entire life.

In the confines of temple life it would have been impossible to conceal clandestine activities. For example, as recorded by Christopher Isherwood, one of the young disciples (Jagendra Nath Choudhary, who later became Swami Yogananda – one of six disciples whom Ramakrishna referred to as *ishwarakotis* – individuals free from karma who became reincarnated to serve mankind), thinking that the master was paying a secret visit to his wife, spied on him. Later, Ramakrishna appeared from the opposite direction but commented that the spying was a correct action, “You should check your guru by watching day and night.”

Ramakrishna's nature was such that he simply could see no fault; but that he did not know what was going on was not the case. On one occasion, Ghosh called late at night in a high state of inebriation. He had left a bottle of wine in his carriage, but Ramakrishna, somehow knowing this, sent one of the servants to fetch it and insisted that his visitor drink it all up – after which he was fairly sick and no doubt experienced the folly of over-indulgence.

During this early period, long before he began to draw a following of well-educated disciples, he learned tantric forms of yoga and eventually, under the tutelage of a *naga* (naked) sadhu, called Totapuri, he was taught to meditate on the 'Formless Absolute' – which involved mentally decapitating his favorite deity, Kali. Totapuri also, with full knowledge of his marriage, initiated him into *sanyas* (monkhood). And then, from being a wandering mendicant who had never spent more than a few days in any one place, Totapuri stayed at the temple as Ramakrishna's devotee. Thus, the master became the disciple.

After this, Ramakrishna spent six months in the state known to yogis as *nirvikalpa samadhi* (a state of nothingness and complete absorption in the divine Self) – in total union with God and completely oblivious to the world. He had to be fed and tended by others, eventually coming down to earth. He had, by that time, lost all traces of individual identity and was totally free of ego. He spent the rest of his life completely immersed in the knowledge that the world and its phenomena were simply, as he put it, 'Waves emanating from the great Cosmic Mind'. He said: "When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive, neither creating nor destroying, I call him Brahman or *Purusha*, the impersonal God. When I think of him as active, creating or destroying, I call him *Shakti* or Prakriti, the personal God. But the distinction does not mean a difference; both are the same Being – as milk and whiteness are the same, as the serpent and its undulations are the same. It is impossible to conceive one without the other."

At this time, he was around 25 years of age and still regarded as an ignoramus by some of the temple servants. But then another wandering ascetic, a female monk known as Bhairavi, came to the temple. She was a woman of extremely strong character and striking beauty, who immediately recognized Ramakrishna as divine. She claimed that he had to be an Avatar because there are 19 spiritual moods, and these can only be combined in an Avatar. Ramakrishna had demonstrated all these moods. She called for a conference of important pandits – well-known for their strong opinions, and after some debate, they had to agree that he did, indeed, have

all the attributes of an Avatar. Ramakrishna took it all calmly and said, “So they think that? Well, anyway, I’m glad it’s not a disease.”

From that time on he was taken more seriously, and later, over the last few years of his life, he began training mostly well-educated young men from good families, who, entranced by his mere presence, gathered around him. They would carry Ramakrishna’s teachings to the world.

Teachings

Ramakrishna’s verbal teachings, for the most part, took the form of sayings and stories in response to events and circumstances as they occurred in the drama of life, and they resulted in numerous parables. He taught by direct statement based on the most supreme spiritual authority – and by his state of God-intoxication, his joy, and his song and dance. Collections of his sayings have been printed and are available at Ramakrishna Missions. Probably the most important record is *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which is based on a diary kept by a disciple, Mahendra Das Gupta, who became the Master Mahasaya. Another book, *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, is an account by Romain Rolland, a French writer of that time, who tried to relate Ramakrishna’s sayings to those of Jesus.

Ramakrishna did not set out to form a new religion or cult, but was one the first masters of modern times to be responsible for what could be called a ‘renaissance’ – a reform of the ancient philosophy of Vedanta. Although he was in no way scholarly, his innate wisdom attracted some of the most highly regarded scholars of India.

Here are some examples of his many recorded teachings:

His comment made to a sadhu who came to him for instruction, encapsulates his views and demonstrates his exalted state of awareness.

“The nameless, formless Reality, the transcendent Awareness in which you are now permanently awake, is precisely the same reality that you have perceived blossoming around you... The perfectly peaceful Absolute is not different from the playful relative universe.” With regard to the playful

relative universe, he said that the world always has to have trouble makers: “Otherwise the plot doesn’t thicken – then there’s no fun.” This is one of the most striking examples that can be found of the difference in the way the world is seen by the enlightened, compared to the judging worldly-bound.

Nevertheless, he also considered matters of the world to be obstacles to liberation. One of the greatest obstacles to progress towards attainment of the higher vision was, he said, “The aggregate of the lustful and voluptuous sensations associated with the sexual act.” But notwithstanding this view of sex, he was neither a sexist nor a bigot. Ramakrishna revered all women as incarnations of the Divine Mother. After his death, his wife, Sarada Devi, became a leading figure within the Ramakrishna Mission and Order. He did discourage his young and unmarried disciples from womanizing. He would say, “I don’t know what people see in women. They are just meat and bone and fat.” He maintained that if a young person, of whatever sex or sexual proclivity, maintains absolute continence for 12 years, the mind will certainly become open to the knowledge of God.

But Ramakrishna had no illusions about human nature and refrained from indulging in judgment. One of his parables is wonderfully illustrative of this point of view:

“Two friends were walking past a place where the word of God was being preached. One said, ‘I must go and hear this sermon and join the pious congregation in the worship of God.’ But from across the road came the sounds of revelry and the second friend said, ‘I think I prefer to join the merry-makers and flirt with the dancing girls over there.’ The two friends parted company, one to enter the temple, the other to sport with the revelers. In a short while, the one who had chosen the house of pleasure grew tired of his amusement and was struck by the folly of what was taking place around him. He said to himself, ‘What am I doing, why have I come here when I could have joined my companion in hearkening to the word of God?’ Across the road his companion, bored with the monotonous drone of the preacher, said to himself, ‘I wish I had joined my companion in his fun instead of listening to this rigmarole.’ Which of these two, the sage might well ask each

one of us, was the better man? Or were they not both the same person – two beings that dwell in all of us?”

Ramakrishna recognized four classes of men: Firstly, the ever-free like Vivekananda who are in the world for the good of others, to serve and teach the truth. Secondly, the liberated, like the *mahatmas* (great souls), who are not entangled in the world at all and are always meditating on the lotus feet of God. Thirdly, there are the seekers who want to become liberated – some will succeed and some will not. Fourthly, there are the majority of men, who are in bondage and stuck in the world. They never think of God and are full of lust, greed and gossip. What should a seeker do? Ramakrishna said that from time to time he should seek the company of holy men, seek solitude and meditate on God; use discrimination and pray for devotion and faith; faith is everything – there is nothing greater.

On being asked how long a devotee should perform the rituals of worship, he said, “When you shed tears, and your hair stands on end when you utter the name of God, then you will know you no longer need to perform rituals – and the rituals will drop away from you themselves. Then it is enough to just say the name of God, or just the word Om. Ritualistic worship becomes merged in the sacred Gayatri mantra; and then Gayatri becomes merged in Om.” To those who were married, like Mahendra Das Gupta, he would say, “Attend to your duties. Wife, father, mother, children – live with them and serve them, but know in your heart of hearts that they are not your own. If you are in family life without having cultivated love for God, you will get more and more entangled and will be unable to withstand dangers, grief and sorrows, if you have not acquired dispassion, knowledge and devotion. In the world, the only thoughts are of lust and greed.”

Ramakrishna was fond of practical jokes and was skilled at imitating others in a humorous manner. He would sometimes parody the British rulers by strutting around and uttering fruity English-sounding words and syllables. But he was always gentle and filled with love and humor, and without aggression. He believed in being assertive only when necessary, without doing harm to anyone. This view was illustrated in a story, thus:

There was a dangerous cobra that lived in a field so that herdsmen would never go there. One day a holy man passed through the field but as the snake approached he put a spell on it so that it was unable to strike. Then he said to the snake, 'I will give you a mantra and from now on you will not attack any creature.' And the holy man passed on his way. But as soon as the herdsmen learned that the snake was now harmless they threw stones at it and beat it badly. The snake crawled into a hole and nearly died. Some time later the holy man passed by again and on seeing the poor condition of the snake, asked, 'What's wrong with you, you look terrible?' The snake explained and the holy man said, 'You were very foolish, I told you not to bite people, I didn't say not to hiss.'

His indifference to forms of worship

To illustrate the egalitarian nature of his beliefs he would say, "Greeting to the *Jnani* (one who knows Brahman as one's own Self); Greeting at the feet of the *bhakta* (devout) who believe in the formless, and to those who believe in the God of form. Greeting to the men of old who knew Brahman, and greeting to the moderns who know the truth."

He would maintain that there is sometimes a need for images, even if made of clay, "God Himself has arranged many ways of worship to suit the varied temperaments of His worshipers in their different stages of growth."

But Ramakrishna was convinced that, on the spiritual path, personal experience was much more important than spiritual instruction or practices based on extreme forms of *tapasya* (ascetic discipline) – because the state of liberation is several times removed from the phenomenal world which surrounds us and cannot be comprehended except by experience. To illustrate this, he told a tale of a blind man who wanted to know what milk looked like: One person said, "White like a crane." "What is a crane?" He asked, and another said, "Like a sickle." And then he was told that a sickle was like a bent arm. Finally the blind man came to a conclusion, "Ah," he said, "milk is white like a bent arm."

He had little time for extreme forms of asceticism and said: "If 20 years of asceticism merely enables you to walk on

water, better pay a boatman and save your effort.” Further, he paid little heed to theoretical matters and the dogmas of different creeds. To him religion was a living experience and he was convinced that the actual participation in the practices of other faiths (than Hinduism) – and particularly Christianity, was also a part of experience and a means of understanding God. His main form of teaching to the many disciples and devotees that gathered around him was, like that of all great beings, by the infusion of his grace – simply by being in his presence they acquired grace and some of them went on to become enlightened masters in their own right. It was these two phenomena that most influenced his disciples; the experience of his presence, and the philosophy of the universality of religion. And it was these characteristics that led to the eventual recognition of Ramakrishna throughout the world as one of the great saints of modern times. The spread of *Sanatana Dharma* (Eternal Truth), the universality of religion, was further advanced, and continues to be advanced, through the teachings of swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Last days

For more than a year before he passed away it was known that Ramakrishna was suffering from throat cancer, yet through what must have been terrible pain even to the last day and the last hour he continued with the teaching of the young disciples. During his last year he continued to laugh, to joke and sometimes, in a croaky voice, to sing. Christopher Isherwood writes that one of the attendants formed the opinion that he was not suffering at all, *‘The eyes of the saint regarded his wasting of the body with a kind of calm, secret amusement, as if the horrible disease was only a masquerade.’* Lex Hixon, in his book *Great Swan*, writes of the experience of an attending doctor. Ramakrishna, his face literally shining with heavenly joy, would say, *‘Please open your entire being... Why feel self-conscious about calling the divine name with total abandon?’* (The doctor was recalcitrant about this, feeling that it would detract from his professional standing.)

Hixon writes that it was during this period that he expressed most strongly his conviction that the Divine Mother was the

Source of all Consciousness. He said, “I experienced the Divine Mother as a young pregnant woman who gave birth to the manifest world, cradled it and nursed it for a while and then began to swallow it. As it entered the dark mouth in the form of a radiant child, it was immediately revealed to be devoid of any substantial and independent existence. The Cosmic Mother then cried in a charming voice: ‘Come delusion, come illusion! The Divine Magician alone is Real!’... All phenomena, including divine forms, are sheer transparency. There’s nothing to hold on to, here or anywhere.”

Just before his death he said, “He who was Rama and he who was Krishna, is now Ramakrishna – in the body lying here... Not in the Vedantic sense and not in the sense of the Absolute, but in the sense of reincarnation of a *Bodhisattva* (a person who is able to reach nirvana but delays doing so through compassion for suffering beings).”

Before his death his skin took on an extraordinary lustre. He placed his hand upon his heart and said, “All phenomena emanate from here.” The disciples were to spread the message of the universality of God through the world. So to the last hour he spoke to them on this matter, and to others he said again and again, “Take care of these boys.”

On the last day, after listening to devotional songs, the master began to shudder and the hairs on his body stood on end. Tears of joy flowed from his eyes. They seemed to be seeing some beatific vision for there was an enraptured smile on his lips. Then in a ringing voice he cried three times the name of his beloved Kali, and lay back in silence, surrounded by the disciples. A doctor felt for the pulse and said that it had stopped. But then, after some time, a tremulous vibration seemed to run through the body and at this the hairs on the heads of the assembled disciples stood on end. Simultaneously, as if prompted by a higher power, they cried “*Jai Ramakrishna*” – it was the *mahasamadhi* (great samadhi) of a truly great being.

Some major disciples

Ramakrishna had trained a band of young intellectuals, agnostics, and rebels against the established order of the day, to comprehend the truth of God. Most had belonged to the Brahmo Samaj sect that opposed the worship of idols. At the same time some, like Vivekananda, were against the concept of Advaita – that everything could lay claim to the name of God. By the time they began their various missions, they were all alloyed into the belief of not limiting God in any way at all.

Of the young monks, Vivekananda and Brahmananda were pivotal in continuing the Order, and Ramakrishna had spent much of his time training them during his last year. He had great love for Vivekananda and said that he was a reincarnation of Narayana (Vishnu). At one point, Vivekananda was tormented by the existence of evil in the world; and then one night, in the presence of the master, a screen was lifted – and he saw the perfect harmony between God’s justice and mercy, and its relationship to all of creation. From that time on, he became totally indifferent to praise or blame. At first Vivekananda was opposed to both idol worship and the notion of everyone being God. He would say: “What’s this nonsense about I am God, you are God, and anything that is born and dies is God?”

Ramakrishna had answered, “You may not be able to accept these truths at present, but is that reason to condemn the great sages who taught them? Why do you try to limit God’s nature? Keep calling to Him. He is truth itself. Whatever He reveals to you, believe that to be true.”

The attitude of accepting God in every form was the key to the success of Vivekananda’s presentation of Vedanta philosophy at the first meeting of the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893. At this meeting, he described the teachings of Ramakrishna on the unity of all religions; that all religions have the same goal and that the teachings of Jesus, the Buddha, Mohammed and others are merely different aspects of the One Divine Reality.

After his death, Ramakrishna’s teachings were spread widely by his leading disciples who became the first monks of the Ramakrishna Order. There were 17 young disciples and a

number of older lay disciples: Balram Bose, Keshab Sen, Mahendra Das Gupta and G.K. Ghosh who have already been mentioned and, of course, Sarada Devi. Following the death of the master, the young disciples found an old house near the Ganges that was said to be haunted. It was all that they could afford. Here they enshrined Ramakrishna's bed and placed his picture upon it. His ashes were put in an urn and placed on a stool nearby. (Some of the ashes had already been deposited at a village house elsewhere, but the boys had secretly preserved some.)

They slept on mats spread on the floor and sometimes went hungry, and they called themselves *dhanas* – the ghost companions of Shiva. They would gather together and discuss the teachings of Ramakrishna, Jesus, and other sages, and they would sing kirtans (devotional singings) long into the night. It was here that they assumed their monastic names. Often, Mahendra Das Gupta who was married (the Master Mahasaya to be) – would visit and join in their activities.

Swami Vivekananda

Ramakrishna saw the fiery spirit in the young Vivekananda that could light the new path that India would spiritually and culturally need to take to cope with modernity. Nearing his last days, Ramakrishna trained Vivekananda and his other chosen disciples in the philosophy of Vedanta. He chose to transmit his spiritual energies to Vivekananda before he passed away.

As part of his mission, Vivekananda traveled the length and breadth of India, preaching and visiting holy sites. It was at this time that the Maharaja of Ketri offered sponsorship for his visit to America. On return to Kolkata, Vivekananda became the first head of the Ramakrishna Order and, during the following years, he traveled widely in the United States and Europe expounding Ramakrishna's vision of reality. In the autumn of 1893, he attended the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. He swept the Parliamentary gathering with his passionate zeal and went on to become a prominent speaker and teacher in America where he made some prominent friends in William James and Nikolai Tesla. His journey to America is a triumph of the faith he had in his mission. When

he went to Europe, he met the philosopher-scholar Paul Deussen, friend of Nietzsche, and even the famous playwright Bernard Shaw came to hear him speak. The German philosopher Max Mueller was captivated by this young Swami, the direct disciple of the man (Ramakrishna) he had admired so much that he had written a pamphlet about him titled *A True Mahataman*. In England, Vivekananda made a great impact on Margaret Noble, who became a disciple and took on the name of Sister Nivedita.

His subsequent travels took him to China and Japan. He was a sublime lecturer and usually spoke to packed houses. He was also a tireless opponent of the concept of dualism in religion. Almost everyone responded to the deep, bell-like voice of this most unusual human being – someone who expressed exactly what he meant – the truth of man’s essential divinity. He would say: “He, for whom you have been weeping and praying in churches and temples, is your own Self.” But as leader of the Order, he never forgot that he was a disciple of Ramakrishna and an equal with his fellow monks. This is an example of his teaching:

‘If living by rule alone ensures excellence, if it be virtue to strictly follow the rules, say then who is a greater devotee, a holier saint, or a railway train? The dualist thinks you cannot be moral unless you have a God with an iron rod in His hand, ready to punish you. Suppose a horse had to give us a lecture on morality, one of those cab horses who moves only with the whip. He begins to speak about human beings and says they are very immoral. Why? “Because I know they are not whipped regularly.”’

‘I hate this world, this dream, this horrible nightmare, we have created with its churches, its fair faces and false hearts, its howling righteousness on the surface and utter hollowness beneath, and, above all, its sanctified shop keeping... Let the barks of puppies not frighten you – no, not even the thunderbolts of heaven – but stand up and work.’

Vivekananda’s zeal for God and abhorrence of worldly matters is shown by a letter to some of his devotees written in 1894:

'Stick to God! Who cares what comes to the body or to anything else! Through the pangs of death say – my God, my Love! Thou art here, I see Thee. Thou art with me, I feel Thee. I am Thine, take me. I am not of the worlds but Thine. Leave me not. Do not go for glass beads, leaving the mine of diamonds. This life is a great chance. Why seekest thou the pleasures of the world! He is the fountain of all bliss. Seek for the highest, and you shall reach the highest.'

His touring and pioneering days ended in 1900, by which time he had become exhausted; but he was much calmer and happier after returning to the *Math* (Hindu religious institution). He organized his brother disciples in what came to be known as The Ramakrishna Mission, formed to ameliorate the ills that plagued Indian society, provide health care and education, as well as to propagate the teachings of Vedanta and knowledge of Indian culture. In many ways, the Mission is his true legacy.

In his last days, he wrote: *'I feel the rest of the soul more than the body – the battles lost and won. I have packed my things and await the Great Deliverer.'* It has been suggested that his death was a predetermined act. Not of desperate suicide but in the way in which holy beings are said to be able to decide the time of their death. He went to his room on 4th July 1902 and, after meditating, he called a young monk to fan him as he lay on his bed. Sometime later, his hand trembled and he breathed once very deeply and then lay still with his eyes fixed in apparent ecstasy. After some time, it was realized that he had passed from the worldly realm.

In his short lifetime, Vivekananda became an institution in India and, although never involved in political activities, he had political and ambassadorial status for India thrust upon him, even though the Order steadfastly refused to comment on political matters, especially in those early days of the Independence struggle. Today, his statue stands at the Gateway of India, in Mumbai.

Swami Brahmananda

Known as Maharaj, Swami Brahmananda became the second head of the Order and held this position for many years

until just before his death in 1923. His character was very different from that of Vivekananda, being quiet and reserved, and he remained in India looking after the young monks and the new disciples. His influence on them was immense and helped to carry on the Ramakrishna tradition into its third generation. As a young disciple, the gentle boy became the deeply-wise Brahmananda, under whose leadership the Mission came to maturity. He steadfastly maintained that the first concern of monks must be spirituality, and its success must be judged by the inner state of its members. Isherwood wrote that Maharaj's care for others extended far beyond ordinary compassion and was deeply spiritual. He seemed to be in mental communication with everyone in the Order and was aware of their unspoken problems, even at long distances when young monks had to go overseas.

It was said that even when members of the Order were being admonished by Brahmananda, they would experience an undercurrent of joy. He was so utterly fearless that others lost their fear in his presence. He had deeply searching eyes and at times would look strikingly like Ramakrishna. He was not an accomplished speaker but rather inspired by silence – instilling a feeling of peace, and an inclination to meditate, in others. He said:

“Religion is a most practical thing. It doesn't matter if one believes or not. It's like science. If one performs spiritual disciplines, the result is bound to come, even practicing mechanically – if one persists one will get everything in time. And remember, if you take one step towards God, God will take a hundred steps towards you. And why did God create us? Answer: So that we may love him.”

Brahmananda was immensely fond of music, whether devotional or not, and he said that sound itself, like silence, is God – everything is God.

Sarada Devi

For most of her life she was simply in the background – a shy, ordinary woman. But after the death of the master, when she was on pilgrimage, she started to become more and more the 'Holy Mother' to the young monks. To call her Mother

was not simply an expression of respect, for the young monks also began to feel her maternal qualities. Slowly, as she grew older, she came to inhabit a world of her children and was unable to see fault in them. At first she was unwilling to assume a spiritual role as a teacher, but she began to become one after a number of visions of Ramakrishna. She also began to help the new and unfolding Order to establish. It came to be that any wish that she expressed was fulfilled instantly. She was considered to be one with the Mother of the Universe, and one with Ramakrishna, and she became the *de facto* head of the Order.

In 1920, she began to isolate herself as she experienced recurring fevers and it became clear that her end was near. And when a young monk asked what will become of them, she replied, “Why are you afraid? You have seen the master.”

Swami Prabhavananda

We probably can discern as much or more about a third generation master, Swami Prabhavananda, as we can about the earlier figures, from the sensitive accounts of the British writer, Christopher Isherwood. Isherwood became a devotee and disciple of Swami Prabhavananda and wrote of him in his book *My Guru and His Disciple*. Prabhavananda was a disciple of Brahmananda and had never met Ramakrishna personally. But he intimated that there was a long-standing relationship with Brahmananda and that he may have been his mentor in an earlier incarnation. When, as a young prospective monk he first met Brahmananda, the latter said to him, “Son, haven’t I seen you before?” And much later, towards the end of his life, Prabhavananda related an incident which may support this belief. He explained it thus, “I was sitting cross-legged in front of Maharaj (Brahmananda) with his feet resting on my knees. This was the position in which I often used to massage his feet. Then something happened to me that I cannot explain, though I feel certain that it was at Maharaj’s doing: I found myself in a condition in which I was talking and talking, forgetting my usual constraint. It seems to me I spoke freely and even eloquently for a long time, but I do not remember what I said. Maharaj listened and said nothing.

Then suddenly I returned to normal consciousness and became aware of Maharaj leaning towards me and asking with an amused smile, ‘What did you say?’ I then realized I was addressing him as ‘tumi’ (the familiar form of ‘you’ used with equals or juniors, and friends). I hastened to correct myself, repeating the sentence – I have forgotten what it was – but using ‘apani’ (the respectful form of ‘you’ by which we addressed him). After this it occurred to me that this may have been Brahmananda’s way of revealing our association from an earlier life in which I was the mentor and he the student.”

In 1923, Swami Brahmananda died and shortly after this, Prabhavananda, who was barely 30 at the time, was transferred to the California Mission as an assistant swami. Some time after this, he became head of the Southern California Branch until his death in 1976, aged 83. For much of this time, from 1939 onwards, Isherwood was one of his devotees and, to a degree, his disciple – the one of the book title. He has given a detailed account of this relationship in which Prabhavananda was both the friend and the mentor of Isherwood. Together they produced an important biography of Ramakrishna and the first generation of monks, called *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*. From *My Guru and His Disciple*, one can discern that some of the successors of the great Ramakrishna were still firmly on the path themselves for most of their lives, and while none of them ventured to presume themselves ‘gurus’, it was obvious that, in the end, many of them had become enlightened beings.

Isherwood records many of the comments and feelings that Prabhavananda conveyed to him. At one time, when aged 62, he said to Isherwood after a ceremony, “I get so bored with philosophy nowadays – even with Shankara (the 8th century reviver of Advaita).” Then he intimated that he had always been intensely aware of the presence of Brahmananda. He said, “If there hadn’t been others there, I’d have bawled like a baby... I used to want visions and ecstasies but now I don’t care. I only pray to love God.” Isherwood commented, “He’s like a young man in love.” And some time later Prabhavananda said, “I want to have this joy not only occasionally but always – then I can pass it on to all of you.”

Later in his life, Prabhavananda began to feel the presence of the Lord almost continuously; he no longer had to make much effort – sometimes it presented itself as Ramakrishna, sometimes Sarada Devi, or Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda). He said, “When I met Maharaj I knew that one could know God... It’s all Maharaj... Everything he told me is coming true; I didn’t understand him at the time. Now I begin to know what he was talking about.” Isherwood recounts, “He kept repeating Maharaj matters most to him – even more than Ramakrishna, because he actually knew Maharaj. He was in a wonderfully exalted mood and said, speaking of Maharaj, ‘Chris (Isherwood), I saw him! His Joy, the nowness of it, was so beautiful’.” He told Isherwood that he had come to realize more and more that Maharaj, Swamiji (Vivekananda), Holy Mother, and Ramakrishna, “are all the same”.

Something that speaks volumes for the exalted state that some of the successors of Ramakrishna must have achieved was concerned with the relationship with Krishnamurti. Both Isherwood and Aldous Huxley were, at one time, official disciples of Swami Prabhavananda, even though Huxley had stronger leanings towards Krishnamurti – who abhorred the idea of priests and gurus. Nevertheless, Krishnamurti and Prabhavananda met on a number of occasions and showed the greatest respect and humility towards each other. (Krishnamurti was actually under fire from the Ramakrishna Mission at that time – because Mrs. Anne Besant, Krishnamurti’s self-appointed patron, had dared to suggest that he, Krishnamurti, was an ‘Avatar’ – and therefore equal, in Hindu mythological belief, to Ramakrishna).

Prabhavananda’s death was characteristic of the deaths of many great beings – serene and focused. Isherwood wrote that in the afternoon he had had a heart attack and was very weak. (Previously he had told Isherwood that after an earlier heart attack he hadn’t been afraid – he had simply observed the palpitations of his heart.) On the day of his death he spoke of Maharaj (Brahmananda) and then was quiet. Later he asked, “What time?” and on being told said, “No, too soon – it must be midnight.” Then just before midnight his lips began to move and his eyes were turned up, and just after midnight

those around him began chanting, “Om, Hari Om, Ramakrishna.” With the first Hari Om, he gently exhaled his last breath and died. (It is generally agreed that he wanted to wait for midnight because the following day was fourth of July – auspicious not because of the American celebration, but because Vivekananda had died on the fourth of July.)

Master Mahasaya

Of all the disciples of Ramakrishna, the one who gained the greatest status as a saint of that period in India was Master Mahasaya. His greatness almost equaled that of Ramakrishna himself. He had been a disciple of Ramakrishna for the last five years of the latter’s life. Unlike most of the others, he did not take sanyas but was married and led a family life until old age. Paul Brunton (author of *A Search in Secret India*) met Master Mahasaya at Kolkata in 1935. He was in his seventies at the time. On being asked to say something about Ramakrishna, he said:

“Ah, you raise the subject about which I best love to talk... It is nearly half a century since he left us, but his blessed memory can never leave me; always it remains fresh and fragrant in my heart. I was constantly in his society for the last five years of his life. The result was that I became a changed man; my whole attitude to life was reversed... He threw a spiritual spell upon all who visited him. Even materialistic persons who came to scoff became dumb in his presence... They had to bow before his tremendous spirituality which was so real that it could be felt. He taught us that pride, riches, wealth, worldly honors, worldly position are trivialities in comparison with that spirituality – fleeting illusions that deceive men.

‘Often he would pass into trances of so palpably divine a nature that we who gathered around him then would feel that he was a God, rather than a man. Strangely, too, he possessed the power of inducing a similar state in his disciples by means of a single touch; in this state they could understand the deep mysteries of God by means of direct perception.

I had been educated along Western lines. My head was filled with intellectual pride. I had served as a professor at

different times. Ramakrishna was living in the temple of Dakshineswar... There I found him one unforgettable spring day and listened to his simple expression of spiritual ideas born of his own experience. I made a feeble attempt to argue with him but soon became tongue-tied in that sacred presence, whose effect on me was too deep for words.

Again and again I visited him, unable to stay away from this poor, humble but divine person, until Ramakrishna one day humorously remarked, 'A peacock was given a dose of opium at four o'clock. The next day it appeared at exactly the same hour. It was under the spell of opium and came for another dose.' That was true, symbolically speaking. I had never enjoyed such blissful experiences as when I was in the presence of Ramakrishna, so you can wonder why I came again and again. And so I became one of his group of intimate disciples, as distinguished from merely occasional visitors.

Ramakrishna has gone, but as you travel through India, you will see some of the social, philanthropic, medical and educational work being done throughout the country under the inspiration of those early disciples of his, most of whom, alas, have now passed away too.

People should associate frequently with truly holy men who have real spiritual experience. Constant contact with them will assist them to bring out their latent spirituality. Higher men turn our minds and wills towards the Divine. Above all, they cause an intense longing for spiritual life. Therefore the society of such men is very important as the first step, and often it is also the last, as Ramakrishna himself used to say.'

Paul Brunton's comments on Master Mahasaya himself are as follows:

'Night after night I come, less to hear the utterances of Mahasaya than to bask in the spiritual sunshine of his presence. The atmosphere around him is tender and beautiful, gentle and loving; he has found some inner bliss and the radiation of it seems palpable. Often I forget his words, but I cannot forget his benignant personality. That which drew him again and again to Ramakrishna seems to draw me to Mahasaya also, and I begin to understand how potent must

have been the influence of the teacher when the pupil exercises such a fascination upon me. When our last night came... the good Master takes my hand... He says softly, 'My task has almost come to an end. This body has nearly finished what God sent it here to do. Accept my blessing before I go'.

In fact, by a strange coincidence, Paul Brunton met a wandering sadhu some time later far to the south in Tamil Nadu. The sadhu, quite unprompted, asked him what he felt about Master Mahasaya. Paul Brunton was surprised, but said that he loved him greatly and would go to see him soon. The sadhu then said, "You will never see the Master in this short life again for the hand of death is already approaching him." And so it happened, not long after the Master Mahasaya passed away.

Swami Tapasyananda: His teachings

Born in 1904, Swami Tapasyananda became the head of the Ramakrishna Mission at Chennai in 1972, until his death in 1991. He was probably one of the best interpreters of Ramakrishna's teachings in relation to other religious beliefs and teachings.

On life: To the question: 'What is the purpose of life?', Swami Tapasyananda said that there can be three possible answers: "The first, the materialistic viewpoint, is that it is mere chance and there is no purpose.

"The second, the Christian and Semitic viewpoint, is that it was the will of God, but through disobedience man became sinful, and God, to give him a way out, chalked out the true religion for him to follow.

"The third reason, held by the Eastern religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism etc., is that man is born to perfect himself and when he develops true love and wisdom, he attains union with God, and becomes enlightened. In each birth, he can rise through *dharmic* (sacred) living or fall back through misdemeanours committed.

If we accept the third view, evolution is that in which liberated man is the culmination of the process."

On dreams: Swami Tapasyananda suggests that the dream experience gives us a clue into the mystery of God and creation. We find that intelligence is creative and can produce its own objects. Moreover, he writes: *'Is this not just a faint hint that is given to us by that Universal Intelligence, who is called God in the language of the religions?'*

This implies that God is supreme and His creative activity produces souls or centers of consciousness, along with the evolution of nature, the worlds and everything else. He points out that this type of reasoning can help a devotee understand divine nature and help support his faith.

On gurus: Swami Tapasyananda explains that the concept of the guru should be that there is really only one guru for all, the Supreme Being Itself, who alone can bring enlightenment to any aspirant. The different human gurus of which people speak – 'my guru', 'your guru' and so on, are only the human media through whom the 'One Guru' of all speaks.

On spiritual practices

Karma yoga: Swami Tapasyananda explains that Karma yoga means communion through work, but this work must be identified with an impersonal cause, like the community, the welfare of mankind, etc. When the identification is sincere, such persons become a conduit for the expression of the energy of the Universal Spirit.

Meditation: On meditation, he says that the purpose is to help man to have an experience of his basic nature as *sat-chit-ananda* of the Self (Being-Consciousness-Bliss). The mind is usually outgoing and concerned with body-mind experiences and dwells upon memories. Meditation is the process of stopping the outgoing tendencies by shutting the mind off from the stimulation of external objects, happenings and memories, and allowing the undisturbed light of consciousness to perceive itself and its source.

Japa: Japa, the continuous repetition of a divine name in the form of a mantra, is one of the ways of steadying the mind that helps in the remembering of God and promotes the love of God.

Mantras contain seed letters and are transmitted from a guru to a disciple for repetition. They are words of power, sound manifestations of the deity whose reality the devotee comes to understand by repetition.

His writings

Swami Tapasyananda was an erudite scholar in both Indian and Western philosophy and the author of many books in English. He was strongly influenced by the teachings of Ramakrishna.

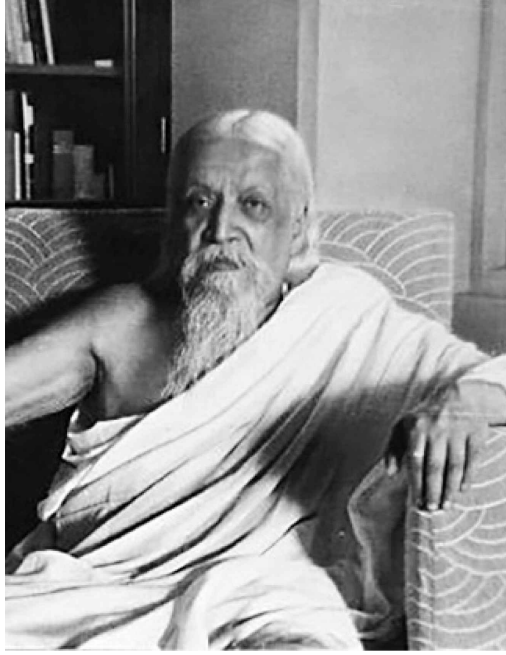
Some of his books are: *Bhagavata Purana* – 4 volumes, *The Spiritual Version of the Rama Saga*; *Sri Sarada Devi – The Holy Mother*, and *The Four Yogas of Swami Vivekananda*.

Contact information

The Belur Math is located on the banks of the Ganges, opposite the Dakshineswar Kali Temple where Ramakrishna served as a priest.

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Sri Aurobindo
(1872-1950)

Chapter 7

SRI AUROBINDO

The Philosopher-Saint of Evolutionary Consciousness

*‘Love is the only reality and it is not a mere sentiment.
It is the ultimate truth that lies at the heart of creation.’*

Aurobindo Ghose was the most prolific writer-guru that India ever produced – until Rajneesh. And yet, curiously, he said and wrote what he had to communicate in just four years and then never wrote a word, and almost never spoke, for the rest of his long life. To begin with, nobody was less likely to end up as a guru, far less the first Indian guru with a great Western following.

His England-educated, physician father, who believed that Britain was the pinnacle of human achievement and glory, went so far as to even change his son’s name to Ackroyd in an attempt to deracinate him and make his son British to the point of caricature. He then sent the seven-year-old Ackroyd Ghose off to England for schooling. The young lad had been kept in a weird bubble of induced Englishness, his only language being English and with no notion that he was living in India amongst Indians. He sailed with specific instructions from the doting parent that “he was not to make the acquaintance of any Indian, or undergo any Indian influence”. He further added, in what would become one of life’s celebrated ironies, that “his son learns nothing about any religion whatsoever”. Dr. Ghose was obviously ignorant of history, for the last time this experiment was tried in India, Prince Siddhartha ended up by becoming the Buddha! In the minds of his followers, that is what became of Ackroyd too – the heat and pressure exerted merely becoming a cosmic process to provide the glittering diamond that is Aurobindo.

For a while, it seemed that the doctor's project was succeeding. Ackroyd ended up as one of the 20th century's most over-educated young men. He was the supernova of King's College at Cambridge, easily winning any academic prize he condescended to contest for. He relaxed by composing poetry in English, Latin and ancient Greek. Dante, Goethe and Cervantes were read in their original languages as well as any French writer worth the name. Later in life, this formidable erudition would once save him from arrest as a dangerous revolutionary in India. The old-school-tie investigating officer was flabbergasted that this man was reading Homer and Virgil in the original – and to his mind, such people could not be conspiring against British rule.

Young Ackroyd went in for the Indian Civil Service exam, then the height of Indian aspiration. However, he refused to show up for the mandatory horse-riding test, the customary perch from where the sahibs administered India. It caused unprecedented consternation and, in later years, was seen for what it was – the first rejection of the West by an Indian who was still alien to his people.

On his return to India

His father died of shock on hearing the mistaken news that his son's returning ship had sunk. Ackroyd landed in India in 1893 and, free of parental shackles, set about acquiring Indian-ness with the same superb efficiency he displayed in England. The young Ackroyd rechristened himself Aurobindo and set about learning Bengali, his mother's tongue, though never his mother tongue, and followed it up with Marathi, Hindi and Gujarati. He went on to learn Sanskrit that gave him the key to all of India's religious, cultural and spiritual treasures – and helped change his ideas forever. He had already started his political career by working for the Princely State of Baroda, in the service of the Maharaja and also as a professor in the State's college. He would do this for the next 13 years.

Quitting his post in Baroda, Aurobindo, as he was known now, went to Kolkata in 1906. Fired by revolutionary zeal, he became one of the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement. As editor of the newspaper *Bande Mataram*, he propagated the

idea of complete independence for India from British rule. For his revolutionary ideas, he courted arrest for sedition and treason but was released for lack of sufficient evidence. His book *On Nationalism*, a collection of editorials, also foreshadows the belief that social action without spiritual underpinnings is futile – an idea Gandhi used to great effect. Gandhi even offered Aurobindo the leadership of the Congress party and country if he forsook seclusion, but Aurobindo refused to meet the Mahatma. India's freedom was assured, or so his spiritual intuition told him. That thus became a side issue; more important to him was the freedom of human souls! Was he, Aurobindo, going to turn away from this challenge, for the easier task of freeing India? Most certainly not!

On the spiritual path

The road to this was paved by the British. Exasperated by his anti-British activities, they put him in Alipur jail for a year to await trial. Here, Aurobindo plunged into his yoga practices and honed up on Indian scriptures. Aurobindo was refreshingly free of the display-humility so prized in India. He knew he was India's genius, and that was that. He did, however, hold Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda in high esteem.

Withdrawing from politics in 1910, he moved to Pondicherry in French India to concentrate on his writings and spiritual work. This was where he wrote voluminously – commentaries on every scripture possible, as well as his monumental *Savitri* – the longest epic poem and spiritual evolutionary work composed in English. Aurobindo was what was called an automatic writer in his day, and what is called a 'channel' today. He was in the grip of a higher force that relentlessly drove him on for up to 10 hours each day, and producing writing requiring no revisions at the end. He was demonstrating what it meant to be a 'seer' once again – he saw rather than thought the things he wrote about. Of his writings, the only real way to comprehend their range and original brilliance is to go into the texts themselves. They are masterful expositions of the spiritual life and his command over the English language is simply dazzling.

While in Pondicherry, he picked up the four major languages of South India, and the consequent access to the respective cultures. In his writings, he was seeking to synthesize all the spiritual ways before him; to be exact to find a 'third position' synthesis between the thesis-antithesis of India-West. The philosophy was primarily Vedantic, with generous dollops of Yogic practices and the byways of Tantra, and hanging from a fundamental evolutionary theory, which held that man as he now exists is but an ongoing process towards the attainment of the Superman with Super Consciousness. He named this 'Integral Yoga'.

This was a revolutionary approach even from an Indian perspective. For one, he openly proclaimed that India had erred in divorcing matter from spirit. Then he formulated the concept of a supreme Personal-Impersonal God, above and beyond the non-sensory realization of the Absolute. This Super God was *Purushottama*, and he brought in his erudition and the Bhagavad Gita to validate this. His essays on the Gita provide further light on this topic, as well as his commentaries on the *Upanishads* (the concluding parts of the Vedas).

Aurobindo next sprang another surprise by providing the most brilliant and consistent explanation as to why the Vedas are the supreme scriptures of Hinduism, even if nobody reads them! Rejecting all notions of the Vedas being nature-worshipping hymns by migrating hordes, he laid out *The Secret of the Veda* in the book of the same name. For the first time in 2000 years, an accomplished and practicing mystic was revealing the inner working of a complex spiritual path. Naturally nobody believed him. The shift of ideas required would be too disconcerting and anyway, Western scholars said they were nature hymns, and that, as we all know, should be conclusive. It is somewhat difficult to digest that a practicing spiritual master is told he is wrong about his own verifiable experiences with his own scriptures, while academics and scholars know better. Taken all together, Aurobindo's writings are nothing short of a revolution in India's philosophy.

Aurobindo finds a spiritual partner in Mirra Richard

Soon enough and predictably so, Aurobindo tired of all this. He now had a new idea to follow, as he now had a partner to shoulder the burden of spiritual needs for the inevitable community that had sprung around them. This person was Mirra Richard, who came to be better known as 'The Mother'. It is inconceivable today to realize what havoc Aurobindo caused in India when he declared this French woman – a master and his equal partner in his spiritual work. Indians have always assumed, and most still do assume, that a Westerner can only be a disciple. Mastership is India's monopoly, the key as to why the land is 'superior' to the West. And now a foreigner, and that too a woman, was being set up above all the innately spiritual Indians.

Aurobindo felt free to take on an 'experiment' that was either galactic effrontery or unthinkable bravery. He proposed, as a realized being, to consciously bring about the next transition, or the next stage in human evolution – to direct evolution consciously. Even Aurobindo was aware that nobody had ever dared such a thing before. Nevertheless, that was his goal now and he pursued it with no distraction and almost no other thought. After founding the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926, with the help of the Mother, he withdrew into his rooms, rarely visible to the public, and speaking almost as little. Fasting for almost a month, sleep deprivation, endless pacing and reportedly endless writings – all seem to have merged back into the cosmos once they cleared up whatever points he was exploring.

His disciples say that he made possible the descent of the Super Consciousness or Supramental Consciousness. What is beyond doubt is that he created a new template in the field of spirituality, because even today there are spiritual masters in both the West as well as India who say their only work is bringing light-energy to the world. Aurobindo's ashram also began new trends in conservative India. Women could join, then families, and finally schools which imparted the best education.

The Mother would go on to create Auroville – an attempt to create Utopia based on practical considerations. Meanwhile, Aurobindo was being visited by Aldous Huxley, and the South

American poet Gabriela Mistral nominated him for a Nobel Prize.

His main writings

Sri Aurobindo's vision of life is presented in several works of prose and poetry. Among the best known of these are *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, and his magnum opus *Savitri* – an epic poem that is even longer than the *Mahabharata*. His other major works include *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Upanishads I-II*, *Letters on Yoga*, *The Human Cycle – The Ideal of Human Unity – War and Self-Determination*, *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture*.

People influenced by Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo's influence has been wide-ranging here and abroad. S.K. Maitra, Anilbaran Roy and D.P. Chattopadhyaya commented on Aurobindo's work. Writers on esotericism and traditional wisdom, such as Mircea Eliade, Paul Brunton, and René Guénon, all saw him as an authentic representative of the Indian spiritual tradition. Frederic Spiegelberg was among those inspired by Aurobindo, who worked on the newly formed American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco. Soon after, Chaudhuri and his wife Bina established the Cultural Integration Fellowship, from which later emerged the California Institute of Integral Studies.

Karlheinz Stockhausen was heavily inspired by Satprem's writings about Aurobindo during a week in May 1968; a time when the composer was undergoing a personal crisis and had found Aurobindo's philosophies relevant to his feelings. After this experience, Stockhausen's music took a completely different turn to focus on mysticism.

William Irwin Thompson traveled to Auroville in 1972, where he met the Mother. Thompson has called Aurobindo's teaching on spirituality a 'radical anarchism' and a 'post-religious approach' and regards his work as having '...reached back into the Goddess culture of prehistory'. Thompson also writes that he experienced Shakti, or psychic power, coming from the Mother on the night of her death in 1973.

The American philosopher Ken Wilber has called Aurobindo “India’s greatest modern philosopher sage” and has integrated some of his ideas into his philosophical vision. The new age writer also looks to Aurobindo as a major inspiration.

His passing

Sri Aurobindo passed away on 5th December 1950. He still remains too universal for Indian tastes – too intellectually active. He was a man regarded as being far ahead of his times even after he wrote *The Foundations of Indian Culture*.

About the ashram

The ashram symbolizes the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The activities of the ashram include agriculture, industries, art and culture. The Samadhi, the final resting place of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, attracts a large number of devotees.

Contact information

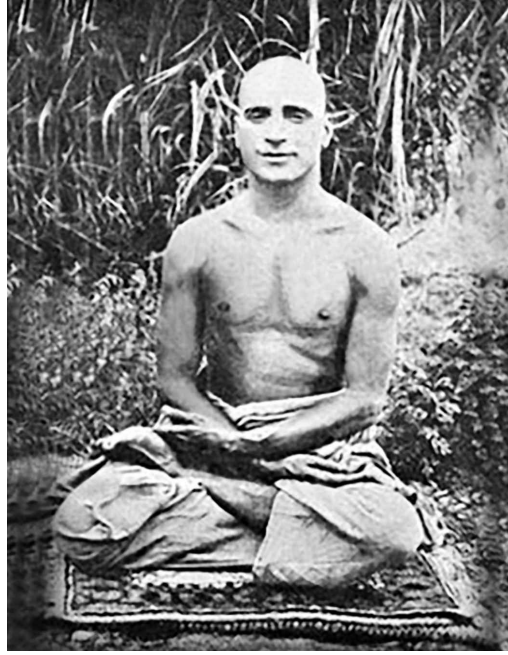
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Swami Rama Tirtha
(1873-1906)

Chapter 8

SWAMI RAMA TIRTHA

Saint of Practical Vedanta

'I can wear the silver threads of moonlight...

I can dance in the waves of the sea.

I am the breeze that proudly walks and the wind inebriated.'

Rama Tirtha was born in West Punjab (now Pakistan). He was related to Gosain Tulsi Das, the mystical saint reputed as the author of one of several versions of the Ramayana. His mother is also said to have been the aunt of H.W.L. Poonja (Papaji). In his short life, he became one of India's best-loved saints and, along with Vivekananda and Yogananda, was considered to be one of the very few, fully-realized, Indian spiritual teachers to travel to the West at that time. During this period, he entranced audiences with his interpretations of both Western philosophy and Vedanta and his explanations of the universality of all religions – from Sufism to Christianity, Hinduism to Buddhism. He said of himself (in the third person), “Rama guarantees that anybody in this world who hears his speeches (or reads his books), would get his doubts removed and would be sure to come to the conviction of his own essential divinity.”

From infancy, Rama Tirtha was regarded as a beautiful and charming child who radiated extraordinary grace and exhibited great intelligence. He won the hearts of all who encountered him. His early life was recorded by Shribad Rama Sharma in his book *Swami Rama Tirtha – the Apostle of Practical Vedanta*. As a child he would sometimes fall into mystical trances. At school he was placed under the guardianship of Baghat Dhanna Rama, a saintly man who wielded a great influence on his life by expounding on Yoga Vasistha – the story of the enlightenment of the Hindu deity Rama under the tutelage of the sage Vasistha.

The young Rama Tirtha became a brilliant scholar with high distinctions and an MA degree, and at the age of 22 was appointed as a professor of mathematics at Lahore University. There he gave an indication of his exalted state when he wrote to his guardian as follows, *'The degree of concentration and pure divine feeling is wonderfully high these days and God Consciousness is possessing with a marvelous sweep. As the body is subject to fickle whims and constant change, I will never, never identify myself with this naughty will-o-the-wisp of the mind.'*

He had been married early in the Brahmin tradition, but in 1897 at the age of 24, he left his family to ramble in sacred spots in the forests around Rishikesh, northern India, and completely devoted his life to spirituality (something considered noble in spiritually-imbued India). In 1901, at the age of 28, and with the persuasion of Swami Vivekananda, he took sanyas.

It was said that he behaved as if he was God-intoxicated through most of his adult life and, at times, would weep tears of joy and ecstasy and lose himself even during his public lectures. He was never pedantic and would not judge others' opinions. He was extremely polite to everyone, even to animals and inanimate things. He would talk lovingly even to his pens and books – to him they were all God. An observer of that period, Sadar Puran Singh, said, "No words could paint the charm of this person." (see the Introduction to *In the Woods of God Realization*, Vol. 2). He toiled day and night practicing spiritual exercises and, at times, attained visions of Krishna and other celestial beings. To these he would also apply scientific observation and conclude, after looking Krishna squarely in the eyes, that He (Krishna) was a product of his own (Rama Tirtha's) divinity that marked a particular state of mind-concentration. His vision was nothing but a manifestation of his own exalted state of mind.

He was above all fear, anxiety and annoyance – a state to which he arose through constant practice and perseverance, from (in his own words) the lowest depths of ignorance and superstition. And he said to all comers, "If I can do it so can you... My voice is your voice... No powers, kings, devils or

gods can withstand it – inevitable is the order of Truth. My head is your head; cut it off and a thousand will grow.”

Whenever he could, Rama went to the Himalayan hills where, it is said, after spending time alone in the forests near Rishikesh, he became realized. Of himself, he would say, “The whole universe serves me as this body. I shine in the lightning and roar in the thunder... I flutter in the leaves – I am in all.”

Rama, though a Hindu, was a great admirer of the Sufi tradition and would talk of the Sufi saint, Shams of Tabriz, as if talking of himself. He said, “Shams forgot he was born... He forgot his personality... He was all divinity. It is said that when he walked people heard, as if coming from the pores of his body as a song, ‘Haq Analhaq, Haq Analhaq’ – God, I am God. Ordinary people were enraged and murdered him for heresy but Shams seemed not even aware of it. Whom would they kill? He was impaled on a spike with his face still glowing with the glory of God. And from every hair came the same sweet song: Haq Analhaq.”

In 1904 and 1905, Rama traveled to Japan, America, Europe, Egypt, and throughout India. His talks were spellbinding and laden with the divine ecstasy of a realized being. They were, in effect, miracles. In Egypt, he was welcomed by Mohammedans as he spoke in Persian in a mosque. His opening words were, “I shall shower oceans of love and bathe the world in joy. All societies are mine! Come; for I shall pour out floods of love. Every force is mine, small and great – Welcome!”

And in America, as if in harmony with the worship of physical power characteristic of that remarkable nation, he went on a cross-country run with marines and finished several hours before the next runners.

In his talks he would first warm the heart of the listener and then the intellect. His scholarship was astounding, covering Western philosophy, mathematics, chemistry, biology and evolution – so that he could talk of Vedanta (Sanatana Dharma), which embraces all these philosophies, to a Western audience. Of Vedanta he knew every detail and he could explain every mantra, analyzing every word with acute insight.

Upon his farewell from America, devotees wrote the following touching little poem for him:

To Dear Rama

*Like a golden oriole beneath the pines,
Rama chants to us his blessed lines,
Rich freighted with the Orient's lore,
he spreads it out upon our western shore,
A bird of passage on the wing,
he brings a message from the King,
And this: his clear resounding call –
is all for God, and God for all,
His message given he flits afar,
a swiftly coursing meteor,
But leaves of heavenly fire a trace,
a new-born love for all his race,
Adieu sweet Rama, thy radiant smile,
a soul in Hades would beguile,
And though we may not meet again,
upon this changing earthly plane,
We know to thee all good must be,
for thou in God hath God in thee.*

Some teachings

It seems that the teachings of Rama were made potent through the divine and unseen energy that emanated from him – the ‘silent teaching’ so to speak. For example, one man commented after hearing a talk on the Bhagavad Gita, “I had no faith in the Bhagavad Gita, nor did I find anything worthy of admiration in the life of Krishna. Yet the charm of his speech and the spell of his words were such that I felt induced to read about these things – the effect it produced on me was simply indescribable.”

Rama maintained that the scriptures should be studied like chemistry and physics, with our own experience as the ultimate authority. He proclaimed, “Develop self-confidence

and reliance. Be a free thinker – judge for yourself, and listen to the inner voice so that you understand the Truth and the Truth alone. Avoid dogmas and blind faith. All the prophets in the world can't help unless you remove your own darkness!”

One of his main and oft-repeated teachings was that renunciation was a necessary ingredient on the path to enlightenment in this life. In defense of this he would say, “The love of God that is good for you must also be good for your wife or husband. The Truth is eternal and the world momentary... Sensuous engagements are nothing but pandering to a dead carcass – those who run after them are behaving no better than animals. If you could love the Truth even half as much as you love your wife you would realize immediately.” But he would sometimes add that it does not mean giving up the family, but rather giving up attachments. He would say, “Happiness is within you. Don't suffer from any desire. Overcome body consciousness. Give up your ego which is the root of selfishness and the worst defilement. Be above body and mind consciousness.” Rama did not try to retain any of his talks but some of them were recorded and collected by his chief disciple Swami Narayana. These have been published in nine volumes under the title *In the Woods of God Realization*.

Here are some examples of his teachings:

The path to Truth: Rama said that the path to the Truth is a contradiction in terms, for the Truth is not far distant somewhere else, but within. To attain it we simply have to undo what we have spent our lives doing in making our own prisons – that is, fabricating our ‘personalities’. There is some effort required for all attachments – loves and hates, and all desires are shackles and chains – as are all debased yearnings, superstitions, and prejudices. He said, “It's a great deal more than refraining from conjugal activities; house, dog, mother, child and so on – so make yourself free of all that keeps you bound to the world!”

On spirituality and psychic powers: In answer to a question on the desirability of contact with departed spirits,

Rama expounded on the cosmic worlds. He explained that there are three basic worlds: the gross physical world, the psychic or astral world, and the world of the unknown. The heavens and hells of the religions all belong to the second – but all of them are simply *worlds*; that is, they exist in the illusion of time and duality. To hanker after any of them, even where you may imagine a departed soul to be, is worldliness. It will not lead to true immortality.

He said, “In India there are many yogis and psychics who know about the astral world but we should not bow to them on our knees for peace and happiness because we cannot get that from them. They are far from being holy. There was a man in India who was apparently dead for six months in a state called *khechari mudra* (a yoga practice in which one pushes the tongue above the soft palate and into the nasal cavity. Mudra is literally a ‘seal’ and when used in yoga, it helps awaken spiritual energies in the body). It seems to be a wonder of wonders but this man was far from being happy and free.”

He explained that everyone wants to enlarge and extend their personal domain, but personal power binds just as much as material wealth does. Such fakirs may be happy when they are in a state of samadhi, which is a good state, but on the material plane they are just as miserable as anybody else. Keeping the mind in a state of trance for hours is not necessarily brought about by divine wisdom – for when they wake, he said, “The snake of passion awakens also! So, is it right to develop psychic powers? For your own sakes remember it is just worldliness. Rama recommends no hunting after shadows and ghosts. It is your own self that appears as ghosts and spirits... In dreams the rivers and mountains are within you. You split yourself into the phenomena (the objects), and the little thinking agent (the ‘subject’ – your egoic self). But in reality you are the subject and the object. You are the lovely rose and the nightingale. Everything is you: the ghosts, the gods and angels, the sinners and the saints – all are you. Know that, feel that, realize that – and you are free. This is attained through the path of renunciation... Place all your confidence in yourself and nothing will make you fall.”

Aids to spiritual practice – *pranayama* (yogic breathing technique): Rama often taught about practices to aid realization. He said, “There are eight principal methods of yoga but one is mentioned by Rama for getting out of the dumps and to control thoughts: it is control of the breath (*pranayama*). Through *pranayama* you gain strength and expel diseases; but most people fall sick when they hear this from Rama, because they prolong the steps excessively. So be natural, be judicious – try to increase gradually.” He also explained that there is nothing mystical in *pranayama*, nothing supernatural – it just helps to concentrate the mind. This is his description of one of the basic *pranayama* exercises: “Sit upright with the right thumb on the right nostril and inhale long and deeply thinking that divinity is being inhaled. When filled close the left nostril and keep the breath in the lungs, abdomen and all cavities and think you are divinity permeating every atom of the universe. As the breath fills your body, realize that you are the Truth that fills the universe. When you cannot hold the breath any longer exhale slowly through the right nostril feeling that impurities and ignorance are being exhaled – weakness, fear, anxiety, worry. Now take the hand away but hold the breath out for some time and let the mind feel that it is divinity – the Atman, and not limited by anything in the world. Now relax and breathe as if you have been exercising for some time until recovered. This resting is actually also part of the *pranayama*. Then begin the process again but this time inhaling first through the right nostril and exhaling through the left.”

Chanting sacred syllables: Rama said that the sages threw themselves into ecstasies by chanting the sacred syllable Om. It does not belong to any language; it comes from within; it resembles a child’s cry and the sound occurs in every language, even animals say it. Pervading life through *prana* (life force), it brings relief to the sick. Mentally saying ‘So-ham’ while breathing in and out is chanting OM mindfully – thus reality runs through the breath. These are his instructions, “Soham is a prayer not of asking but of realization. Sit at ease with back straight and understand there is only one reality. Chant OM! – feel it, let the OM be your symbol. Chant with your whole soul. All powers I am – All joy, all Truth – OM!...

Light, fearlessness is me – no attachment or aversion – OM!... I hear in all ears, see in all eyes. In all minds I think – OM!... Sages aspire to know me – OM!... The light of stars is me – OM!... All your troubles will disappear as you lose your small self that makes the world more real than God. If the body feels sick, leave it aside. Feel healthy and you will be. The small ifs and I's will be gotten rid of with your own divinity.

The secret of rest: Rama recognized that the demands of life bring tension; the secret of rest was not to give up work but to rely on renunciation. Give yourself to any work that presents itself but, while working, take short rests and think, “The body is nothing. You have nothing to do with its actions or results. You are a witness only. Close your eyes and unburden thought. The more you unburden thought the stronger you will feel.”

Lecture to yourself: In a talk delivered in America and recorded in *In the Woods of God Realization*, Vol. 2, Rama advocated lecturing to one's self – in the sense of, and based on, a study of the scriptures – marking the faults that have to be removed and crushing them one by one, “Persuade yourself of the need to give up desires because desires inhibit concentration. If greed or grief exist, reflect why? Chant OM and subdue them... One by one take up the dragon's heads and lecture on each to yourself. And while meditating chant OM.”

Rama maintained that the basic cause of all evil is ignorance. It reveals itself in the desire to identify with the body and bodily pleasures, and the tendency to be grieved, injured, and afflicted: “So, do not starve and do not overfeed – be the master!”

On centering the mind, Rama said, “Whatever you are doing, keep your thoughts always at home. Be not ‘center out’. Continuously contemplate the light of the world as yourself. Always be in touch with your divinity... Those who are really happy are those who keep themselves above worldly pleasures and pains.”

Children, for example, are mostly above causation, enjoying everything and caring not for reason – and so they are cheerful and happy. We should struggle always to be above

causation. He said: “I am simply the witness of phenomena, never entangled, ever above... All phenomena are simply harmonic vibrations of the upward and downward motions of the universe, the rising and bringing down of the step.”

Death – the physical body and the subtle body: Rama explained that a human being is like a horse and rider. The physical body is the horse but the rider is the subtle body. This leads to confusion in thinking about such matters as death and freedom. All must die to the physical body, yet no one entertains death. Everyone carries on developing connections, promoting growth and engaging in activities as if death will never take hold of them. He explained: “The cause of this is that your real Self, is incapable of death... But the attributes of the real Self are, by mistake, attributed to the mortal body, and in the mortal body we find nothing that could give us belief in immortality.”

So why can't we believe in death practically, since it is so certain a thing? According to Vedanta it is because the real Self, the Soul or Atman, is incapable of death – and this thought is universal, even in the animal kingdom.

Conflict and bloodshed: Similarly, we believe in freedom but no one is really free in the world because of so many attachments, desires and temptations. Sweet fruits, delicious food, attractive colors, prosperity – they all make us slaves. In a lecture entitled *Sin: Its relation to the Atman*, which appears in *In the Woods of God Realization*, Vol. 1, Rama continued to develop the concept of attributes of the Atman being incorrectly applied to the body. The misidentifications also apply to sin, guilt and conflict, and the notion of ‘freedom’ – particularly as it prevailed at the turn of the 20th century. The cause of bloodshed, he maintained, was related to the notion of freedom which very few understand. There *is* no freedom in the world because everything of the world is bound by time, space and causation. Every thought and deed is determined by the chain of causation which binds us, so how can we be free?

“Yet,” he said, “We are so concerned about freedom – explain that! This idealized ‘freedom’ comes from the Atman, which really is free – unlimited, unbound. But we want to have

freedom for the body, mind and gross self (the egoic personality) which are bound and hence are not capable of freedom.”

In regard to ‘sin’ he said that everyone in the world, from the point of view of the egoic self, is a sinner – responsible for defects, deficiencies and so on. Yet nobody, except in religious perversion, considers himself to be a sinner – even convicted criminals maintain their innocence. But in church they switch to another mode and confess their sins. Of these tendencies, Rama asked, “Is this not an anomaly? According to Vedanta the belief that we are not sinners is testament to the true holy character of the Atman, the inner Self – which really is sinless and pure – the holy of holies. In the pursuit of wealth there is no limit and no happiness is ever achieved. Therefore the cause of peace must be something else. Yet everyone wants wealth... ‘Gain the whole world but lose your soul.’ What does that mean? According to Vedanta, the real Self is the cause of wanting to possess the world – but while in the body this cannot be achieved... No one sees this.”

He explained that while Jesus spoke about the giving up of riches and the need for renunciation, we still hanker after riches and comfort – even missionaries and dignitaries of the church do this. Rama said that the antidote to this dilemma is to understand that the cause of the ignorance, that makes us confuse body and spirit, is that we attribute to the body what is of the Self, and to the Self, the misery of the body. So, he said, “Remove this ignorance and you will see the rich man with no money and the monarch of the world with no land and property. It is said that Alexander the Great looked at the smiling face of a saint and asked him to come to Greece. The saint just laughed and said, “The world is in me – why should I go to Greece?” Alexander got angry and was going to chop his head off but the saint just laughed and said, “I am the power that makes your hands move.” – and the sword just dropped to the ground.”

The cardinal sins: According to Vedanta there is a power that leads you to anger, greed, vanity, attachment, sensuality, and so on. It is the same energy as the Atman. We can’t remove the propensity for sin by preaching, but we can

spiritualize this energy. However faulty and sinful the physical individual may be, the sinlessness of the real Self must also be there – must sometimes make itself felt, because it is there and cannot be destroyed. The cardinal sins of vanity and pride and the need for flattery, Rama maintained, are not deadly but are universal. He said, “From the lowest vermin to the highest god, flattery is welcome. Even dogs enjoy flattery. How is it? Even the gods of higher worlds are apprised by flattery. In Christian practice prayers are mostly comprised of asking for things by the use of flattery. Vedanta explains that the cause of feeling good from flattery is due to the real Self. It is not that the statements are true when applied to worldly individuals, but they seem true because there is something behind the senses, some potent force to which flattery can be rendered. The sinfulness of wanting flattery is the mistake of rendering it to the body and the egoic small ‘personality’ self.”

“Avarice is also universal; animals, men, women, everybody has it. Such greed is never satisfied and the more we have the more is greed inflamed. All the preaching cannot strangle it. So Rama asks, “Is it due to Satan? Not so. Vedanta explains it as the Atman asserting itself. Its energy cannot be crushed – but you can make the right use of it. Eradicate the error of your misunderstanding and realize the Self and then it is impossible for you to seek these outside things to accumulate around your body.”

Anger, according to the explanation of Vedanta, occurs because the Self is absolutely free and universal so that the ego also is not satisfied to be limited in any way. Sensuality is wanting all the beauty of the Self but in the world it becomes nothing but gratifying the senses of the physical body. Attachment and grief is the wanting that things around you should not change while, in reality, in the world everything is in a state of flux. Of all these things Rama said, “The mistake of attaching vanity or pride to the body is the cause of seeking aggrandizement of the body, of becoming frustrated and angry, and of wanting things to be permanent – and this wanting is based on ignorance. So if ignorance could be called Satan we might say, “Here comes Satan which puts things into confusion”... You will never be able to do away with animal

passions unless you do away with all that attracts you... You stand above all these passions and then you will be perfectly free, perfectly full of bliss – this truly is heaven!”

Swami Rama’s early death

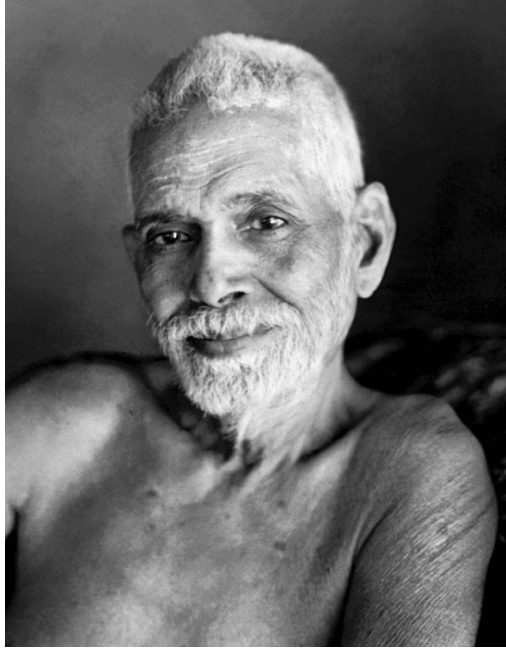
V.C. Lucknow, in a foreword of *In the Woods of God Realization*, Vol. 3, wrote the following words, *‘In the case of Rama Tirtha the sword was too keen for the scabbard. At the early age of 33 he laid himself to rest, as romantic in death as in life, in the icy, bubbling waters of the Ganges in Tehri, on the beautiful festival day of Deepavali in 1906... A strange mystical anticipation of his own death was seen in his poetic expression of immortality, written a few weeks before his demise: Oh death, take away this body if you please. I care not. I have enough of bodies to use. I can wear the silver threads of moonlight. I can roam as divine minstrel and put on the guise of hilly streams and mountain brooks. I can dance in the waves of the sea. I am the breeze that proudly walks and the wind inebriated. All these are my wandering shapes of change. I came down from yonder hills, raised the dead, awakened the sleeping, unveiled the fair faces of some and wiped the tears of weeping ones. The bulbul and the rose both I saw and comforted them. Him I touched, her I touched. Now I doff my hat and off I am. Here I go and there I go, and none can find me. I keep nothing with me.’*

Swami Rama Tirtha became a monk of the Ramakrishna order. His heritage is the salvaged transcriptions of some of his talks, collected by his chief disciple Swami Narayana. The talks have been published in nine volumes under the title *In the Woods of God Realization*.

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Sri Ramana Maharshi
(1879-1950)

Chapter 9

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

The Supreme Guru

'Experience is the word. Knowledge implies subject and object but experience is non-terminous, eternal.'

Many would say that Sri Ramana Maharshi became India's most-loved saint of the 20th century, and the greatest proponent of the path to realization through Self-inquiry. A modern teacher of Vedanta, Swami Dayanand (see *What is Enlightenment?* Fall/Winter 1998), pointed out that Sri Ramana had discovered a means of converting all questions into the primal question of Self-inquiry – Who am I? If someone asked him, “Are you enlightened?” he would say, “Who are you who wants to know? Find out who you are.” Another seeker asks, “What is God?” and he answers, “Who are you that is asking this question?” This is a way of answering questions that he adopted to turn the person towards his inner Self. He was telling people, “Understand who you are. That's what is important.”

Sri Ramana Maharshi tried to convince everyone that Divine Consciousness, the only reality, was their natural state. His explanations on the attributes of the mind and the relationship to the Self (God), were probably the most explicit of the time. From this he developed, to a fine state of proficiency, his method of teaching Self-inquiry.

It is said that Sri Ramana's mission in life was among the most successful in awakening people to their own divinity. To this day, the ashram in Tiruvannamalai, not far from Chennai (Madras), that he founded in 1922, is a powerful seat of learning and a center to which myriads of seekers come to pursue their *sadhana* (spiritual practices).

Much of the information in this chapter is sourced from the many excellent publications on Sri Ramana, and in particular: *Sri Maharshi – A short sketch of his life, Who Am I? The*

Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, and Meditations: The Ramana Way. Appreciation is also expressed to the Trustees of the Ramanasramam for the hospitality given during the research carried out for this account.

Early life

Sri Ramana Maharshi was born in December 1879 to a middle class family in the town of Tiruchuzhi (Tiruchuli) in Tamil Nadu, India. He was named Venkataraman and, in contrast to the often-heard stories predicting the forthcoming of great beings, there were no wandering ascetics who came to tell of his immanent arrival; his mother had no premonition that divinity was about to descend on her. It seems, perhaps, that the gods knew that Sri Ramana would have given short shrift to any such extravagance. However, he *was* born on an auspicious day – the anniversary of the day Lord Shiva appeared to his devotees Gautama and Patanjali.

Later, when he was in his teens, the family moved to the larger town of Madurai and young Venkataraman was sent to English medium schools: first, Scot's Middle School, and then the American Mission High School. He thus received something of a Western education and influence in his formative years. Furthermore, the family as a whole, though Brahmin, seemed to be somewhat Western and Indian Civil Service oriented. As a boy he showed little interest in spiritual life and was much more interested in games than in academic pursuits. His only unusual characteristic was a tendency to go into trance-like states from time to time, from which it was difficult to awaken him. When this happened at school, and because he was bigger than average and consequently better at sports, other boys sometimes used the opportunity to pelt him with mud balls and other missiles.

Enlightenment

The first evidence of this event occurred just before his 16th birthday. For some reason, he had casually asked a relative where he had just come from. The reply was "Arunachala" – a mountain believed to be endowed with mystical powers and to be Shiva Himself in the form of the

primal lingam. Then, for no apparent reason, the reply had a startling effect on the boy, filling him with a feeling of awe and immense joy.

Later another auspicious event occurred: he came across a biography of famous Tamil Saints (*Periapuranam*), and this also stirred him deeply to the heart and again filled him with immense joy. These occurrences preceded what is believed to be his experience of enlightenment, which occurred shortly after he turned 16. This was both his first and ultimate experience of the state of enlightenment, from which he never wavered throughout his entire life. The experience, which was the impetus for his realization of the Self, took the form of a terrifying fear and an actual experience of death. Much later he described it thus:

'The shock of death made me at once introspective. I said to myself mentally, 'Now death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? – This body dies.' As I said so to myself the symptoms of death followed, yet I remained conscious of the inert body condition as well as the 'I' quite apart from it. On stretching the limbs they became rigid, breath had stopped and there were hardly any symptoms of life in the body. 'Well then, I said to myself, this body is dead. It will be carried to the burning ground and reduced to ashes. But with the death of the body, am I dead? – This body cannot be the 'I' for it now lies silent and inert, while 'I' feel the full force of my personality, of the 'I' existing by itself – apart from the body. So 'I' am the Spirit, a thing transcending the body.' All this was not a mere intellectual process. It flashed before me vividly as living truth, a matter of indubitable and direct experience, which has continued from that moment right up to this time.'

A state of God-intoxication

The realization experience had a remarkable effect on his personality. From being a typical school boy with many likes and dislikes, he became completely detached from friends and family while at the same time being filled with humility and lack of concern for everyday matters. While he had formerly resented injustice and retaliated against it, he now accepted

everything with equanimity. As far as food was concerned he ate anything that was given to him without comment. Furthermore, his whole attitude towards temples and religious symbols such as idols changed completely. From irreverence and indifference, he became spiritually absorbed and would go daily to the local temple (Meenakshi temple) and spend long hours of adoration in front of the idols. And he would pray for the descent of grace so that he could be like the saints of the *Periapuranam*. He would become lost in the depths of the Divine within. Tears would flow but without feelings of pleasure or pain.

To Tiruvannamalai and Arunachala

Some six weeks after this event and amidst growing estrangement from members of his family, he had the thought, “What business do I have here?” And he made the decision that he would go to Tiruvannamalai and the holy Mount Arunachala. He took three rupees from the family coffers, which he reasoned was enough to reach his destination a few hundred kilometers north of Madurai, and set off leaving this letter for his family:

“I have, in search of my Father and in obedience to his command, started from here. This is only embarking on a virtuous enterprise. Therefore, none need grieve over this affair. To trace this out, no money need be spent.”

After what was quite an arduous journey in those days, he reached Tiruvannamalai and made his way straight to the temple of Arunachala and mentally announced his arrival to the temple deity *Arunachaleswar*. He abandoned all his possessions except for a strip of cloth to be used as a loincloth and sat in silence in the temple. This, however, soon attracted the attentions of urchins who made him the object of their pranks, so he moved to an unattended and underground part of the temple known as Patala, where few were brave enough to enter. Here, in a place infested by vermin, he remained for many days, being eaten by insects and rats. But so oblivious was he to his body, and so absorbed in bliss of the Self, that he felt almost no discomfort. Eventually the sight of this young man and the intensity of his *tapas* (austerity) were so moving

that local sadhus began to look after him. From that time onwards he began to be known as a holy being as he moved from place to place in the temple compound and sat meditating in complete silence. And thus he acquired his first temporary, and later other, more permanent, attendants.

Although he remained in silence, pilgrims began to visit him regularly to experience his presence and have his silent *darshan* (the blessing of his presence or touch). But as the visitors became more and more intrusive, he moved out of town to a small temple (Gurumurtham temple) where he spent the next 18 months and where his identity was eventually established. It happened this way: An attendant with devotional zeal began to perform religious ceremonies before him, offering flowers and food, uttering sacred syllables and mantras, burning camphor and so on. On the occasion of a subsequent visit he saw, written in charcoal on the wall, the words, “Food alone is the service needed for this body.” This was the first indication that *pujas* (rites of worship) were not necessary and the first indication that the young swami (as he was by then considered) was ready to communicate. After this another devotee, a government servant, asked him on each occasion of visiting for a clue to his identity. This led Sri Ramana to write, this time on a slip of paper, his name and place of birth, ‘*Venkataraman, Tiruchuzhi.*’

The discovery soon became public knowledge and reached the ears of his family in Madurai who went to Tiruvannamalai to try to persuade him to return home where, since he was now a publicly recognized saint, they could attend him – but it was to no avail.

He wrote on another slip of paper:

‘The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their past deeds – their parabdha karma. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. The best course therefore for one is to be silent.’

This became one of the cornerstones of his teaching and a confirmation of his firm belief in the principles of Advaita Vedanta – that we are not the doers; everything just happens.

After the family's departure he moved to a cave on the side of Mount Arunachala, the Virupaksha cave, overlooking the Arunachala temple.

His first teaching

The young Swami had been living in complete silence and more or less without any form of communication for more than three years, so that the extent of his spiritual attainment and understanding was more a matter of speculation than certainty. However, around this time, and apparently out of compassion for the many sincere seekers that were drawn to him, he began to write down answers to questions. Two of his earliest devotees (Sri Ganbhiram Sesahayya and Sri Sivaprakasam Pillai) put a series of questions to him in 1902 (when Sri Ramana was about 22 years of age) relating to Self-inquiry – Sri Ramana's main teaching. These questions and their answers have been preserved with care and published under the title *Self-inquiry and Who am I?* The answers were spontaneous and direct and some are as follows (From *Sri Maharshi – A short life sketch*):

'By incessantly pursuing within yourself the inquiry: 'Who am I?' you will know your true Self and thereby attain salvation. The real 'I' or the Self is not any of the five senses, nor the sense objects, nor the organs of action, nor the prana (breath and vital energy), nor the mind, nor even the deep sleep state, where there is no cognizance of any of these.

'That which remains after excluding each of the above is the real 'I' and that is pure Consciousness. The mind can find rest only when it has found the answer to the query, 'Who am I?' The first and foremost of all thoughts is the 'I' thought.' (It is only the awareness of 'I' that marks the difference between man and a thinking computer.)

Later he wrote:

'The mind and the ego are one and the same. In the body what asserts itself as 'I' is but the mind. Therefore, if you inquire whence the 'I-thought' arises, it will plainly be seen that the Heart is the source. Do not even murmur 'I' but inquire keenly within what it is that now shines within the

Heart as 'I'. Transcending the intermittent flow of thoughts there arises the continuous unbroken awareness, silent and spontaneous as 'I – I' in the Heart. If one catches it and remains still, it will completely annihilate the sense of 'I' in the body and itself disappear as the fire of burning camphor. Sages and scriptures proclaim this to be Liberation.'

Return to the world – what Sri Ramana was like

As indicated before, Sri Ramana is one of India's best-loved saints. His compassion for those who came to him for guidance slowly drew him back to the world and as he became more communicative, he started answering queries verbally. Nevertheless, his main teaching method was carried out in total silence. His nature was kindness and humility itself and he would allow no one to treat him in any special way. He acquired the name Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1907 when he was 28-years-old – when a well-known Sanskrit scholar and poet called Ganapathi Muni became his close devotee and proposed the name Sri Ramana as a derivation of Venkataraman. The other devotees present at that time agreed and from then onwards he became Sri Ramana Maharshi (*Maharshi* meaning Great Rishi).

From 1907 until 1922 he lived in various locations on the Hill of Arunachala, attending to the spiritual needs of the devotees who visited or went around with him. He generally stayed at Virupaksha cave, and in the hot season at the Mango Tree caves. In 1916, he moved to more commodious accommodation built for him on the Hill and known as Skandasramam.

But it was not until the death of his mother in 1922 and, when her samadhi shrine and temple was built, that he moved permanently to what became the first part of the present-day ashram, located at the foot of Arunachala. At first it comprised only a simple hut among other accommodations built by individual devotees. But shortly after this, a hall was built that served both as his residence and as a meeting place for devotees and visitors. After the move the number of permanent and visiting devotees increased appreciably, but at all times he remained humble and accessible to residents and

visitors alike. He participated in the running of the ashram including doing some of the chores. He wore only a loincloth and set an example of simplicity for all. He sternly discouraged any attempt to garland him and never allowed the more ornate religious ceremonies of Hinduism to be performed at the ashram. He received no money though, of course, money was donated, as it is today, for the running of the ashram.

Sri Ramana had an inordinate love for animals and as a consequence all manner of creatures came to live at the ashram and were cared for and fed – a practice which continues to this day. Because he spent so much time on his couch, it appears that on one occasion lice began to infect the couch. The inmates wanted to spray them but he forbade them. However, since he went for a walk every day they did the job during his absence, and when he returned he smilingly commented that someone had tricked him.

On one occasion in 1924, thieves came and started smashing windows to gain access. Some of the inmates wanted to challenge them but Sri Ramana would not allow it. His first concern was for an elderly dog and he saw that it was put in a safe place. Then he said, “Let the thieves play their role. We shall stick to ours.” When the thieves could not find any valuables or cash they became angry and beat some of the inmates including Sri Ramana himself, but he would not allow retaliation. He said: “We are sadhus; we must not give up our Dharma. If you strike them some may receive fatal injuries and the world will justly blame us. They are only misguided men, blinded by ignorance... Sometimes your teeth suddenly bite your tongue. Would you knock out your teeth as a consequence?”

Elaboration of his teachings

Sri Ramana’s assertion was that nothing exists apart from an indivisible and universal Consciousness that is either in its unmanifest form as a beginningless Awareness, or in its manifest form as the worlds of the universe. For him this meant that as an individual (personality) he had ceased to exist. His language equated God, the Self, and the Heart as

essentially the same thing. The unmanifest state he called the Self. He was not confused by the trappings of Hinduism and, possibly because of his early Western exposure and English education, he was able to express himself in terms that were largely free of what may have been construed as Eastern mythology. The condition of Awareness that is usually deemed to be unexplainable, the effect of enlightenment on the body and the normal human condition, he described as something like having “a large elephant in a small grass hut”.

Throughout his life, Sri Ramana continually expounded *Atma Vichara* (Self-inquiry). For those who possessed a sufficiently high level of mind control it was the most direct path, and in any case, an essential final step to liberation. For most, however, meditation – the concentration on one thought to the exclusion of all others, and surrendering to God, may be the first necessary steps. This was to center the mind to learn how to slow the flow of thoughts, but ultimately Self awareness is necessary. So, he maintained, why waste time if one has the ability and can go for it directly?

He said that the only permanent self-evident reality is that ‘I’ exist or ‘I Am’ – which is yet another name for unity with the Self. Contemplation of ‘I Am’ by repeatedly asking the question, “Who Am I?” is used as a tool to divert the mind from externalization, back to its Source. The method centers on the ‘I-thought’ which must be isolated from other thoughts. The ‘I-thought’ is there because the Self, the Atman, has lost its bearings in externalization – investigating the world and becoming the ego. All other thoughts arise from the mind (which is the same as ego and intellect) and cannot exist without the attention of the ‘I-thought’. He pointed out that the mind becomes fattened by thoughts or groups and clusters of externalized thoughts that appear continuously. But it is the individual’s attention to them that allows them to exist – latent tendencies come up only when the individual pays attention to them. So, concentration on the ‘I’ should be done and maintained and at the same time one should be alert to the rising of other thoughts and repeatedly asks the question, “To whom is this thought directed?” This way one can repeatedly and continuously revert to the ‘I-thought’. This, Sri Ramana

maintained, *can* be done, and the ability to do it successfully increases with practice. He said, “The moment the ego self tries to know itself its character changes to participate less in the ‘jada’ in which it is absorbed... It takes to its heels on Self-inquiry.”

While all mind-thoughts depend on the ‘I’ for sustenance and disappear if they do not obtain it – the ‘I-thought’ derives its power from its own conscious Source. Sri Ramana explained that Consciousness (others have called it Awareness) spreads through the various *nadis* (conducting channels of the subtle body) from the heart to the mind and then the body – while the process of Self-inquiry reverses this flow from the ‘I’ to the thinker (the false self), and then from the thinker to the Consciousness and back to the Heart.

Sri Ramana was always patient with seekers asking him questions on Self-inquiry but often they asked irrelevant questions. Commenting on these he said, “Coming here, some people ask, ‘Does the sage, liberated while alive, see the world? Is he affected by karma? Should the body of a liberated sage resolve itself into light?’ ... and so on.” And he would say to them “Leave liberation alone. Is there bondage? Know this: see *yourself* first and foremost.”

On meditation

Sri Ramana maintained that meditation is necessary as a prerequisite to Self-inquiry – for those whose minds are not well focused. It is actually the ego that meditates on the object of meditation; the subtle ego rather than the gross and overt ego of ordinary life. In the first instance, meditation on forms or on a mantra is recommended so that the mind becomes one with the object of meditation and becomes still. But then think, “Who is the meditator?” or “Who is the worshiper?” The answer is ‘I’, that is, the self – the deluded self; and in this way, by repeated effort, the true Self can be gained.

Eventually, however, it is necessary to dispense with all forms and mantras. Even the great saint Ramakrishna, at one stage during his sadhana, became fixated on the form of Kali and could proceed no further. Totapuri had to teach him how

to meditate on the formless by mentally cutting off the head of the visualized Kali during his meditation.

Surrender

For those who could not follow the method of Self-inquiry, Sri Ramana recommended surrender – completely surrendering all responsibility for your life to God; free from the idea that there is a person who is capable of acting independently from God. He often spoke of the correct interpretation of surrender to devotees. It was not, as some supposed, that one did not eat unless someone came and put food into one's mouth; this would be just too silly and could be extended to the need to swallow, should God do this as well – make one swallow? He would say, “In walking it is necessary to put one foot in front of the other, we do not expect God to do this. And for the business of obtaining food one could note the advice of Shankara (the 8th century reformer of Advaita philosophy) in the *Sadhana Panchakam*, who said, ‘For the treatment of the disease called hunger one should eat the food received as alms’.”

Hence, in the practice of surrender, one should take things as they come in accordance with one's traditions, but be free of the feeling that one is doing things oneself; eliminate the concept of being the doer, just be the witness. It is the feeling of doing that is bondage, but it is necessary to consider by what means such a feeling of doing can be overcome. “Do this instead of doubting: should food or medicine be swallowed; may I groan if there is pain; may I exhale the breath straight after inhaling?”

Bhakti

Bhakti is part of surrender and one should embrace it, but at the same time in talking of love there is duality – the one who loves and the entity called God (or the guru) that is loved; but if the individual is not separate from God, then being without duality means one has love for one's own Self; with love itself being the actual form of God. He said, “Worshiping the formless reality by un-thought thought is the best kind of worship, but this is possible only for those without ego.”

Methods of teaching

Although much of Sri Ramana's teaching took the form of dialogue between himself and his devotees in answering questions, he spent even more time on his couch before his meditating devotees, emanating a silent teaching. He maintained that this was the most effective means of teaching for it came directly from the master to the disciple. In his presence, devotees felt a strong sense of peace and in this state they were most receptive to the teachings. Of the difference between silent and spoken (or written) teaching, he said: "First there is the abstract knowledge and out of it there arises the ego, which in turn gives rise to thought, and that thought to the spoken word. So the word is the great-great-grandson of the original source. If the word can produce effects, imagine how much more powerful must be the Source, obtained in silence."

In support of silence as the best mode of teaching, he recounted a story of someone who composed a *bharani* (a poetic exposition) in honor of a great master. Some important persons objected saying that such expositions were meant only for warriors who defeated enemies in battle, and it was inappropriate for a mere guru. To resolve this question, it was decided that all concerned should sit in the presence of the master and contemplate the proposal. On doing this they all immediately fell into deep meditation until the master aroused them. Then, unanimously, they agreed that the *bharani* was after all appropriate, because in such a short time the master had defeated the 'thousand rutting elephants of their minds'.

Teaching by silence has a long history in India with its classical and most famous exponent being Sri Dakshinamurti, who was believed to have been a manifestation of Shiva Himself. It is because of this that Sri Ramana valued and recommended the satsang and darshan of enlightened beings whenever it could be obtained. He said that although man is always with the Self, he does not know it because of his ignorant, wandering mind. Therefore the company of saints is the best medicine for liberation. By contact with realized beings, man gradually loses his ignorance until its removal is complete – then God is realized.

Sri Ramana on gurus

Sri Ramana had strong views on gurus and said that they must be Self-realized to be of any use to a seeker. A true Satguru is simultaneously an incarnation of God, and the Self of the Heart. He maintained that every seeker needs such a guru. Association with a Satguru brings about a temporary cessation of mental activity and encourages the development of samadhi (the inner contemplative habit) in the seeker.

On the finding of a true Satguru, he said that by intense meditation God will provide a suitable guru in accordance with the devotee's state of development. The best guru for anyone is one with whom the seeker feels attuned and experiences peace. A sense of respect will also be felt. A true Satguru should abide steadily in the Self and look at everyone equally, and he should also have unshakable courage at all times. A guru who asks the seeker to do this and that, engaging him in activities, is not a true guru. He maintained that peace, the one thing that is desired by everyone, cannot be attained at any time and place, unless stillness of the mind is reached through the grace of a Satguru. "Therefore always seek that grace with a one-pointed mind." He said, "According to the stage of development of the seeker the master manifests as a personal guru, or as the inner Self. By grace the seeker can feel that the Self is the master and that God is the personal guru, the Self and the Heart all in one. Because he is both inside and out his power works in two ways – he gives instructions that enable the seeker to keep his attention on the inner Self and the inner Self pulls the mind back to its Source."

On the question of whether one should have more than one guru, Sri Ramana pointed out that there really *is* only one, the Self. But the company of saints should always be sought. There are no hard and fast rules; the ancient sage Dattatreya had 24 gurus, including the non-human ones of fire and water. And on the question of having followed a false guru he said: "Each one experiences according to his merits."

On whether everyone needs a personal guru, he said that there may be some rare individuals who do not; but when

someone pointed out that he (Sri Ramana) didn't have a guru he replied: "I might have had one – at one time or another. And did I not sing hymns to Arunachala? God appears in some form or other, human or non-human, according to the needs of each individual." When told that Krishnamurti, at that time, said that no guru is necessary, he replied, "How did he know it? One can say so only after realizing, not before."

Experiences of some devotees

The poet Ganapathi Muni became a devotee of Sri Ramana after a spiritual experience in 1907, before Sri Ramana became well-known. He was in deep meditation at a shrine near Tiruvannamalai when he heard a call that intimated, "God wants you." He felt compelled to go to the Arunachala temple but there was no indication of anything unusual there. The next day he was wandering around aimlessly when he recalled that Sri Ramana was in a cave on Arunachala Hill. He went to the cave and as he bowed before Sri Ramana, something made him say, "I have read and studied the whole of Vedanta, yet I have not understood what tapas is." Sri Ramana gazed at him in silence for a short time and then said, "If one watches whence this notion of 'I' springs, the mind becomes absorbed in that. That is tapas." (In another context, tapas is thought of as practicing austerities.) Ganapathi Muni was completely satisfied with this answer. Prior to that encounter he had disciples of his own, but now he advised them to become devotees of Sri Ramana. This was one of the events that led Sri Ramana to become more communicative for he saw that they were all in need of instruction. And over time, his answers to their many questions became the source material for the *Sri Ramana Gita*. It describes, to the extent that this is possible in words, the state of realization of Sri Ramana himself.

Another extraordinary experience Ganapathi Muni had with Sri Ramana involved astral travel. One day in the temple of the town where he was staying (Tiruvothiyur), he experienced an intense desire to be with Sri Ramana. At that point he saw Sri Ramana enter the temple and bless him, though he was at that time also some considerable distance away at Arunachala.

Sri Ramana confirmed that this event took place through astral travel. He explained it thus, “I was lying down, but I was not in a state of trance; yet awake as I was I felt my body rising higher and higher. I could see clearly the physical objects growing smaller and smaller until they completely disappeared and all around me was a limitless expanse of dazzling light. After some time I felt the body slowly descend and physical objects below began to appear... I concluded it must be by such means that the Siddhas travel over vast distances within a short time. It occurred to me I was in Tiruvotthiyur and some distance away was the temple where Ganapathi was.”

An example of the remarkable effect of being in the presence of Sri Ramana comes from a woman known as Echammal who had lost her husband and two children, and was quite distraught. She had visited many sadhus but her grief was not assuaged. Finally she heard of Sri Ramana and went to him for his darshan. She stood quietly before him for an hour and that brought about a complete change in her feelings. Her mind received a deep feeling of peace and tranquility and her grief had completely vanished. As a result of this, she stayed at Tiruvannamalai and served him for the last 30 years of her life.

An example of the healing of a physical problem is illustrated by the account of a devotee, Ramaswami Aiyar, who was dyspeptic and had for many years been living only on rice gruel. He wrote, *‘I was all along dyspeptic and I could not digest food, nor sleep a wink. I was worrying myself to death and the Swami asked about it. I told him about my health and in about a minute my whole brain felt a cooling sensation. Then a lady brought in cakes and food as a special treat and Sri Ramana pressed me to partake of it. I had a good feast of very rich food which I could never have eaten before. And that night was so strange – I slept profoundly.’*

Sri Ramana never claimed to perform miracles and would take steps to dispel talk about healings and other occurrences. Nevertheless, all his devotees knew that many cases of healing and even more remarkable occurrences were attributable to him. Papaji (Poonjaji), a renowned Advaita teacher of the second half of the 20th century, recounted an incident of

bringing a young boy back to life. He wrote, *'A woman brought her dead son to the Maharshi, placing the body before his couch. The boy had apparently died from snakebite. The woman begged the Maharshi to bring him back to life, but he deliberately ignored her repeated requests. After a few hours, the ashram manager made her take the corpse away. As she was leaving the ashram she met a snake charmer who claimed that he could cure her son. The man did something to the boy's hand, the place where he had been bitten, and the boy immediately revived even though he had been 'dead' for hours. The devotees in the ashram attributed the cure to the Maharshi, saying that when a problem is brought to the attention of a being such as Sri Ramana, some automatic divine activity brings about the solution.'*

Paul Brunton points out that according to this concept, the Maharshi had done nothing consciously to help the boy but, at a deeper level, his awareness of the problem had caused the right man to appear at the right place and time. Sri Ramana, typically, disclaimed all responsibility for the miraculous cure. "Is that so?" was his only response to news of the boy's dramatic recovery.

Papaji claimed to have received enlightenment from his contact with Sri Ramana. After many disappointments at the hands of business-oriented gurus, and other non-enlightened teachers, he finally came to Sri Ramana's ashram. As had always been his approach he bluntly asked Sri Ramana, "Have you seen God – and if you have, can you enable me to see him?" Sri Ramana replied thus: "I cannot show you God or enable you to see God because God is not an object that can be seen. God is the subject. He is the Seer. Don't concern yourself with objects that can be seen. Find out who the seer is. Then you alone are God."

Papaji recounts his reaction to these words, "Under that spellbinding gaze I felt every atom of my body being purified. A process of transformation was going on – the old body was dying, atom by atom, and a new body was being created in its place. Then, suddenly, I understood. I knew that this man who had spoken to me was, in reality, what I already was, what I always had been."

Sri Ramana's mother came to live permanently in Tiruvannamalai in 1916, but she received no special treatment. In fact, he would sometimes tease her in front of others in regard to her strict Brahmin ways, "Oh! Your cloth has been touched by an untouchable – it is polluted. Religion has gone!" Or (because strict Brahmins do not eat onions) he would say, "Beware of the onions, they are a great obstruction to moksha." In this way, Sri Ramana led her to shed her old ways and withdraw into herself. But 1922, as her end approached, he spent many hours at her bedside with his right hand over her heart and his left on her head, until her life had passed away. In explaining what happened in those final 10 or 12 hours, he said: "Innate tendencies (*samskaras*) and the subtle memory of past experiences leading to future possibilities became very active. Scene after scene rolled before her in the subtle consciousness, the other senses having already gone. The soul was passing through a series of experiences, thus avoiding the need for rebirth – and so effecting union with the Supreme Spirit. The soul was at last disrobed of the subtle sheaths before it reached the final destination: the Supreme Peace of Liberation from which there is no return to ignorance."

The body was interred at the site of the present ashram in the temple of Sri Matrubhuteswara – the Lord in the Form of the Mother. This event played a part in the growth of the ashram to the form that it is today, for from that time onward Sri Ramana came down regularly from his cave on the Hill, and eventually resided there permanently. Of this he said, "Not of my own accord did I move... Something placed me there and I obeyed... it was the Divine will." Sri Ramana maintained that the body of his mother, enlightened while alive, was itself a temple of God. And from that time onwards his teachings began to spread widely within and beyond India.

Foreign visitors in early days

The French writer Pascaline Mallet in her book *Turn Eastwards* writes of her reaction to Sri Ramana: *'I took in slowly the strange unforgettable scene, my whole attention fixed on that central figure, whose calm majesty, serene*

strength and perfect poise seemed to fill the whole place with unutterable peace... The Maharshi was busy writing, reading letters and newspapers... (But) somehow I had the feeling that all the while he was living in a state where time and space do not exist... His utter impersonality and supreme detachment did not exclude an all-embracing compassion.'

In the early 1930s, one of the first visitors from the West to visit the ashram, was the writer Paul Brunton, whose book *A Search in Secret India* is a classic. After extensive travels in search for a true master, he became a devotee of Sri Ramana. He was shortly to sail to Europe, strongly disillusioned with 'holy' men and Hindu wonder-workers that he had encountered, when a mental voice thrust itself into his attention. It said, "Life itself is nothing more than a cinema play unrolling its episodes from cradle to grave. Where now are the past scenes – can you hold them?" Then, as he contemplated these words in the light of his immanent departure, the voice again intruded. It said, "Fool! – So this is to be the empty result of years of investigation and aspiration! Are you sure none of the men you met here in India can be the master you seek?" And from the gallery of faces that were conjured up, he recounts, a single face disentangled itself. It was the calm, sphinx-like countenance of the Maharshi.

Paul Brunton decided to delay his departure and return to visit Sri Ramana and, almost miraculously, felt that he was already a changed man; a dark burden of wretchedness and doubt was lifting from his shoulders. His descriptions of encounters with Sri Ramana and his experience of Self-inquiry are summarized below. They are among the most explicit in capturing the atmosphere of that period in the ashram, and in rural southern India generally. They are summarized here but are best read in full.

As Brunton entered the meditation hall he witnessed the Maharshi sitting on his divan, the joss sticks burning slowly on a nearby table. "His eyes are clearly open to this world and glance at me comprehendingly as I bow, and his mouth is stretched in a kindly smile of welcome." In his heart Brunton knew that he had come as one seeking to become a disciple. He put his request and his explanations to the Maharshi and at

length received an answer: “What is all this talk of masters and disciples? All these differences exist only from the disciple’s standpoint. To the one who has realized the true Self there is neither master nor disciple...”

It began to voice itself in Brunton’s thoughts that the Maharshi was not to be drawn into a direct affirmative response, and the answer must be found in some other way. The ensuing weeks absorbed him into a strange, unwonted life. His days were spent in the hall of the Maharshi, where he would slowly pick up fragments of wisdom and faint clues to the answer he sought: was he to become a disciple?

Each day, after breakfast, he took a quiet, lazy stroll to the hermitage, halted beside the sweet smelling rose bushes in the compound garden, or rested under the drooping fronds of palm trees. He felt: *‘It is a beautiful experience to wander around the hermitage garden before the sun has waxed in power and to see and smell the variegated flowers.’* He would then enter the hall, bow to the Maharshi, and quietly sit down on folded legs. He never failed to become gradually aware of the mysterious atmosphere of the place, of the benign radiations which steadily penetrated into his brain. By careful observation and frequent analysis he became completely certain that a reciprocal inter-influence arises: something that was most subtle but quite unmistakable. And it dawned on him with increasing force that in that quiet and obscure corner of South India, he had been led to one of the extremely few Indian spiritual supermen. He wrote: *‘He makes no claims to occult powers and hierophantic knowledge, and strongly resists every attempt to canonize him.’* It seemed to Paul Brunton that the presence of men like the Maharshi ensured the continuity, down in history, of a divine message.

Later, Paul Brunton described something of his experiences of Self-inquiry while sitting before the Maharshi. He would enter the hall and in a few seconds compose himself and bring all his wandering thoughts to a strong center, for the mental questionings which had marked most of his earlier meditations had begun to cease. He wrote: *‘Following his frequently repeated instructions I endeavor to pierce into that which is formless. My real being and inner nature; the soul.’*

To his surprise the effort met with almost instantaneous success, leaving him with nothing more than a strongly felt sense of the master's intimate presence. He would then apply the attention of consciousness to its own center, striving to become aware of its place of origin, and of this he wrote: *'Tonight I flash swiftly to this point... In that concentration of stillness, the mind withdraws into itself, one's familiar world begins to fade off into shadowy vagueness.'*

He became environed for a while by sheer nothingness – a kind of mental blank wall and then: *'Some new and powerful force comes into dynamic action within my inner world and bears me inward with resistless speed. The first great battle is over, almost without a stroke, and a pleasurable, happy, easeful feeling succeeds its high tension.'*

In the next stage, Brunton would become aware that he stands apart from the intellect, conscious though that it is thinking, but warned by an intuitive voice that it, the intellect, is merely an instrument. He watched these thoughts with a weird detachment and realized that the power to think – which had hitherto been a matter of pride, had now become a thing from which to escape, and he would perceive with startling clarity – that he had been its unconscious captive for all of his life. He realized intuitively that he was about to penetrate the mysteries which hide the innermost recesses of man's soul: *'How to divorce one's self from the age-old tyranny of thoughts.'* He remembered that the Maharshi had never suggested that one should attempt to force the stoppage of thinking, rather to trace thought to its place of origin and watch for the real Self to reveal itself was what he taught. So, with the feeling that he had found the birthplace of thinking, he would surrender himself to complete passivity, yet still being as intently watchful as a snake of its prey. The waves of thought would diminish and time would seem to reel as his rapidly growing intuition reached out into the unknown. And finally it would happen: *'Thought is extinguished like a snuffed candle. The intellect withdraws into its real ground, that is, Consciousness working unhindered by thoughts.'*

After these sessions, Brunton perceived that the mind arises in a transcendental source while brain passes into a state of

complete suspension, as it does in deep sleep, yet there is not the slightest loss of awareness. His sense of awareness had been drawn out of the narrow confines of the separate personality; it had turned into something sublimely all-embracing. Of this he wrote:

'Self still exists, but it is a changed, radiant, Self... Some deeper, diviner being rises into consciousness and becomes me... I am in the midst of an ocean of blazing light – the primeval stuff out of which worlds are created... It stretches away into untellable infinite space, incredibly alive... My arms embrace all creation with profound sympathy, for I understand in the deepest possible way that to know all is not merely to pardon all, but to love all. My heart is remolded in rapture.'

As Brunton left the hall that night with his iron lantern softly glowing and followed the path on the lonely walk to his forest hut, 'countless fireflies moved amongst the flowers and plants and trees in the compound'. He had to, as one does today, be careful not to tread on scorpions or snakes in the dark. His meditation had seized him so profoundly that he was unable and unwilling to stop it, so he paid little heed to the narrow path of lighted ground on which he walked. And so he retired to his modest hut, closed the tightly-fitting heavy door, and drew the shutters over glazeless windows to keep out unwelcome animal intruders. His last glimpse was of a thicket of palm trees which stood on one side of his clearing in the bush – *'the silver moonlight coming in streams over their interlaced feathery tops'*.

According to Paul Brunton's detailed personal notebooks (see *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton, Vol. 2 – The Quest*) he did eventually many years later and after he had returned to the USA, reach a measure of enlightenment. He became widely recognized for his many books on esoteric subjects, and always recognized his debt to the Maharshi whose name crops up regularly in his notes.

Paul Brunton's observations during the period of his residence in Tiruvannamalai, gives a penetrating view of the experiences of other visitors to the ashram: Each day brought fresh indications of the greatness of the Maharshi. He wrote:

‘Among the strangely diversified company of human beings who pass through the hermitage, a low cast pariah stumbles into the hall in some great agony of soul and pours out his tribulation at the Maharshi’s feet. The sage does not reply; instead he gazes quietly at the suffering man, whose cries gradually diminish until he leaves the hall two hours later a more serene and stronger person.’

For others it was clear that the mere presence of the sage provided them with spiritual and emotional assurance. Those in doubt would gain renewed faith in their creeds of belief, “For the Maharshi treats all creeds alike, regards them all as significant and sincere expressions – and honors Jesus no less than Krishna.”

Brunton describes a peasant family who had traveled over 100 miles to pay homage to the sage. They had heard that there is a God in human form living at the foot of Arunachala Hill. They stayed for a few hours, hardly speaking, and gazed in reverence and awe at the Maharshi. Yet another man in the hall is bespectacled, silken-clad and prosperous-looking. He is a judge who has taken advantage of a law vacation to pay a visit to the Maharshi. Brunton writes: *‘ This cultured, refined and highly educated gentleman squats democratically among a group of Tamils who are poor, naked to the waist and smeared with oil, so that their bodies glisten like polished ebony. It is clear that that which brings them together also destroys the distinctions of caste and produces unity – the deep recognition that true wisdom is worth the sacrifice of superficial differences.’*

Animals

Sri Ramana’s regard for animals was no different to that for humans. Dogs, cows, cats, monkeys and peacocks abound in the ashram. None of the animals were treated as less than human and never referred to as ‘it’ – they were usually called ‘the boys’. He would say, “We do not know what soul may be tenanted in these bodies... and for what portion of their unfinished karma they seek out our company.” One of the animals was Lakshmi the cow. Lakshmi was believed to be the incarnation of an elderly lady who used to take delight in

feeding Sri Ramana when he lived on the Hill. Lakshmi would take every opportunity to meet Sri Ramana and she seemed to understand what was spoken to her. When she passed away she was given an honorable burial near the hall, and her samadhi shrine is there for all to see today. This is Sri Ramana's description of one dog called Karuppan. He said, "He was a person of high principles. When we were at the cave, some dark object used to pass but always kept his distance. We would see his head peeping over a bush sometimes. His vairagya, non-attachment, seemed very strong... We respected this and used to leave food for him... One day as we were going past, Karuppan suddenly jumped across the path and romped around me wagging his tail in glee... From that time onwards he lived with us at the ashram as one of the inmates."

Sri Ramana's attitude was the same towards dangerous animals, and snakes were often fellow inhabitants of the caves. He would say, "We have come to their residence... We have no right to disturb or trouble them. They do not harm us if we take the correct attitude towards them."

One of his last concerns when he was on his death bed was for animals. A peacock flew on to the roof and he said, "Remember to feed the peacocks."

Arunachala – the sacred mountain

Mount of Arunachala, sometimes referred to as the Hill of Enlightenment, has been venerated since time immemorial as one of the most sacred spots in India. Formerly it was called the *Tejo Lingam* and reputed to be the abode of a legendary Siddha called Arunagiri Yogi. It is much older than the famous Mount Kailash, being a granitic monolith dating from the first formation of the earth's crust. In the *Skanda Purana*, an ancient Hindu scripture, Lord Shiva speaks of Arunachala as the most sacred of all the holy places – the Heart of the world: The translation is as follows:

Though in fact fiery, the Hill is dull in appearance because of His loving solicitude for the spiritual uplift of the world. Here, I always abide as the Perfect Being. Meditate on the fact

that in the Heart of the Hill surges the spiritual glory within which the whole world is contained.

Sri Ramana's own hymn to the Hill is as follows (From *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam* and *Pancharatnam*):

'You are yourself the One Being, ever aware as the self-luminous Heart! In you there is a mysterious Power without which you are nothing. From it proceeds the phantom of the mind emitting its latent subtle dark mists, which, illuminated by Your Light of Consciousness reflected on them, appear within as thoughts whirling in the vortices of prarabdha, later developing into the psychic worlds and these are projected without as the material world transformed into concrete objects which are magnified by the outgoing senses and move about like pictures in a cinema show. Visible or invisible, Oh Hill of Grace, without You they are nothing!' (and) *"O Arunachala, in you the picture of the Universe is formed, and has its stay, and is dissolved; in this enigma lays the miracle of Truth. You are the Inner Self, Who dances in the Hearts as 'I'. Heart is your name. O Lord!'*

At first sight, the Hill looks fairly nondescript but on closer inspection it is discovered that it has its own energy and contains many beautiful spots and patches of forest. At the time of Sri Ramana, the Hill was much more densely forested and because of concern over its further deforestation there is currently a program to plant trees in places where the Hill has become denuded. There are also many caves where yogis live and where visitors can go to meditate. It is said that every part of the Hill was familiar to Sri Ramana. At the highest point of the Hill there is a cauldron that is lit on the last day of the festival of Karthikai Deepam on the full-moon night, as the culminating act of the festival. On this occasion 1,00,000 people visit the Hill to pay homage while ghee and camphor are burned for several days, producing a flame that can be seen for miles around. One of the acts of homage to the Hill is its circumambulation and many people walk this 8-mile course almost daily.

Sri Ramana's last days

The illness and death from cancer of Sri Ramana Maharshi was just another demonstration of his extraordinary detachment from worldly matters. In late 1948, a small growth appeared on his left elbow which a doctor removed. But within two months it had appeared again and this time was removed by an eminent surgeon from Madras, who identified it as a sarcoma and also treated the area with radium. Sarcoma is a painful form of cancer and usually fatal. Before the wound had healed, a fresh growth was observed and the doctors advocated amputation of the arm. Sri Ramana simply smiled and replied, "There is no need for alarm. The body itself is a disease. Let it have its natural end, why mutilate it? Simple dressing of the affected part is enough."

Herbal treatment was also tried and in August 1949, some eight months after the first appearance of the tumor, a third operation was carried out followed by radium treatment. At first the treatment appeared successful but some three months later the tumor reappeared and a fourth operation was carried out. At that time it was said that if the tumor reappeared the prognosis would be very bad. Then another tumor appeared in the armpit and grew rapidly so that the whole arm became one huge swelling that oozed blood; the poison of the disease spread to the whole body. When it was realized that treatment was to be of no avail, devotees prayed to Sri Ramana to set his own health right. But he simply said, "Everything will come right in due course. Who is there to will this?"

Throughout the long course of the illness, Sri Ramana remained quite unconcerned and the doctors who attended to him were amazed at his tranquil appearance and gracious smile; his almost complete indifference to the pain. At the beginning of the disease he had quoted and translated a verse from the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, as follows:

'Let the body, the result of fructifying karma, rest or move about, live or die. The sage who has realized the Self is not aware of it, just as one in a drunken stupor is not aware of his clothing.'

Until the very end, Sri Ramana continued with his duties and even when he was unable to leave his room, up to the last

evening, he continued giving darshan. That evening there was a vast gathering of devotees and everyone had his final darshan. He asked the attendants to raise him to a sitting position and, as a group of devotees began chanting the hymn he had composed to Arunachala, his eyes opened a little and tears rolled down from their outer edges. His last breaths were smooth and gentle and then, without shock, they simply stopped. It is said that those present at that time witnessed a flash of light that came from the body and traveled to the top of Mount Arunachala. It is also said that an extraordinary peace overwhelmed everyone present, both in the room and outside.

About the ashram

Tiruvannamalai can be reached by bus from the major centers of Chennai, Bangalore, and Pondicherry, which is located at the edge of Arunachala Hill, around three kilometers from the center of the town. The ashram provides comfortable accommodation and meals on a donation basis. There is a book shop and a good library of spiritual books and magazines.

The path up the mountain starts from the back gate of the ashram. Circumambulating Mount Arunachala (13 km) in a clockwise direction is a popular way of paying homage. At the foot of the mountain to the north, in the town of Tiruvannamalai, lies an ancient temple of Shiva, which is one of the largest and most spectacular temples in India – the oldest parts of the temple dating from the 9th century. This was the temple in which Sri Ramana first meditated, before moving to the mountain itself.

Contact information

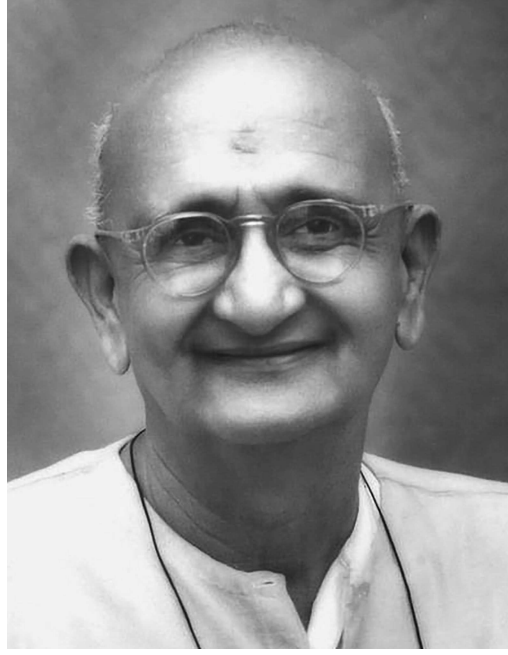
Tiruvannamalai can be reached by bus from the major centers of Chennai, Bangalore, and Pondicherry.

Sri Ramanasramam,

Tiruvannamalai 606601,

Tamil Nadu, India.

Website: www.sriramanamaharshi.org



Swami Ramdas (Papa)
(1884-1963)

Chapter 10

SWAMI RAMDAS

Beloved Papa

*'If by some divine alchemy, Love and Bliss were to coalesce
as one luminous entity – that would be how
Papa could be seen with the naked eye.'*

Swami Ramdas was born in 1884 at Hosdrug, Kerala, and named Vittal Rao. He had an ordinary childhood, got married and was a householder until the age of 36. Thereafter, following the experience of the many trials and tribulations of worldly life, he was forced to enquire deeply into its meaning. This had the effect of bringing about a wonderful transformation. He experienced an intense wave of dispassion for worldly things and became convinced that only through God could he find everlasting peace and happiness. Inspired by the teachings of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Rama Tirtha, he undertook a path of pure devotion and self-surrender. He had been initiated into the *Ram mantra* (Om Sri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram) by his father who was a devout Brahmin, and following its continued repetition, the mantra took hold of him enabling him to find the peace and happiness he was searching for. He came to accept everything in the world as forms of God, and to accept everything that happened as the will of God. (The first year of his spiritual life is described in his autobiography *In Quest of God*.)

Swami Ramdas founded Anandashram and maintained that we should become empowered with activity that fulfils the purpose of God's own activity. We should not waste our powers on trifling things. We should be creative and dedicate our power to the great Giver and Possessor of Infinite Energy. He asked us to combine action with devotion and knowledge and lay our service at His feet. The aim is, he said, to merge your personality in the great Reality, and after gaining a

transformed vision, see every being and animal as an image of the great Truth... March onward until you attain this highest goal, he frequently exclaimed.

Swami Ramdas died in 1963 following which one of his first followers, Mataji Krishnabai, took over the running of the mission. Then when she died in 1989, a long time devotee, Swami Satchidananda (Pujya Swamiji) took over until his death in 2008. Thus the three historical figures associated with the founding and functioning of Anandashram were Swami Ramdas (Papaji), Mataji Krishnabai, and Pujya Swamiji.

Their mission

In 1922, Swami Ramdas left his home in Mangalore. He had no idea where he was going but he was not anxious about it. He felt he was obeying a divine command and the 'Ram' mantra was ever on his lips. Thus he was directed to Srirangam where he bathed in the holy river Cauvery and took the vows of a *sanyasi* (monk). His early travels brought him to Tiruvannamalai where he met Sri Ramana Maharshi. He stood before him and asked for grace. Sri Ramana looked intently at him for a few minutes and he felt he was being filled with blessings. A thrill of inexpressible joy coursed through his psyche, leaving him quivering like a leaf. In that ecstatic state he spent a month in a cave on the slopes of Arunachala Hill, and when he came out he saw a strange light and felt that everything was Ram, and Ram alone.

Following this, he traveled widely visiting many parts of India including the Himalayas, and then returned to Mangalore where he spent three months in a cave known as Panch Pandava, near Kadri. It was there that he had his first experience of nirvikalpa samadhi. Of this experience, it has been written:

'For some days, meditation consisted only of the mental repetition of the Ram-mantram. Then the mantram automatically stopped and he perceived a small circular light before his vision which yielded great thrills of delight.'

That experience continued for a time and then the light became a dazzling lightning flash which ultimately permeated

and absorbed his whole being. Bliss filled his physical frame and he became oblivious to his hands and feet and then his entire body. This trance-like state lasted two or three hours, though he would still have a subtle awareness of external objects around him. In the early stages, the state was occasionally broken, drawing him back to the world of diversity, but then he would be drawn again into the state which he described as ‘dwelling in the spirit’.

Then an even more exalted state came to him. It was the working of divine love. He felt that his very soul had expanded and enveloped the whole universe in a subtle halo of love and light. This experience, at first, would also come and go. When it went he would go into solitude, and when it was present he would mix freely with others, preaching the glory of divine love and bliss.

With this externalized vision, the mission of Swami Ramdas began.

Founding of Anandashram and the basis of his teachings

Swami Ramdas had traveled all over India before he finally settled in a small ashram that devotees had built at Kasargod in northern Kerala. It was here that he met Mother Krishanbai and, following certain circumstances that are not clearly known, moved to the present location of the ashram in Kanhangad. Perhaps relating to this move he said, “Man is God playing the fool” – implying that man is essentially divine but puts on a mask of ignorance that produces the individual personalities and influences their behaviour. But when he is ready, the individual gets tired of worldly life and seeks a wise man and follows prescribed sadhana until all the vasanas of his present life and previous lives are washed away. Thus the mind becomes pure and the person realizes he is really Brahman. But when and how this occurs is a mystery. In this regard he emphasized the need for absolute surrender to the Divine will. He said: “His will is supreme. If we are aware of this there is no struggle in life at all. When we surrender to God’s will we put all our burdens on Him – and surrender brings strength, peace, bliss and wisdom; but when the ego

raises its head, all these disappear and man becomes a puny care-worn creature.”

And what is surrender? Surrender means to know that all our actions are God’s actions. If we live like this, our ego-sense will gradually disappear. The whole universe is the play and form of God’s Shakti.

Ramdas considered himself to be a *jivanmukta* – one who retains a subtle individuality but at the same time, whatever he may do, is conscious that he is the eternal and all-pervading Reality. He had great respect and reverence for all saints, often saying he was the child of all the saints. By his very presence he removed the base of unbridled passions from the hearts of his devotees. He assured all his followers that uninterrupted repetition of the Ram mantra would lead them to the realization of their oneness with God, “That name can change the nature of the world from bitterness and fear to mutual love, goodwill and trust.”

Love, bliss and humor

It is said that when Ramdas opened his heart to his beloved Ram, it became flooded with love and bliss and till his last day on earth, through all his talks and actions, he gave those who sought him a taste of that love and divine bliss. People said, “The purest pearls of wisdom that fell from his lips spread sweetness and light all around, dispelling gloom, fear and anxiety.”

His talks were often punctuated with jokes and laughter.

Some remembered sayings

God demands the highest sacrifice. It is a bid for immortality... And for proof we have before us the instances of innumerable saints who have done just that. They have surrendered their heart, soul and body to the supreme power which is at the basis of all creation. Personal clingings and individual desires must be given up for the infinite vision that is imbued with the consciousness of perfect freedom and peace. The person then transcends the superficial crust of life. The soul becomes free from the bonds of body and mind.

In answer to a question about the meaning of the mantra, he asked, “Do we need to know the meaning? The mantra stands for God. When repeated with love, we are charmed by the sound of it. The rhythm produced brings a strange peace to us. The vibrations have a healing effect on the mind, even if we don’t know the meaning of the words.”

And about uncivilized persons who may get into states of ecstasy through dancing, Swamiji explained that it’s like the view of beautiful scenery, a sense of harmony and peace ensues but it is not lasting. But when it is identified with the Divine, it will take us to the innermost recesses of the mind where a spiritual radiance abides. Music has a charming effect on the mind. That is how deer are caught in India. A flute is played and the deer is attracted to it and stands still. Taking this opportunity, a man can approach and rope the deer.

Some words of Mataji Krishnabai

Whenever you have made a mistake and if you express regret, Papaji wipes clean the effect of your lapse. Mistakes come if your *Ram Naam* repetition becomes less. If constant, the name shields you from making mistakes and Papa sees that you do only things that help you on the spiritual path. But remember, you can always attain the peace of Papaji only if you are truly humble. In rendering service, we should not thrust ourselves on anyone to the point of being a nuisance. We should ask first before rendering service.

Someone said, “I want to dedicate my life to Papa but I feel my aspiration is not strong enough. I have been getting guidance from Mataji. Am I on the right track?” Mataji replied that it would be better to take up a profession and lead a worldly life until the call from within becomes irresistibly strong. It may be just your own little self speaking within.

Some words of Swami Satchidananda

“How can we see God in everyone? Just eliminate the ego – the sense of doership. When everything is seen as God then there is no one place to say, ‘I have done this... I have done that’. We have to develop this attitude in our day-to-day lives. It is not too difficult if we have a mind to do it. Our beloved

Papa has given us the holy and all-powerful Ram Naam mantra to achieve this.

“In what way are the ups and downs of life helpful in spiritual growth? We should try to accept the truth that all experiences, seemingly good and bad, are given by God for our own spiritual progress.”

About the ashram

The principal ashram (Anandashram) was started in 1931 by Swami Ramdas and Mother Krishnabai. It is located about 15 km from Kanhangad railway station, near Kanhangad in northern Kerala. Mother Krishnabai had received darshan from Swami Ramdas and decided to follow the religious life of a *sanyasin* (female monk). Together they put into practice the universal love they had both experienced. Following the death of Swami Ramdas in 1963, and Mother Krishnabai in 1989, the ashram was headed by Swami Satchidananda (Pujya Swamiji) until his death in 2008.

The ashram welcomes all and, by arrangement, offers accommodation to visitors. The morning schedule begins at 5.30 a.m. with *Vishnu Sahasranamam* followed by *Guru Stuti*, a flower offering and other chants and *bhajans* (singing of devotional songs and hymns), and ends with aarti at 12.30 p.m. From 2 p.m. the program starts with Ram Naam followed by *Hare Rama*, *Hanuman Chalisa* and bhajans until 9.30 p.m.

The ashram produces an online e-magazine: *The Vision* and a number of e-books, all of which can be downloaded free of charge in PDF format: *Glimpses of Divine Vision*; *Letters of Swami Ramdas*, Vols. 1-2, and *At the Feet of God*.

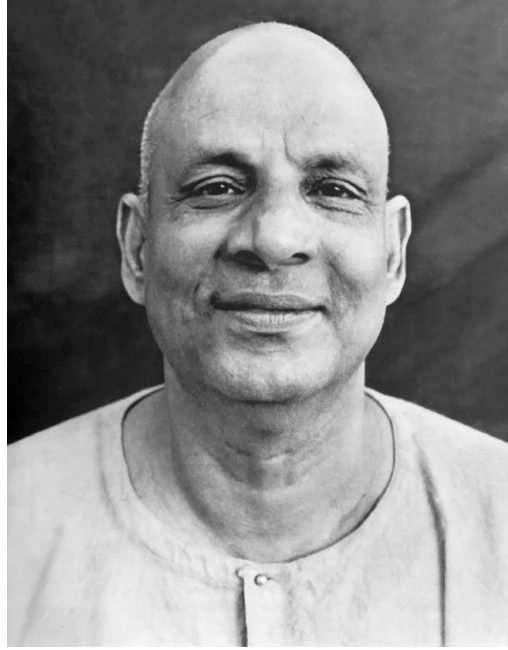
The ashram also supports a number of charitable and social development activities including: The Swami Ramdas Charitable Medical Mission, The Mother Krishnabai Development Trust, and The Vishwa Seva Educational Trust.

The current administrators and managers of the ashram and the centers are humble and active, but do not regard themselves as enlightened spiritual teachers.

Contact information

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Website: www.anandashram.org



Swami Sivananda
(1887-1963)

Chapter 11

SWAMI SIVANANDA

A Divine Life

'Your only duty is to realize God; and this includes other duties.'

Swami Sivananda was the founder of the Divine Life Society and became one of the best known spiritual teachers of the 20th century. He was a supreme bhakta yogi with service to all as his main doctrine. His teachings are available in every corner of the world, and two of his disciples, Swami Satyananda and Swami Chinmayananda, became famous spiritual teachers in their own right. The activities of the Divine Life Society were further augmented by splinter groups based on Swami Sivananda's teachings. These include the Integral Yoga Society founded by a leading disciple, Swami Satchidananda, which has branches throughout Europe and America, and the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers founded by the late Swami Vishnudevananda. At present, the Divine Life Society has more than 200 centers with some 10,000 active members throughout the world.

Swami Sivananda was a follower of Advaita Vedanta. His teachings are firmly rooted in the world and are based on service to humanity, understanding the philosophy of Vedanta, and leading a dharmic life. The slogan over his samadhi shrine reads:

'Be Good, Do Good.'

Swami Sivananda was born in Kerala in 1897 and is believed to be a descendant of the 16th century scholar-saint Appaya Diksitar. He was given the birth name of Kuppuswami and, from an early age, he became a Shiva devotee. Although a Brahmin, he was indifferent to caste distinctions and used to

feed beggars and animals – sometimes to the consternation of his parents. At school, he was a bright lad and also good at sports, and doing regular physical exercise to keep the body healthy became one of his teachings. As a youth he liked to wander about, sometimes for days at a time, visiting temples and holy shrines. Opposing family wishes that he become a religious scholar, he chose to study medicine instead. He attended the Tanjore Medical College, where he was an outstanding student. There he again showed total disregard of all caste distinctions.

After graduation, he went to Malaya (now Malaysia) as Chief Medical Officer of the hospital for a large rubber plantation. His service was excellent but, being sensitive and compassionate, he was appalled by the suffering and death that he had to witness in his work. After 10 years in Malaya, he felt the call to return to India to pursue a spiritual life. He gave up his job, abandoned his profession, and became a renunciate wanderer in India.

He devoted the next 10 years of his life to intense yogic practices and lived in caves, shacks, and temples, subsisting on a diet of *rotis* (Indian bread) and *Gangajal* (Ganges water) – literally bread and water. In 1924, when he was 37 years of age, he met a saintly man called Sadhu Vishwananda in Rishikesh, who initiated him as a monk and named him Swami Sivananda. Then, in addition to continuing his austere tapasya, he was able to withdraw his savings from Malaya and began caring for sadhus, many of whom were undernourished, with food and medicines. He had seen that many of the holy men who wandered about India also suffered from tropical diseases. He started a charitable clinic in 1932 at Swarg Ashram in Rishikesh, where he also lived. Although at that time he did not have disciples, he would often give spiritual talks and distribute religious pamphlets that he had printed.

His concern with the clinic seems to have marked a turning point in his life, for he began to gather a following of devotees. His attitude towards the more extreme forms of tapasya changed and he began to see that matted hair and emaciated bodies had nothing to do with a divine life. In 1934, he started to take disciples and moved from Swarg Ashram to

set up his own ashram in a deserted cowshed on the banks of the Ganges. The ashram grew rapidly, acquired other buildings, and thereby attracted many more disciples. Today the ashram houses several hundred resident monks, lay residents and visitors. In addition, many more day visitors attend meditation and chanting sessions, satsangs, a daily lecture, and a question and answer session given by resident swamis.

After the Divine Life Society was formed, Swami Sivananda embarked on a life of tireless work, travel, and lecturing throughout India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). His talks and the singing of God's names were so irresistible that they attracted large crowds. Even the hearts of the often arrogant British would become softened and some would come up to the stage to dance and sing the sweet names of God with the Swami. This type of activity continued for almost 20 years during which time he developed the practice of recording his thoughts almost daily. These have now become the source of many teachings. Over the same period, the ashram of the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh grew into the large establishment that it is today.

As a medical doctor he was very much concerned with health matters, and the promotion of Hatha yoga as a part of healthcare. He founded many hospitals and clinics based on both Ayurvedic and Western medicine. His special, mild brand of Hatha yoga is aimed at not only the promotion of health but also the generation of a feeling of well-being through control of the mind. It is quite different from the often ego-fired contortions of the Hatha yoga practiced in the West.

In his dealings, he forbade the discriminatory practices of caste system and the religious privilege of the orthodox priests, in all his institutions. He also supported the movement towards equal rights for women in India.

Teachings

The Sivananda teachings are characterized by an emphasis on practical service and living a dharmic life. They recognize the essential unity of all religions and, in the main ashram and centers, festivals of religions other than Hinduism are

respected and celebrated. Christmas Eve carols and Bible readings, pujas and celebrations for the Buddha and Guru Nanak (of Sikhism), are held at appropriate times. He explained that Sanatana Dharma was not just the origin of Hinduism, but was also the basis of all religious philosophies. Yet, the essence of his teachings were drawn from the Bhagavad Gita. Above all, the emphasis is on love and service.

Swami Sivananda was a prolific writer and is the author of around 300 books and papers. He realized that the priestly classes, who used Sanskrit, were keeping ordinary folk in the dark, so he wrote in English and Hindi to bring yogic teachings and the teachings of Vedanta to the masses. He promoted yoga for householders which could be incorporated into family life. These activities resulted in promoting the understanding of Vedanta globally.

His teachings are concerned with leading a dharmic life based on moral behaviour, self-discipline, generosity and devotion to God. They have been condensed into 20 Instructions that are inscribed on a pillar in the courtyard of the main ashram in Rishikesh. They are as follows:

1. Get up at 4 a.m. daily. Do japa and meditation.
2. Sit in Padma or Siddha asanas (postures) for japa and meditation.
3. Take sattvic food (simple non-spicy, vegetarian) and eat frugally.
4. Do charity, one tenth of your income, or one anna per rupee for the poor.
5. Study one chapter of the Bhagavad Gita daily.
6. Preserve *virya* (vital force). Sleep separately.
7. Give up smoking, narcotics, drink and rajasic (spicy) food.
8. Fast on holy days or take milk and fruits only.
9. Observe *mauna* (silence) two hours daily and during meals.
10. Speak the truth at any cost; but speak little and sweetly.
11. Reduce your wants. Lead a happy, contented life.

12. Never hurt the feelings of others. Be kind to all.
13. Think of the mistakes you have made (self-analysis).
14. Do not depend on servants. Have self-reliance.
15. Think of God when you wake up and go to bed.
16. Have always a *japa mala* (rosary) on your neck or in your pocket.
17. Adhere to the motto: Simple living and high thinking.
18. Serve sadhus, sanyasins, and the poor, sick and suffering.
19. Have a separate meditation room under lock and key.
20. Keep a spiritual diary and stick to your routine.

In Sivananda teachings, women are treated as equals in all matters. Women are permitted to learn and practice all aspects of yoga and, if they wish, to take sanyas (the vows of monkhood). The German-born Swami Sivananda Radha was the first woman to take the vows of sanyas within the Sivananda organization. There are also Indian female disciples of Sivananda now teaching in India. Nevertheless, tradition still prevails to some extent and even within the Divine Life Society it seems to have been necessary to restrict the long-term residence of women in the main ashram. Long-term residency for women, at the present time, must be negotiated on an individual basis in each case. Until his death in 2001, the daily question and answer sessions were presided over by the aging Swami Krishnananda, who was known for his blunt humor, wit and a marked aversion to spiritual pretentiousness.

Swami Sivananda's death

At the beginning of 1963, when he was 76 years of age, Swami Sivananda began to give indications that his life was approaching its end. But even while his health was failing, he continued to record his daily thoughts. He had a paralytic stroke on 23rd June 1963, but continued occasionally to take questions and give answers. He seemed fully aware and remained calm and even cheerful throughout the days before his death. When asked questions by an attending physician, he

would give medically astute answers, sometimes correcting the doctor on some point. On 24th June, he dictated the last of his daily thoughts. It was, “When the individual merges in God happiness comes.” Then he said, “Enough,” and lapsed into silence. On 13th July, though he had not consumed anything for some days, he asked for a glass of Gangajal, and 11 days later, on 24th July, late at night, he left this world.

The ashrams

The Sivananda Ashram is the main ashram and headquarters of the Divine Life Society, the worldwide organization started by Swami Sivananda in 1932. It is a large and rambling ashram on the banks of the Ganges in Rishikesh. After the death of Swami Sivananda in 1963, the Divine Life Society was headed by Swami Chidananda who was the President, and Swami Krishnananda, who was the main teaching Swami at the ashram until his death in 2001. In 2007, Swami Ramananda Saraswati, who had been the leader of the organization in Trinidad, became the new leader of the Divine Life Society and returned to the main ashram in Rishikesh.

Rishikesh is about six to eight hours by bus or train from Delhi. There are direct buses but many buses and trains terminate at Haridwar, which is some 30 km from Rishikesh. From Haridwar, there is a branch train service and many buses, taxis and shared autorickshaws ply between the two cities.

There are many other Sivananda-type organizations in India. In Kerala, located amidst the lush foothills of the Sahyadri Mountains, there is a Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Ashram which was started by Swami Vishnudevananda, a senior disciple of Sivananda, but is now unrelated to the Divine Life Society. Since Swami Vishnudevananda’s death in 1993, this ashram has been run by an Italian man, Swami Mahadevananda. The ashram conducts two-week yoga retreats. The ashram also conducts yoga teacher training courses. There are Sivananda organizations in many other countries and details can be sourced on the internet.

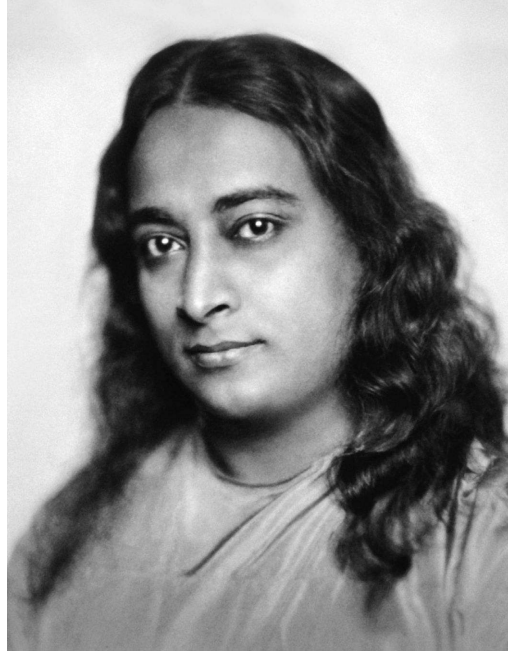
Contact information

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Uttarakhand, India.

Website: www.swami-krishnananda.org

Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Dhanwanthari Ashram,
Neyardam, Trivandrum, DT 695576, Kerala, India.

Website: www.sivananda.org.in



Paramahansa Yogananda
(1893-1952)

PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

And His Lineage

'A sad saint is a bad saint. Spirituality is something that must be expressed joyfully.'

Paramahansa Yogananda is well-known in the West through his book *Autobiography of a Yogi*, first published in 1946. He is considered by many to have been a *premavatar* – a divine incarnation of love. He was born in 1893 in West Bengal and, from the earliest days, he was enraptured with the idea of God. He died in California in 1952. In 1920, at the request of his guru, Sri Yukteswar, he went to the USA to impart the teachings of Kriya yoga (spontaneous spiritual movements and experiences of visions, sounds etc.): a type of yoga that is said to have originated with the legendary *Mahavatar* (great avatar) Babaji. Apart from a brief return to India in 1935, which coincided with the passing away of his guru, he spent most of his adult life in the West. He personally initiated hundreds of thousands of people into Kriya yoga, and in 1935 he founded the Self Realization Fellowship (SRF), the international version of the Yogoda Satanga Society of India (YSS). The SRF in the USA has its headquarters at Mt. Washington in Los Angeles.

Later, in 1938, the Yogoda Math (monastery and ashram) was built at Dakshineswar, Kolkata, on the banks of the Ganges river.

His spiritual lineage

Yogananda was a disciple of Sri Yukteswar, who was in turn the disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya – who is said to have attained enlightenment through a meeting with Mahavatar Babaji. A semi-mythical figure, Babaji is of great age and is believed to live in a secret location in the Himalayas, from

where he travels astrally from time to time to other parts of India. In the same lineage, in the early 18th century, there was a saintly individual called Nanga Baba who later became known as Totapuri. He is said to have been instrumental in the realization of Sri Ramakrishna and who, according to one source of information, may have been well over a hundred years of age at that time, yet subsequently became the devotee of Ramakrishna.

To the Western mind it may seem improbable that gurus who are hundreds of years old do actually exist in reality, but there is much reliable and documented evidence to support their existence. Furthermore, it is well-known that highly advanced yogis can stop their heartbeat, lower their body temperature and refrain from visible breathing for periods of, at least, several hours and sometimes much longer. If these are documented facts then it is not inconceivable that advanced yogis, who spend much of their time in deep meditation and in the practice of altering their physiological states, could slow down the aging process. As Shakespeare pointed out, there is much more going on in the world than is dreamed of in the philosophy of man.

Babaji is believed to be, or had been, a Mahavatar, who lived for many centuries in the Himalayas. Yogananda's guru, Lahiri Mahasaya, has said that when anyone utters his name with reverence, that person attracts an instant spiritual blessing of Babaji. An Australian woman described what she believed to be an encounter with Babaji in the Shiva Caves near Rishikesh in northern India. She had made her way with some difficulty into the caves and there she found sadhus dressed in spotless white. She wondered how this was possible because she had to crawl on all fours to gain access. Presently, when she was looking at the formations of the rocks (which resembled the locks of Shiva) she felt a sudden stillness and noticed that the sadhus had all prostrated themselves on the ground. She followed suit, but not before she had a glimpse of what she was later told was Babaji passing quickly across the cave and disappearing on the far side. Babaji is said to have instructed both preceding gurus of Yogananda, Lahiri Mahasaya and Sri Yukteswar, in the science of Kriya yoga.

Kriya yoga is more than simply a yoga meditation technique and, therefore, Babaji insisted that those who are seeking its initiation should undergo a period of spiritual training before they can be initiated. Although Kriya yoga does not require celibacy or renunciation from its initiates, the acceptance of certain spiritual disciplines is necessary. To this day, the SRF and YSS organizations follow the same injunction.

Lahiri Mahasaya is alleged to have met Babaji briefly near Ranikhet in 1861 and become enlightened immediately. He was instructed in Kriya yoga and given permission to teach it to others. As he was already married he became a householder saint and, for much of his adult life, was also a junior government officer in British India. His superior, the supervisor of the office where he worked, was one of the first to notice the change in him and experienced his acquisition of supernatural powers. It happened like this: The supervisor's wife at that time was believed to be seriously ill in England and he had had no news about her. Lahiri offered to get some information by psychic means and went to sit for a short time in a secluded spot. Shortly, he returned and said that the wife was much better and was at that moment writing a letter, some parts of which he quoted. The superintendent was somewhat relieved but understandably doubtful. That is, until the letter arrived. The letter not only contained news of her recovery but also used the same phrases that Lahiri had quoted.

Lahiri Mahasaya, in due course, initiated his close disciple Sri Yukteswar, who became Yogananda's guru and master. Moreover, Sri Yogananda claims to have had prenatal memories of Sri Yukteswar in a former life, when he was a young student of around 17 years of age. He had a vision of a Christ-like man in the ochre robes of a swami. Of this he said, "I sensed that my guru knew God and would lead me to him. The obscurity of this life disappeared in a fragile dawn of prenatal memories." Later, he met Sri Yukteswar in his physical form in his present lifetime, upon which he said, "How many years have I waited for you."

Sri Yukteswar had met Babaji on a number of occasions, also in a previous life. The first time was in the 1880s at a

Kumbh Mela, a religious fair, and then later when he was 39-years-old. On the first occasion, he was not yet a swami but had received Kriya initiation from Lahiri Mahasaya. He described Babaji as a bright, unusual figure with sparkling dark eyes. He was instantly engulfed in a wave of spiritual blessing as Babaji stilled his wandering thoughts and sensed his interest in the West, saying, “I see you are interested in the West, as well as the East. The West must establish a middle path of activity and spirituality combined. Some years hence, I shall send you a disciple whom you can train for yoga dissemination in the West.” This disciple was Yogananda.

After Yogananda’s death in 1952, he was succeeded in the USA by Rajarsi Janakananda (formerly James J. Lynn, a self-made business magnate with spiritual inclinations) as head of the SRF. Yogananda said of Rajarsi:

“Some people say that the Western man cannot meditate. That is not true. Since Mr. Lynn first received Kriya yoga initiation, I have never seen him when he is not communicating with God.” Mr. Lynn described the effects of his first meeting with Yogananda thus, “I became aware that I was sitting very still... I had found entrance into a spiritual realm previously unknown to me.”

A woman, who became known as the Reverend Mother Daya Mata, succeeded Rajarsi in 1955. She had met Yogananda in 1931 as a young girl of 17 and was taken by his love for God. She entered the Mount Washington Mother Center to be trained by Yogananda and, over the years, she was given special organizational responsibilities and placed above other disciples as an example to follow in the monastic life he envisaged for the followers of Kriya yoga.

On Yogananda, Daya Mata wrote: *‘Paramahansa Yogananda taught us the way, not only by his words and divine example, but by giving to us the scientific SRF methods of meditation. It is not possible to satisfy the soul’s thirst merely by reading about the truth. One must drink the direct experience of God.’* She remained the head of the organization until her death in 2010. The present head in the USA since January 2011 is Sri Mrinalini Mata.

An experience of Cosmic Consciousness

Probably, the nearest Yogananda comes to describing his experience of enlightenment concerns an occurrence at the ashram of his master Sri Yukteswar. He had just returned from a visit to the Himalayas and described his meeting with the master. A blissful wave engulfed him and he became conscious that the Lord, in the form of his master, was “expanding the limited ardor of my heart to the vast reaches of cosmic love.” A few days later, Sri Yukteswar tapped him gently above the heart, upon which his body became rooted to the ground, his breath was drawn out “as if by some huge magnet,” and soul and mind seemed like a fluid light coming from every pore. His flesh then appeared dead but he had acquired an intense awareness, so that his sense of identity was no longer confined to his body but embraced even the ‘circumambient atoms’. With omnivision he saw people in distant streets, a white cow approaching the ashram gate, the roots of trees in the soil and the movement of their sap. All objects trembled and vibrated, and then melted into a luminescent sea. An oceanic joy broke upon him as he realized that the Spirit of God is exhaustless bliss and that his body was countless tissues of light. He felt that a swelling glory within him enveloped the whole universe, and the entire cosmos, gently luminous, glimmered within his being. Again and again, creative beams condensed into constellations and then, “by rhythmic reversion, sextillion worlds passed into diaphanous luster.” And he knew that all this came from “a point of intuitive perception in his heart.” And as the “nectar of immortality” pulsed through him, he heard the primal sound AUM – the voice of God.

Kriya yoga: Yogananda’s principal teaching

The essential teaching of the Self Realization Fellowship is Kriya yoga, which is considered by its adepts to be a science. It became quite widely known in India through the activities of Lahiri Mahasaya and Sri Yukteswar. Its introduction and propagation in the West was due to Yogananda and subsequently it has been transmitted by his Western successors. Yogananda wrote of Kriya yoga as follows:

‘Kriya yoga is a psycho-physiological technique by which the blood is decarbonized and recharged with oxygen. The atoms of the extra oxygen are transmuted into the life current to rejuvenate the brain and spinal centers. By stopping the accumulation of venous blood, the yogi is able to lessen or prevent the decay of tissues; the advanced yogi transmutes his cells into pure energy. Elijah, Jesus, Kabir (said to be the originator of Radha Soami Satsang Beas, another organization with secret teachings) and other prophets were past masters in the use of Kriya or a similar technique – by which they caused their bodies to dematerialize at will.’

Because of certain ancient yogic injunctions, Yogananda explained, Kriya yoga is not given to the general public. It should be taught by authorized adepts of the SRF/YSS organization. Seekers must agree not to impart the techniques to any others. It is believed that the techniques of Kriya yoga were imparted to Arjuna by Krishna, and are mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita. They became lost through the dark ages and were rediscovered quite recently following Babaji’s injunction to Lahiri Mahasaya. In the Gita, one stanza reads as follows: *‘By offering the inhaling breath to the exhaling breath and offering the exhaling breath to the inhaling breath, the yogi neutralizes both breaths. Thus he releases prana from the heart and brings the life force under control.’* (Bhagavad Gita V: 27-28).

Another stanza states: *‘The muni (meditation expert) who, seeking the Supreme Goal, becomes eternally free and is able to withdraw from external phenomena by fixing the gaze within the mid-spot of the eyebrows and by neutralizing the even currents of prana and apana (in and out flow of breath) within the nostrils and lungs, to control the sensory mind and intellect and to banish desire, fear and anger.’* (Bhagavad Gita IV: 29).

Thus the yogi arrests decay of the body by securing an additional supply of prana through quieting the action of the lungs and heart; he also arrests mutations of growth in the body, neutralizing decay and arresting growth.

The adept in Kriya yoga is said to be able to mentally direct his life energy around the chakras and it is believed that this greatly accelerates the natural unfoldment of the kundalini. Yogananda pointed out that Kriya yoga has nothing in common with the unscientific breathing exercises taught by 'misguided zealots'.

Kriya practice may be accompanied by feelings of peace and the soothing sensations of its regenerative effect on the spine. In support of this, Yogananda said that many examples could be given of the relationship between man's respiratory rate and his state of consciousness. A person whose attention is wholly engrossed in something, as in undertaking some delicate or difficult physical or mental feat, automatically breathes very slowly. Fixity of attention depends on slow breathing, while rapid and uneven breathing is characteristic of the harmful emotional states of fear, lust and anger. At the same time, trying to force the mind and senses apart by simple introspection is ineffective because the mind is constantly dragged back towards the senses by the life currents. Kriya yoga controls the mind directly *through* the life force itself, so it is the most effective and most scientific way to approach the Infinite.

According to accomplished yogis such as Swami Anubhavananda, formerly of the Chinmaya Foundation, very slow breathing softens and dissolves the 'glue' holding together the gross physical and the mental sheaths of the soul.

And, speaking generally, it is considered inadvisable to dabble in any form of yoga without proper guidance, particularly the various forms of prana yoga based on breath control. It seems that there are many partly-qualified and unqualified 'teachers' who can do serious and sometimes permanent harm to the unwary. Surjan Singh Uban (author of *The Gurus of India* and an army doctor) mentions the ill effects of a man who was pursuing a correspondence course in Kriya yoga. The experiencing of spontaneous yogic asanas, hearing celestial sounds and seeing visions, not necessarily indicative of a high spiritual state, are characteristic of Kriya yoga. Swami Muktananda and his successor Gurumayi

Chidvilasananda were extraordinarily capable of inducing kriyas in their devotees.

Yogananda's meetings with other great saints

Yogananda, in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, describes many encounters with miracle and wonder workers, as well as his meetings with some of the great saints of the 20th century, including the Divine Mother (wife of Sri Ramakrishna), Sri Ramana Maharshi, Anandamayi Ma, and the Master Lahiri Mahasaya.

In his youth, while still having trouble with his family over becoming a sanyasi, Yogananda visited the temple of Ramakrishna and meditated before the idol of Kali. After several hours, and to the exasperation of his older brother who wanted his lunch, he came out into the stifling heat of the day feeling somewhat disappointed. He mentally remonstrated with the Divine Mother, but immediately felt a cool breeze and went into a state of altered consciousness. He writes: *'To my amazement, the temple became greatly magnified. Its large door slowly opened, revealing the stone figure of the Goddess Kali. Gradually the statue changed into a living form, smilingly nodding in greeting, thrilling me with joy indescribable. As if by a mystic syringe, the breath was withdrawn from my lungs; my body became very still, though not inert. An ecstatic enlargement of consciousness followed. I could see for several miles over the Ganges river to my left, and beyond the temple into the entire Dakshineswar precincts. The walls of all the buildings glimmered transparently; through them I observed people moving to and fro over distant acres... Spiritual sight, X-ray-like, penetrates into all matter; the divine eye is center everywhere, circumference nowhere... If escapism be a need of man, cramped in his narrow personality, can any other escape compare with that of omnipresence?'*

Meanwhile, the older brother was fuming over his lack of lunch. "Could the Divine Mother please provide this?" he asked sarcastically. And at that moment, one of the priests appeared from the temple and said that usually they would not provide lunch unless prior arrangements had been made – but

in this case, because of the young Yogananda's serene meditation, they had made an exception and had put some aside.

Later Yogananda visited the Master Mahasaya, the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who himself became a great saint of the 20th century. Yogananda, describing the occasion of his visit, wrote: *'Silently I entered the room in great awe. The angelic appearance of Master Mahasaya fairly dazzled me. With silky beard and large lustrous eyes, he seemed an incarnation of purity.'*

In the presence of Master Mahasaya, Yogananda felt a strange and angry bitterness about his own mother's death some years ago. Then the Master said, "Little sir, quiet yourself. It seemed that he had, as Yogananda put it, 'control over the floodgates of my soul... This time my tears welled from bliss, and not from pain past bearing'." He wrote as follows:

'He spread his wisdom by spiritual contagion rather than impermeable precept. Consumed by an unsophisticated passion for the Divine Mother, the saint no more demanded the outward forms of respect than a child... From him I learned the sweetness of God in the aspect of the Mother – or divine mercy. The childlike saint found little appeal to the father aspect – or divine justice. Stern, exacting, mathematical judgment was alien to his gentle nature. Shrinking from personal assertion, the saint usually ended his council with the tribute, 'My Master told me so.' So deep was his sense of identity with Sri Ramakrishna that the Master Mahasaya no longer considered his thoughts to be his own.'

Yogananda had had an earlier experience of 'omnipresence' with Master Mahasaya. They were walking in the noisy streets of Kolkata when the Master gently tapped him on the chest. Of this he wrote: *'A transforming silence ensued... Pedestrians as well as the passing trolley cars, automobiles, bullock carts, and iron-wheeled hackney carriages, were all in noiseless transit. As though possessing an omnipresent eye, I beheld the scenes that were behind me, and to each side, as easily as those in front... Like a glow of fire dimly seen beneath a thin*

coat of ashes, a mellow luminescence permeated the panoramic view. Then, with another soft blow from the master, the pandemonium of the world burst again upon my unwilling ears.'

Sri Yogananda also met Anandamayi Ma much later, during his visit back to India in 1935, after some 15 years in the USA and Europe. It seems that Sri Ma instantaneously recognized his greatness; one could regard this as the best of all possible seals of approval and the strongest evidence of his exalted spiritual state. On a visit to Kolkata, he set out with a traveling companion to find Sri Ma. He wrote:

'As the Ford neared the Bhowanipur section of Calcutta, my companion and I observed an unusual street scene. Ananda Mayi Ma was standing in an open-topped automobile, blessing a throng of about one hundred disciples. She was evidently on the point of departure. Mr. Wright (Yogananda's companion) parked the Ford some distance away and accompanied me on foot towards the quiet assemblage. The woman saint glanced in our direction; she alit from the car and walked toward us. 'Father you have come, I am meeting you for the first time in this life! Please do not leave yet,' she said. With these fervent words (in Bengali) she put her hand around my neck and her head on my shoulder... I had instantly seen that the saint was in a high state of samadhi. Oblivious to her outward garb as a woman, she knew herself as a changeless soul; from that plane she was joyously greeting another devotee of God. She led me by the hand to her automobile... We sat together in the rear seats of the car. The blissful mother soon entered the immobile ecstatic state. Her beautiful eyes glanced heavenward and, half opened, became stilled, gazing into the near-far Elysium.'

It appears that this encounter may have been the closest that could have opened the possibility of Sri Ma going to the West. Yogananda invited her, but that produced an immediate and highly alarmed reaction from her devotees. One of them told him firmly, "Twenty or more of us always travel with the Blissful Mother. We could not live without her. Wherever she goes, we must go."

While on the 1935 expedition in South India with members of the SRF, Yogananda also made a visit to the holy Hill of Arunachala near Tiruvannamalai, to meet Sri Ramana Maharshi. He wrote: *'At his ashram the sage welcomed us affectionately and pointed to a stack of East-West magazines. During the hours that we spent with him and his disciples, he was mostly silent, his gentle face radiating divine love and wisdom. To help suffering humanity regain its forgotten state of perfection, Sri Ramana teaches that one should constantly ask oneself: 'Who am I?' By stern rejection of all other thoughts the devotee soon finds himself going deeper and deeper into the true Self, and the sidetracking bewilderment of other thoughts cease to arise.'*

Yogananda's interest in science and miracles Yogananda understood by direct experience the reality of miracles; that is, events and happenings not possible within the framework of material science and man's perception of the material world. Long before modern writers such as Fritjof Capra, Gary Zukov and Amit Goswami began to draw attention to the inadequacy of Newtonian physics in describing the universe, Yogananda pointed out that science had, as yet, no answer to these mysteries although he foresaw that the age of atomic physics and quantum physics – the 'new physics' in contemporary parlance, would bring changes in scientific thought. He said, "The word *impossible* is becoming less prominent in man's vocabulary." It has now come to pass that science, to a degree at any rate (although it has yet to percolate down to the level of biological and medical science) – has caught up and recognizes the role of Consciousness in the manifestation of things.

Yogananda pointed out that the Vedic scriptures describe the world as operating under the law of maya, the principle of relativity and duality, while God, the sole Reality, is Absolute Unity that wears the false veil of maya – the dualistic veil, in manifesting the world. In scientific terms this is the material world described by the physics of Newton and the laws of chemistry and biology. In duality, to have a single force is impossible. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction; electricity and magnetism is based on positive and negative,

and so on. Yogananda explained that no law of that form of science is free of inherent contrasting principles and these are all the laws of maya. In the social sciences opposites are represented by the judgment good and bad, right and wrong, rich and poor. The ancient sages of Vedanta perceived all this in extraordinary detail by direct intuition and did not distinguish between material science and social science. It was all described minutely by the laws of maya, and the laws of maya can only operate in a universe of space and time. But the sages did not fail to cognize the Prime Mover of the mayic universe and to point out the role of man: to rise above the duality of creation and perceive the unity of the Creator. This was conceived as man's highest goal.

Yogananda explained that when Einstein unified the mayic world of space and time to a single constant, the speed of light, it brought us to an understanding of the law of miracles. He said that a material body can only attain the speed of light whose mass is infinite. Therefore masters who are able to materialize and dematerialize their bodies and other objects, and appear in different places at the same time, have fulfilled the condition of infinity. The mayic physical laws are powerless to make a master exhibit the gravitational property of weight. Those who know themselves as the *omniscient Absolute*, are not subject to the laws of maya, "The imprisoning rings-pass-not yields to the solvent *I Am He*."

Yogananda also expounds on the Vedic explanation of maya and how illusion underlies the phenomenal worlds. In the world, maya's principle of duality operates not only in nature but also in the moral aspect of man. Yogananda said that maya, because of its presence in the phenomenal worlds, is ever in flux with the Absolute Reality. He illustrated this aspect of maya through an experience that he had following the seeing of a newsreel of the European battlefields of World War I. He was very disturbed and prayed, "Why do you permit such suffering?" Immediately he felt himself transferred to the actual battlefield with scenes of the dead and dying all around. Then a gentle voice said, "Look intently. You will see these scenes being enacted in France are nothing but the cosmic motion picture, as real and as unreal as the theatre newsreel

you have just seen... Creation is light and shadow both, else no picture is possible... Without suffering man does not care that he has forsaken his eternal home... The tragedy of death is unreal. Those who shudder at it are like an ignorant actor who dies of fright on the stage... My sons are the children of light; they will not sleep forever in delusion.”

Yogananda became convinced by this experience: that creation is nothing more than a vast motion picture – and it is not *in* it, but *beyond* it, that Reality lies. Nevertheless, he experienced many ups and downs in the illusion of maya, including one of his temples falling into the sea in America. He had no illusions about the problems of worldly existence. He said on one occasion that in the world, though it is an insubstantial and temporary dream, it must be suffered. If you are bitten by a dream snake you will get dream sick, and you will need a dream vaccine or you will dream die.

Yogananda’s death

The way that the great beings of this world die or, in the parlance of the East, enter mahasamadhi, is of significance in understanding an important aspect of awakening and at the same time gaining an appreciation of impermanence in the world.

Yogananda spent his life sending his thought vibrations to the thousands of Kriya yogis, and he would often think gratefully: ‘Lord, Thou hast given this monk a large family’. But towards the end of his life he began to divest himself of responsibilities and on a number of occasions said, “This body is living on borrowed time.” He died after concluding a speech at a banquet held in his honour in 1952. In a note following his death it was stated that he demonstrated the power of Kriya yoga as much in death, as in life. For weeks after his departure from this world, his unchanged face shone ‘with a divine luster of incorruptibility’. No physical signs of decay appeared and no odor of decay emanated from the body at any time before his interment.

SRF organization

To receive instructions on the Kriya yoga technique, it is advisable to contact the SRF organization. At one time, there was some difficulty in finding suitable teachers, as the American successors to Yogananda, according to Surjan Singh's account, were less than competent and themselves suffered health difficulties. In the 1970s, many young American disciples were looking to India for direction. One of the stalwarts that were discovered was Baba Sita Ram Das Onkarnath, a disciple of Anandamayi Ma. Onkarnath was widely known and is said to have started 61 ashrams across India.

One of the formally initiated followers of Sri Yogananda was Paramahansa Hariharananda (1907-2002) who until 1974 was the successor to Satyananda. He moved to the USA in 1974 and became the head of the Kriya Yoga Institute, residing at the ashram in Homestead, Florida. In 1980, while on a visit to India, he met a young, pious Indian student, Triloki Dash, whom he initiated into Kriya yoga and who subsequently, in 1995, was given the monastic name of Paramahansa Prajnanananda. Consequently, he may formally be regarded as the current successor in the lineage of Sri Yogananda in the USA (see www.kriya.org). A scholarly man, he has translated and written many books on Hinduism and inter-religious dialogue. In 1999, he became the third Indian monk, following Vivekananda and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, to address the parliament of World Religions.

In India, the Dakshineswar Ashram in Kolkata, on the banks of the Ganges, is a Kriya yoga center. It is primarily a facility for resident swamis and other permanent residents, but there is also a guest house for visiting male members of the Self Realization Fellowship (SRF). Other serious visitors on a spiritual path may also be permitted to stay for short periods with prior permission but unfortunately, women are only admitted if accompanied by a father or husband.

Contact information

Yogoda Satsang Society of India,
Yogoda Satsanga Math,

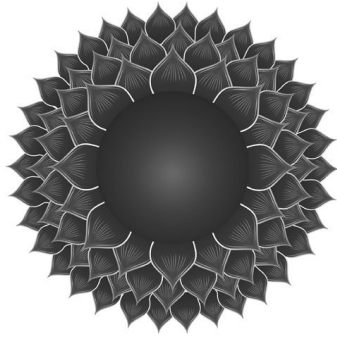
21, U.N. Mukherjee Road, Dakshineswar,
Kolkata 700076, West Bengal, India.

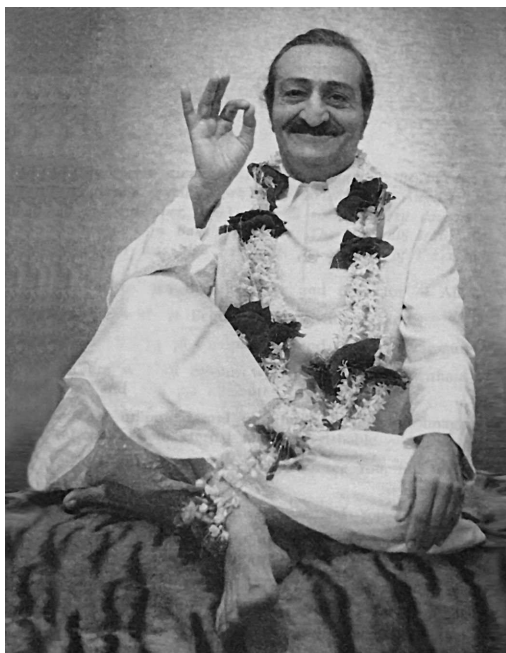
Website: www.yssofindia.org

SRF Headquarters in the USA:

3880 San Rafael Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90065, USA.

Website: www.yogananda-srf.org





Avatar Meher Baba
(1894-1969)

AVATAR MEHER BABA

The King of Hearts

'Don't worry, be happy.'

Meher Baba was born Merwan Sheriar Irani on 25th February 1894, and died on 31st January, 1969. He had a normal youth until the age of 19, with no indication that he was destined to become a mystic and spiritual master. One day in 1913, he was assailed by Hazrat Babajan, an elderly Sufi woman mystic who, some say, threw a mango at him as he cycled by and then, after he had stopped, kissed him on the forehead. Whatever the circumstances, the event influenced him profoundly and produced mystical feelings and visions that were so powerful that he gave up all mundane activities and was propelled into a seven-year progression of spiritual transformation. This culminated in a state in which his recognition of the physical world diminished so much that he would beat himself on the head to maintain physical contact.

Aside from Hazrat Babajan, he was also influenced by four other Perfect Masters of the age: Upasni Maharaj of Sakori, Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur, Narayan Maharaj of Kedgaon and Sai Baba of Shirdi. It was Upasni, he later explained, who helped him to integrate his mystical experiences with normal worldly consciousness.

Much later in life, in 1954, aged 60, he declared himself to be the Avatar of the age – a spiritual figure who is the highest of the high and appears only once or twice in a millennium (such as the Buddha, Jesus and so on).

His teachings, based on non-duality, were simple and did not place undue focus on ceremony and ritual. He proclaimed that they would cut across religious differences and demonstrate the universality of all human spiritual beliefs. At

the same time, since having visited the West, his teachings would help to amalgamate all creeds into the common elements of love, compassion and humility – replacing hatred, greed and lust with a striving for purity and truth. He discouraged proselytization in his name and said that we should rather demonstrate God's love through our actions and our compassion.

Early days

Merwan showed no interest in spiritual matters during his childhood, but his father, a Zoroastrian from Persia, had spent years wandering in search of spiritual truth before settling in Pune, India. Merwan was a bright lad and was interested in worldly affairs in his youth. He was nicknamed 'Electricity' by his classmates and formed something called the 'Cosmopolitan Club' – dedicated to being informed on world affairs while supporting charity, even to the extent of gambling on horse races to raise money for the poor. He was voluble, could speak several languages, and had an excellent singing voice. He loved poetry and literature, especially Hafez and Shelly and also Shakespeare. But this was all about to change.

Following his experience with Hazrat Babajan he spent seven years with Upasni Maharaj and then, in 1921, at the age of 27, he began to attract a spiritual following of his own. His early followers referred to him as Meher Baba, meaning compassionate father and, in 1922, they established a 'House of the Master' in Mumbai where he lived under a code of strict discipline and obedience for himself and all his followers. A year later, in 1922, they moved to an area near Ahmednagar to establish an ashram that he named Meherabad. It is still there and is now the center of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust. There, in 1924, he set up a residential school called the Prem Ashram which drew students from all around India and elsewhere. And just a year later, on 10th July 1925, he entered a lifelong period of silence.

His silence

Meher Baba maintained that his silence was not a spiritual exercise but was undertaken in connection with his universal

work of teaching love, humility and compassion. Because man fails to heed and remains deaf to the universal teachings of love, humility and compassion, he chose to be silent. But, he maintained, there would be a time when he would break his silence by speaking the ‘Word’ in every heart – which would create a spiritual push forward for all mankind. He said, “When I break my Silence, the impact of my love will be universal and all life in creation will know, feel and receive it. It will help every individual to break free from his own bondage in his own way. I am the Divine Beloved who loves you more than you can ever love yourself. The breaking of my Silence will help you to help yourself in knowing your real Self.”

Sadly, the breaking of his Silence seemed never to have taken place, at least in the literal sense, and for the rest of his life he communicated with an alphabet board, and later, to those in the know, by a series of hand signals. The breaking of his silence, which was designed to lay the foundation for mankind’s spiritual development for the next 700 years, it seems, was not yet to be. However, some followers speculate that the ‘Word’ will yet be spoken in some way – or that Meher Baba *did* actually break his silence but in a ‘spiritual’ way rather than a physical way. Others consider that Baba was introducing the age of communication by *intuition* (aided by facial expression, body language and certain hand signals). Lyn Ott, an American painter, wrote: *‘I saw the transmutation of this age magically at work, during the hour or more I was in Meher Baba’s presence, as I listened to whole phrases and sentences being transmitted through his hands, and coming as articulate communication out of Eruch’s mouth (one of Baba’s principal followers)... I was being given a glimpse into a whole new realm of communication – from the Avatar’s hands into the spoken language of the human heart. For Meher Baba, communication was something far greater than the spoken word alone.’*

His life story

As already explained, and according to friends and family who witnessed it, his spiritual career began rather suddenly

with Hazrat Babajan. There are many stories of the dramatic meetings between her as well as other figures mentioned. For almost a decade, he devotedly served them. He personally created many of the first hymns, and promoted the building of shrines and dwellings for those masters. He was so passionate in serving them day and night, that he often did not eat or sleep – staying always at hand in case they required anything from him.

It was these masters who first advised people, especially their own followers, of Meher Baba's Avatarship of the age, and it was from them that his first circle of followers came.

Early work

By his 27th year, Merwan had, on the instructions of his masters, established his life's work. Thus began the guiding of a small band of some 50 followers, many of them old school friends. He initially operated from a tiny hut on a road outside Pune, later moving to Mumbai. He intensively trained these closest followers. As they came from diverse religions, ethnic groups and social classes, he worked to break down their religious and caste prejudices by engaging them across all forms of society and spirituality. With these compatriots, he established the colony called Meherabad near Ahmednagar. The free school established there stressed spiritual training along with normal secular education. A free hospital and dispensary, and shelters for the poor were also established. Meher himself tended the institute's sick, washed their linen, taught the children, engaged them in sports activities, cleaned the toilets, and prepared their food.

The number of followers dramatically increased as thousands flocked to live there freely, but his blending of creeds and castes into a single class, and his overt camaraderie with untouchables, angered many orthodox Indians some of whom withdrew their children from his schools in protest.

Silence and written works

Meher Baba maintained that things which are real are given and received in silence. "You have asked for and been given enough words. It is now time to live them... If my silence

cannot speak, of what avail would be speeches made by the tongue?” His discourses and messages were therefore first dictated into writing, and later transmitted by means of his alphabet board. In the 1950s, he abandoned even that and relied solely on hand gestures and expressions. These were either interpreted by his disciples, or were universal enough to be understood by persons from any background. Though his core messages were relatively few, he nevertheless commented deeply and broadly on many topics by these means, continually re-editing and reworking them in different ways, and sometime from the 1920s until the 1950s, with overlapping themes.

The messages, over time, were formed into his books, which were widely distributed in India and abroad during the 1950s and later. Their names were *God Speaks*, which details the evolution of consciousness, and *Discourses*, which provides instructions on key elements and issues of spiritual life – such as occult powers, sadhana, meditation, sexuality, reincarnation and karma. These were his principal works, but he also issued smaller works such as *Beams*, *Life At Its Best* and *The Everything and The Nothing*, which offered fragments of his cosmological beliefs as stories and maxims.

Foreign travels and prospective films

Meher Baba traveled abroad – first between 1931 and 1937, and then later between 1952 and 1958. These travels covered parts of the Middle East, Europe, North America, the Far East, the Pacific and Australia. Particularly during the 1930s, his journeys aroused much public interest as few Indian spiritual teachers had traveled overseas at that time. He was introduced to many celebrities and political figures including Gandhi, as well as several Hollywood stars. The visits saw the emergence of Meher Baba’s first Western followers, particularly in California. An organization was formed that became possibly America’s first alternative life commune. The Western travels also afforded opportunities to enlarge his vision through films that would express spiritual truths or explain the evolution of consciousness. He worked with various producers on drafts of scripts for these ideas.

Working with the God-intoxicated and the poor

An important part of Meher Baba's work throughout his life, and particularly during the 1930s to 1940s, was to personally contact and serve *masts* or *majzoobs* as they are called. These are advanced souls recognized for centuries in India, as persons so intoxicated with God through their spiritual experiences that they cease to function normally, ignoring their bodily needs and often living in squalor. In fact, Meher Baba's first years following his experience with Hazrat Babajan were of this nature. Most masts and majzoobs talk or behave as though they are mentally unbalanced, except for the extraordinary supernatural powers and gems of knowledge they may possess. For this work, he traveled thousands of miles – deep into city slums, or out to remote country locations throughout India and Sri Lanka. He personally visited and assisted thousands of these individuals, going to great pains to meet their needs.

Other vital work was the bathing of lepers, washing their feet and locating and bowing down to thousands of people such as renunciates, and assisting ordinary persons affected with mental afflictions. This involved finding and distributing food, clothing and money to the most destitute individuals he could find. At that time, little hands-on work with untouchables such as lepers was being conducted in India, so that Meher Baba's activities inspired many similar programs to be undertaken by adherents of other faiths. Usually he sought out those he assisted personally, on a one-to-one basis, without them being permitted to know who he was or why he was helping them. These compassionate journeys were continual, and conducted at such a feverish rate, that Baba and his followers often had little or no comfort, meals or sleep themselves. Indeed, the group often slept in the open – under trees or on railway platforms – in their haste to accomplish as much as possible each day.

The new life

Between 1949 and 1952, just as this endless service became even more intense, Meher Baba embarked on a new phase known as the 'New Life'. In this, he entirely dismantled his

centers, had everything given away, and became a homeless mendicant accompanied by no more than 20 of his closest companions. The New Life was one of extreme deprivation wherein complete renunciation was expected and even the mildest approximations of falsehood, greed, lust, moodiness or anger were curtailed. Participants were sworn to accept no homage, neither covet honour nor shun disapproval, and to fear no one. They were to rely wholly and solely on God, and to love God purely for the sake of loving.

In this New Life, no possessions were kept (in fact, for a long period, the group had to give away anything accrued through the day and start afresh each morning with nothing). No one was permitted to honour Baba in any shape or form, and he kept his identity and movements secret. The travels (mostly on foot) were again aimed at the merciful giving to all and sundry. He showed special interest in locating, assisting and bowing down individually to large numbers (even thousands) of spiritual seekers, *masts* and extremely-impooverished individuals, while traveling throughout the villages and towns of the India.

Growing acclaim, car accidents and seclusion

By the 1950s, large Hindu populations had discovered Meher Baba, resulting in thousands of people coming daily to seek his darshan or blessing. Moreover, people journeyed from all over the world to spend a few days, or even a single day, in his presence. And despite this popularity, he continued to place himself in ever-stricter seclusion for the purpose of what he called his ‘universal work’. This intensive work, which was done inwardly, combined with the effect of two serious car accidents, took a great toll on his health and he often had to be assisted to walk, and suffered greatly when he did so. This culminated, a few months after announcing that he had completed his work to his satisfaction, in increasingly long bouts of illness in the midst of which he experienced spasms of pain and eventually died.

The ‘Love Man’ – posthumous popularity and the movement against drugs

Despite the 1960s being the period of Meher Baba's greatest seclusion which ended in his death, it was also a time that he and his ideas became extremely popular amongst young Westerners. In fact, alongside Yogananda, Prabhupada, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Prem Rawat, Meher Baba was the best known guru of the hippie generation. He was hailed as 'The Love Man' and his maxims and thoughts (mostly gleaned from stickers and posters or from his books) provided many Westerners with their first introduction to Indian spirituality and cosmology, regardless of whether they became his followers or not. The interest of rock musicians such as Melanie Safka, Ronnie Lane and Pete Townsend increased this exposure.

However, on account of his seclusion and later his death, very few of these Western youths had the opportunity to actually meet him. A major exception were the few hippies who had, in their spiritual quests, traveled all the way to where Meher Baba lived in India. To some of these 'pilgrims', Baba gave the special task of returning to the West to spread his strong anti-drug messages. At that time, experimentation in drugs was very popular and thus it was hardly a welcomed gesture.

Meher Baba gave out many messages highlighting the futility of taking drugs and other intoxicants. One of his sayings was: "If God can be found through the medium of any drug, God is not worthy of being God." And another was, "The experiences which drugs induce are as far removed from reality as is a mirage from water." These messages became the platform from which the young crusaders spread Baba's name and message, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of Western followers, who called themselves 'Baba lovers'.

Basic teachings

Meher Baba's teachings may be summarized as follows:

'All souls are One. Any apparent differences between souls are due to their differing levels of consciousness and experience. These souls and the cosmos burst into existence out of God's original whim to know Itself.'

God found infinite ways to do this through constantly evolving and dissolving worlds, life forms and spiritual states. Each soul is unconsciously God, gradually becoming more self-aware as it evolves. Over countless millions of years, on numerous planets, souls evolve from gas through to mineral, plant, invertebrate, bird and mammalian forms, culminating in human beings. This evolutionary process creates a 'false ego' of countless impressions and desires that must then be tediously 'unwound' through innumerable reincarnations. Eventually, however, the soul involves (starts realizing its Divinity through sudden or sequential stages of spiritual unfoldment). Ultimately this culminates in God-realization: the soul living eternally as God in everything.'

According to him, a spiritual hierarchy of advanced souls, saints and masters governs the universe. The head of this hierarchy is the primary Avatar at any time – the very first soul to complete the involutory process and become one with God. Every 700-1,400 years, 'when the wick of righteousness burns low', the Avatar is brought down to creation by the five Perfect Masters of the time (as the five who first revealed Meher Baba himself). He has appeared previously as Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad and other great religious founders. Meher Baba claims that he is that same God-man: 'The Ancient One, the Highest of the High'. According to him, it is through the Avatar that the quickest and safest path to God-realization occurs 'for the eternal redemption of humanity'.

Neither teachings nor practices

Meher Baba did not encourage following any specific spiritual techniques. He explained thus, "I have not come to teach but to awaken. Understand, therefore, that I lay down no precepts. Throughout eternity I have laid down principles and precepts but mankind has ignored them." (*Universal Message* : 81)

Instead, he taught that: 'The approach to Truth is individual'. (*God Speaks*: 178), and God could never be found by 'running away from life'. (*Meher Baba Calling* : 71)

He held that: “Spirituality means meeting life fully and adequately, without being overpowered by the opposites. Living in the midst of your day-to-day duties, responsibilities, likes and dislikes becomes the very means for the purification of your heart.” (Charles Purdom: 286). “Be pure and simple, and love all... Live a sincere life and be natural and be honest with yourself.” (*The Path of Love* : 14)

Thus Meher Baba was averse to his followers wearing funny clothes, eating special foods, or indulging in practices that might distinguish them as being ‘spiritual’. He said, “When you wear long hair or put on sadhu clothes, indirectly you court respect. A false sense of advancement in spirituality is liable to be created when you try to lead a life in some way other than that of the common people.” (*Darshan Hours* : 21)

Love and obedience

Baba considered pure love, especially the love of God, to be: *‘The solution to all our difficulties and problems. He had great faith in its transformative capacity, Love is dynamic in action and contagious in effect. Pure love is matchless in its majesty; it has no parallel in power and there is no darkness it cannot dispel.’* (*Listen Humanity*: 187)

‘Love is essentially self-communicative and those who do not have it catch it from those who have it. Those who receive love from others cannot be its recipients without giving a response which, in itself, is the nature of love.’ (*Discourses*: Vol. 1: 24)

Hence anything that stimulates the love of God is encouraged, but not in any set format. Devotional singing, visiting shrines or places associated with Meher Baba, creating things for a spiritual purpose (writing, painting etc.), and most of all doing anything that entails loving or serving any living thing, are activities Baba followers typically engage in.

He claimed that perfectly selfless service produced true happiness: *‘Real happiness lies in making others happy.’* (*Meher Baba Calling* : 41) He believed that when we love and serve others without any expectations of reward, the resultant self-forgetfulness culminates in Godhood: *‘Use up your bodies*

in service to God and others. This is absolutely necessary if you want to realize God.’ (The Silent Word : 245)

Meher Baba also emphasized the importance of obeying and constantly remembering one’s master, as the quickest road to true self-forgetfulness.

Worry versus humor

“Don’t worry. Be happy.” (*Bal Natu*, Vol. 1: 422) This is the best-known saying of Meher Baba. It first began circulating in the 1930s. He saw worry as a major problem of humanity: ‘There are very few things in the mind that eat up as much energy as worry’. (*Discourses*: 357-358)

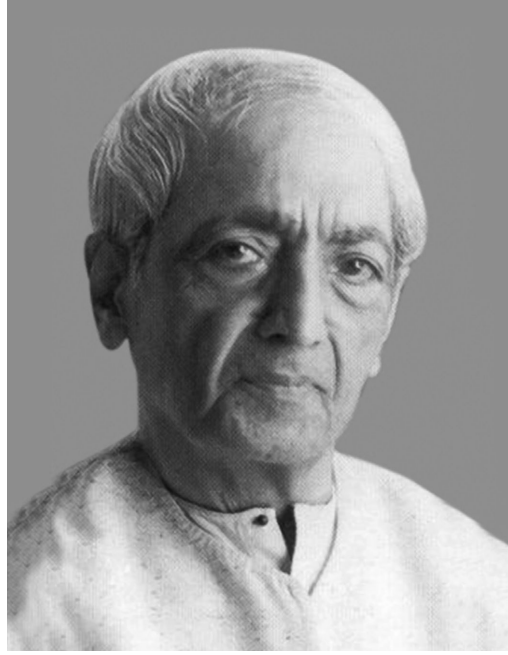
To remedy human worry he advocated cheerfulness under all circumstances – humor and innocent merriment, born of the understanding that: ‘Life is simply a jest... a mighty joke’. (*Life At Its Best* : 9; *The Everything and The Nothing* : 63) He often engaged his followers in jokes, games, sports, skits and other light-hearted activities. Baba believed that being cheerful is a divine art that could often render more true assistance to others than onerous sacrifices. (*Discourses*: 362-363)

Meher Baba frequently stated that he had no desire to establish temples, ashrams or organizations. Many Baba lovers do not associate with centers, preferring to follow Meher Baba privately.

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Jiddu Krishnamurti
(1895-1986)

JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

A Reluctant Master

*'Suddenly it is there, a presence, waiting patiently,
with great tenderness, yet never the same.
There is a sense of watching from infinite depth.
Time as a measure and time as thought had stopped.
It is an energy without border and
it does not leave a memory behind it.'*

Although Krishnamurti was undoubtedly one of the greatest enlightened spiritual teachers of the 20th century, he was, throughout most of his life, strongly opposed to the guru movement and the cults of the time. He was also opposed to all types of formal religion. A possible reason for this may be traced back to his early experience of being 'discovered' by the Theosophical Society and trained to be the 'vehicle' of a 'World Teacher' to come – a kind of latter-day Messiah, who, in collaboration with the Esoteric Branch of the Theosophical Society, would spawn a hierarchy of greater beings and bring order to the world. After he had matured and after certain spiritual experiences described further on had occurred, he came to regard religions as mostly the products of the egoic mind, invented out of insecurity and a desire of the egoic mind to perpetuate itself.

The essence of his teachings was that the ego and the attributes of mind, which thrived on memory and habits, must be stripped away so that the true essence of love can manifest itself. He maintained that this needed great energy, which most of us were unwilling to expend because our energy was always being wasted on the maintenance of the *status quo* of the egoic self.

Even though Krishnamurti was cast as an intellectual, a jnani, and was a man with great physical beauty, those who

knew him would say that he also exhibited great sensitivity and caring. He could transmit a state of deep meditation – thoughtless awareness – by a mere look, or just by his presence.

Much of the information in this account was sourced in the three books on Krishnamurti written by his principal biographer, Mary Lutyens. Comments received from The Krishnamurti Foundation Trust of the UK are also acknowledged, as is the information provided by Mr. Antonio Eduardo D’Agnino who knew Krishnamurti personally.

Early history

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born on 11th May 1895 in Tamil Nadu, India, in the small hill town of Madanapalle located between Madras and Bangalore. He was the eighth child of an orthodox Brahmin family and was given the birth name Krishna. His birth was considered to be auspicious by his mother because Lord Krishna was also an eighth child, and because of a premonition she had that he was to be in some way remarkable.

From an early age he was a dreamy child, poor at school work, but nevertheless extremely observant. Mary Lutyens in her wonderfully illuminating book *Krishnamurti: His Life and Death*, writes, ‘*He would stand for long stretches of time, watching trees and clouds, or squat to gaze at flowers and insects.*’ He also had a generous nature, a characteristic which he retained throughout his life. As a child he demonstrated clairvoyance: when his mother and his older sister had died he would often have striking visions of them.

In 1909, his father retired from government service and obtained a post as assistant secretary to the Theosophical Society. So the family moved to Adyar in Madras (Chennai), where the headquarters of the Society had been located since 1882. This was to lead to the discovery and identification of the young Krishna as a potential vehicle of the so-called ‘World Teacher’ – a celestial being who was going to need a very pure and egoless vehicle (a body) in order to take on physical form.

The leaders of the Society at that time were the elected president, Mrs. Annie Besant, and her colleague Charles Leadbeater, who had also arrived at Adyar in 1909. Leadbeater was a former Church of England clergyman who became a disciple of the clairvoyant Madam Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society. The Theosophists at that time, and in particular the members of an Esoteric Section of the Society, supported a strange concoction of beliefs taken from several religions that had been formulated by Madam Blavatsky. They believed that a Master Maitreya, one of the Bodhisattvas of Tibetan Buddhism, who had earlier taken over the body of Christ, would take over another 'human vehicle' some time soon and such a 'vehicle' needed to be especially prepared for him. Master Maitreya and a hierarchy of spiritual beings belonging to the Great White Brotherhood, were believed to live in a ravine in the Himalayas of Tibet. They communicated instructions to the leaders of the Esoteric Section (those of whom were clairvoyant), and they could also visit them through the medium of astral travel. Leadbeater would often escort candidates for discipleship to visit the masters, and then announce to them on the following mornings whether they had been accepted or not. He and Mrs. Besant were both very 'highly evolved' individuals within the hierarchy, and had already taken advanced levels of initiation with the masters at the time the young Krishna came to Adyar. Apart from the masters there were, in the beliefs of the adepts, other celestial beings of a yet higher order than the masters, one of whom had been the Buddha.

Shortly after Krishna's arrival in Adyar with his parents, Leadbeater discovered him on the beach near the Theosophical Society headquarters. He proclaimed that Krishna had the most wonderful aura he had ever seen, "Without a particle of selfishness in it." Later, in January 1910, Krishna was taken by Leadbeater and Mrs. Besant (by astral travel), to a spiritual ceremony held before the masters in the house of the Lord Maitreya, in his Himalayan valley. After answering correctly the questions put to him, Krishna was formally accepted into the Great White Brotherhood. Mary Lutyens asserted that the initiation had wrought a noticeable improvement in his appearance, and when he returned from his sojourn with the

masters, everyone prostrated themselves before him. Following this conversion, in January 1911, an organization called The Order of the Star in the East was formed with Krishna as its head. The Order had the aim of preparing the way for the coming of the 'World Teacher' who would occupy Krishna's body.

Later that year, an early manifestation of the power of young Krishna was observed when he was giving out certificates to new members of the Order. According to those present, the hall became filled with a tremendous energy which was flowing from the young Krishna.

In 1912, Mrs. Besant took Krishna and his younger brother Nitya to England where they stayed until 1920 – by which time Krishna would have been 25 years of age. The years were mainly taken up with their education and during this period Krishna remained completely unspoiled by all the attention and adulation he was receiving since being discovered. In 1920, he was sent to France to learn French and in 1921 it was discovered that Nitya had tuberculosis, but on that occasion, after a period of treatment, he was pronounced cured and both the young men returned to India – Krishna to play his part as the head of the Order of the Star. He was at that time 26-years-old and in December 1921, he gave four talks at a Theosophical Convention on Theosophy and Internationalism. This was clearly before the onset of his ability to talk without preparation and it was obvious that public speaking at that time was very difficult for him.

In 1922, Nitya's illness returned and the two young men went to California where they stayed in the Ojai Valley, south of San Francisco. Due to the ideal climate, Nitya soon began to feel better. It was there in 1922 that Krishna underwent the first of the spiritual experiences which were to change his life. This was referred to by the Theosophists as 'the process' and was believed to be a purification necessary to enable the forthcoming master to take over Krishna's body. A witness account of the experience, which indicates its deep spiritual dimension, is described further on. The experience took a form that could be described as intense tapasya – a burning purification that charged him with great energy. It also marked

the beginning of the end for the old ideas of the Theosophists and those of the Order of the Star of the East. He wrote to a devotee (Lady Emily, the mother of his biographer Mary Lutyens) as follows:

'I have changed and with that change I am going to change the lives of my friends. My whole inner nature is alive with energy and thought.' After the experience, he began to write poetry and he also took on a new aspect of authority among members of the Order.

From the beginning of 1923 he began to take the duties of running the organization more seriously. He also visited England and Europe where, in August and September, the process started again and was very intense. Then in 1924, Nitya became ill again and the brothers returned to California where Krishna cared for and nursed him. But in 1925, because Nitya was a little better, he embarked on another visit to India to attend the Jubilee Convention of the Theosophical Society, leaving Nitya behind in California. While he was on the trip out, Nitya died.

The breaking of the Order

The news of Nitya's death affected Krishna deeply and it is thought that this experience was central in breaking his implicit faith in Theosophy and in the masters. He wrote the following piece on Nitya which was published in the magazine of the Order, *The Herald of the Star*, and in this he assumed the name Krishnamurti:

'On the physical plane we could be separated but now we are inseparable, for my brother and I are one. As Krishnamurti I now have greater zeal, greater faith, greater sympathy and greater love, for there is also in me the body, the Being, of Nityananda... I know how to weep but still that is human. I know now more certainly than ever before, that there is real beauty in life, real happiness that cannot be shattered by any physical happening. It is a great strength that cannot be weakened by passing events, and a great love that is permanent, imperishable and unconquerable.'

Following this he broke his association with the then leaders of the Order, except for Mrs. Besant with whom he retained a personal connection. Then, at a Star Congress meeting in December 1925, he spoke for the first time as a World Teacher in his own right, using the first person, and not as a body taken over by any ‘Master’. During this talk his voice changed noticeably as he said, “He comes only to those who want, who desire, who long. (Then) I come for those who want sympathy, who are longing to be released, who are longing to find happiness in all things. I come to reform and not to tear down, I come not to destroy but to build.”

The following years were characterized by a progressive change that led to his closure of the Order in 1929. He then also came to be known generally as Krishnamurti, rather than Krishna.

A guru for intellectuals

Notwithstanding his views with regard to his guru status, his own words sealed his role as a *de facto* guru for several generations of followers – among whom are a very high proportion of intellectuals. From around 1926 onwards he had been distancing himself from the Theosophists as their ‘World Teacher’ belief, but at no time did he indicate that he would *abandon* seekers of the truth. In his summer talks of 1926 and 1927 at Ommen in the Netherlands, he made this statement:

“I would ask you to come and look through my window, which will show you my heaven... Then you will see that what matters is not what you will do, what you read, what any person says you are or are not, but that you should have the intense desire to enter into that abode where dwells the Truth. No one can give you liberation, you have to find it from within, but because I have found it I would show you the way... He who has attained liberation has become the teacher – like myself. It lies in the power of each one to enter the flame, to become the flame... Because I am here, if you hold me in your heart, I will give you strength to attain.”

And in 1929, at the time of the termination of his role as the World Teacher’s vessel, he made the following statement:

“You can form other organizations and expect someone else (another vessel for the World Teacher). With that I am not concerned, nor with creating new cages and decorations for those cages. My only concern is to set men absolutely, unconditionally free.” It will be clear that these are not the words of someone who is wiping his hands off his followers as a teacher (a ‘guru’, for want of a better word; for guru, is simply the Sanskrit word for teacher), but rather those of one who is changing the rules. The pursuit of the truth was no longer to be carried out according to the beliefs and prognostications of the leaders of the Esoteric Branch of the Theosophical Society, with Krishna as its ‘vessel’, but rather by personal effort – and in this regard he would show the way.

What was Krishnamurti?

Krishnamurti’s principal biographer and many other close associates were greatly concerned about finding out exactly what Krishnamurti was and, in particular, whether he was indeed a vessel for a higher being – the Lord Maitreya or other – or was he a great being in his own right. To them, the easiest explanation was the former for that would explain how the rather vacant boy, who by his own frequent statements was completely free of thought and had a vacant mind – could astound the intellectuals of the day, and of the present time as well, with the clarity and wisdom of his words. The main contact with his followers and devotees was through his talks and his books (most of which are transcriptions of the talks). These talks were completely unrehearsed and delivered then in the third person by ‘the speaker’. In an interview with Mary Lutyens he commented on the nature of his talks as follows:

“There is a sense of vacuity and then something comes. But if I sat down to it I might not be able to grasp it. Schopenhauer, Lenin, Bertrand Russell etc. had all read tremendously. But here is the phenomenon of this chap who isn’t trained, who has no discipline. How did he get all this? What is it? If it were only K – (himself) he is uneducated, gentle – so where does it come from? The person hasn’t thought out the teaching. It is like – what is the biblical term? – Revelation. It happens all the time when I’m talking.”

He invited Mary Lutyens and another close associate to try to find out what he really was. But much of the confusion in the minds of the reviewers and commentators on Krishnamurti (who were mostly Westerners), seems to come from a lack of understanding, or unacceptance of the basic tenets of Vedanta and Eastern religious philosophy in general. In the East there would be no confusion, for the Self (the higher Self) dwells in all persons, and is singular (without duality). It embraces the masters and everything else, since there is only one Self shared by all, equally within Krishnamurti as it is without. Even in Christian philosophy, duality was refuted by Jesus when he said, "I am in the Father and the Father is within me".

Krishnamurti's own words on the matter were, "There is a factor we are missing. We have come to a point where our brains, our instruments of investigation... have no meaning."

Moreover, his use of the third person during his talks is a common feature among enlightened beings. So as long as we are not insistent on understanding the un-understandable, then there is no reason to be concerned about whether Krishnamurti was or was not possessed by someone else; for he was nothing more than the Self. One may speculate: was his invitation to find out what he really was – an invitation to Self-inquiry?

He emphasized this at a briefing with Mary Lutyens in 1975 when he said:

"What is important in this is the vacant mind (the quelling of thoughts). How is it that the vacant mind was not filled with Theosophy? Right through life it has been guarded, protected. The vacancy has never gone away. At the dentist for four hours not a single thought came into my head... Only when talking and writing does 'this' come into play... Is the vacancy a lack of selfishness – the self – my house, attachment?"

He maintained that the meditative state, that connection with a higher reality – the Truth, only manifests when there is this vacuity and it is something positive that can be felt. He said, "Can you feel it in the room? It is stronger and stronger. My head is starting... I will tell you something that happens. I said yesterday, thinking about something is different from

thinking. I said, 'I don't quite understand it, let me look at it,' and when I did, I saw something clearly."

At the same time, Krishnamurti could use the ordinary mind as occasion demanded and when this happened the 'vacant mind' ceased to be empty, "When it is necessary to use thought, to communicate – otherwise it is empty. During a seminar, when I am talking it comes out."

The process

Although this may not be agreed to by all Krishnamurti purists, some aspects of the process were typical of kundalini experiences described in Woodroffe's books. And it also had attributes of tapasya – the 'way of the cross' or 'the dark night of the soul' and so on. The process was described by a witness as follows:

'Suddenly the whole house seemed full of a terrific force and Krishna was as if possessed and was conscious of intolerable dirt in the house. He cried aloud that he wanted to go to the woods in India. Later he began to chant a mantra from Adyar – then silence.'

According to his brother Nitya's account, who witnessed the 'process', it was as follows:

'The place seemed to be filled with a Great Presence and a great longing came upon me to go on my knees and adore, for I knew that the Great Lord of all our hearts had come Himself, and though we saw Him not, yet all felt the splendor of His presence.'

After this first event Krishnamurti wrote: *'I was supremely happy, for I had seen. Nothing could ever be the same... The fountain of Truth has revealed to me and the darkness dispersed. Love in all its glory has intoxicated my heart; my heart now can never be closed.'*

Later he described accurately a classical kundalini reaction: "My spine and neck have been going very strong and the day before yesterday, I had an extraordinary evening. Whatever it is, the source or whatever one calls the bally thing, came up my spine, up to the nape of my neck, then it separated into

two, one going to the right and one to the left of my head till they met between the two eyes, just above my nose. And I saw the Lord and Master. It was a tremendous night.”

A consciousness of the undifferentiated nature of a universe ‘without duality’ is one of the characteristic signs of enlightenment. During the period of the process, Krishnamurti had a clear and unequivocal experience of universality. This is what he said: “There was a man mending the road; that man was myself; the pickaxe he held was myself; the very stone which he was breaking up was part of me; the tender blade of grass was my very being, and the tree beside the man was myself. I also could feel and think like the road mender and I could feel the wind passing through the trees, and the little ant on the blade of grass I could feel. The birds, the dust, and the very noise were a part of me. Just then there was a car passing by at some distance; I was the driver, the engine, and the tyres; as the car went further away from me, I was going further away from myself. I was in everything; or rather everything was in me, the inanimate and animate, the mountain, the worm and all breathing things. All day long I remained in this happy condition.” (*Krishnamurti: Reflections on the Self*)

The notion of guru

The question may be asked: did Krishnamurti have a guru? This may best be answered by his words on the occasion of the Theosophist’s summer camp of 1929, which was the precursor to his closing of The Order of The Star of the East. He said:

“When I was a small boy I used to see Krishna, with his flute, as he is pictured by the Hindus, because my mother was a devotee of Krishna... When I grew older and met with Bishop Leadbeater and the Theosophical Society, I began to see the Master K.H. (The Master Kuthumi, one of the Great White Brotherhood) – again in the form that was put before me, the reality from their point of view – and hence the Master K.H. was to me the end. Later on, as I grew, I began to see the Lord Maitreya. That was two years ago and I saw him constantly in the form put before me... Now lately, it has been the Buddha whom I have been seeing and it has been my delight and my glory to be with Him. Now I have been asked

what I mean by the 'Beloved'. I will give a meaning, an estimation, which you will interpret as you please.

To me it is all – it is Shri Krishna, it is the Master K.H., it is the Lord Maitreya, it is the Buddha, and yet it is beyond all these forms. What does it matter what name you give? ... What you are troubling about is whether there is such a person as the World Teacher who has manifested himself in the body of a certain other person, Krishnamurti; but in the world nobody will trouble about this question. It is an unfortunate thing that I have to explain, but I must. I wanted to be as vague as possible, and I have made it so. My Beloved is the open skies, the flower, every human being... Till I was able to say with certainty, without undue excitement, or exaggeration in order to convince others, that I was one with my Beloved I never spoke. I talked in vague generalities which everyone wanted to hear. I never said: I am the World Teacher; but now that I feel I am one with my Beloved, I say it, not in order to impress my authority on you, not to convince you of my greatness, nor the greatness of the World Teacher, nor even of the beauty of life, but merely to awaken the desire in your hearts and in your minds to seek out the Truth. If I say, and I will say, that I am one with the Beloved, it is because I feel and know it. I have found what I longed for; I have become united, so that henceforth there will be no separation, because my thoughts, my desires, my longings – those of the individual self, have been destroyed... I am as the flower that gives scent to the morning air. It does not concern itself with who is passing by... Until now you have relied on the two Protectors of the Order for authority, on someone else to tell you the Truth, whereas the Truth is within you... It is no good asking me who is the Beloved. Of what use is explanation? You will not understand until you are able to see him in every animal, every blade of grass, in every person that is suffering, in every individual.” (Source: Lutyens loc. cit.)

Krishnamurti always had the feeling that his life had been planned and that something looked after him – something that happened and had to be respected but not interfered with. And there seems little doubt that, notwithstanding his antipathy to the concept of a guru or master, that he was, in the classical

sense, just such a one – an enlightened master, a Satguru. From his meditation experiences, he gave some remarkable descriptions of the elusive enlightened state.

On meditation

He would always meditate without any expectation of what should happen – so that memory of previous experiences would not get in the way. Towards the end of his life, from the late 1970s, his meditations reached what can only be described as their highest peak. This is an example, spoken in the third person:

“For a long time he had been awakened in the middle of the night with that peculiar meditation which had been pursuing him for many years. This had been a normal thing in his life. It is not a conscious, deliberate pursuit of meditation nor an unconscious desire to achieve something. It is very clearly uninvited and unsought. (He had been adroitly conscious of preventing thought making a memory of these meditations.) So each meditation has a quality of something new and fresh in it. There is a sense of accumulating drive. Sometimes it is so intense that there is pain in the head, sometimes a sense of vast emptiness with fathomless energy. Sometimes he wakes with laughter and measureless joy. These peculiar meditations, which naturally were unpremeditated, grew in intensity... One night in the strange stillness of that part of the world (the Rishi Valley in India), with the silence undisturbed by the hoot of owls, he woke up to find something totally different and new. The movement had reached the source of all energy... This must in no way be confused with, or even thought of, as God or the highest principle, the Brahman, which are the projections of the human mind out of fear and longing, the unyielding desire for total security. It is none of these things. Desire cannot possibly reach it, words cannot fathom it, nor can the string of thought wind itself around it. One may ask with what assurance do you (Krishnamurti) state that it is the source of all energy? One can only reply with complete humility, that it is so... Every night he would wake up with this sense of the Absolute. It is not a state, a thing that is static, fixed, and immovable. The whole universe is in it, measureless

to man... and there was the perception that there is nothing beyond this. This is the ultimate, the beginning and the ending and the Absolute. There is only a sense of incredible vastness and immense beauty.”

And in his *Notebook* (p. 121), which he began late in life, speaking about meditation and love, he wrote:

‘Meditation... was freedom and it was like entering into an unknown world of beauty and quietness; it was a world without image, symbol or word, without waves of memory. Love was in the death of every minute and each death was the returning of love. It was not attachment, it had no roots; it flowered without pause and it was a flame which burnt away the borders, the carefully built fences of consciousness (ego consciousness). Meditation was joy and with it came benediction.’

Teachings

As indicated before, Krishnamurti taught that we must find the Truth primarily by our own efforts; but in this regard, ‘because I have found it’ – he would show the way. And during his subsequent long and active life, that is exactly what he did – virtually right to the last moment. He maintained that because he had found the Truth through his own efforts, others could, if they were serious enough, do the same. In a letter written in 1930 to a devotee who was devastated at his resignation from the Order, he said:

“The ecstasy that I feel is the outcome of this world. I wanted to understand, I wanted to conquer sorrow, this pain of detachment and attachment, death, continuity of life, and everything that man goes through every day. I wanted to understand and conquer it. I have. So, my ecstasy is real and infinite, not an escape. I know the way out of this incessant misery and I want to help people out of the bog of their sorrow...”

In all his talks and books, he prescribes the same formula: that man must examine his own consciousness and strip away everything that is not the Truth; in essence it was Self-inquiry. He maintained that the Truth is a “pathless land” that cannot

be arrived at through any organization, creed, dogma, priest or ritual. Nor can it be achieved through philosophical logic or psychology. It can only be found through the “mirror of relationship” – through observation and understanding of the contents of the mind. He said, “When man becomes aware of the movement of his own consciousness he will see the division between the thinker and the thought, the observer and the observed, the experiencer and the experience. And he will then discover that the division is an illusion. There is only pure observation which is insight, without any shadow of the past. This timeless insight brings about a deep radical change in the mind.”

It is to witness the mind and its parade of thoughts and, in essence – though not enunciated in quite the way of Sri Ramana – his dialogues with those who attended his talks were to guide them into self-examination through contemplation of their thoughts and concepts. The mind, he explained, thrived on memory and habit and produced nothing new. It is always the past parading itself as the present. Of this he said:

“Thought is born of experiences, of knowledge, which is inseparable from time, so man is always a slave of the past.” In contrast, “Freedom is pure observation without direction, without fear of punishment or reward. Freedom is without motive... is found in the choiceless awareness of our daily existence.” And, “Thought is always trying to find a place where it can abide, abide in the sense of hold. But what thought creates, being fragmentary, is total insecurity. Therefore there is complete security in being absolutely nothing – which means not a thing created by thought. To be absolutely nothing means a total contradiction of everything you have learnt... You know what it means to be nothing? No ambition – which does not mean that you vegetate – no aggression, no resistance, no barriers built by hurt. The security that thought has created is no security. That is an absolute truth.” And, “We fill our hearts with the things of the mind and therefore keep our hearts ever empty and expectant. It is the mind that clings, that is envious, and that holds and destroys.”

Krishnamurti maintained that the ego, through its attachment to thoughts of the mind, wants to experience a continuation of pleasurable experiences *ad infinitum*; and it is this, the continuation of experience, that binds us. But this fact must be seen through introspection – not through belief or intellectualization. It must be seen by direct examination; and then when this is understood, the unraveling of the mind and the ego and the surrender of it all can take place. There must be total negation and a stripping away of all that is not love. Only then can the Truth be seen. He said:

“Total negation is the essence of the positive. When there is negation of all those things which are not love – desire, pleasure, etc. – then Love is, with its compassion and intelligence... Truth, happiness lie only through elimination, and then there is a timeless understanding. This is not negative. Most people are afraid to be nothing. They call it being positive when they are making an effort, and call that effort virtue. But true virtue is effortless. When you are nothing you are all things, not by aggrandizement, not by laying emphasis on ‘I’ and ‘me’ – on the personality, but on the continual dispassion of that form of consciousness which creates power, greed, envy, possessive care, vanity, fear and passion.”

It is about discovering love through negation, “You can only find out what love is by knowing what it is not. Not knowing intellectually, but actually in life putting aside what it is not – jealousy, ambition, greed, all the division that goes on in life, the me and the you, we and they, the black and the white... And this needs energy, and energy comes only when you observe actually what is and don’t run away from it... Just observe actually what is, then you have an abundance of energy and then you can find out what love is. Love is not pleasure – really find that out, inwardly, for yourself. Do you know what that means? It means that there is no fear, no attachment, no dependency, but a relationship in which there is no division.”

Although Krishnamurti reiterated these principles in many talks throughout his life, he became particularly lucid in his later years when his meditations were reaching what he

described as ‘a sense of incredible vastness and beauty’. He had started several schools for young people and expressed strong views on the need of man to change, to evolve from a life based on the egoic mind, and to promote ‘the awakening of intelligence’ – which was consciousness of the higher Self. He was very adamant about the difference between learning and the accumulation of knowledge, “To know is not to know, and the understanding of this fact, that knowledge can never solve our human problems, is intelligence.” In education, he believed there should be no psychological wounding – when you have a first and a second, you wound both of them.”

An end to sorrow is love

Krishnamurti maintained that the eroding of the ego also means the embracing of sorrow, “We are seeing the fact, ‘what is’, which is suffering... I suffer and the mind is doing everything it can to run away from it... So, don’t escape from it, which does not mean that you become morbid. Live with it... What takes place? Watch. The mind is very clear, sharp. It is faced with the fact. Then the very suffering becomes transformed into passion that is enormous. From that arises a mind that can never be hurt. Full Stop! That is the secret.”

In a talk given in Washington in 1985, less than a year before his death, he spoke again with great feeling, about love and sorrow: “When there is unacceptance there is no love. When you are suffering, concerned with your own suffering, how can there be love? What is sorrow? Is sorrow self pity? Please investigate. We are not saying it is or is not... Is sorrow brought about by loneliness – feeling desperately alone, isolated? Can we look at sorrow as it actually is in us, and remain with it, hold it, not trying to escape from it? Sorrow is not different from the one who suffers. The person who suffers wants to run away, escape, do all kinds of things. But to look at it you look as a child, a beautiful child, to hold it, never escape from it – then you will see for yourself, if you really look deeply, that there is an end to sorrow. And when there is an end to sorrow, there is passion; not lust, not sensory stimulation, but pure passion.”

Teaching by dialogue

Much of Krishnamurti's teaching took the form of dialogues between himself (the Speaker) and the audience, in which he would guide the audience into the heart of the message. For example, in a dialogue at his annual summer camp of 1971 entitled *Thought and the Immeasurable*, the following exchange took place:

Questioner: "I remember when I came to Switzerland as a small child and I saw a mountain for the first time, it was without any remembrance. It was very beautiful."

Krishnamurti: "Yes, sir, when you see it for the first time you don't say, 'It is a mountain.' Then somebody tells you that's a mountain and the next time you recognize it as such. Now, when you observe, there is the whole process of recognition. You do not confuse the mountain with a house or an elephant – it is a mountain. Then the difficult problem arises: to observe it non-verbally. That is a mountain, I like it or I don't like it. I wish I could live up there, and so on. It is fairly easy just to observe it, because mountains do not affect your life. But your husband, your wife, your neighbor, your son or daughter, they affect you; therefore you cannot observe them without evaluation, without an image. This is where the problem arises. When you look at the mountain, and at your wife or your husband without a single image, then you are looking at them for the first time, aren't you? Then you are looking at the earth, the stars, the mountains, or the politician, for the first time. That means your eyes are clear, not dimmed with the burden of past memories. That is all. Go into it, work at it. You will find out the enormous beauty that is in this."

Questioner: "If you look at a factory that way, without being aware of what it does to the environment, you cannot act."

Krishnamurti: "On the contrary, you see that it is polluting the air, belching forth smoke, so you want to do something. Don't confuse it, keep it simple. Do it and you will see what action comes out of it."

There is a volume of these dialogues entitled *The Awakening of Intelligence*. In this it is possible to discern the difference between 'mind' – the comments of most of the

participators (pandits, professors, know-it-alls), and the no-mind of Krishnamurti.

The effectiveness of his teaching

Although Krishnamurti taught for more than 50 years and has inspired, and continues to inspire, generations of thinkers, the extent to which others managed to achieve the same level of enlightenment that he had achieved is not known. From the accounts of his principal biographer who had known him from a young age, it appears that if there were such, they were either very secretive or very few in number. But other sources of information indicate that there were probably more. One of these comes from Vimala Thakar, an Indian woman spiritual teacher who in 2001 lived in retirement at Mount Abu, a hill station in Rajasthan. Her book *On an Eternal Voyage*, written in 1966, contains a moving account of her association with Krishnamurti – with whom she experienced a dramatic change in consciousness (see *What is Enlightenment?* Fall/Winter 1996). She wrote:

‘Something within has been let loose. It can’t stand any frontiers... The invasion of a new awareness, irresistible and uncontrollable... has swept away everything.’ In a letter to some friends and colleagues she wrote: *‘No words could describe the intensity and depth of experience through which I am passing. Everything has changed. I am born anew. This is (not) wishful thinking. It is an astounding phenomenon... Everything that has been transmitted to our mind through centuries will have to be discarded... I have dealt with it. It has dropped away.’* She had begun, in her own quiet way, to speak with friends who were interested in her life and her experience, but when she met Krishnamurti again he said, without preamble, “Why don’t you explode? Why don’t you put bombs under all these old people who follow the wrong line?... Go out and set them on fire.”

In 1961, Krishnamurti intimated that there were few who had seen the light, but it is also possible that other associates may have realized a high state of spiritual awareness in later years. One of these could well have been Aldous Huxley who was very close to Krishnamurti in the years before his

(Huxley's) death in 1964. Christopher Isherwood, in his book *My Guru and His Disciple*, gives an account of Huxley's death thus:

“Aldous was in obvious discomfort, but there was nothing poignant or desperate in his manner, and he clearly didn't want to talk about death... Each time I did so, he commented acutely, or remembered an appropriate quotation. I came away with the picture of a great noble vessel sinking quietly into the deep; many of its delicate and marvelous mechanisms still in perfect order, all its lights shining.”

There are many instances of the audience at Krishnamurti's talks being moved by the teaching. That is what brought them back again and again. Throughout the world there are Krishnamurti addicts and a good example is a monk and spiritual teacher in Thailand (now moved to a Buddhist center in Australia) called Ajahn Santatito – who plastered the trees in his forest monastery with Krishnamurti's quotations. Santatito's principle teaching to cope with the vicissitudes of the worldly life was, “Keep your life simple.” Another example is that of the ‘saintly scientist’ Amit Goswami who now writes books on enlightenment and who experienced a spiritual breakthrough in the understanding of cosmic phenomena after attending a talk by Krishnamurti.

But in the end it seems that the effort needed to make the transformation was, in most instances, lacking. A man who had been going to Krishnamurti's talks for many years wondered why he had not changed. Krishnamurti replied, “Is it that you are not serious? Is it that you don't care? Is it that you have so many problems that you are caught up with; no time, no leisure to stop, so that you never look at the flower?”

The energy needed to make the quantum leap and abandon the clinging to established habits seems to be the main stumbling block. Krishnamurti frequently said the energy required is considerable. And, in most of us, this is dissipated in worldly life – in the ego's desperate drive to ‘save’ its creations. At a talk given in Switzerland at one of his annual summer camps, he had this to say:

“One needs a great deal of energy, vitality, interest to bring about a radical change in oneself. If we are interested in outward phenomena, we have to see what we can do with the rest of the world in the process of changing ourselves; and also we must see not only how to conserve energy, but how to increase it. We dissipate energy endlessly, by useless talk, by having innumerable opinions about everything, by living in the world of concepts, formulas, and by everlasting conflict within and between ourselves... It needs energy not only for a superficial external change, but also to bring about a deep, inward transformation or revolution. One must have an extraordinary sense of energy which has no cause, which has no motive, which has the capacity to be utterly quiet, and this very quietness has its own explosive quality... One sees how human beings waste their energy, in quarrels, in jealousies, in a tremendous sense of anxiety, in the everlasting pursuit of pleasure and in the demand for it.”

It is not the enjoyment of pleasure itself, which includes both physical and psychological pleasure, but man's attachment to it and his wish for it to be endlessly repeated and embellished that is the problem; the pursuit of pleasure – one of the rights enshrined in the American Constitution, as it is generally understood, reduces the mind to seeking the acquisition of things and experiences making it dull and indifferent. We should be able to enjoy pleasure as it appears and leave it at that.

He said, “Pleasure is such an enticing thing! I look at a tree: it is a great delight. To see a dark cloud full of rain and a rainbow, and this seems a tremendous thing. That is pleasure – that is a delight – that is a tremendous enjoyment. Why can't I leave it there? You understand? Why do I have to say, ‘I must store it up’? Then when I see the next day the dark cloud full of rain and the leaves dancing in the wind, the memory of yesterday spoils the sight of it. I have become dull. Thought has spoiled it.”

It seems that the main legacy that Krishnamurti has left to the world lies in his books which remain an inspiration and, perhaps, in their way, contribute greatly to the spiritual journeys of many seekers. But he ordained no followers and

said that no one was to represent him after his death. The schools that he founded should continue but, he explained, would not be the same as when he was alive. These are some of the views he has expressed on different matters.

His views on psychic powers

Although Krishnamurti's life itself was a miracle, since it is certainly miraculous to produce such enlightened and profound material in talk after talk without the slightest preparation, the meaning here is the performing of demonstrative miracles. Of these he did not approve. In a letter to a devotee (Lady Emily, the mother of Mary Lutyens) he wrote:

'Which would you rather have: a Teacher who will show the way to keep permanently whole or one who will momentarily heal your wounds? Miracles are fascinating child's play... Many friends of mine are spiritual healers. But although they may heal the body, unless they make the mind and heart also whole, the disease will return. I am concerned with the healing of the heart and the mind, not with the body. I hold that no great Teacher would perform a miracle, because that would be a betrayal of the Truth.'

Notwithstanding this statement, it was known that Krishnamurti was himself a powerful healer and cured Vimala Thakar of almost total deafness, considered untreatable by the medical profession.

His views on sex

Krishnamurti was apparently celibate throughout his entire long life. But he was, according to his biographer, completely normal physically and was extremely attractive to almost everyone, with his charming and playful personality. Young women, and also not-so-young women, fell in love with him in droves, but it seems that at no time were his relationships with them anything but platonic. His early life, from the age of around 14, and after he had been adopted by the Theosophical Society, was carefully observed; because of the belief that the masters of the Theosophical Society, the architects of the 'new

order', wanted the main human guides of the project to be celibate.

In later life, after he had broken away from the Theosophists, he had many occasions to refer to sex in his talks. The following statement probably sums up his views on the matter:

“It (sex) has become a problem because there is no love. When we really love there is no problem, there is an adjustment, an understanding. But when we have lost the sense of true affection, that profound love in which there is no sense of possessiveness, there arises the problem of sex. It is when we have completely yielded ourselves to the mere sensation, that there are many problems concerning sex. As the majority of people have lost the joy of creative thinking, naturally they turn to the sensation of sex which becomes a problem, eating their minds and hearts away.”

His views on God

Krishnamurti frequently referred to his disbelief in religions and gods, maybe small 'g' gods, and from what we know about him and his state of development, it is plain that he is referring to the 'ordinary' egoic and unenlightened view of god. In a talk given in 1982, when he was 86, he said the following:

“We have invented God. Thought has invented God – that is we, out of misery, despair, loneliness, anxiety, have invented that thing called God. This 'God' has not made us in His image – I wish He had. Personally I have no belief in anything. The speaker (Krishnamurti) faces only what is, what are facts, the realization of the nature of every fact, every thought, all the reactions – he is totally aware of all that. If you are free from fear, from sorrow, there is no need for a God.” He also extended the same views to what he saw of the Eastern religions, and to the guru-cult movements in general.

He had a low opinion of the hippie movement and considered it to be 'not too serious'. He maintained that the young of today (those in the hippie and social reform cults of

that period) will become the dull middle class of tomorrow – and that is exactly what has happened.

His views on death

Krishnamurti maintained that physical death is of little importance, but that it is assigned paramount importance by most human beings who suffer terribly at the time of dying – something that is not necessary. The horror with which man regards death is related to our attachments and storehouse of memory fostered by the ego, which is also the barrier to spiritual enlightenment. In 1981 in Amsterdam, he said:

“Death means the ending of the known... and I am frightened to let all that go, which means death. Death means the ending of attachments, which is dying while living; not separated by fifty years or so, waiting for some disease to finish you off. It is living with all your vitality, energy, intellectual capacity and with great feeling, and at the same time, for certain conclusions, certain idiosyncrasies, experiences, attachments, hurts, to end, to die. That is, while living, also live with death. Then death is not something far away, death is not something which is the end of life, brought about by some accident, disease or old age, but rather the ending of all the things of memory – that is death, a death not separate from living.”

In 1983, at the age of 87, he wrote in his Journal the following:

‘Why do human beings die so miserably, so unhappily, with a disease, old age, senility, the body shrunk, ugly?... What is wrong with us?... As you teach children mathematics (etc.) they should also be taught the great dignity of death – as something of daily life – the daily life of looking at the blue sky and the grasshopper on the leaf. It is a part of learning, as you grow teeth and have all the discomforts of childish illnesses. Children have extraordinary curiosity. If you see the nature of death, you don’t explain that everything dies, dust to dust and so on, but without any fear you explain it to them gently and make them feel that living and dying are one... There is no resurrection – that is superstition... To grasp the whole movement of life requires intelligence, not the intelligence of

thought, or books, or knowledge, but the intelligence of love and compassion with its sensitivity... As one looked at a dead leaf with all its beauty and colour, maybe one would very deeply comprehend, be aware of, what one's own death must be, not at the very end but at the beginning. Death isn't some horrific thing, something to be avoided, postponed, but rather something to be with day in and day out. And out of that comes an extraordinary sense of immensity.'

His last talk

In his last talk, he was very frail and spoke so quietly that the audience had to strain to hear it. He said, "Creation is something that is most holy. That's the most sacred thing in life and if you have made a mess of your life – change it. Change it today, not tomorrow. If you are uncertain find out why and be certain. If your thinking is not straight, think straight, logically. Unless all that is prepared, all that is settled, you can't enter into this world of creation."

His last words were almost inaudible. They were, "It ends." He died in his sleep at the age of 91 on 17th February 1986.

A note on Vimala Thakar

Born in 1921 in Maharashtra, India, Vimala was interested in spiritual matters from an early age, practicing meditation and other spiritual disciplines. Later, she graduated in Eastern and Western philosophy and became active in the Bhoodan (land gift) program of the Indian Government – that granted land to poor landless families.

In 1958, she met with Jiddu Krishnamurti and this meeting completely changed her life. She left the land-gift program and devoted her life to what she called the internal problem – the spiritual liberation of the individual in both India and the West. In 1979, she became active in a program of social reform aimed at educating villagers about agro-industry, sanitation and local government based on democracy. In 1984, she published a book called *Spiritual and Social Action – A Holistic Approach*, and from 1991 curtailed her travels that had been outside India, to concentrate on the homeland. She became a prolific writer and published several books: *The*

Eloquence of Living – Meeting Life with Freshness, Fearlessness and Compassion, Totally in Essence, and Glimpses of Raja Yoga – An introduction to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.

Vimala's view, following the philosophy of people like Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave, was that social activism without religion was a folly, and that spiritual inquiry without social action was a luxury that India could not afford.

But the single most important thing in her life, she maintained, was her meeting with Krishnamurti. She died in 2009.

Contact information

Although Krishnamurti said that there were to be no successors to him, the records of his life and teachings have nevertheless been a basis for spiritual pursuit for many since his death. The Krishnamurti Foundations offer the opportunity to study and contemplate the teachings (unguided) at their centers. All have comprehensive libraries and audio and video recordings.

Krishnamurti Foundation India,
Vasanta Vihar, 124 Greenways Road,
Chennai 600028, Tamil Nadu, India.

Websites: www.kfionline.org • www.jkrishnamurti.org

Krishnamurti Foundation Trust,
Brockwood Park, Bramdean,
Hampshire SO24 0LQ, UK.

Websites: www.kfoundation.org
www.krishnamurticentre.org.uk

Krishnamurti Foundation of America,

P.O. Box 1560, Ojai, CA 93024, USA.

Websites: www.kfa.org • www.jkrishnamurti.org



Anandamayi Ma
(1896-1982)

ANANDAMAYI MA

The Bliss-Permeated Mother

*‘The young woman lifted the veil from her face and said:
Purna Brahma Narayana – I am the all-pervading Reality.’*

Anandamayi Ma was born in East Bengal in 1896, at a location that is now part of Bangladesh. Over her long lifetime, she came to be considered one of India’s most revered mystical saints of modern times. She had a luminous beauty and exercised a divine intoxication over those who came before her. It is said that waves of happiness rippled among the crowd that formed around her. Decades after her passing, her energy can still be felt at her samadhi, and at the many ashrams and institutions that were established in her name in northern and central India.

There are numerous stories of her healings, miracles, and of the divine energy that was felt in her presence. During her lifetime, she came to be considered as an avatar, a divine incarnation, and enlightened from birth. Her behavior and often spontaneous and unpredictable actions, were stated by her to be the result of divine promptings (*khayala*), and were not in any way related to desires of her own. For example, at a spiritual gathering she suddenly left and took off to another town miles away by boarding a mail train that made an unscheduled stop, and then strode purposefully to a certain hotel. There, it appears, was a disciple stranded penniless who had been praying to Ma in distress. The rest of the night was spent in innocently teasing the now laughing and overjoyed disciple.

The information in this chapter was obtained through the kindness of people still living in Ma’s ashrams, who knew her when she was alive and from books written by individuals who also knew her personally; in particular, those of Bhajji

(Swami Vijayananda), Prof. Lipski, Dr. Bithika Mukerji, and Prem Lata Srivastava. Appreciation is also expressed to the trustees of the Shree Ma Anandamayi International Center and to Dr. S.K. Ghosh, for the hospitality given during the research carried out for this account.

It is said that, notwithstanding Ma's ruthless smashing of egos and her apparent indifference to worldly drama, she was always pained by people in distress. Much of her life, since the mid-1920s, was spent in virtually continuous travel around India giving darshan, conducting satsangs, guiding people's spiritual journeys and performing various other religious duties, in a manner that would have exhausted a normal person. Yet no one had ever seen her doze off or yawn. And during the many arduous travels, those of her close associates who might momentarily nod off during a program would awaken with a start and find Ma's eyes on them.

By her own statements, Ma was nothing less than divine. Meeting Paramhansa Yogananda in 1936 she said, "Before I came on this earth, Father, I was the same. As a little girl I was the same... Ever afterwards, though the dance of creation proceeds around me, I shall be the same." She promoted no particular philosophy nor gave many messages for mankind, save one repeated utterance:

"Talk of God alone is worthwhile; all else is pain and in vain." Ma's education was very rudimentary but she could write well in Bengali. However, only one specimen of her writing exists. It says:

'Oh you Supreme Being, You are manifest in all forms – the Universe with all its creations: man, wife, husband, children, mother, are all in the One. Man's mind is clouded by worldly ties. But there is no cause for despair. With purity, unflinching faith and burning eagerness go ahead and you will realize your true Self.'

At other times, when asked to write something, she would make a dot and say, "This contains everything."

In effect, accounts of her life, the historical events and the biological changes that took place in her body throughout her

life, can only be regarded as things that happened to a detached onlooker, performing voluntarily a play in the earthly theater on a stage limited by time and space. Her teachings were her vehement adherence to and promotion of celibacy, the practice of austerities for herself and her close associates, and the effect she had on others. Throughout her life, Ma showed almost complete indifference to pain and physical matters concerning the body. On one occasion, a burning coal fell on her foot while she sat there and let it burn until someone removed it.

Early days

Ma's birth name was Nirmala Sundari Devi. Though poor, the family did not belong to the class of peasants, but were strict and devout Vaishnava Brahmins (worshippers of Vishnu) with significant spiritual leanings. There were many pandit ancestors and at least one *sati* (widows who immolate themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands). Her father would often sing bhajans all night long, and her mother, who was to become enlightened herself late in life, would dream of gods and goddesses both before and after the birth of Sri Ma; at one point in her confinement, a divine ray of light is said to have entered the mother. Does this sound like romantic imaginings? Maybe, but for anyone who knew Sri Ma it has the ring of truth.

At birth, the baby was completely silent. Later, when this was commented on she said, "Why should I cry, I was looking at the trees through the holes in the wall." She was said to have an astounding memory from the earliest times and could later recount household events and happenings with exact accuracy.

Sri Ma was a strange child, very detached, vacant like the limitless sky, but people and other children were strongly attracted to her. She often became lost to the world and, at the age of two, she went into a trance of ecstasy from hearing a *kirtan* (chanting) recital. She showed no fear at any time as evidenced on several occasions during her childhood (once when cows stampeded near her). Sometimes it seemed that she could almost levitate; for example, when playing with other

children she would draw effortlessly with one foot, a perfect circle in the sand around her body. From an early age, she often referred to herself in the third person as ‘this body’.

She was married to Bholanath, a Saivaite Brahmin, and by 1913, when Bholanath had secured a suitable job, the young couple moved in together. However, it appears that the marriage was never consummated. Linda Johnsen in her book *Daughters of the Goddess*, describes an early marital encounter. She writes:

‘Laughing and joking, Bholanath Chakravati was bringing home a friend to show off his pretty wife. When they burst into the door, however, the wife didn’t move but continued sitting silently on the floor with a shawl draped over her head. Annoyed that she didn’t leap up to greet them, Bolanath snapped, ‘Can’t you see you have a guest? Who do you think you are?’ Slowly the young woman lifted the shawl from her face. The energy emanating from her was so intense that, as they recalled later, both men were involuntarily thrown backwards. ‘Purna Brahma Narayana,’ she replied, ‘I am the all-pervading reality.’ One of the most extraordinary sages of modern times had just unveiled herself.’ On why she rejected the legitimate enjoyment of intimate marital relations she later said, “For this body there is no question of enjoyment or rejection. Whatever happens to it is necessary for all of you – perhaps this aspect is not so necessary.”

Self-initiation

In the Brahmin tradition, deeksha by a guru, in which the guru imparts a mantra, is considered to be of central importance. In her case she initiated herself in 1922; she was the guru, the *shishya* (disciple) and the mantra itself, as all the complex processes of ritualistic prayer and initiation took place automatically. One pious Brahmin who witnessed the event was outraged and demanded proof that things had been done properly, upon which an overwhelming stream of *slokas* (Vedic aphorisms) and mystical syllables flowed from her. The man became dumbfounded and humbly said no more. Sometime later, and against all traditions, she initiated her own

husband – who had by then become her disciple and a worthy, hard-working assistant.

Bhava samadhi

Ma's spiritual development was characterized by extreme forms of Bhava samadhi. She maintained that she had always been fully realized but said that she would play the role of a *sadhaka* – someone undergoing spiritual instruction. Although the beginnings of this phase occurred earlier, the main events took place over the years 1918-1924. Her sadhana grew steadily in intensity over that period and the spiritual occurrences – for in Sri Ma's case they could not be termed transformations – took the form of divine experiences, which included visions of various deities and the generation of a feeling of oneness: worshiper, the act of worshiping and the object of worship merged. During this phase she was hardly conscious for much of the time and hardly touched food. A witness of some of these bhavas, Dr. Nilini Kanta, described one event:

'After sitting veiled her veil suddenly loosened and her face was visible in a brilliant luster. Hymns and seed mantras recited in uncommon accents produced a wondrous resonance which affected the whole surrounding, and a sense of holiness prevailed. Those present felt an indescribable elevation of spirit and depth of silence – a peace that passeth all understanding.'

Night after night, after sitting like a statue, her limbs would start briskly moving and her body would perform various asanas and *mudras* (hand and finger gestures and positions) in quick succession. Her complexion changed and sometimes her breath would become explosive during pranayamas, and then she would faint. Sometimes her fingers would automatically draw *mandalas* (sacred geometric diagrams), and sacred mantras would come out and their meanings would become known to her. Of all this she said, "When I pray repeating God's name – an indescribable joy descends."

These events were the stages of her voluntary sadhana leading to a state of complete fulfillment and enlightenment. Towards the end of 1922, she observed silence except when it

was absolutely necessary to speak. She would make a circle on her hand upon which mantras would gush from her mouth, enabling her to speak. After having spoken, she would wipe the circle, repeat more mantras, and resume complete silence.

At one time she hardly ate for several months. After this, she would eat very little and it seemed that her hands would have difficulty in delivering food to her mouth. They would only rise so far and then she would have to bend her head to take the food. This was to continue throughout her life and because of it the family had, at times, to feed her like a child. But on one occasion, on being admonished for not eating properly, she ate enough for seven or eight people, consuming around 60 *poories* (Indian puffed pancakes) and drinking 20 liters of milk – which produced no signs whatsoever of her being overstuffed and seemed to just disappear into her body. After this, people ceased commenting on her eating habits.

As for the bhavas, they were, for the most part, kept within the family circle, but by 1925, after her silent period was over, they began to attract public attention. One of her actions, which caused a great stir, was instructing the priests of the local temple to permit entry to non-Brahmins. Then, at a public Kali puja – of a type confined to Bengal, in honor of the Divine Mother in her terrifying aspect – Sri Ma assumed the role of the priest. Instead of addressing the idol, Sri Ma addressed herself, putting flowers, sandalwood paste and so on, on herself – as had Ramakrishna. And for all that time, witnesses said, her face glowed with an uncommon beauty and there arose a feeling of great sanctity and deep absorption among those present. In Bengal, the sacrifice of a goat was carried out at Kali puja, but in all celebrations in which Sri Ma participated she allowed no animal sacrifice. She explained to the presiding priests that the true meaning of the sacrifice, lost on many pious Brahmins, was the sacrificing of one's own lower (animal) instincts.

Her *lila* (divine play) constantly took on new forms which often overwhelmed those present. She would effortlessly draw up from a sitting position and seem to float and whirl like a weightless leaf in the wind, as if being supported by a hidden force. And then, seemingly of its own accord, her body would

float down in a seated position and assume the form of a statue with an effulgence of light about it; and she would sing the names of God in a voice of heavenly rapture. On one occasion, in the presence of others, she appeared to shrink to nothing while seated at an altar. At that time, in British India, many devotees who held important public appointments in government, had to tread the delicate path between devotion to this strange and 'occult' woman and credibility in their jobs.

Miraculous happenings

Throughout the first half of her life, Sri Ma followed the promptings of her khayalas. In some instances she seemed to be drawn into a healing, while in others she would ignore someone in distress. Generally, however, Ma did not set out to affect the cures of people's ailments. In cases where people asked for help in healing, she would say, "Pray to God. He will do what is best for the patient." When people persisted, she would look around and say to her companions, "What do you think? Will the patient recover?" Generally, the answer would be in the affirmative and she would ask them to repeat their affirmation three times. In such cases, it is said, recovery invariably occurred. But if, unaccountably, they would stammer or make weak rejoinders, then it seems, the patient would not recover. At other times Ma would, for various reasons, take on the physical suffering of others.

Once on being asked about the outcome of a legal trial, she said that it would be successful – which it was. But then she took a live coal and placed it on the back of her hand. Later, she explained this action by saying that if yogic powers are used deliberately then the sadhaka has to perform penance for it. She said, "This body sometimes has the attitude of a sadhaka."

But apart from the personal experiences interpreted as miracles by numerous individuals, there were others that seemed to show that Ma, in fact, knew everything that was going to happen and in some cases directed evasive action. In an incident recorded in *Life and Teachings of Sri Ma Anandamayi*, the family was on a river trip in an area known for its river dacoits and was being pursued by them in a much

faster boat. Ma was completely unconcerned but at one point, she told the boatman to turn suddenly into a side channel. The larger boat missed the turn and flashed past while, just a little way up the channel, the family came to the safety of a village where they could spend the night. Similarly, on the epic journey to Mount Kailash, there were also threats from bandits which seemed to have been averted by Sri Ma.

Her disciples also sometimes experienced the omniscience of Sri Ma in strange ways. One disciple, exhausted by the continuous travel in trains and the fact that he often could not even get a seat, devised a means of overcoming this problem. He positioned himself with all his baggage close to where he knew the door of a carriage was to stop. He waited expectantly but as the train pulled up he found Sri Ma's eyes on him. He knew she had read his mind when she sent him on a short errand, just long enough to allow the crowd to surge forward and take all the seats in the carriage. This was not due to any malice, but her way of ruthlessly attacking the ego – for the ultimate enlightenment of the person. On another occasion when Ma was giving out oranges as *prasad* (spiritual food offering), the same disciple decided to go without as a sacrifice because there seemed to be far too few oranges for everyone. He hung back in the wings so to speak. Somehow, and in the manner of the loaves and fishes, everyone in the huge crowd received oranges; and then Sri Ma asked where that evasive disciple was. He felt too embarrassed to step forward but somehow the crowd parted before him and exposed him to her eyes, as she pointedly picked up the last orange and held it out to him.

In regard to the miraculous events that occurred during her bhavas, the going without food, as indicated before, posed a concern for many. On this she said:

“Once this body lived on three grains of rice a day for four or five months. Nobody can live for so long a time on such a meager diet. It looks like a miracle. But it has been so with this body... As a result of sadhana the body becomes so constituted that, though no food is taken physically, it can imbibe from the surroundings whatever is necessary for its maintenance. In three ways the body can be maintained

without food: one way has just been referred to... Secondly it can live on air alone, for I have just said that everything exists in all things, so that the properties of all things are in the air in some measure... Again, it may so happen that the body is not taking anything at all, yet it is being maintained unimpaired as in a state of samadhi.”

Sri Ma was also in touch, in an intimate way, with the kundalini and the chakras of the subtle body. Once she was seen drawing diagrams on the floor with a piece of coal. She said:

“This afternoon I sat in an asana and measured the distances from the center of the head to the middle of the eyebrows, then to the neck and heart and down to the end of the spine. I have a kheyala that there are centers at these specific spots in the human body... From the lowest to the highest they range from the gross to the refined... These diagrams have drawn themselves as it were. The stream of vitality flows through them slowly or fast, determining the emotions and actions of the individual. The vital force usually lies somnolent at the base of the spine, but by perseverance and faith, thought and action are purified. The vibrations engendered by the actions of inner and outer purity shake this sleeping power into motion. So when the power moves upwards, penetrating level after level, the sadhaka feels freed of many ties.”

Once when certain Muslim fakirs visited the place where she was staying, they found that a kirtan was in progress. But Ma rose from the gathering and led the fakirs to a nearby mausoleum of an Arab holy man, Shah Sahab. There, to everyone’s amazement, she performed the namaz ritual of the Muslim faith – in absolute detail and to perfection. The Muslims felt that, at that time, Sri Ma was a Muslim as devout as Shah Sahab himself.

Her close associates

A medical doctor, Sasanka Mohan (who became a sanyasi and was referred to as Swamiji), and his unmarried daughter Didi, became devotees in the early days of Ma’s public phase – and Didi virtually became Ma’s life-long assistant and

biographer, producing 26 volumes based on her notes in Bengali and Hindi. An Austrian woman who became a sanyasin, Atmananda, edited most of Sri Ma's English translations and was close to Sri Ma from 1945. (See Ram Alexander's book *Death Must Die*)

Ma's husband Bholanath became her tour manager, and another close associate, Bhajji, whose association with Sri Ma was believed to have started in a previous incarnation, also became, until his death, her constant companion. Later in life, after she became widowed, her mother, known then as Didima but later renamed Swami Muktananda Giri, also became her assistant and travel companion. And since Sri Ma did not think of herself as a guru, she would ask Didima to initiate devotees.

Many others were attracted to her and became renunciates, some dropping out after some time, and others staying the course. One such was a French doctor who, on a spiritual search in the East, came across Sri Ma in the 1950s. He became a devotee, took sanyas, and became Swami Vijayananda. And since then, he has never returned to his native France.

Most of Sri Ma's early associates died before her. Bhajji died after the Kailash expedition in 1937, and Bholanath died of smallpox in 1938. Didima died in 1970, aged 93, and her chief assistant for so many years, Didi, died in 1980.

Travels and public life

The sadhana and bhava phase of Ma's life was over by 1926. Then she began a long period of travel and public duties, spanning over 50 years, virtually until the end of her life. She traveled throughout India, but principally in the central and northern regions. On one occasion, she led an expedition to Mount Kailash in Tibet. However, and notwithstanding the fact that she has many foreign devotees, she never left the region of South Asia. Wherever her travels took her she attracted the saints and sages around there. Mahatmas flocked to see her and were profoundly impressed by this Divine Mother incarnate. In a jungle area of northern India, an ashram was established and later, on Sri Ma's prompting, the buried

ruins of an ancient temple were uncovered there. This location became a favorite place of retreat for her.

By 1928, her life was almost entirely filled with spiritual duties and as her popularity grew, planning for her movements became more and more elaborate. The following of spontaneous khayalas became virtually a thing of the past. Birthdays became elaborate events and a means of focusing attention on the Divine. Her life came to revolve around a succession of religious festivals, kirtans and satsangs, as she roamed around India with her close followers.

In 1932, she embarked on a period of uninterrupted travel, staying only a few days or weeks at any one place. Of this she said, “I find one vast garden spread over all the universe. All plants, human beings, higher mind-bodies, are about in this garden... Their presence and variety give me great delight.”

Her followers included many powerful political figures including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, as well as foreign dignitaries and royal personages. Thousands of people would await her coming to experience the upliftment that her presence brought, or followed her, sometimes with great difficulty, to the most remote locations. However, Sri Ma showed little or no interest in political events including the freedom struggle, the Punjab massacre (when a British general ordered his troops to fire on civilians at the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar), Gandhi’s activities, and events of the Second World War, followed by the partitioning of India and Pakistan. Her views on political and historical events were that they simply happened because they had to happen. Her one goal was the outpouring of divine counsel and facilitating the transforming power of her own presence towards the realization of the divine Self in others.

As the numbers of followers increased, ashrams sprang up all over northern and central India. A *sangha* (fellowship) was established in 1950 under a Council that had the pursuit of Self-realization through sadhana as its primary objective. The organization of religious events and an annual *Samyam Vrata* (vow of restraint and self control for one week) were part of this. The Council was also responsible for the promotion of

charitable activities including the establishment of free medical clinics and a modern hospital at the holy city of Varanasi, and two schools – one for boys at the location of the main ashram in Kankhal, and one for girls at Varanasi, as well as several ashrams dedicated to Sri Ma.

At very large gatherings, many arrangements had to be made but nobody ever seemed to be in charge. Everyone just cooperated under a banner of love. By the 1970s, Ma was a public figure of great renown in India. The pattern of satsangs, audiences and functions changed from small intimate affairs and took on huge dimensions. Darshan was given and received collectively, by simply being present at a function. To pass before Ma, long queues had to be formed. In her book *The Life and Teachings*, Bithika Mukerji writes: ‘Crowds would follow even to remote destinations and generally all the mahatmas graced her functions. The days of intimate gatherings, brilliant conversational sessions, interspersed with hilarious laughter convulsing entire groups of people, seemed to be over.’

At the age of 77, Sri Ma felt less energetic but remained unperturbed and active. She said, “For this body there is no concern whatever for inconvenience or discomfort. This body observes in minute detail what is taking place in every nerve and vein... For this body everything, without exception, is a play... Whatever be the kheyala at any particular moment, according to that, things may happen.”

The Kailash expedition

This expedition to the holy Mount Kailash in 1937 was nothing less than an epic journey through dangerous territory full of dacoits. Yet, the journey was completed with little or no fanfare in around 30 days, even though over the Indian sections a large retinue of people followed. Most of the several hundred kilometers of rough hill country, from the starting point in Almora in northern India, was done on foot or horseback with Sri Ma being carried in a sedan chair. Mount Kailash, at 22,000 feet is considered by devout Hindus to be one of the abodes of Shiva. The pilgrimage also involved circumambulating the mountain (a distance of around 100 km) and then bathing in the icy waters of Gauri Kund (lake) at

18,400 feet. The journey was considered to be very difficult, particularly for people from the plains who were unused to the high elevations and rugged terrain of the mountains.

The party comprised Sri Ma, Bholanath, her assistant Didi, Swamiji (Didi's father) and Bhaji – who died at the end of the expedition. Other local devotees followed the group for certain sectors of the journey and after leaving Indian territory, various guides were engaged to show them the way.

At one stage, they were followed by armed dacoits who, it appeared, were carefully gauging their strength with a view to robbing them. It seems that Sri Ma's presence somehow had the effect of dissuading them from robbery.

On the return journey, and after bathing in Gauri Kund and having a series of spiritual experiences overseen by Sri Ma, Bhaji, who had been a devotee of Ma since early days, died. It is considered that he attained enlightenment just prior to his demise.

Her way of teaching

Ma's relationship with people fell into two categories: there was the general public to whom she gave darshan and, in instances, healings, miracles, and so on; and there were the disciples, those destined for enlightenment, with whom she was both ruthlessly strict and lovingly attentive. Everything was designed to smash the last traces of ego from the disciple's psyche. And there were those who couldn't make it and dropped out. One, a would-be disciple, Daniel Roumanoff, who at first said, "With vision of her there is a flash of happiness, of a bliss that I know and recognize to be the most intimate and profound part of myself." But when the 'romance' was over and the ego needed to be disposed of, he changed his opinion to the view that Sri Ma was a 'sorceress, who catches you in her net and then eats you up.' But those who understood would know the truth and say, "Yes, she is Kali. She is destroying egos."

For another devotee, the young French medical doctor who became Swami Vijayananda, it was a meeting for life. On his first encounter, which he had approached brimming with

serious questions, his mind went blank and he forgot what to ask. He felt that she had read his thoughts and disposed of the questions. He concluded that she appeared to each person in the manner that was most suited to his state of development: mother, sister, goddess – she could playfully open nadis appropriately for each devotee. On his first meeting with Sri Ma, he knew she had infused him with something that made him think, ‘What kind of love is this?’ For Swami Vijayananda, all worldly attachments lost their attraction on that meeting.

Notwithstanding the view that Sri Ma seldom responded to intellectual spiritual questions, she, on occasion, expounded answers of great depth, meaning and profundity. From the 1940s, devotees from Dhaka and elsewhere came to settle near the ashram at Varanasi, and a new era of satsangs began. Among those who came was Amulya Kumar, who kept a record in question-and-answer form of the proceedings and published these in many volumes as *Sri Ma Anandamayi Prasanga*. In these satsangs, Sri Ma spoke with great depth on matters relating to duality and the spiritual practices of mantra repetition, tapasya and so on. On the question of volition in sadhana, she said:

“All spiritual practices begin with the mind that is in duality but, at the proper time, the pilgrim attains the state of no-mind – and that is when the Self is realized... Do not be thinking of sins; nobody should think of themselves as sinners. You are in reality the ‘sons of immortality’ but you do not know this at present. If one concentrates in living steadfastly in the light of God’s presence, then there will be no danger of erring. Faith is all that is required of you.” Sri Ma’s views on the existence of nothing but God were unshakable and based on absolute knowledge, and on many occasions she made this point. Some examples are as follows:

A renowned Mahatma, a saint in his own right, spoke to Ma of Maya and Brahman. Ma replied, “I know but One.” The Mahatma seemed put out, but a little later he smilingly agreed.

On the death of her husband Bholanath from smallpox, Sri Ma nursed him and was with him when he said, “I am going –

I am going.” She responded by saying, “Why do you think so? There are no comings and goings but just one totality of being in which there is no scope for separation.” Bholanath seemed to agree and said quietly just before he breathed his last, “Yes, so you have always said.” On another occasion during a visit to Tiruvannamalai in South India – after the death of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the question on why we are so attracted to transient objects was raised. She replied: “It is God’s lila... Even so, does not the Durga-Saptasati say:

In the guise of delusion it is You only. It is He who is manifest in the form of these distractions. It is to be remembered, however, that if one is attracted to worldly things, one is going towards losing oneself; if one is attracted to God then that leads to liberation. It is necessary to realize that there is nothing but One alone. If you stay with the world, you are purchasing a return ticket!”

The clapping of hands

Sri Ma consistently adhered to the philosophy of Advaita in which everything was under the divine control of God. One day, during World War II, a visitor asked, “Who will win this war? Is it going to have an adverse effect on India?” Sri Ma burst into ringing laughter and said, “Is there a war? How can there be a war without an ‘enemy’? Is there more than One? The war you talk of is like the clapping of hands. So where is the question of defeat or victory?” Nevertheless, a great yajna was carried out for the three years of the Japanese war.

For close devotees, Sri Ma always recommended the sadhana of renunciation. She spoke often of what she called Samyam Vrata as a practice for householder devotees. For example, on one occasion she said, “Once a week one should make a strong resolve to live in the sphere of Truth only. On that day one should eat sparingly, watch one’s speech and action carefully to avoid the least incorrect utterance or unworthy behaviour; emotions should be controlled. One should look upon children as child manifestations of the Divine; one’s wife or husband as not only an object of love but reverence as well. One should render services to all members of the family, including servants, in a spirit of humility. Even

if there should be occasions for anger one should respond with calmness and not be jolted out of a tranquil frame of mind.” Then she laughed and said, “Maybe some naughty children will take advantage, but it will pass. Then, when you feel confident, you may increase the number of days for it to become a way of life rather than something for a special occasion.”

In her book *Life and Teachings of Sri Ma Anandamayi*, Dr. Mukerji explains that renunciation and celibacy is thematized as essential in the Advaita philosophy of Shankaracharya (though not in other schools of thought in India), and it is at the very heart of the identity of the Self and the Supreme Being. In the world, the ‘I’ consciousness becomes superimposed on this Unity and needs to be canceled so that the Supreme Self can shine through. To this philosophy, Sri Ma added her own ‘personality’ and way of living in the world – which was compassionate involvement that somehow lent added credibility to the Advaita theme, through her power of bhakti or divine love.

In the 1960s, an American professor, Dr. A. Lipski met Ma together with other visitors, when she was 69-years-old. She welcomed them and he was struck by her “almost girlish” appearance and ready laughter. Then he discovered that this “almost illiterate” woman responded to the most erudite questions from visitors. He recounts that he felt as if he was being mentally stripped naked, being pointed out some of his glaring, unflattering and painful shortcomings such as his initial patronizing stance – but this took place in such a loving and compassionate way that he did not feel condemned. This is an example of Sri Ma’s generation of bhakti – said to be the easiest path to liberation for the Western devotee.

On another occasion, a devotee said, “You have found peace but we are at the mercy of numerous distractions. Why don’t you distribute some of your peace to us?”

Sri Ma replied, “If you live with things un-peaceful, how can you hope for peace? People are affected by things in their vicinity. But to find peace you do not need to stay in forest retreats. Live with something that is of the nature of peace. I

say to you, keep God always in mind; God alone is peace. Accept me as a little girl and give me a place in your hearts. Little girls need to be loved and looked after. So this is my request to you – make a place for me in your hearts.”

In general, it may be said that Sri Ma awakened and still awakens an intense desire for spiritual life in those who think of her. From his experience, Swami Vijayananda writes: *‘Love for Mother, although it is still illusion, purifies the mind and the heart, awakens and greatly increases yearning for the divine... What may take long years of struggle in the practice of yoga and Self-inquiry, is accomplished in a short period of time, effortlessly as it were, by pure and intense love for Mother... This is the best sadhana. This love then expands progressively to the all-pervading presence. The seers, saints and yogis who attained self realization have almost all followed a definite line of approach. After becoming spiritual preceptors they led their disciples along the path they have themselves trodden... Most prescribe a definite method; Self-inquiry, japa, and so on – and only aspirants of a special type can benefit from such practices. But the divine power that manifests from Sri Ma is characterized by an extraordinary versatility... No path of sadhana is unknown. Sri Ma said, ‘I can tell you that this body has not followed only one particular line of sadhana, but has covered all known lines. An ordinary individual may need to be born again and again, but in the case of this body everything was a matter of a few seconds’.* On Hatha yoga, the favorite yoga in the West, Sri Ma expressed the view that it is not much use if emphasis is on physical agility, but it is useful if done to attain stillness.

On the kundalini

According to Swami Vijayananda, Sri Ma would, on occasion, awaken the kundalini and give yogic kriyas to certain individuals, but only when the nadis had been suitably purified and ‘disciplined’. As indicated before, Sri Ma’s understanding of the nature of the subtle body was total. On one occasion when she was drawing representations of the chakras, her disciple Bhaiji, commented on them and referred

to Woodroof 's book on the kundalini, showing her the pictures from the book. Her reply was:

“I have not read about these centers in any book, nor have I ever heard anything about them from anyone. The descriptions I give are from my actual experience...” She added, “The colors of these vital centers that you find in the pictures are but their external tinge. The same substance of which our brain is made also forms these plexuses, but their shapes, structures and functions vary. Each one has its special characteristics and distinctive qualities, like the eye, or the ear, or the navel, or even the lines on the palms of your hands. In them there is an ever-changing play of various colors and sounds and their symbols called seed mantras, all being natural results of the movement of the life force and the flow of the vital fluid. During the earlier stages, when various mantras issued from these lips accompanied by transformations of the breath, at times questions like ‘What are these?’ flashed across my mind. The reply came from within and the inner structures of all these plexuses became distinctly visible like the pictures you have put before me. When a person regularly prays, performs pujas and yogic practices, meditates and reflects on the higher truths of existence with sufficient concentration, the mind substance gets purified, thought becomes refined and the centers unfold themselves. Otherwise no human can find an escape from the storm of physical urges like lust, greed and anger.”

On particular meditative states that may occur, Sri Ma said that we should not try to induce them if they don't occur naturally: experiences such as discursive thought, colors, sounds, visions, peace and bliss, and out-of-body experiences. Such experiences are meaningful but could be dangerous if not adequately guided by an adept. In regard to intuition, often associated with divine intervention, she said that it could easily be confused with subtle ego and subtle desires. Instead we need humility and to consider if it is dharmic. Her teachings to devotees were mostly concerned with the cultivation of discipline and elimination of the ego. For devotees, as indicated before, she initiated the idea of observing five *yama*, *niyamas* or practises in self-control: non-

violence, truth, honesty, absence of avarice and chastity for periods of time; and, for some individuals, the yamas would continue throughout their entire lives.

On the guru and spiritual experiences

Sri Ma maintained that one could engage in effective sadhana without a physical guru. The One may manifest through people, objects, circumstances, even though we may not be aware of it, and these then would be our 'guru'. She maintained that the quest for a physical (outer) guru will eventually lead to the discovery of the inner guru, "Go and sit under a tree. Saints may be compared to trees; they always point upwards, and they grant shade and shelter to all. They are free of likes and dislikes and whoever seeks refuge in them wholeheartedly, will find peace." However, the mind and ego can easily delude us into thinking we have discovered the inner guru or that we are special in some way. To succeed we have to be totally free of ego, anger, pride, greed and delusion. For this reason, if for no other, Sri Ma recommended a physical guru, "Just as water cleanses everything by its mere contact, so the sight, touch, blessing, even the remembrance of a real Satguru, little by little clears away all impure desires and longings... A true guru emphasizes: 'Be a vehicle for God' – it is false gurus, still with ego, who emphasize personality cultivation. From attachment to this body all other attachment will vanish. Whoever has loved this body will never be able to erase it from his mind, however hard he may try."

As indicated before, Sri Ma's teachings were simple and based on total surrender to God. But this was applied, in practice, only to those close to her. She was, to them, a constant and ruthless mentor for surrender to God and for following the life of renunciation. To others, the public, her teachings were the love that emanated from her very Self, and it was this that kept people flocking to be near her.

On the management of energies, she would often point out that those usually dissipated in pursuing gross pleasures should be focused on conquering the habits and cravings acquired over countless lives. We must cultivate a craving for God, repeat the divine name, listen to religious talks by

mahatmas, chant kirtans and bhajans, and study sacred writings. This should be pursued until God becomes an ever-present reality in our lives – until worship and the worshiper are one. For young people, Ma advocated a celibate life before marriage, with spiritual control – to learn discipline.

With regard to court cases and such altercations, she said, “We should consider who is cheating who, for anything that is lost is not our due anyway. For example would we sue someone if it was our own brother? Let karma alone punish the wrongdoer. It may be generous and cause the culprit himself to change – we should consider carefully and transcend the region of multifacedness.”

On the role of women, she believed that women do have a duty to the family but envisaged a revolutionary change in women’s status. Women should be at the helm of society while men ply the oars. Although she was not against technical progress, she questioned whether it had done much other than enhance greed, envy and fear, “Has it supplied peace and happiness?”

On social service and suffering

While Sri Ma clearly agreed that alleviating physical suffering, if carried out in a selfless spirit, contributes to one’s spiritual progress, she might say that each plays a definite role in the cosmic dance. She was more concerned with getting to the root of all suffering so that it may be eliminated once and for all. Not understanding one’s true Self is the source of all suffering, so that excessive attention to physical suffering may actually prolong the disease of suffering. In fact, from the spiritual viewpoint, suffering can be seen as the means of ending suffering.

Sri Ma urged people to accept their destiny because whatever happens is bound to happen. Adverse conditions lead us to liberation. Man is attracted to material pleasures because they are tangible, but in this world, the greatest stimulant to spiritual endeavor is pain and suffering. She said, “Remember, one is born to experience various joys and sorrows according to one’s vasanas. For the time being God comes to you in the disguise of suffering. He is purifying you in this manner...

The suffering is for your own best, as a mother slaps her child for its own good... Always bear this in mind: everything is in God's hands, and you are a tool to be used by Him as He pleases. Try to grasp the significance of 'all is His', and you will immediately be free of burdens. What will be the result of your surrender to Him? Nothing will seem alien; all will be your very own – your Self.”

Sri Ma's attitude to death was not the Western one in which death is an enemy. On this she said:

“To this world man is a visitor and it is not necessary to tarry unduly. As long as we cling to attachments and desires we have a return ticket to the world. So use will power to get rid of desires, attachments and aversions. Then grace, which is also necessary, will come... By meditation on the immortal the fear of death recedes far away; remember this: in the measure that your contemplation on the One becomes uninterrupted, you will advance towards full, unbroken Realization. Just as a leech does not leave its place without looking for something else, so the soul at the time of leaving the body hooks onto some kind of new existence according to the state of mind of the dying person – man is a creature of habit and his mind will dwell on the habitual thoughts at the time of death.”

Sri Ma said that we should not indulge in excessive mourning for the departed as the soul of the deceased is kept earthbound by the thoughts of the mourner. When one man's wife died she laughed, and when remonstrated against, she simply said, “It's one less barrier for him to cross.”

Although she said we should not cling to life, she also condemned suicide – as an attempt to change karma – leading only to more karma; but there are exceptions, as in the case of ritual suicide as in sati, or for enlightened beings who do not wish to prolong life – perhaps like Rama Tirtha.

These views are poles apart from standard Western views, which are centered on the enhancement of physical pleasure, the promotion of longevity, and the aggrandizement of the ego – the 'personality'. But what seems to happen when too much emphasis is placed on increasing material status, is an increase in mental suffering. In the Western world, man seems to have

forgotten how to be happy without an endless supply of material stimulation. The result is that if you want to see happy people and children joyfully playing around dirty gutters and rubbish, with little or no possessions, you must now go to the third world countries.

Sri Ma's mahasamadhi

The way in which great beings die is of particular interest to many seekers because it throws a light on the mental state of such individuals. Some of Sri Ma's views on death have already been mentioned. Towards the end of the 1970s, she began a process of withdrawal from public life and eventually went into a phase of unapproachability. Devotees felt sad and there were many serious faces. It was given out that Ma was not well, and indeed there were indications that the end was approaching. In 1980, her closest assistant, Didi, passed away after a period of intermittent illness.

Bithika Mukerji wrote that in 1981 and 1982, Ma was "on course for final dissolution." One of her last activities was to officiate at a special yajna in which, contrary to all tradition, woman devotees took the leading part. It was held at a sacred site close to Ma's present samadhi shrine, where, it is believed, a legendary *rishi* (Vedic seer) abandoned a yajna many years ago over an altercation with the king who had insulted the deity there. Sri Ma was to put this right. The yajna went on for 11 days and nights. Bithika Mukerji writes, '*Vedic mantras were chanted and flames arose from 11 havan kundas (fire places) in tongues of yellow, orange, red, saffron, gold, white and grey colours.*'

After the yajna, Ma still continued to officiate at religious functions among crowds of thousands, and she also attended her last birthday celebration. In June 1982, she received Mahatma Jagadguru who had implored her to cure herself. To him she said, "Pitaji (father) this (her condition) is not illness. It is a state of tension between the manifest and the recall to the unmanifest." And later, in response to his further pleas that she should make herself well, she again explained, "This body has no illness Pitaji. It is being recalled to the unmanifest... As the Atma I shall ever abide with you."

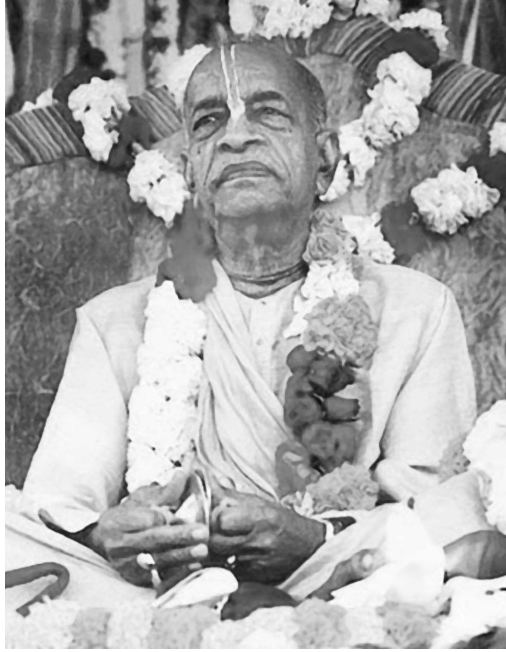
Her last messages to her devotees were, “Strive to become an aspirant towards the fulfillment of the Grace of your Guru.” And later, “Wherever you are, immerse yourselves totally in one-pointed sadhana.”

Sri Ma stopped eating some three months before her death, except for a little water at infrequent intervals. She had spent most of her last year in a house in Kankhal but had been moved to Dehra Dun where, on 25th July 1982, she spoke the reversed form of the Shiva mantra *Shivaya Namaha*. It is said in this form, it is an indication of the severance of all earthly ties. She died at 8 p.m. on 27th August 1982. Sri Ma made no farewells and left no specific instructions. The place where she spent most of her last year, in Kankhal near Haridwar, is now a museum where many can still feel her incredible presence.

Contact information

Anandamayi Ma’s samadhi shrine is at the site of the main ashram and the International Center, which is visited by hundreds, sometimes thousands, daily. The Center also has a comprehensive bookstore.

Shree Shree Ma Anandamayi International Center,
Daksh Mandir Road,
Kankhal, Haridwar 249408, Uttarakhand, India.
Website: www.anandamayi.org



Swami Prabhupada
(1896-1977)

SWAMI PRABHUPADA

The Hare Krishna Movement (ISKCON)

‘Only a pure devotee of the Lord can show one the right way of progressive life.’

‘One candle may light many other candles, yet each candle has the same intensity as the first... In the same way the Supreme Personality of the Godhead expands Himself in unlimited forms, yet remains the cause of all causes. In the Vedic scriptures the supreme original cause, Krishna, possesses unlimited transcendental qualities which attract all living beings. Five hundred years ago the same supreme cause appeared to Lord Chaitanya who declared that the chanting of the Lord’s holy names, Hare Krsna and Hare Rama, is the best way to liberation in this age.’

Swami Prabhupada became one of the best known Indian religious teachers of the 20th century through the Hare Krishna movement. Born Abhay Charan De in 1896, he led a married, householder life until the age of 54, but in 1922 he met his spiritual master, Sri Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, the founder of many Gaudiya Vedic institutes. (Gaudiya Vaishnavism is a form of Vishnu worship revering Krishna, that had first been promoted by the Hindu Saint Chaitanya in the 15th century.) Abhay became a student of Sri Bhaktisiddhanta and, though still leading a householder life, was formally initiated as a disciple in 1933 and named Prabhupada.

He had been educated in the English medium at the local Scottish Church College in Kolkata, and Sri Bhaktisiddhanta, pleased with his intelligence and enthusiasm, instructed him to spread the Gaudiya teachings in the English language to

anyone who would listen. He was a prolific writer and, in 1944, he started an English language fortnightly magazine called *Back to Godhead*, of which he personally typed the manuscripts, edited the proofs, and distributed most of the copies.

In 1950, he retired from a married householder life to devote more of his time to the writing of religious texts. He moved to the holy city of Vrindavan and lived humbly in the historic temple of Radha-Damodara there. He spent several years in deep study and writing religious articles and, in 1959, he took sanyas and started work on his life's masterpiece – a multi-volume translation and commentary on the Srimad Bhagavatam (*Bhagavata Purana*).

After publishing three volumes of the translation, he journeyed to the United States to pursue further his master's instructions of spreading the teachings of Gaudiya Vedanta in the English language. Subsequently he wrote more than 50 volumes of authoritative, highly regarded translations of and commentaries on the religious classics of India.

His time in the West

Swami Prabhupada arrived in New York City almost penniless in 1966, having secured a free passage on an old weathered tramp ship called Jaladuta. He had with him a small suitcase of personal items, an umbrella, a supply of dry cereal, several boxes of books, and about eight dollars worth of Indian currency. He was totally alone, knew no one, with no means of support, and not in youthful good health. He had no idea how he would accomplish the mission given to him by his master. To present the spiritual knowledge of the Vedas to the West must have seemed an almost insurmountable task. In a Bengali poem that he wrote shortly after his arrival, dated September 1965, he intimated: *'My dear Lord Krsna... How will I make them understand your message of Krsna Consciousness? I am very unfortunate, unqualified and the most fallen of men. Therefore I am seeking your benediction so that I can convince them, for I am powerless to do so on my own... I am sure that when this transcendental message penetrates their hearts, they*

will certainly feel englightened and thus become liberated from all unhappy conditions of life...'

After arriving in America, he struggled alone to establish a system of spreading his message. He worked from an obscure storefront in the lower East Side of New York City, and gradually, with the spiritual awakening that was taking place in the 1960s in America, interest in his teachings grew.

Many religious scholars consider that his writings contributed greatly to spreading the knowledge of Hinduism throughout the world. They are used as standard texts in many college religious courses and have been translated into over 50 languages – so that Prabhupada is now regarded as one of most authoritative writers in the field of Indian religious philosophy.

Krishna Consciousness – its purpose

Sri Prabhupada founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in 1966, at the age of 70. Based on democratic principles, it was to be more than just another sectarian faith. Rather, it was a scholarly presentation of the spiritual values described in the ancient Vedic scriptures, which comprise more than 18,000 verses in total. It was also to present the path to Self-realization, something that was at that time little understood in the predominantly Christian West. The Vedas recommend that the most effective means of achieving spiritual enlightenment is to repeatedly hear and chant the names of God – here represented by the most common ones of Hinduism, Krishna (Krsna) and Rama (Ram). The chant, considered to be of the nature of a mantra, is as follows:

*'Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna
Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama
Rama Rama, Hare Hare'*

In the chant, the word *Hare* stands for limitless energy, and the names Krsna and Rama respectively mean: He who is all attractive, and He who is the reservoir of all pleasure.

The nature of chanting God's names: Sri Prabhupada repeatedly maintained that the sublime chanting of the names generates a transcendental sound vibration, which gradually awakens us to our original and eternal relationship with God. The primary purpose of ISKCON, therefore, is to encourage all members of the human family to spend time hearing, chanting, and thinking about the Supreme Lord. Moreover, this should always be done with an attitude of service, humility and love. He maintained that the sublime chanting puts us in direct contact with the Supreme Lord through the transcendental nature of the sound vibrations themselves, so that individuals may derive the highest benefits of spiritual understanding, unity, and peace.

Management of ISKCON: Sri Prabhupada spent much of the last 10 years of his life setting up the management structure of ISKCON. He established a Governing Body Commission (GBC) in 1970, appointing 12 of his disciples – all non-renunciates – as its management team. The major purposes of the GBC was improving the standard of the temple and center management, the opening of new centers, supervising the distribution of literature, and the preaching to and education of devotees. The GBC has now expanded to 48 individuals, including many senior persons, and makes decisions based on a consensus of opinions rather than the views of one or only a few senior individuals.

Charitable and philosophical programs within ISKCON

Spiritual food: In the same way that chanting is effective in attaining Vedic knowledge, ISKCON believes that the practice of distributing prasad also enhances spiritual understanding. The program to distribute pure vegetarian food that has first been offered to the Supreme Lord, before being consumed, started in 1974. The food program now exists in over 60 countries and is said to serve more than two million meals each day. Even in wealthy countries, meals are given freely by many ISKCON centers, usually on a weekly basis, but are also

sold as a means of raising funds. The success of the food program is evidenced by the many ISKCON vegetarian restaurants found now throughout the world.

The Bhaktivedanta Institute: This is the research branch of ISKCON founded in 1976, one year before the death of Sri Prabhupada. In collaboration with the esteemed Birla Institute of Technology in Mumbai, and using Vedic insights into consciousness, the Bhaktivedanta Institute investigates the nature and origin of life, the concept of the Self, the origin of the universe, and so on. It is said to be the first organization devoted to consciousness studies, and offers MS and Ph.D degrees in life sciences, artificial intelligence, philosophy, and other subjects.

The Gaudiya teachings

The teachings conform to the belief that the individual soul is an eternal identity, which does not ultimately merge with any formless light or void – as suggested by the monotheistic Advaita schools of Hinduism. (Advaita means ‘not two’, implying the absence of duality.) However, Prabhupada maintained that Sanatana Dharma and *Varnashrama Dharma* (a person’s responsibility regarding class – *varna*, and stage of life – *ashrama*) are more accurate names for religious systems that accept Vedic authority, so that there is an intermediate state of awareness in which individuals are able to retain worldly awareness while also being cognizant of the non-dual universe.

Sri Prabhupada considered that his books and commentaries were the most valuable contributions he had made in spreading Vedic knowledge during his lifetime. For him, translating and explaining ancient Vedic scriptures became the very life and soul of his work in the world. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust of ISKCON is presently the world’s largest publisher of Vedic literature and it has been calculated, that over the last 25 years, several millions of people have read at least one of Prabhupada’s books and have felt their lives to be enriched by the experience.

One man’s comment is possibly representative of many views: “I can honestly say that spiritually, this humble Swami

and his teachings had a most profound effect on my life. Sri Prabhupada was our father, our hope and the pillar around which our lives revolved.”

As indicated before, Sri Prabhupada’s translations and commentaries have been lauded as detailed and accurate. They have filled a gap in spiritual knowledge and met the needs of both academic and personal spiritual education. An esteemed professor of religious studies at Harvard, Harvey Cox, made the following comment:

‘When I first met the Hare Krishnas I can remember thinking how surprised I was, and I wondered what this would mean in American society. The costumes, the chanting and the shaved heads seemed a little strange to me. But as I came to know the movement, I came to find there was a striking similarity in the essence of what they were teaching as in the original core of Christianity: That is, living simply, not trying to accumulate worldly goods, living with compassion towards all creatures, sharing, loving and living joyfully. I am impressed with how much the teachings of one man and the spiritual tradition he brought, impacted themselves into the lives of so many people. In my view Sri Prabhupada’s contribution is a very important one and will be a lasting one.’

Swami Prabhupada’s death

Prabhupada passed away after 12 years of his arrival in America. Over that time, he had circled the globe 14 times and established the largest Indian spiritual movement in the Western world – the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Its worldwide complex supports more than 400 ashrams and centers, 60 farm communities, 50 *Gurukul* schools based on the Vedic system of education, and hundreds of restaurants. In recent years, the most rapid expansion of ISKCON has been in the former Soviet countries of Eastern Europe.

Troubled times

As often seems to happen on the demise of highly charismatic figures, the organizations they founded falter a little following their deaths. Shortly before Sri Prabhupada

died, he appointed 11 of his disciples on the management team, only a few of whom were among the original 12 members of the GBC formed in 1970. Moreover, in different parts of the world, there were bids by individuals to take over management of the ISKCON organizations in their areas.

Of the 11 appointed in 1977, three remain prominent leaders within the movement as of the year 2012. They are Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami, Jayapataka Swami and Hirdavananda Dasa Goswami – all Westerners who have taken Indian names. Of the others, some resigned and others were expelled from the management body.

Of Sri Prabhupada's original several thousand disciples, some 70 are still acting as deeksha gurus within ISKCON, who are permitted to initiate new devotees into discipleship.

In another case, an elderly sanyasi, Bhaktivedanta Narayana Goswami, became favored by a small group of prominent leaders. He stressed the need for *Gopi*-like devotion (the mood of Krishna's cow-herd worshipers who were liberated souls).

However, others have pointed out that Sri Prabhupada believed in strict disciplic successions in which authority is passed directly from master to disciple, generation after generation. In the case of the ISKCON disciples, it was believed that no such succession had specifically taken place as none of the disciples had been sufficiently liberated, if at all, to succeed in management. So within the present day ISKCON, many believe that Sri Prabhupada returns in spirit to supervise the initiation of new disciples through ceremonial priests called *ritvics*. This idea has been accepted by a group calling itself the ISKCON Revival Movement.

ISKCON Centers and Sri Prabhupada's books can be easily accessed on the internet. Without being selective, the following books, all available from Amazon, may be recommended as starters: *Quest for Enlightenment*, *The Science of Self Realization*, *Easy Journey to Other Planets* and *Beyond Illusion and Doubt*.

Contact information

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West Bengal, India.

Websites: www.mayapur.com • www.iskcon.org



Bhagawan Nityananda
(1897-1961)

BHAGAWAN NITYANANDA

Always in Bliss

'He spoke in a strange language, addressing no one in particular, but everyone present felt he was speaking to him or her alone.'

Bhagawan Nityananda was one of the great mystical saints of the 20th century and has become a household name in many parts of Bombay (Mumbai) and Maharashtra. Thousands of people still go to ask for blessings at his mahasamadhi shrine at Ganeshpuri near Mumbai, to his first ashram in Kanhangad, Kerala, and to other places where he had lived.

Nityananda's origins and nature are shrouded in mystery but his influence on those that came to him was, and still is, profound. He was considered to be an *avadhoot* (a mystic who does not give verbal teachings), yet his 'silent teachings' and his social work for poor villagers were quite remarkable. Here are comments of a devotee who visited him for the first time in the early 1940s:

'Rain poured down in sheets. In the enclosed veranda, the atmosphere was filled with the sulphurous odors from the nearby hot springs. A few rain-drenched visitors were staring, wide-eyed, through the bars of a window at the ebony figure seated alone on a hard wooden bench inside. He was as motionless as a black granite statue – gazing into space far beyond human vision. The visitors waited expectantly for some indication that this being was alive and not merely a statue. But he seemed totally unaware of their presence. Then, after a few minutes, the figure did move: He lowered his gaze and spoke. A high-pitched voice broke the silence of the dark, rainy afternoon. He spoke in a strange language, addressing no one in particular, and continued speaking until everyone present felt he was speaking to him or her alone. My rain-soaked

clothes were completely dry by now and I started sweating under them when he looked at me and asked, 'Did you take a bath in the hot springs? Did you have the Darshan of Vajreshwari?' Awestruck, I could only nod...

'Bhagawan Nityananda was a giant among the Siddha Masters of his time. There have been very few who have equaled his stature throughout history. Nevertheless, his life was completely shrouded in mystery until Swami Muktananda, his worthy disciple, opened the treasure house of his own spiritual experiences, and I was shown who Nityananda truly was.'

Early life

Bhagawan Nityananda was considered by his devotees to be an Avatar – that is, he was already enlightened at birth and, like Ramakrishna, Anandamayi Ma and Amma, needed no guru or spiritual guide. But in spite of his great popularity, details of his birth and growing up years are not clearly known. There are several versions but this is the most popular one: He was born around 1897 in Kerala, being found in strange circumstances as a baby abandoned on a forest path and being guarded by a cobra. He lived with his adopted father, Ishwar Iyer, a well-known lawyer, through his childhood to the age of around ten. He was apparently quite mischievous but instinctively knew the scriptures in great detail.

His adopted father took him on a pilgrimage to the holy town of Kashi (also known as Varanasi and Benares) when he was ten years of age, after which he insisted on going off on his own. As indicated in *Gurudev Nityananda*, it is believed that during this period he spent a further ten years in the Himalayas.

He first reappeared in Kanhangad in south Karnataka at the age of about 20 in 1916 or 1917, and lived for some time in a nearby forest cave in deep meditation. This place is now called Guruvan (Guru's Forest) and is considered to be a holy and mysterious place that is a destination of pilgrimage for devotees from Mangalore and elsewhere. Many go there on the anniversary of his death.

After some time, he began to travel again but mainly around Karnataka and Kerala. It is also believed that these travels took him to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) when a boat on which he had been working, left suddenly. This was during the First World War and British officials in Ceylon, seeing an apparently ordinary healthy young fellow, tried to recruit him into the army. However, Bhagawan was having none of that and foiled them by slowing his heartbeat so much during the medical examination that the doctors thought he had died.

During this period of wandering he mostly lived alone and never remained anywhere for long. Usually he traveled on foot – at faster than lightning speed on some occasions – because, like some other great Avatars, he would sometimes be seen in different places at the same time. He appeared to be always in a state of total bliss. It was said that he was almost always smiling and lived in childlike innocence, so people began to call him Nityananda – which means one who is always in bliss. He accepted food and water when it was offered and sometimes it appeared that he did not eat for long periods of time. Consequently, it was believed that he didn't really need anything – he was complete in himself.

After several years in South India, he again began to travel further afield and visited holy sites throughout India – on a pilgrimage of blessing, and receiving the blessings of places with great spiritual energy. Swami Muktananda, in his biography *Bhagawan Nityananda of Ganeshpuri*, records that he could describe each pilgrimage site in great detail. According to some sources of information, he may have again lived in the Himalayas during this period. But later he returned to the South.

Around 1925, he started to build a road and develop a meditation cave complex close to Kanhangad, which attracted the attention of British authorities. They wondered where this strange fakir was getting the money for these enterprises. He was asked by visiting officials to explain and, according to records of that time, he took them to a crocodile-infested lake where he dove in and came up with handfuls of new rupee coins. Awestruck, the officials returned to their headquarters; but later another visit was made, this time led by the somewhat

arrogant English Collector Sahib of South Karnataka, a Mr. Gawne. They traveled along the road in question and eventually met the Bhagawan. Immediately, it seems, a marked change was wrought in Mr. Gawne – who dropped his official stance and appeared quite humbled. Bhagawan said that if he (Mr. Gawne) wanted the road, he could have it. After this, apparently satisfied, the party retraced its steps and as they reached the start of the road, they were amazed to see a perfect Public Works Department road sign bearing the name Gawne Road.

Bhagawan's building days resulted in a complex of 43 caves and also a large ashram at the edge of the town of Kanhangad, a few miles from the Guruvan cave. The cave complex is accessed from the ashram itself and the number of caves is considered to relate to the *Mahayantra* (Sri Chakra), a symbol of the Divine Mother, which has 43 corners.

In 1933, when the construction of the ashram was complete, he made another move. He had spent the first half of his life as a wandering avadhoot around India, but he then made his way to Ganeshpuri where he spent the second half of his life.

The Ganeshpuri period

The Ganeshpuri area is considered to be a very holy place where, in ancient times, the Sage Vashistha (the guru of Lord Rama) is said to have performed a great yajna and installed a statue of Lord Ganesh in a temple there. Bhagawan Nityananda arrived in the 1930s. At first he lived near the Vajreshwari temple, built by Shree Chimnaji Appa, a local ruler, to commemorate a victory over the Portuguese at the nearby coastal town of Vasai. He also spent time at the village of Akloli. At both places, he built rest houses for visiting sadhus and sunk wells. In Vajreshwari, he also established a clinic, a maternity home, a restaurant and a school.

Later, he settled in Ganeshpuri town around 2.5 kilometers from Vajreshwari, near the hot springs of the Bhimeshwar Mahadev temple there. The Ganeshpuri valley was at that time surrounded by a forest. The Tejasa river flows beside the town where the hot springs are located, and the valley is overlooked

by Mount Mandagni – believed to be the ‘Mandakini Mountain’ mentioned in scriptures.

At the time of Bhagawan’s arrival, the area was a forested wilderness with snakes and wild animals including leopards and tigers. There was only an overgrown Shiva temple with hot springs beside it. This is now the site of Bhagawan’s samadhi. At first he lived in a simple hut near the hot springs while the temple, as well as the hot spring facilities, were being renovated. This ancient Shiva temple has a Shivalingam (a symbol of male Divine energy) known as Bhimeshwar Mahadev which gives its name to the temple. To this day, a continuous trickle of holy water falls from the dome of the temple onto the lingam. This water is considered to be extremely sacred – no less so than the water of the Ganges that allegedly flows from Shiva’s locks. During early mornings Bhagawan used to bathe at the hot springs. Devotees would watch him and receive his darshan and feel happy.

From the earliest days, many devotees used to come to have darshan of Bhagawan even though there was no place for them to stay. Later, in 1956, devotees built a large accommodation called Kailas Nivas where Bhagawan lived, and since then the village has grown steadily to become a small town with simple hotels, rental apartments, shops, a clinic, electrification and internet connection. There is a frequent bus service to the nearby cities of Thane, Vasai and Virar.

During the building of the road to Ganeshpuri, which was undertaken at the instigation of Bhagawan, the activity again came to the notice of the Government and an official was sent to investigate. The official report noted that Ganeshpuri had become a place of pilgrimage and a road would have had to be built anyway, and since this was already done by this strange fakir, the Government had been spared that expense. Nevertheless, the District Forest Officer and the Collector came to inspect. When they saw Bhagawan they withdrew without comment, but expressed surprise that someone dressed in a loincloth could be engaged in works of social benefit.

Nowadays there are blocks of flats in and around Ganeshpuri but there are still many farms, paddy fields and

forested hills near the town. Hundreds of people visit Bhagawan's mahasamadhi shrine daily, and thousands visit it on special occasions.

Siddhis (Miracles)

Miraculous happenings took place around Bhagawan Nityananda. They are a subject of great interest in India and constitute much of the biography associated with him. Bhagawan's miracles are considered to be of the highest type and should not to be confused with those of the many wonder-working yogis that abound in India. Higher miracles manifest of their own accord and are the reason that so many miracles occur around great beings, often without even their own awareness of them.

Reports of Bhagawan's miracles would fill volumes and only a few of the best known ones are mentioned here. Some events of his dealings with officialdom have already been described. Apart from these, he is said to have caused several streams to flow which were not there before he came on the scene; one at his meditation cave at Guruvan, and another at the site of his ashram near Kanhangad. The former, the cave at Guruvan, is considered to be a place where the power of performing siddhis can be attained by yogis. There are eight huge stones there that are said to be symbols of the eight psychic powers and the eight-fold path of yoga.

Bhagawan had a great liking for inducing siddhis in his dealings with officialdom. In one instance, he was thrown into jail for vagrancy but when his jailers saw him standing outside at the same time as he was in his cell, they quickly realized that he was someone not to be meddled with and so released him. He also had a great liking for railway trains and would get on them from time to time. On one occasion, the guard put what he perceived to be a simple fellow in a dhoti off at a station because he didn't have a ticket. But when the driver tried to start the engine it wouldn't move – not until locals told the guard that Bhagawan was a divine being, and then he was allowed to board again. On another occasion, when a guard asked him for his ticket, he produced hundreds of perfect tickets from his dhoti.

Once he was observed to be walking on the surface of the Pavanja river in South Canara in the State of Karnataka and, on another occasion, the Netravati river mysteriously flooded inundating the town of Bantwal where people had been ungracious to him. When they realized their mistake, a delegation met him and asked him to intervene – he did and the floods rapidly subsided.

Later, in Ganeshpuri, the miracles continued. On one occasion when sitting before a group of devotees, to their great alarm a tiger came up behind him. He turned and gently touched the tiger's paws and said, "Devi's vehicle has come for her darshan." (The Goddess Durga traditionally rides on a tiger.) After this the tiger quietly turned and disappeared into the surrounding jungle.

Powers of yoga

On two recorded occasions, Bhagawan went into trance-like states and appeared to his devotees and other witnesses to be quite dead. The devotees naturally became very alarmed. The first occasion was in 1922 or 1923 in Mangalore. Some devotees were sitting with the master in the evening when they noticed that he appeared to be in a trance, and even after a long time had elapsed he remained motionless. Suddenly there was a flash of light on a nearby wall and the master became quite stiff and was not breathing. The devotees thought he had died and many came to pay their respects. But suddenly, on the afternoon of the following day, he came back to life. When questioned, he simply commented that the time was not yet.

The second, well-recorded event occurred around 1933 on Chowpatty beach in Bombay (Mumbai). He asked devotees to bury him in the sand and dig him up only late in the evening. His comment this time was that he had to go to Delhi on some work. These are striking examples of his mastery of yoga. However, the most remarkable feature of his life is not miracles, nor his powers of yoga, but Bhagawan himself and the influence he wielded on literally millions of devotees.

What he was like

It is said that Bhagawan was always very tranquil and in his presence, those who were disturbed or had questions would become silent and would receive answers to their questions by what seemed to be mental infusion, or through a gesture or a cryptic word full of profound meaning. Even his casual remarks produced a profound effect of deep calm and happiness on those near him, or when addressed to a particular individual or group of individuals. The atmosphere around him and in his ashram was always very quiet and disciplined – his tranquility and silence was transmitted to others who also became silent. His appearance was always auspicious, radiant, and attractive. In the heat or cold, he wore only a dhoti and sometimes a short blanket as a cloak. Swami Muktananda describes his appearance thus:

‘His skin was like a dark shining jewel with divine radiance. His forehead was high and arched, and his face completely captivating. Thick eyebrows curved over his large beautiful eyes. A river of love poured forth from his glance...’

Even to this day, to view one of the old films made of him can fill the viewer with a feeling of awe. Bhagawan never used the first person when referring to himself. One of his biographers, M.U. Hatengdi records:

‘On no single occasion either in His youth or later in Ganeshpuri, was He ever found using the first person singular (‘I’) in reference to Himself. It would always be ‘this one’ or ‘from here’.’

Bhagawan loved solitude and silence and was not given to the performance of rituals or to intellectual discourse. He had no gospel to preach. But once when a rich visitor insisted on him and his family being blessed by touch, he uncharacteristically explained that blessing is not given by placing one’s hand on somebody’s head – it is an internal transmission. In this way a master blesses countless people even when they are not present before him.

He lived very simply and often lay on a plain concrete bench covered with a single blanket. He was a champion of the poor and set up many feeding, health and other social

programs. To this day, children and wandering holy men are fed daily at the temple of his samadhi shrine at Ganeshpuri.

He loved children and the sounds of their voices playing around him could be heard all day long. He also loved animals and was frequently seen feeding them. He had a special relationship with snakes and it is said that on his first arrival in Ganeshpuri, which was infested with cobras at that time, he asked them to move away so that his devotees would not be disturbed. To this day, the area of the temple and residence is said to be free of snakes – though they abound nearby.

Bhagawan never seemed to sleep. He was absorbed inwardly in the *turiya* state (a higher yogic state beyond the three common states of wakefulness, dreaming and deep sleep). In the scriptures it is described thus:

‘It is beyond the heat of the sun, the blowing of the wind, and the coolness of the moon; beyond starlight and the blaze of fire; beyond pain and death – It is supremely blissful, eternal, and peaceful.’

He used to say, “This one is everything.” Once when a photographer asked if he could take a picture, he replied, “Take a picture of the world – this one is the world. Is there any place where this one doesn’t exist? In everything there is a glimpse of the one.”

Teachings

As indicated earlier, Bhagawan did not give lectures or hold long discourses. His teaching was by the divine infusion of spiritual knowledge. Swami Muktananda, who lived nearby, became one of the main interpreters of Bhagawan’s protracted remarks. A devotee, D.M. Parukelar, a respected lawyer, had the privilege on occasions to sit at Bhagawan’s feet and hear what were said to be his *sutra* (set of aphorisms) teachings. He would write down the words and take them to Swami Muktananda who would then elucidate their meaning.

As far as actual teachings go, Bhagawan would emphasize purity of mind, purity of feeling, and faith in God. He used to tell his devotees to meditate. When people asked questions he

might say, “Why talk so much? Meditate! You will get everything through meditation.”

Shaktipat

Though it is not necessarily supported by recorded evidence, Bhagawan Nityananda was said to be one of the few masters who advocated the direct giving of *shaktipat* (spiritual energy) to fairly large numbers of devotees. Shaktipat is often considered to be one of the keys to enlightenment, but can also lead to enhancement of the ego (having a feeling of being special) in those who are not ready to receive it.

Meeting Ajja – a ‘guru avatar’

A strange encounter between a newly-discovered ‘guru avatar’ called Ajja (grandfather) and Bhagawan Nityananda, was described by Andrew Cohen in the fall/winter issue (No. 14) of *What is Enlightenment?* Although Ajja had been around for many years, he was discovered by a well-known Indian pandit, Bannanje Govindacharya. While touring villages and expounding the teachings of Vedanta, he recognized Ajja as an extraordinary enlightened being. His recognition spread and he is now honored as a living master of Advaita and a large ashram near Bangalore has been built for him. He is hardly known in the West and it seems that many of his Indian devotees, quite understandably, want to keep it this way. His story goes something like this:

Ajja was born in 1916 into a wealthy farming family. He had no particular interest in spiritual matters but was possessed of unusual purity of heart. As a young man he was struck by a severe pain, beginning in the heart and soon encompassing his entire body. The pain lasted for around six months and then dispersed as quickly as it had arrived. Then, after a period of deep contemplation for several months on the nature of the pain that had afflicted him, he was able to arrive at the conclusion that the pain was bondage – and the cause of bondage is karma. He realized that karma is created by the thoughts of the mind concerned with the small self – the ego. On the last night of this contemplative period, he concluded that money was the most important thing in the material world

of the small self, and that all fear and insecurity was rooted in attachment to it. At this instant, he experienced an astounding vision of a beautiful woman whose body was red and who, to his horror, had blood pouring from her mouth. This he recognized as death incarnate and with the vision came the conviction that the root problem of money was possession, and possession was death. The vision of the woman then changed into a door and at this point he asked himself, "Who Am I?" The door then opened and he passed through it leaving his body – through the top of his head. Following this, his body lay on the floor apparently dead but was guarded by a Muslim farmer who had received a cosmic instruction to look after it. He would not allow members of the family to touch it (with a view to cremation). Then, after some time, a ball of light appeared and entered the body at which point he opened his eyes, rose up, and said, "The one who was here is gone – someone else has come. I am not the body, I have no mother, I have no father – I am that brightness!"

These events had a profound effect on him and after a period of adjustment (during which his family had him committed to a mental asylum – where he was declared to be quite sane), he left home and spent the next 20 years completely God-intoxicated, wandering about as a naked avadhoot. He would dance and sing and move about wherever the inclination took him, oblivious to the elements and to his surroundings. The Muslim farmer, Ishmael, became his constant companion and looked after his physical needs. Then in 1961, while in Rishikesh, he heard an internal voice that said, "Come to me. You come to me. This one is here in Ganeshpuri."

He recognized this immediately as a message from Bhagawan Nityananda and journeyed to Ganeshpuri to meet him. It is said that they spent only five minutes together staring into each other's eyes in complete silence; but after this Ajja came down from his solitary state, returned home and re-entered the life of the world – though only in the location of his village in Karnataka.

He presumably had a small following but was virtually unknown outside his immediate circle until he was discovered

as indicated above.

When Andrew Cohen met Ajja, he observed that after a session with both devotees and potential detractors who questioned Ajja's spiritual authority, what profoundly moved him was this extraordinary man's utter emptiness of a personal self. He seemed to be literally an example of someone whose mind and body had become truly empty and through which that 'One without a second' could shine – 'untainted by even a trace of any individuality'.

One could wonder if Ajja, in the 'lineage' tradition, is the true successor to Bhagawan Nityananda. From what little is known it seems that his teachings would best lie in his presence itself – his silent emanations, and that any attempt to verbalize them would only reduce their efficacy. Bhagawan Nityananda was also such a master who left no books and seldom spoke. Ajja then, albeit with a 40-year time gap, could be said to be continuing the teachings of that great saint. But where Bhagawan Nityananda may have thrown a banana or a pebble at a devotee too full of mind stuff, Ajja bears all with equanimity and fields questions with what seems to be a simple return to the Absolute. These are some examples cited by Andrew Cohen:

'Words are coming, it is true. Through this vehicle, some unknown force is acting; some power is working, using this body as an instrument. It is not this body that is speaking...'

'There is no relationship between the state of bliss... (and) my actions.'

'Words come out, but between the words that come out and that ultimate reality there is no relationship.'

'I don't have the experience that I am a jivanmukta, I don't have anything. When the 'I' is gone, the consciousness does not even raise the feeling of 'I'. So, for a jnani, that question does not arise. When there is no question of thinking, then ordinary action as in day-to-day life, does not take place. Our thoughts are transformed into contemplation, and then our day-to-day routine interactions become spiritual. In that the

regular routine itself becomes spiritual life. That itself is yogic life. That itself is divine life.'

'You have to have the experience. Only then will you be able to understand.' (and)

'Some people are the embodiment of love but the nature of their love is beyond the senses. You cannot see it with your eyes. You cannot describe it with your words.'

He has a concern, reflecting Buddhist philosophy, for the enlightenment of all beings. He said:

“This message is for the whole of humanity. If I alone become free, it is not enough to make me happy. Everyone should become free. Every soul has to become free. I have had a glimpse of that possibility, and if all were free, that would be true bliss for me.”

And on advice to devotees:

“We must understand how, by doing action, we can reach that state (where there is no difference between birth and death). What kind of action will help us to become liberated? Chanting the name of God, contemplation, surrender, truth, non-violence, detached action; one who, during his lifetime, can translate the knowledge of the Self into action, that one deserves to realize the extreme blissful state... Enquiring Who am I? What is the secret of my life, my birth? – Understanding this, realizing this through his search, even when he is engaged in actions and duties, he attains his original nature, which is bliss. So it is through action that he becomes transformed... Any action which is done as a duty without expectation of a result... any action, if you do it without expectation and selfishness, is transformed into duty. This leads you to a state where there are no emotions. One is doing but he is not doing. There is no feeling that ‘I am doing something’ – what happened to that ‘I’? It doesn’t happen all of a sudden. It has to pass through various stages. However, even the most elementary state of bliss is bliss itself. One loses his existence through knowledge and action. Through these he becomes free. Then he himself is a jivanmukta. But when that ‘I’ has gone, what is there? Where is the question then?”

“Meditation is the starting point. In the beginning you should sit. You should have that internal preparation. One has to discipline oneself. But it is not enough only to sit. It is not merely that the body must sit; your mind must also sit... The wandering mind itself is the world. The mind should not be wandering. Unless the mind is controlled, there is no meditation.”

“Who am I? – This inquiry is the foundation. When you go in search of that, it is possible to find the answer to every question on this earth... you will reach a state where there is nothing... That state is Atman... Until then, ego is there. Then it is not... ‘I’ means the state where nothing is there. It’s over. No sadhana is required for this – only search. We all have to go beyond thought to that state where there are no obstacles at all... every individual has the capacity to become That.”

Bhagawan Nityananda’s death

By 1960, Bhagawan Nityananda’s health had begun to deteriorate but nevertheless he continued to give darshan to whoever came to see him. In 1961, two months before his death, he stopped eating except for a little fruit and water. He became quite thin. On 25th July he asked to be moved to another building ‘to rest’. 15 days later, in the presence of a few close devotees, he died. His last words were, “Sadhu became Swami, Swami became Deva, and now it is Sthira Samadhi.”

His disciples decided to leave his body there for 48 hours so the devotees could have his last darshan. People were deeply distressed and many wondered who would help them now in their times of sorrow. Everywhere people spoke of Bhagawan and what he had done for them. Day and night people kept coming and it is estimated that nearly 4,00,000 people came for the final darshan of his body. He was interred at the site of his first hut in Ganeshpuri and, subsequently, a large temple was built on the site with a beautiful statue of Shree Gurudev. It is today a place of pilgrimage for thousands of devotees who still feel that they receive his blessings and have their prayers answered.

His samadhi-shrine

Bhagawan Nityananda's samadhi-shrine, temple and former residence are in the village of Ganeshpuri, north of Mumbai. It can be reached by train, bus or taxi. It is around a two-hour drive by car from Mumbai airport. The entire town is imbued with his presence. There are a number of small hotels that offer budget accommodation – rooms and apartments can be rented. Bhagawan's Ganeshpuri Temple and the nearby Gurudev Siddha Peeth Ashram, both founded by Muktananda, perform aarti to Bhagawan daily.

Two disciples of Muktananda who carry on his teachings are: Swami Chidvilasananda (Gurumayi), who heads the organization set up by Swami Muktananda (see www.siddhayoga.org), and Swami Nityananda, who has ashrams in Pine Bush, New York, and Haridwar in northern India.

Main disciples

Bhagawan Nityananda had three principle disciples: Sri Jananand Swami who lived most of his later life in the Kanhangad cave complex built by Bhagawan (he died in 1982); Sri Shaligram Swami, who lived in Ganeshpuri for many years and died just before Bhagawan himself in 1961; and Swami Muktananda who became Bhagawan's best known successor in the West and gained fame as one of the most powerful yogis of the 20th century. He continued to spread the message of Bhagawan Nityananda for some 20 years until he died. His main ashram, called Gurudev Siddha Peeth, is very close to Ganeshpuri, and he has also established other ashrams in India, the USA, Australia and Europe.

Contact information

Bhagawan's ashrams are at Mumbai and Kanhangad in Kerala. The Kanhangad ashram offers the opportunity to meditate in the Guruvan caves (5 km away), and in the cave complex that he constructed in the Kanhangad ashram itself.

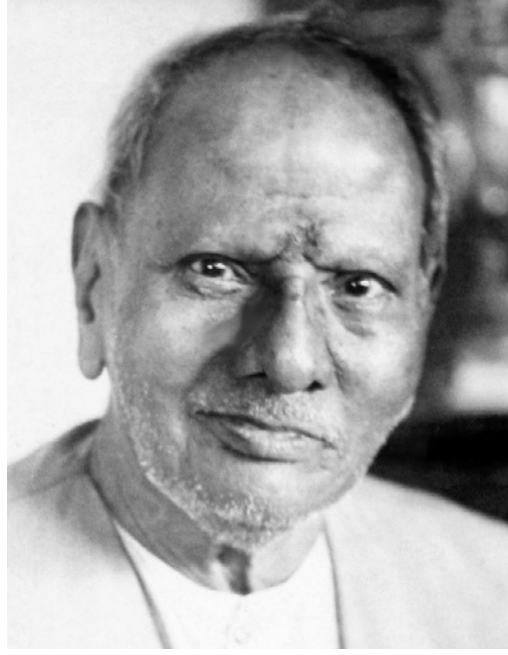
Swami Nityananda Ashram Trust,

Kanhangad 671315, Kerala, India.

Website: www.bhagawannityananda.org

Ganeshpuri, Bhiwandi, Thane 401206, Maharashtra,
India.

Website: www.nityanand.org



Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj
(1897-1981)

SRI NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ

The Master of Advaita (Non-duality)

*'A master doesn't live in memory but sees the world as it is:
A momentary appearance in Consciousness.'*

'Do you know what happened in your mother's womb? Did you have any choice in being born? Can you not see your body is nothing more than a manifestation of the five elements – so what is there to be proud of in that? But, indeed, you are something special. Find out what it is that gives sentience without which you would not even know that you exist. Then go deeper and examine if this consciousness is not time-bound.'

Nisargadatta Maharaj was possibly the most lucid of all the great spiritual teachers in explaining the nature of Reality, and it was with hammer blows like these that for many years, twice daily, he held discourses in his loft in one of the poorer sections of Mumbai, for whoever came to listen to his powerful logic. His silent emanations affected many, and produced enlightenment in some.

Nisargadatta was born around 1897 to a poor family and given the birth name of Maruti. Hindus consider it very important to record the exact time of birth of a child. It is therefore significant that he was born on the auspicious full moon day of the Hanuman Jayanti festival. His father worked as a domestic servant and later became a small farmer near the village of Kandalgaon in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra, south of Mumbai. It appears that Maruti was an inquisitive child with an interest in spiritual matters as a Brahmin friend of the family spoke to him often about Vedanta (non-duality). Later he went to Mumbai and took up petty trading with some

success. He married, produced three children, and led an unremarkable householder's life until middle age, with no indication of the greatness to come.

About himself, he said that he had an intense interest in understanding his own consciousness and pursued the investigation of this for many years. Then, well into middle age, he met Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj – a spiritual teacher of the Navanath Sampradaya sect of Hinduism. This sect has a long and auspicious tradition of embracing both Bhakti yoga and Jnana yoga, and they emphasize that the Supreme Reality can be found only in the heart. Sri Siddharameshwar gave him a mantra and meditation instructions, and shortly after this he began to have visions and fall into trances – which led to his attaining realization.

For a time, he became a wandering mendicant in the Himalayas and other places of religious significance, but then he returned to family life in Mumbai and became recognized as the living head of the Navanath Sampradaya sect in Maharashtra. But he said that this has significance only as a tradition; it is just a way of teaching and does not denote any particular level of consciousness. He maintained that, in reality, there is neither guru nor disciple, neither theory nor practice, neither ignorance nor realization – there is only what you understand yourself to be. He often said, “Know yourself correctly. There is no substitute for self knowledge.”

He is generally recognized as having been a great enlightened teacher of Advaita and, some would say, the clarity and power of his teaching has never been exceeded. In life, he always possessed total spontaneity and was always exhilaratingly fresh. He lived in a mental state so peaceful and joyful that all else paled into insignificance. He was warm-hearted, humorous, fearless and absolutely true – and although uneducated, his spiritual knowledge penetrated to the ultimate depths of all knowledge.

Devotees said that many miracles happened around him, but of this he said, “I know nothing about miracles, unless we agree that everything is a miracle. There is consciousness in

which everything happens. It is quite obvious and within the reach of everybody: Look well and see what I see.”

Maharaj died in September 1981 from the effects of throat cancer, which brought about considerable physical suffering and progressive debilitation. His disciple Ramesh Balsekar wrote of this period as follows: *‘During his last days – from May / June to 8th September, his body visibly withered day after day, but his spirit remained indomitable till the end. He continued to talk, though in a weak voice, with inherent authority, and at his mere word as it were, the listener’s illusions and delusions shriveled.’*

Fragments of the teachings

Liberation and the world: Maharaj said that the liberated see beyond the world. What may occupy the whole field of consciousness when bound in the personal world based on memory, will be only a speck to an enlightened being. Such an individual doesn’t live in memory but sees the world as it is: A momentary appearance in Consciousness. But can this be explained? Only by negation – every positive explanation is from memory and is therefore inapplicable. Yet the enlightened state, he said, is supremely actual and therefore possible and realizable.

The personality mind: The mind of the world is always restless and disturbed, seething with thoughts. Yoga, religion and all that, may seem to give some peace, but such peace is very brittle and any little thing can crack it. Even striving and seeking in spiritual pursuits is a form of restlessness. The Self – the true ‘I am’ – does not need to be put at rest because it is peace itself – not *at* peace. It is the mind that is restless. Man regards the pleasant as more peaceful than the unpleasant, but any worldly changes are not peace because they must have a beginning and an ending. The true Self is timeless, but the ‘personalities’ of the world are time-bound products of the imagination and the egoic self, which is itself the victim of this imagination. Man looks for true knowledge, but it is not something found by this kind of searching. What is thought of as knowledge is but memories and patterns of thought, motivated by pleasure and pain. Being seduced by pleasure

and goaded by pain, man searches for knowledge but only attains it when he has understood that all existence, in separation and limitation, is painful, even if it is pleasurable. When you learn to live integrally, in oneness with all life, you have gone beyond the world and all need of help.

Master and seeker: To a visitor, Maharaj said, “My life is a succession of events just like yours. Only I am detached and see the passing show as a passing show, while you stick to things and move along with them. An enlightened person, though still a person, has realized that he is the Ultimate Reality: He sees every being as he sees himself, i.e. not as a person nor as a mere ‘form’ or ‘thing’. On the other hand, a seeker expects to learn something. But how can a mere conceptual object know something?”

It is first necessary to give up identification with the body. Then, in the presence of an enlightened master, a guru if we wish to use that word, grace will bloom and the seeker will realize that the guru is none other than the consciousness within: the true Self, not the consciousness that is identified with the body and with an individual personality. It is that consciousness, pleased with the faith and love of the seeker, which will unfold the knowledge of Reality. “But there cannot be any progress if you continue to regard yourself as an entity, and the master, though different in some way, as another entity.”

Maharaj explained that he sees himself in everyone and everything, “Things happen and I just see them happen. I accept and am accepted – being all, what am I afraid of? And being also nothing, no-thing is afraid of nothing. Conversely, all things in the world, all personalities, are afraid of nothing. It is like a bottomless well – whatever falls in disappears.” He also said, “I am not attached. It is attachment to a shape or form that breeds fear. I may be angry – furious perhaps – but at the same time I know that I am and what I am: a center of pure love and wisdom. All subsides and the mind merges into silence.”

Ramesh Balsekar described an instance in which a visitor made a humorous remark at the expense of Maharaj. There

was an outburst of laughter, but the laughter of the master was instantaneous and started before all the others. Ramesh postulated that when the ego is involved there is always a gap of a second or two, during which the ego ponders and decides on a reaction – but with a master everything is spontaneous.

End the personality: To the great majority of mankind, statements like those above may seem absurd. A Western visitor said that he thought the life that Maharaj led was ridiculous and must be miserable. What is the use of being alone most of the time and just sitting in a tiny apartment? Maharaj replied that he was in fact supremely happy but, if he had been like the visitor, he would be extremely miserable – like the majority of mankind most of the time, “In the world, the memory of pain causes fear and depression and the memory of pleasure spawns desire.”

The Western world believes, for the most part, in the law of evolution of forms and intelligence, with an imagined ongoing enrichment of consciousness taking place through cause and effect. But what this so-called evolution shows is an endless state of confusion and turmoil. The happiness of the world has not improved throughout the entire span of known history. To the Western visitor, Maharaj said, “You came here because you are in pain, and all I can say is: wake up, know yourself, be yourself. The end of pain lies not in pleasure. The created world in which we live is full of contradictions. You do and undo at every step. You want peace and happiness but you work hard to create hatred and war. You want longevity but you overeat. You want friendship but you exploit. The world is like a net made up of many contradictions.

“But we can see beyond the net and see all the contradictions: Your very seeing them will make them go. Step beyond the net. It is not hard to do for the net is full of holes – and there is nothing cruel in what I say. To wake a man up from a nightmare is compassion. What are birth and death but the beginning and ending of a stream of events in Consciousness? And because of the idea of separation they are painful. Un-deceive yourself and be free – the real you is not a person, not a personality!”

The nature of reality: A questioner asked if the world is an accident, the capricious play of God, or a divine plan to awaken consciousness throughout the universe – from lifelessness to life, dullness to bright intelligence, from misapprehension to clarity – to actualize infinite potentials of life and consciousness. “Do enlightened beings see this good purpose even though the world is a mental construct? When God takes rest, do enlightened ones remain aware of the universal silence, while those not ready become unconscious for a time before the emergence of a new universe? Mahatmas say this, and that distaste for the world is necessary but temporary and becomes replaced by love and a will to work with God; but it seems that Maharaj maintains that the world is no good and should be shunned altogether? Please explain.”

Maharaj agreed that this is all true for the outgoing path when Consciousness becomes manifest. But for the path of return to the Absolute, becoming nothing is necessary. He said, “Words do not reach there, nor thoughts. To the unenlightened mind it seems all darkness and silence.” It was a statement like the Buddha’s explanation of enlightenment, “Where water, earth, heat and wind find no footing, there no stars gleam, no sun is made visible, there shines no moon, (but) there darkness is not found; When the sage, the Brahmin, himself in wisdom knows this place he is freed from the form and formless realms.”

Maharaj continued: “Then consciousness stirs and wakes up the mind which projects the world based on memory and imagination. The mind imagines goals and strives for them seeking means and ways, displaying vision, energy and courage. We cannot deny that this is what happens. But that the world displays an ongoing enrichment of consciousness, taking place through cause and effect, may not be so even though it may appear to be so from the mind’s point of view. In pure being consciousness arises and in consciousness the world appears and disappears. But before all these beginnings and endings there is always ‘I am’. Even not-being is unthinkable without ‘me’. ‘I’ must be there to witness it. So while the world can be said to appear it cannot ever be – as long as the mind is there and the body and material things are

there. (To the questioner) Your world is mind-made, subjective, enclosed within the worldly mind, fragmentary, temporary and hanging on the thread of memory.”

He explained that in the outgoing world, man may die and emerge into another life as the worlds of desire and fear form and dissolve. But the Supreme Self never sleeps and never dies. Eternally the Great Heart beats, and at each beat a new universe comes into being. He is beyond all that the mind conceives, and his (Maharaj’s) stand is where no difference exists, where things are not, nor the minds that create them. There one is at home: free from memory and expectation – ever fresh, innocent and wholehearted. Needing nothing, one is unafraid. Whom to be afraid of?

Causation: This means the succession of events in time, and physical and mental space. These events are mental categories that arise and subside in the mind. In worldly life we are always initiating actions with a view to results, but people do not know that nothing can happen unless the entire universe makes it happen. In existence, no thing has a particular or personal cause because the universe contributes to the existence of the smallest thing. But, Maharaj said, “The universe is not bound by its content because its potential is infinite – and besides it is a manifestation itself, or an expression of a principle that is fundamentally and totally free. The Source and Ground of everything is the only cause so it is not correct to speak of causality as a universal law... When the past and the future are seen in the timeless now, as parts of a common pattern, the idea of cause and effect loses its validity and creative freedom takes its place: Causality is just a worldly thing – a vortex into which the ‘personalities’ are drawn and whirled about, and to which they contribute.

“The enlightened being understands that he is a non-doer and the eternal witness to the transient. God alone is the All-Doer. All is done by God and there is no difference between God and nature. To Him things happen by their own nature. Both the All-Doer and the non-doer – the enlightened – know themselves to be the immovable center of the movable. The center is a point of void, and the witness a point of pure awareness. They know themselves to be no-thing, therefore

nothing can resist them. From the highest point of view, the world has no cause yet everything is interlinked. Things just happen. There is no separation, we are not separate selves. There is only one true Self, the Supreme Reality, in which the personal and impersonal are one. But when you create a world for yourself in time and space, it is governed by what appears to be causality. “And although one may appear to hear and see and talk and act, in reality it just happens – like digestion and perspiration. The mind-body machine just looks after things.”

Consciousness is the key: Ramesh Balsekar, who was a close and intuitive follower of Maharaj, said that when Maharaj spoke it was as if consciousness was speaking to consciousness about the nature of consciousness. He would explain that what is born in the physical body is consciousness, which needs an organism to become manifest. Awareness, which is much more fundamental and has been called Godliness, becomes consciousness when the separate personality ‘I’ has an object, the body, to reflect against. Then a gap is formed between Awareness and its reflection as consciousness that the mind does not bridge. But it is a mere concept of being a separate ‘I’ that activates the physical body and separateness. Thus, consciousness, which arises in Pure Being, produces the worlds that appear and disappear like waves and ripples on the sea.

The worldly personality ‘I’, the ‘you’ and the ‘me’ are only appearances in consciousness. So, the world can be said to *appear* but not to *be*. And all the appearances are bound in time – that is, they exist only for a period of time which may range from a few hours for an insect or bacterium, to aeons for Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – ultimately they are all just appearances and cannot have any permanent reality. But they are also basically the ‘I’ consciousness, which arises from Awareness – and this is the key, the portal, to regaining that Awareness.

Even though distinctions cannot really exist between the manifest and the unmanifest, the notion of ‘I’, Maharaj explained, could be considered in three aspects: The impersonal Absolute beyond sensory perception and unaware of Itself, the super-personal which is a reflection of the

Absolute in the manifest (as light which pervades the universe cannot be seen until there is something there to reflect it), and the personal which is a construct of the physical and mental apparatus in which consciousness manifests itself. This ‘individual’ in the form of a body-mind is always the *object* and consciousness the witnessing *subject*, but the ego deludes itself into thinking it is a subject seeing others which are its objects. Their relationship is interdependent and sentience cannot exist without consciousness; this relationship, Maharaj says, is proof of their basic identity with the Absolute. Each of us – the ‘I’ – is all there is.

The body and ego consciousness: A visitor asked: What is the difference between Awareness and consciousness – if any? Maharaj explained that Awareness is the Absolute and beyond the three gunas, while consciousness in its worldly aspect, is limited by the food, body and mind. This consciousness depends on the food-body for its existence and is subject to the three gunas, while Awareness simply *is* – the primordial state (before the concept of space-time), in which there is only unity – the unity of God, if you like. Consciousness is time-bound, but in death only the body dies together with that attribute of consciousness which is the personality or the ego. This did not exist when you were born and has been built up in the world – and, in any case, is constantly changing. But the ‘I am’ attribute of consciousness, the super-personal, does not die. Reality does not, and Maharaj maintained, “Life is never so alive as after death of the body.”

Although birth and death are nothing more than movements in the perception of events set in time and space, we become so accustomed to thinking of ourselves as bodies and egos that it is very difficult to understand the real position – that we have no control whatsoever. In dreams we have no control, and also in the ‘dream’ of the waking state we have no control. We know that we have no control in the dream state but, usually, we think we do have control in the waking state – but we don’t.

In deep sleep, consciousness retires, so to speak, and there is no awareness of a separate ‘I’. Indeed, there is no sense of the existence of the world and its inhabitants at all – there is

just existence and presence. But when a dream occurs, a spark of 'I' consciousness stirs and then an entire dream world appears including the dreamer himself – fabricated only out of memory and imagination. There, as in the waking world, the dreamer has no control over what the dream figures are doing. Most worldly people know of the waking, dream and deep sleep states but know them only separately. But to the enlightened, there is only one state of being. Maharaj said that such a person transcends the mental states and even when asleep he is aware of being asleep, "He accepts the world and has no desire to lock it up in mental pictures. Awareness is primordial, beginningless, endless, the original state. Consciousness is a reflection and there can be no consciousness without Awareness – but there is Awareness without consciousness."

Self-inquiry: The moment consciousness arises in the primordial state of unity (with the formation of the body), the sense of 'I am' arises, causing duality. But Awareness is always there, and we can know this because at the moment of waking we are aware of having been asleep – before the busy egoic mind gets involved with its affairs. Maharaj said that continuous attention to one's stream of consciousness takes one into Awareness, which is the basic existence of life, love and joy. Even the consciousness of consciousness is a movement towards Awareness, and this is the basis of Self-inquiry. The mind by its nature is dualistic and tends to go outwards, but when it is directed towards the Source within, it is almost like the beginning of a new life. Awareness replaces consciousness: the 'I am', which is merely a thought in consciousness, ceases and is replaced by Awareness, which is the source of consciousness. This is what enlightenment is.

The knower and the subtle body: Even witness-consciousness is not permanent; Maharaj said, "It is the 'knower' – which is also an attribute of being born into the world. But with awareness in deep sleep the knower knows that he is there. It is not just a matter of escape from memories, for the memory of well-being is there. There is a difference in saying that 'I was deeply asleep' and 'I was absent'. But, like the ego personality, the knower disappears with death.

Consciousness needs a vehicle in life and when life produces another body, another knower comes into being. However, there is some connection between bodies through the subtle body or the causal body – which is like a cloud of images held together.”

If jiva is something different from the Self then this is what it is: the images that are held in the subtle body.

Living in the present: Living in the present is flowing with life. Life flows like a river between the banks of pleasure and pain, but the mind gets stuck in the banks while flowing with life means acceptance: ‘letting come what comes and go what goes’. Maharaj said that we should observe what actually happens without desire and fear, for we are *not* what is happening, and we are not in control of what happens. And ultimately, even this observer – the witness – we are not. This is what we are, “We are the ultimate potentiality of which the all-embracing Consciousness is its manifestation and expression.”

The mind becomes obsessed with past memories, but memories are feeble in comparison to the present moment because of the difference created by presence. I am real for I am always in the present, and what is with me now shares my reality. There is nothing special about an event in the present over an event in the past except the fact of presence itself – it is our own reality that is imparted to the present event. On the other hand, the mind hankers after the past. Instead what we should be after is discovering the “Other mind – which unites and harmonizes, and sees the whole in the part and the part as totally related to the whole.” In going beyond the limiting, opposing and dividing mind and ending the mental process, the true mind, the mind of God, the inner Self, the Atman, is revealed. And that inclusive mind is love in action. It creates an abyss and the heart crosses it, “It becomes a question of love seeking expression and meeting with obstacles, and becoming ultimately victorious.” This is why suffering, poverty, abuse and so on, and the witnessing of them, have a role in our lives – they are the catalysts for love to become.

The enlightened teacher and sadhana

The intellect can be a barrier: In talking to a Sanskrit scholar well versed in Vedanta, Maharaj asked him, just for a moment, to forget all the knowledge he had accumulated and try to grasp what he was about to say. “Remember; keep an empty mind, empty but alert – not just void and inert.” Then he said, “Whatever the state is when we do not know anything is our true state – that is reality. In that state we did not even know our own existence. Then, spontaneously the message or the knowledge ‘I am’ came. This started duality, subject and object, sin and merit, and all the interrelated opposites. Whatever was before the knowledge ‘I am’ is truth; whatever is subsequent to it is false... That ‘I am-ness’, the sense of being present in it, is maya, prakriti, Ishwara etc. – and is an illusion. It is maya that creates the world and peoples it with many forms, from gods to bacteria. It makes Consciousness (from which arises sentience) mistakenly believe It is a particular form Itself existing in duality, and makes It forget Its true nature. It is like an illness – for certain duration – subject to the three gunas of behaviour... Then, on death, consciousness is freed. The process will have reached its allotted end. A true master can help the seeker to become liberated from the illusion.” Maharaj said, “My guru told me that that I am nothing but myself and I believed him – so I ceased caring for what was not me or mine... Be aware of your own existence and study the prison you have built around yourself. The way back is through rejection. Once this obsession with the body goes and once you become convinced that the only thing you can say about yourself is ‘I am’, then when nothing that can be pointed at can be yourself, the need for ‘I am’ is over. All you need to do is to get rid of the tendency of defining yourself. All definitions apply to the body and once these go you will revert to your natural self... And we discover it by being earnest, by searching, inquiring, questioning daily and hourly, by giving one’s life to this discovery.”

He maintained that the root of realization is trust in the teacher, but even without this the power of his words would be there, latent, waiting to be realized. The words of a realized master never miss their purpose. Teacher and disciple are each part of the other. The true guru will never humiliate. He will

constantly remind you of your inherent perfection and encourage you to seek within.

The dualistic illusion: Even sattvic things, are still gunas – they are attributes of the world. Maharaj said, “Understand that to be liberated, reality need not be ‘known’. The good people, who have read a lot and have a lot to say, may teach many useful things – but they are not enlightened. They talk of ripeness and effort, of merits and achievement, of destiny and grace. But all these are mere mental formations, projections of an addicted mind. Instead of helping, they obstruct. The real knowledge is a state of mind, while ‘teaching’ another is just a movement in duality.”

But it does help to know this – how it really *is*; and this is what a master teaches. All knowledge is a form of ignorance from the aspect of the Absolute, for it is only worldly knowledge of what is an illusion. You need not reach out for what is already within you. Give up the idea that you have not found it and just let it come into the focus of direct perception, here and now, by removing all that is of the mind. As long as you believe that only the outer world is real, you remain its slave. It is not you who suffers fears and desires, it is the personality that you think you are, the false self, built on the foundation of the body by circumstances and worldly influences. You are not that person with a name and shape that experiences joys and sorrows. When you ‘see’ an object, what really has happened is that your senses have reacted to something and your mind has identified it as an external object. But this is nothing but an appearance in your consciousness that is construed as an event in time and space – like the figures in a dream. That person was not there before you were born, nor will it be there after you die. So, “Instead of struggling with the personality to make it become what it is not, why not go beyond the waking state and leave the personal life altogether. Break the spell of the illusion that only what you perceive is real. How can a person, a gasp of pain between life and death, be happy?”

What is unchanging in the world? Maharaj said that people feel they are in bondage but it is the false ‘I’ that feels it. As we go through life, the idea about one’s self constantly

changes. So which image is real? Is there an identity which is unchangeable? The answer is that there is something that remains unchanged and that is the sense of *presence* – the sense that we *exist*. We know this without a doubt, and don't need confirmation of it from anyone else. When we are in deep sleep we are unable to sense this existence, but in the morning – the very first moment – we can feel our existence simply as 'I am' – not as an individual but just as presence. The master explains that all manifestation depends on time and space and in the absence of these, no manifestation could possibly arise in consciousness. He said, "We only exist in consciousness as one another's objects and only in the consciousness that cognizes us. When objectification ceases, as in deep sleep, the objective universe disappears. So as long as one imagines oneself as a separate entity, a person, one cannot see the total picture of the impersonal reality. And this idea is an illusion of time and space – which have no independent existence for they are only media to make manifestation cognizable. If we think of ourselves as momentary, without a past and future (without time) then where are the personalities?"

The best sadhana is achieved in silence: A visitor complained that the austerities prescribed by many gurus were just too much to bear – and Maharaj replied that they are necessary because the egoic self is so confident, it needs to be totally discouraged. Sadhana, like yoga and prolonged meditation, may seem like suffering but they are only to remind one's self not be drawn outwards. What helps most is silence. Look at yourself in total silence and do not describe or judge what you see. You are not what you seem to be. Being like this will be a movement into Self-inquiry.

In going into Self-inquiry you start by giving attention to the 'I am' – the witness. The witness too is transitory but through the witnessing of the consciousness of 'I am' – the path to reality is opened. (As *reality*, you were never born and shall never die.) Now go within, into a state which you may compare to a state of waking sleep, in which you are aware of yourself but not of the world. In that state you will know that at the root of your being, you are free and happy.

Now imagine that you are born and have a body – which, within the limits of illusion, was born from desire based on memory. This illusion is true only in a relative sense – in time and space. In fact there is no body, nor a world to contain it. There is only a mental condition, a dream-like state, easy to dispel by questioning its reality.

So, can we realize that we can witness our original state of pristine Awareness and bliss, separate from the movements of consciousness? Maharaj said that the perceiver of duality cannot be what he perceives – he must be different! And it is the inner Self that can be aware and through which the Supreme Awareness can be contacted.

The personal self is delineated by the physical body and the mind – it is the object, and the object can never know the subject. But, Maharaj said, the most likely situation under which the personal self can perceive the Self is when the mind is “fasting” – when the mind fasts, reality appears; when the mind feasts (on worldliness), reality disappears. When consciousness is tainted with self-identification (with the object), the person appears; when consciousness witnesses the object, when it is in its purity state, there is Awareness.

A true master is the Self: Maharaj said that a real living guru is very rare. But when there is complete surrender, life dawns “full of love and beauty.” Then a guru is not important, for the disciple has broken the shell of self-defense. So make your goal your guru. The real Self is not affected by the comedy that plays in this world for a time. Duality is a temporary state. Leave others alone and examine yourself: What are you? How did you come to be born? What is the purpose of life? These are weighty matters and need to be attended to. The fact is that we are never really without a guru, for the inner guru is timelessly present in the heart. In life, the guru may externalize as an uplifting factor – a mother, a spiritual teacher, a propensity to be moved by words or events, or simply as an inner urge towards goodness, humility and perfection. What the guru wants is simple – so learn self-awareness, self-control, self-surrender. Maharaj says that may seem arduous but it is easy if you are earnest – and compassion is the foundation of earnestness. Respond to the

sorrows of others as the Buddha did. But if you are callous, your own suffering will propel you to ask the inevitable questions. This is why some masters impose austerities. It's like the suffering of sadhana is either entered into voluntarily, or is imposed by the guru – which may amount to just life experience, like the dhamma of Buddhism. In either case it is just happening. Work in the world should be done without making it a means to something else. A thing is worth doing for its own purpose and meaning.

For some simple folk just singing the praise of God is enough. To these the teacher may give a mantra. The constant repetition of a few words is all the food that is needed to live on, “It may seem like madness but it is divine madness. It may seem like tamas but it is also sattva. It will take the form of complete dispassion, detachment, immutability. And it becomes a foundation on which an integrated life can be lived.”

Should one change gurus (as most gurus advise)? Maharaj said, “Why not? Gurus are just like milestones. It is natural to move from one to another. The eternal guru is the road itself – the road is life and life is the best teacher. It is the same as dhamma. Once you realize that the road is your goal, enjoy its beauty and its wisdom – life ceases to be a task and becomes natural and simple, in itself an ecstasy.”

On how will you know you are succeeding, he said, “Watch yourself... If you see yourself changing, growing, you will know you have the true guru. More essential is becoming a true disciple – life will bring you a guru. Until you realize yourself you cannot know who is a real guru.”

How an enlightened master helps the world? In answer to a question about whether he helps the world, Maharaj said, “I do help always – from within. My Self and your Self are one. The thought of a master pervades all humanity and works ceaselessly. And being anonymous and coming from within, it is more powerful and compelling.”

To a visitor who was grieving the loss of his son in an accident, he explained that there is no ‘me’ and no ‘you’. What he called his son was just a chance event over which he had no

control – and now it had come to an end. Most of us go through life enjoying the usual pleasures and suffering the usual pains without ever once seeing the true perspective. But grief, such as the man was experiencing, presents an opportunity to see the transient as transient, the unreal as unreal, and to realize one's true nature, "From the point of view of the false, you are a person who enjoys, suffers etc. It is the Self that mistakenly identifies as a person and is conscious of being it. As long as you identify yourself with the body-mind organism you are vulnerable to sorrow and suffering: Outside the mind there is just being, not being father or son, or this or that."

Maharaj explained that our attention is fixed on things. When, through the practice of detachment, we lose sight of sensory and mental states, pure being emerges as the natural state. By focusing the mind on the sense of being, the 'I am so-and-so' dissolves. Then all becomes one, and the One is you. The master constantly points this out, "Unmanifest, manifest, individual, personality, all are merely mental attitudes – points of view. There is no reality in them. The real experience is silence. You cling to personality but you are conscious of it only when you are in trouble. Otherwise you do not think of it. The use of the unmanifest is like sleeping in order to wake, dying in order to live, destroying in order to build (not the body which is a dead thing anyway until it gets prana). But the Supreme is the universal solvent. Without the absolute denial of everything, the tyranny of things would be absolute. The Supreme dissolves you and thus reasserts your true being... And the thought of 'me' as a separate identity brings the feeling of bondage, "But to realize that *all there is, is I am*, is the end of bondage."

His death

Maharaj died of throat cancer but throughout the months that his body succumbed to the painful disease, he remained calm and detached, and continued teaching, though with a voice growing weaker and weaker, till the end.

Contact information

Nisargadatta Maharaj's legacy has been a number of enlightened successors – the best known being Ramesh Balsekar. There is no official website for Nisargadatta Maharaj, but many have been set up by his devotees.



Swami Muktananda
(1908-1982)

SWAMI MUKTANANDA

Founder of the Siddha Yoga Peeth

*'The supreme bliss that pulsates in the wake of meditation
is your pure essence.'*

One of the principal devotees of Bhagawan Nityananda was Swami Muktananda. He was responsible for founding several ashrams, the two major ones are Gurudev Siddha Peeth close to Ganeshpuri, and the Shree Muktananda Ashram at South Fallsburg, NY, USA. He was also responsible for the name Siddha yoga, derived from the term 'siddha' meaning perfection, and also used to designate spiritual power. In Siddha yoga there is much focus on the transmission of spiritual energy from guru to disciple, something that is possible when the guru is an enlightened being and a siddha master.

In a manner of speaking, Swami Muktananda did a great deal for stimulating interest in the Indian guru profile in the West during the 1970s – though he was ever warning against “false gurus” – advising people to test the guru well, saying that the guru who can transform your inner state for the better is the one for you.

Muktananda was born in 1908 in Mangalore and given the birth name of Krishna. At the age of 15 he entered sanyas and was given the name Muktananda – meaning bliss of liberation. In his youth he saw Bhagawan Nityananda on several occasions, who was at that time located in nearby Kerala. On one particular day the saint embraced him and stroked his cheek, and it is said that this sparked his life-long interest in spirituality and in seeking enlightenment. This took him on a great journey to many holy places across India, during which time he became adept in several forms of yoga.

In the mid-1940s, he began to visit Bhagawan Nityananda who by that time had located to Ganeshpuri. Though at first Bhagawan did not acknowledge him, he surrendered to the great man completely and would stand for hours at the back of the crowd and never approach unless invited. At that time he knew that it was not the physical guru that mattered, for the guru really represents Consciousness Itself. Finally in 1947, Bhagawan initiated him through the sacred mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* (in the name of Shiva), saying that he should repeat the mantra with a feeling of identification with Shiva. In his remarkable book *Play of Consciousness*, Muktananda said that he felt a ray of light passing from Bhagawan to himself – and thus he had become enlightened. Many people have actually experienced shaktipat by simply reading that particular book.

For the next five years Muktananda lived in a hut near Ganeshpuri, which slowly grew into the Gurudev Siddha Peeth ashram. One of his duties was to interpret the sayings and utterances of Bhagawan to visitors, particularly to well-educated ones who had serious spiritual questions. Muktananda was slowly becoming more important and just before Bhagawan died in 1961, he is said to have called him to his bed and transferred lineage to him. Of this he wrote:

'He stroked my head for a long time... and then transmitted something to me... There are no words for that... you experience your all pervasiveness and your personal individuality is destroyed.'

Following that, Muktananda spent a further nine years during which the Gurudev Siddha Peeth Ashram was formed, and expanded to become internationally known. He made sure that the Trust deeds outlined its purpose as: fostering the seeing of God in each other, the elimination of suffering, and the attainment of extreme bliss. As the sixties progressed, more and more visitors came to Ganeshpuri and the ashram expanded its accommodation facilities considerably. Muktananda formalized the ashram schedule to promote meditation, chanting, and seva. He would explain that we chant to purify the mind and should maintain propriety in dress and conduct – and, of course, see God in each other. He

had a fiery demeanor and was ever ready to harangue anyone for digression.

Towards the latter days of the 1960s, Muktananda was also becoming better known in the West and more and more Western visitors were coming to India. Some of these invited him abroad. One of them was the American spiritual stalwart Ram Dass, author of *Be Here Now*, and another was Paul Zweig who wrote a book about him called *Three Journeys*, the third part of which was entitled *A Bright Yellow Circus* and dealt with his experiences with Swami Muktananda. Muktananda's first world tour lasted three months and took him to Singapore, Europe, Australia and the United States.

His second world tour started in 1974 and lasted about two years, much of it spent in North America where he gave rise to what could be called a meditation revolution. A new vehicle for the transmission of shaktipat was invented and called the 'Intensive'. It consisted of two full days of meditation and chanting along with spiritual lectures and instructions given by swamis of Siddha yoga and other teachers, and the darshan of the guru given by the touching of hands for the transmission of shaktipat. Pretty soon there were droves of devotees experiencing shaktipat and embracing changes for the better, in their lifestyles. At the same time, the Muktananda Ashram was formed at South Fallsburg, along with another ashram in California – and many centers across the world also arose.

Then the SYDA Foundation was formed to handle finance and undertake a number of charitable activities in India, including giving meals for school children, eye camps to remove cataracts, setting up clinics and assisting with housing the poor, in a number of locations.

Muktananda was an extraordinarily gifted Kriya yogi who induced kriya experiences in his devotees with great regularity. It is said that such experiences arise from the movement of the kundalini energy through the spine of the subtle body. Typical kriyas would include uncontrolled crying, the hearing of celestial sounds and sacred music, having visions of saints and angels, cosmic travel, and experiencing spontaneous, sometimes violent, yogic asanas and mudras. One man in

Australia, who had been unable to get work for a long time, dreamed that Bhagawan Nityananda took him flying over a city and, at one point, indicated a large factory beneath them, saying, “That is the Nissan factory.” The following day he received an unsolicited letter from Nissan offering him a job on the assembly line – sticking on engine detail labels. Usually, it is said, it is not recommended to give these kriya experiences to just anyone, because harmful effects can arise.

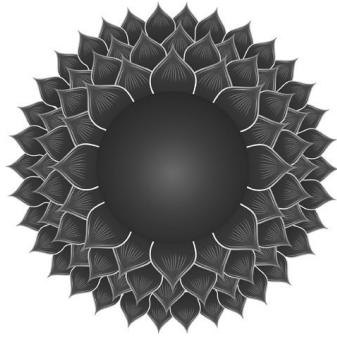
His death

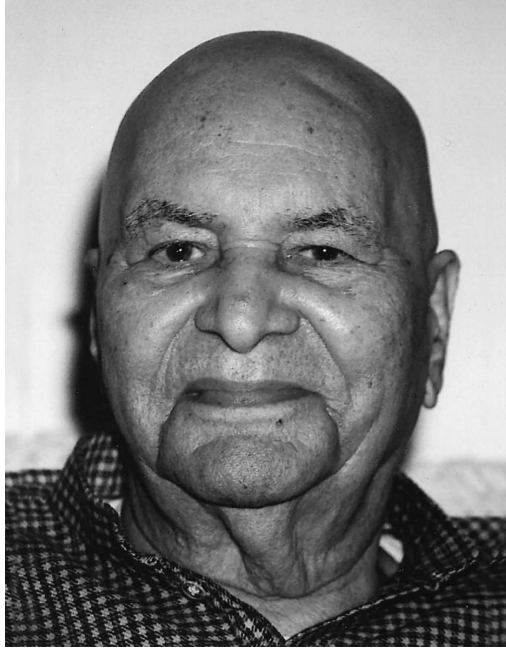
Swami Muktananda suffered a heart attack during his birthday celebrations in 1977 but, nevertheless, still undertook a third world tour in 1978. At that time he also initiated a group of Western disciples into the Saraswati Order of Monks. Before his death on 2nd October 1982, he formally announced his two successors who became Gurumayi (Swami Chidvilasananda), and her brother Subhash who became young Swami Nityananda (Swami Mahamandaleshwar) for a number of years before his retirement. After an altercation, Gurumayi attained control of the ashrams at South Fallsburg in New York, Ganeshpuri in India, and elsewhere.

Contact information

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Papaji (H.W.L. Poonja)
(1910-1997)

PAPAJI
H.W.L. POONJA

*'Surrender to that Source through Whom you speak;
and plunge into eternity.'*

Papaji was a renowned Advaita teacher who was born in 1910 and died in 1997. His teachings were centered on Self-inquiry as expounded by Sri Ramana Maharshi – that is, the finding of one's identity through introspection. He taught without formality and had many Western devotees. After years of following various gurus and getting nowhere, he became enlightened as a result of his contact with the great master Sri Ramana Maharshi. It is said that Sri Ramana divided seekers into three categories: Those who only need to hear the Truth once from an enlightened master to realize the Self; those who need to contemplate for some time before knowledge of the Self comes to them; and those, the majority, who have to undergo a long preparation before they are ready to experience Reality. Papaji seemed to have been one of the former. Much of the information on his early life, up to the stage of his enlightenment experience, is recorded in a sub-section *H.W.L. Poonja* of the book *Papaji: Interviews* by David Godman.

Early days

Papaji came from a devout Hindu family and his mother was a sincere worshiper of Lord Krishna. At the age of eight, he had an experience which he later came to know was an enlightening experience. He was so consumed by this experience that it left him immobile, for two full days, in a peaceful, blissful and happy state, unable to communicate with anyone yet aware of all that was going on around him.

Subsequently, he followed his mother's example in becoming a Krishna devotee, and was particularly attracted to

a picture of the child Krishna. He became an intense bhakta of this youthful form of Lord Krishna who is depicted as mischievous and always stealing butter from the Gopis. As a result of this, visions of Krishna began to appear to him. He lost interest in schoolwork and also lost sight of his earlier experience of realization. Nevertheless, from this early experience, he retained an intense desire to search for God.

His next major spiritual experience occurred at the age of 13, when he came across a picture of the Buddha. He writes: *'I immediately felt an attraction for him, even though I didn't know any of his teachings... I simply fell in love with the beautiful face and decided that I should try to emulate him. I didn't even know what meditation was, but undeterred, I began to sit in a cross legged position in our garden.'* For some time after this, somewhat to the consternation of his family and the neighbors, he emulated other activities of the Buddha – such as begging for alms and preaching sermons.

His next unusual experience was when he went into deep samadhi meditation – to the point where a doctor had to be called. He could not be aroused, although he was aware of what was going on. He began to utter strange words in Sanskrit that mystified everyone – until a local pandit recognized them as portions of the scripture *Yajurved*. On another occasion, while at school, he became immobile after hearing the words *Om Shanti, Shanti* (Om Peace, Peace) recited during the school assembly.

His search for enlightenment

As a result of all this spiritual activity, his school work suffered and his marks were not high enough to continue on to higher education. Instead, for a time, he joined the Indian army and eventually became an officer. But then his desire to find God reasserted itself and he began a concerted effort to find a spiritual master to help him in this endeavor. He felt that such a master would necessarily have seen God himself, and that he should have the ability to pass this experience on to others. He was still, at that time, a sincere worshiper of Krishna but there was a problem: Krishna was not always present, and nor could He be called upon at will.

He began to tour India, visiting almost every well-known ashram and guru in the country. These included Swami Sivananda, Tapovan Swami, two of the Shankaracharyas (current representatives of the sage Shankara), Swami Kailasananda of the Ramakrishna Order, and many lesser-known individuals. Of this period he wrote:

'At each place I stopped, I asked the same questions: Have you seen God? Can you show me God? All of them responded in much the same way. They tried to give me a mantra, or they tried to make me meditate. All of them made a point of saying that God could not be produced like a rabbit out of a conjurer's hat, and that if I wanted to see him I would have to undergo years of strenuous sadhana.'

But none of this was what he wanted to hear, and he was not interested in undergoing years of strenuous sadhana. Eventually he returned home and shortly after that, he received an unsolicited visit from a sadhu to whom he asked the same question. To his surprise the sadhu gave a positive answer. He said, "Yes, I know a person who can show you God – his name is Sri Ramana Maharshi."

Soon after that he managed to get a job in Madras, not far from Sri Ramana's ashram in Tiruvannamalai. On going there he was surprised to find that the sadhu that had visited him was none other than Sri Ramana himself on one of his out-of-body excursions. According to his inquiries, he was informed that the sage had never left the ashram, at least physically, for the past 20 years.

So he asked the same question of Sri Ramana, "Can you show me God?" This time the sage gave what to him was a disappointing reply. He said, "No, I cannot show you God because God is not an object to be shown. God is the subject. He is the seer. Don't concern yourself with objects that can be seen. Find out who the seer is."

Papaji would have dismissed this explanation without further consideration if it had not been for an experience that he immediately had in the sage's presence. Of this, he said, "At the conclusion of the words he looked at me, and as he gazed into my eyes, my whole body began to tremble and

shake. A thrill of nervous energy shot through my body. My nerve endings felt as if they were dancing and my hair stood on end. Within me I became aware of the spiritual Heart. This is not the physical heart; it is, instead, the source and support of all that exists. Within the Heart I saw or felt something like a closed bud. It was very shining and bluish. With the Maharshi looking at me, and with myself in a state of utter silence, I felt this bud open and bloom. I use the word ‘bud’ but this is not an exact description. It would be more correct to say something that felt bud-like opened and bloomed within me in the Heart. And when I say Heart I don’t mean that the flowering was located in a particular place in the body. This heart, this Heart of my Heart, was neither inside the body nor out of it. I can’t give a more exact description of what happened than that. All I can say is that in the Maharshi’s presence, and under his gaze, the Heart opened and bloomed. It was an extraordinary experience, one that I had never had before.” Nevertheless, Papaji’s inclination to look for God outside of himself still persisted. He formed the opinion that the Maharshi and his followers were a lazy bunch because they mostly just sat around all day. The Maharshi hardly said anything nor gave talks about God, and he didn’t appear to be chanting God’s name either – he was just sitting there doing nothing. Papaji moved out of the ashram and engaged in playing with his visionary Krishna again – who at that time appeared to him quite frequently.

But after a few days, he was drawn back to the ashram and the Maharshi gave him a clue to what was going on. He inquired about the visitations from Krishna and asked, “Do you see Him now?” Papaji replied that he did not, at that actual moment, see Krishna but that He appeared quite often. He recounts that there was a distinct element of ego in this assertion. Then the Maharshi continued: “So Krishna comes and plays with you and then He disappears; what is the use of a God who appears and disappears? If He is a real God, He must be with you all the time.”

Papaji had been feeling quite smug about having visitations from Krishna, which the Maharshi obviously did not, but he had experienced a deflation of ego at the Maharshi’s last

remark. After this, he left the ashram and returned to his home in Madras. There he resolved to intensify his worship of Krishna, mostly through the repetition of the divine name and by attempting to repeat it 50,000 times a day – synchronizing the name with each breath. Then, after some time, he received a celestial visitation of the deities Rama, Sita, Lakshmi and Hanuman. They explained that they were visiting him because he was such an ardent bhakta yogi of Krishna. However, after this visit, he began to find great difficulty in the repetition of Krishna's name. He went to the Ramakrishna Mission in Madras and was told that this sometimes happened. It was what the Christians called 'the dark night of the soul'. He should continue to try and also attend the regular satsangs held at the Mission. But for some reason, he didn't find this advice very satisfactory and his thoughts turned once more to Sri Ramana Maharshi.

He returned to the Maharshi's ashram and managed to secure a private audience. He explained that for 25 years he had been repeating the name of Krishna but now, he explained: "My mind refuses to engage in thoughts of God. What has happened to me and what should I do?"

The Maharshi replied by asking, "How did you come here from Madras?"

"I didn't see the point, but I politely told him – by train," he replied.

"And what happened when you got off the train at Tiruvannamalai?"

"Well, I engaged a bullock cart to take me here."

"And when you reached the ashram, what happened to the cart?" "It went away, presumably back to the town."

The Maharshi then explained what he was getting at: The train brought him to Tiruvannamalai and then he got off because he didn't need it anymore. Then the same thing happened with the bullock cart – it was needed only for the journey to the ashram. And that was what had happened with his sadhana, it had brought him to a spiritual destination. So it was that he didn't abandon his sadhana – it was the sadhana

that had abandoned him because he didn't need it anymore. Then the Maharshi gazed steadily at him again. Papaji described this experience, which was to be his enlightenment, thus:

“I could feel my whole body and mind being washed with waves of purity. They were being purified by his silent gaze. I could feel him looking intently into my Heart. Under that spell-binding gaze I felt every atom of my body being purified... A process of transformation was going on – the old body was dying atom by atom, and a new body was being created in its place. Then, suddenly, I understood. I knew what this man who had spoken to me was, in reality, what I also was, what I had always been. There was a sudden impact of recognition as I became aware of the Self... I knew unerringly, that this was the same state of peace and happiness that I had been immersed in as an eight-year-old boy... I cannot describe exactly what the experience was or is because the books are right when they say that words cannot convey it... The source of that knowledge will always remain indescribable.”

Papaji had spent a quarter of a century in obsessively searching for God and had at last found God within as his very own Self. He maintained that many people have temporary glimpses of the Self, as had happened to him when he was eight years old. And this happens to man in the presence of a realized master. But, he said, to maintain and make permanent the experience one must develop a consuming desire to want God, “A single thought or desire other than the thought ‘I want God’ or ‘I want Self-realization’, is enough to prevent the realization from taking place.”

In the first few months after his realization, Papaji didn't have a single thought. He explained, “I could go to the office and perform my duties without ever having a thought in my head... Whether I was sitting in the hall with the Maharshi, or shopping in town, everything I did was performed without any mental activity at all. There was an ocean of inner silence that never gave rise to even a ripple of thought. It did not take me long to realize that mind and thoughts are not necessary to the functioning of the world. When one abides in the Self, some divine power takes charge of one's life. All actions take place

spontaneously, and are performed very efficiently, without any mental effort or activity whatsoever.” After this, he came to know that in his previous life he had been a yogi in South India. He had been a great Krishna bhakt who had frequently reached the state of nirvikalpa samadhi (a high state of meditative consciousness), but had not attained enlightenment.

His knowledge of other enlightened beings

Papaji maintained that in all his travels to ashrams and meetings with yogis and gurus, up to the beginning of his wanderings in 1966, he had seldom met a truly enlightened master. He cites this as an indication that the state of total enlightenment among gurus is quite rare. Apart from the Maharshi, he claimed to have met only two other men who had, in his opinion, attained full and complete Self-realization. A Muslim *pir* (a priest of a Sufi order) was one. The other was an unknown forest sadhu whom he met in Karnataka. Of this encounter, he said:

“I was waiting for a bus in an isolated location near Krishnagiri, a town located between Tiruvannamalai and Bangalore. An extremely disreputable looking man approached me. He had tattered filthy clothes and open wounds on his legs... We talked for a while and I offered to treat his wounds but he wasn't interested in having assistance from me... He just said, 'Leave the maggots to their destiny' and then said 'good-bye' and walked off into a nearby forest. I had recognized him to be a jnani and was idly speculating on what karma had led him to neglect his body in such a way, when a woman approached me. 'You are a very lucky man,' she said, 'that was a great mahatma. He lives in this forest but he almost never shows himself. People come from Bangalore to have his darshan, but he never allows anyone to find him unless he wants to meet them'.”

Of the Muslim *pir*, Papaji makes the point that when he stayed at his house in Madras, he kept himself locked up and refused to see visitors who wanted to see him. And these two encounters “reflect great credit on the Maharshi, for only he made himself available to anyone who wished to see him”.

His later life

After his enlightenment in 1944, and until 1966 when his children were grown up and married, Papaji led the life of a householder. In 1947, just before Independence and the partitioning of India and Pakistan, there were frequent conflicts between Muslims and Hindus fleeing the areas to be partitioned. There were many cases of robbing and killing of the fleeing refugees. At this time Papaji's parents were still in Lahore, an area about to become part of Pakistan, and were in danger. He did not want to leave Madras but the Maharshi persuaded him to go help his parents, and somehow he knew that this was to be the last time that they would be together. The Maharshi also told him where to sit in the train – in a Muslim carriage. As a result of this, and in spite of the fact that he wore all the marks of being a Hindu, he escaped being massacred and also brought 35 members of his family and extended family to the safety of Lucknow. For the next 20 years, he held many jobs in many parts of India; one for several years as the manager of a mine in the deep jungles of South India.

In 1966, he retired from family life and became a wanderer. He traveled to all parts of India and met many great beings, including Krishnamurti, and the great yogi Nisargadatta Maharaj. During this phase of his life, he never settled at any one place. At one stage he became involved with hippies from the West and at the invitation of some of them he visited Australia, South America, Europe and the USA; but, at no time would he consider setting up an ashram and settling down.

That was until the early 1990s when failing health forced him to return to Lucknow. There he would meet small groups of seekers in his family home; later, when the numbers swelled, in a hired house nearby. This period can be considered as the one in which he gave regular teachings, chiefly by following the methods of Self-inquiry. His followers were mostly Westerners and included many of the Osho Rajneesh community who were looking for quick-fix enlightenment. He would always turn the attention of his

visitors inward while fielding questions both genuine and ridiculous.

Some of his teachings

In recent times and until his death, thousands of people had gone to Papaji in their search for enlightenment. He was known for his quick wit and sometimes the bluntness of his discourses. When fielding questions, he would guide the questioner back to the ultimate query: “Who is asking this question?”

When asked by an interviewer if he could explain his teachings in a single sentence he said, in true jnani manner: “No teaching, no teacher and no student.” When the interviewer said, “Then why am I here?” He replied, “To find out who you are, which is nothing.” In the same taciturn style, when asked what kind of shrine he would like to commemorate his teachings and his life, he said, “Not one brick.”

Like other great masters he would say that we are all already liberated – but we just don’t know it: “You are already here and you are already free. You think or have a notion that you have to search for something. You have been told this many times. Now just for a short while, sit quietly and do not activate a single thought. You will discover that what you were searching for through many methods or sadhanas is already there. It’s what was prompting you to meditate. The desire for freedom arises from freedom itself. Most meditation is only mind working on mind. You are somewhere where the mind can’t trespass.”

He would explain that our true nature is unbounded, unlimited Consciousness. We simply need to realize that fact. We do not need to practice anything to become what we already are. Going within means listening to your own inner guru – and your own guru is your own higher Self. A true external guru will not ask you to do things; he will introduce you to your inner guru, and ask you to keep quiet. In an interview with Catherine Ingram, published in *Papaji: Interviews*, he expounded many of the views that illustrate his teaching method. Some fragments are summarized as follows:

On surrender: The persistent inquiry on the Self does require surrender. Surrender to what? He would say, “Surrender to that Source through which you speak, through which you see, through which you breathe, through which you taste and touch, through which this earth revolves and the sun shines, through which we ask this question itself. Everything happens through that Consciousness in which even ‘emptiness’ is housed – but which is beyond the concepts of eternity or space or emptiness itself – which accommodates the space or emptiness or eternity, within which everything is existing, unborn and undying. To That supreme power which is beyond the beyond: Your own higher Self – to that you have to surrender.”

On duality: In Self-inquiry, getting rid of notions that we are separate from anything is necessary, and this includes the identifying with all names and forms. He said, “You have to disidentify with things that are not true. No need to identify with the ocean of the Source because you are the Source. When your identification with the unreal has vanished, then you will be what you have always been, what you are, and what you will always be... I don’t indulge in any kind of differences. The Divine is playing. Whatever it is doing, it is being done by the commands of that Supreme Source. And all are my own Self – having different roles to play, and they are being beautifully played.”

Mind: Papaji often talked about the mind and thoughts and of the nature of the ‘I thought’. On this he would say, “Mind is thought existing as subjects and objects. The first wave of consciousness is ‘I’, then ‘I am’, then ‘I am this, I am that’, and ‘this belongs to me’. Here the mind begins. Now keep quiet, and do not allow any desire to arise from the Source. Just for an instant of time don’t give rise to any desire. You will find that you have no-mind and you will see that you are somewhere indescribable, in tremendous happiness. And then you will see who you really are.”

Ego: He explained that ego also arises from the ‘I thought’: “The ‘I’ arises, then mind, then senses – seeing, smelling, tasting, and hearing, touching. There must be ‘I’ before ego arises. This notion of ‘I’ is the root cause of the ego, the mind,

manifestation, happiness, and unhappiness, in fact *samsara* – the stuff of the world. Now return to ‘I’ and question what this ‘I’ is, what is it? Where does it come from? – This is the essence of Self-inquiry. Just jump in without sense of doership. You have only to be watchful – vigilant, attentive, serious. No doing, no thinking, no notions, no intentions – leave everything aside, simply keep quiet and wait for the result. You will have broken at least this process of ego, mind, senses and manifestation.”

Spiritual practices: Practices such as *Vipassana* – the Buddhist practice of awareness – are, according to Papaji, something different to Self-inquiry because any ‘practice’ has an objective – something to be gained. We should find that through which we practice anything, “What is that through which we practice? Through what do we derive the energy to put anything into practice? If you want to go somewhere, you have to walk, so there must be some energy. People are doing practices for freedom. If you want freedom then find out what bondage is. Sit down calmly, patiently, and question: How am I bound? What binds you except these notions, concepts and perceptions? Forget about all these things – instantly. Now who is seeking freedom? The seeker himself is not yet tackled. There is a saying: What you are looking for is what is doing the seeking.”

Thoughts: Quelling thoughts is very difficult and has the nature of a tug of war. This is not the best way to deal with them. He said, “So long as you are powerful and you are checking, they are not there. When you don’t check the thoughts quickly come back again. So don’t worry about thoughts. Let them come and play with you as the waves play with the ocean. When the waves disturb the tranquility of the ocean, it doesn’t mind. Let the thoughts arise, but don’t allow them a landing place.

So much emphasis is placed on getting rid of thoughts, as though a mind without thoughts is tantamount to an awakened state – no, no, no. Let the thoughts come. If you reject them they will forcibly invade through your door. So remove the door. This door is ‘I am different from consciousness.’ Let us not fight anything. Let us be one. You will see your own face

in everything. You can speak to plants. You can speak to rocks, and you are the hardness of rock itself. You are the twittering of birds. You have to see: You are the shining of the stars.”

Afterlife: Papaji was not interested in speculation on an afterlife. He said, “This experience I speak about is here and now. What is not here and now is not worth attempting or attaining. To enjoy this here and now is to get rid of notions that you are not here and now. The Truth must be simple, no complications, and no falsehood. Where there is two there is fear, and there is falsehood.”

Life is a dream: On the question of the reality of life, he said, “Life has been referred to as a dream because it is not permanent. The great sages don’t differentiate between the waking state and the dream state. In a dream you are seeing mountains, rivers and trees which appear real. It is only when you wake up that you say, ‘I had a dream’, and see that those things were transitory... Our waking state now seems permanent when compared to the dream, but, like the dream, when we wake up to Consciousness Itself, this so-called waking state also appears to be a dream.”

On compassion and service: He said, “When we know the supreme state, our own Self, from within there arises compassion. Automatically we are compelled. It is not the same as service, doing things. Service has to do with somebody else. When the command is compassion, there is no one doing any service for anybody else, as when you are hungry you eat. You are not in service to the stomach, nor are the hands the servant when they are putting food into the mouth. Like this we should live in the world. Service is the responsibility of the Self. Otherwise who is doing the service? When the action is coming from the ego, there is hypocrisy, jealousy and crisis. When the doer is not there, then compassion arises. If a person is realized then all his actions are beautiful.”

Desires: When asked about the view of some teachers that one should work out desires by indulging them to completion, he replied, “I don’t think that to extinguish a fire, you go on pouring gasoline on it. This is to continue the desire with the

wrong desire. It will not end the desires. The best way is to know what is real. Once you know what is real and what is not real, then you will stand with absolutely one weapon in hand and that is discrimination between the unreal and the real – the desire to be free. When you have this desire it merges with freedom itself.”

Mental suffering and the past: He said, “Mental suffering denotes that you are digging in the graveyard of the past. Without touching the past, tell me who is unhappy? If you are living in the present, you are happy. In between the past and the future, who are you? You are bliss; I don’t even call it love. When you utter the word ‘love’, if you carefully watch, you see it taking you to some previous objective experience to translate this love into the past. As far as my experience goes it is not even love. It is something, a fullness as when there are no waves in the middle of the ocean.”

On love: He said, “The word love is misused. I could believe in love if there is no lover and no beloved. No subject and no object. This is true love. It is not from any individual towards something else. The silence is itself surrendering to the Source. Every moment one is going beyond and beyond.”

On gurus: Papaji’s view on the guru is that he or she must be someone who knows the Truth, actually knows the Truth, and can impart it to others who need help, “This is a guru. And the guru then removes ignorance: The darkness of I am the body, I am the mind, I am the senses and I am the objects and manifestation.”

Yet it seems that, as with Sri Ramana Maharshi, most of his real teachings were of the silent type; because most of the effective teaching took place not by listening to dialogues, but by just sitting in his presence. At the present time and since his death, seekers still report that his presence can be felt in the satsang hall and in his home, both of which are open daily for meditation.

His death

Poonjaji died in 1997 and there is still a strong sangha associated with his last place of residence. Long-term devotees

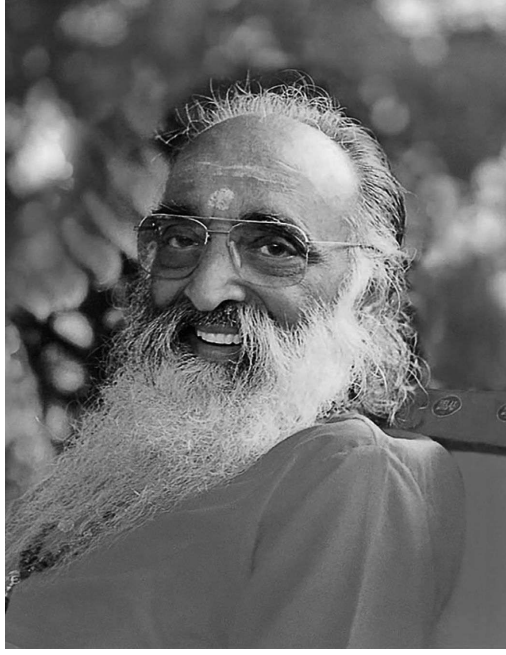
have established a Center in a large suburban house in Lucknow, not far from Poonjaji's former residence. It has been named Satsang Bhavan and videotapes of Poonjaji's satsangs are screened daily from about 10 a.m. to noon and 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.

There is a vegetarian restaurant at the house called Papaji Restaurant, but no accommodation is available. However, there are guest houses nearby and information on these can be obtained from Satsang Bhavan. Meals are offered at reasonable rates, and donations are accepted at the Center to cover running expenses.

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Swami Chinmayananda
(1916-1993)

SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA

And other Swamis

‘True Hinduism is the eternal Truth of the Upanishads.’

Swami Chinmayananda was born in 1916 and died in 1993 while on a visit to the USA. Like Swami Sivananda, he was born to a wealthy family in Ernakulam, Kerala. He was given the birth name of Balakrishnan Menon. He studied liberal arts and journalism and, after a hectic youth that included being imprisoned by the British for involvement in the Independence struggle, he became a reporter and columnist for the National Herald, a newspaper that had been started by Nehru. In 1936, while still a student, he met Sri Ramana Maharshi and had his darshan. Of this he said that he felt that his ‘whole life had gone up in a wave’. Later, after becoming a successful journalist, he began to feel the hollowness of worldly life and, in 1947, he visited Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh with a view to becoming a sanyasi.

He became strongly influenced by Swami Sivananda and by the life of the monks in the ashram at Rishikesh, but at the same time he noticed that many of the sadhus seemed quite ignorant of the lofty ideals of Hinduism. This marked the beginning of his notion of teaching Vedanta in English and Hindi. But first he had to learn about it himself, and for this he had to learn Sanskrit. In 1949, he took sanyas as a disciple of Swami Sivananda and, on his advice, went to study under Swami Tapovanam, who was a great Sanskrit scholar, at Gangotri in the Himalayas. There again he met many sadhus and was shocked at their inadequate understanding of the scriptures.

Prior to acquiring his abiding interest in spirituality, he had become an accomplished writer with a good command over English and Hindi. So in 1951, he resolved to take the

knowledge of the Vedas directly to the people in languages they could understand. Like Swami Sivananda, he wanted the teachings to be accessible to ordinary people, not just to the priests, and to do this he would use English and Hindi. He became an avid campaigner for teaching the essential essence of Vedanta, which he maintained was a far cry from the usual show and expostulations of the priests and pandits. Following Swami Sivananda's example, he established a teaching procedure which he called a yajna. He said that, in the old days, yajnas were fire sacrifices in honor of the Gods but this yajna would be to burn ignorance in the fire of knowledge. This is an example of his writing that illustrates his conviction of the need for reform in the teaching of the scriptures, *"In India Hinduism has come to mean nothing more than a bundle of sacred superstitions, or a certain way of dressing, cooking, eating, talking, and so on. Our gods have fallen to the mortal level of administration officers at whose altars the faithful Hindus might pray and get special permits for the things they desire – that is, if they pay the required fee to the priests. But Hinduism is not the external show that we have learned to parade about in our daily life... True Hinduism is the Sanatana Dharma (Eternal Truth) of the Upanishads."*

During his lifetime, Swami Chinmayananda established eight major teaching centers in India, and more than 150 smaller centers in other parts of the world. The regional headquarters for India is the Sidhbari Ashram near Dharmshala in the Himalayas, and there are large teaching centers in Bombay (Mumbai), Madras (Chennai) and elsewhere. The missions offer three-year full-time courses on Vedanta for prospective monks of the Shankaracharya Order, or simply for those who are interested in Vedanta. Residence in the ashrams requires the acceptance of renunciation and celibacy. The courses are tailored for modern, principally well-educated Indians and foreigners who want to get in touch with the traditional values and teachings of Hinduism.

Swami Chinmayananda's successor, and current head of the Mission from 2001, is Swami Tejomayananda, who speaks excellent English and was at one time head of the large Chinmaya Mission in San Jose, California. He is highly

educated, an articulate speaker and a dedicated teacher, but also a humble and unpretentious man.

Swami Anubhavananda of the Bombay Mission is another example of the brilliant teachers who are attracted to the Chinmayananda Missions. He is well-known for his bright sense of humour. For example, in giving an account of an address he made at a school function in which everyone was laughing away except one woman in the front row – he asked her, at the luncheon that followed, if she had suffered a bereavement in the family. She answered, “Swamiji, I was silently laughing at your jokes, but I have new dentures – if I actually laughed they would have flown out into Swamiji’s lap.”

It seems as if many of the teaching swamis of the Chinmaya Mission have the ability to demonstrate that religion and God are foundations for joy and happiness, not man’s somber view of an avenging deity who casts sinners into the eternal flames of hell. They promote a disciplined and spiritual understanding of the classical scriptures, as well as being fierce upholders of the traditions.

Teachings

The teachings are based on classical Advaita Vedanta – that branch of Vedanta that rejects duality, and follows the methods advocated by the 8th century sage Shankaracharya – the reviver and popularizer of the ancient teachings. To this day, there are Shankaras in different parts of India who are spiritual successors to the original Shankara. The succession of Shankaras is followed in much the same way as the succession of Popes and Dalai Lamas. They are recognized as highly evolved souls and interpreters of Vedanta. Paul Brunton in his book *A Search in Secret India*, wrote about his meeting with the 66th bearer of the title in South India, who was instrumental in leading him to Sri Ramana Maharshi. In 1936, he asked the Shankara to recommend someone who had ‘high attainments in yoga’. He replied thus:

“I know of only two masters in India who could give you what you wish. One of them lives in Benares, hidden away in a large house, which is itself hidden among spacious grounds.

Few people are permitted to obtain access to him; certainly no European has yet been able to intrude upon his seclusion... The other man lives in the interior, farther south... He is called the Maharishee. His abode is on Arunachala mountain, the mountain of the holy beacon... I will provide you with full instructions, so that you may discover him.”

It is significant, perhaps, that at virtually the exact time that Paul Brunton asked this question, Balakrishnan Menon, who was to become Swami Chinmayananda, was having darshan of the great Ramana Maharshi.

In Advaita Vedanta there is no essential difference between the pure soul of man, the Atman, and God the Ultimate Reality (not the deities, who are also manifestations of duality). Realization of the Ultimate Reality, the Absolute, eliminates all forms of duality; then there is no *us* and no *Him* – as in the dogma of the Semitic religions. The basis of the teachings within the Chinmaya Mission, as with the Divine Life Society of Swami Sivananda, is the Bhagavad Gita. Alluding to the efficacy of this great scripture in solving all matters of life and spirituality, Swami Anubhavananda explained that when he was a novice, his mentor would advise reading the Gita to overcome any kind of problem. One student had bad insomnia and was advised to read the Gita to cure it. The next day, when the teacher inquired after the student’s sleep, he replied, “It was very effective Swamiji, I read it for just ten minutes and I fell into a deep sleep.” In the teachings, there is emphasis on the disciplined study and interpretation of the classical scriptures. It is maintained that the Vedas were divinely inspired, and the Upanishads not only talk about God-realization, they methodically teach it as well. The message is conveyed through words and in some instances the clarity of enlightenment may take place as the teaching unfolds. The method involves reciting passages of the scriptures, followed by study and cognizance of the various commentaries and comments of the teachers. The importance of having spiritual experiences (visions etc.) is not emphasized in this teaching method and it was over this that Swami Chinmayananda once expressed disapproval of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s emphasis on experience. It is maintained that anything that can be

experienced by the mind is by definition not Self-realization – because there must be the experiencer and the experience which together represent duality. The small self, the egoic personality, has no means of directly understanding realization. Moreover, except in the case of the great realized beings, an experience such as nirvikalpa samadhi (ecstatic absorption in non-dual reality), is of no practical use to others because the subject cannot ever relate to the world. Swami Dayanand (a former associate of Swami Chinmayananda) said, “We have to be stoned forever.” Even the great beings have to come down to earth. Sri Ramana Maharshi remained in an exalted state for several years; Amma lay about among the coconut trees; Ramakrishna was always falling into divine bhavas and had to be fed and looked after at various times in his life. (Nevertheless, he maintained that if he borrowed one-sixteenth of his mind back from the Divine Mother, it was enough to talk and dance with his devotees.) Even Krishnamurti, firmly opposed to esoteric experiences, sometimes talked about “going off” and asked people to hang on to him.

So, in the end, and while they are on this earth, they all had to ‘come down’ to some degree, in order to be able to function and guide others.

It is said that in Vedic teaching, the emphasis is on the cognizance of enlightenment, which is nothing more than *knowing what is*. That is called *sahaja*, which means ‘natural’ – just seeing clearly. Sri Ramana Maharshi explained *sahaja samadhi* is when awareness is firm, even when objects are sensed, as in ordinary life the mind rests in the Self rather than in its outward objects.

The sage Acharya recommended this in preference to nirvikalpa samadhi in the *Vivekachudamani*: “If people insist on having a particular experience,” Swami Dayanand said, “that simply means that they have not understood the teachings... And if your interpretation of that experience is that there is an object other than yourself, then it is your interpretation itself that is in duality. Therefore it is a problem of cognition, and that problem of cognition needs to be solved.”

In an interview with Andrew Cohen, Swami Dayanand said, “In all experiences what is invariably present is consciousness, and no object is independent of that. Consciousness is not dependent on and has none of the attributes of any particular object. Consciousness is consciousness, and while it is everything, it also transcends everything. That is why I say: ‘this is Advaita, this is nondual, this is Brahman, and this is limitless time wise and space wise’. It is Brahman and therefore you are everything already. This is the teaching, and what it means is that I need not wait for any particular experience because every experience is Brahman, every experience is limitless.”

So with these points of view, the best teaching of Advaita Vedanta takes the form of intense and intuitive analysis of the scriptures and contemplation on their meaning. And many insights are obtained on the nature of matters such as service, the sheaths of maya, the nature of the Self and so on. Swami Anubhavananda said, “The Self is always present and can be perceived as that which Is, whether thought is present or absent, when doer is there or not, when observer is there or not, when the knower knows or not. When both knower and doer are quiet, what is left is the Self.”

Yet, notwithstanding these views, many have experienced that the silent teaching that emanates from a master is of central importance.

The Chinmaya Mission Pledge

We stand as one family bound to each other with love and respect.

We serve as an army courageous and disciplined ever ready to fight against all low tendencies and false values within and without us.

We live honestly the noble life of love and service, producing more than we consume and giving more than we take.

We seek the Lord’s grace to keep us on the path of virtue, courage and wisdom; may His grace and blessings flow through us and the world around us.

We believe that the service of our country is the service of the Lord of Lords, and devotion to the people is devotion to the Supreme Self.

We know our responsibilities give us the ability and courage to fulfill them.

Contact information

There are Chinmaya Missions at many locations in India and abroad.

The Tapovan Trust has a beautiful ashram in the Himalayas where courses in Advaita Vedanta, for students hoping to become monks, are conducted. Residential retreats are also held in both Hindi and English.

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Ramesh Balsekar
(1917-2009)

RAMESH BALSEKAR

Modern Sage of Advaita

'Consciousness is all there is.'

Ramesh Balsekar was a disciple of Nisargadatta Maharaj and is possibly his best-known successor in the West. Until his death, he lived in a modern apartment in Bombay and met devotees and interested visitors in an informal style. Many Westerners attended the sessions in which he would field their questions or expound his belief in the philosophy of Advaita; and particularly that part of Advaita about non-doership: that God, or Consciousness if you prefer, does everything. His explanations are extremely penetrating and as clear as those of the great Nisargadatta himself.

Ramesh was trained as an economist and until his retirement in the 1970s was in banking, which included a period as head of the Bank of India in Mumbai. But throughout his career, and through marriage and family life, there was always a thread of spirituality which had started in childhood. He followed the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi but never actually met the great saint. He spent many years with another guru but, it seems, got nowhere until he met his final guru, Nisargadatta.

His enlightenment experience: Ramesh became a regular attendee of Nisargadatta's daily talks and would translate for English-speaking visitors. After some time, while translating, he had the experience of witnessing the translation taking place even before Nisargadatta Maharaj could complete his sentence. There was a clear impression that he was not actually doing the translating; it was taking place so spontaneously and with such precision that he realized it was simply being done to, or through him. This was a liberating

experience and Nisargadatta later confirmed he had come to understand the profound meaning of Advaita (non-duality).

Some teachings

Ramesh always explained that the principle on which all his teachings were summed up lay in the words: ‘Thy will be done’. This concept has a strong spiritual foundation, for the Buddha also said, “Events happen, deeds are done, but there is no individual doer thereof.” And the Bhagavad Gita proclaims that the ‘ego personality’ cannot actually commit a sin nor do a meritorious act in volition, because the light of knowledge is covered by the darkness of the ego’s delusion. The unenlightened person believes that he or she is a ‘personality’ who is the doer of actions, and as a result of these actions, either expects a reward, or if they go wrong or were ill-conceived, is in fear of punishment and experiences guilt.

Ramesh explained that the individual, the *person*, does not really exist and is merely a concept, a thought of Consciousness, which through misidentification and association with the other thoughts of the mind becomes the egoic mind, the body and the personality. Ramesh put it this way, “In the mental space of time, perception and cognition, innumerable forms get created and destroyed, but the Absolute is immanent in all of them. So although individual personalities figure nowhere, they are yet everywhere – because we are the manifestation, the functioning, and the life being lived. We are the living dream.”

This is what the enlightened being understands – whatever happens is part of the general functioning of Consciousness. And, Ramesh said, the only difference between a sage and an ordinary person is that the sage *knows* this.

He explained that understanding is not derived from the study of books and religious texts, which are nothing more than hearsay, but through the experience of a sense of a *conscious presence* – which reveals the knowledge of one’s own true identity. Consciousness cannot be aware of Itself without a form, a body; but the force behind the conception and growth of the body throughout its lifespan is also Consciousness. Consciousness, Ramesh explains, is the “taste”

or the “I-am-ness” of the physical body – like the sweetness in sugar; without Consciousness there can also be no world. Thus, Consciousness can be thought of as the highest God that the individual in dualism can conceive, and as such it has been called Krishna, Shiva, Allah, the Trinity, the Creator, or just plain God.

Consciousness really does not have any relationship to the notion of the individual personality, but the existence of the individual and the world, however, relate to Consciousness. But when consciousness leaves the body, then that is the end of that individual and his concepts of the world, and of his God. Such gods were conceived by the individual in duality simply as concepts, albeit as a part of a total functioning of the impersonal Consciousness.

The sense of duality: Ramesh said that the sense of duality starts with a stirring of consciousness, in which it becomes manifest through a process in which Consciousness, the subject, perceives Itself as an object in duality. Then the object assumes a pseudo-identity as the subject that cognizes other objects (other personalities, things etc.) in the world of duality, but external to Itself. It then regards itself as an autonomous identity – a ‘self’ – with the power of volitional action. This is the well-known ego together with what it perceives in the dualistic world. But, in truth, the body, mind and ego of the individual, are nothing more than a psychosomatic apparatus created by Consciousness – and each is only one of the untold millions of forms that are in that way activated by Consciousness. Furthermore, these manifestations depend on the concepts of space, place and time, for in the absence of space, no object could become apparent with its three-dimensional form. And similarly, in the absence of time, the object could not be perceived, nor any movement measured, without the duration necessary to make it perceivable. (This is the necessary ‘measurement’ that must be made in Einstein’s theory.) Consciousness has worked out for each phenomenal form its allotted span of action, and at the end of its lifespan it disappears as spontaneously as it appeared. Then consciousness, relieved of its physical limitation, merges in Awareness.

Spiritual practice

Self-inquiry and escape from illusion: Ramesh says that the principle of duality which perceives itself as a ‘subject’ starts with the sense of ‘I am’. It then carries things a step further in its role as a pseudo-subject and begins a process of reasoning and identifying objects through comparing, naming and judging inter-dependent counterparts – such as mine and yours, good and bad, merit and sin, presence and absence, and so on. All the so-called problems of the world arise with this individual personality, who, in ignorance, believes that it is it that acts, and so binds itself in illusory bondage. The individual, in its relationships to other forms, and its belief of being the doer of actions and the acceptor of the consequences, creates bondage and the necessity of the ideas of karma and rebirth. The doership plants the seeds of karma and although it is nothing more than a concept, for those bound in its illusion, it is very real.

Ramesh explains that the escape from bondage is best achieved through Self-inquiry into where the question of a ‘you’ is. Find out what you *really* are through Self -inquiry: ‘How did I arise? What is the Source? What sustains it? What is its nature? What am I? Who then are you?’ The understanding of the answers to these queries is said to lead to true knowledge – to enlightenment.

Getting rid of volition: Ramesh said that sometimes people asked him, “If nothing is in my hands, should I or should I not meditate?” His answer was always very simple, “If you like to meditate, then meditate; if you don’t like to meditate, don’t force yourself to meditate... Whatever is spontaneous is correct because, in the absence of conceptualization, the spontaneous is natural and therefore correct without any reasoning, comparison or any consideration of cause-effect.”

Or he may have said, “Who is the one who thinks he must do something? Understanding is all and no amount of ‘doing’ will achieve anything. There must be a total annihilation of the concept of an independent entity with autonomy of action.”

He said that seeking is an obstacle only because of the seeker. It is the seeker who is the obstacle – not the seeking.

Seeking happens by itself because the programmed individual is programmed to seek what it is seeking. The problem is the seeker who says, “I want enlightenment so I’m going to seek for it.” For spiritual practice to be true, there has to be a kind of un-thought-out intensity in the seeking, “For whether one seeks or doesn’t seek is not under one’s control. And whether seeking for God or seeking for money happens, it is neither to your credit nor is it your fault.”

Probably for everyone, the best spirituality, the best sadhana, is listening to and reflecting and meditating on the words of enlightened persons. Then it is actually Consciousness that is listening to the words of Consciousness which has, through divine planning, identified Itself with the personality. But, Ramesh carefully pointed out, “Once the intention and meaning of the words are grasped, they should be discarded – to prevent the personality-intellect from raising conceptual structures around them.”

Our true identity is the timeless Absolute Unmanifest that becomes Consciousness seeking Itself in duality, as a reflection of Its own Awareness, “So understand the whole process of the Absolute and Its manifestations. They are not different. Identification of the unicity (or the subject) that we are, with the object of separateness in duality, that believes itself to be the subject, constitutes bondage – and dis-identification constitutes liberation. It’s as simple as that! The aim of sadhana, therefore, should be to seek the source of the manifestation... So ask, “Who has come to this conclusion?... Who else but ‘I’?... The ‘I’ who is responsible for every kind of manifestation, that has been called the true Self – with a capital ‘S’... The ‘I’ who is every kind of manifested phenomenon – the ‘I’ who was present before time was conceived.”

In the true state of wholeness there is only One. Therefore, Ramesh said, every sentient being can say this, not as himself as the ‘personality’ – for the ego personality loves the idea of being immortal – but as the ‘I’ of Consciousness. And in sadhana it is important to understand this. It is *not* the ego personality ‘I’ that the world believes in, that can make this claim.

Maya: Maya is what keeps us from knowing what we really are. It is not just a simple illusion but a fraudulent, cheating illusion – a ‘magnificent fraud’ as Nisargadatta described it. Ramesh said, “The mis-identification of Consciousness becomes the beguiling, bewitching Mahamaya. And the sense of being alive is so intoxicating that Consciousness becomes enchanted by the spectacle It presents. But it gets so involved in the spectacle as a ‘pseudo-entity’ that one only rarely finds out that it is merely a dream contained in a speck of Consciousness, which conceives the world with all its problems.” Moreover, the dream is not something we are born with. It is cultivated and grows and changes with time, from infancy at one end to senile dementia at the other.

The will of God: Ramesh insists on the view that everything that happens is the preordained will of God. He said, “Once this is clearly appreciated, it cannot but be understood that the idea of living our lives is a joke – because it is based on the wrong belief that what we do are acts of volition.” He maintained that the intuitive understanding of Consciousness in all its roles, and the realization of ‘I Am That’, must be what enlightenment is. And what it is not is the something conceived by an entity that is itself an illusion. The experience of liberation may be perceived as blissful (as are the often-described experiences of the enlightened) and something for the ego to hanker after – but the essence of it is the recognition of the I-am-ness of Consciousness.

But if everything is planned by Consciousness, what about heinous crimes – rape, pedophilia and so on, one may ask? Is God cruel? Most would maintain that what happens in such cases can only be reasonably explained as being due to evil acts of volition carried out by deranged personalities – who must be held responsible for their actions. Many would say that to have the attitude that we are not responsible, could allow people to do what they like and feel no guilt for wrongdoings.

But Ramesh explains that it is not that God is cruel, but that the ‘false identity’ which is an illusion, is not responsible for its actions and perceives them as its doing in a bartering of cause and effect. Such actions, heinous or benign, are always

performed by those who *believe* they act, and whom society has trained that way, not by those who know they are not the doers. So the question of responsibility, for those who surrender all happenings to God, does not arise. He said, "Suppose a killing happens. That event is the destiny of the mind-body organism. Whether the killer would be caught and punished, or an 'innocent' man is punished in his stead, would also be God's will – according to the destinies of the individuals concerned." And is not suffering in the state of illusion inevitable and exactly equal in the final analysis? The suffering caused by age, illness and death happens to everyone. And those who suffer in motor accidents experience the same traumas as the victims of bombs. The Buddha proclaimed the universality of suffering in the world of the unenlightened as the truth of suffering – the first noble truth. And it seems, in the world, that the poor suffer mostly physically while the rich suffer mostly mentally. Which is the more heinous?

Ramesh explained, "The fact of the matter is that it is impossible for the unenlightened human being – an object in the totality of manifestation – to know and understand the basis on which God's will functions. The rationalist and illusory doer lives only on the surface where everything seems logical and reasonable – or unreasonable as the case may be. But the individual, without choice, is really in harmony with the totality of phenomenal existence." Even such differences are the will of God that have been programmed into the individual. Even the enlightened are programmed, but the difference, Ramesh said, is that they know it to be so and see this also as the will of God.

If we truly examine carefully and in great depth the events of our lives, we will be forced to the conclusion that they were, in every case and without exception, not under our control – they simply happened. So you have the Mother Teresas and also the serial killers; and through all this activity they contribute to the amazing spectacle of the universe – which can only be appreciated by those who know they are not the doers. The German mystic, Meister Eckhart, proclaimed

that all a human being can do is marvel at the magnificence and variety of God's creation and functioning.

The mystics have always held that whatever actions that happen can be traced to programming, and they have always advised people not to harbor excessive guilt. This only exacerbates the situation. Instead, they advise the perpetrator to make atonement and show compassion. Surrender everything to God they say. Whatever happens should be accepted: then there is no unhappiness, there is no misery, no pride, no hate, no envy. What is wrong with that? Accepting that nothing happens unless it is the will of God, Ramesh said, "Removes the egoic sense of doership along with the sense of pride in successful accomplishments, and shame in apparently unsuccessful or disastrous happenings. What else can one do? What we think we should do in any situation at any particular moment is precisely what God wants you to think you should do! But when you cognize that you are not actually doing it then there is no guilt, no pride, no hate, no envy! Life becomes more peaceful."

It is only the egoic personality that dwells on motivation and wants to control things, and as a result creates a world of attack and the trading of grievances. Action, Ramesh said, will almost always involve the concept, "I have done this good thing and should be rewarded, and he or she has done that bad thing and should be punished." In reality, the only choice man may have in this world, and this may not actually be a choice but also the result of programming, is to approach an enlightened individual for help and guidance.

Ramesh drew attention to a tragedy in which a Christian missionary from Australia and his two sons were burnt alive by Hindu extremists in India. The wife and mother who survived them had the grace of surrender so deeply unconditional and total, that her comment on the meaning of the event was simply that: "Their allotted time on this earth had come to an end." There is a Christian hymn that expresses this:

*'Though dark my path and sad my lot,
Let me be still and murmur not,
But breathe the prayer divinely taught,
Thy will be done – the rest is naught.'*

The effectiveness of Ramesh's teaching

A good example of how satsang with Ramesh can influence the seeker was described by Chris Parish in *What is Enlightenment?* magazine (Issue No. 14, Fall/Winter 1998). At the end of the interview, Chris wrote that his head was reeling. How could it be that an intelligent man could really believe that everything is preordained? Although 'Thy will be done' is the essence of many religions, surely there is more to it than that, and God's will applies only when all self-centered notions have been eliminated? Then, recovering from the ordeal in a tea shop, something dawned. He wrote: *'As the first sip passed my lips, in a flash, it hit me. 'I' was not the one who was drinking the tea. And 'I' was not the one who had just been tormented for an hour in discussion with a man who at that moment was beginning to seem like the sane one. It was as if a burden I had been carrying for my entire life was lifted. It wasn't even 'me' who was misguided. And the world in which I had been living was not, as I had assumed, a world of human complexity, but one of mechanistic simplicity, of perfect order, a mathematical playing out of programs in motion since the beginning of time... As the clinical perfection of God's scientific plan started to open for me, the ecstatic thrill of absolute freedom began to rush through my veins... with an absolute cessation of tension, in the recognition that no matter what apparent ambiguity or uncertainty I might encounter thereafter, I could always rest assured that whatever choice I made would be exactly the choice God wanted me to make... I mused to myself what a fantastic game life would be if everyone understood how it all really works.'*

The essence of Ramesh's teachings is found in the book *Consciousness Speaks: Conversations with Ramesh S. Balsekar*.

Ramesh passed away in September 2009 at the age of 92.

Contact information

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Maharishi Mahesh Yogi
(1918-2008)

MAHARISHI MAHESH YOGI

Transcendental Meditation (TM)

*'There is one unity, unified wholeness, total natural law,
in the transcendental unified Consciousness.'*

The birth name and date of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi are not known with certainty. Some say he was born in the Central Provinces of India as Mahesh Prasad Varma around the year 1917. A majority of sources say he was a Kayastha – a high caste community whose profession is generally associated with writing. He studied physics at Allahabad University, graduated in 1942, and became an administrative secretary to Brahmananda Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of the Jyotir Math in the Himalayas, who was affectionately called Guru Dev. There he took the new name of Brahmachari Mahesh and is said to have become a celibate ascetic. He claimed that it took two-and-a-half years for him to attune his mind to the thinking of his Guru Dev, whom he said was the source of his inspiration, and gain a feeling of complete oneness with him. In his role as administrative secretary, he was entrusted to take care of correspondence and also to give public talks on Vedic themes.

He remained with Guru Dev until the latter died in 1953, and then moved to Uttarkashi in the Indian Himalayas, where he began publicly teaching the meditation technique learned from Guru Dev, which was called Transcendental Deep Meditation – later abbreviated to just Transcendental Meditation (TM). It was said that he often spoke in English in a manner that appealed to the learned classes. The reactions to his talks led him to think that TM could be of wide benefit to those who followed the technique. A major thesis of his teaching was that it was not necessary to be an ascetic to benefit from TM and become happy. Criticism of this notion

came mainly from religious pandits who claimed that asceticism is essential to enlightenment.

He began to be known as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the mid-1950s. Much of his popularity in the Western world has been attributed to the fact that it was a time of social and spiritual change, with young people becoming disenchanted with the conventional thinking of the day – which was steeped in international and local tensions and altercations.

The TM technique

When asked what TM was exactly, he said that it is a simple, natural way for the mind to realize its own unbounded essence. The mind unfolds its potential for unlimited transcendental awareness and provides a way for it to fathom the whole range of existence. It is not a set of beliefs, nor is it a religion. It is a mental technique that one practices every day for 15-20 minutes.

When asked how TM differs from other forms of meditation, he said that the basic essence of TM is that it concerns itself only with the mind. Other systems involve additional aspects such as breathing and physical movements. These are more complicated because they involve other things, but with TM the conscious mind is enabled to fathom the whole range of its existence, ranging from active mind to resting mind. In the resting mind one has purity and simplicity. The mind gains transcendental consciousness and brings about transformations in different fields of manifestation. All fields of life which involve the expression of intelligence are nourished and made better. Thus TM deals only with the transformation of the mind from the active state to the settled state – though other aspects are dealt with as well through the intelligence that is engendered.

Yet TM is still a form of mantra meditation but one in which the mantra sound is thought, not spoken out. Simply, it is a vehicle for the individual's attention to arrive at a less active, quieter state of mental functioning. Some say the mantras are meaningless sounds but others maintain that they are based on Vedic or tantric traditions. Originally there were hundreds of mantras but now, in TM, they have been reduced

to just 16. The most effective mantra is determined for each individual on the basis of age, gender and personality. It is said that the technique can be learned only from a trained teacher and mantras given should not be shared with other individuals.

The technique is taught over a seven-step course consisting of two introductory lectures, a personal interview, and four two-hour instruction sessions given on two successive days. In step seven, the teacher discourses, on the basis of his or her personal experience, on the higher states of human development that can be achieved through the technique.

There are also advanced techniques such as ‘rounding’ which are based on breathing, yoga postures, and meditation over a prolonged period in a supervised situation, and there is a TM siddhi which is said to facilitate a type of levitation.

Historical background

According to many religious scholars, the TM technique was first delivered to man about 5,000 years ago by Lord Krishna. It was then lost for several thousand years until it was rediscovered by the Buddha; lost again and rediscovered by the Hindu philosopher-saint Shankara in the 8th century CE, and finally rediscovered by Brahmananda Saraswati (Guru Dev), who passed it on to the Maharishi.

Underlying philosophical concepts of TM

The important elements of the Maharishi’s philosophy are that TM is entirely compatible with science. Another is that happiness is of utmost importance in the world. Success in everything is achieved through happiness, and within everyone there lies an unlimited reservoir of energy, intelligence, and happiness. According to TM reports, the performance in Germany of yajnas by 7,000 pandits, combined with the distribution of yogic fliers, aided in bringing coherence and unity in the collective consciousness there.

International acclaim

By the late 1960s, the Maharishi had achieved international fame, particularly when he became the guru of the Beatles. From that time onwards, he attracted celebrities and people in

powerful positions, particularly in the West. He was also a favorite of governments because of his stand against drugs, and his popularity with the younger generations. His conventional stance even went as far as admonishing the youth of the day for their slothful appearance. At one gathering of a thousand students, he said they should all have haircuts and wear neckties – something that would have alienated them if it had come from government sources.

Travels and organizations formed

In his long life as a TM teacher, the Maharishi spread his message through many lands. He undertook several long teaching tours both in India and abroad, on which he usually received favorable media comment. On his first tour in 1959, the Honolulu Star Bulletin reported thus, “He has no money, he asks for nothing. His worldly possessions can be carried in one hand. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is a world odyssey. He carries a message that he says will rid the world of all unhappiness and discontent.”

On this he said, “I had one thing in mind. I knew that I had something which would be useful to every man.”

In the same year, he formed the International Meditation Society with centers in London and San Francisco. Between 1960-67, he undertook six long local and international tours. In 1961, he appeared on BBC television while addressing an audience of an estimated 5,000 people at the Royal Albert Hall in London. In the same year, he conducted the first TM Teacher Training Course in Rishikesh, India. This also introduced knowledge on the development of human potential, and the importance of yoga postures that help restore the life force. At that time, he also started writing his translation and commentary on the first six chapters of the Bhagavad Gita.

In 1962, he began dictating his book *The Science of Being and Art of Living* which has sold more than a million copies. In 1964, he began teaching the first course on Advanced Techniques in Transcendental Meditation. In 1966, he founded the Students International Meditation Society which was reported to be a phenomenal success.

But in 1968, the Maharishi announced that he was curtailing public appearances to concentrate on the training of TM teachers. He formed global headquarters at Seelisberg in Switzerland and, in 1970, moved his activities to Italy and later to Austria. In the same year, he received the 'Man of Hope' award from the City of Hope Foundation, Los Angeles. And it was in 1972, at Queens University, Canada, that he again advised students to have haircuts and wear neckties.

In 1973, in Illinois, the legislature gave support for the use of the Maharishi's book *The Science of Creative Intelligence* in public schools. But later, in New Jersey, it was banned because it was being judged a 'religion' – the teaching of which is forbidden in public schools in the USA, under the First Amendment.

By the mid-1970s, the Maharishi's movement was functioning in 370 TM centers staffed by 6,000 teachers. It continued to expand through the 1970s and 1980s and, in 1988, the 'Master Plan to Create Heaven on Earth' was started. It was a plan to reduce crime, increase lifespan, prosperity and happiness of all human beings – something never achieved by any government or organization in any corner of the world. His adventure into politics led to the formation of the Natural Law Party (NLP) in 1991, which was active in 74 countries and fielded political candidates in India and several states in the USA. Subsequently, in 1994, the NLP was mostly closed down but still exists in India.

In 1991, he moved his headquarters from Seelisberg to Vlodrop in the Netherlands and started the Maharishi European Research University (MERU). During that time, he also created a TV station called Veda Visi. Overall, the organization was brilliantly managed and included Deepak Chopra as one of its administrators, before he left to launch his own spiritual career.

Financial matters

But the Maharishi's involvement with celebrities, his business acumen, and his acquired love of luxury such as traveling in Rolls-Royce cars, had brought criticism; but others, at the same time, have commented on his overall

moderation and the fact that money was never used for questionable purposes. His lifestyle was simple and, overall, he inspired non-materialism. His use of a helicopter was entirely within the bounds of modern traveling for a busy public figure. When asked what the money was used for, he said that it was to run the centers which, by the end of his life, numbered over a thousand.

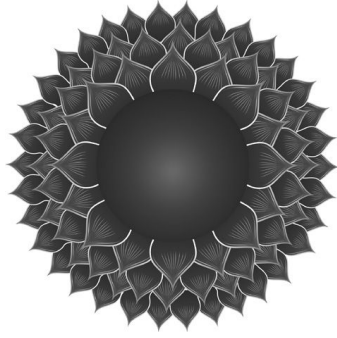
Retirement and death

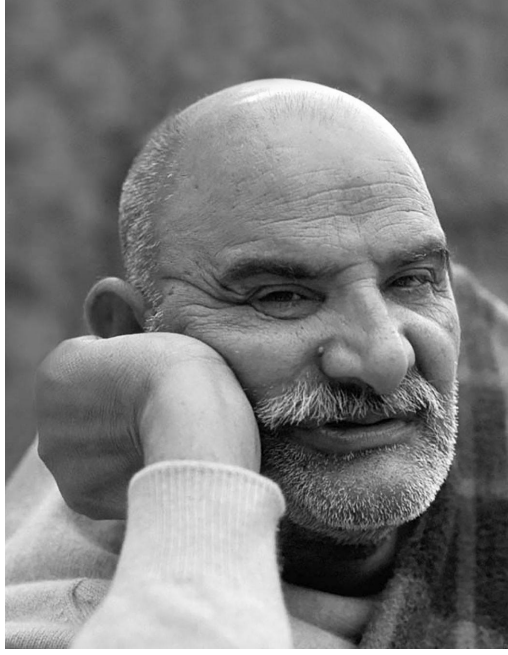
In 1991 he retired from public life, but in 2008 he declared: “It has been my pleasure at the feet of Guru Dev to take his light and pass it on. Now today, I am closing my designed duty to Guru Dev, and I can only say: ‘Long live the world of peace, happiness and prosperity, and freedom from suffering’.” He died in his sleep three weeks and a day later. A State funeral was conducted in Allahabad, India, and a memorial building was well on the way to being constructed nearby.

Contact information

More than a thousand TM centers and a golden-domed university are to his credit. To make contact with and receive TM training, simply google Transcendental Meditation, followed by a nearby location. The Wikipedia encyclopedia lists more than 250 of his books and other publications.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Vedic Vishwavidyalaya,
University Head Office,
Karaundi, Umariyapan, Katni 483332,
Madhya Pradesh, India.
Website: www.mmyvv.com





Neem Karoli Baba
(N.A.-1973)

NEEM KAROLI BABA

Propagator of Bhakti Yoga

*'Love all, feed all, serve all, and
Do not try to figure God out.'*

Neem Karoli Baba, also called Maharajji by his devotees, was a modern-day saint. His origin, like that of Bhagawan Nityananda, is shrouded in mystery but he is thought to have come originally from the Akbarpur region of Uttar Pradesh. He became known in the West following his discovery in the 1960s by counter-culture guru, Ram Dass, who became his devotee and wrote about him in his book *Be Here Now*. He also wrote and assembled information about him in a second book called *Miracle of Love*. There are many ashrams and temples founded in the name of Neem Karoli Baba throughout India, and there is an ashram in Taos, New Mexico.

Little is known about his early life except that he may have been born to a well-to-do family. He is said to have told one devotee that at the age of seven or eight he used to skip school and go to the jungle to practice tapasya. He left home at an early age to wander about as a sadhu, wearing only a loincloth and blanket in the tradition of the *Kambal Posh* – an Islamic sect also known as the 'blanket wearers' who are said to have preceded Sufism. It appears that he may have been known by different names, at different times, and in different parts of India. He also had a reputation for appearing in more than one place at the same time. In his early days, he took his food and water in a broken clay pot which he also used as a hat, and through this he became known as *Handi Wala Baba* – the Baba with the broken pot. At another stage of his life, he spent time around Aligarh and Mainpuri where he performed tapasya by sitting up to his neck in a triangle-shaped reservoir for long periods of time. There he came to be called *Tikonina*

Wala Baba – the Baba of the triangle-shaped tank. Later, he began to pass his time in the town of Neem Karoli, from whence he derived the final name of Neem Karoli Baba. There he lived in various underground caves, coming out from time to time to sit in between hot fires – as a further type of tapasya. There is a story similar to the one about Bhagawan Nityananda, of him being turned off a train at Neem Karoli station and the train, apparently in perfect working order, refusing to go until the desperate and repentant conductor allowed him back on.

In the 1930s, he began to spend time in villages in the foothills of the Himalayas and the northern plains. He would sometimes allow people to take him into their homes and it was then that his extraordinary spiritual power and miracles of healing began to be known, and he acquired followers who were interested in spiritual matters. He had a special affinity for the deities Hanuman and Rama and instigated the building of temples to them at many places. He was also fond of the Sufi saint Kabir and often quoted his sayings. He would chant a Persian song that was attributed to Kabir:

*'I am in the world but not concerned with the world,
I go to the market place but I am not the purchaser.'*

Those who were close to him said that there would often manifest a strange, sweet perfume in places where he had been or where he was expected to be going. Early photographs showed him as long-haired and aesthetic looking, but by the time he became known to the West, he was already quite old and had become a cuddly teddy-bear of a man with a stubby beard and moustache.

His two best-known and most frequented ashrams are in Nainital and Vrindavan, both in Uttar Pradesh, but he had the habit of disappearing for extended periods of time and then suddenly reappearing again or, as indicated before, of being in more than one place at the same time. An example, recorded in Ram Dass's (Richard Alpert) book *Miracle of Love*, is as follows:

Once a devotee met him in Kanpur, a town several hundred kilometers to the south. When the devotee was leaving to return to Nainital, Maharajji gave him a message to deliver to a temple there. The message was to the effect that they should expect him back there within a fortnight. When the devotee arrived back at Nainital the following day, he went straight to the temple even before going home. There was a crowd there and the devotee wondered why so many people would come to the temple when Maharajji was away. But he overheard people say that Maharajji was inside one of the rooms.

'I can't believe it,' the devotee said, 'I just saw him in Kanpur.' Others said, 'No, Baba has been here for fifteen days.' The mystified devotee then went to Maharajji's room: 'Babaji, what is this?' he asked, and Baba shouted at him, 'Hap! Get out! Go away! – Don't tell anyone anything... You are always telling lies!'

East and West

Maharajji was totally indifferent to caste, creed and social status. To him everyone was the same. In his later days, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when he began to be visited by droves of Westerners, the counter-culture use of hallucinogenic drugs was at its height. Richard Alpert, who took the name Ram Dass after meeting Maharajji, was a strong proponent of the use of hallucinogens such as cannabis and LSD in the search for 'higher' spiritual experiences. Maharajji demanded that some of the 'medicine' (LSD) be brought to him, and then, to the amazement of the assembled hippies, he swallowed 900 mg – an unbelievably high dose guaranteed to scramble the brains of anyone, many times over. But there were no visible effects whatsoever on Maharajji. His comment on the matter was, "These medicines were used in the Kulu Valley long ago. But Yogis have lost that knowledge... To take them with no effect, your mind must be firmly fixed on God."

Maharajji avoided publicity but received devotees, including a large number of Westerners, whenever they could find him. Sometimes he would appear unexpectedly to a particular devotee and give personal darshan. Once he waited for the arrival of Ram Dass to give darshan to him. His

darshan could only be had when he showed up somewhere to conduct ceremonies, or oversee feeding *bhandaras* (free food for the poor). When he was in one or another of the various ashrams that he frequented, he would lay down wrapped in his plaid blanket or sit on a bench, and devotees would squat or stand around him. He was usually humorous and there was frequent gossip about many things. He would slap people on the head or back and sometimes he would hug people, and such actions would be taken as the greatest of blessings by the devotees.

It was apparent that he could read peoples' minds and understood their problems intuitively; there are many accounts of problems being solved and diseases being cured simply by being in his presence. Although many became devotees, his elusive nature precluded the formation of close master-disciple relationships. There are hundreds of records of healing and other miraculous happenings attributed to him, but the most significant were concerned with the profound changes of 'consciousness' that people experienced in his presence and the feelings of love that were generated.

Maharajji strongly supported and promoted the celebration of religious festivals. While hosting *bhandaras*, he said that, "For the hungry, God appears as food." He maintained that such ceremonies helped devotees to become more like the deities that were being worshiped, and he became renowned for the *bhandaras* that he conducted in many temples around India. It was said that foodstuff, such as sacks of rice, would mysteriously appear at particular temples preceding such an event, even when he was not present there.

His principal teaching

Maharajji's principal teaching, often repeated, was: *Love all, feed all and serve all*. Thus it could be said that he was a great bhakti master with love and service the principal ingredients of his teachings. He said that the love given always comes back multiplied many times. Since he avoided giving formal discourses, his teachings were disseminated through parable-like stories that arose, and through his silent presence. He seemed to have the ability to know what was required and

made specific comments to suit the circumstances, so that each individual would get the teaching appropriate to his spiritual and mental development. But his main form of teaching, judging from the effects he had on people, appeared through the silent transmission of grace that stirred people at the deepest levels. Ram Dass wrote that, *'Bliss and peace poured down on us.'*

Maharajji maintained that people should always have God in their minds and stressed the need for total surrender to God. He said people should chant: 'Oh Supreme One, my life is a thread in your hands'. He advised people to live *dharmically* (righteously), always remember God and to always speak the truth: "People may hate you for it but never worry. Christ died for the truth. If you live in the truth, God will always stand with you." This was not just a matter of not telling lies but referred to the loving of the truth – that is, the loving of what is – which is God Himself. He said, "This was why Jesus was put to death – people couldn't stand what he said, but it was the truth, and so he said it."

He encouraged devotees to visit temples and other holy shrines and places. But, above all, he recommended the feeding of people as a spiritual practice. This could awaken the kundalini and purify people, without recourse to yogic practices. Some comments on specific matters are as follows:

On surrender: He used to say, "I do nothing. God does everything. Change is the way of the world and if Kali Yuga (the present Dark Age) still has to go on then let it. Unless you are the Lord, you can't stop it, so why berate it? Worship God in every form and don't try to figure God out. And don't think I or you have done this. All is God's play in His own way. It has to happen according to your karma. You reap as you sow. It has to happen so don't resist it."

On maya: He said, "What is maya? Where is it? It is nothing at all. It's illusion. Just keep God in your heart and worship God in every form without trying to figure it out."

On stress: He said that stress was worldly and is really nothing. "Counter it by getting rid of attachment. Don't provoke, stay cool in a hostile atmosphere." And, since the

mind has both positive and negative aspects, one should concentrate on the positive. “Thought processes will change and you will feel more relaxed. Then you will be able to remove the rest of the stress problem.”

On renunciation: Although he had performed severe tapasya as part of his sadhana, he later taught that extreme physical forms of tapasya were not necessary, “Renunciation is tapasya and is just getting rid of attachment. It’s not leaving the family and living in a cave. It’s the breaking of the link between you and your desires. It’s giving up the satisfying of your appetites and desires. Fasting is therefore a very good practice.”

Maharajji encouraged family life but said that every family member should become disciplined and follow the teachings of the elders and the scriptures. He said, “Attachment is the strongest block to realization. If you desire a mango at the moment of death, you will be reborn an insect or a monkey. If you want to see God, kill your desires... When you have a desire for something, don’t act on it and it will go away. If you have enough faith you can give up money and possessions. God will give you everything you need for your spiritual development. Money should be used to help others. A true saint never accepts money. Money brings anxiety.”

On the ego: He said, “What is this with the ego? It’s a cheat, an impostor! One of these days you will leave the world and become earth. Clear the mind of all worldly things. If you can’t control your mind, how can you realize God?”

On service: “Work is God. Work is worship. Whoever works for God serves. His work will be done by itself. Always give love, service, caring and sharing. Serve the poor and remember God.”

Religious differences: “There are none! You become one with Christ, Krishna – whatever. The world does not need creeds and religious divisions, so worship God in all forms. Freely exchange ideas but don’t force or divide.”

On love and relationships with others: He said, “Never hurt another’s heart. Cleanse the mirror of your heart and you

will see God. Love all men as God, even if they hurt you or shame you. Be like Gandhi and Christ.”

On the kundalini: He said, “Kundalini rests below the navel. It can be raised by the guru’s grace, by the gentle, simple touch of the Guru’s hand. The kundalini can be awakened by feeding people. Sexual energy is the power to create God. If you raise the energy above the lowest level, then you can feel and meet Brahma.”

On gurus: He said one should always listen to the inner guru. God, the Self and Guru are the same thing. The guru is a guide to realization. It is an inner journey and total surrender gets the guru’s grace. The guru’s grace is beyond thought and action. Mind and body become purified so that you become sensitive to receiving spiritual perceptions: “How can you purify yourself without the guidance of a guru? So, silence your thoughts and fix your attention on the inner master, which you cannot see but you can feel. When the traveler is ready the guru will be found. You may not meet a physical guru in this life but the inner guru is always there.”

Some devotees’ experiences

Ram Dass, in *Miracle of Love*, reviewed the experiences of more than 2,000 devotees and put them into various categories. Here are some examples:

A man traveling in India found his way to Maharajji. He had been thinking about his mother and how she died of a spleen condition. When they met Maharajji said, “You were thinking about your mother... Spleen, she died of spleen.” The man was amazed. He wondered, ‘Who is he? Who does he represent? Where’s the button he pushes to make your file appear? Why have I come here?’ None of it made any sense. He had classified experiences into those that were drug induced and other ‘ordinary’ experiences, but he felt that neither of these categories applied to Maharajji. (This was at the height of socially accepted drug use in counter-culture philosophy.) His mind raced and raced. And then he felt a tremendous wrenching pain in his chest and a tremendous wrenching feeling, and he started to cry. He cried and cried but he was neither happy nor sad. He had not experienced this

kind of crying before; it felt as if he had finished something – he had come home.

A woman related her experience of being drawn to Maharajji. She knew about the hardships of India and was nervous about going there. Nevertheless she found herself at the airport in New York and was experiencing a degree of panic. What bothered her was that she was not sure that Maharajji would accept her as a devotee – as she had been led to believe that this was a distinct possibility. She said, ‘I hadn’t the temerity to chance rejection. I was going to visit the ashrams of some South Indian saints and, perhaps, visit up north to Maharajji’s ashram if there seemed to be any chance of being received.’ Then, coming off the plane in Bombay, she found tickets to New Delhi had been left for her. No one knew where they had come from. Again in Delhi there was a message that said: Go to Vrindavan, Maharajji expected soon. She didn’t know who sent it. Attempting to get to the indicated destination, she ended up in a market late at night with shops starting to close. Her panic grew, exacerbated by exhaustion and hunger. She began to envision herself huddling in a doorway among cows. Then suddenly a Westerner approached and she discovered that where she was supposed to be going was just around the next bend. At the temple, an old gatekeeper after scrutinizing her, let her in. At the front of the temple, Maharajji was sitting. When she saw his form, her heart jumped so that she staggered against the gate. The first sight of him remained piercingly clear in her memory. Maharajji was bouncing, smiling and clowning. She said that during that first darshan, she understood everything even though it was spoken in Hindi. And she recognized the love that had poured into her, that had irresistibly drawn her to India. This she felt, was *The Source*.

Another visitor was pretty indifferent about meeting the great sage. As she came up for darshan, Maharajji started bouncing up and down and speaking in Hindi. Then he hit her with a rolled up paper. She had both a sense of great confusion and a feeling of the most incredible oneness that she had ever felt in her life. At that moment she felt all the suffering, all the pain from the past several years, dissolve completely. And

though the pain was to come back, the love that she felt at that moment made it much less important later.

A man gave an account of how Maharajji dealt with those who had committed serious crimes. At a gathering of people before Maharajji, two men, one dressed as a lawyer and another in peasant's dress, said they had a request. Maharajji said, "Go on."

The man in peasant dress said, "My friend is in great trouble."

Maharajji said to the other, "You are not a lawyer, are you?"

He replied, "True, I am not," and indicated that he had been involved in a murder.

Maharajji asked, "Did you commit the murder?"

He replied, "No."

Then Maharajji asked, "Was the murder arranged by you?"

And the man replied, "Yes."

Maharajji said, "The victim has four children. It is a heinous crime. Are you sorry?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Will you do it again in your life?"

The man replied, "No."

Then Maharajji said, "You can go... you will be pardoned." And he added, "Look after the children. Help them, and you will realize what you have done."

It appears that the judge had already written a decision to convict the man but, late at night, some impulse made him get up and change the judgment to acquittal.

Once in Haridwar, a man was bathing in the river and lost his footing. He was tossed about and carried to a whirlpool like a log. His wife, after crying out Maharajji's name, jumped into the water and saved him – but she lost her nose ring in the struggle. When they went to the place where Maharajji was

staying, people there told them that Maharajji was in an impossible mood and was being very abusive. He would not let anyone near him. But the wife went up and gently tapped at the door and he sweetly asked her in and inquired after her nose ring – something very important to a Hindu woman. When her husband arrived Maharajji said, “You were going down the river like a piece of wood being whirled around.” It was believed that his strange behaviour, and the abusiveness, had been due to the psychic efforts in empowering the woman who could hardly swim, to save the man.

A doctor met Maharajji in 1942. He was on the run for involvement with the Independence movement and was staying in a small hostel for pilgrims where Maharajji was also staying. Maharajji came to him with food and then told him to run. The police would be there within the hour. He said, “Go to Tibet but follow another route, not the usual one.” The doctor took the advice but because he never believed in saints and their powers he asked a colleague there to see what would happen. In an hour, a district superintendent of police came with a search party looking for the doctor.

Maharajji said to them, “Who would come at this hour?” The police searched and then started towards Tibet but Maharajji called them back and warned them not to go. He said that if they went there they would be killed in an avalanche. They decided not to pursue the matter.

His death

A few days before his death, a close devotee felt a longing to see him. During the visit, Maharajji predicted his going by saying, “Ask anything you want – then I am going to go.” The devotee said that on this statement everything that was in his mind just evaporated. The devotee asked nothing but only afterwards realized the prediction that was to come about.

Maharajji died in 1972 after experiencing diabetic convulsions and going into a coma. He was taken to hospital where he was given injections of insulin and put under oxygen. Presently, he roused and pulled the oxygen mask off and shouted, “*Bekar!*” (useless) and asked for Gangajal. He then repeated, “*Jai Jagadish Hare,*” (Hail to the Lord of the

Universe) several times at a decreasing pitch. His face became very peaceful and he died.

Ashrams

Kainchi Ashram: In the Kainchi Ashram, Neem Karoli Baba is still honored. The ashram is overseen by an Indian woman called Siddhi Ma who was a devotee of Maharajji for many years. She does not give any teachings except to remember and honor Maharajji. Devotees say that they still feel his presence there, ‘enveloping one like a plaid blanket’. The ashram is located in a picturesque river valley amongst a number of temples. It has accommodation for around 150 guests who must be devotees or intending devotees. Permission to stay must be obtained in advance in writing, and guests must follow the daily ashram schedule of morning and evening chanting.

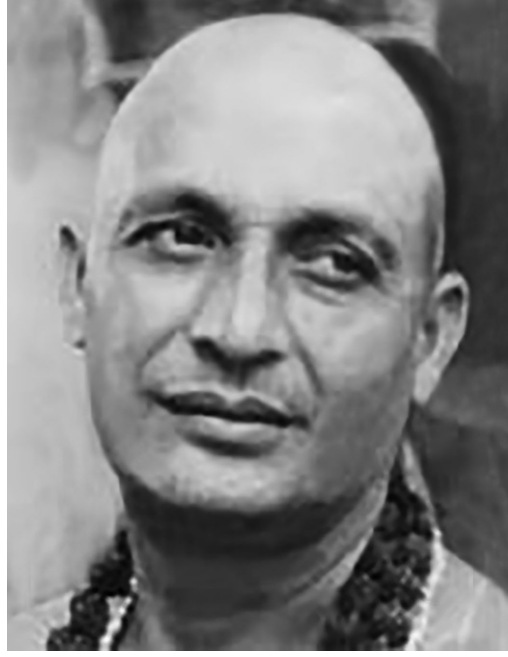
It is said that Maharajji’s presence can be felt in all the temples that he frequented. One such is a Hanuman temple located between Haridwar and Rishikesh and marked by a large Hanuman statue visible from the road.

Contact information

Kainchi Ashram,
Sankata Mochana Hanuman Mandir,
Kainchi, via Bhowali, Nainital,
Uttar Pradesh 26313, India.

Other ashrams and temples associated with Neem Karoli Baba can be sourced on:

Website: www.neemkarolibaba.com



Swami Satyananda Saraswati
(1923-2009)

SWAMI SATYANANDA SARASWATI

Founder of the Bihar School of Yoga

*'When you are helpless, when you have nowhere to go
When your body is completely tired and broken and
your mind does not function –
Then your soul becomes free to unite with Him.
The bulb breaks and the energy returns to the source of all
power.'*

Swami Satyananda Saraswati was born in 1923 to a family of farmers in Almora in the foothills of the Himalayas, India. As a youth he was classically educated in Sanskrit and became familiar with the Vedas and the Upanishads. He began to have spiritual experiences at the age of six when he felt his awareness leave his body that lay motionless on the floor. These experiences of disembodied awareness continued and led to the meeting of many saints of that period, such as Ramakrishna and Anandamayi Ma. Many sadhus and holy personages blessed him and proclaimed that his awareness was very highly developed. He also met a tantric bhairavi, Sukhman Giri, who initiated him into shaktipat and told him to find a guru in order to stabilize his experiences.

At the age of 18 he left home in the search of such a spiritual master and at 20, in 1943, he met Swami Sivananda. From 1943 to 1955, he immersed himself in the life of the Sivananda Ashram at Rishikesh under the tutelage of Swami Sivananda. In 1947, he took initiation as a sanyasi in the *Dashnami Sanyasa* tradition. Swami Sivananda described him as a versatile genius who did the work of four people. He undertook physical labour, edited the ashram's Hindi journal, and wrote poems and articles in both Hindi and Sanskrit. He held the same view as Swami Sivananda, that most pandits

kept the people ignorant by using only Sanskrit instead of the common languages of Hindi or English.

In 1955, after receiving instruction from Sivananda to spread yoga teaching from door to door and shore to shore, he left the Sivananda Ashram and traveled around India, Afghanistan, Nepal, Burma and Ceylon as a wandering mendicant in search of the meaning of life, thus extending his knowledge of spiritual practices. He eventually ended up in Munger in the province of Bihar where, inspired by Sivananda, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship Movement, based on an integrated approach to yoga.

In 1963-64, following Swami Sivananda's death, he opened the Bihar School of Yoga which formed centers for the teaching of yoga in India. Over the following 20 years, from 1963 until 1983, he lectured and taught globally, traveling to Singapore, Japan, New Zealand, America and Colombia. In 1984, he formed the Sivananda Math and a charitable organization known as the Yoga Research Foundation, to honour the memory of his Guru.

Swami Satyananda has authored more than 80 books including the *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, which is recognized as one of the most authoritative texts on yoga and has been translated into many languages. He emphasized the yogic side of Tantra and, in 1971, published the *Tantra Yoga Panorama* in which the concepts of Tantra that are appropriate to the needs of modern society are outlined. By 1983, the Bihar School of Yoga had become a widely recognized center for the learning of yoga and the spiritual sciences. But in 1988, he renounced all his spiritual work and handed responsibility for the ashram to Swami Niranjanananda, and left Munger.

In 1989, he went to Rikhia, Deoghar in Jharkhand, an underprivileged rural area, to live in seclusion and perform Vedic sadhanas including the tapas of sitting before blazing fires in the hottest months of the year (see *Satpatha Brahmanas Kathopanishad*). At Rikhia in 1995, he started an annual 12-year yajna invoking the Cosmic Mother through tantric ceremonies, for the peace, welfare and upliftment of all.

During the first of these yajnas he formally transmitted his spiritual sanyas to Swami Niranjanananda.

Teachings

Swami Satyananda's teachings, known as the Bihar School of Yoga, emphasize the integration of yogic asanas that address the head (the source of intellect and emotion), the heart and hands, so as to inculcate the psychological, spiritual and physical dimensions of yoga into each practice session. Thus, the codification of the wisdom of yoga as it appears in the ancient tantric scriptures became accessible to the modern aspirant. The yoga involving the breath (pranayama and *prana vidya* – knowledge of the life force), the role of mudras and *bandhas* (seal) and the grouping of asanas according to physical position were scientifically explained, made generally understandable and available for the first time. The techniques given in the Tantras are classified and explained in stages of practice and meditation. He also invented a technique which he called *yoga nidra*, now known as Satyananda Yoga Nidra, which comprises the following elements:

Kundalini yoga: the evolutionary energy of the universe;

Kriya yoga: austerities, the study of spiritual literature and the repeating of a personal mantra. This involves self-surrender to the Lord and the doing of actions as an offering to the Lord;

Mantra yoga: the repetition of sacred sounds;

Laya yoga: absorption on an object of meditation.

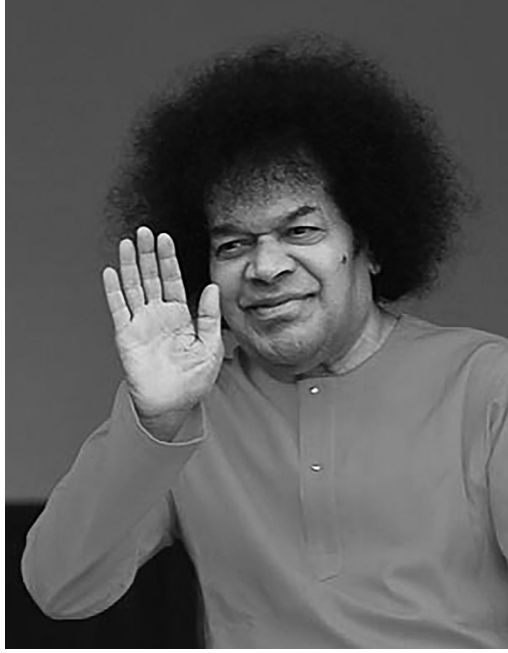
In addition to these, he also added advanced forms of what is known as the Eight Limbs of Yoga that were originally codified by the sage Patanjali.

His death

On December 5, 2009, Swami Satyananda entered mahasamadhi while in an exalted state. Sitting upright, he consciously departed from his physical body. On his death, thousands of followers traveled to Rikhia to pay homage to this inspired spiritual master.

Contact information

There are many Satyananda centers throughout the world.
Visit the website of Bihar School of Yoga:
www.biharyoga.net



Sathya Sai Baba
(1926-2011)

SATHYA SAI BABA

Godman of Puttaparthi

'Be like the sandal wood tree – that gives its fragrance even to the axe that fells it.'

Sathya Sai Baba was born in 1926 and passed away in April 2011. He claimed to be a reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba and has predicted that he will be reborn eight years from the time of his death, for the third time, in the modern world.

Sathya Sai Baba was certainly the most popular of the present-day gurus of India, with devotees and others that knew of him probably running well into the hundreds of millions. He also had strong followings in other parts of Asia, in Africa, Australia, Russia and its former territories, throughout the West, and almost everywhere else. Throughout the world, there are thousands of Sai Centers. Unquestionably though, he was a man of India who served the people of India. He only once traveled physically outside the region, when he went to Uganda to help the Ugandan Indians during the days of Idi Amin.

The most authoritative works in the English language about Sai Baba are the four volumes by Dr. N. Kasturi called *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*. Dr. Kasturi, now deceased, was a history professor and the principal of Mysore University. In the West, Sai Baba is probably best known from the books of Howard Murphet: *Sai Baba – Man of Miracles*, *Sai Baba, Avatar*, and *Walking the Path with Sai Baba*.

His enormous popularity initially stemmed from the fact that he was a spectacular performer of miracles. In the days when he performed miracles almost daily, he explained that he did that to give the people what they wanted, in the hope that they would come to want what he really had to give them –

that is, the path to enlightenment. In the latter years of his life he entered a teaching phase, though miracles still occurred almost randomly, and were ‘performed’ by him on special occasions. It seemed that his hoped-for wish that people would want to know the Truth, rather than just experience miracles has to some extent come to pass. His best-known public miracle was the production of sacred ash called *vibhuti* from his hands. This sacred ash also emanates from pictures of Baba, and from statues, sometimes to the consternation of those who possess them. Vibhuti is still given out at Sai gatherings and is used by devotees for spiritual upliftment, healing, attaining desires and so on. It is said that the production of vibhuti was done in reverence to his predecessor, Sai Baba of Shirdi, who always gave ash from his fireplace, to his devotees.

His other regular public miracle of recent times was the materialization of Shivalingams, which he produced from his mouth on certain ceremonial occasions. Howard Murphet described one such event at a ceremony in India as follows: *‘They (the lingams) are always hard (ellipsoidal), being made of crystal clear or colored stone and sometimes metals like gold or silver. ‘Are you sure he doesn’t pop them into his mouth and then eject them at the right moment?’ I asked. My hearers looked at me with amusement and pity. One of them said, ‘He talks and sings for a long time before the lingam comes out and it’s always much too big to hold in the mouth while speaking.’ Well, I thought, even if he does bring these things up from somewhere inside him, what is the point of it? To this question I received a number of answers, but it seemed to me the most satisfactory explanation was as follows: The Shivalingam belongs to a class of ‘natural’ Hindu symbols... If the center, or the one focal point of a sphere (representing the absolute Brahman), divides itself into two, we get the ellipsoidal shape. So the lingam gives a symbolic representation of the primary pair of opposites formed out of the original harmonious One (Brahman) – which emerges as Shiva-Shakti. And from this first duality all manifestation comes, all creation, and all the multiplicity of things in the universe.’*

Another plausible explanation is they are sculptures of temples (simple village temples have oval roofs). Poor people, who can't afford to dedicate real temples, make such offerings made in clay.

Sathya Sai Baba has sometimes been criticized for his miracles. It is said that all advanced yogis can perform miracles and that they are, in fact, obstacles to spiritual development. Howard Murphet refutes this and tells of an interview with a devotee of Sai Baba, Swami Karunyananda, who said that the first time he met Sai Baba in 1957, he thought that his miracles may have been demonstrations of common yogic powers that were less than divine. However, as he was drawn closer to Baba and after much meditation, and more experience of the miracles and their context, he came to the conclusion that they were truly divine and of the highest type.

Sathya Sai Baba is considered by his devotees to be an Avatar – a direct divine incarnation. Christianity believes that Christ was the only Avatar, but Hinduism and Buddhism hold the more reasonable belief that there have been many such beings – and, of course, there seems no rational reason to believe that Avatars only appeared in the distant past and have now completely died out. At the same time, Sathya Sai Baba claims to be a reincarnation of the well-known saint Sai Baba of Shirdi, a prolific producer of miracles.

However, whatever the world thinks of him, the evidence for his genuineness is overwhelming. He taught and followed the path of Karma yoga – the yoga of selfless service, and nothing could be more appropriate than miracle-working for India, where the majority lives in poverty. Sathya Sai Baba's service to India is enormous and includes (apart from his own presence and the faith he engenders in devotees), many charitable and educational services overseen by the Sai Foundation – not only in India, but all over the world. His teachings were based on service and the cultivation of morality, and devotees are encouraged to undertake charitable works as their sadhana. The Sai organizations never solicit money from devotees or charge money for spiritual services. If anyone wants to donate (even now since his death) they have

to first contact the Sai Foundation, or local centers, that oversee the various charitable activities that are performed in Sai Baba's name. In a talk on the occasion of the Telegu New Year in 1999, Sai Baba, speaking in the third person, said, "Swami does not ask for anything for himself. Today there are many Swamis and others who are making money in the name of spirituality. The Sri Sathya Sai Organization has no connection whatsoever with any of them. You should not have anything to do with them. Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization should progress only with the spirit of sacrifice."

Early life

Sathya Sai Baba was born in the village of Puttaparthi in southern India where the present main ashram, Prasanthi Nilayam, is located. It is said that before his birth, musical instruments in the house of his parents would mysteriously play in the middle of the night. And soon after he was born, the women who attended the birth noticed a movement under the bed clothes, which turned out to be a cobra but it didn't harm anyone and soon went away. (Cobras have a special place in Hindu mythology because of Lord Shiva's association with them.) The baby was given the birth name Satyanarayana, from which his present name of Sathya Sai Baba is derived.

In those days Puttaparthi was a small, sun-baked farming village of whitewashed mud houses and sandy streets, lying in a valley surrounded by low hills. His family was not of the priestly Brahmin caste but Sathya's paternal grandfather was a man of status and a minor landlord, who dedicated a temple to the goddess Satyabhama. The grandfather led a devout religious life and was also a good musician and actor, often performing from the Indian spiritual epics such as the Ramayana. It is said that young Satyanarayana was fascinated by these performances.

The boy had a sweet nature, a ready smile and showed love towards all creatures. Although the family was not vegetarian, he always refused to eat meat or fish, and when an animal had been selected for slaughter he would hold it closely and lovingly in the hope of persuading his elders to relent and spare the creature. He was always giving food to beggars and

when his mother scolded him, would say that it could be his share of the food that is given. On one occasion, his mother noticed that he hadn't eaten for several days but was still full of energy. So, as happens with many saints, it seems he was sometimes nourished from a celestial source.

At primary school, and later at secondary school, Sathya was a very popular boy because of his ability to produce sweets from thin air. In the world of an Indian village, the children had little difficulty in accepting these manifestations simply and without intellectual analysis, as a spiritual boon. Sathya told them that a certain minor *grama shakti* (village deity) obeyed his will and gave him whatever he asked. He soon became a leader of the children in most activities and some boys began to regard him as their guru. He would arrive a little early at school and collect children around him to conduct pujas. He was also highly regarded by the teachers but on one occasion, a teacher, who had been unfairly punishing students, found that his chair had stuck to his bottom – that is, until he had made appropriate apologies. Sathya confessed to this incident but explained that his intention was not revenge but, as Dr. Kasturi writes, *'It was only to reveal a little of his uniqueness... and to make the world around him sit up and ask, "Who is this boy?"'*

Sathya was a deeply religious child. He seldom answered back when spoken to and had little interest in food. He would suddenly burst into song or poetry and sometimes quote long Sanskrit passages, far beyond anything learned in his formal education or at home. Sometimes he would become stiff and appear to leave his body and go somewhere else. At times he would show extraordinary strength, and at other times he was as 'weak as a lotus stalk'. There was also sometimes an alternation of laughter and weeping, and sometimes he would become very serious and give penetrating discourses on Vedantic philosophy. On occasions he spoke of God, and sometimes he described far-off holy places which – certainly during his life as Sathya – he had never visited.

A celestial scorpion sting?

A new phase of Sathya's life began in 1940 when he was 13 years of age. In the evening while walking barefoot through the village, he suddenly leapt into the air with a loud cry. The area had lots of black scorpions and it was assumed he had been stung on the big toe of his right foot by one of them. To Indians, steeped in Hindu mythology, this event itself was thought to be auspicious because, in the *Guru Gita*, one verse says that '*the right big toe of the Guru's foot is the abode of all places of pilgrimage*'. Nevertheless, everyone was worried because the scorpions of that area are said to be very poisonous. He collapsed and remained unconscious all night long. His body became stiff and his breathing faint. A doctor administered an injection and the next morning he recovered and seemed quite normal. However, people noticed that from that time onward he seemed, at times, to be a different person, and speculated that it marked the beginning of a dramatic change in his development.

But Dr. Kasturi gives a different interpretation of the 'scorpion' event in Part I of his book *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*. According to this, Sathya was well recognized for his supernatural powers long before the time of the alleged scorpion sting. He could read others' thoughts and see into the future. He could travel astrally to help people, and could perform many other wondrous acts. Dr. Kasturi speculated that on the day of the alleged sting he could not, for some reason, leave his body and go to the succor of a devotee in dire distress, and that his imposition in that matter and apparent collapse was misunderstood by his brother and others as a scorpion sting. Sathya, he wrote, had come to save humanity from downfall and this event marked the beginning of the spiritual discipline that he was to introduce in all corners of India, and in many other parts of the world as well.

Whatever the reason, his family at the time was incensed because of an assumed insult to his father. Once when his father had admonished him over producing miraculous candies before a group of children, he had caused offence when he calmly said, "I am Sai Baba." His parents had, for some time, been concerned for his sanity because they thought he might be possessed by a malevolent spirit – one that could quote

Sanskrit scriptures, expound Vedic philosophy, and produce candy! They had even taken him to a number of doctors and sorcerers in an attempt to alleviate this ‘problem’.

Later that year, he left home and spent most of his time in another house in Puttaparthi, steadily serving the people by performing the miracles: granting wishes, curing diseases, materializing items, causing people to have visions, and so on. He also organized people to chant devotional songs, an activity which now forms one of the main acts of worship in all Sai Centers. He stressed the worship of the guru and said that the singing of praise should be in the mind as well as in the voice. One frequently sung bhajan translates thus:

*‘Oh, you seekers, you seekers,
Worship the feet of the Guru with your entire mind;
You can thus cross the ocean of grief and joy,
And birth and death.’*

As a prelude to the affirmation that he was indeed an incarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi, and when people were still mystified about who or what he was and asked for a sign, he picked up a cluster of jasmine flowers and threw them on the ground; they landed as a display in Sanskrit lettering of the name – ‘Sai Baba’.

The Shirdi connection

Sai Baba of Shirdi passed away in 1918, some eight years before Sathya’s birth. He was also a man of miracles who had appeared in the small town of Shirdi in Maharashtra state. His origin is unknown but the most plausible theory is that he was the son of an impoverished Brahmin family who gave him to a wandering Muslim fakir – who became his teacher and guru. Whatever his origin, the first Sai Baba took up residence in a dilapidated mosque in the town of Shirdi, wore the clothes of a Muslim fakir, but also knew the Hindu scriptures in detail. Consequently, through his knowledge of both the Muslim and Hindu faiths, and his frequent performance of miracles, he became revered by both Hindus and Muslims. Sathya Sai Baba

also has both Hindu and Muslim devotees, as well as devotees of other faiths.

Following Sathya's announcement of his connection with Sai Baba of Shirdi, devotees became very interested in checking its veracity. The best evidence probably came from those who had known both the Sai Babas. In that time, the 1940s, there were many such individuals still living. One of them was the Rani of Chincholi, whose deceased husband had been a devotee of the first Sai Baba who had visited the palace on several occasions. Over the years a number of changes had been made, and when Sathya visited there he immediately commented on them. He asked why they had removed a large margosa tree that had once grown there, and why a certain well had been covered over. He also commented on new structures and pointing to a line of buildings said, "They were not built when I was here in my previous body."

Another devotee of Sathya was Mr. M.S. Dixit who had met the first Sai Baba in 1916. Many years later, in 1959, with no knowledge of the second Sai Baba, he had a dream that a man followed him and poured ash over his head. Later he came across a photo of Sathya and recognized him as the man in the dream. He became a devotee and said that Sathya correctly identified individuals from an old photograph that Mr. Dixit had.

Aside from these examples, there are many others dating from the 1940s, 1950s and later, when many Shirdi Sai devotees were still alive. But there is also much indirect evidence of the connection between the two Sai Babas. For example, a news photographer was taking a picture of Sathya and asked him to move away from a large un-photogenic rock. Sathya declined and the picture was taken. When developed, a clear image of Sai Baba of Shirdi could be seen sculpted into the rock. Many people who are devotees of Sathya have visions of the first Sai Baba. One involved a swami of the Shankaracharya Order, his Holiness Gayanthri Swami. On a visit to Sathya's ashram, the swami was only half-convinced about the reincarnation story, but there he had a visitation of the old Sai Baba who declared that he had returned from his mahasamadhi after eight years (the period before Sathya was

born), and that he had brought his ‘properties’ with him 15 years later. This was a mystery at first but when discussing the vision with devotees, they explained that Sathya had first announced his reincarnation at the age of 14 and begun manifesting the miraculous powers of the old Sai Baba at that age.

Sathya Sai Baba

Physically Sathya was quite small-built unlike his rugged former incarnation. Nevertheless, dressed in his simple red robe and with his ‘Afro’ hairstyle, his appearance became quite striking. From the earliest knowledge of him, he always made himself accessible to his millions of devotees in a most democratic manner. He appeared for darshan almost daily at his ashram Prasanthi Nilayam, and it was always strictly a matter of first-come, first-served. Those who assembled early got to sit at the front of the hall, where even in advanced old age he walked slowly before the devotees. They could pass letters to him which, it is said, were always read and acted upon in an appropriate manner. Even in his old age, he still sang bhajans in a sweet melodious voice at public gatherings, almost daily.

His life, it seems, was entirely about service and the spreading of goodness and optimism. And he asked devotees to serve others selflessly in their own communities. In a talk given on the occasion of the Hindu New Year in 1999, he said, “The name of this new-year is Pramadi, which implies dangerous prospects. But no danger will befall the world... There are no dangers either for the world or for the nation or for the family... Nothing will happen. What we encounter depends on our thoughts. So entertain good thoughts and you are bound to be successful.”

He was also a great believer in the sacred place of India in bringing enlightenment to the world. He said, “Since ancient times, this sacred land of Bharat (India) has shared its spiritual wealth with the rest of the world to foster peace and security... Without Bharat there will be no trace of spirituality in the world. There is Sathya (Truth) in the air of Bharat; there is Dharma in the dust of Bharat. The land of Bharat is suffused

with love. The waters of Bharat overflow with compassion... you must always uphold and sustain the principles of truth, love, righteousness and compassion...”

Sathya also had the ear of political leaders. For example in a recent talk on the occasion of his birthday, he made the following statement, “I told Vajpayee (the then Prime Minister of India), Vajpayee, you are a good person. But develop friendship with Pakistan and China. If India, Pakistan and China become united, they will make a formidable force for goodness in the world.”

Sai Baba miracles

Although many saints and spiritual teachers disassociate themselves from miracles, Sai Baba is not one of them. Moreover, as a reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba, performing miracles would merely be a case of being true to type. Consequently, this account would not be complete without a description of some of the miracles. But, it should be noted, Sathya had said that the first 32 years of his mission would be marked mainly by *lilas* and *mahimas* (different types of miracles), and the subsequent years would be characterized by an emphasis on teaching – and this was how it turned out to be.

However, miracles still continued to occur with great regularity. Recently a woman from Penang, in Malaysia, said that, “The Sai Center in Penang (Malaysia) is really marvelous. There’s vibhuti (ash), kumkum (the red powder used by Hindus for marking the supposed position of the ‘third eye’ on the forehead) and sandalwood paste materializing on the walls and the statues of Mother Mary, Kwan Yin, Buddha and Durga, and from all of Baba’s photos.”

It is known that many advanced yogis and great beings possess the power of astral travel. (In fact, it is also known that even some ordinary people can make excursions out of the body.) Sai Baba has often been reported as being in more than one place at the same time – his physical body being in one place, while his astral body traveled to some other location. Devotees believed that he kept an eye on things around the world in that way. In Penang again, where there are many Sai

followers, a devotee took some photographs at a Sai gathering, showing people seated and facing the temple altar, on which there were two candles burning. The first photo was perfectly ordinary, but another one, taken a few seconds later, showed the candle flames flaring up a meter into the air. In the second picture, there was what appeared to be a reddish figure standing behind in the dark, looking in at a window behind the altar. No one at the gathering noticed anything unusual about the behaviour of the candles, but there is no doubt about the authenticity of the photos and the negatives, which were taken with an ordinary simple camera and processed in the usual way.

In the early days, Baba's miracles were spectacular and numerous, witnessed by so many people as to be irrefutable. Among the most spectacular are those that occurred on a stretch of sand on the bank of the Chitravati river in Puttaparthi, where crowds used to gather. There he would produce scores of images of various gods and saints that would protrude from the sand. He would scratch the surface and an idol would pop up. Those made from metal would often still be hot as if just recently cast.

Almost everyone who knows anything about Sai Baba will have had a personal experience of a miracle. Howard Murphet described a spectacular demonstration of the production of vibhuti as follows:

'On the stage is a silver statue of Sai Baba of Shirdi... Dr. Kasturi takes up a wooden urn filled with vibhuti and lets the ash pour over the figure until the urn is empty. Then he continues to hold it above the statue with its open top downwards. Now Baba thrusts his arm in as far as the elbow and makes a churning motion with his arm. Immediately the ash begins to flow again from the vessel in a copious stream and continues to do so until he takes his arm out. Then the flow of ash stops. Next he puts in his other arm and twirls that around. The ash streams over the statue again. The process goes on; finally Shirdi Sai is buried in a deep mound of ash. There is a joyous, elevated atmosphere all around: Dr. Kasturi's face is more radiant than ever, Baba's movements and manner are the acme of unselfconscious grace.'

Sai Baba's miracles frequently involve materialization of objects and he himself has said that some of these are *apports* – that is, the moving of an existing object from one place to another; while others are manifestations of objects from nothing. It is generally understood, in India, that great gurus and saints are attended by celestial beings. In the Western tradition, these would be angels. Baba has said that such beings are the ones that attend to his wishes, and also sometimes do things unbidden. For example, when he was in conversation with a devotee at her house, he interrupted her by saying that a celestial being wanted to give something to her, and then manifested before the amazed woman's eyes, was a crystal bowl filled with candies from different parts of India.

An example known to one of the compilers of this book concerns a no-nonsense high court judge. The judge was visiting a friend who was a Sai Baba devotee. The judge would have nothing to do with such things and pointing to a picture of Sai Baba, said to the devotee, "How can you say that a fellow like that is the same as Jesus Christ?" As he said that glaring at the picture, two perfect tears appeared from the eyes of the picture. The no-nonsense judge was not one to stand on ceremony. He pulled the picture off the wall and took the frame apart to find out if it had some device for producing tears. He then had to apologize and subsequently became a Sai devotee.

Probably the most common type of miracle was that of healing. Baba has actually said that he sometimes goes to the aid of devotees who may, for example, be having a heart attack. In other instances, the healing is in response to the prayers of the devotee. Such miracles of healing are too numerous to mention.

Some individuals who criticize miracles may miss the point that they are a tremendous source of inspiration and encouragement to ordinary simple people. Every miracle can be regarded as a prompt to the recipient to pursue his or her spiritual practices diligently. Those who dodge such opportunities may have simply become surfeited with miraculous phenomena. Another factor is that close devotees may themselves become imbued with miraculous powers,

which could then go to their heads and fortify their egos. Howard Murphet cites an example from Sai Baba of Shirdi. One of his devotees who had just noticed that he had developed clairvoyance, instantly felt Baba's eyes on him, who said, "Why are you gazing at the strumpet's performance?" On this occasion, the man's wife happened to be present and caused a disturbance because she assumed that Baba was referring to some other woman in the assembly. But the devotee himself understood that he was being warned not to be carried away by that newly acquired power.

There are countless examples of miracles that endear Baba to the hearts of his devotees and help them to hearken to his teachings: be virtuous, help the needy, and participate in service activities. Skeptics say that these events are merely coincidence, but the fact is that such occurrences number in the many millions – and they can't all be ignored.

But it seems, to many devotees, the greatest miracle was the presence of Baba himself. There was, and still is, a divine power that reaches to the depths of people's hearts and, on occasions, even to the hearts of those who know little about him. As indicated before, Baba remained mostly in India (in the physical body at least), but on the occasion of his visit to Uganda in 1968, to comfort the Indian population there, not only Indians but many thousands of Africans from all walks of life, from high government and military personnel to lowly tribesmen, paid homage to him. Howard Murphet wrote thus: *'Crowds danced with joy at the sight of him, and ranks of police guards fell to their knees as he walked past them.'*

But there is no doubt that Baba receives much criticism in the press from those who proclaim themselves to be 'rationalists', but this is meaningless to those who have experienced his grace. The real miracle was the love of Baba himself. Recently, Howard Murphet, who was then over 90 years of age but still alert, attended a Sai gathering in which various people were making comments on the matters under discussion, the nature of the ego, morality and so on; then, when Howard was asked if he had anything to say, he simply said, "All that really matters is the love."

Some teachings

Sai Baba recommended the three-fold path of Karma yoga (selfless service), Jnana yoga (knowledge) and Bhakti yoga (love and devotion). They conform to the understandings of the classical Hindu scriptures: the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and the *Shastras*. He also regards the great Hindu epics of the Mahabharata and Ramayana as vehicles for the transmission of Truth. These are some examples of his teachings, “Base your action on knowledge, the knowledge that all is One. Let the action be suffused with bhakti; that is to say, humility, love, mercy and non-violence. Let bhakti be filled with knowledge, otherwise it will be as light as a balloon which drifts along any current of air or gust of wind. But mere knowledge will make the heart dry; bhakti makes it soft with sympathy, and karma gives the hands something to do, something which will sanctify every one of the minutes that have fallen to your lot to live.”

He emphasized that man is not just the gross body but is, in essence, Atma – which is the higher Self. The Atman is formless but creates the forms it requires, all of which are associated with obscuring *koshas* (sheaths). The grossest of the sheaths is the *annamaya* kosha (food sheath), the next is the *pranamaya* kosha (vital breath sheath) – these two make up the gross body. The subtle body or astral body has two more sheaths, the *manomaya* kosha (mind sheath) and the *vijnamaya* kosha (intellect – also known as the *buddhi* sheath). The fifth sheath is the *anandamaya* kosha (sheath of bliss) which is the highest body of man’s individual psyche, the causal body. At the same time, all these components together serve the Atman, or the true Self – the One. On this he said, “You are really the invincible Atma (spirit), unaffected by the ups and downs of life. The shadow you cast while trudging along the road falls on dirt and dust, bush and briar, stone and sand, but you are not worried at all, for you walk unscathed. So too, as the atma substance, you have no reason to be worried over the fate of its shadow, the body... Man is not a despicable creature, born in slime and sin, to eke out a drab existence for ever. Man is immortal and eternal. So when the call comes from the region of immortality, he responds with his whole heart... He seeks

liberation from his bondage to the trivial and the temporary. Everyone craves for this in his heart of hearts. And it is available only in one shop – that is, in the contemplation of the Atma, the highest Self, which is the basis of all this appearance.”

Baba’s esoteric teachings also sometimes differed from the usual to some degree, but conform to the cosmology in which the ‘Mother’ is the Source of everything; perhaps, it has been said, to bring home a message to the people. An example is his interpretation of the gunas. In a recent talk, he compared the gunas to the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara (Shiva). He said, “In this human body, constituted of the five elements, God dwells in the form of the three gunas. Bharatiyas (Indians) adore the Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara. The Trinity is not embodied beings. No one has ever seen them. Nor is it possible to experience them in any way. The Trinity dwells in the human body as the three gunas: Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The three qualities are forms of the Divine. Brahma is responsible for creation. The process of creation is subtle and cannot be perceived by the senses. This transcendental process is taught by the Mother. All are creations of the Mother. Hence, the Upanishad declares: ‘Revere Mother as God.’ The Mother is to be adored as Brahma, the Creator. Revere the Mother, serve the Mother and trust the Mother. This symbolizes the worship of God.

Next comes the father. He protects the child, takes care of his upbringing and leads him to God. The protective function is attributed to Vishnu. The father symbolizes Vishnu as the protector. Hence the injunction: ‘Revere the father as God.’ Thus the mother and the father are images of Brahma and Vishnu.

Then there is Easwara. He is called Bolaasankara. He gives whatever one prays for. He never says ‘no’ to any supplicant. Such an embodiment of Truth cannot be hidden. To experience this embodiment of auspiciousness (Shiva), Tamas is the means. The tamasic quality is usually associated with slothfulness and indolence but this is not the proper meaning of Tamas (as an attribute of Shiva). Shiva’s role is to lead man on the right path to realize his divinity.

The Trinity, in the form of the three gunas, is present in every human being. This is borne out by the scriptural aphorisms:

'Easwaras – sarvabhoothaanaam' (The Divine dwells in all beings), *'Isaavaasyam idam jagath'* (The Lord is the indweller in the cosmos). When the significance of the three gunas is understood, the nature of the Trinity can be understood.”

But Baba’s teachings to the masses took the form of encouragement to lead a virtuous life, to serve others, and in particular, to control desires. The road to liberation is a long one and, as we should understand, does not usually end with death – for all the psychic scars, desires, attachments, aversions, and habits that we have not gotten rid of, are carried over in the subtle body and become the vasanas of the new creation. On the question of desires, he said, “Man is like rice. Provided the husk is not removed it will grow. Man’s husk is his body of desires; if this is liquidated, he will not reincarnate... Man’s many desires are like the small metal coins he carries in his pocket. The more he has, the more they weigh him down. But if he can convert them all into one paper note of higher currency, he will not feel any weight. In the same way if he can convert his many desires into one desire – into the aspiration for union with God, then there will be no weight to pull him down to the earthly level.” Howard Murphet tells of an encounter of a rich man with the first Sai Baba. The man had come to ask the way to salvation and Baba put him to the test by elaborating 10 points that need to be observed. They are summarized here because they are considered to be the basic requirements for realization:

1. Realize the absolute triviality of the things of this world and the subsequent worlds. Do not look for honors and the fruits of this world and the ones to follow – because the aim for liberation is higher than these.
2. Realize we are in bondage to the lower worlds and then develop an intense desire to get free, and work earnestly and resolutely to this end, caring for nothing else.

3. Ignore the outward pull of the senses and turn the gaze inward to the inner Self.
4. Turn away from wrongdoing and become composed so that the mind is at rest. One cannot gain Self-realization in other ways even though one has great knowledge.
5. Lead a life of truth, insight, penance, and right conduct.
6. Two classes of things constantly present themselves to man for acceptance – the good and the pleasant. The wise choose the good, the unwise, through greed and attachment, choose the pleasant.
7. The aspirant must control his mind and senses. If these are unrestrained, a man cannot reach his destination. But when the enlightened intellect will exercise control, then the true Self reaches the supreme abode of the all-pervading God. (Sometimes Sathya Sai Baba uses the example of an electric cable, “Do not establish contact with the mind; that is as bad as contacting a naked cable! Watch it from a distance; then only can you derive bliss.” That is to say, becoming too closely identified and involved with the mind incapacitates one from seeing the reality that lies beyond the mind.)
8. Purify the mind by performing satisfactorily and without attachment, the duties of one’s station in life (one’s Dharma). Get rid of the delusion ‘I am the body’, ‘I am the mind’ – this will help to get rid of the ego. Get rid of avarice and purify the mind of the lower desires.
9. The aspirant *must* have a guru; that is, a true guru, not a self-styled person who fancies himself or herself as a guru. The knowledge of the Self is so subtle that no one by his own effort can ever hope to attain it. When a pupil has done all he can in self-training and Self-inquiry, the guru will come. Baba has said, “If necessary God Himself will come down and be your guru.”
10. Last but not the least – in fact, the most important of all – is the Lord’s grace. This comes when the pupil realizes his own utter helplessness, then the divine grace comes, the light shines, the joy flows, the miraculous happens. He takes another step forward on the spiritual way.

It appears that after the dissertation was over, Baba told the rich man (correctly) that he had 250 rupees in his pocket (a large sum in those days), and said, “Roll up your bundle for God. Unless you completely get rid of your greed, you will never see the real God.” Apparently the rich man, unlike the one who walked sorrowfully away from Jesus, gave his 250 rupees for the poor and went away happy and contented.

One of Baba’s most often stressed teachings was that of selfless service, and particularly service to the poor and hapless. On the occasion of his 74th birthday address he said, “Swami (himself) needs nothing. Do not offer even a small robe. Swami belongs to you. He is not separate from you, nor are you separate from Swami – this is an inextricable relationship. Promote the well being of backward and poor villagers. You must have listened to the list of offerings of gold ornaments made by some devotees. What is an ornament to Bhagawan? Only Love is the ornament. He is beauty itself. Why cover him with a shower of jewelry?”

Later in his address, he said, “Today devotees from 137 countries have gathered here. (They had brought many offerings.) How much work is being done in those countries? That is the test. In all countries there are people who are hapless. They are embodiments of ‘Darida Narayana’ (God in the form of the poor.) What need is there to serve Sriman Narayana? He has a host of persons to serve Him. You must serve the ‘poor Narayanas’, who have nobody to serve them.

Baba recommended selfless service combined with love or devotion as the fastest way to liberation. He describes service as the slow passenger train; with stops, changes, and has many junctions. But if you add bhakti to it you will be on the express train, and get to the destination more quickly. Concerning Baba’s declared mission in the world these are some of his own words:

“I have come to repair the ancient highway leading man to God. Become sincere, skilful engineers, overseers, and workmen, and join me... I came to sow the seeds of faith in religion and God. You might have heard some people say that

I became Sai Baba when a scorpion stung me. Well, I challenge anyone of you to get stung by a scorpion and transform yourselves into Sai Babas. No, the scorpion had nothing to do with it... I came in response to the prayers of sages, saints and seekers for the restoration of Dharma.” On his human form and why it should be necessary, he said, “A person wishing to save a man from drowning must jump into the same pool; the Lord must come here in human form to be understood by men.” And on the frailties of the human body, he said, “Man must pay his taxes.”

Most recently, Sai Baba issued instructions to the International Sai Organization of Great Britain and Sai Centers generally, to divert attention from deities and even from himself, and direct attention inwardly – to the Self within everyone. He has advised devotees to get rid of photographs of him along with depictions of deities on their puja altars, and to concentrate on the inner journey. In the UK (and probably elsewhere), he has advised devotees to disregard any of his teachings prior to 1996.

Contact information

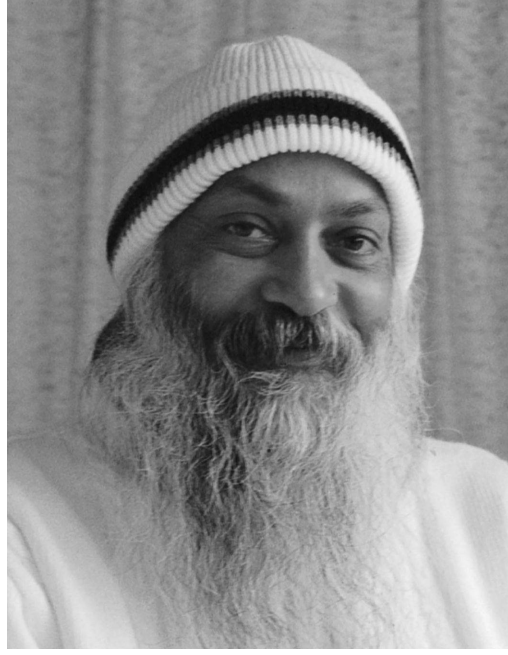
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Bhagawan Shree Rajneesh
(1931-1990)

BHAGAWAN SHREE RAJNEESH (OSHO)

The Love Guru – an odd man out

*'I initiate you into freedom, and into nothing else...
I am destroying your ideologies, creeds, cults, dogmas,
and I am not replacing them with anything else.'*

Born Chandra Mohan Jain in 1931, Shree Rajneesh became referred to as Bhagawan Shree Rajneesh, and also later as Osho, following the recognition of his spiritual power and his somewhat controversial teachings, for those days. The teachings were strongly attractive to Westerners in particular, becoming quite widespread and talked about in the West. In his talks he often expressed criticism towards socialism, institutionalized religion, and specifically at that time, the non-resistance philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. In the political circles of today, he would have fallen firmly into the Republican basket.

After years of lecturing far and wide throughout India, he moved in 1970 to Mumbai and began initiating followers, whom he referred to as neo-sanyasins. In his talks he often took the liberty of reinterpreting the traditional writings of the major religions, and freely expressed his views, often in a contradictory manner, on the teachings and writings of mystics and philosophers throughout the world.

In 1974, he relocated to Pune where he established his famous ashram. The ashram offered therapies derived from The Human Potential Movement and created a generally permissive atmosphere. Soon armies of Westerners moved in – encouraged by Osho's sometimes provocative lectures. However, through the 1970s, increasing tensions arose – both

from the Indian government and from the Indian public in general.

In 1981, he moved to the United States and established an international community in Oregon known as Rajneeshpuram, but there soon arose a struggle with the local population, mainly over land rights, that generated hostility on both sides. The large number of Rolls-Royce automobiles purchased by devotees for his use also attracted criticism. From the Rajneesh side, an attempted bio-terror attack using water pollution, was carried out. This led to his arrest and subsequent charge with immigration violations, so that he was deported from the United States as part of the plea bargaining arrangements.

Following this, he traveled the world looking for a safe haven. 21 countries denied him entry – so he returned to Pune, where he died in 1990.

But this was all the newsroom view of Rajneesh. So what of the inner man? Hundreds of thousands of devotees saw him as an enlightened being and a great spiritual teacher with a strong bent for humor. As a person, he was recognized as a formidable debater with a brilliant mind, but disruptingly argumentative.

Rajneesh was the eldest of 11 children of a cloth merchant father in the village of Kuchwada, but for some reason he lived for most of his first seven years with his maternal grandparents. It is said that this was an important part of his life because he was allowed the utmost freedom, which may have helped to develop his cavalier attitude towards the established order of things. During this period, he was profoundly affected when his grandfather died and, it is said, this led to him having a preoccupation with death.

Enlightenment

In 1953, aged just 21, he claims to have become enlightened through a mystical experience while sitting under a tree in the Devtal garden in Jabalpur. He described the experience something like this: “I was aware that many layers of experiences were gathering into a collective understanding

and felt that it was my inner voice assuring me that I was close to something. I decided to sit for seven days in silence. (Presumably this was before he sat under the tree in the Devtal garden.) Starting with my silence my body became very hot, followed the next day with a feeling of intense cold. Something in my body started to break down and I felt a transparent vapor surrounding me, like a silent guide that made my body obedient to its wishes. I felt energy gripping me from the air and arising within as if to become one, so I became still and focused on the stillness. Breathing in and out I focused on the gaps between the breaths. Then I had a sudden feeling that I was falling into some sort of tunnel in the gaps. I also began to experience an expansion of the stillness and my body began to smell of Jasmine. I was moving into a trance-like state. It was like sound that came from everywhere and the more I was aware of my silence the more I became drowned in the sound of hum humming. My touch began to expand and my hands felt feather light. I was looking upwards at the spot between my eyebrows as if waiting for something to appear. My senses were reaching outwards but also moving inwards to merge inside and out. My body started expanding, the air merging within me – from the sky, the earth, the grass, the trees, the rocks which were all becoming animate, and I felt my body had disappeared. I was completely transparent and my body seemed to be preparing for something. Then I experienced a tall kundalini-like opening, like a torrent into the sky. Someone please stop this, I cried to myself. Then my breathing became clearer and it seemed I was becoming breath itself. I was walking in a magical dream and the air became full of light and color dancing like rainbows – and every moment was alive with the newness of change.”

Rajneesh graduated from the University of Sagar in 1957, at the age of 25, with an MA in philosophy, with distinction. He quickly secured a teaching post at the Raipur Sanskrit College there, later moving to Jabalpur University. At both these organizations, though a popular lecturer, he was known to be a disruptive influence.

Later, he began speaking in public and became associated with a movement known as the ‘Sarva Dharma Sammelan’

(Meeting of All Faiths). At the same time, in addition to his university work, he traveled throughout India under the banner of the 'Life Awakening Movement', lecturing on his favorite topics: that socialism only increased and institutionalized poverty, and what India needed was capitalism, science, modern technology and birth control. He gathered wealthy merchant devotees who supported his activities in exchange for personal consultations on their spiritual life.

From 1962 onwards, he organized meditation camps and also set up meditation centers. But after a controversial teaching tour in 1966, he was removed from his teaching post.

Speaking at the Second World Hindu Conference, he again raised controversy by saying that religions that are full of misery and eulogize poverty are teaching against life and therefore are not true religions. Religion, he maintained, is an art that shows how to enjoy life. His disciples were required to wear the traditional orange garb of holy men and became known in the West as Orange People. But instead of following an ascetic lifestyle, they were to follow a celebratory lifestyle. He said, "If you go and tell people that sex is a sin (as prescribed for sanyasins) and they are convinced or they cannot refute you, you become happy. You have convinced yourself. But looking into others' eyes, you are trying to cover your own failure." He believed that most gurus had sex but hid it from the public.

In a 1968 lecture series, he called for a freer acceptance of sex and thus became known as the 'Sex Guru' in India, and the 'Love Guru' in the West. He publically bragged to the American media that he had sex with hundreds of women. His sex partners were his own female meditation students – his personal harem.

Women in his life

There were a number of very powerful women in Osho's life. His secretary, Laxmi (Ma Yoga Laxmi, his first disciple) was the daughter of a wealthy Jain businessman with high political connections, who raised the money that allowed Osho to settle down in Mumbai. He lived in an apartment from where he gave lectures and received visitors. It was from that

time onward that he took the name Bhagawan Shree Rajneesh – Bhagawan meaning Blessed One.

Another influential woman was Cathrine Venizelos, a Greek shipping heiress, who helped to purchase a property in Pune where the famous Pune ashram was established. Cathrine became Ma Yoga Mukta.

A third, highly charismatic woman was Sheela, who played a dominant role in his move to the USA.

Teachings

Osho's teachings were interspersed with rhetoric and humor. They emphasized the importance of meditation, awareness, love, celebration and courage. All of these, he argued, had been suppressed by the static belief systems of the religions. From the roots of Vedanta, he maintained that the human experience of separatedness, duality, is a dance of Cosmic Consciousness in which everything is sacred. (Here there are clear similarities with the teachings of Krishnamurti.) Every human being has the capacity for enlightenment but in most cases the ego, which is nothing but a barrier of dreams strengthened by social conditioning and perceived needs, prevents this.

The present moment: The ego mind's reliance on past events leads people to repress natural emotions and shuts them off from their inherent capacity for joy – that lies only in the present moment. Thus arise neuroses, jealousies and insecurities. He went further to say that sexual repression may lead to an obsession with sex. Instead of repressing themselves, people should accept themselves unconditionally. He wrote:

'The whole ignorance of mind is not being in the present. Mind is always moving: into the future or back into the past. Mind is never here and now because the mind has to think and for thinking space is needed: You can walk into the future or back into the past, but how can you walk into the present?'

Emptiness: His teachings often expressed the philosophy of 'emptiness'. He said, "Whenever you are against something

remember that understanding has not arisen, for in understanding, *for* and *against* both disappear.”

Recognizing ‘emptiness’ was one of Osho’s frequent teachings, “People come to me and say, ‘I have experienced one moment of emptiness.’ And I tell them if you have experienced it then forget about it, because who will experience it? The experiencer is the barrier. Emptiness cannot be experienced because the experiencer is not there: the experience and the experiencer have become one – it is an experiencing... But now I tell you it happens. It happened to me and it can happen to you – but a sublime emptiness is needed.”

Getting rid of thoughts: He said, “You must be thoughtless; thoughts are a crowd... They create chaos within you, every thought pulls you apart. That means you must be thoughtless... Thoughts divide because they always carry the opposite within them... Love carries hate... So the first thing to remember is how to drop thoughts – be thoughtless but alert. In deep sleep you are thoughtless, which is good for the body, but that won’t do... In deep sleep for a few moments you become one. What is attained is more consciousness. If you can add more consciousness to your deep sleep you will become enlightened.”

Keeping the door open: He maintained that the only effort that you can make for enlightenment is to be ever receptive – to keep the door open, “How can the infinite happen through finite efforts? You make efforts, they are necessary, they prepare you because they open the door – but the happening happens when it happens. Remain available. God knocks many times at your door, as the sun rises every day.”

Dynamic meditation: Osho taught many meditation techniques, saying that a master shares his being with his devotees and thus anything could become an opportunity for meditation. In 1972, he presented his Dynamic Meditation method for the first time as one of his main pillars of teaching. Based on ancient Buddhist and Hindu spiritual practices, movement is added as a part of meditation, the principal aim of which is to control the incessant flow of thoughts. Within

Osho's organization, Dynamic Meditation was only taught to actual devotees, so that the Osho version may be somewhat different from that presented here – but, in general, Dynamic Meditation goes something like this:

1. Stand with eyes closed and breathe deep and fast through the nose for 10 minutes.
2. Then let go totally, body and mind. Dance and roll on the floor. Scream and shout if you like. Act out your anger in a safe way for a further 10 minutes.
3. Then jump up and down yelling “HOO, HOO, HOO” for 10 minutes. It is said that the voice vibrations travel to your energy centers, raising the energy upwards. Keep the arms loose and dangling down. Raising the arms can be medically dangerous.
4. Flop down and completely relax in a comfortable manner for 10 minutes, surrendering totally to the cosmos.

At the Pune ashram, he taught continuously from 1974 to 1981 and was very voluble and expressive though, it is said, his teachings in later years becomes somewhat risqué and crude. (Some of his talks and sayings have been recorded in the books: *And the Flowers Showered* (1975) and *Just Like That* (1975) published by Ma Yoga Laxmi.)

The ashram also featured an Arts and Craft Center and, by all accounts, it was an exciting and intense place with a zany carnival atmosphere. The day began with Dynamic Meditation at 6 am, followed later by a spontaneous lecture, and a question and answer session given by Osho. During the day, various meditations and therapies also took place, charged with Osho's energy. In the evenings, he conversed with visitors and initiated disciples. (For those who may be interested, Osho's teachings have been compared with those of Gurdjieff, the Russian mystic who taught in France in the 1930s – who was known for his abrasive personality designed, it is said, to promote Self-inquiry and transcendence.)

Osho's 10 commandments were as follows:

1. Never obey anyone unless it comes from within you.
2. There is no God other than life itself.
3. Truth is within you. Don't look for it elsewhere.
4. Love is prayer.
5. To become nothingness is the door to truth.
6. Life is now and here.
7. Live wakefully.
8. Do not swim, float instead.
9. Die each moment to renew each moment.
10. Do not search. That which is, is. Stop and see.

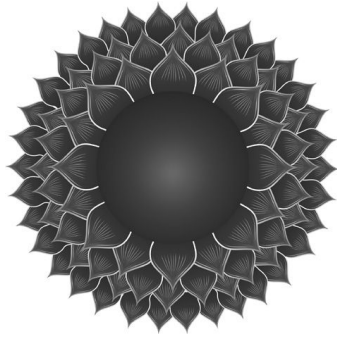
His legacy

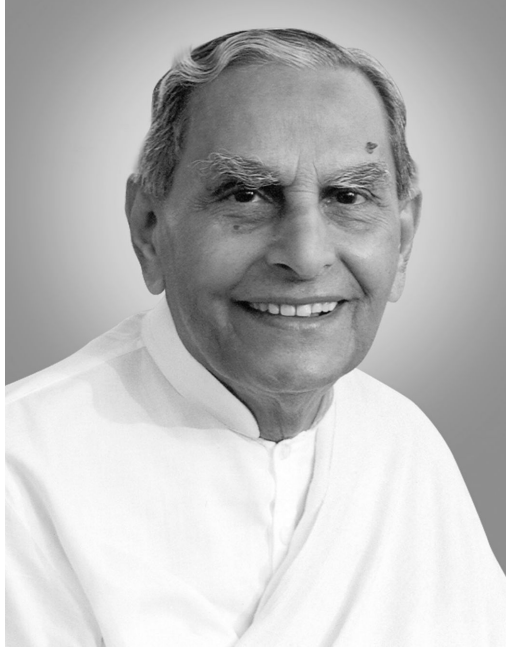
His writings have been placed in the library of the Indian National Parliament. Some of his better known works include: *Love, Freedom, and Aloneness: The Koan of Relationships*, *Joy: The Happiness That Comes from Within*, *Intuition: Knowing Beyond Logic*, *Maturity: The Responsibility of Being Oneself*.

Contact information

The Pune ashram is now known as the Osho International Resort, from where video recordings of his discourses are still distributed.

Osho International Resort,
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Website: www.osho.com





Dada J.P. Vaswani
(1918-Present)

DADA J.P. VASWANI

Pilgrim of Love

'Face life with love, love that is flowing, forgiving, unconditional and humble. Love God to the extent of self-effacement and for the sake of Him.'

It was a chilly winter night in Chennai, which in those days of the 1980s was still known as Madras. The famous Marina beach was dark and deserted, for the conservative families had left to go home by 7.30 p.m. Two figures were walking briskly at the very edge of the waters, on the wet sands. They were engaged in animated conversation and did not notice the stranger who had tiptoed behind them noiselessly until his hands were around the throat of the older man, threatening him in a rough voice, "Part with all that you have on yourself, or I will strangle you to death."

The older man was none other than Baba Gangaram, then Chairperson of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission, Pune. His friend and fellow walker on the beach was Dada J.P. Vaswani.

Dada had come on a lecture tour to Chennai and had just given a well-attended talk in English, in the city's AVP auditorium. A huge crowd of appreciative listeners had come to listen to him. Returning to his host's house after the event, Dada had asked for the car to stop at the beach so that he could take his daily walk on the seashore. His host had dropped Dada and Baba Gangaram near the beach and asked them not to venture far; he would soon park the car and join them. But in the starlit night and the fresh sea breeze blowing on them, they had walked far without even realizing it. That was when the stranger accosted them. Baba Gangaram was alarmed lest any harm should come to Dada. He hastily removed his watch and wallet and handed them to the stranger, pleading with him not to harm Dada. "He is a saint, a saint!" Baba said

repeatedly. But the thief cared little for his earnest words. He turned to Dada and said to him in broken English, “Now, what have you got to give me?”

Dada gazed unflinchingly into his eyes and said, “I am going to give you the world’s greatest treasure – Love.” And Dada threw his arms around the figure and gently patted his head. To say that the man simply crumbled, would be no exaggeration; he fell to his knees weeping and clung to Dada’s feet, sobbing loudly.

“It’s not my fault... it’s not my fault... I need money desperately! I haven’t managed to earn a paisa for the last three days and my wife and children are starving... I actually came to throw myself into the sea and put an end to my misery. I saw both of you and decided this was the only way left for me. Oh please forgive me... will you both please forgive me?”

Dada’s healing touch was still on his head, as he comforted the man wordlessly. Now, the host came up running, breathless with anxiety, “Dada, are you alright?” he enquired. “Who is this man? What is he doing here?”

“He is a friend whom I have just met,” said Dada. “With your kind permission, can I bring him home for dinner?”

“Of course, Dada,” stammered the host. “Whatever you say, Dada.”

The family and the Pune volunteers travelling with Dada had the shock of their lives as they saw the stranger being escorted by Dada out of the car. He sat next to Dada at the table and Dada himself served him lovingly. “What do you do for a living?” Dada enquired gently, when the meal was over. It turned out that the man was a fitter at a local factory which had closed down recently. He had been doing odd jobs to earn a living, but everything had worked against him.

“Is it possible that you can find him a job?” Dada asked his host. “Certainly Dada, there are members of the Madras *sangat* (community) who can fit him in one of their workshops,” he replied.

Dada requested his hostess to pack some food for his family. A generous hamper was thrust into the man's hand, and Dada slipped a few currency notes into his hands. "Come and see me here tomorrow," he said. "My friends here will get you a job. And do bring your family along! I would like to meet them."

The stranger was overwhelmed. He held Dada's hands and said, "You are a *mahapurush* (a divine being)." His eyes twinkling, Dada said, "I am your brother and I love you."

Birth and family background

Jashan Pahlajrai Vaswani, known to his devotees as Dada Jashan, is the nephew of Sadhu Vaswani. Born on 2nd August 1918, in Hyderabad, Sind, Jashan was the first son of Krishnadevi and Pahlajrai Vaswani. He was given the name 'Jashan', meaning celebration. Jashan was raised in a deeply religious family of scholars. Pahlajrai held a senior position in a Teachers' College at Hyderabad and eventually became supervisor of all Municipal Schools in Karachi. A man of literary leanings, he was well-read in Sindhi and Persian literature. Krishnadevi, his mother, in spite of belonging to a time and tradition in which women were not expected to be seen or heard, bravely broke through these barriers by exercising freedom in her attitude and attire. Jashan would go on to inherit both his father's appetite for learning and his mother's forward-thinking approach.

But the greatest inspiration that shaped Jashan's life came from the great soul who was his uncle, mentor, master and Gurudev, Sadhu Vaswani. A perfect disciple to a perfect master, Jashan acknowledges that all that he is, all that he has achieved is by the grace of his Guru. An appreciation of Sadhu Vaswani's teachings and philosophy by which he lived, therefore becomes crucial to our understanding of Dada Jashan's motivation and purpose in life.

Sadhu Vaswani believed that 'True life is that which is lived in the depths. It is life in the spirit.' Man need not run away from the world to the solitude of a mountain cave but he should live a life of dynamic action, rooted in contemplation, compassion, and courage. Having renounced his family, home,

and distinguished academic career, Sadhu Vaswani had chosen to dedicate himself, single-pointedly and selflessly, to the welfare of others. He chose to serve the nation through awakening the youth to the ideals of the rishis, through the emancipation of women, through service of the poor and suffering, which encompassed all living beings. Above all, he sought to awaken people to live the life of the spirit and become truly free. For true freedom, he emphasized, belonged to him who had mastered himself. Gradually, an ever-widening circle of devotees and disciples had grown around him in Hyderabad, Sind. A loving uncle and an inspiring role model, Sadhu Vaswani drew young Jashan to himself.

Academic achievements

Jashan displayed exceptional intelligence and capability at school and completed his primary education in three years instead of the usual five. He then joined the Rosary School where again he excelled and received a triple promotion enabling him to join St. Patrick's High School at the age of eight.

Life in the Vaswani household was the epitome of simplicity. Pahlajrai believed that whatever money flowed in was to be shared with the needy, which left the family with a bare minimum. But what was available in abundance was love. The family had unlimited access to an abundance of books, since Pahlajrai's friend owned a bookshop. The condition set by Pahlajrai, however, was that all the books must be read and there would be animated discussions on them. Thus began Dada's lifelong interest in reading. To this day, he remains a voracious reader.

The sudden death of his father while he was in high school plunged the family into a severe financial crisis and motivated his courageous mother to become a teacher. Jashan had to switch from St. Patrick's School to the Government High School. While she strived to support her family of seven children, she pinned her future hopes on her eldest son, Jashan, who displayed sparks of a brilliant future. Jashan matriculated at the age of 13, and then joined the D.J. Sind College, Karachi, from where he graduated in science.

Standing first in the university, he became a Fellow of the college. The family and well-wishers were confident that the young man would easily qualify for the Indian Civil Service. That was not to be for, as he grew, all ambition vanished. He felt irresistibly drawn to Sadhu Vaswani. However, at his insistence Jashan completed his M.Sc. in Physics. His thesis entitled 'The Scattering of X-rays by Solids' was assessed by none other than the Nobel Laureate, Sir C.V. Raman.

Unique child

As a child, Jashan was playful but also loved silence. He exhibited a deep compassion and sensitivity towards the sufferings of others. His heart was moved at the sight of those stricken by poverty – he spontaneously and generously parted with food, toys, and hard-won pocket money to do whatever he could to alleviate their suffering. He even set aside crumbs and scraps of his meals for birds and animals.

A particularly touching incident occurred on one of his birthdays. He had been eyeing a toy train in a shop window for some time, and with his birthday gift of one rupee he could finally afford it. On the way to the shop, he encountered a beggar woman nestling an ailing infant in her arms. To get medicine for the child, she needed one rupee – an amount she could not afford. Initially, he tried to ignore her and raced towards the shop to purchase the toy train. However, suddenly, he tore himself away from the much wanted toy and bolted out into the street. Retracing his steps, he found the beggar woman and gave her the rupee. Her happy smile of relief and gratitude was much more rewarding than the possession of the toy would have given him.

The young ascetic

Jashan established himself as an outstanding student but there was a side to him that hungered for a life in the Spirit. He spent considerable time wandering and living in the villages of Sind in quiet retreat, trusting wholly in the loving care of God. Often he slept under a tree and ate a common meal at the zamindar's *langar* (free community meal). On these occasions,

he would sometimes come into contact with saints and men of God.

Unlike boys of his age, who looked forward to vacations away from the city and trips to unknown places during their holidays, Jashan longed to commune with fakirs, dervishes, and other such holy men. There were periods when his mother would have to go out of town and Jashan would use these opportunities to visit the villages that formed the rural hinterland of Karachi.

Once, while walking down a country lane, he saw a man seated by the side of the road. The man was observing him carefully. Jashan was curious to know what the man thought about him and if he had any advice for him. Promptly came the reply, “Be a lion, not a dog.” Jashan was taken aback. What did this mean? Then, being quick at repartee, he said, “I am a lion already. My zodiac sign is Leo!”

The man smiled and said, “The difference between a dog and a lion is that if you throw a ball or a stone at the dog it will run after the ball or the stone. But, if you throw something at the lion, the lion will come and pounce on you. He will not pay attention to what you have thrown.”

“I’m not sure that I understand what you mean,” said Jashan. “It means that you don’t have to think of all the balls and stones that come your way. In other words, you don’t have to flinch at the worries and difficulties that come to you and weigh you down. You have to ask yourself ‘Where are they coming from?’ Then you will realize that everything comes from the holy hands of the Lord. If you be like a lion, you will turn to the Lord.” Following his passion for solitude, sitting by the seashore or walking through the woods feeling a communion with the Eternal, he returned home a different person – more mature, more evolved and more certain now, about what he wanted from life. He would resume his studies and continue to be the brilliant scholar that he always was, but a slow transformation had begun within his heart. He had seen the Light, and it beckoned him in a new direction.

The choice is made

In the year 1931, when Jashan was 21, he accompanied Sadhu Vaswani to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) for a Peace Conference. The master decided to extend his stay in Ceylon till September. Jashan was then a Fellow at the D.J. Sind College. While he was in Ceylon, a lecturer's post became available and Jashan was offered that position by the college authorities. In order to accept the appointment, he would have to return to Karachi by June.

His mother was keen that he take up the prestigious position. Jashan was in a dilemma; he was reluctant to leave the master and wished to stay by his side despite the splendid professional opportunity that had presented itself. Sadhu Vaswani urged him to respond immediately to his mother's call and return to Karachi. He told Jashan that he could only stay with him if he first obtained his mother's permission to do so. Jashan felt he was at the crossroad of his life. It was a hard decision for Krishnadevi, but wisdom and a spirit of sacrifice prevailed and she gave Jashan permission to follow the master. It was probably the most momentous decision of Jashan's life – one that shaped its course.

The transformation

It was in 1939 that Jashan single-mindedly took up his spiritual quest to follow in the footsteps of Sadhu Vaswani. Now began a phase in his life, when his focus was singularly on his Guru and it made him oblivious to everything else. Nothing pleased him more than to be with the master. Wherever he went, he would diligently dwell upon every word the master uttered – be it privately to him or at public addresses. While conscientiously recording Sadhu Vaswani's thoughts and utterances for posterity, he was at the same time absorbing his teachings for his own edification and for transmission to devotees in the time ahead.

Sadhu Vaswani once asked Jashan what his highest aspirations were. Without hesitation, Jashan replied that his greatest desire was to enter samadhi and become one with the Lord. The master then explained that he would prefer Jashan to see God with open eyes in all men, in all creatures; in fact, in every atom of Creation.

Discipleship

Besides being highly receptive, Jashan also had a logical and analytical mind that questioned, rather than blindly accepted anything he was told. Because of this, his early days of discipleship were given to many arguments and debate with his master. But Jashan had the special privilege of living with his master and intently observing him. He was thus gradually moulded into the likeness of his master. Over time, the questioning spirit that had dominated the early phase of his spiritual growth, gave way to a phase of absolute and complete acceptance. There came the day when he saw life through the eyes of his master.

The great spiritual link between master and disciple is most poignantly captured in a poem that Sadhu Vaswani wrote for Jashan entitled *Child of My Tears*, where he refers to Jashan as the ‘Child of my tears and prayers; Child of destiny!’

Partition

In 1947, during the Partition, the master and Jashan flew out of Karachi on 10th November 1948. Arriving in Bombay (now Mumbai), they immediately set about visiting the refugee camps and helping the homeless and destitute migrants. Evening satsangs were organized. The spiritual routines helped many to maintain peace of mind in the face of severe physical hardship. Sadhu Vaswani gave the battered refugees a sense of faith, self-confidence and belief in their own abilities to face the odds and begin a new life.

In February 1949, Sadhu Vaswani decided to settle in Pune and start his multifarious activities, which included schools, colleges, dispensaries and spiritual fellowship centers.

Spiritual legacy

Living in close proximity to the Guru, all traces of doubt that had remained in Jashan were resolved. His surrender was total. Over the years, he had become malleable as clay in the hands of the potter, to be shaped as his master willed. The divine spark that had been within him as a child, steadily grew

into a bright and brilliant flame in the continued presence of the master.

Uncompromising in his quest, and steadfast in his devotion and service to the Guru, he had reached his destination. Having attained that, he continued to serve the master with utmost humility and love. He continued to be the devoted disciple; one who clearly proved worthy of eventually becoming a master in his own right.

When Sadhu Vaswani was confined to bed from 1960-66, his weakened state of health made it impossible for him to personally meet the hundreds of devotees who flocked to see him every day. And so, it was up to the disciple to undertake the master's responsibilities. On the night of 15th January 1966, Sadhu Vaswani said to his beloved disciple, "Jashan, my child, be by me." And Jashan – ever obedient, loving, and attentive – was beside his master through that fateful night. At 8:20 a.m. on 16th January, Sadhu Vaswani left his physical body.

The sangat agreed that the greatest legacy that Sadhu Vaswani bequeathed to them was his perfect disciple, Jashan, who now began to be addressed simply as Dada. To those that flocked to him, he would reiterate, "Sadhu Vaswani can have no successor for he lives and will continue to live, in age after age. He has no need of a successor." Dada Vaswani also declared to the followers of Sadhu Vaswani that when the master was about to pass away, he had said to his disciples, "I can do greater things through you than I have done through this body." And that was exactly what the disciples, led by Dada Vaswani, resolved to do.

His humility, "I am not a Guru"

Despite all his achievements as a leader, Dada refuses to accept a word of acknowledgment. Upon being asked, he gladly provides a definition of the term 'saint' as "he who does not dwell apart from the people (but) mingles with (them); he who takes part in daily activities but who does not for one moment forget God. A true saint is one who lives the message, "Each day, aspire to live in the love of God, in fellowship with broken ones, in kindness and compassion, in love and truth."

However, he flatly rejects all praise and the lengthy list of titles, honors and awards bestowed upon him by saying, “I am a seeker, a student, a servant of God. I am a pilgrim.”

Dada’s modesty is the cornerstone of his life. It is represented in the simple khadi-spun white kurta, pyjama, and cream shawl that constitute his signature attire. It manifests itself in his plain and minimal meals. In responding to his disciples, Sadhu Vaswani once said, “I am not in search of the proud of purse, those pompous with power, or swollen-headed with learning. The world is full of them. I am in search of the simple ones who consider themselves to be naught.”

No task is too low and no service too small for Dada. Once at a community meal at the Mission, when hundreds of devotees were being served lunch by the volunteers, Dada came by to greet everyone. Seeing all volunteers busy with their allotted tasks, he picked up a broom and stationed himself near the door of the room where the meals were being served. The volunteers noticed this and wondered what Dada was up to. Someone asked, “Dada is there anything we can do?” “On the contrary,” he replied, “since you are doing everything else that is to be done, I shall sweep the floor clean.”

Action-oriented pragmatist

Dada serves as a living example of the teachings that were imparted to him by his Guru, and those that he passes on to thousands upon thousands of keen listeners today.

At a discourse in the town hall of Ahmedabad in 1987, Dada had to deliver a lecture on ‘Life after Death’. In the course of his introduction, the host mentioned to Dada that this was the fourth year the city was affected by a severe drought. The words touched Dada’s heart. When he was asked to deliver a lecture, he said: “The people of Ahmedabad are passing through a difficult period. They do not need lectures, but food. I request my friends to bring me wheat and other things which I may send to the drought-stricken people in the villages.” Within a matter of minutes, large sacks of wheat were brought that Dada passed on to the workers to be

distributed among the village folk. It was only after this that Dada proceeded to give his talk.

In January 2000, Dada was invited to join a gathering of saints and spiritual leaders of India, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in Benaras. The event was being held in conjunction with the 'Save the Ganges' campaign, a movement to clean up the polluted Ganga river. Dada was reluctant to join the gathering because he was unsure whether any concrete action would actually be adopted and taken. When he went up to the podium, Dada said, "There is no use in my speaking mere words on an occasion like this. Rather, my presence here would be more useful if I were to get to work right away." He held up a broom that he had brought with him and started sweeping the area around him.

Epitome of compassion

Deep empathy and compassion in the face of others' pain and suffering is one of Dada's defining characteristics. On a trip to Kathmandu to address a Rotary Conference, he visited the famous temples of Nepal. As he approached the magnificent Neelkanth Har Har temple, his eyes fell on a figure huddled in a corner of the temple. Reaching there, Dada found a leper crouched in pain; his entire body was covered with flies that hovered over his wounds. Dada quietly took out his handkerchief and began fanning him. "My temple is at the feet of the leper," he said. He got the leper a warm drink and refused to abandon a suffering brother. Eventually, a local boy was found who was willing to take care of him.

Voice of the voiceless

Although a smile remains on Dada's lips when he himself undergoes indescribable pain, his tender heart bleeds when it comes to the trauma inflicted on innocent, voiceless creatures in slaughter houses every day. He is an ardent advocate of animal rights. He regards birds and beasts, fish and fowl as our younger brothers and sisters in the one family of creation, and cannot bear to see them held in captivity and killed for the sake of taste or fashion.

In 1968, Dada heard of an impending yajna that some pandits were going to perform in Pune. Pained at the thought of animals being killed, Dada and three of his followers courageously went to the site of the intended sacrifice and offered their own heads in exchange for the lives of the four meek lambs lined up for decapitation. Seeing the sincerity of the appeal and the radiant compassion writ on Dada's visage, the pandits were moved to proceed with the yajna without the customary animal sacrifice.

Dada often releases birds imprisoned in cages, and fish caught in nets. On one occasion, he even comforted a dog which had just been run over. He picked up the mortally wounded animal and laid it gently at the side of the road, then stroked its head while reciting slokas in an attempt to ease its agony of a painful death.

Sadhu Vaswani's birthday on 25th November is observed worldwide as an International Meatless Day and Animal Rights Day. Millions all over the globe pledge to abstain from all foods of violence on this day.

Literary talent

Dada has a natural gift for poetry and a clear, lucid, captivating and conversational style of prose.

As a student, he often contributed articles on a wide range of topics. Magazines and newspapers were only too pleased to publish his works. In 1939, he made his first efforts at independent publishing. He put forward the idea of bringing out a monthly magazine for the youth of Sind. Together with two friends, he apprised Sadhu Vaswani of their plan. The master encouraged the idea and even suggested the name 'Excelsior' for the periodical and gave it an inspiring motto, "Oh onward march ye, on and on to greet beyond the night, the dawn!"

The East and West Series - alive and thriving even to this day - was also founded by him to spread the soul-stirring message of Sadhu Vaswani. In this highly popular monthly series, Dada aims to acquaint his readers with the lives and

teachings of great men who had brought spiritual enlightenment to humanity.

His writings are read widely across the spectrum of various age groups and professionals. Dada's practical suggestions are easy to follow and can be easily applied in modern day living.

Dada is an admirable raconteur. The appropriate parable, the right anecdote, the judiciously chosen example – always seem to be available at his fingertips. With the help of these, he can bring home the most complex truths and philosophical ideas, which we would otherwise find impossible to grasp.

A gifted writer, he has authored over 100 books, many of which have been translated into 17 languages. From the sublime to the mundane, from the important to the practical, from the serious to the jovial, from religion to human relationships, Dada shares his invaluable knowledge through his books and writings. His words are backed by the witness of his life. Hence they stir the chords of every heart.

An inspiring educationist

Dada believes that the frontiers of knowledge must be saturated with values and ideals. The by-product of acquiring knowledge must be the creation of strong, courageous individuals who will live lives of simplicity and service. A new humanity, a new race, and thereby a new world order can be built by investing in a value-based education.

His Master's voice

A brilliant orator, Dada has addressed distinguished audiences worldwide communicating only as he can, the positive messages of love, faith, harmony and peace. He has spoken at eminent venues including the United Nations, Millennium World Peace Summit, at the World Parliament of Religions, Chicago, South Africa and Australia, at the House of Commons, London, at the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival, Oxford and Kyoto, Japan, at The World Vision 2000, Washington, at the World Hindu Conference, Sri Lanka and USA, the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in New

York, World Parliament of Spirituality in Hyderabad besides a number of other international forums around the world.

Anjali

Often in the midst of nature, or sometimes even suddenly when in ecstasy, from Dada's lips flow songs full of longing and love, of adoration and sympathy. Many of these songs in Sindhi have been gathered together and today form a huge compilation called the *Anjali Sangraha*.

The message of the messenger

Given his spontaneity as well as the breadth and depth of his knowledge of both the spiritual and the secular, it is difficult to crystallize Dada's philosophy in a few words. He does not espouse any specific rules or principles for spiritual seekers – in his own words, “Spirituality is not taught. It is caught – by associating with those who are truly spiritual.” Though there are no particular rules, rites and rituals he advocates or even recommends, certain universal thoughts do emerge consistently in his writings, public engagements, and informal talks.

The therapy of surrender: “When all around us the storms blow and the tempests roar, let us close our eyes, think of God and repeat the words: ‘God is with me and He is in control.’ Those are words of power and can quell the fiercest storm.”

“Problems and challenges are not a dead end; they are only a bend in the road. Problems are not stumbling blocks; they are stepping stones to a better, richer, more radiant life. Not unoften, problems become the door through which God enters our life.”

Non-sectarianism and simplicity in spirituality: “Neither rites nor rituals, neither creeds nor ceremonies are needed to improve the condition of the world. All that is needed is to love one another.” “I have met many who will go to any length to prove the superiority of their religion over those of others. They will hold endless discussions and debates. They will even fight for it – and die for it. But I have met very few who

live for their religion – who bear witness to the great teaching in deeds of daily living. Religion is life!”

The liberating power of forgiveness: “Life is too short to be spent in fault-finding, holding grudges, or keeping memory of wrongs done to us. Forgive even before forgiveness is asked. Forgive and forget.”

The law of karma: “I must never forget that every thought I think, every word I utter, every action I perform, every feeling, every emotion that wakes up in me, is recorded in the memory of nature. I might be able to deceive those around me, I may even succeed in deceiving myself. But I cannot deceive nature.”

The True Self: “An infinite potential lies hidden within us. We are unaware of it, because we think of ourselves as limited, restricted creatures. We have identified ourselves with a biochemical mental organism. Our true self is the Atman. *Tat twamasi!* That art thou! There can be no limit to what we can do – and achieve!”

The root cause of man’s problems: “When man wanders away from the Atman and the silence within, restlessness results. He must learn to be silent and turn within himself to find the true center, which is the light of God.”

Sowing seeds for a better world: “A new education aiming at awakening of the heart is our urgent need. When the heart is awakened, it will influence the head in the right direction. A new vision will illuminate knowledge. And India will be a herald of a new World-Renaissance, a renaissance of the Spirit.”

Will India shine ahead? “India has much to learn from the West and vice versa. When India learns to absorb the best in the life of the West and shares with the Western nations the truth of her ancient culture; the rich spirituality of our ancient rishis, saints and sages, she will shine once again in splendour and will be respected as a leader of the nations and a builder of a new civilization of simplicity, of strength, of brotherliness, of sympathy and service.”

Religion: “Today in the name of religion, we have fights and feuds, sectarian strife, hatred and violence. Religion came to unite, to reconcile, to create harmony among men.

“Little wonder that young men and women today are turning away from religion. It is not religion which has failed us; it is we who have failed religion.

“In the Kingdom of God, we will not be judged according to our labels, but according to the life we have lived.”

Woman power: “Woman is the architect of the new generation. Woman is a symbol of Shakti. It is this woman-soul that will rebuild our shattered world with the strength of her intuition, her purity, her simplicity, her spiritual aspirations, her sympathy and silent sacrifice. The new civilization, built by women, will be a civilization of harmony and peace for which the tortured, the wounded soul of humanity has piteously cried, age after age. The woman-soul shall lead us upward, on!”

The Sadhu Vaswani Mission

The Sadhu Vaswani Mission is a humanitarian organization with its headquarters in Pune, Maharashtra. It strives to serve humanity in the fields of education and health, social work and culture and is also dedicated to the moral and spiritual upliftment of mankind. Today the Mission has several centres in India and across the world. Dada J.P. Vaswani visits these centers annually, keeping in touch with his innumerable devotees.

The pivot around which the Mission’s activities revolve is the satsang. The Mission believes in the unity of all religions and reveres the saints and prophets of all faiths. Days sacred to great sages of East and West are observed with special prayer meetings and service programs.

The Sadhu Vaswani Medical Complex in Koregaon Park, Pune, is the realization of a dream of Dada J.P. Vaswani – that of a hospital where no sick person would be turned away because he was poor. Here, even the lowliest of the lowly receive medical treatment. No patient here is reduced to a

mere case number and each is treated with love, respect and sympathy.

The Mira Movement in education was launched by Sadhu Vaswani over 65 years ago. Its aim – not just to make students pass examinations but to impart a humane, character-building education with its emphasis on the integration of hand, head and heart. Today the Mira Movement has grown and expanded to 11 educational institutions in Pune, all of them reputed for their strong sense of discipline and emphasis on cultural, moral, spiritual values. Schools have also been established at Delhi, Baroda, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Rajkot and Mumbai.

The Medical Complex houses the Inlaks and Budhrani Hospital, the M.N. Budhrani Cancer Institute and Research Centre, the K.K. Eye Institute, the Fabiani & Budhrani Heart Institute and the Shanti Clinic Diagnostic Center.

The Sadhu Vaswani Mission has undertaken village upliftment programs in the backward areas of Maharashtra, Saurashtra, Kutch and Bihar to improve the quality of life of villagers living below the poverty line. The activities include the provision of drinking water, digging of irrigation wells, tree plantation, soil conservation, education of children, training members of households to work and become self-reliant, health camps, vocational training classes, rehabilitation of poor families and the provisions of rations, among other social activities.

Global Forgiveness Moment

Dada J.P. Vaswani's birthday on 2nd August, is celebrated as an International Forgiveness Day.

On 2nd August at 2 p.m., young and old alike across continents, observe the 'Moment of Calm' – a Global Forgiveness Moment by forgiving all those who have wronged them.

Darshan

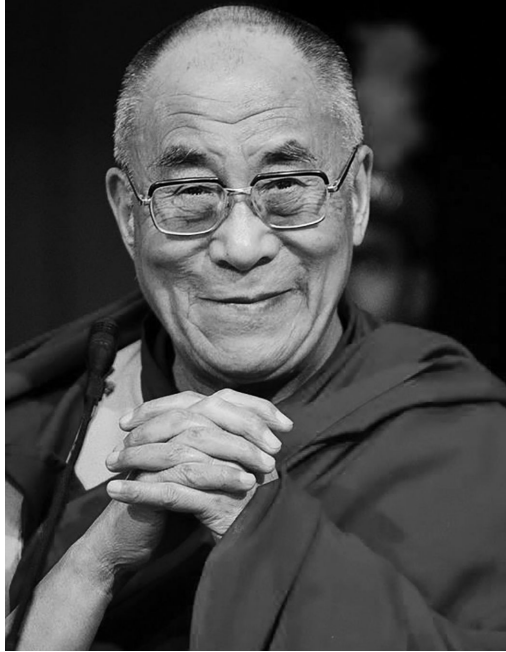
Dada's devotion, his adoration for his Master Sadhu Vaswani has been sculpted to become a reality for the world to

witness in the form of ‘Darshan’, a spectacular light and sound show at Pune. It has been rated among the topmost destinations consecutively for the past three years by the popular travel site Trip Advisor.

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His Holiness The Dalai Lama
(1935-Present)

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

Tibetan Buddhism

*‘If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
If you want to be happy, practice compassion.’*

“As a Buddhist, I view death as a normal process, a reality that I accept will occur as long as I remain in this earthly existence... I see no point in worrying about it. I tend to think of death as being like changing your clothes when they are old and worn out, rather than some final end.”

– *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*

It is necessary to point out that the Buddhist precepts of the four noble truths, the six perfections and the eight-fold path, are fundamental to all forms of Buddhism. They have never been refuted, even by modern scientific discoveries. They apply to both Tibetan and other forms of Buddhism.

But Tibetan Buddhism recognizes enlightened masters to assist man in his spiritual progress. In the Mahayana schools of Buddhism, such beings are called Bodhisattvas and they are believed to be individuals who have reached the penultimate state of individual enlightenment, but choose to reincarnate, sometimes many times, to help man and the entire universe along the path. The lamas of Tibet are considered to be such beings, and among them the Dalai Lama is the best known.

Buddhism in Tibet developed as a result of a synthesis of Buddhist and Tantra philosophies. It first reached Tibet in the 7th century and became strongly established by the end of the 8th century. The first monks were ordained by the Tantra master Padmasambhava, who was said to have had extraordinary mystical powers.

Then in the middle of the 9th century, Buddhism suffered a decline until its revival and firm establishment in the 11th century following the arrival of the Indian Master Atisa, who emphasized the importance of monastic discipline and the direct transmission of doctrine from master to disciple. During this period, the monks of the famous Sakya monastery of the yellow hats (as they are called from their wearing yellow head gear), with the assistance of the Mongol warlord Gushri Khan, overcame rival sects and rose to prominence. They established the order of Dalai Lamas as the leaders of the Order, whose authority is based strongly on the belief in enlightened reincarnated abbots, all of whom are given the honorific title of Lama.

They acquired the territory of western Tibet as a religious gift from Gushri Khan, and until the communist occupation, the successive Dalai Lamas (of the sect of *Dge-lugs-pa*) have been the political and religious leaders in that territory. The lamas are all considered to be incarnations of Chenrese – the Buddha of Mercy.

Over the same period, the heads of the Tashilhunpo monastery to the west of Lhasa became known as the Panchen Lamas. They were without political power and were considered to be purely spiritual rulers, and they are believed to be incarnations of the Amitabha Buddha.

The Dge-lugs-pa is a reformist sect that arose to counter a general decline in monastic discipline, morals, and deviations in the interpretation of the Tantras. It places emphasis on a process of mental purification through dogma, logic, and conclusions arrived at by debate between competing groups of monks. This is a path to enlightenment known as the Great Gradual Path, which has ascension through 10 spiritual levels to states of quiescence, enhanced vision, and Buddhahood. In the early stages, the sacred scriptures are learnt by heart under the guidance of teachers.

But there is also an additional path based strongly on tantric elements, known as ‘The Great Gradual Tantric Path’, which is open to those students who have already mastered theoretical learning. Some forms of Tibetan Buddhism particularly stress

the direct transmission of esoteric knowledge from master to disciple. They are also quite concerned with the interpretation of dreams, and with 'Bardo' – a state of existence between life and death that occurs during transition from one existence to another.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that there will be a thousand incarnations of supreme and perfect Buddhas in the present cosmic age. This wonderfully liberal idea implies that each incarnation will adopt teachings and establish doctrines appropriate to the existing conditions and the stage of development of man at those future times – and this especially applies to certain groups of enlightened individuals.

However, it must be noted that excessive zeal for liberalization, especially in regard to the abandonment of celibacy and the acceptance of easy living, may mark some modern Buddhist schools. It is this flexibility that seems to have been a major impetus for the popularity of Tibetan Buddhism in Western eyes.

The Dalai Lama

There is an opinion in the West that the present Dalai Lama is principally a political figure and a campaigner for the 'freedom' of Tibet from the Chinese; but to Tibetans and to all Buddhists he is truly regarded as a Bodhisattva and an enlightened being. The guru researcher, Surjan Singh Uban, in his book *The Gurus of India*, described a meeting with the Dalai Lama shortly after his arrival in India. He writes that, notwithstanding the political stance that is associated with him, the Dalai Lama is a man of peace: *'He exudes peace at all times and is almost always smiling – a charming smile which says: 'I understand everything – these are children's pranks. They will understand in the course of time and all will be well.'* He laughs at even small matters and his laughter seems bewitchingly honest and directly from the heart.' Uban felt that every word the Dalai Lama spoke came from the soul, for it was a very high soul that was speaking.

However, the system of reincarnation of abbots is not an invention of the Dge-lugs-pa, but has its origins in the Indian theory of high yogis having the power to control their destiny

and to be reborn wherever they wished. In Buddhism, this ability is believed to go back to the Buddha's order of monks, the original Sangha.

Reincarnation

The lamas of Tibet (not just the Dalai and Panchen Lamas) are thoroughly tested before being accepted as reincarnations of particular individuals. The principal indicators are the occurrence of visions, dreams, unusual events and other signs, and testing by wise and experienced lamas, monks and oracles, the knowledge of the aspirants – who are always small boys – on details of the former lama's life.

Usually, the particular signs that are taken into account in locating candidates are quite a many. The present Dalai Lama is the 14th in the present lineage. His whereabouts were discovered in the Amdo region of Tibet when he was two years old – three years after the 13th Dalai Lama had died in 1933. Uban describes the events leading to the discovery as follows: *'The search for the 14th Dalai Lama began according to the old custom, by consulting the oracles and learned lamas. Curious cloud formations northeast of Lhasa were one sign pointing towards the birthplace of the incarnation. Then the dead body of the 13th Dalai Lama (which had been placed on his throne facing south), had in a few days changed its position so that the face had turned towards the east – another indication of the direction to look.*

'Then the Regent, a renowned lama, went to the sacred lake of Lahmoi Latso of Chokhargyal, about 90 miles southeast of Lhasa. In this lake, pious lamas can see visions of the future, which take the form of letters as well as pictures of events and places. After several days of prayers, the Regent saw a vision of letters Ah, Ka, Ma followed by a picture of a monastery with a jade-green roof and a house with a turquoise tiled roof next to it. A party of lamas went to Kumbum Monastery in the Amdo area and recognized the roof seen in the vision, and close by, in the village of Taktser was that of a farmer whose house had turquoise tiles. There they learnt that the farmer had a two year old son.

'Then the real leader of the party, Lama Kewtsang Rimpoche of the Sera Monastery, dressed up as a servant and went to the servant's quarters of the farmer's house, while a junior official, disguised in good clothes, posed as the leader. The infant boy went straight to the real leader, told him his name and removed from around his neck a rosary which had belonged to the 13th Dalai Lama. He further identified and named the other members of the party.'

'More tests were carried out in which two identical black rosaries were offered to the boy, who unhesitatingly picked up the one belonging to the 13th Dalai Lama. The boy also recognized a drum and the stick of his predecessor. It was later learnt that the 13th Dalai Lama had once halted in this area and appreciated the farmer's house, saying it was very beautiful.'

The boy was proclaimed the present Dalai Lama in 1937. He ruled Tibet until the time of the Chinese military action, which caused him to flee to India in 1959.

Some teachings

Buddhist teachings emphasize the disciplining and reorganization of the mind. As indicated before, the teachings of the Dge-lugs-pa are divided into two parts: The Great Gradual Path and The Great Gradual Tantric Path. In his book *The Heart of the Buddha's Path*, the Dalai Lama expounds on the essential aspects of the teachings. Some of them are summarized here:

On general behavior: Concerning general behavior in life, the Dalai Lama points out that there are positive and negative aspects which distinguish different states of ego. For instance, compare a loving, caring smile with a sarcastic smile; the latter only creates grievance and suspicion. Similarly, the following mental factors are quite similar but have very different meanings: self-confidence and conceit; humility and lack of confidence; loving kindness and attachment; desire for oneself and desire for everyone. In Buddhism there is a good example of the latter, which demonstrates an aspect of the Middle Way. Mahayana Buddhism points out there are two types of aspiration: desire for enlightenment, and desire to benefit *all*

enlightenment for sentient beings. In this, there must be a balance so that the Middle Way is followed. Such a way will lead to contentment, which is the antidote for desire. And in the same way, if our attitude to material possessions is not properly balanced and the attachment is strong, there can be no contentment.

The six perfections: The same balance is necessary in human relationships. Buddhist literature mentions the practice of ‘Six Perfections’ in daily life. The Dalai Lama explains that generosity and the act of giving are seen as the causes of wealth, and this is the first perfection. But in order to practice generosity and giving successfully, one must first of all have a sound ethical discipline – which is the second perfection; and that ethical discipline can come about only if one has the third perfection, which is the ability to bear hardships and adverse circumstances when confronted with them. And for that we need a certain degree of exertion and joyful effort which is the fourth perfection. Then, in order to practice the application of joyful effort successfully, one must have the ability to concentrate – so that this is the fifth perfection, which is necessary to focus on events, actions and goals. Finally, that perfection depends on whether or not we have the ability to exercise the power of discrimination, the perfection that enables one to judge between what is desirable and what is undesirable, what is negative and what is positive.

It may be assumed that the Six Perfections are attributes that greatly enhance the power of understanding, but the Dalai Lama also maintains that the essence of following the Buddhist path to salvation is the understanding of the four noble truths, the understanding of which should be deeply instinctual and not merely intellectual. The cause of suffering comes about through delusion; consequently, the cessation of suffering is possible.

The four noble truths

The truth of suffering: An important aspect of suffering involves the coping with problems, with sickness, with old age and death, in the correct way. There are two distinct approaches to dealing with such issues. One is to simply avoid

thinking about them. But the other, much more effective, is to face the problems directly so that one becomes fully conscious of them. Then, when unfortunate things happen, there are two possible results: mental unrest (anxiety, fear, doubt, frustration and depression), or the using of the experience to become more realistic and closer to the appreciation of reality. And this is what has the potential to make one stronger and increase one's self-confidence and self-reliance. (This is not different to the concept of 'what is, is God' and the embracing of sorrow so that it becomes love and compassion.)

Three types of suffering, the Dalai Lama points out, can be recognized. The first is the suffering of those in the samsara of worldly life – birth, sickness, old age and death. Recognizing these states of suffering is the main catalyst in any spiritual quest. The second level of suffering is the one related to change. For example, becoming jaded about conditions of good living and requiring more and more bizarre forms of stimulation is a consequence of change. Or when in relationships, the initial passion wears off and leads to discontent and even hatred. Experiences perceived as pleasurable are only so in the sense of being relative to less pleasurable or painful ones. The Dalai Lama says, "In reality, as long as we are in the unenlightened state, all our joyful experiences are tainted and ultimately lead to suffering." Finally, there is the suffering of conditioning. This level of suffering refers to unenlightened existence itself. As long as we exist in a state of confusion, we experience negative karmas to which confusion gives rise. And, the Dalai Lama explains, it is called the suffering of conditioning because it is not only the basis of the painful experiences of life, but also for those of future lives.

Understanding all aspects of the truth of suffering, being based on Buddhist concepts of causation, is made more complex because of different realms of existence which engender different forms of suffering. In Buddhist philosophy, there are three primary realms in which suffering occurs, and the nature of the suffering and its relationship to cause and effect are different in each. The realms are the 'desire realm', the 'form realm', and the 'formless realm'. The Dalai Lama

explains that if a person's ordinary mode of being is very much within the realm of desire and attachment to physical things, then such attachment leads to a form of existence which is confined within the desire realm, both at present and in future lives. While individuals who have transcended attachment to objects of immediate perception and to physical sensations, but are still attached to the inner states of joy and bliss, future rebirths will be where physical existence has a much more refined form. Finally, there are yet those who have transcended attachment not only to physical things and sensations, but to pleasurable inner sensations of joy and bliss as well, so that they tend more towards a state of equanimity and to the Formless Realms – of which there are several. From the fourth level of the Formless Realm upwards, existence is beyond the processes of evolution and change that is characteristic of the physical universe.

In Buddhist philosophy, and Eastern philosophy in general, the human state is regarded as the highest because it offers the opportunity to progress towards enlightenment. Even though spirits may possess supernatural powers such as precognition and so on, such are still in the unenlightened state of samsara, which is always a sorry state of suffering. One great being, Lama Tsongkhapa, describes the coils of samsara as like being tied up very tightly by the ropes of negative karma, delusions, afflictive emotions and thoughts, and encased in a tight net of ego and self-grasping. One is tossed around aimlessly by the currents of fluctuating experiences of suffering and pain, “This is what samsaric life is like.”

The truth of the origin of suffering: In the Dalai Lama's commentary, he says that the origin of suffering is due to those emotional experiences that lead to confusion and afflict the mind. To perceive the truth of the origin of suffering we need to develop an understanding of ‘dependent origination’: that everything we perceive and experience arises as a result of the interaction and coming together of causes and conditions. We need to understand that there is a fundamental disparity between the way things appear and the way that they actually are. We grow to understand that although certain types of mental or emotional states seem real, and although objects

appear to be so real and vivid, in reality they do not exist in the way we think they do. It is only by truly coming to know the illusory nature of the everyday world – that is, the world of conventional reality where the causal principles operate, that we can appreciate the truth of the origin of suffering. The acceptance of the empty nature of this world is, according to Buddhism, the understanding of the ultimate truth of the origin of suffering, the *paramathasatya*. The Dalai Lama says, “It is through this type of reflection and analysis that we will be able to gain an insight into what, in technical Buddhist language, is called the origin of suffering.”

Ignorance is therefore one of the causes of suffering but there are many other derivative causes which are described as ‘afflictive emotions and thoughts’. In the various branches of Buddhism, detailed lists of different types of afflictive emotions and thoughts are given. Such thoughts and emotions arising from delusion give rise to volitional actions and they cause suffering, because they both create immediate disturbance in the mind and also afflict the mind from within. The Dalai Lama points out that the most important thing for us to know is that afflictive emotions are our ultimate enemies and ultimate source of suffering. Once such an afflictive emotion forms in the mind, it destroys our peace of mind, affects our health as well as our relationships with other people. All negative activities such as killing, bullying, cheating and so forth, stem from afflictive emotions.

Causation is, of course, directly related to karma which is unique in that it involves intentional action and the belief in doership. The Buddhist scriptures recognize 10 types of negative action: three of the body, four of speech and three of the mind. The three of the body are killing, stealing and sexual misconduct; the four of speech are lying, engaging in divisive speech, using harsh words, and engaging in senseless gossip; and the three of the mind are coveting, harmful thoughts and intentions, and holding wrong views. With regard to the effect of the emotions on karma, it is the internal negative emotions that are the worst enemy. The Dalai Lama says that if there is a possibility of eliminating this inner enemy, then we should take the opportunities offered by having a human body, brain

and good heart, and combine these strengths to uproot it to take advantage of the Truth of Cessation.

The truth of cessation: The cessation of suffering is related to moksha or liberation and, in Buddhist philosophy, liberation is very closely related to the understanding of ‘emptiness’. In Buddhism, what is commonly understood by emptiness is the need to counter the grasping of the lower self which is the notion of ego – the ‘I thought’. But it is nevertheless right to ensure that negation does not defy the apparent reality of the conventional world. In applying the understanding of emptiness, the Dalai Lama explains that when strong emotions arise (attachment, anger and so on) – we should examine the experience of them. This will show that in underlining the experience, there is always an assumption that there is something objective or real on to which we project desirable or undesirable qualities. Strong emotional reactions always assume the existence of some form of objective reality. But once you know that this is assumption, and thus the emotions themselves are actually based on a fundamental misconception of reality, the purpose of the reactions is eliminated. When we have developed such an understanding of emptiness, even if it is an intellectual one, we may have a new outlook on things and events, and this can modify our responses and reduce the generation of strong negative emotions. We will realize that most of our strong emotions arise from assuming the reality of something that is unreal. We can then see the disparity between the way we have perceived something, and the way things really are. We see that strong emotions that afflict our minds arise from a fundamental state of confusion, through apprehending things as real and existing independently when they do not.

The Dalai Lama maintains that our potential for knowledge is intrinsic to our consciousness and is an inherent, natural quality, but all those factors which afflict the mind are not essential parts of it – they are acquired through the state of delusion. He says, “The mental afflictions are distinct from the essential nature of the mind, and are therefore called adventitious.” Consequently, when we talk about gaining the perfect wisdom of a Buddha, we should not think that we need

to create qualities in ourselves that are not already there. Rather, we should understand about removing the defilements of the mind that hamper the flowering of wisdom. Then we can conceive of the possibility of eliminating those afflictions completely. And, finally, there is the truth of the path.

The truth of the path: The truth of the path should be understood, at first, in relation to the development of an intellectual understanding of emptiness – and that will lead to a direct intuitive realization of emptiness. This was achieved in the Buddha's day by his 'progressive talk', but now the recommended method is single-pointed meditation. But before this method can be effective, the Dalai Lama explains, it is necessary to have a high level of morality, concentration ability and insight, in order to acquire 'wisdom' – the wisdom that realizes 'emptiness' requires the union of single-pointedness of mind and penetrative insight. And for this training in *shamatha* – the meditative practice of calming the mind so that it rests free from the disturbances of thought – is necessary. In such training, one applies both mindfulness and mental alertness.

The question arises as to whether an aspirant of enlightenment can attain the wisdom of understanding the four noble truths, without direct transmission from an enlightened master. The Buddhist scholar and Pali translator, Peter Masefield, maintains that according to the original sayings of the Buddha, it is hardly possible without an intuitive 'flash of awareness' that comes through the agency of an enlightened master. In the Dalai Lama's explanation, this is the direct intuitive realization of emptiness. Thus, the true understanding of the four noble truths would seem to depend on the attainment of Right View, the first step of the Eight-fold Noble Path, and a prerequisite in treading the other steps of the Path. In Right View, it is clearly seen that the suffering of the ordinary world is brought about by craving, and that there is another realm that can be attained – and that it is attained through treading the Path. Then, with clear understanding of the sameness of worldly life, the second step of renouncing the things to which we were previously attached can be achieved and Right Renunciation attained. With renunciation, it then

becomes possible to have right speech, action and livelihood, so that a strong moral foundation can be attained, which will enable right effort, mindfulness and concentration to be pursued – because desire and guilt are not disturbing the mind’s tranquility. At this stage, the Dalai Lama points out, a high level of morality, concentration ability and insight are attained through the union of single-pointedness of mind and penetrative insight.

Practical considerations

In practical terms, the noble truths merge with each other and lead to an understanding of the essentiality of the Noble Path. In considering the truth of suffering, an important aspect is coping with problems and with death in the correct way. As indicated before, one can simply avoid thinking about them, but a much more effective way is facing the problem directly so that one becomes fully conscious of it, so as to become stronger and increase self-confidence and reliance.

In dealing with death, the Dalai Lama says that it is very important, in fact essential, to have a right understanding of impermanence – so that the suffering that centers on death can be correctly perceived. The truth of suffering should be understood in relation to the ‘characteristics of existence’. The first of these is impermanence of both coarse material things and subtle mental things. If one understands the nature of impermanence correctly, it will be possible to comprehend that any existence that is causally produced, entirely depends on various causes and conditions for its existence. Consequently, the very causes and conditions that produced it also bring about its disintegration and cessation. When this is related to the understanding of the impermanent nature of the body and the mind, then here the cause refers to our ignorant state of mind (the egoic mind). Our bodily existence is very much entwined with the power of an ignorant state of mind – for the mind and body are not your friends. Understanding this will enable us to counteract grasping at impermanence. This grasping for something that is impermanent forces us to cling to the matter of one’s present lifetime alone. But by releasing this grasping within us we will, the Dalai Lama explains, be in

a better position to appreciate the value of working for our future lifetimes.

On reincarnation

It should be noted that the Buddha is believed to have had many lifetimes during which he developed the perfections and, that in Mahayana Buddhism, reincarnation is necessarily a basic element of the theology; especially the need for reincarnation as a Bodhisattva. In this regard, the type of rebirth is of absolute central importance.

The Bardo state: In Tibetan Buddhist belief, and as a general truth, one's state of mind at the time of death has a very great effect in determining what form of rebirth will occur. The Bardo state of mind which one experiences at the time of death is extremely subtle – and because of the subtlety of that level of consciousness, it has the power to impact one's mental continuum. In the tantric practices of Buddhism there is great emphasis on death-related meditations and on the process of death itself. It is considered important that at the time of death an individual not only retains his presence of mind, but is also in a position to utilize that subtle state of consciousness effectively towards realization of the Path.

That this subtle state exists, and that all bodily functions and states are connected in some way with mind states, can be verified by experience. When the body ceases, the egoic mind also ceases. But there are gross states of mind, associated with the physiological body, and a subtle state of consciousness which is associated with the transition, that is evident during death. This has been called the Bardo state – and has also been described as the 'clear light state'. The Dalai Lama explains that there are definite indications of the existence of the 'clear light state' of mind. There are not infrequent occurrences among religious practitioners, not only Buddhists, where people have been pronounced clinically dead but the onset of decomposition of the body is delayed – sometimes for many days. The Dalai Lama gives the example of his own late tutor, Kayabje Ling Rinpoche, who remained in that state for 13 days. He was pronounced clinically dead and he had already

experienced the death of the brain, but his body remained fresh and did not decompose for that many days.

The Buddhist explanation for this is that, during the Bardo state, the individual is not actually dead but rather in the process of dying, and although the mind-body relationship may have ceased at the gross level, it has not ceased at the subtle level. The body of Sri Paramahansa Yogananda did not decompose for several weeks and was still fresh at the time of interment. The transitions from the living states of waking, deep sleep, and the dream state are considered to be similar Bardo states of transition. A good reference text is *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*.

Tibetan Buddhism, in particular, is very concerned with the process of transition during death and uses tantric practices while living to ensure a satisfactory transition. Meditation on the mental dissolution of deities helps train the practitioner in coping with this transitional state. In this type of meditation, the acquisition of what has been called ‘wisdom’ is first necessary, and wisdom is attained by altruistic practices and the development of the understanding that ‘self-ish realization’ is an inadequate goal. The adequate goal should be to wish enlightenment for everyone. Then by practicing equal vision – imagining everyone to be equal to oneself or by feeling empathy with everyone by imagining that all beings are someone close and dear – this wisdom is attained. The unifying conjunction of wisdom with tantric practices leads again to the concept of ‘emptiness’ – which is then very effective in securing a spiritually high rebirth.

The Dalai Lama explains: The practitioner must first subject his or her perception of self and the phenomenal world to the cognizance of emptiness. Everything is dissolved into emptiness. The cognition of ‘emptiness’ is then visualized as the form of the chosen meditational deity. Next, the practitioner reflects on the non-substantial or empty nature of the deity. Thus, both method and wisdom are present and complete, “There is visualization of the deity, and at the same time an understanding of the empty nature of that deity.”

Escape from suffering: As indicated before, the state of mind attained through practice, effort, and correct understanding (of impermanence, emptiness etc.) which erases negative emotions, enables the escape from suffering. Naturally, emotions can be positive or negative and even anger, though mostly negative, can have positive aspects – as, for example, in disciplining someone to protect them from danger. But generally, anger has negative consequences for health and at the same time creates hatred. The expression of anger in the form of attack, or generating attack thoughts, is what projects and maintains the illusory egoic world. So, the Dalai Lama points out, it is important to be able to distinguish between good states and negative states of mind and to increase, through appropriate practices, the good states of mind. There are meditative techniques which affect the transformation of negative emotional states so that through mental discipline and effort, change is really possible and a totally new attitude can develop, “Each person should feel that he or she has great potential and gain self-confidence.”

The Dalai Lama says that if one feels that one’s present way of life is unpleasant and has some difficulties, then don’t look at these negative things. One should see the positive side, the potential, and make an effort. He says, “Unless we adopt a certain method, there is no possibility of escape. Therefore, hatred and anger – and here I mean negative anger – is ultimately the real destroyer of peace of mind.”

In practicing change of attitude it is necessary to identify and analyze any apparently negative situation at an early stage, in order to facilitate the stopping of the causal process. One must adopt a good attitude to adverse events, situations and circumstances; to companions, friends and partners, so that dissatisfaction does not arise. By change of attitude, “All phenomena and events can become the source of happiness... And even enemies can provide us with a good opportunity to practice tolerance and patience.” The recognition of development of a positive attitude to adverse events and circumstances provides the opportunity to grow spiritually. For if life is too comfortable, then there is no opportunity to change for the better.

The question arises as to what to do if people take advantage of one's humility and tolerance – how should one react? The Dalai Lama says that it is quite simple: One should act with wisdom and common sense, without anger and hatred. If the situation is such that some sort of action is required, then take counter measures without anger. And it is a fact that such actions, based on true wisdom rather than anger are more effective. In the very competitive modern society, and in abusive relationships, it sometimes becomes necessary to take appropriate counter measures – but without anger.

The Eight-fold Noble Path

The first and essential step is the acquisition of 'Right View' which, the Sutras say, is only attainable with the help of a 'Buddha'. It is not an intellectual process of understanding that is required but is of the nature of an enlightenment itself – a 'seeing' that has been compared to the momentary vision of a dark landscape during a flash of lightning. It can be said to be a spiritual rebirth that enables man to tread the hard and apparently austere path to enlightenment. From an intellectual point of view, as indicated above, the process would obviously be enhanced by seeing that all things of the material world are transitory and that the only certain thing is change.

In the Mahayana path, it is also a necessary part of the path to practice the enhancement of a good heart and an altruistic mind – which is called the generation of *Bodhichitta*. Mahayana also takes on the task of helping others along the way to enlightenment. Attaining liberation for oneself is not enough, and is considered not to be a state of true awakening. To reach a sufficiently altruistic state of mind it is necessary to gain a thorough insight into the nature of suffering by contemplation of the first injunction of the Path – which, as in Theravada Buddhism, places this step in the special position of being a precursor to the Path – and, it is said, a guarantee of enlightenment. Shantideva – the consideration of all others to be the same as oneself, or all others to be someone dear to oneself, as already mentioned, is also a practice for the promotion of Right View. In Tibetan tradition both methods are combined and then meditated upon.

The second step of the Path is Right Resolve and this has sometimes been said to mean right renunciation. It has been interpreted as resolving to eliminate desires and attachments in the light of the revelation of Right View.

The next three requirements are concerned with actions: Right Speech, Right Conduct and Right Livelihood. We must speak the truth, to help but never to hurt others, avoid propaganda which is a popular way of deceiving people in commerce, politics and religion. Right Conduct, from the Buddhist viewpoint must be the avoidance of involvement in the world of maya – the pursuit of sense pleasures and the acquisition of attachments. Actions should be moral, ethical and motivated by love rather than the negative tendencies of hate, envy, greed, lust, anger and so on.

Then Right Livelihood will involve not manipulating events and circumstances to feather one's own nest. If we look carefully at society we will see that almost everyone and every organization, engages in manipulation to feather various nests. Therefore choose an occupation that is fair and balanced.

The last three steps of the Eight-fold Noble Path are concerned with mental and attitudinal behaviour and discipline: Right Effort, Right Awareness and Right Contemplation. Right Effort may mean striving to keep on a balanced middle path and Right Awareness or attentiveness to be aware all the time of what we are doing, thinking or saying, and ceasing to be creatures of habit reacting in predetermined ways. We watch ourselves and our thoughts as a witness viewing ourselves in action. Right Contemplation may be a necessary adjunct to all aspects of spiritual development and may be the final step in arriving at the direct experience of reality.

The practices of Tibetan Buddhism may well seem complicated, but when boiled down they resolve into nothing more than living dharmically – and, one could say, a matter of choosing Truth or choosing the world. Tibetan Buddhism, and indeed all forms of Buddhism, are wonderfully explicit, and provide wonderfully guided techniques for spiritual practice.

On consciousness

The tantric (Vajrayana) literature discusses different levels of consciousness or different subtleties of mind that correspond to subtle levels of energy. The Dalai Lama says that most of our conscious mind consists either of states related to recollections of past experiences that inform our present consciousness – or consists of some kind of feeling or sensation. Because of this it is very difficult to glimpse the actual nature of consciousness, which is the sheer state of ‘knowing’ or the ‘luminosity’ of mind. One technique that we can use to comprehend this is sitting meditation. We aim to free our mind from thoughts of the past and from anticipation of the future, so that we come to abide in the ‘nowness of the present’. He says, “When we are able to clear away thoughts of the past and the future, or at least relegate them to the limbo of un-attachment, slowly we begin to get a sense of the space between past and future. That space is the present moment and in that space we can glimpse what is called emptiness. If we can remain in that emptiness for longer and longer periods, gradually the nature of Consciousness Itself – the sheer luminosity and natural awareness of mind will slowly dawn.”

However, The Dalai Lama says, this experience of luminosity of mind, of the nature of mind, is not profound realization in itself. Rebirth in the formless realms of samsara is considered to be the result of abiding in such states of clarity. On the other hand, if we know how to use that initial experience of luminosity as a basis of spiritual growth, then we can build on it by complementing our meditation with other practices, and in this way it will become truly profound. In Tantra, as already indicated, realizing emptiness can also be achieved by dissolving a selected deity into nothingness. The *Gu-lugs-pa* sect of Mahayana recognizes four different classes of Tantra: Kriya Tantra, Caryā Tantra, Yoga Tantra and Anuttarayoga Tantra (highest Yoga Tantra) and in all of them the aim is to achieve insight into emptiness. The meditative practices of the highest Yoga Tantra involve the energy channels, the energies which flow within the channels, and what are called ‘subtle drops’. (One may reasonably conclude that these channels and subtle drops and the energy that flows in them, are the same as the kundalini energy and the channels and ‘chakras’ as understood in Hinduism.) In Buddhism, this

form of Tantra is considered suitable only for adepts who have traversed all the other elements of the Great Gradual Path and the Great Gradual Tantra Path. For it to be used by ordinary worldly individuals may result in mental or physical illness and even in madness. Also, if experienced by those who are not well grounded in morality and discipline, the ego can be stimulated and this may lead to even deeper levels of worldly delusion. The Dalai Lama's concluding advice in his book *The Heart of the Buddha* is first and foremost to establish a firm grounding in Buddhist Dharma, and then, simultaneously, develop an understanding of the four noble truths through meditation – and for this there must be continuous determination.

The Lama tradition

The history of Buddhism in Tibet has been quite turbulent, but a stable period arose when the dominant group, the Gylugs-pa, gained ascendance, and the tradition of a reincarnating Dalai Lama as the central spiritual figure was established. The title of Panchen Lama as a reincarnating lineage was also established around that time and traditionally the Panchen Lama has been revealed by the Dalai Lama. Aside from these high profile figures, Tibet is blessed with many high lamas who are believed to be Bodhisattvas – reincarnated for the purpose of guiding all beings on the path to enlightenment. Among these is the Karmapa who has been in the news lately. It is said that the Buddha Shakyamuni predicted that 2,000 years after his death the 'Lion-voiced Bodhisattva Karmapa' would appear in this world. He was to be so powerful that many beings, on just seeing, hearing or thinking of him, would attain peace. The Karmapa is said to be an emanation of Avalokiteshvara and the sixth Buddha of the age – Buddha Simha, the Lion.

The present Karmapa was born in 1984. He has been seen worldwide in video footage which depicts his first Dharma teaching at his monastery in China in July 1999. There is also video footage of him debating, performing lama dances, giving empowerments, and performing other activities. It will be apparent to those who view this footage with an open heart,

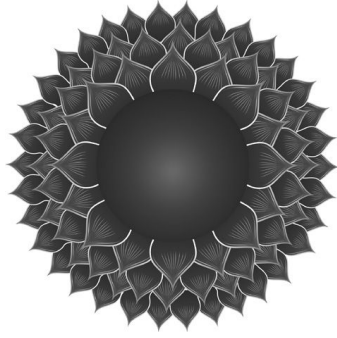
that the Karmapa, like the Dalai Lama, is a very holy being who is fulfilling the role of a fully-realized Bodhisattva.

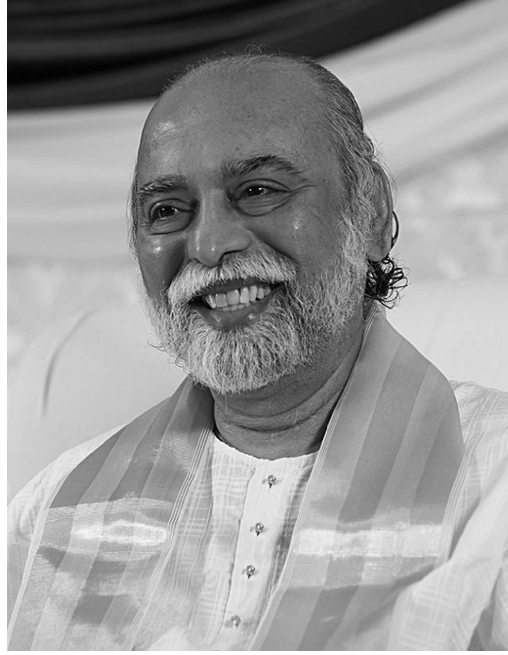
Although he was performing, apparently unhindered, all his religious duties in China, he moved to India in January 2000 and is now living close to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Whatever precipitate views Westerners may have on the defection, it would be best to ensure that they are tempered with the practice of tolerance that the Dalai Lama teaches. Traditionally, the Karmapa has been instrumental in identifying and training new Dalai Lamas. The Karmapa has not commented publicly on the reason for his move and nor has he commented on the political situation in China. Whatever the facts may be in this instance, there is no doubt that the military action in Tibet has had the effect of opening up the Forbidden Land to all comers and has facilitated the spread of Tibetan Buddhism to all parts of the world.

The present headquarters of the Dalai Lama in exile is in Dharamsala.

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Sri Bhagavan
(1949-Present)

SRI BHAGAVAN

The Phenomenon

Sri Bhagavan was born on 7th March 1949 to Vaidharbhi and Varadarajulu in Natham, a small village about 100 kms from the city of Chennai. When Sri Bhagavan's mother was 13, she used to go to a temple called Sri Pallikonda Perumal located in Pallikonda in the Vellore district of Tamil Nadu. The temple is dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu and is glorified in the *Divya Prabandha*, the early medieval Tamil canon of the Azhwar saints from the 6th-9th centuries CE. It is one of the 108 *Divya Desams* (temples) dedicated to Vishnu, who is worshiped as Pallikonda Perumal. Here, she would pray that Pallikonda Perumal be born to her. Soon, Pallikonda Perumal manifested as baby Krishna in her heart. At the age of 18, when she gave birth to a son who was named Vijay Kumar, she thought it was Lord Krishna who had been born to her.

Vijay Kumar was a very quiet child and he seemed to be lost in a world of his own. Nobody really knew why he was so silent. He never played or mixed with other children. However, in school he had a friend called Sankar, who in later years came to be known as Sankara Bhagavadpada. This is what Sri Sankara Bhagavadpada has to say about him:

'There were certainly two personality traits of my friend that were quite evident even in those school days. He was always happy and smiling and seemed not to have a single care in the world. At the same time, he was also so very simple, completely guileless. Knowing his boundless compassion, I often had to wonder why it was so necessary for him to wear that mask of being unconcerned with the sufferings of others – when in his heart of hearts there was such an abundance of empathy. Many years later, even when I

had questioned him on this, I do not remember him giving me a satisfactory reply...'

Early years

When Vijay Kumar was three years old, a Golden Orb appeared before him and he was made to chant a mantra, in very ancient Sanskrit, night and day for the next 21 years. That was the reason why he was always so silent, and also why he did not mix with other children and play games with them.

His sadhana of 21 years with the Golden Orb was the well-spring of his teachings. The Golden Orb gave Sri Bhagavan a variety of experiences that included experiencing the states of other great beings from the past. It also gave him various religious and spiritual experiences and insights that helped him understand the human condition.

After 21 years, the Golden Orb disappeared and his sadhana stopped. In 1977, according to the wishes of the elders, Sri Bhagavan got married to Padmavathi, the daughter of Venkaiah who lived in Simuloor. She began to be addressed as Amma by their students and was also a spiritual lady who began taking a keen interest and started participating actively in her husband's ventures.

However, with the experiences he had with the Golden Orb, he knew the awakened state could be given to people and together with his wife began conceptualizing an organization dedicated to the philosophy of Oneness.

His transformation as Sri Bhagavan

Vijay Kumar proclaimed himself as Kalki, the 10th incarnation of Lord Vishnu, in 1989 and began to be addressed henceforth as Sri Bhagavan. According to traditional Hindu belief, the Kalki avatar would appear on a white horse, wielding a sword that symbolically represents slaying the self which is the cause of all suffering.

Many devotees who visit Sri Bhagavan have claimed to have experienced Sri Bhagavan as the Kalki incarnation.

His personage

In the words of Sri Sankara Bhagavadpada:

“Sri Bhagavan is the embodiment of Supreme Intelligence. I mean to say that, while all other divine glories also shine forth from the Sampurna Avatar, like the various colours of the spectrum; this one particular divine glory alone, far exceeds in abundance, all other divine *Swabhava Lakshanas* (intrinsic characteristics) of the Lord.

“For him rules and conventions did not matter. It was man, who mattered. It was you who mattered and to ensure your growth and fulfillment, he would often turn his own philosophies upside down, so that by so doing you might feel more at ease or get some much needed relief.”

Sri Bhagavan would constantly be surrounded by friends and acquaintances, and even strangers, because of the immense love, grace and wisdom that would emanate from every one of his words and gestures. Around the being of Sri Bhagavan could be witnessed an immense healing of body, mind and spirit to all those who came in touch. It is indeed an unforgettable experience to be in his presence because love and freedom are natural happenings around him. Listening to Sri Bhagavan speak would mean the tearing asunder of the veil of ignorance of several lifetimes.

The mystic

In 1989, the Golden Orb manifested once again in Sri Bhagavan’s life. It also manifested in the hearts of several school children and gave a series of revelations about Sri Bhagavan and the work he has to do. And most surprisingly, it also revealed itself as the Kalki avatar.

The Orb also entered his son, Sri Krishnaji, from whom the ‘deeksha’ phenomenon emerged, leading to a great transformation in the lives of millions of people across the world.

The return of the Golden Orb led to the release of immense powers from Sri Bhagavan such as manifesting in the hearts of millions of people as their *Antharyamin* (In-dweller – God residing in one’s heart) and Sri Bhagavan’s ability to come out

of his picture (known as *srimurthi*) and perform countless miracles.

Sri Bhagavan started manifesting physically to thousands of his devotees and could even be photographed. Miracles from his *srimurthi* are countless. Miracles of healing, physical appearance, solving the problems of people and fulfilling their desires are known to have taken place on numerous occasions.

These are recorded in the archives of Sri Kalki Vishwa Vidyalaya known as 'Sri Kalki Bhagavatham'.

His spiritual movements

Sri Bhagavan's movement has used various names such as The Golden Age Foundation, Bhagavad Dharma, Kalki Dharma and the Oneness Organization.

Someone asked Sri Bhagavan, about the reason for the several name changes that this Vishwa Vidyalaya has undergone. Sri Bhagavan replied that he simply wants to awaken the world and that he is happy to adopt any structure, vocabulary, or appearance to get the job done. He has no problem changing anything at any time, as he has absolutely no interest whatsoever in dogma.

The movement, started in the early 1980s, was reported to have more than 14 million followers worldwide by 2008. Its stated mission is to 'Create oneness for all, for lasting spiritual transformation'. Its rites include the ritual practice of giving *deeksha* to its disciples and followers.

The headquarters and main ashram for the movement is in Varadaiahpalem in Andhra Pradesh. Within the ashram premises is the Oneness Temple. Built at an estimated cost of USD 75 million, it is claimed to contain the largest pillar-less meditation hall in Asia.

The Oneness University and the World Teacher

In 1999, the work on building the Oneness University started in the district of Ananthapur district in Andhra Pradesh. Located 70 km from Chennai, it is on the Tirupati Road leading to the ancient temple town of Kalahasthi. In 2000, the first campus was completed and Sri Bhagavan and his team of

teachers moved to the campus. Over the next few years, various campuses, including the Oneness Temple (2008) were built. In 2004, the first international program was begun.

Thousands of people around the world from all walks of life consider Sri Bhagavan as the World Teacher. Sri Bhagavan's teachings spontaneously arise as he interacts with the people from his own state. The essence of these teachings is 'Freedom'.

These teachings quickly become experiential and almost immediately liberate the person from his or her suffering. Generally, Sri Bhagavan gives his teachings about awakening and awakened states, and then gives the deeksha which flows from him. As a result of this deeksha, a neuro-biological shift occurs in the person, and that person is completely transformed and lands into a permanent state of holistic consciousness.

His vision

One of the letters which Sri Bhagavan wrote from Coimbatore, bears abundant testimony to his boundless compassion: *'As I write this, the world comes up before me and I am filled with anxious tears.'* In the words of Sri Sankara Bhagavadpada, "His anxiety and despair concerned itself with whether man could be saved at all from his own madness. His passion to save India became a ceaseless burning fury and the fury became a madness. In the years to come, He was to plunge into even greater depths of enquiry as to how he could achieve his vision. A hundred solutions he threw up, a hundred he rejected, till he arrived at the well-spring of life which was to be his very own Self.

"Sri Bhagavan's vision is to end all suffering of humans, animals, plants and mother earth."

His mission

Sri Bhagavan's mission is to create deeksha givers, trainers, oneness meditators and sacred chamber facilitators, all around the world.

His way

To use the increasing power of deeksha to create over 21,000 siddhayogis who would create a shift in human consciousness, leading to a new generation of human beings filled with love towards all living creatures.

Given below are experiences of some devotees on receiving the teachings and deeksha from Sri Bhagavan, from the archives of Sri Kalki Vishwa Vidyalaya:

'There is a witnessing, but no one witnessing. The eyes are seeing but there is no one seeing. There's no such thing as somebody there. And when I see you, it is not as if I am seeing someone else.'

'When it is required to think, I do. Otherwise I do not. My mind is in a state of emptiness. Sometimes there is joy. No fears arise.'

'My mind is not chattering anymore. There is a vast inner silence. During deeksha I could actually feel my thoughts being plucked out.'

'When Sri Bhagavan gave me deeksha, I felt something spurting out of my head. As if a plant were being pulled out by its roots. On my way home, whatever I saw, pebbles, trees, people, became Bhagavan.'

Turning his vision into reality

After a 25-year journey with the phenomenon, Sri Bhagavan has transferred the Golden Orb into a specially created Golden Ball through a process called 'Avahanam'.

The Golden Ball is housed in a unique temple which is a three-dimensional projection of the Surya yantra as revealed by the Golden Orb.

When people come to the temple, after going through Sri Bhagavan's teachings, as they touch the Golden Ball and receive the deeksha, they are immediately moved into a thoughtless state, which they could thereafter enter at will. With this transformation, all suffering comes to an end for the individual. Thousands of people come to the temple and receive the deeksha daily from the Golden Ball.

Sri Bhagavan's vision is slowly becoming a reality. It seems that in the years to come, the number of people getting awakened would be growing exponentially.

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Amritanandamayi (Amma)
(1953-Present)

AMRITANANDAMAYI (AMMA)

A Spiritual Avalanche

*'Life and Love are not two; they are inseparable,
like a word and its meaning.'*

Amma is certainly one of the great mystical saints of the late 20th century. She inhabits a world made up entirely of her devotees, who are like her children. The British writer, Christopher Isherwood speculated that if God really does come to the world from time to time in human form, these are the forms He would assume. Like passing minstrels they appear and bring light to the world: *'They dance and sing for a while yet they abide in silence, and then, just as suddenly, they disappear.'* And for those who are fortunate enough to be influenced by them, they may experience happiness and liberation. In a recent issue of *Matri Vani* magazine, the editorial speaks of the 'silence of sound' with regard to Amma: *'In Her presence there is a sudden hushing of mental activity where many feel their doubts dispelled... And though she talks and acts, sings, dances and laughs, yet she abides in silence.'*

Amma (Mother) or Ammachi as she is affectionately called in the West, is probably the best known Indian woman saint of modern times, widely considered to be a spiritual prodigy. With what have been described as miraculously simple acts of love, she holds close to her heart many of the suffering people of the world. Her panacea for spiritual and worldly life is bhakti, unconditional love – the love which is said to be of the nature of God. She dispenses bhakti, without choice or favor, to all those who come to her. And to society, her panacea is selfless service which takes the form of numerous charitable, spiritual, educational and social programs and projects.

At Amma's ashram, and at her many retreats held all over the world, you will find devotees and visitors from many faiths and disciplines coming to receive the blessings of a truly great enlightened being. In her main ashram in Kerala, South India, there is often a significant quieting of mind activity – while to others it may seem more like a frontline war hospital where the 'poor in spirit' can find redemption.

What is Amma like?

When referring to herself, Amma mostly uses the third person. Throughout her strange and sometimes difficult upbringing – to her present state of international recognition, Amma has never looked back and never worried about the future. She commented: “Amma feels no difference of any kind. Amma is always the same. At the time when the so-called difficulties existed, I lived within my Self, and now when so-called name and fame have come, I continue to live within my Self.”

Probably the most common reaction to first meeting Amma, or sometimes only on hearing about her or coming across a book, is an experience that can best be described as the dislocating power of love. The deepest depths of the heart stir and frequently tears come to the eyes, with a joyful release of tension. The Indian scripture, the Srimad Bhagavatam, has described such tears thus: *'The devotee whose voice is choked with emotion, whose heart melts out of love, who sobs again and again, and at times begins to laugh – and shaking off bashfulness begins to sing loudly and dance, sanctifies the whole world.'*

It seems that around Amma, holes are punched in the sheaths that surround the soul, and puffs of bhakti both stir and calm the busy minds. Amma says that such tears are not tears of sorrow, but are a form of bliss. They flow when the *jivatman*, the individual soul, merges with the *Paramatman*, the Supreme Spirit, and they mark a moment of oneness with God. Amma maintains that the devotee who cries for God experiences the bliss of his love for God, “What then is the need for liberation?” That is why Amma promotes the path of bhakti as the best of spiritual practices.

To look at, Amma is plumpish, dark-skinned and always happy, bubbling over in fact, and very pleasant to behold. She accepts everyone, no matter what they are like, with the same tenderness and compassion. She is almost always cheerful and no task is too great for her to tackle with enthusiasm. Even when talking about difficulties, Amma is cheerful. Whenever she can, she meets her devotees, listens to their problems and stays until everyone has been received – sometimes right through the day and night. In Amma's biography, *Mata Amritanandamayi – Life and Experiences of Devotees*, the author, Swami Amritasvarupananda, writes: *'She not only listens to their problems but also solves their problems by mere touch, look, or through pure resolve... Mother knows that spiritual advice won't satisfy the hunger of a person who is plunged in poverty.'*

Amma's particular form of darshan involves the hugging of each and every person who comes to her – an activity that absorbs long hours. When asked why she hugs people she replied, "Why does a river flow?" Or she may explain that in each one of us she sees only her own Self – the immaculate form of God. Linda Johnsen in her book *The Daughters of the Goddess*, describes a typical scene when Amma was surrounded by over 20,000 devotees in India:

'Amma had just completed a program of devotional singing and was taking time to greet her devotees personally – all of them... The evening passed, and then the night, and then the morning. But there was not a trace of fatigue on her face with still around 5,000 devotees left to go. She beamed her blessings at the enormous crowd and touched every person who came to her. She was completely present with each one, and pressed vibhuti (sacred ash) into their palms.'

So how is it possible for someone to do this year in and year out? A visitor to the ashram once asked Amma if she didn't get bored, doing the same thing every day? She answered something like this, "Son, boredom happens only to human beings... A Mahatma (liberated soul) experiences a constant sense of wonder and freshness in all his or her outlook and actions. Boredom and dryness come only when you have a feeling of duality, the attitude of 'me' and 'you'...

Oneness with the entire universe eliminates any such feelings... When your existence is rooted in pure love, how can you ever be bored? Actually, newness lies within us. A child looks at the world with so much wonder! For him there is newness in everything because there is newness within him – so much love is within him.”

Amma has said that she will never give up hugging people while she is alive and will be doing so until she breathes her last breath. She said, “Each and every drop of Mother’s blood, each and every particle of energy, is for her children... The purpose of this body and of Mother’s whole life is to serve her children.” And devotion is to Amma, better than enlightenment – for it flowers when one is still in the world and in the body.

Thus Amma’s work takes up most of the 24 hours of any day and she sleeps, if at all, only for very short periods. As with Anandamayi Ma, no one has ever seen Amma yawn. She remains cheerful and perfectly normal through all her activities. Once when a devotee asked, “Are you God?” she broke into peals of girlish laughter and said, “Amma is just a crazy girl. The only reason Amma is sitting here now is because no one has put her behind bars. Amma does not ask anyone to believe in her. It is enough for you to believe in yourselves.”

Amma abhors the tendency to turn spiritual activities into business and instructs her disciples never to ask for money. Spiritual teaching is never charged for in Amma’s ashram and on her tours.

Early days

Much of the information given here was sourced from the excellent biography of Amma by Swami Amritasvarupananda. Amma was born in 1953 into a moderately poor fishing family in the village of Parayakadavu in Kerala, and given the birth name Sudhamani. Like Anandamayi Ma, she did not cry during the birth. But the parents and other family members could not recognize the signs and predictions of her exalted state. But children somehow could sense that she was something special. The attitude of the parents may have had

something to do with her dark complexion, for they and the siblings were relatively light-skinned. Furthermore, this period was seeing the rise of communism in Kerala and there were many groups describing themselves as 'rationalist movements' who were opposed to religion in general. Amma's older brother, Subhagan, who tormented her through most of the early years, was a member of the local rationalist movement, and also a member of a committee to eradicate blind faith. They opposed young Amma at every opportunity. Her brother's attitude was not helped by the fact that Amma had a brilliant mind and perfect memory, while he was a bit dim.

So, the young girl was given most of the household chores to do and was taken out of school at fourth grade to devote all of her time to household tasks. To the parents Sugunanandan and Damayanti, the behaviour of their daughter was strange indeed and they were for many years convinced that she was quite mad.

Nevertheless, her devotional moods intensified almost daily through this period of her life. She had a most loving nature and was often surrounded by children whom she would involve in enacting scenes from the childhood of Lord Krishna. At other times, she would dance in ecstasy while singing devotional songs. Her biographer wrote: *'The little one's songs were filled with poignant longing for the beloved Krishna. The enchanting, soulful singing of these simple, yet at the same time deeply mystical songs, became well-known throughout the village... Some villagers would arise early in the morning just to hear the little one's angelic singing greeting the newborn day: Oh Lord of the ocean of milk, who is the color of rain clouds, Oh you with the lotus eyes, I adore you with joined palms.'*

With an eye on practicality, and perhaps to enhance the chances of a suitable marriage, Amma was allowed to learn sewing for one hour a day. She went to a Catholic workshop where the priest was touched by her divine nature and the fact that she also, without hesitation, took part in Catholic prayers and rituals. Her biographer wrote: *'Gazing at the little one, the priest would weep with emotion like a little child. She would look at the crucified form of Jesus and would feel it was her*

beloved Krishna, and immediately she would become enraptured. She would think: Oh how they have sacrificed everything for the world. People turned against them but they still loved the people. If they have done it, then why can't I? There's nothing new in it.'

Thus, the child became established in the ocean of pure existence and bliss and attained perfect peace of mind. She remained unaffected by abuse and showed no evidence of holding grudges against its perpetrators. On a number of occasions, she said that those who are enemies now will become the greatest friends.

Around this time her parents and older brother Subhagan, still not understanding her true nature, tried without success to marry her off. Thinking that she was uncooperative, they became affronted at her resistance to the marriage plans. On one occasion, the family tried to force her cooperation and one of the cousins held a knife to her chest. Notwithstanding Amma's indifference to persecution, the antagonist experienced what could be taken to be the 'wrath of God'. He collapsed and died vomiting blood; a wealthy boat owner who had ridiculed her, lost his boat in a freak storm. And her brother Subhagan developed elephantiasis and eventually took his own life.

However, from these accounts, it should not be assumed that Amma took to her amicable state without effort. Some events suggested that it was only with difficulty that she resisted the tendency to become lost in divine bliss, which would have affected the demanding role of selfless service to her devotees that she has undertaken.

Divine states: Krishna bhava and Devi bhava

Krishna bhava: Later, Amma started to exhibit these divine states and turned them into something that entranced her devotees. It seems that divine states occur in all spiritual traditions. The person may take on the appearance and mannerisms associated with deities. In Christianity, experiencing the stigmata of Jesus is an example of a bhava.¹ In Amma's case, the bhavas first became apparent to others

when she was 22-years-old. On passing a certain house in the village, she stopped to hear some verses from the Srimad Bhagavatam being read out by someone in the house. She became overwhelmed with divine bliss and her inner devotion overflowed to assume some of the physical features of Lord Krishna. The devotees from the house came out and felt that Lord Krishna had come in the form of this village girl to bless them.

At this time, Amma attained omniscience – knowing all things; the village girl, whose education never went beyond grade four and who had never read scriptural texts, acquired encyclopedic knowledge of the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, as well as those of other religions. Later, she had a vision that marked the beginning of further spiritual development in this extraordinary young woman: as she sat in meditation a beautiful globe of light appeared in front of her. It was reddish like the setting sun but also soothing like the moon, slowly rotating. Then from the globe emerged the most enchanting form of Devi. At that time she no longer lived at home. Her body would become extremely hot and she could hardly bear to wear clothes. She would stand immersed in the backwaters of that area in deep meditation. Her family's conviction that she was demented gained strength, but her father tried to help in various small ways. Seeing her sitting in the open in a state of intense samadhi, he would place a small shade of palm leaves over her to protect her from the elements.

Animals came to love her: a cow would lie down beside her exposing its udders, a cat would constantly follow her, an eagle would present her with fish, and a dog would also bring food offerings and would allow itself to be used as a pillow. One day, the dog was caught by the local dog catcher and was howling pitifully. When Amma approached, the dog began shedding tears. This was too much for the dog catcher who then released the animal. Later, she had the premonition that the dog would get rabies – and it did. Nevertheless, Amma nursed him putting her hand into its mouth so that it became covered in the highly infective saliva. Witnesses to the event were alarmed, but Amma shrugged off their concern. Later the dog died, but peacefully and without the usual manic

symptoms of that terrible disease. When asked if she was sad about the event she said, “I am not at all sad about his death. Even though he died, he will come to me. Therefore why should I be sad?” Later she recalled, “How blissful indeed were those days! Strangely enough, those animals could understand my feelings and act accordingly. If I cried, they also would join me in crying. If I sang, they would dance in front of me. When I lost my external consciousness they would crawl over my body to protect me. All the traits of various animals can be found in human beings. When one gets rid of all attachment and aversion and attains equal vision, then even hostile animals will become friendly in one’s presence.”

Devi bhava: Amma’s longing to see the Divine Mother again increased in intensity. Then one day, the vision appeared again and after this Amma started manifesting what became known as *Devi Bhava* – the mood of the Goddess. She said of herself, “From that day onwards I could see nothing as different from my own formless Self wherein the whole universe exists as a tiny bubble.” At present, Amma acts out the *Devi bhava* experience as a celebration of the event at certain darshan sessions. She explained it thus, relating it to the non-duality principle of Advaita, “Mother is not manifesting even an infinitesimal part of Her spiritual power during the bhavas. If it were to be manifested as it is, no one could come near! Here is a crazy girl who puts on the garb of *Devi*, but it is within this crazy girl that everything exists. However, it should be remembered that all objects having a name or form are merely mental projections... All these are external aids to create an impression. Mother dons the garb of *Devi* in order to give strength to the devotional attitude of the people coming for darshan – for the Atman or Self that is in Mother is also within you. If you can realize that indivisible principle that is ever shining in you, you will become That.”

Amma places great emphasis on the chanting of the divine names of God in the form of *Lalita Sahasranama* (1,000 names of God), as a panacea against suffering. Generally, life is full of sorrow and no one knows this better than Amma who has listened to the sorrows of millions of people. She says, “In

the present age, the instincts of the heart and the motherly instinct have been lost... Feminine qualities like compassion and love should become stronger in men, and masculine qualities like steadiness and courage should grow in women. The worship of the Divine Mother is ideal for enhancing these good qualities. Rapid progress will then become possible in both worldly and spiritual life.”

The 1,000 names of God are chanted twice daily in Amma’s ashrams and centers.

Dattan the leper

In Europe during the Middle Ages, the licking of lepers to cure them was undertaken by some Christian saints. In the same way Amma, who seems to have total disregard for her own body, licked the suppurating sores of a local leper and cured him. This is an account summarized from Swami Amritasvarupananda’s book: *‘A man named Dattan became a victim of leprosy at a young age and was turned out of his own home to become a beggar. As the disease advanced his whole body became covered with infective oozing pus and his body would emit the foul odor of putrefaction. For years he heard no loving word nor saw a compassionate face. Then he heard of the Holy Mother and went to see her on Devi Bhava day... Full of abhorrence people urged him to go away, but the Holy Mother called him to her, held him close. For those who witnessed the healing it was a blood-curdling sight to watch the Holy Mother licking the pus-infected wounds. Some of the witnessing devotees vomited, some fainted. But others watched in awe and reverence, weeping with love and devotion on realizing they were sitting in the holy presence of the Divine Mother Herself. She said, ‘Who else is there to take care of him and to love him? Mother doesn’t see his external body. She sees only his heart. I cannot discard him. He is my son and I am his mother. Can a mother abandon her child?’ Following this, on each Bhava Darshan day she gave him a bath, pouring pots of water over his body and treating the wounds with holy ash.’*

Now Dattan is transformed. His eyes are open and he can see clearly. Hair has grown back on his head. He can travel on

a bus and people will talk to him and serve him food. Though the scars of the disease remain, he is happy. The Holy Mother had given him new birth. He has found meaning and joy in life. He still visits the ashram from time to time.

Amma's first ashram

From 1976, when Amma was 23, young and well-educated, people began to come to the small temple she had established at Parayakadavu on the coast of the Arabian Sea. For the most part, they had come to follow her teachings and to become devotees or disciples. But this was much to the consternation of the 'rationalists'. Amma's father, still with unmarried daughters to look after, also objected to the young men hanging around. A smear campaign was started but the temple continued to function anyway and became the nucleus of the present ashram. The story goes something like this: Amma sent a young aspirant called Chandu to Tiruvannamalai, which had been the abode of the great Sri Ramana Maharshi. Chandu was supposed to go there to observe silence and meditate for a period of 40 days, which he did. But there he also met three foreign seekers and told them about Amma. All three of them immediately felt a stream of love binding them together. One of the foreigners was called Nealu (Neal Rossiter, who became Swami Paramatmananda). Following Chandu's 40 days they, together with Chandu, made the journey to Kerala to meet Amma.

Later, Amma's father gave her a small piece of land to build a hut to augment the small temple. In those days, the devotees either slept in the open under the numerous coconut trees there or stayed in the houses of villagers. The hostility of the family towards Amma diminished at around that time because she had arranged the marriage of her two sisters. At the same time, the 'rationalists' also gave up their opposition and Amma's prediction that enemies would become friends came about. The first group of *brahmacharis* and *brahmacharinis* (celibate monks and nuns) settled in with Amma.

Nealu subsequently organized the formation of Amma's first overseas ashram in California. He published a book in

two volumes describing his own spiritual journey and his meeting with Amma, entitled *On the Road to Freedom: A pilgrimage in India*.

Amma's teachings

The teachings of true saints or enlightened beings represent the only believable spoken or written indications of the existence of another reality than the material world, that the world-bound mind can perceive. Amma's teachings, as indicated before, are based on bhakti, unconditional love – and seva, selfless service, without the notion of doership. Such teachings are often unspoken, being transmitted silently to devotees. Amma once said of herself, "Amma doesn't know how to give satsang, she just blurts things out." However, one should not take this statement too literally. Collections of Amma's teachings have been recorded in a two-volume book called *Eternal Wisdom* and are constantly being expanded in a series of books called *Awaken Children*, presently in its ninth volume. They are derived principally from satsang sessions with Amma in which the answers to devotees' questions are given. There is also a small book titled *For My Children*.

Even so, Amma has said that of every 1,00,000 people that come for darshan, only around 5 to 10, on an average, are really interested in spiritual matters. Nevertheless, whether they seek it or not, they all receive the silent teachings. And she says, that she is always chipping away at egos – even though people may not know it.

Amma's teachings reflect the traditional Advaita (non-dual) philosophy that God exists in all beings as the Self – the Atman or the 'soul' of man.² And the realization of the Atman should be the aim and end-point of all spiritual practice. But Amma also knows that she has to come down to the level of ordinary people, in order to raise them up. In an issue of *Matri Vani* (Vol. 15 – Sept. 2003), Amma wrote as follows: '*The revelations of the Rishis (Sages) were called Sanatana Dharma. They embrace everything and give seekers freedom to choose – even in believing or disbelieving in God. Buddhists don't believe in a personal God. A master of Sanatana Dharma will prescribe methods that suit the physical, mental*

and intellectual nature of the individual devotee. It's like a river with many tributaries, so that many people can benefit from it. The Rishis developed Jnana, Karma, Bhakti, and Raja, Kriya, Seva and Laya yoga – along with mantra repetition and other spiritual practices. Sanatana does not even reject materialism. In this way the sciences of linguistics, architecture, geometry, astrology, mathematics, medicine, economics, musicology, logic, and even sexology and other sciences flourish. Sanatana respects every kind of animal and even inert objects. Everything is pervaded by Brahman. So the shamanistic beliefs are also Sanatana Dharma... Nothing should be rejected. An illusory object, as in maya, is not one that does not exist, but one that changes and is impermanent. And Sanatana Dharma does not accept the concept of an eternal hell because there is divinity in everyone and everything... So we must become capable of seeing God in everyone, and to gain that vision, we must first remove the impurities veiling our own minds.'

Amma's teachings are multi-layered. For those who have chosen to become renunciates there is one code of teaching involving strict discipline, celibacy and long hours of service. Although in India gurus are by no means always tied to celibacy, Amma herself has always been celibate. To keep up the spirit of her renunciates, Amma often makes fun of marriage. These are a couple of examples, "Marriage is like licking honey off the point of a needle. It's sweet no doubt but you get pricked a lot, and you don't get much." And also, "Most people think there are two rings in marriage but there are three; the engagement ring, the wedding ring and the suffering."

For devotees who are not renunciates, no rigorous lifestyle is required even in the ashram, but there is nevertheless the certain feeling that most have of residing in a spiritual hot-house; most of the visitors that come for more than a day or two are on serious spiritual pursuits of their own, or are confused in some way and looking for guidance – and many seem to find what it is that they are searching for.

In the ashram, visitors who have no interest whatsoever in spiritual matters are also welcomed. They are simply left to

their own devices, adhering only to the ashram restrictions on drugs, alcohol and so on. But nevertheless, such visitors often find themselves coming back for something, yet again. Swami Amritasvarupananda explains, “Even the most notorious fellow, who in the eyes of his own parents and close relatives is hated, is a darling son to the Holy Mother... Even about a rogue the Holy Mother would say, ‘What a good fellow he is. He is very innocent.’ Overlooking his bad qualities, Amma will speak highly of his goodness which in reality may be only infinitesimally small.”

To serious devotees, Amma says that they should come to a master with the innocence of a child and the attitude of a beginner – that is, empty and willing to receive. Then devotion will be attained. And particularly for her Western devotees, Amma recommends the path of devotion. She says that those brought up with Western values are usually well-developed in the intellectual sense and are very aware of their ‘personal’ importance, but lack understanding of the concept of devotion as a means of self-improvement and spiritual growth. In this regard, her teachings are often extremely subtle. She says, “In the beginning a true master won’t give strict instructions to a seeker. He will simply love him. He will bind the seeker with unconditional love. The strong impact created by love will make the seeker fit for the master to work on his vasanas or mental tendencies. Slowly the master, with strict yet loving instructions, heard and unheard, will discipline and remold the disciple’s ‘personality’. In such relationships it will become difficult to distinguish mentally who is the master and who is the seeker because the master will be humbler than the seeker and the seeker will become humbler than the master. Then the master will start disciplining the disciple, but with love.”

Serious spiritual practice is directed to the goal of realizing the Self – the Atman, and achieving enlightenment. Progress in this depends on bringing the mind under control. Because the mind can’t entertain two thoughts at the same time, Amma says that mantra repetition, even when doing activities, is like putting up a sign, ‘Post No Bills’. From ancient times to the present, countless sages have attained Self-realization through the constant repetition of the divine name as a mantra.

Therefore serious aspirants should repeat the divine name in the form of mantra japa given by a true Satguru. This is done in the ashram by repeating the Sri Lalita Sahasranama every morning and evening.

Helping the devotee to meditate is done by way of concentration on sound or form. It is not the worship of these things, but the centering of the mind that is of importance. Amma relates a story of a guru who saw that one of his disciples was having great difficulty in meditating, so he asked him what he most loved in life.

The disciple replied, “My buffalo...”

“Fine,” said the guru, “go into your room and make your buffalo your mantra.” Later, the guru noticed that the disciple had been away for a very long time so he asked him to come out; whereupon a very deep voice came from the room saying, “I would like to come out and have some grass, but I can’t get my horns through the door.” But rather than instructing and lecturing, Amma often uses opportunities to discipline the minds of devotees. Some examples recounted by Swami Amritasvarupananda are as follows:

A disciple had typed ‘Mother, make me your slave’ on a portable typewriter. Amma, who was sitting nearby, asked him what he had typed and he translated it for her. She said nothing but, after some time she said to another devotee within his hearing, “I am going to send Balu (the disciple who was typing) abroad – residents are increasing and we have no income to support them all. So, he must go and work.” This was a severe shock to Balu – all his inner foes raised their heads. He wanted only to stay near Amma and said with vehemence, “No, I cannot go away from here!” Then Amma said in a soft voice, “Son, what did you type just a few minutes ago? To become God’s servant is to accept all experiences, good and bad, with an equipoised mind. See everything as God’s will... Son, I don’t want your wealth. When I see you crying for God, I am so happy and my heart overflows for you.”

Sometimes Amma uses direct intervention to teach something. In the case of Nealu, Amma said, “You have been

treading the path for a long time and still you have not achieved what you set out to accomplish. Why not try crying out to God? You may be able to succeed that way. Take a photo of your guru (Sri Ramana Maharshi) and, keeping it next to you, weep to him to reveal himself to you and rid you of all your sorrow. Just try it. It's not as impossible as you think."

After that Amma left to visit devotees across the backwaters and when Nealu tried to eat his lunch, each time he raised the spoon to his mouth, he would burst into tears. At the same time, Amma's image became imprinted in his mind's eye. A friend was alarmed for such emotional outbursts were uncharacteristic of Nealu. He thought, "It's taking Amma a long time to return. I'll sit outside and chant my mantra – wherever she is, she may hear me and return quickly." Some time later, Amma's mother came rushing in. "Amma is coming," she announced breathlessly. "We were on the other side of the backwaters and could not get a boat to take us across and Amma started to shout, 'Chandu (the friend) is sitting there in the hot sun and Nealu is weeping to see me. If you don't find a boat soon, I'm going to swim across!'" At that moment Amma walked into the room. "Crying?" she asked innocently. Nealu interpreted this episode as a much needed attack on his ego.

Amma has always said that a true master adapts his teachings to suit the devotee. For most people the way of bhakti is the easiest. Recently Amma said, "All the great masters, including the advocates of Self-inquiry, said that bhakti is the way for the majority of men and women in the world today." An enlightened spiritual guide will prescribe methods that suit the physical, mental and intellectual nature of the individual. In the world, learning for life (as in learning a profession) and learning the meaning of life, are both part of the path. But learning just for living, as sophisticated as it may be in the modern world, is just samsara. "Even cannibals," Amma said, "consider themselves to be sophisticated in their way of life, their eating habits. But mental attitude is as important as actions."

She recounted a story of two neighbors – a spiritual teacher and a prostitute: The spiritual teacher was always preaching and couldn't get the prostitute out of his mind. While the prostitute, who had been forced by circumstances into that way of life, always admired the spiritual teacher and wished she could live that way. Eventually they both died and the spiritual teacher was assigned to a period in hell, while the prostitute went to heaven. Naturally, the spiritual teacher lodged an objection and brought a case against God. So God had to explain about attitude of mind. But the spiritual teacher got another chance in a following life by being reborn as a prostitute.

'IAM' meditation

IAM stands for Integrated Amma Meditation. It is an integration of different forms of yoga – yogic stretching movements and breathing combined with Makaara Meditation, giving attention to the chakras of the subtle body. IAM is taught free of charge at Amma's ashrams and centers all over the world by especially trained teachers. Amma points out that how we see the world depends on our minds. The IAM technique offers a way to connect with our real center and gain spiritual advancement through integration of body, mind and intellect with the heart – which brings joy and peace in life. We gain automatic mental mastery so that we can find happiness no matter what happens around us. The technique involves focusing on the chakras, sounds, sensations and emotions such as fear, anger, greed etc., and observing our mental and vital functions. Awareness increases to remove stress and gain insights into our true Self.

There are four versions of IAM for different classes of individuals: 35-minute and 20-minute practices, and versions for youths in the 10-14 and 15-18 age groups. IAM is usually taught over a two-day period. It has been followed by military organizations, corporations, detention centers, and the State University of New York.

Some comments on specific matters

Some of Amma's views on different matters frequently expressed during her satsangs are as follows:

Love: The mind can't actually understand God's love because it belongs to another thought system. God is love, but can we understand that love? Even ordinary romantic love we can't understand. To the mind it may be very unsatisfactory and irrational, like a young girl running away with a rascal. But the emotion that can't be understood is nevertheless real. So God's love, which is infinitely more potent than human love, cannot be comprehended by the mind.

Pure love removes all negative feelings, destroying selfishness. What really belongs to you? Only the ego which opposes pure love, so pure love consumes all judgment and prejudice. All attachments fall away. Even battles can be fought without attachment if the fight is against evil. Love can kill but it is not against the perpetration of what may be evil, as in the classical battle described in the Mahabharata. Krishna fought with complete detachment. And that is why Jesus could forgive and pray for those who destroyed his body. He forgave them and said, "They know not what they do."

On jnana and bhakta: Amma explained that not everyone has the spiritual stamina to follow the direct path of Jnana, intellectual study. Even a great scholar like Sri Shankaracharya founded temples and worshiped deities, "Didn't he? And he wrote the Saundarya Lahari, describing the Divine Mother's form. Amma knows he said that God was Consciousness, but didn't he show that even a mere stone is also God? Realizing that the philosophy of non-duality and Vedanta cannot be digested by ordinary minds, he tried to strengthen the devotion of people through symbols. Amma knows her own nature very well, but the people of today need some instruments to realize that Supreme Principle. Images of God are needed to increase peoples' faith and devotion. It is easier to catch a chicken by offering it food than by chasing it... And in order to uplift ordinary people to the spiritual plane, we first have to come down to their level."

Recently, Amma published a two-part explanation of the origin of idol worship. Bhakti is total surrender to God and for

the ordinary person it is the easiest path to follow. It may involve the worship of idols, but the idols are just symbols of God so there is no need to limit their perception. And, in a sense they are also God, for God is everything – and therefore total worship, including idols, is the means of attaining God. God is all-pervasive and dwells even in a stone pillar.

She said, “People don’t actually worship the idols; they worship the all-pervading Supreme Consciousness through the idol. When a son sees a picture of his father he remembers the father, he isn’t worshipping the picture. If objects can induce emotions in an ordinary person, how much more precious will such images be to the devotee? To see an idol as a mere statue is ignorance. ‘I am going to worship the Lord through an idol’ is felt with such resolve that it becomes ritual worship. The image helps to enhance devotion and make the mind one-pointed.

“There are idols in Christianity, Buddhism and even Islam. Christians light candles. They take bread and wine seeing Christ’s body and blood respectively in them. They pray while kneeling before an image of Christ on the Cross. Muslims pray facing Mecca, seeing it as holy. They sit before the Kaaba, contemplating the attributes of God. So Mecca and the Kaaba are also idols. The purpose of all prayers is to awaken noble qualities within us – that is what matters.”

The unsatisfactoriness of worldly life: Almost everyone comes to know that they are not experiencing real peace and happiness in this world. The Buddha expressed this in the first noble truth – the truth of suffering: that suffering is universal and sees its final expression in sickness, old age, dementia and death. Amma put it this way in an interesting story, “Brahma, the creator, conceived the multitude of species and was allocating lifespans to them. To man he gave a span of thirty years, but man was not content with this and demanded a longer life. Brahma explained that the total number of years could not be arbitrarily increased, but if any of the other creatures did not want their apportioned life spans, he would give the remaining years of their allotments to man. First came the ox that was given forty years. The ox cried out, “Oh Lord, I couldn’t bear to live such a long life pulling carts, please cut

it short by half.” So man got another twenty years. Following this man got time from the donkey, the dog, and finally from a worm. The worm had been allotted ten years. Hearing this, the worm almost fainted. It pleaded with the Creator. “Kindly reduce it to just a few weeks,” it said. So man got that and achieved longevity of almost a hundred years. He began to live his life on earth.”

Amma then said, “Children, until the age of 30, life is a period of education for man, when he leads a carefree, easygoing life. Then he gets married. From then on his life is like the ox. Man strains himself pulling the heavy cart of his family. In this way he reaches the age of 50. Still he is carrying a heavy burden but he no longer has the health and vigor of his earlier days. His life at this stage can be likened to that of an old donkey, and when the years of the donkey have come to an end, man is, by then, totally exhausted. He is left only to guard the house, like a dog, and to look after the grandchildren. Most of his time is spent sitting by himself, or lying down, completely ignored by his children. He is now constantly thinking about the past, reviving old memories. And then, for the last ten years which he borrowed from the worm, man spends his time crawling around like a worm. He is helpless due to old age and sickness. His body and senses have become powerless. All he can do is to lie down, brooding about the past. Finally, he passes out of this life, verily like a worm. The awful face of such a life is marked by despair, regret and misery.”

The mind and ego: The egoic mind is the root cause of all our troubles and unhappiness. The mind, Amma explains, has four functions: storage of *chit* (memories), *manas* (doubting and questioning), *buddhi* (determining) and *ahamkara* (maintaining the ego). The ego is actually a product of the mind, no more than a thought, that exists because we identify with it, and attach to it other thoughts produced by the mind. We hurt people because we have egos and the ego is happy to see others struggling and suffering. And, Amma explains, all thought must be based on past memories for it is not possible to conceive something totally new with the mind. The mind actually attains its power from the true Self, but misidentifies

itself from being an object of Consciousness to being a subject that reacts with other imagined and perceived objects – and so it becomes the egoic mind.

The ego, Amma says, has two principal powers: the power of veiling and the power of projection. The mind veils the true nature of phenomena and then misinterprets and projects them, so what we become identified with is just a dream based on thoughts and past experiences that are projected by the mind... And at our present state of understanding, Amma says, we believe that the dream is real... The ego believes that it is in charge. It demands recognition and seeks attention. It forms endless attachments and aversions. Amma says, “We are attached to husbands, wives, friends, toys and countless other things that keep our minds busy, but they all become boring and then we run after new things to keep the mind quiet... We are destined to get bored with all the objects and experiences we get in the world... And most people are only intent on feeding the ego... They point their finger at insane people but they don’t know that they are actually crazy themselves; whoever has a mind is mad – because the mind is madness.”

Amma told a story of a man whose mind made him think he was a rat. He was so convinced of this that his wife made him go to a psychiatrist, and after a long session the psychiatrist convinced him he was really a man. He left happily. But a few minutes later, he ran back crying in great agitation. The psychiatrist asked him what happened and he said, “You know I’m not a rat, and I know I’m not a rat – but there’s a big tomcat out there on the stairs.” This, Amma says, is how crazy the mind is, “In this world a child is taught everything: religion, culture, physical training, education – everything except how to simply abide in his own nature.”

Even though the egoic mind is very difficult to control and one needs the help of a master, this mind can nevertheless be trained and the ego can be disciplined. This is what a great guru does. Amma draws attention to the difference between boys and girls in India. For social reasons, boys are usually pampered in the Indian family and as a result may develop ten-ton egos. Girls develop much lighter egos. To have a controlled ego is a great step in the right direction. It’s like the

difference between a good bus driver who understands that the road has bumps, potholes, and other vehicles to contend with, and controls himself and the bus appropriately, as against a road-rage driver who is like a coiled spring that goes off at the slightest upset. Even just tooting at him, in America, Australia, and elsewhere, can make him want to kill you.

Anger and hate: These negative emotions have grown to reach alarming proportions in the modern world. At the time of the Ramayana, gods and demons existed in their own worlds – symbolically in India and Sri Lanka in the Ramayana story. Later, by the time of the Bhagavad Gita, they had come to abide within the same family – the Pandavas and the Kauravas. But now, Amma explains, they exist in the same mind. The demons within reside in the egoic mind. That is why we need to observe extreme vigilance. The demons of anger, hate and greed must be countered with compassion, service and love. We should look upon an angry person in the same way that we look upon a person with a physical disability – that is, with compassion.

On depression: Amma has said that the wounds that cause depression are psychic wounds, not only from this life but also from previous lives, and no doctor or psychologist can heal them. Counselors and psychiatrists, using analysis and drugs may help people cope with life to a certain extent in spite of those wounds, but they cannot actually heal them. Amma said, “They cannot penetrate deeply enough into their own minds to remove their own wounds, let alone those in the minds of their patients. Only a true master, who is completely free from any limitations and who is beyond the mind, can penetrate into a person’s mind and treat all those unhealed wounds with his or her infinite energy.”

Spiritual life under the guidance of a true master does not weaken the psyche as some may think, but greatly strengthens it because it works towards union and wholeness. For, the ultimate cause of all our psychological wounds is separation from the Atman, from God, which is actually our true nature. It may be necessary for a person to go to a psychiatrist to seek temporary relief and that is fine, but to put spirituality aside in order to strengthen the ego (on which modern psychological

treatment and counseling is based), is to strengthen the sense of separation which will only lead to further suffering. Amma says, “What is the use of thinking, I will go to the doctor (a true master) as soon as I feel better?” To wait for the inner or outer circumstances to be just right, is like standing on the seashore waiting for the water to be completely calm before jumping in. It will never come about. Every moment of life is so utterly precious, such a rare opportunity, we should not waste it.”

Desire and attachment: On these phenomena, Amma has said something like this, “Human beings have two problems. One of them arises when you don’t get what you desire, and the other is strange, because it arises when you do get what you desire. Because of the attachment to what we have attained, the next move will be to protect it, so that the sense of possessiveness increases... We will lose our peace of mind... Tension builds up and thought accelerates and exacerbates the chaos of the mind... We don’t know in which direction to turn, and we lose all sense of clarity. The burden becomes too heavy and we lose our grip on life... Our thoughts overwhelm us and swallow us up as we become identified with the mind and all its negative emotions... Then an emotional breakdown takes place and you may even go madder than you were before.”

Amma said, “Mother will tell a story: A man was being shown around a mental hospital by his friend who was a doctor there. In one cell a patient was sitting on a chair endlessly repeating the name ‘Pumpum, Pumpum, Pumpum’ over and over again. The visitor said, ‘Poor fellow. What’s his problem? Who is Pumpum?’ The doctor replied, ‘Pumpum was his beloved. She jilted him and ran away with another man.’ The visitor sighed and they went on to see other patients. As they approached the last cell he was surprised to see another man banging his head against the wall and crying out the same name – Pumpum, Pumpum – with great anguish. The visitor asked the doctor, ‘Has the same Pumpum got something to do with this man too?’ And the doctor replied, ‘Yes, this is the man who Pumpum ran away with’.”

When someone asked whether satiating desires (in this case a desire to go on safaris to see wild animals) would be the best way of getting rid of them, Amma said that indulging desires is always like falling into a trap. Maybe satiation takes place for a while but the desire always comes back and, if indulged, develops into a habit or even an addiction. “Happiness does not lie in anything external,” she said. “Learn to see God in everything. Then you will see all the animals just by looking at your friends in the ashram – gorillas, chimpanzees, and elephants, all of them you will see.”

On sex: When asked to comment on problems relating to sexuality, Amma said that the only way was to behave dharmically. The West is too liberal and has lots of problems. But in the East there are problems too, because men may already be in their thirties before marriage, and there are problems of prostitution too. But anyone can live dharmically; husbands sometimes live away from their family to earn money, for long periods of time. Dharma can be taught to children on how to behave properly, rather than exposing them to unsuitable kinds of media.

Does time exist? Amma has said that time exists in the mind. The mind is made up entirely of a flow of thoughts which create a feeling of time. The ego arises by attachment to these thoughts and then projects them into what it thinks is the future. But to that which is beyond the mind, God or Brahman, or Consciousness – whatever you want to call it, there is no time. There is only this moment, now. But the worldly mind can't comprehend this. So, Amma says, instead of worrying about if there is time or not, it is better to train the ego. With a trained ego our lives can have equipoise and spiritual development can proceed smoothly.

Impermanence: Amma says that your wife, children, house, job etc. are all temporary. We are all tourists in the world, yet we always forget this. What is permanent in the world? It is only this moment, now. If you ask a condemned man on the gallows, with the noose already around his neck and knowing that the hangman is about to spring the trap, if he wants a delicious meal, or a box of jewels, he won't be interested. And just like him, we all, without exception,

already have the noose around our necks – yet we still run after things of the world.

The karmic pendulum: The pendulum of karma which swings within and between incarnations and the body, which is what incarnates, is a learning device. Mahatmas also have bodies and experience the vicissitudes of life, but to them it's a 'movie' that they themselves create and enjoy.

Saying 'yes' to life: To surrender is to accept – to say 'yes' to everything. Amma has said that even when everything goes wrong in your life, you should still find yourself saying, "Yes, I accept. Thank you God." The word 'no' exists only where duality exists. Amma says that when you see life as a gift, you will be able to say 'yes' to everything. If, on the other hand, you see it as a right you can only say no. That is, when everything goes wrong, you feel unhappy and discontented...

And when you feel insignificant and unsatisfied, why is this? It is because you are always wanting. You want money, fame, a new house, a new car – the list goes on and on. Thus you become unhappy, you get bored and life becomes dry. We need to give far more importance to the soul, to the realization of the Self, so that we can lead truly contented, blissful lives even in times of hardship. And we need to give far less attention to the body.

On tapas: Deep suffering and deep sorrow, when confronted and recognized as *what is* – turns to clarity and peace. It becomes spiritual burning. The master induces spiritual burning as required in a disciple. Amma has said that spiritual burning is the most effective means of dissolving the mind, "While it is true Amma is trying to please all her devotees who come to her to unburden their sorrows, Amma doesn't believe that she should treat those who wish to devote their lives to God in the same way. Their minds need to be churned and churned, so they will become clearer than the clearest – so transparent that you will be able to perceive your real existence, the Atman. The mind is dissolved by the heat of tapas. The master creates turbulence in the mind in strange and incomprehensible ways, so that the vasanas are exposed, and then the devotee attains a sincere desire to work with the

master to eliminate them. The mind along with all its judgments and preoccupations will melt away and you will begin to function from the heart (but) great patience is needed.”

As indicated before, Amma says that crying for God marks the exalted state of devotion. It can be induced by closeness to the master, or through deep suffering. All suffering is separation from God, but that which brings tears to the eyes is a form of grace: “Such tears are not tears of sorrow. They are a form of inner bliss. Those tears will flow when the individual separated soul merges with the Paramatman – the Supreme Spirit. Such tears mark a moment of oneness with God.”

Seva (Karma yoga): Selfless service is a spiritual practice relating to bhakti. The mind must be kept on God when engaged in each action. Amma says, “Our minds should dwell on God, and our every action should be a form of worship. We should see our beloved in everyone, and offer them our love and service... We should have the attitude that everything is God – then it is bhakti. On the other hand, if we think of other things, then it is not bhakti.” Amma tells a story, “There was a poor woman who used to utter the words *Krishna pranam astu* (let this be an offering to God) before doing anything... There was a temple next to her hut and the priest didn’t like the woman’s prayer one bit, especially when throwing out rubbish. One day she threw out some cow dung which landed in front of the temple. As usual, she didn’t forget to say *Krishna pranam astu*. The priest trembled with rage and made her remove the cow dung and then beat her... The next day the priest found that the arm that had done the beating was paralyzed and he cried out in anguish to the Lord. That night the Lord came in a dream and said, ‘I enjoyed that cow dung my devotee offered me much more than the sweet pudding you gave me. What you do cannot be called worship, whereas every one of her actions is a form of worship. I will not tolerate you harming such a devotee of mine. Only if you touch her feet and beg her forgiveness will your arm be cured.’ The priest realized his error. He asked the woman to forgive him and was soon cured.”

Selfless service is not a matter of the aspirant acquiring 'merit' by doing good works for others, because the mind doesn't understand merit. Amma says that in performing actions through selfless service, the main problem is to avoid the concept of being the 'doer'. Amma understands that it is very difficult for people immersed in the activities of the world to get away from the 'doer' notion, but around a master it becomes easier. She explains that if you are devoted to the master, when you get the feeling of doership, the master will "immediately cut it off". Amma says that we should practice becoming the witness of our actions; this will enable us to see how the ego works. It must be watched by the witness. In this way, with practice, we will get to know the characteristics of the ego and will not be so easily taken by it. In Karma yoga, service is the essential element and because of this the person served is actually the one who is helping the aspirant in his or her spiritual quest – not the other way around. If this fact is appreciated, it will help to generate the right attitude and avoid the notion of being the helper or the 'doer'.

Worldly effort and grace: Striving for what the world would call the pursuit of excellence is a form of arrogance and pride. Amma says that humans have the wrong notion that they can attain everything through effort. Effort, in fact, is just pride in us. In our journey to God, all effort that stems from ego will crumble. This is a divine message, the message of the need to surrender to grace, that eventually helps us to realize the limits of our effort engendered by our ego. In short, effort teaches us that through effort alone we will not attain our goals. Ultimately, grace is the determining factor.

Whether it is striving for God-realization or for achieving worldly desires, grace is the factor that fulfils the goal.

Detaching from doership: Amma says that we should always try to detach from the fruits of our actions. That encourages a sense of non-doership. Actions thought of as a duty according to Dharma are okay. For example, a seed planted by a farmer may be eaten by birds or insects, tramped on, die of drought, or it may grow into a large tree – this is in the hands of God, and not in the hands of the person performing the action of planting the seed.

The need for a true master: Amma maintains that one needs to be guided by a real master who has no ego, who will replace the other attachments of the mind. She says we need to be attached to something higher than the mind, which is the noisiest thing in the world. The pull of attachment to the master's external form is what balances out all other attachments. It is hard to surrender and accept everything, so to begin with the need for a true master arises – someone we can relate to and learn true surrender from. It will develop from the inspiration you receive through the master's physical presence. Then the disciplinarian in the master will be invoked. This is meant to teach the disciple detachment, self-surrender and acceptance, not only to the external form of the master, but to all creation, to your Self and to God.

Gurus and subtle ego: In an interview with a magazine for an issue of *What is Enlightenment?* that was devoted to the ego, Amma said that she does not agree that certain gurus referred to in the article are fully enlightened. If they have to derive their satisfaction from sources outside themselves, then they are obviously not fully established in the Self. The problem seems to arise from the 'subtle ego'. Amma said, "Unfortunately it may happen that a spiritual person learns to hide his ego and pretends to be very humble. But such a person who wears the false mask of a spiritually advanced person does not know what terrible harm he or she is doing in misleading others. A number of sincere people may get trapped in the deception. And once they realize they have been misled, they will lose their faith. They will even be suspicious of genuine masters. The ego of such a 'guru' is very subtle and is difficult to get rid of."

Pranayama and shaktipat: Amma generally does not encourage the practice of awakening of the kundalini through Prana yoga or shaktipat. In her handbook of teachings *For My Children*, she says, "Pranayama should (only) be practiced with utmost care. While doing these exercises, one should sit with the spine erect. Ordinary diseases can be treated and cured, but not the disorders caused by the incorrect practice of pranayama. Children, the number of times pranayama is to be performed is specified for each stage. If these specifications

are not followed, the exercises can be dangerous. Their effect will be like trying to stuff a five kilo sack with ten kilos of rice.

“When pranayama is practiced, there will be movement of the intestine in the lower abdominal area. There is a time duration and order specified for pranayama exercises. If this order is not observed, the digestive system will be irreparably damaged and food will pass through undigested. And the nervous system can also be damaged. Therefore, pranayama should be practiced only under the direct guidance of an adept, someone who knows what should be done at each stage and someone who can give guidance and appropriate herbal medicines if needed.

Kumbhaka is the stillness of breath that occurs when one gets concentration. It may be said that the breath itself is thought. Thus, the rhythm of the breath will change according to the concentration of the mind. However, even without doing pranayama, kumbhaka can happen through devotion. It is enough if japa (mantra repetition) is done continuously.”

It is said that some practices can overcharge the nadis of the subtle body, in a way similar to the application of excessive voltage or electrical power to a sensitive electronic device such as a computer. In Amma’s ashrams and centers, one does not hear the words pranayama or shaktipat very often; there it is more a matter of *bhaktipat* or the master’s love in setting the devotee up for spiritual growth. In fact, although the movement of the kundalini energy may take place through yogic practice and is considered to purify the nadis, this happening in spiritually-retarded people can exacerbate the ego. People may feel that having visions etc. is a sign of their spiritual superiority. In contrast, when this takes place of its own accord through conventional spiritual practices, and by helping people selflessly, it does not inflame the ego. Neem Karoli Baba, one of the great yogis of modern times, said that the kundalini is best awakened by feeding people – in other words, by selfless service. It seems that Amma discourages the pursuit of such esoteric experiences unless they happen without seeking them out.

Nevertheless, Amma does allow the teaching of a type of prana meditation in the IAM programs, but only under the guidance of trained instructors.

Humility: To be a good disciple we need to cultivate the attitude of a beginner and try to absorb what the teacher says. Many people come to advise Amma, rather than the other way around. We should avoid focusing on the ‘I’ and ‘me’ aspect of our minds: wanting the attention of Amma and being jealous of others if she is giving attention to someone else. Rather we should empty our minds and focus on absorbing the master’s teachings and performing selfless service. We should be like little children listening to a story. They listen with their whole being, their eyes wide with attention, not just with their ears and minds.

On scholarship and Self-inquiry: Amma recommends that the understanding of spiritual matters is best attained by attending the satsang of enlightened masters, asking questions, and observing the lessons of life. Simply reading the scriptures without correct interpretation can be misleading. For example, a young boy after reading the story of Arjuna may conclude that there is nothing wrong with killing your uncle if you don’t like him. But in Amma’s ashram there are classes on Vedanta and other spiritual themes for renunciates and others interested in attending them. Swamis tour the world giving talks and conducting retreats. On occasions learned teachers, such as Swami Anubhavananda of the Chinmaya Foundation, are invited to give classes. For some individuals, who may be past the ability to approach the master in innocence, Amma has recommended Self-inquiry as a spiritual practice.

The witness state and enlightenment: At a recent satsang gathering, someone raised the question of the usefulness of the ego, “Is ego necessary for the fulfillment of life in the world?” Amma countered by asking what we think it will be like to be enlightened. Various answers were forthcoming: it would be like the feeling of love we experience in the presence of Mother; various scriptural explanations were also advanced. Then Amma said, “They are all wrong because when you are enlightened there will be no ‘you’ to say what it is like. The ‘you’ that you think you are will have ceased to exist.” Amma

explained that the Self is not a person, a personality, or something that the egoic personality will become, but it is a state of being. To a degree, it is associated with being in the witness state, for here the ‘personality’ is being watched – so at such times you are not the ego personality. Amma said that the experience of witnessing actually does occur in the day-to-day lives of people under certain circumstances. It comes down to a question of actually being aware of it. And if the ability to witness can happen under certain circumstances, then we should be able to experience it constantly.

The Self (the awareness of which takes place with enlightenment), unlike the ego, is always present and is perceived as that *which is* (I am that) – whether thought is present or not, whether the ‘doer’ is there or not, whether the ‘observer’ is there or not, or the ‘knower’ knows or not. When both the knower and the doer are quiet, what is left is the Self. When the struggle stops with complete surrender, then the Lord is revealed. The more struggle and striving there is, the more there is the ego. The Self is above the gross body and the subtle body, the prana, the mind, the ego and the supracausal body; so all experiences that we can perceive including visions, blissful experiences and non-blissful experiences, anything we can describe, are all within the framework of the mind and duality – hence they are *not* the Self. The very nature of the Self *is* experience; it is not an *object* of experience. We encounter the Self often in the state of deep sleep but when we continue to struggle for it, that struggle holds us back.

In spiritual practice, the mind must be brought under control. And as long as the mind is associated with the gross body we have no chance of purifying it. We must tune in to the master with the innocence of a child. She said, “The mind is also your past, so die to your past, your thoughts and memories, and you will suddenly become fully conscious. Get rid of the mind and be a new person with a fresh and ever-new outlook on life. You will learn how to witness. When you truly exist in the present moment, you are simply witnessing. When the thoughts are eliminated, the past disappears. Children, at this time you are leading an unconscious life. You may wonder: ‘How can I possibly be unconscious?’ You may have

a hundred arguments to prove that you are conscious – but you are not.”

Amma’s travels

Amma now spends more than half the year touring India, Europe, North America, Japan, Southeast Asia, Australia, West Asia, Africa and even the islands of Mauritius and Reunion, from which some of her earliest devotees came. The main activity of her tours is the giving of her form of ‘hugging darshan’ described earlier.

International recognition

In recent years, Amma has gained international reputation as an ambassador of peace in the world. In 1993, she attended the centenary meeting of the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. There were over 6,500 delegates representing 125 religions and sects at the meeting. (At the first meeting of this body in 1893, Swami Vivekananda had rocked the audience with his views on the universality of all religions.) Amma’s talk at the 1993 meeting gave an enlightening insight into Advaita. An observer, reflecting on the impact of the various speeches, made this comment, “Every other speaker had treated the subject of religion and spirituality as if they were two separate, disparate entities. However, Amma’s powerful words struck deep into the center of religion and spirituality, effacing the contradiction, bridging the gap, and affecting a harmonious blend of both, thus unfolding their very essence. It was one of the most significant and powerful speeches.”

At New York in 1995, Amma was one of the invitees from all over the world to an Interfaith Conference convened to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the United Nations. These are some of the comments she made in that speech:

“The chain of limitations that binds us must break in order to open our hearts; to know each other and to understand the pain and suffering of others by putting ourselves in their place. According to science, the world falls into two categories: the known and the unknown. In the future scientists may discover much of what is not yet known. But it is the unknowable, that

which is far beyond the intellect, that we really know nothing about. That is God, or our own true Self.

“We may deny the existence of God but the intellect cannot completely prove or disprove God. If the intellect were able to prove God’s existence – if it could contain God within its grasp – it would only mean the intellect is greater than God. If God can be understood through the intellect, then God and religion are not necessary. Science and the intellect would be enough. What we have to inquire about is the very source of that Power, which exists within our very selves.

“There is one Truth that shines through all of creation. Rivers and mountains, plants and animals, the sun, the moon and stars, you and I – all are expressions of this one Reality. It is by assimilating this truth in our lives, and thus gaining a deeper understanding, that we can discover the inherent beauty in this diversity. When we work together as a global family, not merely belonging to a particular race, religion or nation, peace and happiness will once again prevail on this earth which is now drenched with the tears of division and conflict.”

In August 2000, Amma addressed the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the United Nations, on *The Role of Religion in Conflict Transformation*. Part of her address is as follows:

“The reason for the fighting (between religious factions) is that people are not going into the depth of their religions. Our ties to a religion, society, or country should not make us forget our basic human values... There is a lack of awareness of our true nature, the one living power within us, of which we are all a part. The role of spirituality, true religion, is to awaken this awareness and to help us develop such qualities as love, empathy, tolerance, patience and humility.

“Religion is the science of the mind. Today we are able to air-condition the external world, but we have yet to learn how to air-condition the mind. We are trying to clone human beings, but we do not attempt to create within ourselves a perfect, loving and peaceful human being. An important role of religion should be this purification process... Though the founders of all religions realized and practiced the noblest

ideals in their lives, followers have failed to live up to them. Instead of focusing on the essence of religious principles of love and compassion, we focus on the external rituals and traditions, which vary from religion to religion. That is how these religions, which were originally meant to foster peace and a sense of unity among us, became instrumental in spreading war and conflict. Amma will tell a story: The leaders of three religions – A, B and C – decided to convene a meeting to bring about peace. God was so pleased with their efforts that he sent an angel to them during the meeting. The angel asked the leaders what they wished for. The leader of religion A said, “Religion B is responsible for all the problems. So please wipe them off the face of the earth!”

The leader of religion B said, “Religion A is the cause of all our troubles. You have to reduce them to ashes!” On hearing this, the angel was very disappointed. He turned expectantly to the leader of Religion C. With an expression of grave humility, C’s leader said, “I wish nothing for myself. It will be enough if you merely grant the prayers of my two colleagues!”

But we cannot lose sight of the essential needs of people, for until these needs are met, it is impossible for anyone to aspire to higher states of awareness and understanding. If, in any part of the world, people are dying of hunger or suffering in poverty, or being exploited, it is a matter of shame for all nations. Based on the religious ideal of universal brotherhood, all nations that are in a position to help should share their material wealth and resources. There is enough for the survival of all living beings on this earth, yet not enough to satisfy the greed of just a few.

Lending a helping hand to a neglected soul, feeding the hungry, giving a compassionate smile towards the sad and dejected – this is the real language of religion. We should invoke God’s compassion in our own hearts and hands. Living only for oneself is not life but death.

The following are some of the globally recognized problems listed by Amma, wherein the UN should strengthen their efforts:

1. In God's creation, men and women are equal. But over the centuries, the sad condition of women has not significantly improved. Women, who give birth to humankind, should be assured an equal place in society.
2. Millions of people are suffering from AIDS, which continues to spread like wildfire. This disease must be brought under control.
3. Let the UN lead the transformation from a world of conflict to one of peace by training a group of youth in community service. These young emissaries, serving selflessly throughout the world, will inspire people to cultivate universal spiritual and human values. What cannot be achieved through bloodshed, can be easily achieved through love.
4. Terrorism and violence against human beings in the name of any religion (whether official or unofficial) should be condemned at the international level, and appropriate, strong action should be taken – but not military action, which is also terrorism. Love is the only medicine that can heal the wounds of the world. Just as the body needs food to grow, the soul needs love to unfold. Love is more nourishing than breast milk is for a baby. Love is the very foundation, beauty and fulfillment of life. Where love exists, there cannot be conflict of any kind – peace alone will reign.

Peace award

In 2003, Amma received the *Gandhi-King Award* for the promotion of global peace.

Charities and social works

Amma's service to society in India cannot be faulted. She has established around 750 spiritual centers and 12 temples, and has initiated thousands into spiritual life. At Amma's centers, women disciples are trained to perform religious rites and can become Swamis – in opposition to the mainstream views of Hinduism and Islam. And principally in support of widows, often hard done by in India, Amma's organization has, at the time of writing, supplied more than 25,000 homes

to the poor, and pays pensions to around 50,000 destitute women.

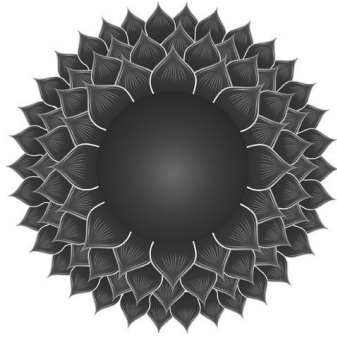
Amma believes in the necessity for material progress in underdeveloped countries like India but, at the same time, she supports the preserving of traditional values and promotes spiritual development and harmony.

A marvel of modern medicine, said to be the best in India, is the Amrita Institute of Medical Science (AIMS) with its medical and nursing schools and state-of-the-art medical and surgical services. It offers treatment at lower than average charges for all, and free or subsidized treatment to the needy. In addition, Amma has started many free hospitals and clinics throughout India.

Amma has established 33 secondary schools and vocational training centers in areas where government schools are poor or lacking. There is a school of nursing, the Amrita Institute of Technology and Science, the Amrita Institute of Management, and the Amrita Institute of Advanced Computing. In line with the aim of raising the material standards of the poor, she offers annually 5,000 scholarships to poor students who will each undertake to sponsor another student for training, when they get jobs.

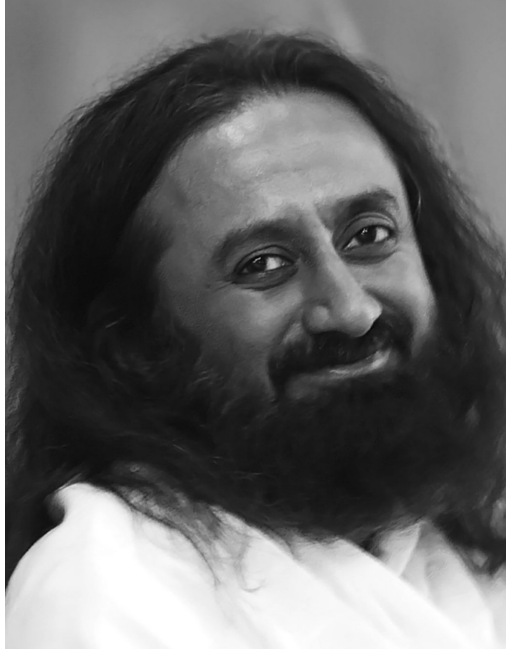
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¹ Therese Neumann is possibly the best-known example from Christianity in modern times. Timothy Conway, in his book *Women of Power and Grace* (which also has a chapter on Amma), writes: *'During her reliving of Jesus' passion, Therese would experience lucid visions of his suffering and death and the stigmata on her body would appear and disappear suddenly, defying etiologic pattern.'*

² The word 'soul' may refer to the bound individual egoic self (the 'I thought'). Only the higher Self (Atman) is the true immortal soul.



Sri Sri Ravi Shankar
(1956-Present)

SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

The ‘Art of Living’ Guru

‘My vision is of a violence-free, stress-free world.’

Ravi Shankar was born on 13th May 1956 to Visalakshi Ratnam and R.S.Venkat Ratnam at Papanasam in Tamil Nadu. The name chosen by his parents was auspicious: *Ravi* meaning the Sun and Shankar, after the 8th century Hindu saint Adi Shankara who was also born on that date.

He is an important spiritual leader of modern times and has founded, and supports several educational, spiritual and social welfare programs in India and elsewhere.

In 1982, he founded the globally recognized Art of Living Foundation. It is an NGO with UNESCO consultative status that aims to relieve stress, solve social problems, and reduce violence worldwide. It is currently established in 152 countries throughout the world.

Later, in 1997, he established the International Association for Human Values based in Geneva, which is also an NGO charity, that concentrates on rural development and relief work.

Early years

Sri Sri was a prodigy who graduated in science from St. Joseph’s College, Bangalore University, in 1975, at the age of 18. After graduation, he became a devotee of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and traveled with him, giving talks on Vedic science and assisting Maharishi in arranging conferences, setting up Ayurvedic centers, and assisting with other charitable undertakings. He was with Maharishi at the inauguration of the first of the ‘golden domes’ at the Maharishi International University.

In the 1980s, Sri Sri initiated a series of practical (and experiential) courses in spirituality around the world. In particular, they feature a system of meditation that he had discovered which became known as Sudarshan Kriya. It forms a central part of his teachings at present. On this, he says that the inspiration came to him after a 10-day period of silence in 1982, “like a poem – a revelation. I learned it and started teaching it.” He explained that every emotion produces a characteristic rhythm in the breath, so that regulating the breath in specific ways can relieve unpleasant emotions and reduce personal suffering. However, he was careful to explain, this should in no way be confused with hyperventilation that increases oxygenation of the blood.

Sri Sri’s meditation method has been called a guided meditation and there are several types based on factors such as the level of contentment and the emotion of the practitioner. He states, “In deep meditation, you are time itself and everything is happening in you. Events are happening in you, like the clouds, sun and moon come and go in the sky in the present moment. When you are ahead of time it becomes dragging and boring. When time is ahead of you, you are surprised and shocked. You cannot digest the events. But when you are in tune with time, in the moment, you are wise and at peace.”

In 1981, Sri Sri persuaded his father (who was very wealthy and a leader in the automobile industry of India), and several other wealthy and prominent citizens of Bangalore, to found the Ved Vignan Maha Vidya Peeth – an educational and charitable trust that established a school near Bangalore for the education of rural children.

Then in 1983, he held the first foreign Art of Living course in Switzerland and, in 1986, he held the first such course in North America.

Some teachings

Sri Sri teaches that spirituality enhances the human values of love, compassion, and enthusiastic energy. These values, he explains, are things that are common to all religions and cultures, and so provide a bond that is more important than nationality, gender, religion, or anything else that separates

mankind, and is open to all people. He maintains that “a violence-free society, disease-free body, confusion-free mind, inhibition-free intellect, trauma-free memory, and sorry-free soul,” is the birthright of everybody.

He points out that science and spirituality are linked and compatible since they both spring from the urge to know. The question “Who am I?” leads to spirituality, and the question “What is This?” leads to science.

By emphasizing the joy that comes only in the present moment – the ‘Now’, Sri Sri’s plan is to create a world free of stress and violence. His programs are said to offer practical tools to establish this situation. Since the teachings are, for the most part, based on breath control, he maintains that the breath is the link between body and mind and, therefore, offers the means of acquiring a relaxed mind and healthy body. And in all this he emphasizes the importance of meditation, spiritual practice, and service to others.

Sudarshan Kriya: Sri Sri’s main breathing technique is called Sudarshan Kriya. Medical studies have shown that a range of physical and mental conditions can be relieved by this practice. It is said to bring about reduced levels in the stress hormone cortisol, improvement in the immune system, the suppression of anxiety and depression, increased antioxidant levels in the body, enhanced brain function, increased mental focus and calmness, and faster and better recovery from diseases and stressful situations.

Persons enrolling in the course agree not to pass on the teachings, unless they have undertaken appropriate Teacher Training sessions under Sri Sri’s guidance. However, the techniques have been described in the book *The Way of Grace* by Burge and Boucherle. There, as indicated above, it is stressed that Sudarshan Kriya is not a hyperventilation technique, but is based on much more complex and subtle changes in the breath. Participants in the courses report attaining a state of deep relaxation with a feeling of being rejuvenated and re-energized.

Shakti kriya: This is a new breathing technique developed by Sri Sri that was introduced in March 2013. It is a physically

demanding process that requires one to be completely medically fit. Shakti Kriya is said to elevate consciousness and significantly increase happiness and overall well-being. Through satsang, mantra and meditation, one will connect with the Divine within. In exploring one's consciousness and discovering one's true transcendental nature, bliss and joy overflows into every area of life.

Social services and organizations

In addition to the Ved Vignan Maha Vidya Peeth, a university, the Sri Sri University was opened in 2009. It is located in Odisha state and has a capacity of 10,000 students, with a faculty of about 2,000 teaching, research and other staff. It is currently reported to be one of the best universities in India. (see: www.srisriravishankar.org/sri-sri-university).

Volunteers for a better India: The Art of Living Foundation together with UN agencies, NGOs, augmented by the participation of civil society, launched Volunteers for a Better India (VFABI) in December 2009. It is reported to be engaged in many social and educational activities including the recent movement against rape and abuse of women in India. It participated in condemning the 2012 Delhi gang rape and murder of a young woman that created international interest.

Ayurvedic medicine: Sri Sri has also recently opened the Sri Sri College of Ayurveda to study Ayurvedic medicine.

Peace initiatives

In 2004, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar went on a goodwill mission to Pakistan in 2004. On a subsequent mission in 2012, he inaugurated Art of Living centers at Islamabad and at Karachi.

At the invitation of Prime Minister Nouri al Malik, he visited Iraq in 2007 and 2008 where he met with political and religious leaders with the objective of promoting global peace. Again in November 2014, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar traveled to the relief camps in Erbil, Iraq, and further held a conference of leaders and peacemakers to highlight and help alleviate the

dire condition of Yazidis and other non-Muslim groups living in the region.

He was also instrumental in negotiating a peace deal between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla movement, during his visit to Cuba in June 2015. The FARC agreed to follow Gandhian principle of non-violence to attain its political objectives and social justice.

Sri Sri is actively involved in interfaith dialogue and is presently on the Board of World Religious Leaders for the Elijah Interfaith Institute. Through interfaith summits held in 2008 and 2010, he has been engaging faith-based leaders for collective measures against the spread of HIV. At a meeting held at UNAIDS headquarters in Geneva in July 2013, he discussed issues relating to HIV prevention, stigma and discrimination attached to those who were affection by the syndrome as well as gender-based violence.

Bringing spirituality into the ambit of corporate culture

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar initiated the ‘Ethics in Business – Corporate Culture & Spirituality’ dialogue with the objective of promoting human values and ethics in business. Later on, this led to the formation of the World Forum for Ethics in Business, which convenes international conferences on business ethics.

A ‘World Summit on Ethics in Sports,’ a one-day event held in September 2014 at FIFA headquarters in Zurich, focused on ‘Morality and Openness’ in the field of sports.

Rehabilitation of prisoners and other distressed people

In 1992, he initiated a program to rehabilitate prison inmates and help them reintegrate into the social mainstream.

His volunteers assisted the 2004 tsunami victims, and the Hurricane Katrina victims in Haiti, and many other regions afflicted by conflicts and natural calamities.

Awards and recognition

- Peru’s highest award: Medalla de la Integracion en el Grado de Gran Oficial (Grand Officer)

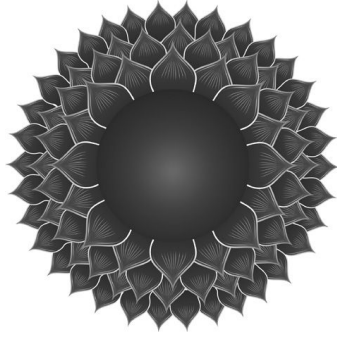
- Colombia's highest civilian award: Orden de la Democracia Simon Bolivar
- Gandhi, King, Ikeda Community Builders Prize
- Paraguay's highest civilian award: National Order of Merito de Comuneros
- Tiradentes Medal, the highest honour from Rio de Janeiro State, Brazil
- The Sivananda World Peace award, Sivananda Foundation, South Africa
- Crans Montana Forum Award, Brussels
- Culture in Balance Award, World Culture Forum, Germany
- Phoenix Award, Atlanta, USA
- Honorary Citizenship and Goodwill Ambassador, Houston, USA
- Proclamation of Commendation, New Jersey
- Order of the Pole Star, Mongolia
- Sant Shri Dnyaneshwara World Peace Prize, Pune, India
- Bharat Shiromani Award, New Delhi, India

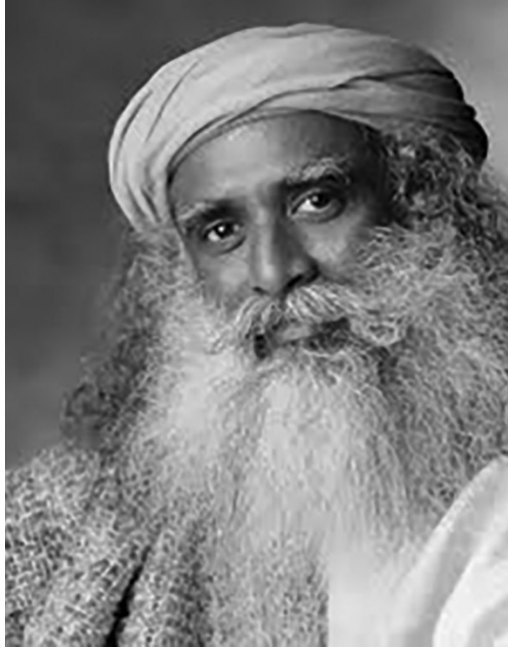
In 2009, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar was named by Forbes Magazine as the fifth most powerful leader in India.

Contact information

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Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev
(1957-Present)

SADGURU JAGGI VASUDEV

The Isha Foundation

'When your mind becomes still, your intelligence explodes.'

Jagadish Vasudev (popularly known as Jaggi Vasudev) is an Indian yogi and mystic who has appeared on the international stage in recent times. He formed the non-profit Isha Foundation in 1992, a teaching organization that offers yoga programs around the world.

Regarded as a Sadguru (an enlightened being) by his devotees, he is also deeply involved in promoting grassroots ecological awareness programs – for which he was awarded the Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puraskar (the highest Indian environmental award) in 2010. It may be said that the teachings of the Isha Foundation, which has more than two million volunteer/devotee workers, is based on the understanding that yoga and spirituality have a scientific basis as well as a transcendental one. The Isha Foundation works in association with international bodies such as the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Jagadish participated in the World Peace Summit in 2001, and the World Economic Forum from 2006 to 2009. In 2012, he was voted as one of the Top 100 most influential Indians in the field of environmental protection.

Early years

He was born in Mysore to Susheela and Dr. Vasudev on 3rd September 1957 in Mysore. Sadguru's father was an ophthalmologist with the Indian Railways and as a result the family moved frequently. The youngest of four children, Jagadish, or Jaggi as he came to be known, developed an interest in nature and would frequently go ambling into the nearby forests. When he was 11-years-old, Jaggi came in

contact with Malladihalli Sri Raghavendra Swamiji who taught him a set of simple yoga asanas, the practice of which he regularly maintained. He later stated that “without a single day’s break, this simple yoga that was taught to him kept happening and led to a much deeper experience later.”

After schooling, he attended Mysore University and obtained a degree in English Literature. While at university, he became interested in motorbikes and frequently went around the countryside. But the favorite rides of him and his friends included nocturnal trips to Chamundi Hills. On a trip to Nepal, he was stopped at the Indo-Nepal border from entering Nepal because he did not possess a passport. This experience made him resolve ‘to earn some quick money’ as he put it and led him to subsequently to start several successful ventures that included a poultry farm, a brickworks and a construction business.

When he turned 25, Jagadish took off on his motorbike and on 23rd September 1982, he rode up to Chamundi Hill, about 13 km east of Mysore, the Palace City of the Wodeyar rulers, in the State of Karnataka. Named after goddess Chamunda, the Chamundeshwari temple rests atop the main hill that is accessible by an ancient stone stairway of 1,008 steps leading to its summit. Almost halfway to the summit, a large sculpture carved out of a single block of black granite to represent the Nandi bull, the ‘vehicle’ of Lord Shiva, sits facing the temple. From here onwards,, the steps become less steep and on reaching the summit the climber has a magnificent view of Mysore city, its many temples, and its serene lake below.

Young Jagadish parked his bike and began climbing the steps. As he sat down to rest on a rock, he gazed at the temple and had a deep spiritual experience.

A life-changing moment

Here is how he describes in his own words, that awe-inspiring experience:

“Till that moment of my life I always felt that this is me and that’s somebody or something else out there. But for the first time I did not know which was me and which is not me.

Suddenly, what was me was just all over the place. The very rock on which I was sitting, the air that I breathed, the very atmosphere around me, was me. I had just exploded into everything. This, I thought, lasted for ten or fifteen minutes, but when I came back to my normal consciousness, it had been about four and a half hours that I had been sitting there, fully conscious, eyes open, but time had just flipped.”

Giving up the worldly life

Packing a haversack, he mounted his motorbike and traveled around India, determined to gain insights into his ‘mystical’ experience. This also prompted him to start teaching yoga. After a year of meditation and travel, he decided to give up his business and start teaching yoga so that he could share his inner experience with others who were also spiritually inclined.

In 1983, he conducted his first yoga class with seven participants in Mysore. Over time, he began conducting yoga classes across Karnataka and Hyderabad travelling from class to class on his motorbike. He used the money earned from renting his poultry farm and would usually refuse payment for the classes that he conducted. He would often give the donations he received from some participants to a local charity on the last day of the class. These initial programs were to form the basis on which the Isha Yoga classes would be later built.

In 1993, he decided to set up an ashram and obtained a site in the Velliangiri Mountains, 40 km from Coimbatore, on which the ashram was established.

The Dhyanalinga

In 1994, Sadguru conducted the first program in the ashram premises, during which he discussed the Dhyanalinga. The Dhyanalinga is a yogic temple and a space for meditation, the consecration of which Sadguru had stated was his life’s mission entrusted to him by his Guru. In 1996, the stone edifice of the linga was ordered. Three years later, the Dhyanalinga was completed on 23rd June 1999 and was opened to the public on 23rd November 1999.

The Dhyanalinga yogic temple offers a meditative space that does not ascribe to any particular faith or belief system. Its 76-foot dome, constructed using only bricks and stabilised mud mortar without steel or concrete, covers the sanctum. The lingam is 13 feet, 9 inches in height and made of high-density black granite. The Sarva Dharma Sthamba (pillar), located at the front entrance, functions as an icon of singularity, with the sculptural reliefs of Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Shinto inscribed as a universal welcome. Then, sometime later, he consecrated a LingaBhairavi representing the feminine Divine.

The Isha Foundation

In 1992, Sadguru set up the Isha Foundation, (in Sanskrit, *isha* means ‘the formless Divine’), a non-profit, spiritual organization at the Isha Yoga Center near Coimbatore, India, and also at the Isha Institute of Inner Sciences at McMinnville, Tennessee in the United States. The foundation offered yoga programs under the name Isha Yoga.

Isha Yoga’s introductory flagship program is ‘Inner Engineering’, which offers initiation into meditation, pranayama and the Shambhavi Mahamudra. Yoga classes are also conducted for corporate leaders to introduce them to what Sadguru calls ‘inclusive economics’, to introduce a sense of compassion and inclusiveness into today’s economic scenario. In 1998, Isha Foundation started yoga classes for prisoners who are serving a life sentence in Tamil Nadu’s prisons.

The Foundation organizes *Mahasatsangs* (large gatherings) on a regular basis with Sadguru in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka where he gives discourses, conducts meditations and answers the audience’s questions. It also organises annual yatras to Mount Kailash and the Himalayas under the banners Kailash Manasarovar Sojourn and Himalayan Dhyana Yatra. The Kailash Sojourn led by Sadguru is among the largest groups to make the trip to Kailash with over 500 pilgrims making the journey in 2010.

Project GreenHands (PGH)

This is a grassroots ecological initiative established by Sadguru in 2004 that seeks to restore ecological balance and maintain proper environmental health in Tamil Nadu. Toward this end, PGH aims to increase the green cover in Tamil Nadu by 10% and has successfully overseen the planting of more than 8.2 million trees by over 2 million volunteers. In 2006, PGH organized the planting of 8,52,587 saplings, earning a place for itself in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Action for Rural Rejuvenation (ARR)

This is a multi-phase program aimed at improving the quality of life of the rural poor. ARR was established by Sadguru in 2003 with the hope of extending benefits to 70 million people in 54,000 villages across South India. As of 2010, ARR had reached over 4,200 villages and a population of over 7 million people.

Isha Vidya

This is an education initiative that aims to raise the level of education and literacy in rural India by providing quality English-language-based, computer-aided education to rural children. Isha Vidya provides full scholarships for its students based on their economic situation. There are seven schools in operation which educate around 3,000 student.

Contact information

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Website: www.ishafoundation.org

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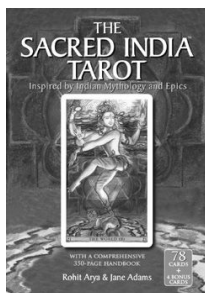
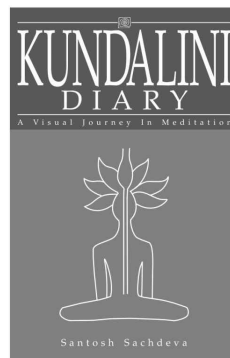
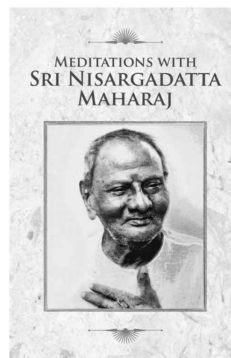
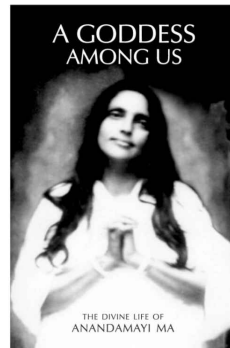
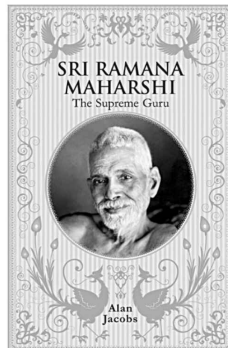
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