

The Mountain Path

JAYANTHI ISSUE
1992

*In this issue we have taken the unusual step of having a specific religion — **Christianity** — as our main theme. This is based on the belief that all religions offer viable routes to the same Goal. We have not attempted to cover the subject comprehensively. Instead, we have asked our contributors to elaborate on themes which they feel will be of interest to readers of The Mountain Path. It is thus hoped that the material in this issue will enhance our knowledge of some aspects of Christian spirituality and generate within us a genuine respect for one of the world's great religious traditions.*

-- Editor

THE MOUNTAIN PATH

"Arunachala! Thou dost root out the ego of those who meditate on Thee in the heart, Oh Arunachala!"

— *The Marital Garland of Letters*, verse 1

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— Editor.

The Mountain Path

The aim of this journal is to set forth the traditional wisdom of all religions and all ages, especially as testified to by their saints and mystics, and to clarify the paths available to seekers in the conditions of our modern world.

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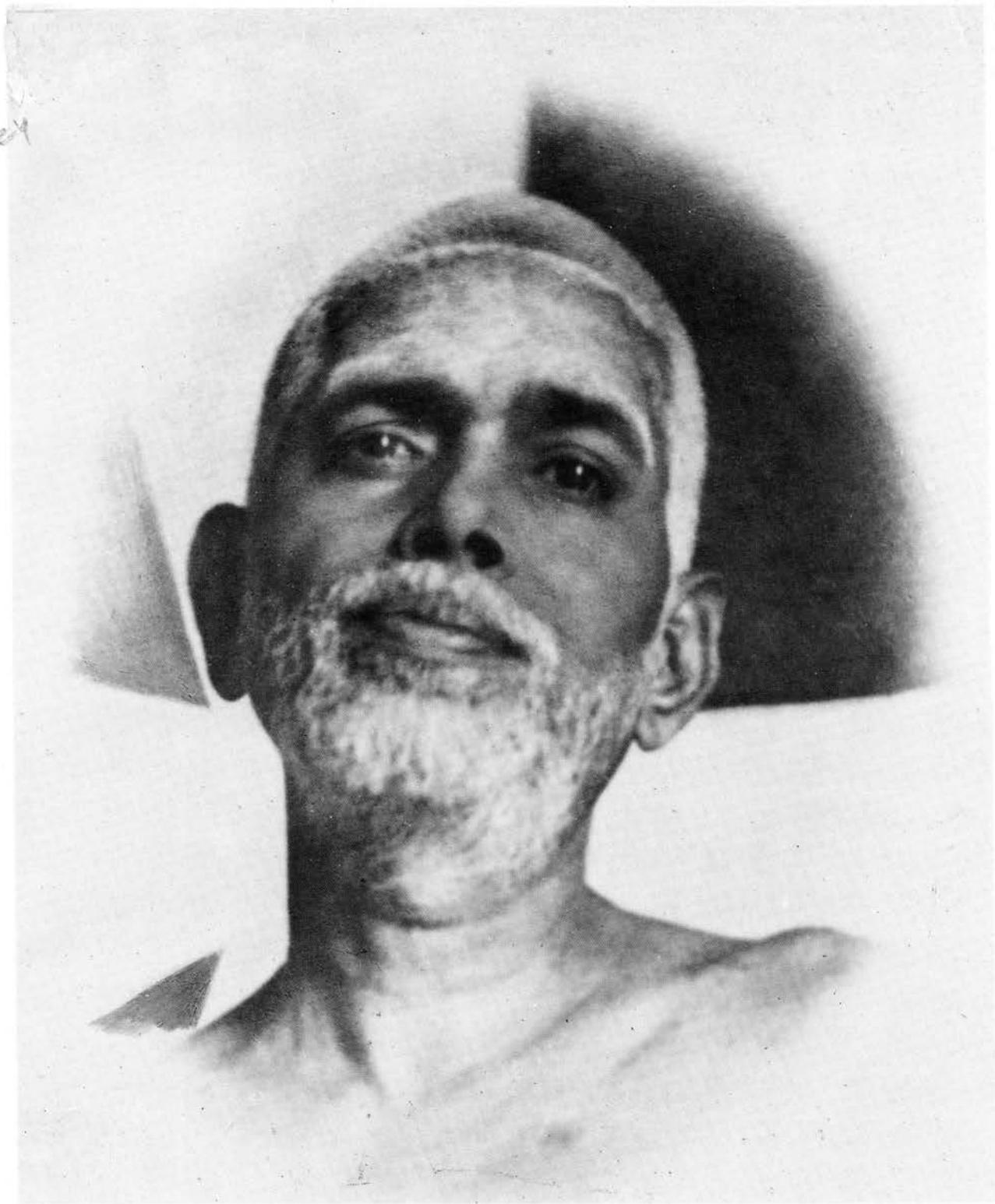
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THE MOUNTAIN PATH

is dedicated to

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi



EDITORIAL

JESUS AND RAMANA

IT IS said that during his last years, old and infirm, John the Apostle and Evangelist, was carried around by followers, and all that the beloved disciple of Jesus said was, "Agapao, agapao!" The Greek word means "love".

By that one word, St. John told men all that they needed to know about Jesus, the man and his message. Surely, that is the quintessence of the Christian teaching.

Jesus is the eternal symbol of total, unconditional and sacrificial love. He laid down his life "for the sake of his friends", and foes. Indeed, "greater love hath no man than this".

Those who had the supreme bliss and blessing of being with Ramana Maharshi, saw that total love and goodness in silent action during the fifty-four years of his ministry on earth. That love is the river of grace, the river of life eternal, having its source and confluence in the cave of the spiritual heart (*hridaya kuhara*), the Self, the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not a river which is frozen in time and space; then in Israel, now in Arunachalam. It is an endless, boundless flow. "I shall be with you for ever and ever."

"Where could I go? I am here." Here, of course, is everywhere.

True love liberates. It is impersonal. It does not seek an object, because there is no subject as the lover. Both the lover and the beloved are

dissolved in Love. The love of Jesus and Ramana is totally impersonal, transcending all division and duality. They were not just individuals, playing their personal roles for a time in the drama of history.

Karl Barth, the great theologian, wrote that if there were no Crucifixion and Resurrection as historical events, then Christianity may as well shut up shop. For us, neither the historicity of Jesus, nor the fact or fiction of his crucifixion on a Roman cross, not even the supreme yogic feat of rising up from the sepulchre on the third day, is the *sine qua non*. For, even when Ramana was in the flesh and blood, one realised that he was not the body, but the Self, the Atman, pure awareness.

One senses his all-pervasive, timeless presence even now, absorbing humankind's suffering and dispelling its darkness. Jesus, likewise, is true awareness, the Self, the *veritas, lumen et vita* (truth, light and life), which is beyond all time.

Through a sage's *jnana*, all *ajnana*, *avidya* comes to an end. In a saviour's redemption, all are redeemed. In Ramana's presence, there was neither *jnani* nor *ajnani*, sinner nor saint; there was only *jnana*.

Dying on a wooden cross is a moment in time. But in their death to their personal 'I' and their resurrection as the impersonal 'I-I' — the

Self, the Kingdom of God — Jesus, Ramana, Buddha and other known and unknown masters revealed to man the glory of Reality, *Sat, veritas*, which knows neither time nor space.

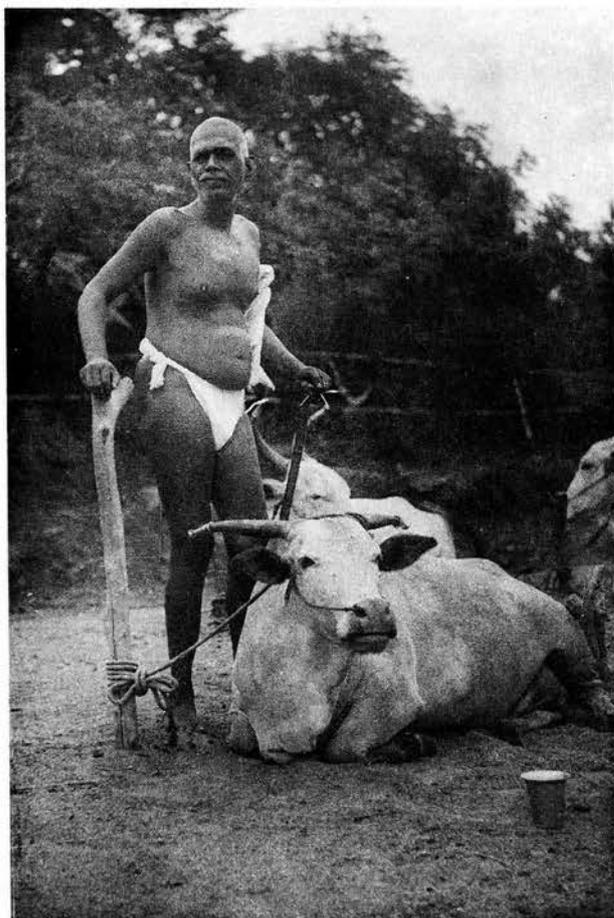
Bhagavan told a questioner that the Bible and the *Bhagavad Gita* were not different and that both should be read "always". He told inquiring Christians as well as Muslims, Parsis and Jews that they did not have to forsake their religion to practise *Atma-vichara*, the path of Self-enquiry revitalised by him.

Among the five biblical statements to which Maharshi attached the greatest importance, three are from the *New Testament*:

"The Kingdom of God is within you."

"Before Abraham was, I am."

The Divine Cowherd



"I and my Father are one."

Maharshi explained the Crucifixion thus: "The body is the cross. Jesus, the son of man is the ego or 'I-am-the-body' idea. When the son of man is crucified on the cross, the ego perishes, and what survives is the Absolute Being. It is the resurrection of the glorious Self of the Christ, the Son of God."

This is about all that we have from Ramana, verbally, on Jesus and Christianity. However, when one makes a study of the Gospels, one is amazed to see how effortlessly and wordlessly Bhagavan gave us intimations of the Truth that Jesus taught.

Ramana was a mountain of silence through whom the love of Jesus and the goodness of the Beatitudes taught in 'The Sermon on the Mount' flowed to us more powerfully than through the most eloquent words.

Jesus's teaching, like Ramana's, is perfect *Atma-vidya*, the science of the Self. The difference lies more in their styles of teaching than in the content of their message.

Jesus was inimitably intense and dramatic. Bhagavan was uniquely still and silent. In the ministry of Jesus, there was fury, passion, urging, upbraiding, cajolment, comfort, warning, fiery oratory, cut and thrust repartee, awe-inspiring deeds, retreat and advance, patience and impatience, agony and peace. Bhagavan was a rock of stillness, a majestic mountain of peace throughout. His words were soft and few. The miracles of Jesus were spectacular; those of Bhagavan could easily miss the eye.

In Jesus's "I, thou and he" and "Father, Son and Holy Spirit", the oneness of the Atman is not spelt out though it is implicit. Non-duality is a solid monolith in Bhagavan, the non-dual *noumenon*, the perfect advaitic essence.

Ramana sat on rocks, in caves, and then on the famous couch in the Old Hall. Wherever he sat, it was the "last seat" which Jesus counselled his followers to take and which only he, Ramana and their like — the humblest and the

meekest, though the highest of the high — are able to take. Jesus spoke out that one cannot serve both God and Mammon (worldliness), nor the rich — those who cling to possessions, position, ego — enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Ramana himself died young to all that he possessed and all that he had been. He “lost his life and found the Life”. Those “who had eyes to see” saw and perceived.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Jesus’s words have authority and assurance, because he spoke out of his experience. He, the immaculate one, was from the Kingdom. Seeing Ramana, one learnt that the pure in heart — totally free from *chitta-vritti*, the mind-movements, which stem from the ego, the ‘I’-thought — are the Atman, and that state is “seeing God”. To be the Self, he said, is Self-knowledge, and that is *Isa-darsanam*, the vision of God.

“Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” Ramana, hailed by the great *muni*, Vasishtha Ganapati, as an incarnation of Skanda, the son of Siva and Divine Commander, was, like Sri Rama, the most obedient of men, obeying the wishes, prayers and commands of everyone. “I do *namaskarams* to everyone even as they enter the hall.” He asked us to be *anoraneeyam*, smaller than the smallest.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” Ramana’s boundless mercy was so moving that poet Muruganar could not hold back copious tears at the mere mention of Ramana, the embodiment of compassion.

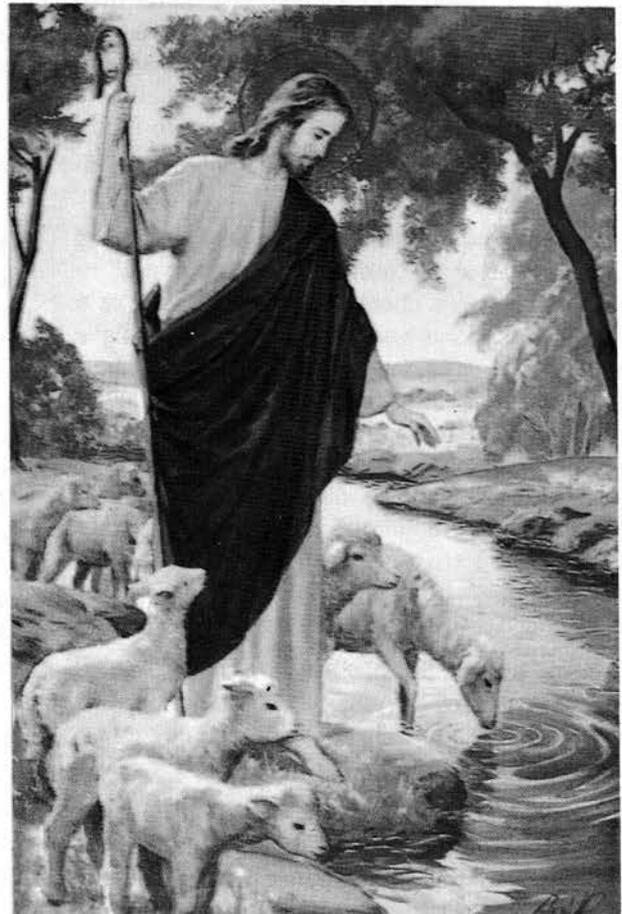
“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.” In Ramana’s presence, peace instantly and spontaneously welled up in one’s heart. The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram seems to have said: “When people wanted peace, I sent them to Ramana Maharshi; now I send them to the Himalayas.” Gandhiji used to send his restless or over-worked colleagues to Ramana and they obtained peace much sooner than they had hoped. Bhagavan said, “Peace of mind is

mukti, Liberation.” He gave men the sword of *Atma-vichara*, which cut at the root of duality, the cause of fear (*dviteeyaat vai bhaya*), and brought peace. Countless were those who were freed from all doubt and fear by the very look and smile of Ramana. Jesus likewise said, “I come not to bring peace [i.e. complacency] but a sword,” and later added, “I give you peace; my peace I give unto you.” Jesus and Ramana are no ordinary peacemakers. They bring a “peace which passeth understanding”.

Like Jesus, Ramana brought comfort to suffering humanity by showing how suffering leads one to God. He counselled, “Patience, patience, patience.”

Jesus said, “For what is a man profited if he

The Good Shepherd



shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Ramana said, "Is it not ignorance to know all else without knowing the Self which is the source of all knowledge?"

"Bless them that curse you." This great truth has been taught by other masters in other lands, but here again Jesus gave it his own incandescence and intensity. And to pick out just a few of the innumerable instances from Ramana's life: the thieves who belaboured him with sticks during their midnight robbery; the "sadhu" who tried to roll down a boulder upon his head; and the long-standing devotee who turned against him, dragging the purest of the pure into litigation — all were as dear to him as the dearest disciples.

"Judge not, lest ye be judged," said Jesus, who also taught the most profound wisdom of "seeing the beam in one's own eye rather than the mote in the eye of another". It was well known how impossible it was to have Bhagavan Ramana find fault with anybody in any circumstance, and how he saw *nil nisit bonum* (nothing but good) even in universally disliked people, living or dead.

As for the famous and equally neglected Christian virtue of "turning the other cheek" to those who slap a cheek, what can one say of a being who let ants and insects eat into his thighs as he sat in samadhi; who let a swarm of hornets sting away at his leg because he had unwittingly trodden upon their nest; who would remain still as snakes and scorpions crawled over his body, lest they be disturbed if he moved; who would not enter the dining hall if anyone was refused entry for a meal? or one who would call a tiger "a gentle animal" and would not allow the deadliest snake to be killed?

Jesus repeatedly told his followers: "Rejoice ye", "Be exceeding glad", "Be of good comfort", "Be of good cheer". Bhagavan Ramana showed us that *ananda*, happiness, is one's own true nature because the Self, one's own being, is the kingdom of happiness.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment was: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all

thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Jesus preached what he practised. His heart was all the time with his Father, *Abba*, working "for the greater glory of God", his Father. Of Ramana, Balarama Reddiar, the old Ashramite, says, "Bhagavan was always in Brahman." Brahman, Self, Arunachala, Ramana — the unity was total.

Jesus exhorted his disciples to be perfect "even as your Father in heaven is perfect". Jesus was perfect. Humankind has marvelled at his integrity, incorruptibility and total goodness for two thousand years. Too perfect to be true for the sceptics. But not for us, because we have seen this divine perfection in Bhagavan Ramana, the totally ego-free being. As he saw everyone as the Self, he saw no imperfection anywhere. "Ye are the light of the world."

Ramana said, "Do not think that various masters taught various truths. They all taught the same Truth." And it is a well-known fact that Christians, Hindus, Parsis, Buddhists, Jews all saw new meaning and depth in their own religions.

If the Christian Church, despite the vicissitudes of its history, its numerous schisms and disputes, its deviations from a strict adherence to the Master's teachings, its taking his words literally or not as was expedient, its failure in the past to see the greatness of other religions, its overzealous proselytising, and its collaboration with imperialism, has nevertheless been a tremendous civilising influence during the past two millennia, it is because it has functioned as an earnest ecclesiastical receptacle of an extraordinary teaching and has produced men and women of amazing faith, dedication, self-denial and compassion, the latest but certainly not the least of whom is Mother Teresa.

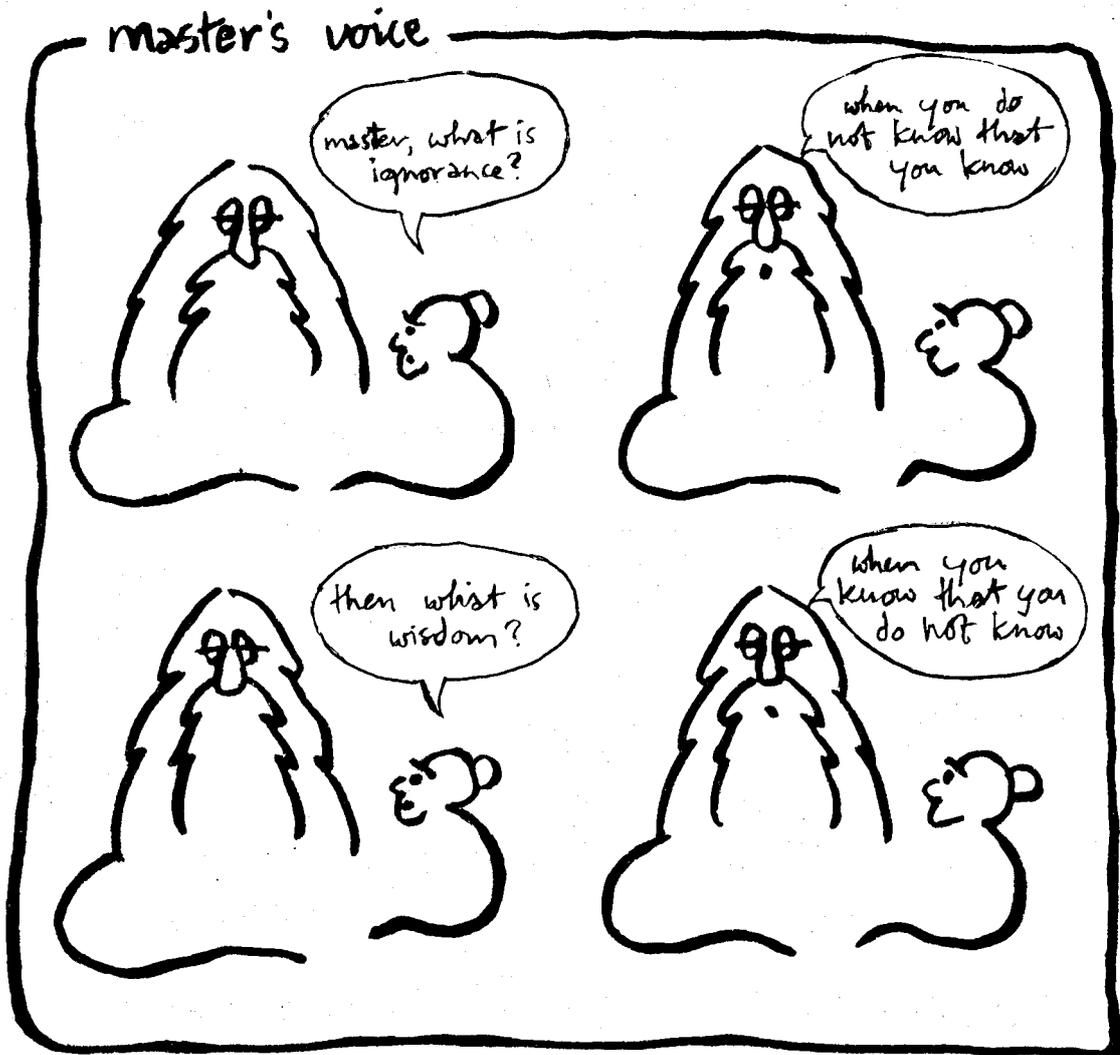
While Christian poverty, in the literal sense, has inevitably eluded the Church, it has nevertheless shared its material abundance with the needy all over the world and, taking the Master's command earnestly, it has done remarkable service in education and in healing the sick, especially in caring for the leprous.

Today, Christianity is renewing itself through its dialogue with other faiths and is thus deepening its vision of Jesus, who, like Bhagavan Ramana, is too cosmic to be confined to the mission compound or an ashram. The lives and works of savants like Fathers Thomas Merton, Henri le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda), Bede Griffiths, Anthony Elenjimmittam, William Johnston, Raimundo Panikkar, Anthony de Mello and Sister Sara Grant and others, are proof that to love one's religion is to love others' as well, and *vice versa*. This is in the truest ecumenical spirit.

Louis Fischer said in his biography of Gandhiji: "Gandhi was a Christian and a Hindu and a Muslim and a Jew. Who else is?"

To meet Jesus and Bhagavan Ramana, one does not have to go back in time or far in space, or join any organisation. One meets them surely in one's own being, the Kingdom of Heaven, where there are not two or many but the One, the Self. They came to remind us of this truth. In the Self alone, they taught us, is *agape*, love, *shanti*, peace, *mukti*, *nirvana*.

"The Kingdom of God is within you."



“I and My Father are One”

By Arthur Osborne

BUT who is this ‘I’? Not the ‘I’ who is anxious what the morning post will bring, who likes one person and resents another, who plans for the future and broods over the past. I am not raising the question whether it is bad or wrong to do these things but only stating that the person who does them is not One with the Father. Everyone admits this; that is why, putting it crudely, they say that they are not One with the Father, but only Christ was. But that is putting it very crudely, treating it as a mere accident of birth, just as one person might be born the son of the king and others not, and there is nothing you can do about it. If that were so, would Christ have urged us to do something about it, to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect?

If the ‘I’ who is One with the Father is not John Robinson, it is also not the individual Jesus of Nazareth, the man who trod the streets and gave sharp rejoinders to his critics. How could it be when the Father is eternal and immutable, while John or Jesus is situated in history and subject to change and growth? How can the two be the same?

Then what is this ‘I’? If you stop thinking but retain consciousness, you become aware of a sense of being that is more essentially ‘you’ than your thinking mind or your body is. It is hard to describe but it can be experienced. It can be accompanied by full physical awareness, [perceiving] the physical circumstances of life, its obligations as professional man, husband and father, its powers and liabilities, but all impersonally. The whole environment seems a reflection of itself, and at the same time seems to be contained in it. It sees the world as something ephemeral in it, not itself as something ephemeral in the world. It has a sense of changelessness, of reality, of eternity or timelessness, untouched by the world of forms.

And what is the Father that it is One with? One can feel rather than understand that there is pure Being manifested in the entire cosmos but unaffected by it, manifested equally and

simultaneously in each individual creature and in the whole universe. As good a definition as any is by a Christian woman to whom an experience of Realisation came spontaneously: “It was all that is, and there was no God, and equally no Not-God.”¹

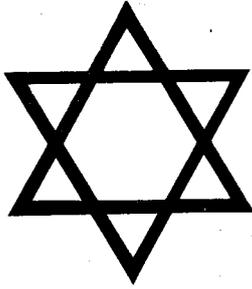
Then how does this differ from the being that one feels in oneself? The whole point of Christ’s saying is that they do not differ but are the same. It is not John or Jesus or Horatio Gubbins, but the One that manifests equally and simultaneously as all of them.

It is sometimes queried how this pure being that is One with the Father can function as John Robinson or Horatio Gubbins. It obviously can because there have been examples of it. There was one in modern times in the person of Ramana Maharshi. And such rare exemplars have always been felt to be more human than the rest of us, not incompletely human. Visitors to the Maharshi did not feel that he was unnatural but that they were. They felt that he alone was fully and naturally human because he alone was fully divine.

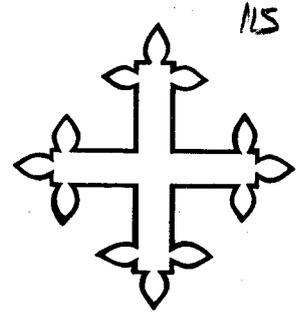
“Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.” (*Matthew 5:48*) There is no more fundamental injunction in the whole Bible than this, for it is the injunction to realise the Supreme Identity. For how can you be perfect without being One with the Father? Christ himself said that “only God is good”. (*Mark 10:18*) Furthermore, he reminded his critics of the saying in the scriptures: “I said: ‘You are gods’”. If, then, a man is the son of God and can be called a God and, as Christ also said, contains the kingdom of heaven within him, what is this but the Supreme Identity?

Being is One; therefore you cannot be other because there is no other; therefore if you realise your true Self you realise your identity with the One, the Father, and are perfect, as He is perfect.

¹ *The Following Feet*, by Ancilla, pg. 21, Longmans.



The Star of David (left) and the Cross (right), the two most common symbols of Judaism and Christianity.



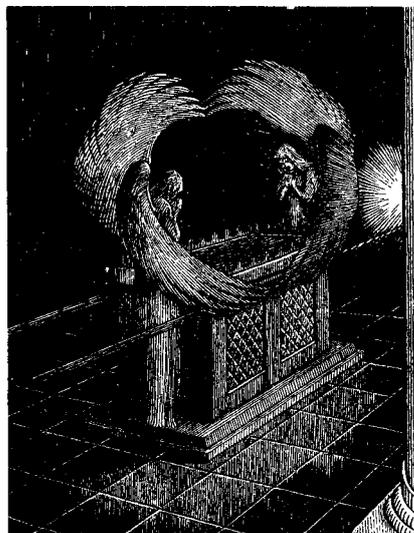
Judaism, Jesus and Christianity

By Nadhia Sutara

TWO thousand years ago in a strife-torn part of the Middle East known as *Erets Israel*, the land of the Jews, a man was born named Jesus, whose personality and teachings were to totally transform the Western world. Within 300 years of his death a new religion called Christianity had spread as far northwest as Britain and as far southeast as India. Who was this man and what did he teach to capture the minds, hearts and lives of the whole Western world and not a little of the Eastern?

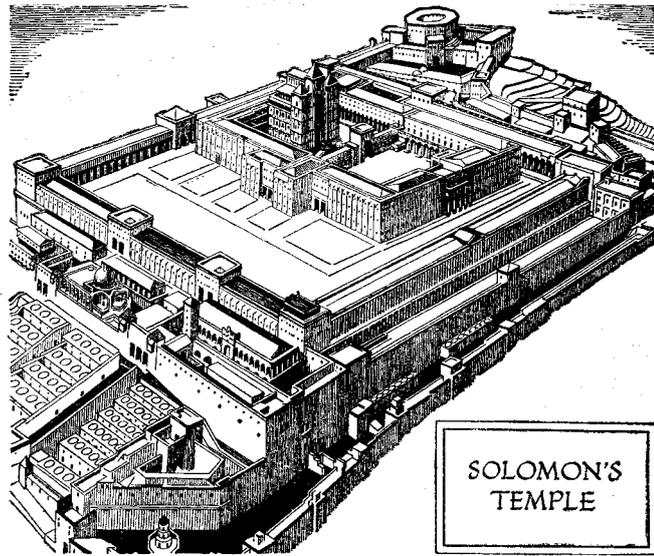
It is helpful to know something of the milieu into which Jesus was born to understand why his coming made such a tremendous impact, first on the Jewish community into which he was born, and, after his death, on the non-Jewish world, spreading like wildfire. The Jewish chronicles stretch back more than 5,000 years, tracing the history of mankind from creation up to around 2,000 years ago. More or less recorded time begins 3,000 years ago with the founder of the Jewish religion, Abraham, who, it is written, entered into a special Covenant with God. The particular innovation established for the first time in

these lands was monotheism. From out of the hodgepodge of deities to be propitiated, often with human sacrifices, Abraham, as instructed by God, was to worship only the highest, *formless* God — the most fundamental and essential point of Jewish theology — both transcendent and immanent. Things were never smooth for the followers of the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (later called Israel), the three great Patriarchs of Judaism in patrilinear succession. Besides this one-pointed move towards monotheism, the mystical connotations of an individual's name, given by God to embody his special characteristic,¹ the third most distinctive feature of Judaism was the Blessing, given by a father usually to his eldest son, and carrying with it more than paternal good wishes and inheritance. It was more like a passing on of the *parampara*, carrying with it a mystical link with God and His special Covenant with His "Chosen People", the descendants of Abraham.



The holy Ark of the Covenant, which contained the written covenant between God and the Jews.

¹ See "I AM — The First Name of God", Part I in the last issue of *The Mountain Path* — Editor.



Artist's reconstruction of Solomon's Temple

From the very beginning the Jews have known nothing but trouble in their attempt to adhere to their faith. Originally nomadic, the first great catastrophe was a long period of slavery in Egypt, from which they were delivered by Moses who, acting upon God's instructions, led his people out of Egypt, brought down to them the Ten Commandments for the worship and conduct of life which he had received from God on Mt. Sinai as the first codification of the Jewish religion, and finally led his people to the Promised Land, Canaan (more or less present day Israel), where they were to settle, prosper and pursue their religion. Of all the Ten Commandments, the first is the most significant:

I am the Lord thy God ... Thou shalt have no other god before me....

Even after settling in the Promised Land, the Jews knew few periods of peace. Rather the opposite. Border disputes were ultimately resolved in the 11th century B.C. when King David unified the country and established Jerusalem as his capital. His son Solomon, who received the Blessing from David and ruled after his death, was known for his great wisdom and piety. It was King Solomon who built the first Temple at Jerusalem, the only temple in the land where pious Jews could come to perform special sacrifices, rituals and purifications, and established an hereditary priesthood to officiate

there. David founded the city, but it was King Solomon who made it great.²

Unfortunately, things went downhill after Solomon's death as his kingdom was divided up by his sons, so that by the 6th century B.C. the Babylonians were able to conquer the land, destroy the Temple and force the exile into Babylon of the cream of the Jews. While the Israelites were later able to return to their homeland and rebuild their Temple, the next five centuries saw only brief periods of peace and prosperity alternating with a seemingly endless series of foreign invasions and oppression. Yet the Jews looked upon the former not as mere hard luck, but rather as periods of penance and purification brought about by the will of God. For each period of peace saw lapses from the Divine Covenant, and each period of oppression saw the Jewish people penitent and seeking afresh to turn their lives back to God. In all cases it was the prophets, the sages and "spokesmen of God", who showed the way. The Roman conquest in 63 B.C., however, saw the Jewish community rent in two. The Romans tended to be liberal rulers, and those who cooperated with them always prospered. The best and most sin-

² It has been noted by biblical philologists that the Hebrew words for "ivory" and "peacocks", two of King Solomon's treasures, are direct transliterations from the Tamil, indicating that Solomon must have been trading with the Tamil people.

cere in the Jewish community were revolted at this lapse from the pristine simplicity of the Divine Covenant and turned in a movement back to the God of their fathers in a renewed effort to abide by the laws of His Covenant with His Chosen People. Many sects arose within the



A Jewish High Priest, according to ancient biblical descriptions

Jewish community as a result of such an atmosphere: the Sadducees, the hereditary priests of the Temple; the Pharisees, the teachers, or rabbis, of the community, who formed the centre of each congregation (*'edah*) or synagogue; the *Hasidim*, the Pious Ones, who did not participate in the worldly activities around them, but adhered strictly to the Law, indifferent to rulers and their wars; the Essenes, a

pious esoteric and monastic movement of Jews who were preparing, through their austere lives and practices, for the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed or Chosen One of God, who would reveal a new Covenant and save his people; the Zealots, a party of "home-rule" advocates who considered it an act of disloyalty to God to acknowledge Caesar as king — a very volative, guerrilla element; and the Gnostics (from the Greek word *gnosis*, from the Sanskrit *jnana*, meaning "Knowledge"), who sought divine revelation through first-hand experience. Each sect had many adherents, groups and sub-groups, but the latter four were united in one thing: a burning aspiration to *live*

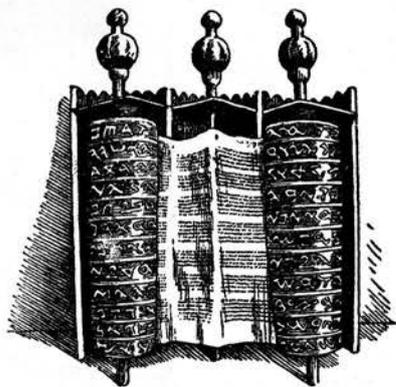
their religion (however variously they conceived it) in poverty, humility, faith, charity and brotherhood, spurning the ways of the world for the ways that lead to God. It was in this atmosphere of turbulence, dissolution, decadence and quest (not so very different from that in which we now live) that Jesus, the son of Miriam (Mary) and Joseph, was born.

The Old Testament, the Jewish portion of the Bible, is full of prophesies of a Messiah — *Christos* in Greek, and thus Christ in English — who would come to revive the faith and establish a new Covenant between God and His people. The New Testament (or Christian portion of the Bible, not accepted by the Jews) deals exclusively with this man Jesus, recognised as the long-awaited Messiah, the Christ, deliverer of his people and founder of the New Covenant, and with the activities and writings of his Apostles.

The New Testament records Jesus' birth as attended by signs and miracles, one of which being the Star of Bethlehem that guided the Three Wise Men from the East to the isolated cave in Bethlehem where the divine child had been born. What more symbolic place could there be for a divine saviour to be born than a cave? Sri Bhagavan himself uses this imagery in verse 8 of the *Supplement to the Forty Verses*, where he writes: "In the interior of the heart-cave the one Brahman shines alone as 'I', as

the Self." Who were these Wise Men from the East? Might they have been sages come to revere the divine child and advise the parents? Could they have played a role in preparing Jesus for his ministry in the 18 years between the age of 12 and 30 during which we know nothing of his life?

From the Bible we learn that Jesus was, like Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a prodigy, resolving theological disputes even in his early childhood. But, as mentioned



The Torah: the portion of the Old Testament, hand-written on parchment as a scroll, and encased in an ornate container, revered and used in Synagogues to this day



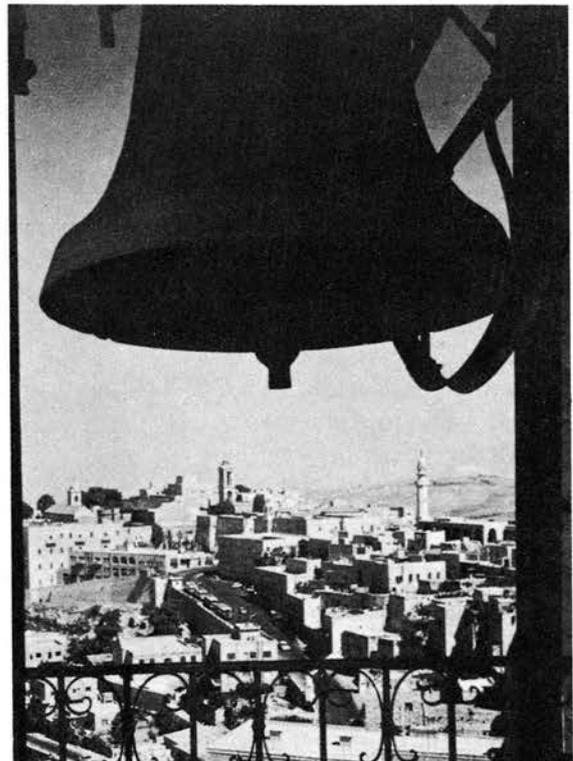
The Jaffa Gate entrance to Jerusalem's Old City, with David's Tower.

above, we know nothing of him from about the time of his *Bar Mitzvah*, or initiation as an adult member of the Jewish community (not dissimilar to the investment with the sacred thread by Hindus) until his reappearance some 18 years later at the River Jordan to receive baptism — ritual purification through immersion in water — from John the Baptist. That John hailed originally from an Essene or some such fringe group is fairly certain, although it is equally certain that he struck out on his own, seeing as his particular mission the preparation of the Israelites for the immanent coming of the Messiah. John was extremely popular and had a vast following. He preached repentance and renewal — a sort of born-again Judaism — sanctified through the ritual of baptism. Such ritual religious immersions were a common practice among Jews of all sects and denominations, and every Jewish household or community had a *mikvah*, a ritual bath, used, for instance, to purify women after their monthly periods and also after the birth of a baby. But it was more than that: when undergone in a sincere spirit of repentance an individual of either sex could feel purified from past sins in preparation for a better life thereafter. John went yet further and proclaimed his baptism as preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of God to be brought in by His Messiah. Clearly, with John at least, and Jesus thereafter, they were a form of initiation ceremony. Said

John, "I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (*Matthew 3:11*)

When Jesus arrives at the Jordan, John tries to dissuade him, saying, "I have need to be baptised by thee, and thou comest to me?" (*Matthew 3:14*) But Jesus replies, "Let it be so now: for thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness." (*Matthew 3:15*) And John performs the baptism. Like Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Jesus accepts a guru for initiation into a new *sadhana* in accordance with the Law and tradition. As soon as the baptism is completed, a voice speaks from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, on whom my favour rests."³ (*Matthew 3:17*) God Himself has given the Blessing to His Son, thus establishing the Son's authority and all-important place in the *parampara*.

Immediately after the ceremony Jesus departs



The bells of Bethlehem proclaim the coming of Christmas every year to the whole world

³ Alternatively, "This is my only Son, in whom I am well pleased."

for the wilderness to perform *tapas* for 40 days. Here, it is said that, like Buddha, he was tempted by the Devil with all manner of worldly accomplishments, pleasures, kingdoms, and powers, if only he will worship him. But Jesus refuses, saying, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord [Yahweh] thy God, and only Him shalt thou serve." (*Matthew* 4:10) Renouncing all sense of egoity or ownership, Jesus takes refuge in the first of the Ten Commandments. He has recourse to do so on many occasions, and this will be covered later in this article. In all instances, the Hebrew word for "Lord" is one or another euphemism for "I AM", the Name of God that was revealed to Moses as the highest, most sublime name, so sacred and holy to the Jews that it was never spoken aloud. Nevertheless, Jesus refers to it again and again as his one and only Law, his one and only God, and the foundation of the *sadhana* of love and brotherhood that he taught.

It is only after this 40-day retreat that his ministry, which was to last not more than about three years, begins.

The next personal milestone in his career is the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor at which God again asserts His bestowal of the Blessing, this time before three of Jesus' disciples. "And behold a voice out of the cloud [spoke, saying], 'This is my beloved Son, on whom my favour rests; listen to him.'" (*Matthew* 17:5)

There are numerous instances where Jesus, having received the Blessing from God, lays down the essence of the New Covenant and establishes his authority to do so, teaching its laws as he goes. In one instance a woman is brought before him who has been caught in the act of adultery. The usual penalty for such a crime was death by stoning, but Jesus will have nothing to do with it. When pressed, he finally looks up at the crowd and says, "He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone." (*John* 8:7) The crowd disperses shamefacedly, each stricken by his own conscience. Jesus then looks up at the woman and asks her where her accusers are. "Hath no man condemned thee?" She answers, "No man, Lord."

And Jesus says to her, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." (*John* 8:10-11)

Immediately after this, in the very next verse, he says, "I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (*John* 8:12) His opponents counter this by denying his assertion and asking how he can bear witness of himself, to which he replies:

Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true; for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but you cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. You judge after the flesh; I judge no man.

....You are of this world; I am not of this world.... If you continue in my word.... you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (*John* 8:14-32)

Jesus' ministry is punctuated by signs and miracles to illustrate his teachings. When asked by a nobleman for his son to be healed, Jesus replies almost, one might conjecture, with a sigh, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." (*John* 4:48) But he certainly need not be remembered for his healings, exorcisms, walking on the water and raisings from the dead. Of far greater value for posterity are his teachings, such as the famous Sermon on the Mount, where he teaches the foundations of the New Covenant and the qualities to be most highly revered:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.⁴

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

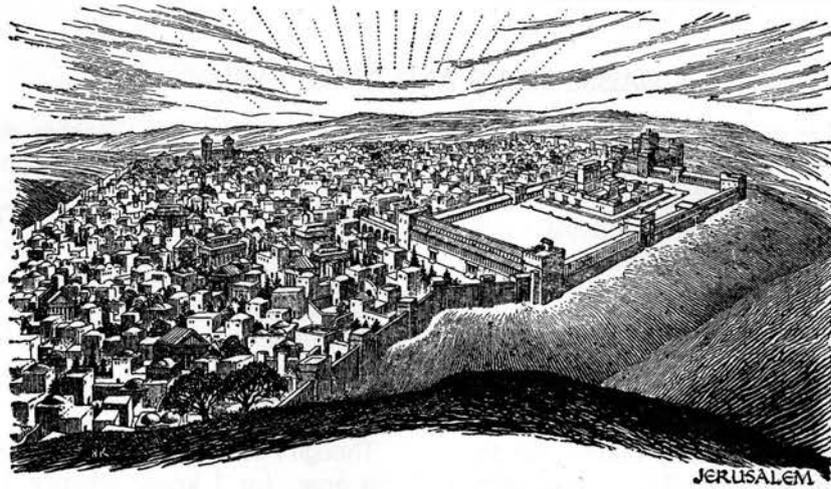
Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

⁴ Meister Eckhart, the famous German mystic, defined "spiritual poverty" as *being nothing, not having nothing*.

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Jerusalem, with Solomon's Temple towering over it

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.⁵

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God....

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.... You have heard that it was said by them of old, "Thou shalt not kill"... But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement.... Therefore if thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hast ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.... You have heard it said, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," but I say unto you that you resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him two.... You have heard it said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy." But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who spitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise

on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love them who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans⁶ do the same? And if you greet only your brethren, what is there extraordinary in that? Even the heathens do as much. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:3-48)

Jesus goes on to caution his listeners not to make a show of their charitable acts, saying "When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have the admiration of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee.... And when you pray, do not go babbling on like [those] who imagine that the more they say, the more likely they are to be heard.... For your Father knows what your needs are before you ask Him. After this manner, therefore, pray ye:

Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed by Thy name.

⁵ This is extremely significant since the Jews believed that no one could see the face of God and live.

⁶ Jewish tax-collectors for the Romans, much hated by their fellow Jews as traitors.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.⁷

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.

Amen.⁸

(Matthew 6:1-13)

There follows one of the most beautiful passages in the Sermon which, like much else cited above, has a certain Hindu ring:

I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are you not much better than they?

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his height?⁹

And why take you thought for clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Therefore, if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Therefore, take no thought, saying "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" ... for your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. (Matthew 6:25-34)

Summing up, he says, "Whosoever heareth

"The question of whether or not there is a God or truth or reality, or whatever you like to call it, can never be answered by books, by priests, philosophers or saviours. Nobody and nothing can answer the question but you yourself and that is why you must know yourself. Immaturity lies only in total ignorance of self. To understand yourself is the beginning of wisdom."

— J. Krishnamurti

these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:24-29)

But perhaps Jesus' most succinct summary of his teaching occurs in *Mark* 12:28-30. Asked by one of his fellow Jews, "Which is the first [i.e., most important] commandment of all?" Jesus answers:

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

And then he immediately adds, "And thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these."

In the first quote, "Hear, O Israel...", Jesus is

⁷ Alternatively, "supersubstantial (i.e., spiritual) bread."

⁸ The solemnising Judaeo-Christian word "amen" is derived from the Sanskrit word "AUM".

⁹ An alternative reading is "... add one day to his life?"

citing the first of the Ten Commandments handed down by God to Moses. This is the rock and foundation of the Jewish faith. In fact, though the original text is in Greek, there is no doubt that, as a rabbi, Jesus was quoting directly from the Hebrew Old Testament verses in *Deuteronomy* 6:4-5. This is the most sacred prayer of the Jewish people through to the present day, the profession of faith which every practising Jew is enjoined to recite morning and evening every day of his life:

*Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Elohenu,
Adonai Echod.*

But in his addition of "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", Jesus has once again carried the Old Covenant forward into the New: no more "thine and mine". Not only is God one, but so, too, is all mankind.

However Jesus was rocking — albeit knowingly — a very volatile boat. He was extraordinarily popular with the masses. While on the one hand the Romans were fearful of another Jewish revolt, on the other hand the Jewish establishment was fearful for its perpetuation. They were increasingly alarmed by this rebel preacher who did not fulfil their idea of what a Messiah ought to be. On the contrary, the man threatened their very position, authority and lucrative business dealings. In the end, hoping to put an end to the trouble, the prevailing authorities had him crucified, a Roman death sentence so horrible and abhorrent that not one original painting depicting it has come down to us although many thousands of victims before and after Christ were put to death in this way. The Romans usually reserved it for slaves, the worst criminals, and foreign rebels against the state. It took, on the average, three to six days to die, generally of exposure, exhaustion and ultimate asphyxiation. Jesus was neither a slave nor a criminal so the authorities contrived to convict him of being a rebel against the state, twisting his frequent reference to his "kingdom" as a sign that he intended to overthrow the Roman rule. The superscription over his cross indicating his crime was written in Greek, Latin and Hebrew and read, "This is Jesus, the King of the

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THOMAS

Jesus said:

If those who guide your being say to you: "Behold, the Kingdom is in heaven", then the birds of the sky will precede you; if they say to you: "It is in the sea", then the fish will precede you. But the Kingdom is within you and it is about you. If you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will know that you are the sons of the Living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you are in poverty and you are poverty. (log.3)

* * *

The disciples said to Jesus:

Tell us in what way our end will be.

Jesus said:

Have you then discerned the beginning in order that you seek after the end? For in the place where the beginning is, there will be the end. Blessed is he who shall stand at the beginning, and he shall know the end, and he shall not taste death. (log. 18)

* * *

Jesus said:

I am the Light that is above all, I am the All. The All comes forth from Me, and the All reaches towards Me. Cleave the wood, I am there; lift up the stone, and you shall find Me there. (log. 77)

* * *

Jesus said:

He who seeks shall find, and to him who knocks within, it shall be opened. (log. 94)



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The Old City of Jerusalem. The Muslim Dome of the Rocks stand where Solomon's Great Temple once stood

Jews." In all of the canonical gospels Jesus is depicted as knowing his end from the very beginning and accepting it calmly and in the order of things.

While Jesus is already aware that his arrest and execution are at hand, this does not deter him from entering Jerusalem to celebrate his last meal with his disciples. This is known as the Last Supper, and the episode is significant in many respects: during the course of it he consolidates his teaching, the New Covenant, and makes an eternal bridge between this New Covenant, and the old one established by Abraham and Moses.

The story goes that Jesus comes to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Passover with his disciples. This is one of the most important holidays in the Jewish calendar as it commemorates the exodus of the Jews from their period of slavery in Egypt and the receiving, in the wilderness, of the Ten Commandments. This exodus, it will be remembered, was led by Moses, who was to be the instrument for announcing to his people the Name of God, "I am that I am", and handing down to them the laws that were to govern their lives, the Ten Commandments, thus firmly establishing and codifying the first Covenant with God. The Passover dinner, or *seder* as it is called in Hebrew, is a ritual meal in which the dynamic and mi-

raculous exodus is retold and re-enacted with scriptural readings, special symbolic foods, prayers and songs. It begins, like all Jewish meals, with two sacramental prayers, the blessing over the bread and the blessing over the wine, both beginning with the traditional words, "*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu...*" — "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God...". In being the chief male leader of his community, it was Jesus' role to recite these prayers, part of the Old Covenant, but in doing so he gives them, as usual, a new direction:

Jesus took the [ritual unleavened] bread, and blessed it and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat: this is my body."

And he took the cup and gave thanks [i.e., the ritual prayer of blessing the wine], and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins." (*Matthew 26:26-28*)

One significant detail of the holiday of Passover with which Jesus consciously identified himself was the Paschal Lamb. It is written in the Old Testament book of *Exodus* that on the night before the Jews were to flee Egypt, they were to paint their door frames with the blood of a sacrificial lamb to signify to the Angel of Death that these were homes of God's Chosen People, so

that the Angel would pass over them, claiming the first-born sons of only those homes which were not so signified — that is, the homes of their Egyptian enslavers. It was in the ensuing chaos that the Jews were enabled to make their escape. This incident of favour from God is celebrated at every Passover *seder* throughout Jewry. Jesus, in consciously identifying himself with the Paschal (Passover) Lamb, whose blood is shed for the salvation of many, draws the Old Covenant into the New one, with himself and all that he signifies as its lifeblood. Not at all missing this significance, the early Church Fathers, in particular St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great (4th century A.D.), when establishing the Divine Liturgy, or Mass, made this Sacrament the centre and climax of the entire worship. In partaking of the bread (Host) and the wine, the pious Christian enters into Holy Communion with the eternal Body and Blood of Christ, the centralmost mystery in Christian theology.

In yet another bridging of the Old and New Covenants, God's sacrificing of His "only-begotten Son" is strongly reminiscent of His establishing the first Covenant with Abraham. God, in order to test Abraham's faith in their Covenant, orders him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. In obedience, Abraham prepares to do so, trusting fully in God's providence, but is stopped in time by God, who, pleased with his depth of devotion and obedience, confirms Abraham as the Patriarch of a new religion and father of His Chosen People. Instead of sacrificing Isaac, Abraham sacrifices a sheep.

Thus, Christ became known as "The Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world." (*John 1:29*) Jesus, as the Son of God and receiver of the Blessing, becomes the willing sacrifice, the Paschal Lamb, for the salvation of mankind.

Immediately after the Passover meal, the Last Supper, Jesus is arrested, convicted and crucified. Following his death on the cross, his body is placed in an empty tomb hewn out of the rock, as was the custom among Jews of that

period. The entrance was then sealed with a large stone. Three days later, when some disciples come to mourn at the grave, they are astonished to find the stone moved away and the tomb empty. Not even the Roman sentries who had been posted to guard the tomb can account for it. Following this, Jesus is said to have made a number of appearances to his disciples, displayed his wounds — even to the satisfaction of "Doubting Thomas", who refused to believe that it was Jesus unless he put his finger into one of the wounds — eaten with them, and ultimately, after giving his final instructions, disappeared from sight 40 days after his resurrection. A few days later, according to Jesus' prediction, the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples, confirming them in Jesus' divinity and immanence among them, and endowing them with the *pakkva* to carry on their Master's work. But more, and through to the present day, it is a confirmation of God's presence within each one of us: "The Kingdom of God is within you." (*Luke 17:21*)

The events of the Crucifixion and Resurrection are fraught with intense meaning and deep symbolism for observers of all denominations of the Christian faith.¹⁰ What we wish to emphasise here is the thread linking all the diverse interpretations of the events: to a believer, Christ *was, is and ever will be*. Whether or not one takes the Crucifixion and Resurrection literally or symbolically, its impact on Jesus' followers and their converts and subsequent adherents is inescapable. It gave them not merely a faith worth living for, but such a burning faith as worth dying for. During the first three centuries following Christ's death, they were horribly persecuted: they were humiliated, tortured, mutilated, and savagely murdered. Yet they underwent all — stoning, dismemberment, crucifixion (St. Peter, when faced with his own crucifixion, refused to be crucified as his Master had, and ordered himself to be crucified upside down), the arena, where

¹⁰ Certain aspects of these events are dealt with in "Crucifixion and Resurrection", later in this issue — *Editor*.

they were fed to hungry lions before a stadium full of decadent, bloodthirsty Romans and their ladies, who watched on in amusement — they underwent all in the spirit of their Master, bravely, humbly, with forgiveness, not hatred, not fearing for the fate of their bodies, knowing themselves to be immortal; seeking the Path of their Saviour wherever it might lead, through whatever trials and tribulations, confident in His mercy, care, wisdom and knowledge of their *real* needs, not of the body but of the soul.

Immediately following Pentacost, or the descent of the Holy Spirit, the apostles set forth to evangelise the world. With the unsuccessful Jewish revolt of 66-70 A.D. and the resultant Roman sacking and destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, the Jews were scattered in a diaspora that lasted nearly 2,000 years. With the dispersion of the Jews, the Jewish followers of Jesus, led by his brother James and later his cousin Simeon, inevitably diminished until the Jewish element in Christianity became more and more overshadowed by the Graeco-Roman influences brought in by the non-Jewish converts. While

evangelising and martyrdom continued hand in hand for the first three centuries, the latter saw its end when, under Constantine the Great (288-337 A.D.), Christianity was made the state religion and, more specifically in 325, when he convened the first ever world congress of Christians at a council in Nicea. With this council and the formulation of the Nicene Creed, the fundamental articles of faith for all "true Christians", the shift slowly began that saw at once a flowering of Christian thought and culture and, ironically, the beginning of internal disputes that have led to the formation of the more than thirty Christian denominations extant today. But however the different denominations may disagree, the words of the Master cannot be denied:

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (*Mark 8:34-36*)

THE NOW

"Is there such a thing as One Minute Wisdom?"

"There certainly is," said the Master.

"But surely one minute is too brief?"

"It is fifty-nine seconds too long."

To his puzzled disciples the Master later said. "How much time does it take to catch sight of the moon?"

"Then why all these years of spiritual endeavour?"

"Opening one's eyes may take a lifetime. Seeing is done in a flash."

— in *One Minute Wisdom* by Anthony de Mello, S.J.*

* Quotations published with grateful thanks to the author and publisher. This book is available from: *Gujarat Sahitya Prakash*, P.B. 70, Anand 388 001, Gujarat, India.

I AM - the First Name of God

Part II

By David Godman

IN THE first part of this article I explained the ancient Jewish attitude to names, noting how many biblical names revealed something about the person or being who possessed the name. God's name, 'I am', revealed His essential nature; Abraham's his destiny; Jacob's his chief character trait, and so on. At the dawn of the Christian era the belief that names gave an insight into a person's character and destiny was still widely prevalent, so when an angel appeared to Joseph at the beginning of the New Testament, announcing that his wife would bear a son conceived by the Holy Spirit, the meaning of the name given by the angel assumed great significance:

... an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save the people from their sins.' (Matthew 1:20-21)

The name Jesus is a Greek translation of the Hebrew name Ieschouah, which is itself a contraction of Iehoschouah. The longer version is not euphonious to Jewish ears, so the shorter version is generally used. The etymology of the



*EHYEH ASER EHYEH. "I AM THAT I AM"
in the original Hebrew script*

longer name produces the meaning, 'Yahweh is salvation', or 'Yahweh helps'. The former meaning has always been more popular, and it is alluded to in the passage I have just cited: 'for he will save the people from their sins.'

Yahweh, it will be remembered, is 'He who is', the name used by the Jews to denote 'I am', the original divine name revealed by God to Moses in Exodus. Since Yahweh is merely a euphemism for 'I am', one can say that Jesus' name also means 'I am is salvation', or, more generally, 'The Name of God is salvation'. Both ideas were to be major themes in early Christian teachings.

The idea that the Name of God, by itself, could produce salvation, without even being chanted or remembered by the devotee, was a peculiarly Jewish one. Psalm 54:1, for example, begins with the plea, 'Save me, O God, by your name'. For the Jews of the biblical period the Name of God is God, not a mere designation or title. For them, the statements, 'The Name of God is salvation', 'God is salvation', and 'I am is salvation' are all saying the same thing.

When Jesus began his teaching career He consciously identified Himself with the Yahweh

of the Old Testament by calling Himself, on several occasions, 'I am', a name and a title that all Jews knew only God could use.

In one of the most famous New Testament stories Jesus walked on the surface of the Sea of Galilee in order to meet some of His disciples who were fishing there from a boat. Seeing that the disciples were alarmed by His action, Jesus called out to them, 'I am; do not be afraid'.¹ In most Bible translations the sentence is rendered, 'It is I; do not be afraid', but this is not what the original Greek says. The Greek for 'I am' is *ego eimi*, and these are the only two words which appear before the semicolon. The claim to Godhood is not lost on the disciples. The miraculous feat of walking on the water combined with Jesus' bold assertion 'I am', cause the disciples to exclaim, 'Truly, you are the Son of God' (Matthew 14:33). The same sentence, '*Ego eimi*; do not be afraid', also appears in some manuscripts of Luke 24:36. On this occasion Jesus was appearing to His disciples after His resurrection. Again, most translators have rendered it as 'It is I' rather than 'I am', but the post-resurrectional context makes it more likely that He is declaring His Godhood ('I am') rather than His mere physical presence ('It is I').²

There is another verse, found in both Luke's and Mark's Gospels, in which Jesus uses the words '*ego eimi*' in a most interesting way. After predicting the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, the centre of Jewish worship, Jesus warned John and Andrew of terrible events to come. During the course of His warning He said, 'Many will come in my name, saying "I am", and shall deceive many'.³ To proclaim oneself as 'I am' is to announce one's divinity, and such a claim would be taken by the Jews to be blasphemy. Evidence of how strictly this injunction was upheld can be found in Mark 14: 62-3. In these verses, which give an account of His trial, Jesus was asked by the Jewish High Priest, 'Are you the Christ, the son of the blessed?' and He replied, 'I am'. This simple statement 'I am' was not taken as a mere affirmative answer, but as a claim to Godhood because the priest angrily exclaimed to the others present, 'You have heard

his blasphemy'. The priest's associates agreed with him that it was blasphemy, for after this reply they condemned Jesus to be executed (14:64). So, going back to Jesus' warning to John and Andrew, when He said that many people would come 'in my name, saying "I am"', He was saying that impostors would appear, claiming to be God Himself, and furthermore claiming that Jesus had sent them. The juxtaposition of 'I am' and 'my name' is particularly interesting, for in the context it is possible to say that Jesus Himself is laying claim to the original divine Name.

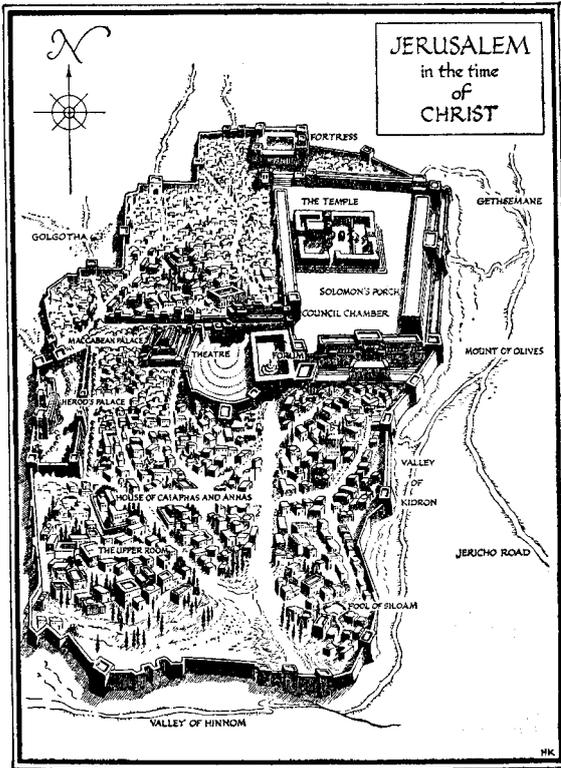
The verses I have quoted so far have all come from the synoptic Gospels, the first three books of the New Testament. The fourth Gospel, John's, has a different approach to Jesus' life and teaching and gives a far more prominent place to His affirmations of 'I am'. To understand just how different John's Gospel is, one only needs to make a brief list of what it contains, and what it doesn't, and then compare these items with the contents of the other Gospels. Unlike the other Gospels, there is no account of the birth of Jesus or of His baptism and temptations; there is no account of the last supper or His ascension; no healing of people possessed by devils and spirits, a major theme in the synoptic Gospels; there are no parables whatsoever; and finally, Jesus' speeches in John are long dignified pronouncements, often a whole chapter long, rather than the short pithy sayings that typify the synoptic accounts.

John's Gospel was written decades after the other three had been composed, and innumerable theories have been propounded to explain why its approach and style are so different from the other Gospels. An early judgement, which has stood the test of time, was put forward by

¹ Matthew 14:27, Mark 6:50 and John 6:20.

² Three verses later (24:39) He does identify Himself by saying 'It is I', so both forms of identification are present in this passage.

³ Mark 13:6, Luke 21:8. Matthew also reports the event but has Jesus say 'I am the Messiah' rather than 'I am'.



Artist's reconstruction of Jerusalem in the time of Christ

St. Clement of Alexandria, who, writing around 230 A.D., claimed that 'John, perceiving that what had reference to the bodily things of Jesus' ministry had been sufficiently related, and encouraged by friends, and inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote a spiritual Gospel'. That is to say, John was more interested in proclaiming what Jesus was than what He did. He wanted to explain the significance and meaning of Jesus's appearance on earth, rather than merely chronicling the physical events of His life. It is in this context that the 'I am' statements in John acquire added significance.

What are these statements and how are they phrased? Biblical scholars have distinguished two major categories: (1) simple assertions that He is 'I am', that is to say, God manifesting through a human body, and (2) more complex assertions in which He describes the nature and function of the 'I am' in a series of common, everyday metaphors. I will list and discuss the quotations that fit into the former category first.

1. *The Woman at the Well*: Jesus asked for a drink from a Samaritan woman who was pulling water from a well. During the course of a long philosophical conversation the woman, who had already become convinced of Jesus' greatness, asked Him whether she should worship God on the mountain where her ancestors had worshipped, or whether she should go to the Temple at Jerusalem, the place all Jews went to perform ritual acts of worship.

4:21. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.'

23. 'But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.'

24. 'God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'

25. The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes he will show us all things.'

26. Jesus said to her, '[I] who speak to you, I am'.⁴

Here we have a simple but bold declaration by Jesus that He is both God Himself as 'I am' and the Messiah who has been sent to save the world.

The exact formulation of this 'I am' statement owes as much to the book of Isaiah as to Exodus, for in Isaiah God repeatedly identifies Himself as 'I' and on one occasion (52:6) speaks a phrase which is very similar to the one Jesus used. In 52:5 God takes note of the fact that His name is despised by the Assyrians, who were then oppressing the Jews, before going on to say: 'Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know it is I who speak; here am I.' (RSV)

Since the word 'am' does not appear in the

⁴ RSV has 'I who speak to you am he' but there is no 'he' in the original text.

original Hebrew, the last portion could be more accurately rendered as '... it is "I" who speak; behold, "I" '. This is almost identical in sense and implication to Jesus' later words, cited above: 'I who speak to you, I am.' It should also be noted that 'behold "I" ' is associated with an earlier part of the sentence in which God says that 'my people shall know my name'.

The Jews of the biblical period had long been waiting for the Messiah to come. By using the name 'I am' and by using other phrases by which God identified Himself in the Old Testament, Jesus was conveying to His audience, many of whom would have been familiar with these Old Testament texts, that He was their ancestral God, 'I am', functioning through a human body.

The Jews were accustomed to having God identify Himself as 'I', for Isaiah is liberally sprinkled with such statements. In 43:11 He says, 'I, I Yahweh [He who is]; beside me there is no saviour'.⁵ In this and the succeeding two verses there are twenty-nine words in the original Hebrew. Twelve of them are first-person words such as 'I' or 'my', and the first-person pronoun repeats itself five times.

Most of the Isaiah 'I' phrases are in the form of 'I am He' rather than simply 'I' or 'I am'.⁶ And since 'am' is not present in the original Hebrew, God is actually saying 'I-He' rather than 'I am He'. This is probably a contraction of 'I, I, Yahweh', a variant that appears in 43:11. Most of these 'I-He' verses indicate either God's transcendence or His omnipotence:

43:10. I-He: before me there was no God.

43:11. I, I, Yahweh; beside me there is no saviour.

43:13. Yea, before the day [was], I-He.

This last verse echoes the most famous of all John's 'I am' quotes. In 8:58, where he has Jesus say 'Before Abraham was, I am', he is merely confirming what Yahweh had said in Isaiah 43:13: that before time and the world began, 'I', the 'I' that is God, existed, untrammelled by creation, as He who is.

One of the most important statements in the New Testament is the passage "I am the way" ... Rightly interpreted, the words "I am the way" mean what they say. The way, the truth and the life more abundant are to be found in 'I' — the 'I' that I am, the 'I' that you are, for you have been told that you and your Father are one... 'I' is the way that reveals that "I and my Father are one"... It is in the word 'I' that you find the entire secret of the spiritual message given to the world by Christ Jesus.

— Joel Goldsmith

"I stand at the door and knock." [Revelations 3:20] Who is this 'I' standing at the door? And at what door is this 'I' standing? 'I' stand at the door of your consciousness, but you must open the door and admit Me [God as 'I'], for "I am the bread of life... I am the way the truth and the life... I am the resurrection, and the life... I am come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly."

— Joel Goldsmith

2. *The Address to the Pharisees in the Temple:* In chapter eight Jesus got into a long dispute with the Pharisees in the Jerusalem Temple. He responded to their various com-

⁵ The second half of the verse may also mean 'and none but I can deliver'.

⁶ See 43:13, 25; 46:4; 51:12.

plaints and questions from a lofty 'I am not of this world' position, while twice declaring (vv. 24 and 28) that 'I am' provided a route to salvation:

8:19. They said to him therefore, 'Where is your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither me nor my Father; if you knew me you would know my Father also.'

21. 'I am going away and you will seek me and die in your sins; where I am going you cannot come.'

22. 'Will he kill himself since he says "Where I am going you cannot come"?'

23. He said to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.'

24. 'I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am.'

25. They said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them, 'Even what I have told you from the beginning.'

28. So Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, you will know that I am, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak thus as the Father taught me.'

In this fascinating passage Jesus is not merely saying that He is the 'I am', He is saying that belief in Him, that 'I am', is essential for those who do not want to die in a state of sin. Note also that in verse twenty-eight He states that it is quite possible to 'know' this 'I am', and that when one knows 'I am' one will also understand Jesus' state and His statement that, of His own accord, He could do nothing.

The second half of verse twenty-five, in the original Greek, is very hard to decipher, and the version I have given comes from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Other versions include:

- (a) I declare to you that I am the beginning.
- (b) Everything I am saying to you is only a beginning.

(c) Primarily, essentially, I am what I am telling you.

(d) How is it that I even speak to you at all?

I am in no position to offer an opinion as to which of these is more likely to be correct. I will merely note that versions (a) and (c) seem to fit in quite well with the theme of Jesus' assertions, both before and after this verse, that He is the 'I am', and that the 'I am' is the route to salvation.

3. *The Betrayal by Judas*: In order to convince His disciples that He was 'I am', Jesus told them, after washing their feet prior to the last supper, that one of them would eventually betray Him: 'I tell you now,' He said, 'before it takes place; that when it does take place you may believe that I am.' (13:19)

Later, when Judas, the one who betrayed Him, brought the soldiers and priests to arrest Him, Jesus twice identified Himself as 'I am':

18:4. Jesus came forward and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?'

5. They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth'. Jesus said to them 'I am'...

6. When he said to them 'I am', they drew back and fell to the ground.

7. Again he asked, 'Whom do you seek?' and they answered 'Jesus of Nazareth'.

8. Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am'.

Most versions of the Bible have Jesus say 'I am he' in verse five even though the original merely says 'I am' (*ego eimi*). Many commentators have noted that the literal answer, 'I am', gives added significance to verse six. The soldiers are overawed by this declaration of Godhood and fall to the ground. An 'I am he' answer, meaning, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you seek' would not have produced such an extreme response.

What was the purpose of these repeated identifications? One reason was that Jesus wanted to establish His credentials as God incarnate, sent to earth to redeem suffering humanity. 'I have

manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world,' says Jesus to God in John 17:6. That is to say, the divine Name, 'I am', became incarnate for the sake of those in the world who needed salvation. It can also be argued that in repeatedly identifying Himself as 'I am', Jesus wanted to make the Name of God more widely known so that It could be used, believed in or focused on as a means of experiencing God:

O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; ... I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:25-6)

Jesus Himself prayed to God, 'Father glorify thy name' (John 12:28)⁷ and taught His disciples to revere the Name in their own prayers by saying, 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name'. (Matthew 6:9)

The early Christians accepted that the Name of God had great power, and that it could be used as a means to salvation, but the name they adopted was not the 'I am' that God and Jesus both revealed. It was *Kyrios*, a Greek word which means 'Lord' in the sense of being a king. To understand how this came about one needs to trace the development of the Name through its various mutations.

God originally revealed Himself as 'I am', adding that this was the name by which He wanted 'to be remembered throughout all generations'. (Exodus 3:15) 'I am' was too holy a name for the Jews to use so they recorded it as *Yahweh*, meaning 'He is' or 'He who is' in their written texts. But when they spoke of God they used a further euphemism, *Adonai*, which merely means 'Lord' or 'my Lord' because it was prohibited to say the name of *Yahweh* out loud. Instead of using the name *Yahweh* or 'I am' for God, the authors of the New Testament used the word *Kyrios*, meaning 'Lord' because that was the word which the Septuagint, the already existing Greek translation of the Old Testament, had used as a translation of *Yahweh*.

By adopting the word *Kyrios*, the early Christians were using a term which they felt conveyed the idea of Jesus' kingship. Psalm 110:1 says, 'Yahweh said to my Lord, "sit at my right hand"'. The early Christians took this 'Lord' to be Jesus in His risen, ascended state, and they believed that after His ascension He sat next to God in heaven, exercising, like a king, spiritual dominion over the world. The word *Kyrios* was originally only meant to describe the risen Christ, but slowly, over time, it became the accepted Greek word for the God of the Old Testament.

By these progressive mutations — 'I am' to *Yahweh* to *Adonai* to *Kyrios* — the impact and significance of God's original Name, 'I am', was lost. By this change in vocabulary, He became in the eyes of the early Christians not 'I am' but a divine King who received homage from His subjects. When Paul, for example, wrote to the Phillippians that 'God has highly exalted him [Jesus] and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,' he is not referring to 'I am', as he makes clear in the succeeding lines: 'That at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord [Kyrios].' (Phillippians 2:9-11) The statement 'Jesus is *Kyrios*', rather than 'Jesus is "I am"' became one of the earliest and most widespread proclamations of Christian belief.

The change from *Yahweh* to *Kyrios* was a deliberate and calculated one, and even Old Testament verses were adapted to conform to the new terminology. When the author of Acts wrote, 'And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord [Kyrios] shall be saved,' he was merely changing the vocabulary of an almost identical Old Testament quote: 'And it shall come to pass that whomsoever shall call on the name of the Lord [Yahweh] shall be delivered.'⁸

Sometimes, especially in Acts, the name of Jesus Christ alone (that is, not even *Yahweh* or

⁷ God answered, 'I have glorified it and I will glorify it again'.

⁸ Acts 2:21 and Joel 2:32.

Kyrios) is proclaimed as being the ultimate and most powerful name. It was by calling on this name that the earliest disciples performed miraculous cures. When Peter saw a lame man begging outside the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, he told him, 'I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk'. And he took him by the hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.' (Acts 3:6-8)

When he was subsequently asked, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' he replied:

Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.⁹

I have noted on several occasions that the Name had a special significance for the Jews. It was not merely a title, it was a manifestation of God Himself. The earliest Christians, who were all brought up in the Jewish tradition, took this conception, applied it to Jesus, and taught that salvation could be attained through His Name. When Christianity spread to the non-Jewish world, it encountered people, countries and whole civilisations which had no tradition of regarding names in such a holy and powerful way. So, as Christianity spread and evolved, the early emphasis on the Name became sidelined and was increasingly replaced by another teaching, which had always been present in and central to the Church's beliefs, that salvation could be attained merely by accepting that Jesus was the Son of God and that He died in order to save mankind from the consequences of their sins. Anyone who accepted this became reborn spiritually. It is worth noting that in the first decades of the Christian era some of the most popular competing pagan cults were the mystery

⁹ Acts 4:7, 10, 12. See also 4:30 '...signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus'.

To be sure that no one misses the point, we caution our students never to say, even to themselves, "I am God". It is not even wise to voice such a statement as "I am the Son of God". The ideal way is just to say 'I' and think of what It means.

Close your eyes and within yourself silently, sacredly, secretly and gently say the word 'I', 'I' ... That 'I' has been with you since "Before Abraham was", awaiting your recognition and your acknowledgement.

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?" [I Corinthians 3:16] Know ye not that the name of God is 'I' or 'I am' and that you are the temple of God only when you have admitted 'I' into your consciousness and held it there secretly, sacredly, gently, peaceably, so that at any moment you can close your eyes and just remember 'I'?

When you know the secret of 'I', you abide in the stillness and let 'I' do its work: not your 'I', that 'I' that is in the midst of you. You need no thoughts, since you cannot and need not enlighten God.

Abide in the word 'I'. Let this 'I' abide in you and recognise Its identity. Never let anyone veil it for you again.

— Joel Goldsmith

religions of the Greek world which generally revolved around the death of a god and the concomitant idea that his death or sacrifice enabled his devotees to be spiritually reborn. It was in these surroundings and against this background that the importance of the crucifixion grew and the significance of the Name of God diminished.

John, who wrote his Gospel around 100 A.D.,¹⁰ must have witnessed these developments with interest, and perhaps even concern. The synoptic Gospels, Acts and virtually all the epistles were in existence and were being circulated prior to the writing of the final Gospel, and it is reasonable to assume, though it cannot be proved, that John had gone through much of the Christian literature that preceded him. Many scholars feel that John recorded his own experiences with Christ not merely to supplement the existing literature, but to correct some of the mistaken ideas that he felt had sprung up about Christ and His teachings, and to express what he felt were the real truths of Christianity in philosophical terms and structures which the Greek civilisation he lived in would understand. While writing his account he refuted some of the unchristian heresies which were being put about by the newly-emerging gnostics; he played down the importance of John the Baptist, who was beginning to develop a cult of his own; and on a more positive note he stressed the divinity of Jesus, His Sonship; the glory of God, and Christ's union with Him. Only in John does Jesus Himself say that He is the Son of God (10:36) and it is John alone who records Jesus' famous remark, 'I and the Father are one' (10:30) The various 'I am' proclamations I have given are part of this pattern. They affirm that God has incarnated in the form of His Son, and indicate that though the Two (Father and Son) are separate as Persons, in essence they are the same 'I am'.

There are several other occasions on which Jesus alludes to Himself somewhat indirectly as 'I am'. These are known as the I-am-with-predicate statements, and they include such famous remarks as, 'I am the way, the truth and the



Jesus Christ preaching

life', 'I am the light of the world', and 'I am the bread of life'. These statements usually appear in carefully constructed stories which often begin with a miraculous event or a deep spiritual analogy and end with a majestic 'I am' pronouncement by Jesus.

Take, for example, the story in which Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes. On the following day He told His disciples, 'Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life... I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst.'¹¹ (John 6:27, 35) The I-am-with-predicate comment gives a spiritual

¹⁰ While it is generally accepted that the contents of John's Gospel record the observations and ideas of John, one of Jesus' direct disciples, the author is believed to be someone else. The most favoured candidate is John the Elder, one of the disciple John's contemporaries.

¹¹ See also 6:51 in which, in continuation of the same story, He says, 'I am the living bread'.

interpretation to the miracle, affirms Jesus' divine nature as 'I am' while simultaneously proclaiming that through Him salvation can be attained.

Here are a few more examples of similar narratives:

(a) At the beginning of chapter nine Jesus saw a blind man and cured him. Before doing so He commented, 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world'. (9:5) The man's blindness was a metaphor for the spiritual blindness into which the world had been plunged. By giving sight to the man and by saying 'I am the light', He was indirectly saying that the Son of God, as 'I am', could banish spiritual darkness. The idea that Jesus is Light is a major and recurring theme in John. He began his Gospel by saying that Christ, as the Son of God made manifest, was the 'light of men' come to earth to dispel spiritual darkness, and the metaphor reappears at regular intervals. In chapter eight, for example, He announced, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'. (8:12)

(b) In chapter two Jesus compared Himself to the door which opens into a sheep pen: 'He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out'. (10:1-4) In explaining the analogy Jesus said, 'I am the door of the sheep... I am the door; if anyone enters by me he will be saved... I am come that they might have life, and have it abundantly... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father.' (10:7, 9-11, 14-15) The message of the repeated 'I am's' in the explanation is that Jesus, 'I am' incarnate, is the sole route to union with the Father.

The I-am-with-predicate statements are not to be found in the synoptic Gospels, though there are passages there, called 'the parables of the kingdom', which serve a similar purpose. 'The

kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed,' says Jesus in Matthew. 'It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs.' (13:31-2) In other places He compared the kingdom of heaven to the leaven in dough and to a sower who sows seeds. The kingdom of heaven parables are similes, for they say what heaven is like. John's 'I am' statements, on the contrary, are metaphors which say what God really is: 'I am the bread', 'I am the light', 'I am the door'.

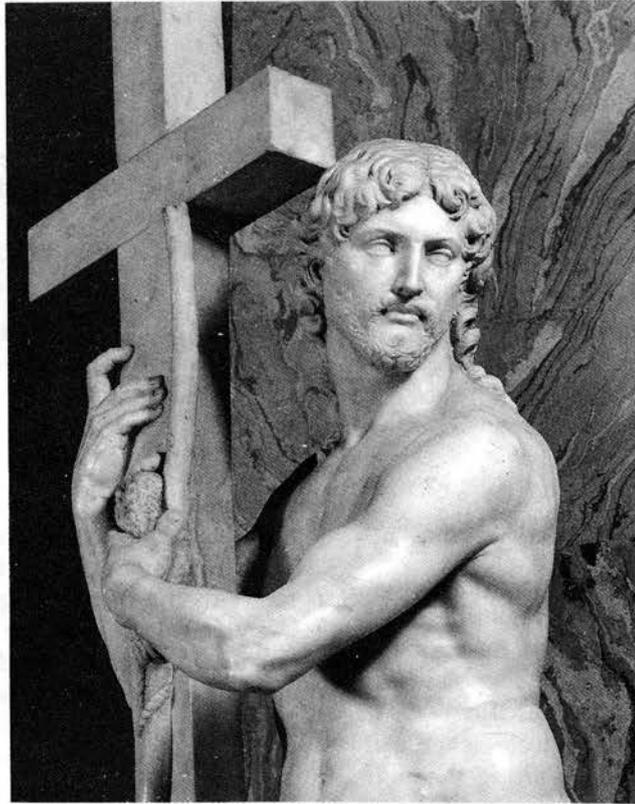
A comment by Bhagavan is appropriate here:

The only permanent thing is Reality, and that is the Self. You say 'I am', 'I am going', 'I am speaking', 'I am walking' etc. Hyphenate 'I am' in all of them. Thus, I-AM. That is the abiding and fundamental Reality. This truth was taught by God to Moses: 'I am that I am'. 'Be still and know that I-am God' So, 'I-am' is God.¹²

So, if one follows Bhagavan's advice and hyphenates 'I-am', one comes up with: 'I-am' is the bread which will dispel all hunger; 'I-am' is the light which will dispel spiritual ignorance; 'I-am' is the door through which one must pass if one wants to attain union with the Father.

(c) In chapter thirteen Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to leave them physically and that 'Where I am going you cannot come'. (13:33) Later He said that He was going to His Father's house, that He would prepare a place for the disciples there, and that eventually they would join Him. Thomas then asked, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me." (14:5-6) This phrase, when given the hyphenation treatment suggested by Bhagavan, ceases to be a statement that the historical Christ is necessary for all those who want to journey to the 'Father's house', and becomes instead a non-sectarian announcement which states that abidance in the 'I am', the

¹² Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, talk no. 503.



Christ with cross — Michelangelo's sculpture

reality of God and Jesus, is the route for all those who are seeking union with the Father.

(d) When Jesus was informed of the death of Lazarus, He went to his house and brought him back to life. In the same way that the blind man whom Jesus cured symbolised the darkness which could be overcome by the spiritual light, the raising from the dead of Lazarus symbolised the resurrection that was available to anyone who believed in Jesus as 'I am'. 'I am the resurrection and the life,' said Jesus, shortly before He performed the miracle. 'He who believes in me though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.' (11:25-6) 'I-am' is the resurrection. Whoever reaches that state and abides in it transcends bodily death.

(e) There is one more I-am-with-predicate statement which appears in isolation, unconnected with a miracle or a prior teaching story:

I am the real vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (14:1, 3-5)

When Jesus proclaimed Himself to be 'I am' without adding a predicate, He was signifying His identity with God, the 'I am' who revealed Himself in Exodus. But when He added a predicate, He was not just announcing His Godhood, He was giving Himself a role and a function and was demarcating a relationship between Himself and humanity. He was saying, in effect, that 'I am' is the light which would illumine man's journey to God, the bread which would sustain him spiritually, the door through which he must eventually pass to reach the Father, the vine, uniting him with the Son, on which his spiritual fruition

depends, and the final resurrection which is independent of ordinary bodily existence.

There is one other interesting characteristic of John's Gospel which is worth noting. In the synoptic Gospels Jesus performs healing miracles without any apparent motive other than a compassionate desire to aid the victim. But in John, the few miracles that are reported are performed to manifest the glory of God. The first miracle at Cana in Galilee 'manifested his glory' (2:11); He raised Lazarus from the dead 'for the glory of God so that the Son of Man may be glorified by means of it' (11:4); and in the story of the blind man I have already cited, Jesus noted that he had been brought before Him so 'that the works of God might be made manifest in him'. (9:3) Often the miracles are accompanied by long teaching discourses which culminate in one of Jesus' famous 'I am' statements. For John, these miracles were not casual, random events, or merely occasions to show off Jesus' or God's power, they were what he called '*semeia*', which means 'signs'. They were teaching demonstrations whose primary purpose was to show ordinary people the glory of God as He manifested His power and authority through His Son. And for those who had the discrimination to understand the true import of the discourses, there was an additional bonus: Jesus would give the ultimate sign by saying in various metaphorical ways, 'The 'I am' whose power you have just witnessed is among you now. Turn to it and salvation is yours.'

For John, Jesus was the reality of God come down to earth in a human body. There is a Greek word *alethinos*, meaning 'real', which he applies to Jesus on several occasions, sometimes in conjunction with the I-am-with-predicate statements. Jesus is the 'real light' (1:9), He is the 'real bread from heaven' (6:32), He is the 'real vine' (15:1), and to Him belongs the 'real judgement' (8:16). Jesus, for John, was the 'I am' made manifest, the incarnate reality, whose function was to become a human beacon, shining the 'real light' in a shadowy world whose spiritual darkness would otherwise prevent man from being able to perceive God. (1:5)

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding to know him [God] who is real. And we are in him who is real, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the real God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourself from idols. (I John 5:20-1)

Through Jesus Christ, the reality, God as 'I am' can be known. To approach Him through other forms, other names, is, said John, tantamount to idolatry, because it sets up for worship an unreal image of God.

I noted earlier that one of the factors which motivated John to write his Gospel was a desire to write a spiritual and interpretative account, rather than a merely biographical narrative. His intention was to stress the real teachings of Jesus and to refute erroneous ideas about Him. When John talks about the Name of God, he is, like all Jews of his generation, talking about God Himself, the Yahweh who revealed Himself in Exodus.¹³ It must have saddened him to see Yahweh transmuted into *Kyrios*, a different concept altogether, and for the ancient tradition of the Name to wither in the inhospitable soil of the non-Jewish world. Jesus had declared Himself to be 'I am' a few times in the synoptic Gospels, but His declarations there did not appear to have had much significance for the early Christians. It was left to John to resurrect the tradition. He had Jesus identify Himself as 'I am' more times than in the other three Gospels combined, and in his I-am-with-predicate statements, none of which can be found in the synoptic Gospels, he simultaneously identified Jesus with the Old Testament 'I am' and mapped out a path by which Christians could approach the Father and become one with Him.

John's efforts did not meet with much ultimate success. Little attention was paid, either then or subsequently, to his attempt to put Jesus' identification with 'I am' in the centre of

¹³ John uses *Kyrios* many times as a respectful title without associating it with the name of God. He also uses it in the traditional early Christian way to signify the risen Christ.

Christian beliefs. Nowadays, if one looks for an explanation of the 'I am' statements in Bible commentaries, one finds that they are often ignored or relegated to footnotes and appendices. They tend to be regarded as a minor puzzle rather than a major revelation.

So far as I am aware, only one Christian group has given pride of place to Jesus' revelation that He is 'I am', and that is a modern twentieth century organisation, 'The Infinite Way', which was founded by a mystic called Joel Goldsmith. After many years in the Christian Science movement, the inner 'I' revealed itself to him. By abiding in it he came to realise that this inner 'I' was God Himself. This gave him new insights into the nature of Christ's teachings, particularly those which were revealed in the Gospel of John. He eventually started his own group, teaching all who came to him that God is within, shining as the 'I'. More than twenty books appeared under his name, most of them being edited collections of his teachings. I have selected a few of his statements on the nature of God as 'I' or 'I am' and they appear, inset in boxes, alongside this article. All of them have been taken from *The Mystical 'I'*, a book which relates the author's own experience of 'I am' and also gives his explanations of the 'I am' statements which appear in John's Gospel. Readers will note that his exegesis of the biblical texts is very similar to my own, and that his teachings on the nature of 'I' and the means by which it can be experienced are very similar to those propounded by Ramana Maharshi.

The idea that Jesus indirectly taught a *sadhana* of concentrating on God as an inner feeling of 'I am' will probably sound strange and even a little dubious to most Christians. They would, in response, more than likely point out that Jesus never directly asked his followers to be aware of God in themselves as 'I am', and add that the only practice he overtly endorsed was that of *bhakti*. This, they would probably go on to say, is clearly pointed out in Mark's Gospel:

'Which commandment is the first of all?'

[asked a scribe]. Jesus answered, 'The first is "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength". The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"'. There is no commandment greater than these.' (Mark 12: 28-31)

In giving this answer Jesus was repeating and embellishing on the great Jewish proclamation of faith and practice which was originally given to the Israelites by Moses (Deuteronomy 6:4-5):

4. Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord;

5. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.

The word 'Lord', mentioned three times in these two verses, is, in the original Hebrew, Yahweh, the term the Jews used to denote the 'I am' who revealed Himself to Moses. In addition to this rendering, which I have taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, three other readings can be regarded as acceptable translations:

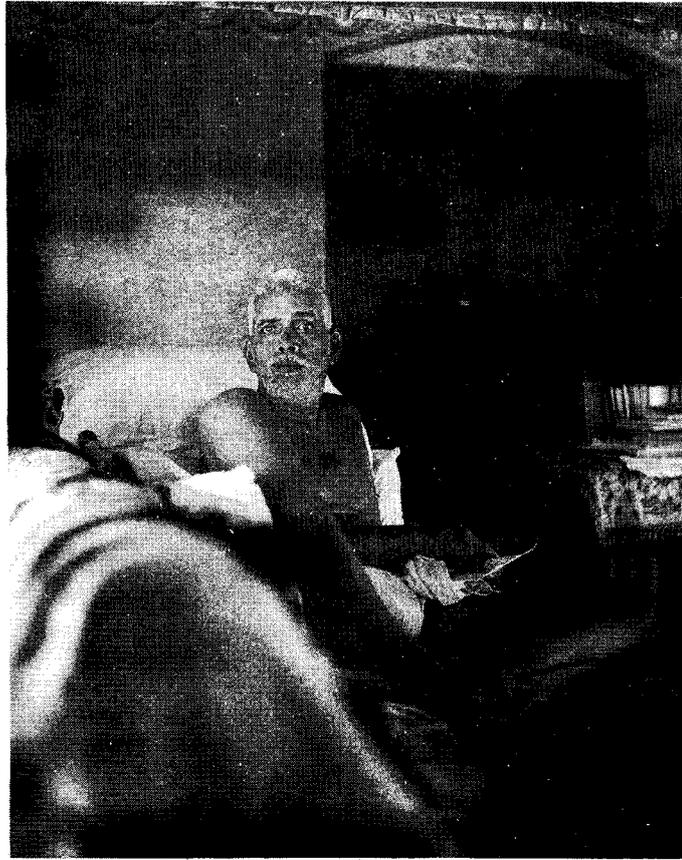
(a) Hear O Israel: Yahweh, our God, Yahweh is One.

(b) Hear O Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is One.

(c) Hear O Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.

Once one knows that Yahweh denotes God as 'I am', the significance of the following verse becomes more apparent: 'and you shall love Yahweh, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.' That is to say, both Moses and Jesus were saying, indirectly, that heart, soul and mind must be directed exclusively and lovingly towards the 'I am' that is God. Jesus said that there was no greater commandment than this, and Moses, emphasising the same point, went on to tell the Israelites:

And these words [Deuteronomy 6:4-5] which



I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

In fulfilment of this command, orthodox Jews attend their synagogues wearing phylacteries on their foreheads and hands which contain copies of these verses from Deuteronomy. They also have copies in special containers which are attached to their door and gate posts. Some devout Jews even kiss the container reverently each time they enter and leave as a gesture of respect towards Yahweh, the one God who revealed Himself to Moses as 'I am'. Verse four in particular is the greatest and most widespread

affirmation of faith for all Jews. Whatever their mother tongue, and irrespective of what country they live in, all practising Jews regularly recite verse four in the original biblical Hebrew.

The *sadhana* of loving God as He really is, as 'I am', with all one's heart, having rejected all other thoughts, is identical to the path of true devotion as taught by Bhagavan on many occasions:

Question: That is why I am asking you whether God could be worshipped through the path of love.

Bhagavan: ... Love itself is the actual form of God. If by saying, 'I do not love this, I do not love that', you reject all things, that which remains is *swarupa*, that is, the real form of the Self. That is pure bliss. Call it pure bliss, God, *atma* or what you will. That is devotion, that is realisation, that is everything.

If you thus reject everything, what remains is

the Self alone. That is real love. One who knows the secret of that love finds the world itself full of universal love.¹⁴

Jesus instructed his followers that they should not merely love God with all their heart, they should also love their neighbours as themselves. Here Bhagavan is saying that this automatically happens when the first commandment, loving God with all one's heart, is fulfilled. When one experiences 'Love... the actual form of God' the world itself, including all possible neighbours, is experienced as one's own Self, and is found to be 'full of universal love'.

The experience of not forgetting consciousness ['I am'] alone is the state of *bhakti*, which is the relationship of unfading real love, because the real knowledge of Self, which shines in the undivided supreme bliss itself, surges up as the nature of love. Only if one knows the truth of love, which is the real nature of Self, will the strong entangled knot of life be untied. Only if one attains the height of love will liberation be attained. Such is the heart of all religions. The experience of Self is only love, which is seeing only love, hearing only love, feeling only love, tasting only love, and smelling only love, which is bliss.¹⁵

I should not like to give the impression that the interpretations I have given represent the teachings of any major Church or denomination that I know about. Although, much to my surprise, the Pope devoted his Easter message this year to an explanation of some of the 'I am' quotes in the Bible, mainstream Christianity has never taught that God can be approached by abiding in the inner feeling of 'I am'. Those who have advocated such practices have only ever been in a small minority, and they have usually been regarded with deep suspicion by more orthodox members of the Church.

I should like to discuss in the last portion of this article the views and experiences of one man from this small minority who, though a committed Christian, found in the Bible's 'I am' statements a major revelation which indicated to him both a way to attain union with God and at

the same time provided a bridge between Christianity and *Vedanta*. Swami Abhishiktananda was a Benedictine monk and priest who spent twenty years in a French monastery under his original name and title, Father Henri le Saux. He came to India in the 1940s and soon fell under the spell of Ramana Maharshi. His experiences at Sri Ramanasramam in 1949 presented him with a challenge, the resolution of which was to occupy his mind and heart for twenty-five years.

In its own sphere, the truth of *advaita* is unassailable. If Christianity is unable to integrate it in the light of a higher truth, the inference must follow that *advaita* includes and surpasses the truth of Christianity, and that it operates on a higher level than that of Christianity. There is no escape from this dilemma.¹⁶

Swami Abhishiktananda came to feel that Christians and Hindus, divided by differing and contradictory theologies, could only meet on equal terms in the 'cave of the Heart'. In this 'place' the followers of both religions could experience the 'I am' of God's real nature: 'Deep in his heart, the Indian seer heard with rapture the same 'I AM' that Moses heard on Mount Horeb.'¹⁷

In my own depth, beyond all perceiving, all thoughts, all consciousness of distinction, there is the fundamental intuition of my being, which is so pure that it cannot be adequately described. It is precisely here that I meet God, in the mystery at once of my own being and of His... In the last resort, what can I say of myself except that 'I am'... Just so, all that I can truly say of God is simply that 'He is'. This is what was revealed to Moses at Horeb, and it was also realised intuitively by

¹⁴ *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam* 2:39.

¹⁵ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, w. 974, 652, 655.

¹⁶ *Saccidananda*, by Swami Abhishiktananda, ISPC, 1974, p.48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

the rishis: 'It is only by saying "He is" that one may reach him.' (*Katha Upanishad* 6:12) He is — nothing more can be said of Him.¹⁸

Christianity teaches that God is a Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that the three will always remain three even in the final experience of 'I am'. It also teaches that God can never be fully known, in the way that He knows Himself, and so knowledge of Him can only ever be partial. Abhishiktananda initially accepted this idea — he was after all a Catholic priest — and speculated that the final 'I am' experience for a Christian must necessarily be a Trinitarian one in which God was not fully known:

The mysterious name which the Lord had revealed was beyond all human comprehension. The reply 'I am who I am' meant that the Name is permanently withheld from the merely curious enquirer, but at the same time, for the earnest seeker who is moved by love, it constitutes a precious invitation to penetrate to the very heart of the One who essentially is. Yahweh is indeed the name which reveals God, and at the same time conceals Him.¹⁹ ... It is a call to the deepest recesses of the human spirit, a call which itself comes from the secret 'cave of the heart' where alone man is really himself. The call is the most powerful reminder that the name of God is indeed mysterious, as the Bible says, that reason alone is incapable of apprehending God, that he remains essentially the Inaccessible One.²⁰ In unveiling for man the secret of God, he [Jesus] reveals the last secret of man's own being, the secret that his own origin lies deep within God's infinite love. At the very heart of the dazzling glory of being, he reveals to man the even greater glory of the love in which Being, 'He-who-is', has within himself a threefold communion with himself.²¹

At this stage of his career Abhishiktananda was saying that the 'I am' which the rishis experienced was not the highest state. Beyond this, he said, there is the Christian experience of being in which one knows and experiences God

as a Trinity. This conclusion was a natural consequence of his dilemma, stated earlier, that Christians must integrate *advaita* in 'the light of a higher truth' or concede that the truth of *advaita* 'surpasses the truth of Christianity'. According to Abhishiktananda, in this final state of being there is an awareness of the sharing and the intermingling of the three distinct Persons of the Trinity:

The mystery of the Holy Trinity reveals that *Being* is essentially a *koinonia* [a fellowship or sharing] of love; it is a communion, a reciprocal call to *be*; it is being-together, being-with, *co-esse* [Latin for 'to be with']; its essence is a coming from and a going to, a giving and receiving.²²

The book I have taken all these quotes from, *Saccidananda*, expounded a view of Christianity which is called 'the theology of fulfilment'. Simply stated, it is the belief that everyone in the world, at some distant future date, will become a Christian. It is underpinned by the belief that the fullest revelation of God can only be had within a Christian framework, and that while other religions may contain interesting and even holy ideas, the practical application of them cannot result in the highest knowledge of God which is available to a Christian. Thus Abhishiktananda could write that a 'Christian *jnani*' (an oxymoron in my opinion) would have a Trinitarian experience of 'I am' which would be superior to the 'I am' experiences of Hindu sages. This attitude enabled him to write, without feeling at all patronising, 'India become Christian would surely feel a quite special attraction to silent meditation on the name of Yahweh'.²³

Towards the end of his life Abhishiktananda

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

finally had, as a consequence of a heart attack which left him temporarily paralysed on a street in Rishikesh, a full realisation of 'I am' which, judging by his descriptions of it, seemed to convince him that his previous attempts to fit it into a Trinitarian framework were presumptuous:

Who can bear the glory of transfiguration, of man's dying as transfigured; because what Christ is I AM! One can only speak of it after being awoken from the dead... It was a remarkable spiritual experience... While I was waiting on my sidewalk, on the frontier of the two worlds, I was magnificently calm, for I AM, no matter what in the world! I have found the GRAIL!²⁴

The finding of the grail was inextricably linked to losing all the previous concepts he had had about Christ and the Church. Commenting on this experience, he said, 'So long as we have not accepted the loss of all concepts, all myths — of Christ, of the Church — nothing can be done'.²⁵ From this new experiential standpoint he was able to say, from direct experience, that it was the 'I', rather than a collection of sectarian teachings and beliefs, that gave reality to God:

I really believe that the revelation of AHAM ['I'] is perhaps the central point of the *Upanishads*. And that is what gives access to everything; the 'knowing' which reveals all 'knowings'. God is not known, Jesus is not known, nothing is known outside this terribly solid AHAM that I am. From that alone all true teaching gets its value.²⁶

In addition to writing several books which attempted to bridge the gap between Hinduism and Christianity, Abhishiktananda was a regular contributor to seminars and conferences on the future development of Indian Christianity. After his great experience he received an invitation to attend a Muslim gathering in France to give a Christian point of view. In declining the invitation he revealed how all his old ideas had been swept away and how he no longer felt able to expound a specifically Christian viewpoint:



Swami Abhishiktananda

The more I go [on], the less able I would be to present Christ in a way which could still be considered as Christian... For Christ is first an idea which comes to me from outside. Even more after my 'beyond life/death experience' of 14.7 [.73] I can only aim at awakening people to what 'they are'. Anything about God or the Word in any religion, which is not based on the deep 'I' experience, is bound to be simply 'notion', not existential.

Yet I am interested in no Christology at all. I have so little interest in a Word of God which will awaken man within history... The Word of God comes from/to my own 'present'; it is that very awakening which is my self-awareness. What I discover above all in Christ is his 'I AM'.... it is this I AM experience which really matters. Christ is the very mystery 'that I AM', and in the experience and existential knowledge all Christology has disintegrated.²⁷

Then, confirming that a lifetime's convictions had been dropped, he went on to explain that the final Christian experience of 'I am' could not differ from its Hindu equivalent:

What would be the meaning of a 'Christianity-coloured' awakening? In the process of

²⁴ *Swami Abhishiktananda*, by James Stuart, ISPCK, 1989, p. 346.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 348-9.

awakening all this colouration cannot but disappear... The colouration might vary according to the audience, but the essential goes beyond. The discovery of Christ's I AM is the ruin of any Christian theology, for all notions are burned within the fire of experience... I feel too much, more and more, the blazing fire of this I AM in which all notions about Christ's personality, ontology, history etc. have disappeared.²⁸

After a lifetime of meditation and research he had finally conceded that no explanation or experience could impinge on the fundamental reality, 'I am', that was revealed to Moses by God. Years before he had predicted that this standpoint would be the inevitable consequence of a full experience of 'I am'. Perhaps even then he was having doubts about the theology of fulfilment and its premise that only through Christianity could the highest experiences be attained:

Doctrines, laws and rituals are only of value as signposts, which point the way to what is

beyond them. One day in the depths of his spirit man cannot fail to hear the sound of the *I am* uttered by He-who-is. He will behold the shining of the Light whose only source is itself, is himself, is the unique Self... What place is then left for ideas, obligations or acts of worship of any kind whatever?²⁹

When the Self shines forth, the I that has dared to approach can no longer recognise its own self or preserve its own identity in the midst of that blinding light. It has, so to speak, vanished from its own sight. Who is left to be in the presence of Being itself. The claim of Being is absolute... All the later developments of the [Jewish] religion — doctrine, laws and worship — are simply met by the *advaitin* with the words originally revealed to Moses on Mount Horeb, 'I am that I am'.³⁰

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

²⁹ Abhishiktananda, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

"No religion in this world is accepted only by its doctrines. People do not much care for doctrines! When unbounded mercy, purity and meekness are observed in any great soul, people pay their homage to him and accept his preachings."

— Kanchi Sankaracharya

* * *

"Religion is not something that descends from the sky to the earth below. That which gives fullness to humanity alone is religion."

— Rabindranath Tagore

* * *

"I never said that devotion is unnecessary. I do not remember to have prohibited even meditation. Unlike Sankara or Chaitanya, I did not give special emphasis to them; but in my Yoga I stressed the necessity of Bhakti and Jnana along with Karma."

— Sri Aurobindo in *Yoga Deepika*

Ramana, Christ and Christianity

By Henri Hartung*

The words of wise men are heard in quiet more
than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.

Ecclesiastes 9:17

IN THE face of an event so amazing, what should one think of it? Here is a holy man in the heart of this mysterious land, India, and of this timeless religion, Hinduism. Shouldn't I then convert because today Christianity does not bring forth a personage of as exalted a spiritual reality as that of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi? Or would it not suit me to continue on my Christian path, insensitive to a sign, doubtless divine, but which does not belong to my psychological universe or the divinity I conceive of? Does not the first approach represent a submission to a force which is certainly powerful but which remains external to what I am? And isn't the second prompted by the prejudiced notion of the infallibility of "my" religion? Each question, surely, will have its own answer, but the one who is the origin of such queries has himself already answered very clearly: why convert? who is converted?

It isn't necessary, without any special reason in a particular case, to abandon the tradition in which one is born. On the contrary, one may seek its support to better understand the one who asks such a question.¹

What is important, what is really decisive for the one who follows a path is not to say, "I tread the only path of Truth". This means one should not be attached to the external aspects of one's religion and an enquiry which is essentially an inward one.

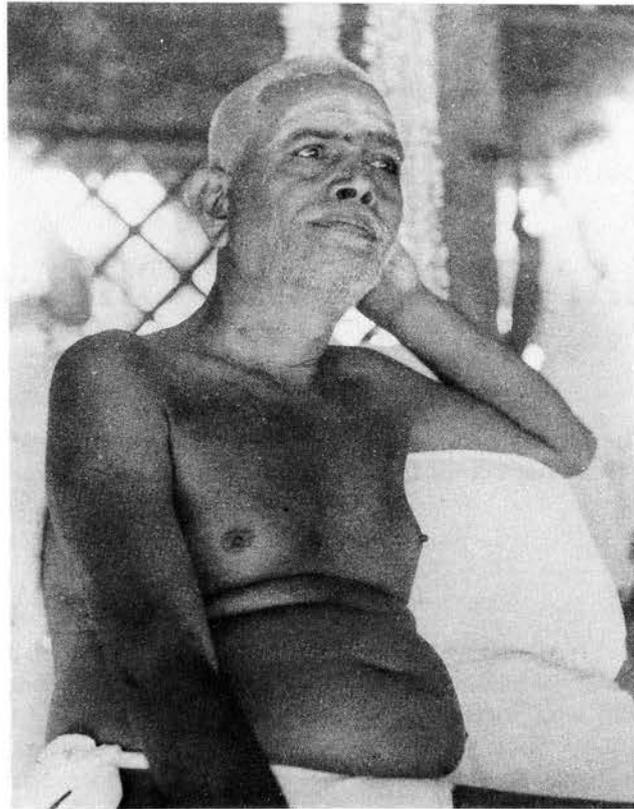
Each system of thought postulates the three fundamentals: the individual, God and world. It is only as long as there is an ego-sense that one says that the three are really three. The best thing is to renounce the ego-sense and remain in one's true state.²

This is very much in the manner of Ramana, and I would think that it unequivocally bypasses any approach, religious or otherwise, which is not essentially centred on "Who am I?" In any case, it points to the way in which I can embark on a thought centred simultaneously on Christianity and the Presence of the Maharshi: try and absorb the essence, the spirit of each tradition, the ultimate point where they all meet, without getting involved in making a comparative study of the religious forms connected with the traditions, nor even making an attempt to place one tradition in relation to the others; endeavour to understand the diversity of quests without making evaluations fraught with polemics which are of little use in each individual's personal spiritual voyage; above all, keep clear, on this plane, of any patronising charity implicit in the ethnocentrism of the West, which is, in fact, linked to all

* Translation of an excerpt from the late Mr. Hartung's French book, *La Présence de Ramana Maharshi*.

¹ Reply heard by the author. It was meant as much for Christians as for Buddhists and Muslims.

² *Reality in Forty Verses*, v. 2.



forms of imperialism, whether cultural, religious or political. Also, do without descriptions which, in the name of "objectivity" and "scientific realism", describe a universe divested of mystery and made to order for humanists whose minds are closed to the secret of inner life. Reject, as well, any artificial syncretism which cannot recognise the integrity of each path and each tradition, and which absorbs only the external aspects of each by resorting to too high a generalisation. Finally, seek to listen to the other in order to understand him truly when he speaks from within his profoundest reality so that his experience and spiritual state may enable us to better realise in ourselves our own being. In other words, Christians should understand Ramana Maharshi not only with their intelligence, but also with their heart and their own sensitivity.

Even the very first message of Bhagavan reaching the West revealed, as it were, an uncanny unity of verbal expression between Christ and Bhagavan. To Paul Brunton, he said:

It is possible to go inward until the last

thought "I" gradually vanishes.³ ... What does it matter if one lives in the East or in the West?⁴

Sri Bhagavan often said that the whole of Vedanta is contained in the two biblical statements: "*I am that I am*" and "*Be still and know that I am God.*"⁵

The religions are according to the viewpoint of the seeker. Krishna [for the Hindus] said, "Yes. There have been so many incarnations of myself and yourself". The Christ also declared that He was even before Abraham.⁶

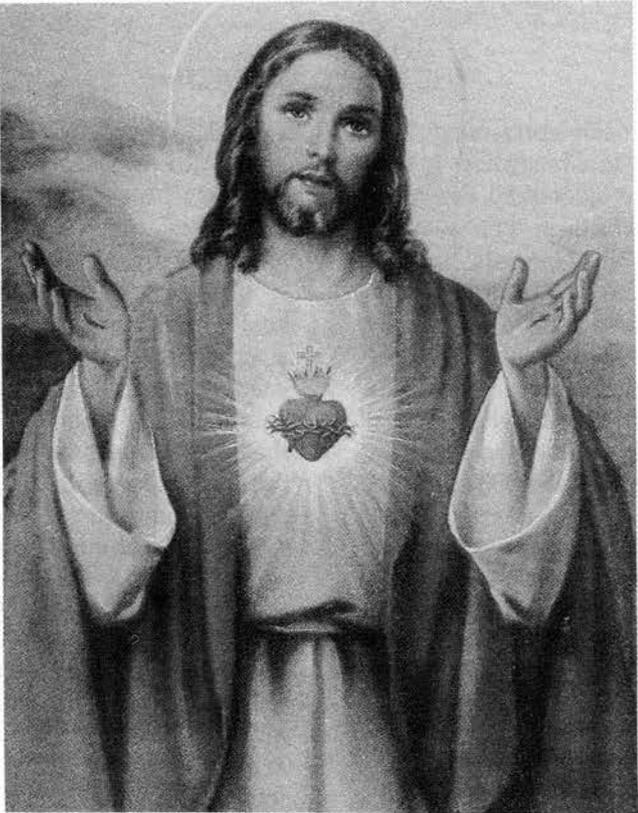
Yes, a sage teaches the people according to their place and time, their mentality and milieu. We should, therefore, go behind the external form of the teachings, into the message, using the teachings as a kind of stepping-stone to

³ Reply heard at Tiruvannamalai by the author.

⁴ *The Maharshi and His Message*, p. 38.

⁵ *Talks With Sri Ramana Maharshi*, no. 338.

⁶ *Talks*, no. 145. "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58)



wards the Self. Who worships God? Who is God? In our self-enquiry, why not at least pause for a while on these remarks and biblical quotations cited by a contemporary Hindu sage? After all, are there many Christian saints or even less exalted representatives of the Church of Christ who recommend to the Hindus who approach them that they should read or refer to the Vedas?

D.: Is there efficacy in bathing in the Ganges?

B.: The Ganges is within you. This Ganges does not make you feel cold or shiver. Bathe in it.

D.: Should we read *Gita* once in a while?

B.: Always.

D.: May we read the Bible?

B.: The Bible and the *Gita* are the same.

D.: But the Bible teaches that Man is born in sin.

B.: The [idea of being a] Man is sin. There was no man-sense in deep sleep. The body-thought brings out the idea of sin.⁷

Here is, doubtlessly, a statement which could seem to a Christian to be typically Hindu. A Christian would prefer to say that sin consists in deeming oneself man outside of God. But both these expressions can meet in a common statement: the idea of sin is not a moral or moralistic one. It points to the fact of a human being not dissolving himself in God, not becoming one with the Self. This oneness or unity is transcendental to the duality of matter-spirit, the seed of ever-so-much human suffering.

The definitive question which arises before us in our human situation is whether we should not free ourselves of our carnal and mental bonds so that we may recognise that which transcends them. And when we are in the Presence of a witness of this liberation, do we have the inner freedom to take the plunge in Him, like in a secret Ganges, or do we have first to verify the authenticity of His words in relation to our own religious criteria?

⁷ Talks, no. 164.

Sri Bhagavan's approach corresponds to a current which is integral to Christianity. In addition to the biblical verses quoted by Bhagavan, there are many others which, in their own special language, say what the Maharshi has said: "And I appoint unto you a Kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me." (*Luke 22:29*) "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (*John 14:9*) "Except ye...become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven." (*Matthew 18:3*) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (*John 1:1*) "I and my Father are one." (*John 10:30*) One hears a similar echo in the gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*, discovered in 1946 near Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt: "But the Kingdom is in your interior." (*Logion 3:7*)

In the gospels, the verb "to seek" figures in many significant places: "He who seeks should not stop seeking." "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God..." (*Luke 12:31*) "Seek and ye shall find..." (*Matthew 7:7*) — like the inward enquiry timelessly recommended by the Maharshi which culminates in the death of the ego. Find out who you are, says Bhagavan. What is important is that we question ourselves on the manner in which we read such statements and study the Gospels in particular, and the sacred texts in general.

But have we really learnt to read? "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" asks St. Luke (10:26). Yes. How do we read today? Whether with pain or joy, do we not read in a way which keeps us learned illiterates? Yes, *how* do we approach this inner and outer freedom which is in us, but which we have not learnt to see or hear, not to mention to live. To shed our ego, St. Paul's "old man", and replace him with the "new man", the Self, who renews himself ceaselessly in the image of the One.

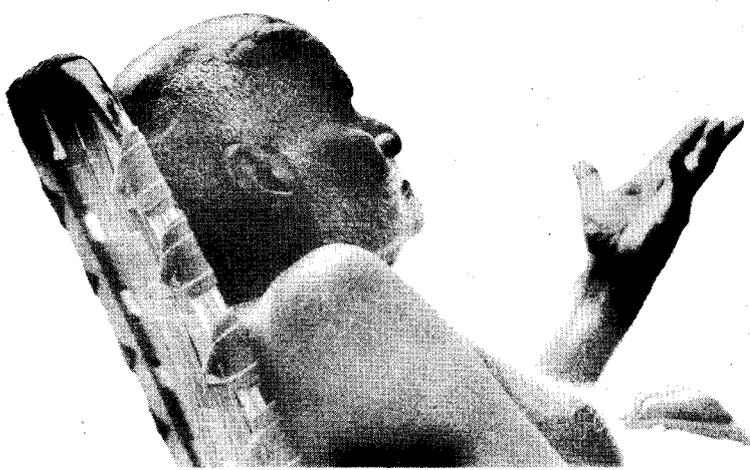
Much more markedly than in Hinduism, the emergence of Christianity in history raises a number of questions for those who poorly understand the individual aspect of the quest for Knowledge. The central problem here stems from the meaning of the word "Kingdom" in the

Gospels. Whereas Christ (but while writing this am I not prompted by the vision of the Maharshi?) turns his listeners towards personal Realisation, the Kingdom within, the disciples, for the most part, saw it as something external, such as driving away the Romans from their land — the kingdom without — ignoring Christ's assertion that "the Kingdom of God is within you." (*Luke 17:20-21*), insensitive to the symbolism of the inner life. The birds of the sky shall precede us if the Kingdom is in the sky; the fish shall precede us if it is in the sea. But the Kingdom is in our interior, says St. Thomas. (*Gospel of Thomas, Logion 3*)

And what about the dimension of Christ? Is it yours or is it necessarily linked, in your eyes, to an outer world, to an event in history? The only honest answer is that it is both historical *and* universal. How can you in any manner exclude your person, your "I" from it? Personally, I cannot exclude myself from this universality, but I ask myself why, in such circumstances? Why Christ? If, because of one's heritage or religious inclination, one lives, like I do, in the dynamic tension of the words of Christ, then this issue of "chance" need not be altered, only deepened.

The Christ transcends the Mosaic Law just as the Maharshi goes beyond the laws of Manu and the Hindu moral codes: the limitations of religious proscriptions are obliterated, and what remains is only the inner realisation of the individual, occurring thus unexpectedly in both Palestine and South India. And the great ones who personify this realisation and manifest it are, simultaneously, at a place and a point in time and yet at *all* places and *all* points in time. "Before Abraham was, I am." (*John 8:58*) "Where could I go?" said the Maharshi before his death, "I am here".

The very range of the debate seems to me to awaken an awareness of the universality represented by the message of the Maharshi, who finally answers, through the constant enquiry of "Who am I?", the totality of questions posed by seekers from all religions.



Obeisance to Sri Kunju Swami, the Delight of Devotees

By V. Ganesan

Last photo of Sri Kunju Swami taken ten days before his samadhi

A major chapter in the Book of Ramana has ended.

Imagine a perfect fusion of the brilliance of the sun, the coolness of the moon, the joy of twinkling stars, the fresh aroma of herbs, the life-giving energy of the earth, the pleasantness of the breeze, the innocence of a child, the helplessness of a weary athlete, and the fullness of a desireless ascetic.

Now add: wisdom born of listening, learning, sharing and living; the memory of an elephant; total and devoted surrender; inherent humility, strengthened by association with *mahatmas*; a compassion embracing even the most ignorant and arrogant; and simplicity, pure and true to the core.

The sum of all these was our beloved Kunju Swami.

Kunju Swami came as a young man of 23 years to Bhagavan in 1920, while Maharshi was living on the hill at Skandashram. He was from Kerala and knew little Tamil. He waited for initiation, *upadesa*, from Sadguru Ramana. Come it did, though in a cryptic way.

Bhagavan was attending very tenderly on four puppies. That day, Bhagavan made gruel for them and told Kunju Swami, "Catch the four." Kunju Swami understood it to mean, "Hold on to the four *Mahavakyas*."¹

Then Bhagavan said, "Leave them one by one." For Kunju Swami, it meant, "Leave your habits — good, bad, indifferent — one by one."

When the puppies urinated or defecated, Bhagavan said, "Wipe clean." Kunju Swami thought, "This means: keep your mind clean by wiping out all impurities."

These three commandments remained with Kunju Swami as permanent guidelines for the rest of his life.

Ever since, till his *samadhi* on August 7, 1992, he did nothing but breathe Ramana's glory, speak of His grandeur, sing Ramana's hymns in his euphonious voice, and enthuse *sadhaks* to take to *Atma-vichara*.

He spent the evening of his life within Sri Ramanasramam, without going out anywhere. When admirers invited him to visit their native places, he squarely rejected them all, saying, "I have taken *marana sannyasa* — a vow not to move away from the place occupied." Ramana, Arunachala and the Ashram — these were his home and universe.

¹ The *Mahavakyas* are the Upanishadic pronouncements on the identity of the individual soul with the Absolute, imparted by the guru at the time of initiation into *sannyasa*.

At the age of 96 years, he attained his Sadguru's Holy Feet fully conscious, at 1.30 a.m., with a serene face and seated in *padmasana*, the lotus posture. His body was interred according to traditional injunctions and within the Ashram premises at the foot of Arunachala, with all the rites of *abhisheka* and *aarati* due to a *sannyasi*.

Devotees in large numbers, singing "*Arunachala Siva*", paid their last homage to this servant of the Master of Masters.

Kunju Swami once said, "I am the child of Bhagavan. I know nothing. Bhagavan is my Father, my Mother, and everything to me." This child is now restored to the lap of Mother-Ramana.

* * *

Some of us were with Kunju Swami the week before his *samadhi*. He was weak and his eyes were closed. We wanted to draw him into active conversation. I provoked him thus, "Swami! Anuradha says she likes *Guru Stuti* best. I prefer *Hashtamalaka*. Whose side do you take?" Smt. Anuradha interjected, "What he means is that in *Guru Stuti* every verse ends with the words 'You are That', while *Hashtamalaka* ends with 'I am That'."

Without any hesitation, Kunju Swami said in a clear voice, "Both are equally correct. 'You' and 'I' both refer to the same Truth. Though two words are used, the essence that they refer to is the One Self only!"

We were amazed that such resonant words could issue from one who was so weak, and looked so totally withdrawn, with eyes closed.



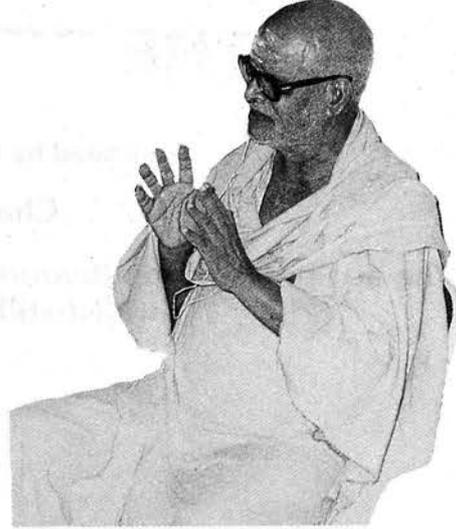
Anjali to
Sri Kunju Swami

Obtaining his permission, we started reciting both the works, as translated by Bhagavan into Tamil verse from the Sanskrit original. Others joined us. Tears rolled down Kunju Swami's cheeks. Witnessing this marvel of devotion, we too were in tears of ecstasy.

We wanted Kunju Swami to talk again. "Swami! You taught us *Nool Thirattu* (Maharshi's collected works in the Tamil original). We are holding on to it with all our dedication. What more *sadhana* would you prescribe?"

Sharp came his reply. "*Nool Thirattu* — one work alone is enough. Stay with it. Recite it, understand it, practise it. Thus, Bhagavan will always be with you. What *sadhana* is needed other than having Bhagavan all the time on your lips, mind and heart? *Nool Thirattu* is enough. Nothing else is required!" As I left him, I wondered how truly these words of Swami summed up his own life. These turned out to be the last words I heard from him. We cherish them as the testament of devotion from an incomparable devotee.

On behalf of the innumerable admirers of Sri Kunju Swami all over the world and that of the Ashram, our grateful thanks go to those who served Kunju Swami in his last days with love, dedication and tender care: Smt Pankajakshi



Ammal, Smt Srividya, Sri Thiagarajan, Sri Lakshmanan, Sri Narayanan, Sri Velayuda Swami, Sri Chandramouli, Sri Palaniappan, Sri Viswanathan and Sri Suresh. Special thanks go to Dr T. Ganesh, our Ashram doctor, who looked after Kunju Swami's health for the past six years. Swami Ramanananda performed the *abhishekam* and the last rites.

For those who moved closely with Kunju Swami, his physical absence will ever remain an unfillable void. Yet, where could he go? He is here, with us, in our hearts, as pulsating *bhakti* to Guru Ramana!



Swami's 95th birth celebration: (l. to r.) Sri Ilayaraja, Sri Kunju Swami and our Editor

THE RIBHU GITA

Translated by ROBERT BUTLER

Chapter 8

The attributes of the *jivanmukta*, the sage who is liberated whilst still in the body.

1. Nidaga, in this chapter I shall impart to you the teaching concerning the attributes of the *jivanmukta*. The *jivanmukta* is one who dwells in the deep peace of that Self whose nature is abundant and everlasting bliss. The *jivanmukta* is one who is possessed of the firm conviction that he himself is that supreme *Brahman* which, noble, deathless and all-pervading, its nature intelligence and bliss, is inseparable from the Self which in turn is of the form of pure consciousness.
2. The *jivanmukta* is one who possesses the unbroken awareness: 'I myself am that supreme *Brahman* whose nature is the ultimate bliss of pure consciousness, the highest reality, beyond the reach of *sattva* and the other *gunas*.' The *jivanmukta* is one who holds the ineradicable conviction: 'I myself am that supreme eternal Self whose form is true knowledge, and whose nature is oneness, overflowing bliss and pure knowledge, untouched by the impermanence of the three bodily sheaths.'
3. Totally free of the identification with the body and all the rest, the *jivanmukta* is one who abides eternally in the state of highest bliss, which consists in the firm and single-minded conviction: '*Brahman* is none other than my own Self.' The *jivanmukta* is one who dwells in a state free of delusion, completely free of the debilitating awareness of a personal self, his inner self one with the supreme divine intelligence. Attaining to that state of supreme bliss, he dwells in holy silence.
4. The *jivanmukta* is one who has concentrated his purified mind upon the divine intelligence until his own self is dissolved and become one with it, his mind ceasing to reflect upon all the phenomena originating in the illusory power of *maya*. The *jivanmukta* is one who, having conquered his attachment to that dream-like manifestation which begins with the body and spreads out to encompass the entire universe, remains a holy one, firmly established in the eternal bliss of divine love.
5. Becoming eternally one with the supreme Self and reflecting, 'That universal consciousness is myself alone,' the *jivanmukta* dwells in the form of supreme bliss, quite free of any sense of an individual self. His mind motionless like a rock, his soul purified, intent on the faultless condition of final emancipation, the *jivanmukta* is one who has become absorbed once and for all into that blissful state of the awareness of the real.
6. Having thoroughly rejected the process of thought with its endless diversity, abiding in

- the peace of the indivisible One, the *jivanmukta* is one who is established in the state which lies beyond differentiation, beyond that illusory reality which generates the pairs of opposites. The *jivanmukta* is one who adheres steadfastly to the certain knowledge: 'For me there is no *maya*, which the mind cannot encompass, no mind, no intellect, no memory, no arrogant sense of self, no life force, no organs of sense, no physical body. I am *Brahman* only.'
7. The *jivanmukta* is one who adheres steadfastly to the certain knowledge: 'For me, in this state, hearing and the other senses do not exist. Those twin enemies, desire and anger, do not exist. Vices and virtues with the lessons they impart do not exist. This whole illusory reality does not exist. By virtue of the non-existence of will and all the other faculties of mind, there is no liberation or demeaning bondage, for I am that *Brahman* in whom all of these things are not.'
 8. The *jivanmukta* is one who dwells in the firm conviction: 'Existing independently of my own self, there is no gross body nor any of the other bodies; no waking state, nor any of the other states, nor any of the individuals who experience those states; no individuality, no aggregation, no world, whether subjective or objective in its nature. Existing independently of myself, there is nothing whatever, for *Brahman* is my own Self.'
 9. The *jivanmukta* is one who dwells in the firm conviction: 'Existing independently of my own self, there are no holy waters, no ritual bathing-places, no gods, no sacred sites, nor any holy service, no righteous path, no sin, no birth, no bondage, no holy wisdom or final emancipation. Existing independently of myself, there is nothing whatsoever, for *Brahman* is my own Self.'
 10. The *jivanmukta* is one who possesses the realisation: 'Existing independently of my own self, there is no command or prohibition, no master or disciple, no teaching which embraces the supreme, no time and no space, no *Vedas* and no written works. There is nothing which exists independently of myself, for that Self is none other than *Brahman*.'
 11. The *jivanmukta* is one who possesses the realisation: 'Existing independently of my own self, there is no earth, no five elements, no physical manifestation whatsoever. There is no whole and no part, no oneness and no duality, nothing near or far, high or low, nothing to praise, nothing to be scorned, for I am none other than *Brahman*.'
 12. The *jivanmukta* is one who possesses the realisation: 'Existing independently of my own self, there is no family, clan, caste or moral law, no action or any fruit of it, no cause and no effect, no knowledge and no ignorance, no meditation and no realised state, no voice and no sound, for I am none other than *Brahman*.'
 13. The *jivanmukta* is one who possesses the realisation: 'Existing independently of my own self, there is no penance or reciting of the holy name, no *mantra* or *tantra*, no sacrificial fire, no propitiatory rites, no night, no day, no sun, no *Brahma*, *Vishnu* or *Siva*, nor any God in heaven, for I am none other than *Brahman*.'
 14. The *jivanmukta* is one who possesses the all-transcending knowledge: 'For myself in this state, there is no heat and no cold, no victory and no defeat, neither fear nor fearlessness, no hunger and thirst, which are like a sickness, no thought or the ills it brings, no top or bottom, nothing above and nothing below, for I am that *Brahman* whose nature is knowledge.'
 15. The *jivanmukta* is one who possesses the indivisible supreme knowledge: 'For myself in this state, there are no directions and no intermediate directions, nothing which can

- be called either interior or exterior, nothing concerning which a question might be made, nothing to which the thought process might apply itself, nothing which the act of cognition takes as its object, for I am that supreme *Brahman*, separate from which nothing can exist.'
16. The *jivanmukta* is one who dwells ever in the conviction: 'For myself in this state, the manifold objects of pleasure do not exist, nor does the sense of enjoyment, which seeks to embrace them; there is no fickle desire, no abiding tranquility, no unstable state where discrimination is lacking, no worldly bond which is impossible to shake off, for I am that *Brahman*, immovable and supreme.'
 17. The *jivanmukta* is one who possesses the firm conviction: 'For myself in this state, there is neither pleasure nor displeasure, neither delight nor rejoicing, no mistaking of the false for the real, giving rise to duality, nothing to be refuted and nothing to be asserted, no abiding practice of union with the divine, for I am that very *Brahman* whose nature is Oneness.'
 18. The *jivanmukta* is one who abides steadfastly in the knowledge: 'For myself in this state there is no birth, no existence, no growth, no maturity, no ageing and no death, no enveloping skin, nor any other bodily parts, no distinctions at all for the mind to grasp, no *dvaita* or *advaita* or any other philosophical system, for I am the Supreme, the fulfillment of all knowledge.'
 19. The *jivanmukta* is one who dwells in a state beyond all comparison in which he affirms: 'The colours black, white and red do not exist, neither do the myriad names and forms which men perceive; there is no confusion or clear understanding, nothing which is hidden, and no vast expanse of space, no joy or sorrow, no religious observances. For myself in this state there are no differentiated entities, for I am the all-encompassing supreme *Brahman*.'
 20. The *jivanmukta* is one who dwells in a state beyond all distinctions in which he affirms: 'Nothing exists to be rejected as faulty or embraced as agreeable. The God, Guru and disciple of which men speak do not exist, neither does the glorious triad of knower, known and knowledge. There are no sentient beings nor any inanimate objects without intelligence. For myself in this state there is no contact with anything whatsoever, whether auspicious or inauspicious, for I am the supreme *Brahman* in whom there is no differentiation.'
 21. The *jivanmukta* is one who unwaveringly abides in the knowledge: 'There is nothing which exists in a transcendent mode. The soul and the non-soul are equally unreal. The imagined reward of heaven and all the rest do not exist, nor does the faultless learning which men assiduously practise. For myself in this state doubt and equanimity in their manifold degrees, the cultivation of self-restraint and tranquility, all do not exist, for I am the Self-absorbed supreme *Brahman*.'
 22. The *jivanmukta* is one who remains ever resolute, affirming: 'For myself in this state the diversity which engenders dissatisfaction does not exist, neither do the worlds in their endless variety. Here there is nothing to be spumed, nothing to be acted upon, no voice which speaks out, dispelling the darkness, no attainment of the condition of divine silence, for I am that most exalted supreme *Brahman*.'
 23. The *jivanmukta* is one who possesses the realisation: 'Primordial matter, which is synonymous with the three *gunas*, is not. *Maya*, which is prior to the glorious *sattva guna*, is not. *Avidya*, which is prior to the other two *gunas*, is not. The principle of darkness, which is prior to darkness itself, is not. Due to the absence of any limiting adjuncts to be applied, the celebrated trinity of God, the soul and the world does not exist, for I am the supreme *Brahman*, the One who exists beyond duality.'

24. He is a *jivanmukta* who in this manner ceaselessly affirms his unshakeable certainty:

'The "I" is the very form of the blissful knowledge of the real!

The "I" is the very form of the blissful knowledge of the real!

The "I" is the very form of the blissful knowledge of the eternal!

The "I" is the very form of the blissful knowledge of the eternal!

The "I" is the form of the pure and all-embracing Supreme!

The "I" is the form of the pure and all-embracing Supreme!

25. The *jivanmukta* is one whose form is not different from *Brahman*. Free of all bonds, he has attained the unequivocal realisation that the supreme *Brahman*, intent only upon Itself, abiding in Its own effulgent nature, as Itself alone, is none other than his own Self. The *jivanmukta* is one who has become firmly established in the Self, which knows no other, and experiences the deep joy of that state. Dwelling within that Self, as himself, totally alone, he enjoys the bliss of his own Self.

26. He who is extolled above all others, the *jivanmukta* is one who, through his meditation, has become one with the noble Self-nature of *Brahman*. Liberated from all the mind's endless modifications, and oblivious to all this illusory world of appearances, which manifests as God, the world and the

individual self, he has attained the highest bliss, firmly establishing himself in the exalted knowledge of *Brahman*.

27. Nidaga, I have here flawlessly revealed to you in all its deep significance that certain knowledge concerning the *jivanmukta* which the Supreme Lord Siva in former times imparted to me through His own sweet grace. The import of these words, is deeper, more subtle, more recondite than all the *Vedas* and *Sastras*. He who hears these words even once with deep devotion and mind undivided, and comprehends their meaning, will himself become one with the Supreme.

28. They who, like those who argue that there is no God at all, rely upon the mind's divisive judgement and torment their bodies in accordance with the prescriptions of the ritual and sacrificial portions of the *Rig* and other *Vedas*, believing that thus they will reach heaven's eternal state, will never attain to the pure bliss of *Brahman*, but only to the sorrow of birth and death.

29. Those great devotees who embark upon that sturdy vessel which is the perfect knowledge gained through the worship of Lord Siva, alone shall cross over the wide ocean of becoming. So it is certain that none other shall cross the ocean of birth, even though it be, like the horn on the head of a hare, an empty fiction. So it was that the wise Ribhu described to Nidaga the distinguishing characteristics of the *jivanmukta*.

The disciples asked the Master to speak to them of death. "What will it be like?"

It will be as if a veil is ripped apart and you will say in wonder, 'So it is all along!'

de Mello, S.J.

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Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

PEARLS OF WISDOM

The latest addition to spiritual treatises is this welcome new book by Dr. Robert Powell: THE WISDOM OF SRI NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ (Price:\$10.95), published by Globe Press Books, Inc., P.O.Box 2045, Madison Station, New York, NY-10159, USA. Robert Powell's introduction is superb and Milo Clark's narration of 'A Day with Maharaj' transports one to the presence of Maharaj itself. We quote a selection from the pearls of wisdom of Sri Maharaj, so dedicatedly culled and recorded by the author.

"What happens to the body and the mind may not be within your power to change, but you can always put an end to your imagining yourself to be body and mind. Whatever happens, remind yourself that only your body and mind are affected, not yourself."

*

"There can be no consciousness without awareness, but there can be awareness without consciousness, as in deep sleep."

*

"While the mind is centered in the body, and consciousness is centered in the mind, awareness is free. The body has its urges and mind its pains and pleasures. Awareness is unattached and unshaken. It is lucid, silent, peaceful, alert and unafraid, without desire and fear. Meditate on it as your true being and try to be it in your daily life, and you shall realize it in its fullness."

*

"Awareness becomes consciousness when it has an object. The object changes all the time. In consciousness there is movement; awareness by itself is motionless and timeless, here and now."

*

"Remembering yourself is virtue, forgetting yourself is sin."

*

"The world and the mind are states of being. The Supreme is not a state. It pervades all states, but it is not a state of something else."

*

"Your own Self is your ultimate teacher. The outer teacher is merely a milestone. It is only your inner teacher that will walk with you to the goal, for he is the goal."

*

".....ultimately you are the proof that God exists, not the other way round. For before any question about God can be put, you must be there to put it."

*

"By no effort of logic or imagination can you change the 'I am' into 'I am not.' In the very denial of your being you assert it. Once you realize that the world is your own projection, you are free of it."

*

"Consciousness and unconsciousness, while in the body, depend on the condition of the brain. But the Self is beyond both, beyond the brain, beyond the mind. The fault of the instrument is no reflection on its user."

*

"The illusion of being the body-mind is there only because it is not investigated. Non-investigation is the thread on which all the states of mind are strung."

*

"This talk of personal Self and universal Self is the learner's stage; go beyond, do not be stuck in duality."

*

"The mind cannot know what is beyond the mind, but the mind is known by what is beyond it."

*

"You are concerned with your own happiness and I am telling you that there is no such thing. Happiness is never your own, it is where the 'I' is not."

*

"The 'here' is everywhere, and the 'now' always. Go beyond the 'I-am-the-body' idea, and you will find that space and time are in you and not you in space and time. Once you have understood this, the main obstacle to realization is removed."

*



THE THREE HERMITS*

ONCE upon a time there lived on a desert isle three aged and pious religious hermits. They were very, very old, so old that none of them could remember how old he was, nor how long he had been there. Their long, white beards hung down to their waists, and their faces were wizened with age. So old were they, and so long had they been secluded on their desert isle that they had long ago forgotten all they knew. Their daily devotions consisted of but a single prayer:

"You are Three, we are three — bless us!"

This they performed reverently many times throughout the day, facing east, with heads bowed, first the eldest, then the next older, and then the youngest, standing side by side, holding hands:

"You are Three, we are three — bless us!"

One day a bishop was sailing along in his ship, inspecting all the various religious communities under his jurisdiction to make sure that they were adhering to the canons of the faith, when he spotted this hitherto unknown island and noted that it appeared inhabited. He ordered the ship to draw ashore. It so happened

that the three hermits were not far off and, noticing the arrival of the luxurious ship and the bishop in his magnificent robes, they approached reverently and bowed at his feet. The bishop shrank somewhat: they were dirty, their clothes were in shreds. Nevertheless, he made the sign of the Cross over them and asked them to stand. Then he began to question them as to their origin, length of stay on the island, and what religious austerities they were performing to their merit. The three hermits bowed their heads and explained that all they knew or did was to hold hands and repeat a single prayer. "Show me," said the bishop.

"You are Three, we are three — bless us!"

"What!" he exclaimed in astonishment and not a little indignation. "Is that it? What kind of prayer is that? I never heard of such a thing! Who taught it to you?"

* Although this story was most recently re-told by Leo Tolstoi, it exists in many religious traditions to illustrate one and the same spiritual truth. The hermits' prayer refers to the Christian mystery of God as a Trinity.

The hermits answered that, as with everything else, they couldn't remember.

The bishop couldn't believe his ears. "You mean no Divine Liturgy, no recitation of psalms, no scripture reading?" It was then that he learned that the three hermits were quite illiterate.

"Well," he said, grasping at one remaining hope, "at least you repeat the 'Our Father' every day?"

"'Our Father'?" said the youngest and most alert. "'Our Father'?... Perhaps.....No. If I ever did know it it is most certainly forgotten." The others hung their heads.

"What!" exclaimed the bishop. "The most important prayer in the whole Christian faith! The cornerstone, the very foundation of our glorious religion, given to us by Jesus Christ Himself! Forgotten?!"

The three hermits continued to hang their heads silently, ashamed.

"Well," said the bishop, "this most certainly will not do. As your bishop, your spiritual well-being is my responsibility. As your spiritual shepherd I owe it to you to teach you at least this one orthodox prayer so that your souls may find some rest in the afterlife."

The three hermits agreed readily enough, but they all found it very hard going. For one, they

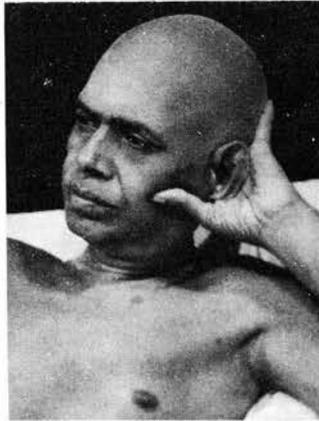
were all quite hard of hearing and the bishop had to repeat himself many times to make himself understood. Then also, due to their extreme age, their memories were not what they could be, and the memorisation was long and tedious. In the end, although the prayer takes only two minutes to recite, it took the bishop all day, from dawn till dusk, with innumerable stumblings and repetitions, to satisfy himself that, between the three of them, the hermits had mastered the prayer. At last, as dusk fell, he bade them farewell and counselled them to repeat the prayer as often as possible throughout the day. With this, he climbed into his ship and sailed off.

The sun had set. The moon had not yet risen, and the night was very dark. The bishop sat on the deck of the ship performing his accustomed prayers. Suddenly there came a cry from the sailors as they all ran to gather at the stern of the ship. The bishop looked up to see what was going on.

"Look! Over there!" cried the sailors. The bishop looked and beheld a strange spectacle: a radiant point of light was moving on the water and approaching their ship. He stared incredulously. As the point of light approached, it grew in size until it was like a blazing sun. Within that sun the bishop beheld the three hermits, running over the water, hand in hand.

As they neared the ship the three hermits waved their arms and cried, "Wait! Come back! We forgot your prayer!"





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DESERVE IT, OWN IT!

By V. Ganesan

IN the mid-sixties, *The Mountain Path* generated great interest among readers and devotees. It was already being acclaimed as the “best spiritual journal in India”. My most revered Arthur Osborne had set a unique pattern of disseminating the essence of all religions through the journal and his brilliant articles. Reputable authors proudly offered their articles to *The Mountain Path*. A new horizon in spiritual journalism had dawned!

Yet, there were mounting criticisms too. A few devotees expressed their opposition to our invariably publishing photographs of Sri Bhagavan in every issue, in addition to a frontispiece of His comely form. Their stand was: “Maharshi’s teaching denies giving recognition to the body. When *dehatma buddhi* (I-am-the-body idea) is the obstacle to Self-realisation why deify Maharshi’s body, almost to the point of idol worship, by printing his picture with every article?”

In front of St. Peter’s Square, Rome



I conveyed this vehement criticism to Mr. Osborne. He smiled and said, "The bondage under which man squirms is due to his inextricable attachment to names and forms, beginning with his own. Release from this bondage of name and form can be achieved only through the wise application of the *nama* and *rupa* of the Guru. The *Sadguru's* name and form are not the same as ours. Moreover, in some corner of the world, a yearning soul, a suffering *sadhak* is pining, waiting perhaps to get redemption by having a *darshan* of a picture of Bhagavan.

"Never commit the mistake of treating the *Sadguru* as merely a normal human being. Refer to *Supplement to Ulladu Narpadu*, v. 39: 'Never use the sense of non-duality towards the Guru'. All our efforts, expenditure, labour, distribution — everything connected with the journal — will be fully justified if such a suffering soul is helped, redeemed!"

With these pithy sentences, Arthur Osborne not only cleared my doubts but also gave me an invaluable glimpse into a different dimension of Bhagavan's presence, which formed one of the powerful guidelines for my future.

* * *

In 1990, when I was invited to tour the United States of America, I had no presumptions that I was going on a mission. In my heart, I appealed to Sri Bhagavan: "Bhagavan! How is it that You have chosen me, the meekest of Your children; ill-equipped, immature, and non-starter that I am?" Then I remembered Mr. Osborne's words: "Maybe there's a deserving soul waiting, in some corner of the world, for a *darshan* of the *nama* and *rupa* of Sri Bhagavan. Let me serve the purpose of a spoon, Bhagavan the food, and the yearning soul the hungry man." This gave me the confidence to undertake my first tour, and subsequent tours in 1991 and 1992.

On my first trip, I would deliver talks on four consecutive evenings: the first on His life, the second on His teachings, the third on His senior devotees, and the fourth on His compassion for animals. Though I am neither a seasoned nor a professional speaker, I was guided by Him in maintaining *Atma Vichara* as the undercurrent of all these talks. Later, in 1991 and 1992, I felt that listener-participation was very important, so 'speeches' became *satsanghs* — discussion, questions-and-answers, talks, all rolled into one. It worked. The audiences were happy. I was happy.

Every time I returned from abroad, friends and inmates of the Ashram insisted that I give a detailed talk about the tour. I have politely refused but perhaps it may be fitting if I write some aspects of it in these columns.

Before I venture to share a few interesting incidents that took place during these pilgrimages I wish to outline the emphasis of my talks on Sri Bhagavan's teachings. As recommended in the *Kaivalya Navaneeta*, a seeker should again and again remember and recount the Master's *upadesa* (spiritual instructions).

* * *



Sri Ramana Maharshi's life and teaching are inseparable. His teaching *is* His life. His "death-experience" is central to them both. It is essential to read, any number of times, the full narration of this unique spiritual experience from His own holy lips. Likewise, never refrain from reading, again and again, His small book: *Who Am I?* Each time you read it, one more inner door opens. It is not a compendium of intellectual or emotional statements. Every word uttered therein by our Master, is by itself a spiritual experience.

Sri Bhagavan's message was never meant only for Hindus or Indians. The core of Sri Bhagavan's teaching — which He not only taught but *lived* throughout His life — is that there is only one Truth, one Self, and that it is not confined to any religion or dogma, but lies at the heart of each individual as the very essence of his being. Once a person truly *knows* himself, he knows the Truth and, in the words of another great Master, "the Truth shall make him free."

Sri Bhagavan was a normal 16-year-old schoolboy, sitting in His uncle's house, when a sudden fear of death overwhelmed Him. He met death face to face, and thereby emerged as the deathless Self. In His own words:

"The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally, without actually framing the words: 'Now death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.' And I at once dramatised the occurrence of death. I lay with my limbs stretched out stiff as though rigor mortis had set in and imitated a corpse so as to give greater reality to the enquiry. I held my breath and kept my lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape, so that neither the word 'I' nor any other word could be uttered. 'Well then', I said to myself, 'this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body, am I dead? Is the body I? It is silent and inert, but I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the 'I' within me, apart from it. So I am Spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means that I am the deathless Spirit.' All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as living truth which I perceived directly, almost without thought-process. 'I' was something very real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with my body was centered on that 'I'. From that moment onwards the 'I' or Self focussed attention on itself by a

powerful fascination. Fear of death had vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on. Other thoughts might come and go like the various notes of music, but the 'I' continued like the fundamental *sruti* note that underlies and blends with all the other notes. Whether the body was engaged in talking, reading or anything else, I was still centred in 'I'. Previous to that crisis I had no clear perception of my Self and was not consciously attracted to it. I felt no perceptible or direct interest in it, much less any inclination to dwell permanently in it."

* * *

Years later, Sri Bhagavan elaborated on this to Paul Brunton, the Western seeker who imbibed His teachings so deeply that he was able to popularise them in the West. Sri Bhagavan explained:

"To understand this matter it is first necessary for a man to analyse himself. Because it has all along been his habit to think as others think, he has never faced his 'I' in the true manner. He has not a correct picture of himself; he has too long identified himself with the body and the brain. Therefore, I tell you to pursue this enquiry, 'Who am I?' You ask me to describe this true Self to you. What can be said? It is That out of which the sense of the personal 'I' arises and into which it will have to disappear."

"Disappear?" asked Brunton. "How can one lose the feeling of one's personality?"

Sri Bhagavan explained that "the first and foremost of all thoughts, the primeval thought in the mind of everyone, is the thought 'I'. It is only after the birth of this thought that any other thoughts can arise at all. It is only after the first personal pronoun, 'I', has arisen in the mind that the second personal pronoun, 'you', can make its appearance. If you could mentally follow the 'I'-thread until it led you back to its source, you would discover that, just as it is the first thought to appear, so it is the last thought to disappear. This is a matter which can be experienced."

Brunton was astonished. "You mean that it is possible to conduct such a mental investigation into oneself?"





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"Certainly," assured Sri Bhagavan. "It is possible to go inwards until the last thought, 'I', gradually vanishes."

"But what is then left?" asked Brunton. "Will a man then become quite unconscious or will he become an idiot?"

"No," answered Bhagavan. "On the contrary, he will attain that consciousness which is immortal, and he will become truly wise when he has awakened to his true Self, which is the real nature of everyone. When a man knows his true Self for the first time, something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him. That something is behind the mind; it is infinite, divine, eternal. Some people call it the Kingdom of Heaven, others call it the Soul, and others again Nirvana or Liberation; you may give it whatever name you wish. When this happens a man has not really lost himself — rather he has found himself at last."

* * *

How to practise Self-Enquiry? Who is the 'I' who makes the enquiry?

'Everyone refers to himself as 'I'. Millions and millions of bodies, all refer to themselves as 'I'. Are there so many millions of 'I' s? Or, conversely, is there only one 'I', to which these countless bodies refer? Yes, the 'I' is a symbol of something immeasurably wider than itself. What, then, is this 'I'?

In the body, which is insentient, there arises a sense of alertness, a sensation of 'I'. This is termed as 'mind'. Bhagavan Ramana says that if one investigates the mind, it is seen to be a bundle of thoughts. On scrutinising what remains after eliminating all thoughts, it will be found that there is no such thing as mind apart from thought. Thoughts themselves constitute the mind. Mind is, therefore, a function wherein the 'I' serves as the basis of all thoughts. All thoughts are related to you. Every thought is either about you or connected to you as an individual, object, thing, event or opinion. All these are rooted in you as 'I'; thus, the 'I' in you is only an 'I'-thought, the ground for the entire gamut of countless thoughts.

How to enquire into the source of thought?

When we have thoughts, if we pose the question, "For whom is this thought?" the answer will be, "To me." Then ask, "Who am I?" This questioning, "Who am I?" again draws our attention to the 'I' or the 'I'-thought. Such keen attention leads one to one's Source. Thus, focussing one's attention on oneself is the only effort one has to make to find out one's true identity.

Sage Vasishtha enlightened Lord Rama thus: "Shining in everybody as 'I'-'I' is nothing but the Self on which one has to meditate.... With the stick of enquiry, strike the fierce-looking mind and snake-like senses and make them abide in the Heart."

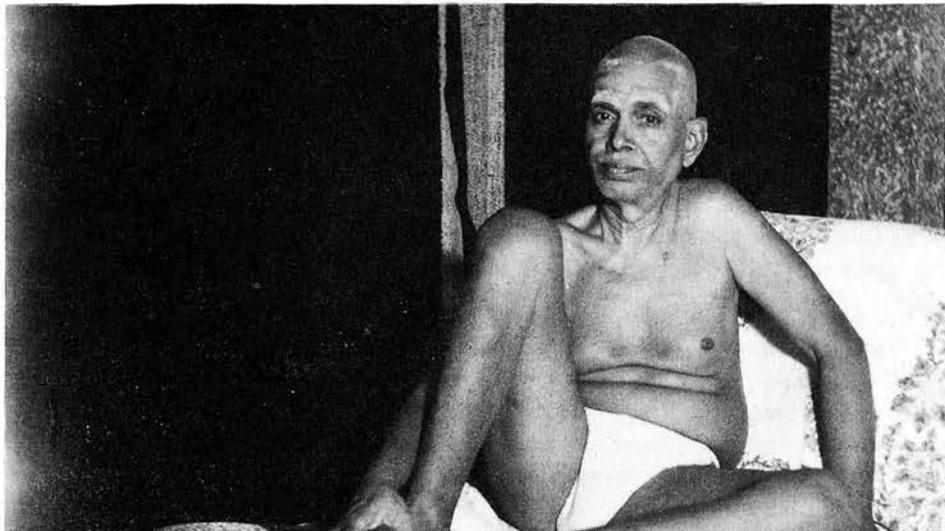
Remaining in a state where there is no trace of even a single thought is the state of Silence, the threshold of the Self.

* * *

The uniqueness of Maharshi's teaching lies in the importance He gives to the individual. He said, "You are the Truth. God is within you. Self is all. If there is no God within you, there is no God outside you. If there is no Reality or Truth within you, there is no Reality or Truth without you.

"You are the goal and you are the path. You are the *siddhi* (attainment) and you are the *sadhana* (effort). Own it, deserve it, be it. To remain as you are is the teaching of all scriptures. What can be simpler and more direct than to be as you are. Simple being is the Self. You are ever that Self."

* * *





At Chinmaya Mission in Chicago

My hesitation over embarking on the tour was initially dispelled by the prophetic words of Arthur Osborne. Thanks to three individual sponsors — to whom I am deeply grateful — for all three tours, financial worries were totally absent. Also, on hearing of my proposed visit, overseas devotees of Sri Bhagavan wholeheartedly welcomed me. Yet, some hesitation still remained. I felt the necessity for confirmation and blessing from a saint.

I went to Sri Yogi Ramsuratkumar, the *siddha purusha* who lives near the Temple of Sri Arunachaleswara in Tiruvannamalai. I told him: “Swamiji! I don’t know why I am being sent out like this. I am interested neither in travel nor in sightseeing...” Before I could complete my sentence, the Yogi interrupted with a smile, “What to do, Ganesha? You have to go abroad. You have to give talks on Sri Bhagavan. Everything will be all right... Father’s Grace.... Go Ganesha, go!”

The die was cast and I began my first tour abroad, leaving India for London on August 5, 1990.

* * *

Satsangh, meeting with devotees, is my mainstay. It energises me as well as guides me in my *sadhana*.

The Ramana Maharshi Foundation, London, was to be inaugurated on August 12, 1990, and I was staying at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Ramana-devotees from France, Germany, Italy and other places participated. The whole congregation was a thrilling Ramana-moment!

Three elderly devotees from France, led by Mme. Edith Deri, narrated a “simple coincidence”. When they were coming to London from Paris, they had requested their friend to find simple accommodation for them all. They did not specify the location of the inaugural function, much less mention the name Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. On arrival at their lodgings, they found that the Bhavan was immediately adjacent in the next compound with only a wall separating them. This enabled the four of us to enjoy each other’s company, and speak of Sri Bhagavan, for three whole days. What a blessing from Bhagavan for His chosen children!

* * *

In these three years, during my pilgrimages to the USA, Canada, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Japan, I delivered over forty talks. Before each meeting, I would behold each one in the audience as Sri Bhagavan's *rupa* (form) and mentally prostrate to each of them. Then, closing my eyes and folding my palms together, I would pay obeisance to the Lotus Feet of my *Satguru*, Bhagavan Ramana, and chant aloud, "OM NAMO BHAGAVATE SRI RAMANAYA" — three times. Remaining silent for a few moments, I would offer salutations to Sri Yogi Ramsuratkumar and to Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (years ago, it was Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj who repeatedly insisted upon my delivering talks. When I voiced my incapacity, Maharaj said, "The one who now says, 'I can't give talks,' is not going to talk. Open your mouth. The talk will pour forth from the one within who never speaks!"). It was only then that I would commence my talk.

* * *

For the past two decades, an old devotee had been requesting me to reprint *Mahanirvana*, a booklet published in 1950 after Sri Bhagavan attained *Brahma Nirvana*. But there were others who dissuaded me from doing so on the grounds that to read about His last days, filled with physical suffering, was itself a torture. Also, strangely, no copy was available, not even in our Ashram archives. Last year, the same old devotee salvaged a worn copy and insisted again on its reprinting. I kept it in a drawer in the Asram office.

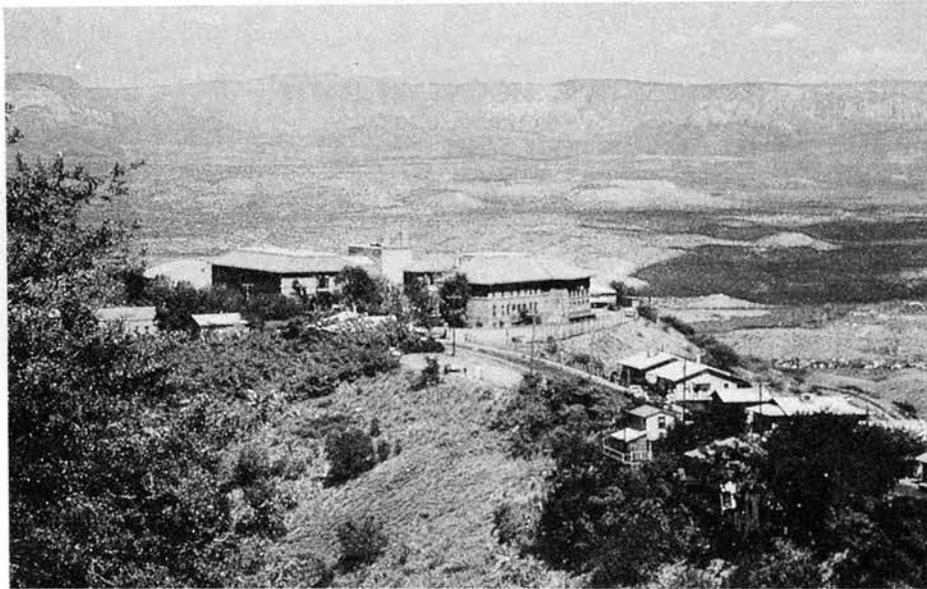
During my stay in San Diego, Mr. Dennis Wills, who owns an old but popular bookshop there, requested me to give a talk in his bookshop. The talk was well attended and much appreciated. All my hosts know that I do not accept any money for the talks delivered. So, at the end, while thanking the audience and myself, Dennis brought out a small packet and announced: "Here is something my brother Ganesan cannot refuse to accept!" He gave it to me. When I opened it, there was a brand new copy of *Mahanirvana*, well suited for reproduction by the offset process!

Dennis told us how he got it. Some years ago, someone wanted to sell his old books. Among them Dennis found this well-preserved old edition. He kept it, intending it for someone who would fully deserve it. He now felt that I was that person. Perhaps it was not dear Dennis who was preserving it but Bhagavan, to fulfil an earnest *bhakta's* years of longing. A reprint of this booklet is now available from the Ashram.

* * *

In Arizona, the beautiful township of Jerome is situated on a hill. Though I was staying in Cottonwood with dear John Lowenstein, the talks, spread over four days, were arranged at "Shanti", a beautiful hall in Jerome. Perhaps it was as all-American an audience as I ever had in the USA. The talks were well attended.

On the second and third days, I noticed a young girl seated next to the entrance who was in tears throughout. She left as soon as the talks were over. On the fourth day, I insisted on introducing myself personally to everyone, and so requested them to stay. I shook hands with each one, asking his or her name.



The building which houses the hall, "Shanti", where the talks were held, at picturesque Jerome in Arizona

Finally, I reached this tearful girl. I said, "Young lady! I have been observing you all these days. You are in tears throughout. If you don't mind, will you please tell me why?"

She said with joy, "I don't know why these tears are rolling down my cheeks. I know nothing about philosophy, much less spirituality. On the first day of your talk (I didn't know about it at all), my mother wanted me to get groceries from the health food store. As I was paying for the purchases at the cash counter, my eyes fell on the picture (it was Sri Bhagavan's) with the xeroxed notice announcing your talk. I could not take my eyes away from it, even though it was not very well printed. I suddenly noticed that my eyes were welling up with tears. There was joy surging within. Tears came non-stop. When I got home, still in tears, I told my mother about it. She also went to the shop and read the notice. My mother said, 'He seems to be a Hindu saint. Instead of questioning these tears, why don't you go to the talks yourself?' So, from the second talk onwards, I am here. I understood every word you spoke about Maharshi. It is joy, nothing but joy!"

I mentally prostrated to this blessed girl. She had been initiated by Sri Bhagavan through the glance of grace, *nayana diksha*.

* * *

It was in 1991. One day, when I was with Sri Yogi Ramsuratkumar, he asked me: "Ganesha! Did you receive any letter from Germany?" I replied in the negative. After a few days, he again asked me the same question. This time I could not contain my curiosity. "May I know why Swami is specifically asking this question?" "Because Genesha has to go to Germany!" he burst out laughing. The next day I received a letter from my dear friend Charles Madigan, inviting me to Germany.

Before leaving for Germany, while seeking the blessings of the Yogi, I said: "Again I am being sent away. I don't like it. I am all alone, Swami". He touched

my head and said: "You are never alone, Ganesha! This beggar is always with you. He will be with you wherever you go. My Father's Blessings on you. Now, go!" Tears of gratitude welled up in my eyes.

It was a direct flight to Frankfurt. From the airport, I was taken by my friend Mr. Folker Gausmann to Bonn, to meet Marlis Hibschenberger. As the car sped along the *autobahn*, that leave-taking from the Yogi flashed in my mind's eye. I opened my eyes and looked around. On my left was a van and on the right a big car, both moving equally fast. My attention was pointedly drawn to the names of these vehicles: "Brahma" the van, and the car "Ram". (The Yogi's initiation *mantra* is *Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*. He always utters the name "Ram"; especially when people prostrate to him, and he blesses them by voicing the holy name — "Rama".) The two vehicles continued alongside our car for a long time. It thrilled me.



Sri Yogi Ramsuratkumar

And, in Bonn, Hamburg, Frankfurt — wherever I went — either at underground stations or on billboards, I was met with huge advertisements proclaiming "Rama": "Begin your day with RAMA, the margarine!" When I landed in Boston from Germany, a Westerner stopped me at the airport and enquired, "Are you from India?" When I said, "Yes," he asked with devotion: "Do you know the saint who lives in South India, Yogi Ramsuratkumar?"

Yes, the Yogi accompanied me throughout the trip.

* * *



'At the Feet of RAMA' in Hamburg

In Berlin, I stayed with Judge Cornel Christophel. He arranged for *satsangh* at his residence and invited seekers, many of whom had never heard of Ramana Maharshi. Someone asked me to narrate the life of Maharshi. I described Bhagavan's death-experience and affirmed that Bhagavan's life itself was His teaching. I noticed one youngster in tears. Afterwards he came to me, held my hands, and said with immense gratitude, "Thank you, Sir! Thank you!" I told him that I had to thank him equally for permitting me to share Bhagavan's life and teaching.

In a voice choked with emotion, he said: "Sir! A great miracle has happened today. From my birth, a question arose within me, 'What is death? What dies?' I did not raise it. It was there, continuously, every day. Can a two-year-old child raise such a profound question? When I grew up, it was still there. One day, I asked my parents about it. They became alarmed that something was mentally wrong with me. I did not mention it to them again. Recently, I asked one of my closest friends about it. He, too, was deeply concerned and suggested I get myself thoroughly examined by a psychotherapist. Again, I went into my shell.

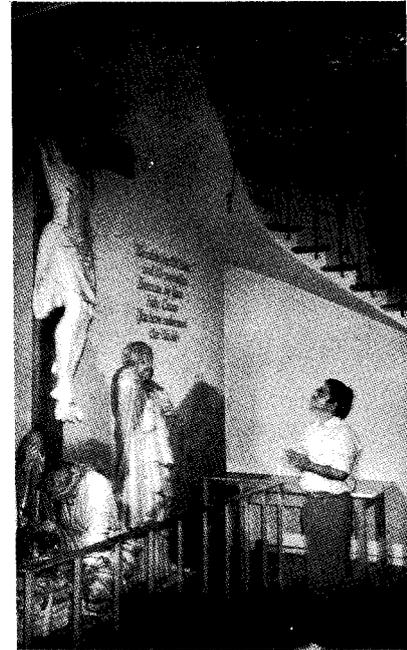
"Today, as you narrated Maharshi's death-experience, for the first time the questioning within me stopped. I experienced elation, ecstasy. I understood everything — why the question dogged me from my childhood, why it persisted, and why it has left me today."

I was all appreciation. "Yes, my friend! You have been initiated by Sri Bhagavan today. *Atma Vichara* (Self-Enquiry) is your path. The goal itself has sucked you in. You are blessed. Go ahead with your *sadhana*!" Then, suddenly, I remembered Mr. Osborne's pregnant words about a suffering soul being redeemed by His grace.

* * *

I have heard glowing tributes paid to the Japanese for their capacity to absorb intricate subjects, even at their deeper levels, so great is their one-pointedness. They also demand the best out of those who come to teach them. For instance, Hatha Yoga, which is very popular there. There are umpteen yoga institutions with capacity memberships. They tolerate no tall talk. They mean business and they demand business.

Nippon Ramana Kendra, which was started in Japan in 1980, thanks to Dr. Sozo Hashimoto, has grown sizeably under the leadership of Prof. Tadashi Yanagida. Members of the Kendra and a few yoga institutions visited the Ashram



Inside the Church at Santa Fe

in 1991. They invited me to Japan on my way to the USA. My stay in Japan during my tour in 1992 was a most memorable one. Their hospitality is really praiseworthy.

At Kyoto, I gave a talk inside the biggest Zen monastery there. Each member was seated with a cassette recorder, camera, notepad and pen! They listened avidly as I explained Maharshi's teaching: "You are the Truth. Reality is within you, not outside you. So, find it for yourself through Self-Enquiry, *Who am I?*"

My talks in Kyoto, Kobe, Osaka and Tokyo were centred on this basic teaching alone. I felt that the Japanese received the message seriously and in their heart. In Tokyo, they demanded that I clearly explain how to do *Atma Vichara*. After the talk, the audience insisted that I continue the session, sit with them, and do *Atma Vichara* with them. I was thrilled to see so much enthusiasm among listeners.

After this silent 'enquiry'-meditation, I was asked, "I never sleep in the daytime. Now, while practising *Atma Vichara*, I went to sleep. Have I done it wrongly?" I replied: "No! On the other hand, you have done it correctly. When you stopped the functioning of the mind, it took the only other course known to it, which is sleep." I quoted *Devikalottara*, in which Sri Bhagavan says: "Mind works only in one of two ways: to think or to sleep." It knows nothing else. I explained: "When, due to *Atma Vichara*, you stopped the mechanism of thinking, instantaneously it went to sleep."

"What to do now?" they immediately demanded. I again quoted from the same *agama* scripture, which says: "When it goes to sleep, due to the stopping of thought, wake it up; being awake, it will rush to manufacture thoughts; then prevent it from the thinking process through persistent questioning, *Who am I?* Alternate the process relentlessly. You will arrive at a silent state — awake, alert — which is whole wakefulness, yet devoid of even a trace of thought."

Hail Sri Bhagavan's glory!

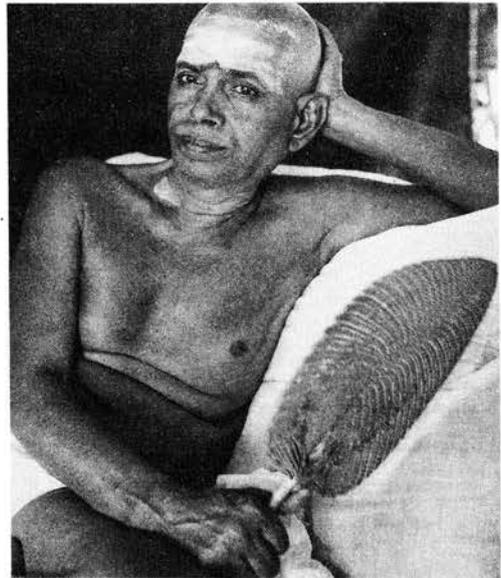
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Devout Japanese in rapt meditation of Atma Vichara

FLOOD OF LOVE

By Dr. K. Subrahmanian



WHEN we are in love, we are possessed by it, we are obsessed with it. We don't choose to love, we are taken by storm. Reason melts away and we lose control over ourselves. While in love, we seek the company of the person we love. There is joy even at the mention of the name of the person we love. In that state, we are not 'me'-centred, we are 'other'-centred. Love is an infatuation, madness, a joyous madness. We are acted upon rather than act. Love comes into being unawares. We don't plan it, we don't move gradually towards it. We *fall in love*.

Sri Bhagavan has not said even once that he loved Arunachala. It is Arunachala who 'made him mad for Him'. The following are from his *Aksharamanamalai*:

Out of my house you enticed me, into the chamber of my heart you entered, and then little by little, you revealed the many mansions of your house, your infinite freedom, O Arunachala! (97)

You aimed at me and sped the arrow of your grace and now you are devouring me alive, O Arunachala! (92)

Unknown to all, stupefying me, who was it that ravished my soul, O Arunachala? (89)

My Arunachala, you have driven out of me the evil spirit of worldliness and possessed me

so that I can never shake you off, and have made me indifferent to the world. (71)

With madness for You have You freed me of madness (for the world); grant me now the cure of all madness, O Arunachala! (66)

In my unloving self created a passion for You, therefore forsake me not, O Arunachala! (60)

Unless you join me, O Arunachala, this body will melt away in a river of tears and I shall die. (34)

In all these verses, Sri Bhagavan begs for the Love of Arunachala. Drawn by Arunachala, Sri Bhagavan went to Arunachala. He never left the place even for a single day. He was in the company of the Beloved all the time. He never asked for anything. The only thing he prayed for was that he should always love Arunachala. In the seventh stanza of *The Necklace of Nine Gems*, Sri Bhagavan addressing Arunachala says:

Do what you will, my darling, but grant me a flood of Love for your Lotus Feet.

We can't love God. Only He can make us love Him. We can only pray that He grant us a flood of Love for Him. In the flood of Love, our individuality will be washed away. Our sense of 'me' and 'mine' will be gone. We can't drive out our ego. It can only be drowned in His flood of Love.

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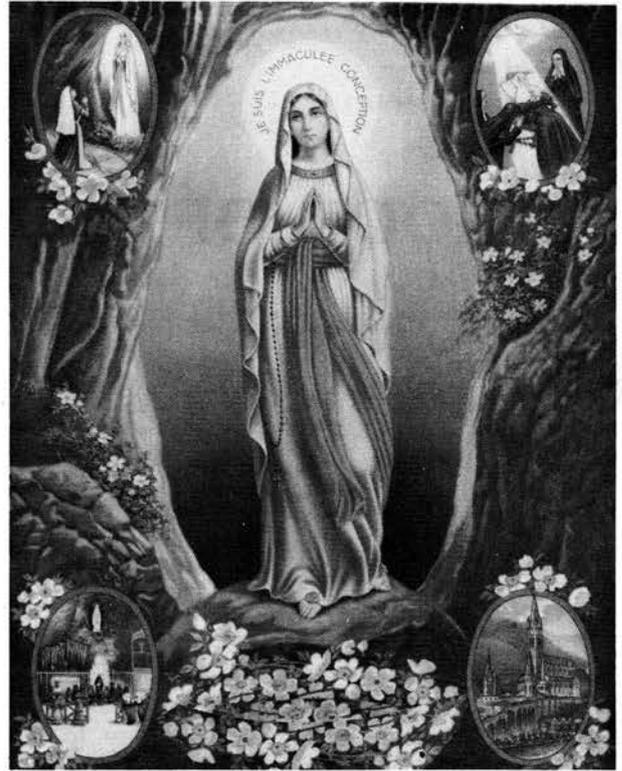
THE MYSTERY OF LOURDES

By Dr. Susunaga Weeraperuma

To the casual tourist travelling across Europe, Lourdes is probably little more than a beautiful city in the French Pyrenees, verdant mountains and snow-capped peaks reminiscent of the Himalayas and inspiring a sense of awe. To Catholics throughout the world, however, Lourdes is not just a popular resort but a centre of pilgrimage, one of the few places where the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, appeared in person. Here she was seen by a poor 14-year-old shepherdess, Bernadette Soubirous, (1844-1879), on eighteen different occasions, between February 11 and July 16, in 1858.

When Bernadette asked the Virgin Mary who she was, the Lady replied in the local patois, "*Que soy era Immaculata Councepciou*, I am the Immaculate Conception." The girl kept repeating the words, eager, perhaps, to retain in her mind an overwhelming experience. What she saw was the living presence of a sacred being. Bernadette was truly blessed, for how many have met the Virgin Mary face to face?

The Heavenly Mother instructed Bernadette, "Penance, penance, penance!" Then the girl was asked to "come up on your knees and kiss the ground in penance for sinners". On another occasion, the Mother said, "Go to the priests and inform them that I want a chapel built. I



desire a procession to come here." Via Bernadette, the Virgin highlighted the need for penance and prayer.

In many parts of the world and particularly at Lourdes, the Virgin is held in great reverence. She is praised in her own right and not merely as the mother of an outstanding spiritual teacher. Here pilgrims give thanks to Mary or ask for her help. Three million pilgrims visit Lourdes every year, including 50,000 sick or disabled, many praying for their complete recovery from an illness.

On several evenings one summer, I watched spectacular devotional processions. As the last rays of the sun fell across the large square in front of the Basilica of the Rosary, the disabled were wheeled in a slowly moving candle-lit procession and taken to the Grotto where Bernadette had her visions. Thousands lined the

processional route, listening to the sonorous chants. I noticed much pain and suffering. The chronically ill and the dying lay on stretchers, helped by stretcher-bearers. Nurses cared for the mentally and physically handicapped. The injured walked on crutches. I saw a hairless cancer patient waving a banner and frantically shouting, "Ave Maria, Ave Maria!" He looked pale and utterly worn out but his eyes glittered.

Seeing this procession every evening was an experience of mixed joy and sorrow. Just hearing the ecstatic singing of hymns was itself a moving experience. Priests and devotees addressed the vast crowds through loudspeakers. During all the prayers and ceremonies, the references to Mary outnumbered those to Jesus. It was as though the whole of Catholicism was temporarily centred around the Virgin. The Lady was like a doorway to the Lord, interceding for all with God.

For more than a hundred years there have been such processions during the pilgrim season. Most of the miracles at Lourdes have taken place during this Blessed Sacrament procession and the blessing of the diseased.

Next to the Grotto, a tiny cave, is a spring where water gushes out even to this day. The Madonna once told Bernadette, "Go drink at the fountain and wash there." She tried to follow the Lady's instructions but there was no fountain, only some muddy water. So Bernadette started scraping the ground and managed to get enough water. The next day there was a spring of fresh clear water in the very same place.

These waters have now been channeled to nearby taps and baths for drinking and immersions. The sick are immersed in the baths. Others immerse themselves. Though the water from this spring is chemically similar to that of other springs in the area, it is this particular spring-water that has cured countless persons. The healing property of this water defies scientific analysis.

A famous case of healing was that of Father Maximilian Kolbe¹ who was canonised in 1982.

He greatly adored his Beloved Immaculata. When he developed an ulcer on the thumb of his right hand, the doctors wanted to amputate it. But Maximilian requested that his thumb should have a dressing soaked in Lourdes water. This was done and, astonishingly, the thumb healed.

Many of these miraculous cures have been well documented. Documents in the archives of the medical office of Lourdes cover more than 6,000 cases of healing. However, only sixty-four were declared miraculous. The international medical committee applies strict criteria in establishing the occurrence of a miracle. For example, the cure must be sudden, unforeseeable and should not involve convalescence; it should be a total cure lasting four or five years before it will be taken into consideration; and the illness should have been a life-threatening one.

The Massabielle Grotto where the Virgin manifested herself is surrounded by lush green vegetation and not far from the Gave de Pau river. The cave's walls are blackened by the smoke of burning candles. Pilgrims come here to wash away their sins. Nowhere else in the world have I seen such piety — thousands kneeling before the Grotto, clicking the beads of their rosaries and praying in silence. Here is a microcosm of the world people of various religions, races and nationalities, forgetting their petty differences, coming together to worship in what is surely the *sanctum sanctorum* of Europe. I am not a Christian, let alone a Catholic, but I too felt the cathartic power of the Grotto.

The apparition, according to Bernadette, was a human figure, a lady dressed in white and with a blue sash. A white veil covered her head. On her bare feet were two yellow roses. The Virgin was very beautiful. Never before had she seen such beauty. The Lady's rosary was wrapped around her right arm. When she first saw the apparition, Bernadette rubbed her eyes several

¹ See "Father Maximilian Kolbe — Knight of the Immaculata" by Gladys de Meuter, *The Mountain Path*, Jayanthi, 1990, p.160.

times, thinking that she was hallucinating. This detail is significant. It shows that the girl had not taken leave of her senses. The apparition was a living reality.

Only Bernadette saw the apparition. Her companions failed to notice it. There were no witnesses to testify to what she had seen. Whenever Bernadette was in the presence of the Lady, the former's face was transfigured with ecstasy. She was filled with joy and on such occasions she looked angelic. Although onlookers failed to see the Lady, they were themselves deeply moved when they observed Bernadette's piety and transfiguration.

The visions were declared authentic by the Pope in 1862 and the cult of Our Lady of Lourdes was authorised.

It was not before learned theologians or priests that the Virgin revealed herself; instead it was to a poverty-stricken peasant girl. She alone had the unique privilege of witnessing a series of supernatural appearances. Was it her purity, humility and childlike simplicity that endeared her to the Virgin? We cannot be sure why Bernadette was chosen. It remains a mystery.

Hers was a life of suffering from beginning to end. At the age of eleven she was struck down by the plague. Although she was cured with painful massages involving the use of straw, the asthma she contracted during the epidemic remained throughout her life.

Bernadette became a celebrity. Crowds followed her, wanting to see her, touch her and to ask questions over and over again relating to her spiritual experiences. She decided to become a nun. Given her devotional temperament and religious background, it was a natural decision. Various religious orders competed to have Bernadette, but she joined the Sisters of Charity of Nevers. Bernadette said, "Since they did not lure me to Nevers, I am going there." At the age of twenty-two she left Lourdes for good.

Although Bernadette went to Nevers with the

intention of hiding herself, she still had to provide information to various inquirers relating to the happenings at the Lourdes Grotto. At the convent where she lived her last years, it was found that she had no particular talent. She spent most of her time ministering to the needs of the sick. But her own health was fast deteriorating. She suffered from chronic asthma, chest pains and bone decay (tuberculosis in the bones of her legs). Twice she was afflicted with pneumonia. As the inevitable end approached, she had very little skin left on the lower part of her body and back, but not once did she complain.

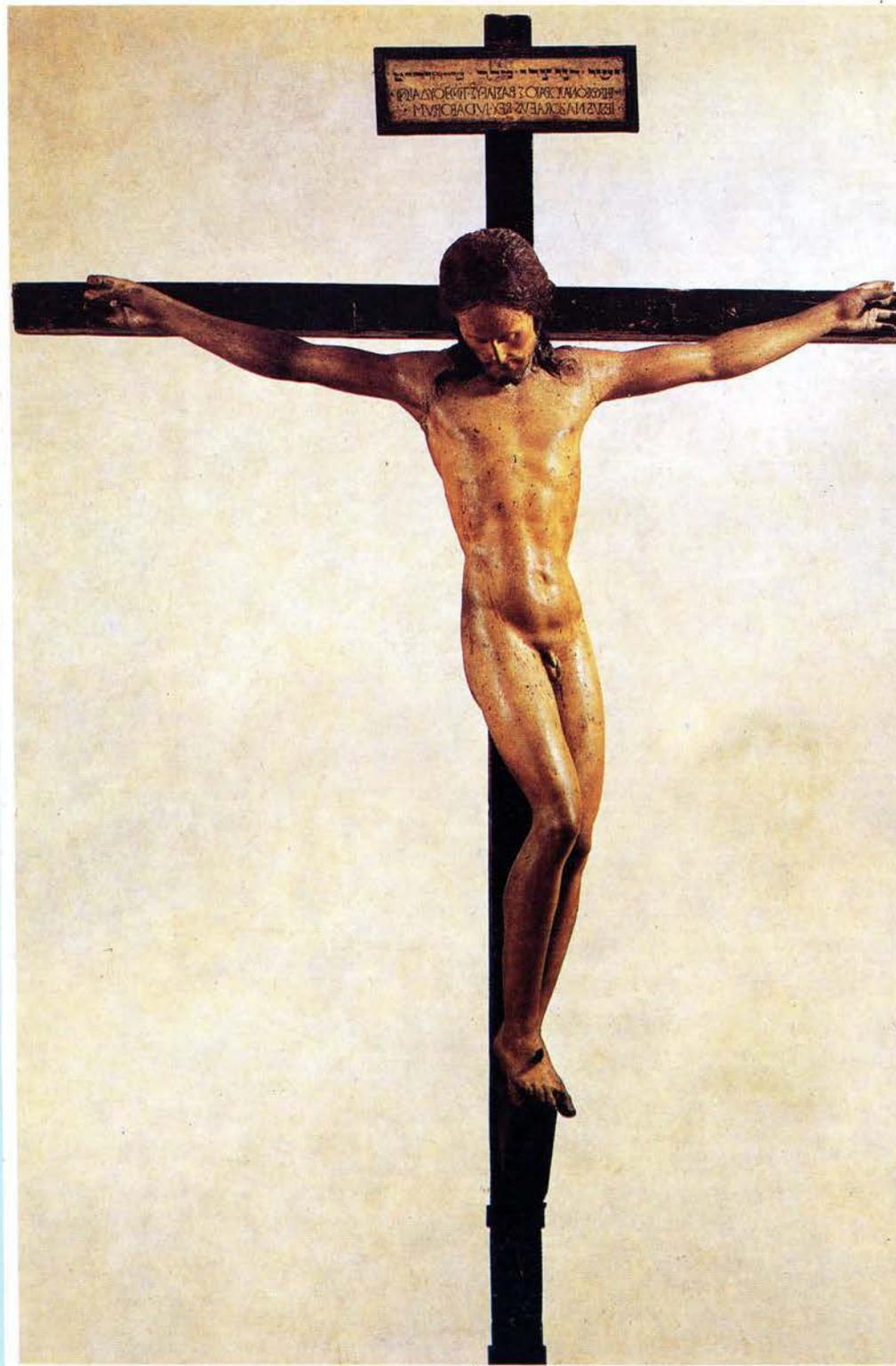
Given her inherent piety, why did Bernadette have to suffer so much? Like Jesus on the cross, was she atoning for the sins of mankind? "Perhaps Our Lady wishes me to suffer," answered Bernadette, when she was asked why she did not pray to the Virgin to be cured. During the Virgin's third manifestation at the Grotto, she told Bernadette, "I do not promise you happiness in this world but in the next."

Clutching a crucifix, she passed away quietly during an asthmatic attack on April 16, 1879. Her thirty-five years of pain, penance and prayer had ended. Before dying, Bernadette said, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me a poor sinner, a poor sinner."

Bernadette's whole message is contained in what she once wrote on a piece of paper: "Obeying is loving. It is joyful to suffer in silence for Christ. Loving sincerely is giving everything, even pain."

In 1909, thirty years after Bernadette's death, her body was exhumed according to French custom. It was in a perfect state of preservation. There was no putrefactive smell emanating from it. Years later, during the second and third exhumations in 1919 and 1925, it continued to remain in a well-preserved state.

Her short life was extraordinary. Long after her death, we are still filled with its wonder.



The crucifix resembling the most the wooden crucifix presented by Michelangelo to the parish priest of Santo Spirito in 1494.

b



Pietà — Madonna holding the Christ's body in her arms, sculpted by Michelangelo around 1497 in Rome.



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Middle Age depiction of the Holy Trinity

God and the Godhead

By David Godman

AMONG the Christian mystics who have left a record of their spiritual attainments, the one whose philosophical ideas most closely parallel those of Hinduism's advaitic sages is undoubtedly Meister Eckhart, a medieval German preacher, writer and theologian. The similarity is so marked that Ananda Coomaraswamy, the famous Indologist and art historian, was once prompted to write: 'Eckhart presents an astonishingly close parallel to Indian modes of thought; some whole passages and many single sentences read like a direct translation from Sanskrit.'¹

Very little is known about Eckhart's life, and the little that has come down to us pertains to his academic career rather than his interior religious life. He was born around 1260 AD into a family of knights at Hochheim, Germany. He entered the local Dominican monastery at Erfurt

at a very young age, underwent a ten-year training in philosophy and theology, and then moved on to the local *studium generale* for more advanced studies. While he was still in his thirties he became the Prior of the Erfurt monastery and Vicar-General of Thuringia, the local province. His superiors thought so highly of him that he was sent from there to the University of Paris, at the time the world's most famous and respected centre for the advanced study of theology. He attained the degree of Master of Sacred Theology in 1302 and was henceforth known as 'Meister Eckhart', *meister* being German for master. He went back to Germany to teach and to take up a succession of important administrative jobs within the Church. After another spell at Paris, where he became a Dominican Profes-

¹ A. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, p. 201.



Church of the Dominicans at Erfurt, where Eckhart preached

sor of Theology in 1311, he returned to Germany for the last time and held important appointments at Strasbourg and Cologne. Towards the end of his life he got into considerable trouble with the Church authorities for expressing ideas which seemed to contradict or refute many aspects of traditional dogma. He was unable to clear his name and both before and after his death, which occurred around 1329, several of his more controversial statements were condemned by a papal court of inquiry.

What were these ideas, and why did they prove to be so controversial? I shall attempt to answer this question by describing in some detail his views on the nature of God and by comparing them, wherever it seems relevant, to the very similar ideas espoused by Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Eckhart took great pains to distinguish between the personal God (the Creator and the first person of the Trinity) and the Godhead, which for him was the impersonal Absolute Reality. These two categories correspond in many ways to the Hindu notions of Iswara, the

personal God, and *nirguna Brahman*, the underlying impersonal Reality. In the sections that follow I shall attempt to pursue this analogy in order to show in what areas such comparisons are valid, and where, on the contrary, there are genuine points of disagreement.

The Godhead

In the same way that a fountain can be said to proceed from its fountainhead, the Godhead is the origin and support of the personal God. The Godhead can exist without the personal God, but the personal God can have no independent existence apart from the Godhead.

'God and the Godhead,' said Meister Eckhart in one of his sermons, 'are as different from each other as heaven and earth.'² In the course of his address he elaborated on this bold statement, explaining just why they should be regarded as being so different:

God acts, the Godhead does not. It has nothing to do and there is nothing going on in It. It is never on the lookout for something to do. The difference between God and the Godhead is the difference between action and non-action.³

The Godhead, according to Eckhart, is pure unmanifest Being, one and formless. Distinctions such as God the Father and God the Son can be said to abide within It in a potential form, but the Godhead Itself is an undifferentiated stillness. 'Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness,'⁴ says Eckhart.

This is basically the same standpoint as that taken by Bhagavan. He taught that the Self alone exists, that its nature is undifferentiated Being, and that the personal God, whom he called

² *Nolite timere eos...* Many citations in this article will come from Eckhart's German sermons. These were given Latin titles by a later editor. I shall refer to them by the first three words of the Latin title. All translations from Eckhart, unless otherwise stated, are from Raymond Blakney's 1941 anthology of Eckhart's works.

³ *Nolite timere eos...*

⁴ Fragment 29.

Iswara, could only exist in conjunction with the individual soul, itself an unreal entity.

Question: Is there a separate being Iswara who is the rewarder of virtue and punisher of sins? Is there a God?

Bhagavan: Yes... Iswara, the personal God, the supreme creator of the universe, really does exist. But this is only true from the relative standpoint of those who have not realised the truth, those people who believe in the reality of individual souls. From the absolute standpoint the sage cannot accept any other existence than the impersonal Self, one and formless.⁵

Both Eckhart and Bhagavan taught that the personal God can be transcended by taking the soul, the individual 'I', back into its ultimate source, the Godhead, and allowing it to perish there. Here is a typical description of the process, taken from one of Eckhart's sermons, in which it is explained how one must go beyond mere union with the personal God, and how the true experience of reality can only be found when the soul dies in the Godhead.

...the soul [first] enters the unity of the Holy Trinity [the three divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit], but it may become even more blessed by going further, to the barren Godhead of which the Trinity is a revelation. In this barren Godhead, activity has ceased, and therefore the soul will be most perfect when it is thrown into the desert of the Godhead, where both activity and form are no more, so that it is sunk and lost in this desert where its identity is destroyed and it has no more to do with things than it had before it existed. Then it is dead to self and alive to God.⁶ What is dead in this sense has ceased to be. So that soul will be dead to self which is buried in the Godhead-desert.⁷

If the personal God and the soul have no reality in the Godhead, then neither does creation, for, as Bhagavan noted on many occasions, the three are connected; when the soul or self disappears, the world and the personal God vanish too.⁸

Because the true nature of the Godhead is motionless, and because nothing ever happens in the Godhead, the sage who has transcended both his individual 'I' and the personal God can say, with a certainty based on direct experience, that creation is not merely unreal, but that it never happened at all. This standpoint is known as *ajata vada*, the theory of non-creation, and it is the only one which Bhagavan taught from his own experience.⁹ All his other teachings on the subject were conceptual constructs. They were not propounded to convey the nature of reality, they were given out merely to convince his listeners that the world was not what it seemed to be.

Bhagavan confirmed his *ajata* stance in an answer he gave to Swami Madhavatirtha, a vedantic pandit who visited him in 1944:

Q: In the *Vedanta* of Sri Sankaracharya, the principle of the creation of the world has been accepted for the sake of beginners, but for

⁵ P. Brunton, *Conscious Immortality*, 1984 ed., p. 10.

⁶ Here, 'alive to God' means 'alive to the Godhead'. Eckhart often used the term 'God' when he really meant 'Godhead'. In this, as on most other occasions, the true meaning of the word can be derived from the context. The same linguistic problem exists in many Sri Ramanasramam books, for Bhagavan also used the word 'God' indiscriminately, sometimes meaning 'the Self', sometimes 'Iswara', and, even more confusingly, sometimes *ās* a term which covered his questioners' own many and varied conceptions of the Divinity. I shall leave both Eckhart's and Bhagavan's terminology untouched, leaving it to the reader to decide which concept or attribute of the Divinity they are trying to convey.

In my own comments I shall use the terms 'Godhead' and 'personal God' when I am specifically writing about one or the other. And when I use the term 'God', I am either referring to some popular conception of the Divinity (e.g. 'God is Love') or I am using it to denote some aspect of God which is common to both the personal God and to the Godhead. Like Eckhart and Bhagavan, I hope that the context will provide a reliable guide to the intended meaning.

⁷ *Expedit vobis ut....*

⁸ See, for example, *Ulladu Narpadu*, v. 2.

⁹ See *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, v. 100.

the advanced the principle of non-creation is put forward. What is your view in this matter?

*B: Na nirodho na chotpattir-
nabaddho na cha sadhakaha
Na mumukshur-na vai mukta
ityesha paramarthata.*¹⁰

This sloka appears in the second chapter [v. 32, *Vaithathya Prakarana*] of Gaudapada's *Karika* [a commentary on the *Mandukyo-panishad*]. It means that there is no creation and no dissolution. There is no bondage, no one doing spiritual practices, no one seeking spiritual liberation, and no one who is liberated. One who is established in the Self sees this by his knowledge of reality.¹¹

God as Being

Though the Godhead is indescribable, both Eckhart and Bhagavan taught that its nature is Being, and nothing but Being. Both would on occasion caution their listeners and readers that it was so indescribable that it was beyond the concepts of Being and non-Being, but in so far as it cannot be denied that It is, they both agreed that 'Being' was the most appropriate term to use.

B: Sat denotes Being beyond sat [being] and asat [non-being]... Even if Brahman is not sat nor asat, It must be admitted to be sat only.¹² Nothing more can be predicated of the Self than that It exists.¹³ There is only Being in Self-realisation and nothing but Being.¹⁴

The next two quotes are Eckhart's. The first should be seen as the equivalent of Bhagavan's statement that the real *sat* is prior to and beyond the concepts of *sat* and *asat*; the second is more typical and conveys his usual teachings that the Godhead is 'Being... and nothing but Being'.

God acts at large above being, animating Himself. He acts in uncreated essence. Before there was being, God was; and He is where there is no being... When I say that God is not being, and that He is above being, I have not denied Him being but, rather, I have dignified and exalted being in Him.¹⁵

One authority says that God is like nothing so much as Being; to the extent that anything has Being it is like God. Another says that Being is so high and pure that God cannot be more than Being. God sees nothing else, knows nothing else, thinks of nothing else than His Being.¹⁶

The Christian conception of God as Being is supported principally by God's revelation of Himself to Moses as 'I am' (Exodus 3:14,15). This is a point on which Eckhart and Bhagavan are in full agreement. Bhagavan often cited God's 'I am that I am' revelation as being the best description of God's true nature, while Eckhart, though quoting it less frequently, also used it to support his and the Church's thesis that God is Being:

The word 'I' is proper to no one but God alone in His uniqueness.¹⁷ 'I am' has to do with essence ... the word 'am' belongs to God alone, and none may use it but He.¹⁸

Being is the Self. 'I am' is the name of God. Of all the definitions of God, none is indeed so well put as the biblical statement 'I am that I am'... The Absolute Being is what is... It is God.¹⁹

¹⁰ An approximate translation is given by Bhagavan in the second and third sentences of the next paragraph. Bhagavan's own translation of this verse appears as the ninth stray verse of *Collected Works*.

¹¹ A version of this question and answer appeared in *The Mountain Path*, 1980, p. 211. It was originally printed in 1944 in a Gujarati book entitled *Sri Ramana Maharshi Parichaya Ane Bodhe (Introduction to the Life and Teaching of Sri Ramana Maharshi)* by Swami Madhavatirtha.

¹² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 431.

¹³ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 17.10.46.

¹⁴ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 33.

¹⁵ *Quasi stella matutina*....

¹⁶ *In occasione gladii*....

¹⁷ *Ego elegi vos*....

¹⁸ *Laudete coeli et*....

¹⁹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 106.



If the Godhead is Being, as both Eckhart and Bhagavan assert, what then is the relationship, if any, between this Being and the phenomenal world, the personal God who administers it and the souls who have the notion that they inhabit it? Eckhart's views on this subject are complex and I shall therefore deal with them later, after first giving more details of his mystical philosophy. As for Bhagavan, his views are clear and uncompromising. The 'soul and God are only mental conceptions',²⁰ he said, and since the mind itself is also unreal, how can any of its concepts claim to have any reality?

Perhaps the most uncompromising expression of this standpoint appears in *Upadesa Manjari* where Bhagavan, in answer to a question about *maya*, says, 'the individual soul (*jiva*), the world (*jagat*) and God (*para*) ... have been conclusively proved to be non-existent at all times and places'.²¹

Bhagavan expanded on this bold and uncompromising statement, without diluting it in any way, when a devotee asked him to qualify it a little:

Paul Brunton, while reading *Upadesa Manjari*, came across a statement that the

ego, the world and God are all unreal. He desired to use a different word for God, or at least a qualifying adjective, e.g. the Creative Force, or Personal God.

Sri Bhagavan explained that God means *Samashti* [the totality of everything], i.e., *all* that is plus the Being — in the same way as 'I' means the *individual* plus the Being and the world means the *variety* plus Being. The Being is in all cases real. The *all*, the *variety* and the *individual* is in each case unreal... Reality is that which transcends all concepts, including that of God.²²

That is to say, the appearances of the personal God, the world and the soul in Being, the substratum, are unreal appearances, and therefore non-existent, because the only reality they have is the formless Being that underlies them. We are back at the *ajata* standpoint: creation never took place; Being never became manifold, even though appearances may indicate the contrary. It remains as It is, formless and undivided.

²⁰ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 244.

²¹ *Upadesa Manjari*, section 2, answer 5.

²² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 112.

The Eye of God

The general and popular conception of God is of a great being who created the universe and who surveys its unfolding, occasionally intervening to aid souls in distress or to make minor adjustments to the machinery. Neither Eckhart nor Bhagavan subscribed to this view. On the contrary, they said, neither God nor the Godhead sees an unfolding world because there is nothing apart from 'Himself' to be seen. It is the individual self that, in turning away from God, sees a world which, being unreal, does not appear in the sight of God at all. Eckhart explains:

The soul has two eyes — one looking inwards and the other outwards. It is the inner eye of the soul that looks into essence and takes being directly from God. That is its true function. The soul's outward eye is directed towards creatures and perceives their external forms, but when a person turns inward and knows God in terms of his own awareness of Him, in the roots of his being, he is freed from all creation and is secure in the castle.²³

Bhagavan taught that the true hallmark of realisation, the state of final oneness with God, is that there is no 'seer' and nothing 'seen'. Seeing, which in the final state is no different from Being, remains, but there are no objects of sight. One sees and knows the world as an appearance in one's Self, without cognising it in a dualistic way.

Bhagavan expressed his teachings on this subject in an uncharacteristically mystic and cryptic way when he composed *Ulladu Narpadu*, verse four:

If one is a form, the world and God will also be so. If one is not a form, who can see their forms, and how? Can what is seen be of a different nature to the eye? Self, the Eye, is the limitless Eye.²⁴

²³ *In diebus suis...*

²⁴ All translations from *Ulladu Narpadu* (kalivenba version), *Upadesa Undiyar*, *Guru Vachaka Kovai* and *Arunachala Ashtakam* are, unless otherwise indicated, based on unpublished translations by Sadhu Om and Michael James.

DHARMA IS ACTION

By Professor K. Swaminathan

Two brothers had two sugarcane fields which had caught fire. News reached them of this fire. One took no notice and kept calm. The other rushed out shouting for help to extinguish the fire. The latter had a fine crop of cane standing in the field. The other had finished the harvest and the field was full of stubble and dried leaves, which in any case had to be burnt away. The *mukta* (one released) has finished with the body and does not care what happens to it. The *baddha* (one bound) has still to reap the harvest and his body is not yet ready to die.

Dharma is for action. *Moksha* is Being, Awareness, Bliss.

Verse 39 of the *Forty Verses on Reality*, like verses 26 and 27 of the *Supplement*, explain how bondage and liberation are both concepts.

The real "I" is *always free*. The false "I" feels bound, i.e., feels different from other selves. All selves are One.

If we all *practise* what we profess, all will be well with the world.

Let us preach less and practise in action our faith.

The words in the penultimate sentence (*kan alal katchi undo*) can also be taken to mean 'Without the eye, can there be sight?', a much more common-sense reading, but this was not the meaning Bhagavan intended to convey. Lakshman Sharma once recorded Bhagavan's explanation of this verse, and from it it is clear that the rather strange rendering given above is the one which Bhagavan intended:

If the eye that sees be the eye of flesh, then gross forms are seen; if the eye be assisted by lenses, then even invisible things are seen to have form; if the mind be that eye, then subtle forms are seen; thus the seeing eye and the objects seen are of the same nature; that is, if the eye be itself a form, it sees nothing but forms. But neither the physical eye nor the mind has any power of vision of its own. The real Eye is the Self; as He is formless, being the pure and infinite Consciousness, the Reality, He does not see forms.²⁵

Since the word '*kan*', literally translated here as 'eye', may also mean consciousness or knowledge (*chit* or *jnana*), the last line of this verse also means 'Self, the consciousness or knowledge, is the limitless consciousness'. It is this second meaning that Bhagavan is alluding to in the last sentence of his explanation.

Bhagavan agrees with Eckhart that the real Eye opens when the eye which sees objects vanishes:

That which dwells in the hearts of one and all as pure awareness is the one Self; so when the heart melts in love and the cave of the Heart where He shines is realised, then the Eye of awareness opens and He is realised as the real Self.²⁶

God does not see or even acknowledge the existence of 'forms'; He only sees and knows Himself as Being. Eckhart once made a minor joke about this when he told one of his audiences that to pray for the welfare of Henry or Conrad, two names he picked out at random, was pointless because 'as far as God is concerned there is neither Henry nor Conrad.'²⁷

The phrase *jnana-drishti* (the vision of knowledge) was often used by Bhagavan when he wanted to convey this same idea that the Real Eye sees and knows Itself subjectively as consciousness, without reference to non-existent separate objects. Eckhart, in one of his most famous statements, conveyed the same idea with great elegance when he said, 'The eye by which I see' God is the same eye by which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one — one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving.'²⁸

The Trinity

The Trinity, comprising God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, lies at the heart of the Christian conception of God. The relationships of the three Persons to each other and ideas about their respective natures were the subject of heated debate in the first few centuries of the Christian era. When the dust had settled, almost all Christian theologians had agreed on several basic points: that the three Persons have eternally existed,²⁹ that the three are 'consubstantial', meaning identical in their essence, and that, although they are identical in their natures, they are still three distinct entities, and will always remain so.

If one looks at the Trinity from a historical perspective, the Father created the world; after some time He incarnated Himself in it in the form of His 'only begotten Son', Jesus Christ; when the Son, His mission completed, ascended to heaven to return to the Father, Christians were given God in the form of the Holy Spirit to guide them and nurture their spiritual life.

²⁵ *Maha Yoga*, 1973, p. 72.

²⁶ *Maha Yoga*, 1973, p. 181.

²⁷ Fragment 34.

²⁸ *Qui audit me...*

²⁹ Although Jesus, the Son of God, incarnated long after God the Father had created the world, Christians teach that He has existed eternally alongside the Father in an unmanifest form. His famous statement 'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:58) is often cited in support of this.

Bhagavan, commenting on these traditional Christian beliefs, put them into a Hindu context:

God the Father represents Iswara, God the Holy Spirit represents *Atman*, God the Son represents the Guru.

Bhagavan then quoted a Sanskrit verse which began, 'God is the same as Guru and Self' before continuing with his explanation of the Trinity:

God appears to His devotee in the form of a Guru (Son of God) and points out to him the immanence of the Holy Spirit. That is to say that God is spirit, that this spirit is immanent everywhere, and that the Self must be realised, which is the same as realising God.³⁰

The orthodox Christian conception of the Trinity was not subscribed to by Meister Eckhart. His differing views on the subject were so radical, so elevated, so mystical that they bore little or no resemblance to the traditional tenets of Christian dogma. As I have already noted, Eckhart's Godhead is free of all distinctions, including the Trinity, while at the same time containing within Itself the potential for the Trinity to evolve. In his scheme, God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, appears in the Godhead, inseparable from It and imbued with Its power. The Father then brings the Son into existence, not as a historical person at a particular time but as an unmanifested aspect of the divine Trinity. The Son, feeling His unity with the Father (both are pure Being and one in essence) is so overjoyed by this union that He radiates divine love back towards His creator, and the Father, in return, emanates His joy and His love back towards the Son. This flow of divine energy from the Son to the Father and back is called by Eckhart 'the Holy Spirit'. All this takes place not in the realm of physical manifestation but in a timeless, dimensionless sphere which, citing Plato for support, he simply calls 'purity':

He [Plato] speaks of a purity that is not of this world, which is neither in the world nor out of it, neither in time nor in eternity, which

has neither inside nor outside. Out of this purity God the Father eternally derives the fullness and the emptiness of His Godhead and gives birth to His only begotten Son...³¹ Once I was asked what the Father is doing in heaven. I replied that He begets His Son, and that this activity is so pleasant to Him and suits Him so well that He never does anything else and that from the two blossom forth the Holy Spirit...³² The Son is the source of the Holy Spirit. If there were no Son, there could be no Holy Spirit...³³ The eternal fountain of things is the Father, the image of things in Him is the Son, and the love for this image is the Holy Spirit.³⁴

All this may sound very abstract and rather remote from Hindu philosophy, and from Bhagavan's ideas in particular. However, one should not be put off by the strange vocabulary because I think Eckhart is describing, in his own way, a process and an idea that would be more easily understood if they were couched in a more familiar language. Hinduism has its own trinity — *sat-chit-ananda*, being-consciousness-bliss — and while this is not quite what Eckhart means by the Trinity, a brief comparison will give a little insight into his ideas. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit can be regarded as different aspects of the same indivisible unmanifest being in the same way that *sat*, *chit* and *ananda* are indivisible aspects of *Brahman*. 'There are no distinctions in God,' says Eckhart, 'and no differences between the divine persons since they are to be regarded as one in nature.'³⁵

Is *sat-chit-ananda* an accurate description of the unmanifest *Brahman*? Bhagavan sometimes remarked that *sat* alone is the one real attribute of *Brahman*, saying that 'it is only because we

³⁰ Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, talk no. 90.

³¹ *Ego elegi vos...*

³² *Omne datum optimum...*

³³ *Elizabeth implementum est...*

³⁴ W.R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, 1933, p. 152.

³⁵ *The Aristocrat*.

are in the phenomenal world that we speak of the Self as *sat-chit-ananda*'.³⁶ That is to say, from the standpoint of the Self, *sat* alone exists and has reality. Nevertheless, in most of his remarks he seems content to accept the prevailing wisdom that *sat*, *chit* and *ananda* are indivisible aspects of the one reality.

'That which is, is only *sat*,' says Bhagavan. 'That is called *Brahman*. The lustre of *sat* is *chit* and its nature is *ananda*. These are not different from *sat*. All the three together are known as *sat-chit-ananda*.'³⁷

While it may be tempting to regard the Father as *sat*, the Son as *chit* and the *ananda* as the bliss that flows between and permeates the two, the comparison should not be pushed too far because it fails in important areas. Firstly, *sat* does not bring into existence *chit* in the same way that Eckhart says the Father generates the Son. Secondly, and more importantly, *sat-chit-ananda* is generally equated with *Brahman*, the Godhead, whereas the Trinity is something that arises out of the Godhead as a manifestation of Its creative energy. Bearing this in mind, I think a better analogy would be to regard God the Father as the *sakti* of the Self, a dynamic force that arises within the Godhead which, while being dependent on It, does not, somehow, affect or disturb Its fundamental stillness.

In an earlier quotation Bhagavan equated God the Father with *Iswara*, rather than *sakti*. On that occasion he was giving equivalents to the traditional Christian conception of the Trinity. Since Eckhart's view of the Trinity is fundamentally different from the mainstream one, I don't think that the *Iswara*/Father comparison is a valid one.

This analogy, equating *sakti* with the Father, may seem a strange one to Hindus, since *sakti* in Hinduism is always regarded as being a feminine energy, but personally I find the comparison rather apt. The Father, *sakti*, manifests His energy and brings into existence, simultaneously, the Son and the appearance of the world in Himself. This would make *Iswara*, the personal



Illuminated 13th century manuscript
of one of Eckhart's sermons

God, an ideal candidate for the Son, since in Bhagavan's teachings it is the *sakti* of the Self which causes *Iswara*, the world and the soul to arise more or less simultaneously as an appearance in Itself.

There are several mystical cosmologies which teach what theologians call 'theories of emanation'. In such schemes the Absolute, by whatever name it is called, gives rise to some power or force, which in turn gives rise to a lesser power, and so on. Saiva Siddhanta, for example, speaks of nine *saktis*: the first gives rise to the second, the second to the third and so on. Proponents of these theories teach that the Absolute is so purely spiritual, so elevated, it cannot produce gross forms of matter except by scaling down Its power and purity through a series of weaker and weaker emanations until one lower-grade power arises which is so far removed and so out of contact with the original source that it can bring into existence physical matter. The early

³⁶ Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, talk no. 433.

³⁷ Letters from Sri Ramanasramam, 1:117.

gnostics and the Neo-Platonists in the West invoked theories of this kind to explain how a wholly transcendent spiritual Absolute could bring the physical world into existence.

Superficially it might seem as if both Bhagavan and Eckhart taught theories of emanation. However, in the two sequences — 'Godhead to God to Son-and-the-world' and '*Brahman* to *sakti* to *Iswara-and-the-world*' — there is not a diminution or a dilution of the original power; rather, each component in the sequences is an undiluted expression of the primal source. The three Persons of the Trinity abide in the Godhead in a potential form and manifest It fully when they appear. Similarly, *sakti* and *Iswara* are expressions of the active mode of *Brahman*, and though one appears to bring the other into existence, one is not inferior to the other.

Q: What is the relation between *Brahman* and *Iswara*?

A: *Brahman* is called *Iswara* in relation to the world.³⁸

In describing these analogies it is not my purpose to 'prove' that Eckhart's Trinity has an exact equivalent in Bhagavan's teachings, because it doesn't. It is hard, for example, to find a place for the Holy Spirit in the scheme I have just outlined. My only reason for introducing these comparisons is to enable readers who have a reasonable understanding of basic Hindu concepts to understand better the ideas that Eckhart was trying to formulate.

In Eckhart's scheme the three Persons of the Trinity are equal in nature, equal in Being, and

equally God, but at the same time it is conceded that God the Father must have greater power because it is through His activities that the other Persons and the world are engendered: 'What are the attributes of the Father?' asks Eckhart rhetorically, and then goes on to answer, 'More power is attributed to Him than to the other Persons [of the Trinity].'³⁹

What does God the Father do with all this power? Eckhart, in a typical reply, explains how He expends it all in continuously begetting His Son:

Our Father's total pleasure, affection and enjoyment are found in the Son. Except for the Son, the Father is not conscious of anything. He takes such great pleasure in His Son that He can do nothing but beget Him, for He is a perfect likeness and image of the Father.⁴⁰

This mystifying paragraph raises more questions than it answers. If God spends all His time and energy begetting His Son, how does the world come into existence? Where is He begetting the Son, when is He doing it, and why? Since the answers to these questions take us into the heart of Eckhart's teachings I shall try to answer them one by one, and in such a way that the similarities between his and Bhagavan's teachings become apparent.

(To be continued)

³⁸ Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, talk no. 388.

³⁹ In his quae....

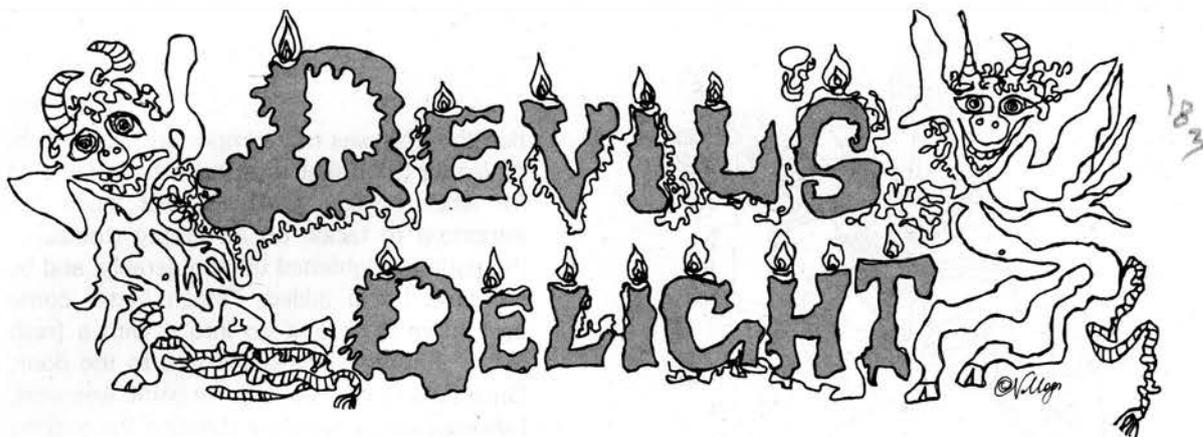
⁴⁰ Haece dicit dominus....

MOTION

To the disciples who were always asking for words of wisdom the master said, "Wisdom is not expressed in words. It reveals itself in action."

But when he saw them plunge headlong into activity he laughed aloud and said, "That isn't action. That's motion."

— in *One Minute Wisdom* by Anthony de Mello, S.J.



OR

HOW TO TEMPT A HUMAN

Letters from a Senior Devil to a Junior Devil:

The Screwtape Letters, by C. S. Lewis

B EING a devil is no easy job, even for a devil. Humans are full of so many loathesome virtues that, left to their own devices, they might all, sooner or later, end up in heaven unless some especially astute devil doesn't take it upon himself to prevent it. Indeed, the situation is so grave and calls upon so many untapped demonic resources that Our Father Below has established sophisticated Institutes of Lower Learning where aspiring demons at every level of the Lowerarchy study the art of tempting mankind with the aim, of course, of securing their permanent residence in the Lower Realms. The Philological Department specialises in turning spiritual truths into boring platitudes, slogans, cliches and propaganda, while the Philosophy Department devises ever more efficient ways of turning insights, metanoias and conversions into movements, organisations, schisms, witch-burnings and, with some luck, holy wars. Until recently their methods of operation have been known only to themselves below, and a perspicacious elite above, but now, thanks to the efforts of one particularly incisive researcher, an exposé has been published. However, although many thousands of copies have been sold to date, and highlights of

this remarkable study will be detailed here, the devils, I am afraid, are not much distressed. They know only too well how mechanical human beings are and that, after the first insight, metanoias tend to recede into the fog like so many other things that "sounded like a good idea at the time". However, for the aspiring sadhak, this exposé holds innumerable valuable hints that will ease and enlighten his Way.

The particular group of fiends we have under our scrutiny include His Abysmal Sublimity Under Secretary Screwtape, T.E. (Tempter Extraordinaire), B.S. (Bachelor of Subversiveness), etc.; his nephew Wormwood, a novice tempter with whom he is corresponding with the aim of training him in the subtleties of their trade; and their colleagues Glubose, Scabtree, Slubglob, Triptweeze, Toadpipe, Slumtrimpet, the Infernal Police, and the staff of the House of Correction for Incompetent Tempters, which department, incidentally, has just issued a new manual, "profusely illustrated", on their activities.

Illustrations by **Natalia Mogilever**

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His Abysmal Sublimity Screwtape, a master in the art of deluding human souls to their perdition, and anxious to see his nephew advance in the Lowerarchy, fills his letters with priceless wisdom gleaned from aeons of successful service to Our Father Below. Let us examine one of his most ingenious techniques:

My dear Wormwood,

Your business is to fix your patient's attention on the stream of immediate sense experiences. Teach him to call it "real life" and don't let him ask what he means by "real". I once had a patient, a sound atheist, who used to read in the British Museum. One day, as he sat reading, I saw a train of thought in his mind beginning to go the wrong way. The Enemy, of course, was at his elbow in a moment. Before I knew where I was I saw my twenty years' work beginning to totter. If I had lost my head and begun to attempt a defence by argument I should have been undone. But I was not such a fool. I struck instantly at the part of the man which I had best under my control and suggested that it was just about time he had some lunch. The Enemy presumably made the counter-sugges-

tion that this was more important than lunch. At least I think that must have been His line for when I said, "Quite. In fact much *too* important to tackle on an empty stomach," the patient brightened up considerably; and by the time I had added, "Much better come back after lunch and go into it with a fresh mind," he was already half way to the door. Once he was in the street the battle was won. I showed him a newsboy shouting the midday paper, and a No. 73 bus going past, and before he reached the bottom of the steps I had got into him an unalterable conviction that, whatever odd ideas might come into a man's head when he was shut up alone with his books, a healthy dose of "real life" (by which he meant the bus and the newsboy) was enough to show him that all "that sort of thing" just couldn't be true. He knew he'd had a narrow escape and in later years was fond of talking about "that inarticulate sense for actuality which is our ultimate safeguard against the aberrations of mere logic.

He is now safe in Our Father's House.

Among the obstacles that His Abysmal Sublimity outlines for Wormwood's edification are the fact that "the Enemy actually *loves* the hairless bipeds"; that "He really *does* want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself"; that "He is a hedonist at heart" and has filled His world with sublime pleasures so easily attainable were it not for the unceasing, tireless efforts of Our Father Below and his Lowerarchy; "that pestilent fellow Paul", who put so many obstacles to temptation in men's minds, helped much by a contemporary playwright, "Pshaw, I think", "and anyway," he sums up, "why *should* the loathsome creatures be happy?"

In the course of their correspondence Screwtape underscores the philosophy of Hell with enumerable examples and extrapolations.

The whole philosophy of Hell rests on recognition of the axiom that one thing is not another thing, and, specially, that one self is

not another self. My good is my good and your good is yours. What one gains another loses. Even an inanimate object is what it is by excluding all other objects from the spot it occupies; if it expands, it does so by thrusting other objects aside or by absorbing them. A self does the same. For us, it means the sucking of will and freedom out of a weaker self into a stronger. 'To be' means 'to be in competition'.

Now the Enemy's philosophy is nothing more nor less than one continual attempt to evade this very obvious truth. He aims at a contradiction. Things are to be many, yet somehow also one. The good of one self is to be the good of another. This impossibility He calls *Love* (with which He has positively littered the universe), and this same monotonous panacea can be detected under all He does and even all He is — or claims to be

Do remember, my dear Wormwood, you are here to *fuddle* him. From the way some of you young fiends talk, anyone would suppose it was our job to *teach*!

It is, therefore, jargon, not reason, that you must rely on. Here again our Philological Arm has made much progress. The mere word *phase* will very likely do the trick. (You keep him well fed on hazy ideas of Progress and Development and The Historical Point of View, I trust?) You see the idea? Keep his mind off the plain antithesis between True and False. Nice shadowy expressions — 'It was a phase' — 'I've been through all that' — and don't forget the blessed word 'Adolescent'....

The pleasure of novelty is by its very nature more subject than any other to the law of diminishing returns. An ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain, and it's better *style*. To get the man's soul and give him *nothing* in return — that is what really gladdens Our Father's heart. All healthy activities which we want him to avoid can be inhibited

and *nothing* given in return, so that at last he may say, as one of my own patients said on his arrival down here, 'I now see that I spent most of my life in doing *neither* what I ought *nor* what I liked.'

You will say that such temptations lead to very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one — the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts. And don't forget, in this regard, that a moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all — and more amusing

You must cultivate in your patient every sense of difference and exploit his haziness to make him think that *his* difference is *better* than others'. You see the application? Let him think that his way of genuflecting and crossing himself is superior to that of other sects of his religion. Without our ceaseless labours in that area the variety of usage within the Church might well have become a positive hotbed of charity and humility....

Nothing matters at all except the tendency of a given state of mind, in given circumstances, to move a particular patient at a particular moment nearer to the Enemy or nearer to us. If, for example, your patient is an emotional, gullible man, feed him on minor poets and fifth-rate novelists until you have made him believe that 'love' is both irresistible and somehow intrinsically meritorious. This belief is not much help, I grant you, in producing casual unchastity, but it is an incomparable recipe for prolonged, 'noble', romantic, tragic adulteries, ending, if all goes well, in murders and suicides....

You say you are 'delirious with joy' be-

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cause the European humans have started another of their wars [World War II]. I am delighted to hear that your patient's age and profession make it possible that he will be called up for military service. We want him to be in the maximum uncertainty so that his mind will be filled with contradictory pictures of the future, every one of which arouses hope or fear. There is nothing like suspense and anxiety for barricading a human's mind against the Enemy. He wants men to be concerned with what they do; our business is to keep them thinking what will happen to them....

Humans are amphibians — half spirit and half animal. As spirits they belong to the eternal world, but as animals they inhabit time. This means that while their spirit can be directed to an eternal object, their bodies, passions, and imaginations are in continual change, for to be in time means to change. The humans live in time but our Enemy destines them to eternity. He therefore, I believe, wants them to attend chiefly to two things: to eternity itself, and to that point of time which they call the Present. For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity. Of the present moment, and of it only, humans have an experience analogous to the experience which our Enemy has of Reality as a whole; in it alone freedom and actuality are offered him. Hence the encouragement we have given to all those schemes of thought such as Creative Evolution, Scientific Humanism, or Communism, which fix men's affections on the Future, on the very core of temporality. Hence nearly all vices are rooted in the future. Gratitude looks to the past and love to the present; fear, avarice, lust, and ambition look ahead.

Further along these lines you must, therefore, zealously guard in his mind the curious assumption 'My time is my own'. You have here a delicate task. The assumption which you want him to go on making is so absurd that, if once it is questioned, even we cannot



find a shred of argument in its defence. The man can neither make, nor retain, one moment of time; he might as well regard the sun and moon as his chattels. Therefore, the last thing I mean you to do is to furnish him with arguments in its defence. There aren't any. Your task is purely negative. Don't let his thoughts come anywhere near it. Wrap a darkness about it, and in the centre of that darkness let his sense of ownership-in-Time lie silent, uninspected, and operative....

Pray do not fill your letters with rubbish about this European War. Its final issue is, no doubt, important, but that is a matter for the High Command. I am not in the least interested in your ecstatic details of how many people have been killed by bombs. In what state of mind they died, I can learn from the office at this end. That they were going to die sometime, I knew already. Please keep your mind on your work....

So! Your man is in love — and in the worst kind he could possibly have fallen into. I have looked up the girl's dossier and am horrified at what I find. Not only a Christian but such a Christian — a vile, sneaking, simpering, demure, monosyllabic, mouse-like, watery, insignificant, virginal, bread-and-butter miss. The little brute. She makes me vomit. She stinks and scalds through the very pages of the dossier. It drives me mad the way the world has worsened. We'd have had her to the arena in the old days. That's what her sort is made for. Not that she'd do much good there, either. A two-faced little cheat (I know the sort) who looks as if she'd faint at the sight of blood and then dies with a smile. A cheat every way. Looks as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth and yet has a satirical wit. The sort of creature who'd find *ME* funny! It's all *His* fault. Ugh! I don't think He has the least inkling of that high and austere mystery to which we rise in the Miserific Vision. He's a hedonist at heart. He's filled His world full of pleasures: there are things for humans to do all day long without His minding in the least — sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, playing, praying, working. Everything has to be *twisted* before it's of any use of us. We fight under cruel disadvantages, Wormwood.

Moreover, could you not see that the very house she lives in is one that he ought never to have entered? The whole place reeks of that deadly odour. The very dog and cat are tainted with it. The whole house and garden is one vast obscenity. It bears a sickening resemblance to the description one human writer made of Heaven: 'the regions where there is only life and therefore all that is not music is silence.'

Music and silence — how I detest them both! How thankful we should be that ever since our Father entered Hell no square inch of infernal space and no moment of infernal time has been surrendered to either of those abominable forces, but all has been occupied by Noise — Noise which alone defends us

EXPOSURE

One day the Master asked, "What in your opinion is the most important of all religious questions?"

He got many answers:

"Does God exist?"

"Who is God?"

"What is the path to God?"

"Is there a life after death?"

"No," said the Master, "The most important question is: *Who am I?*"

The disciples got some idea of what he was hinting at when they overheard him talking to a preacher:

Master: "So then, according to you, when you die your soul will be in heaven?"

Preacher: "Yes."

Master: "And your body will be in the grave?"

Preacher: "Yes."

Master: "And where, may I ask, will you be?"

— in *One Minute Wisdom* by Anthony de Mello, S.J.

from silly qualms, despairing scruples and impossible desires. We will make the whole universe a noise in the end. Research is in progress. Meanwhile you, disgusting little —

Here the MS. breaks off and is resumed in a different hand.

"In the heat of composition I find that I

have inadvertently allowed myself to assume the form of a large centipede. I am accordingly dictating the rest to my secretary. Now that the transformation is complete I recognise it as a periodical phenomenon which proceeds from within and is a glorious manifestation of that Life Force which Our Father would worship if he worshipped anything but himself. In my present form I feel even more anxious to see you, to unite you to myself in an indissoluble embrace....

His Abysmal Sublimity Screwtape writes letter after letter to "My dear Wormwood", ever signing himself (with the one exception cited above) "Your affectionate Uncle, Screwtape". But even devils have their undoing. The Law of Hell states "Eat or be eaten", and if not a human, then why not dine on one of your friends or relatives? Screwtape's last letter runs thus, revealing all:

My dear, my very dear, Wormwood, my poppet, my pignie,

How mistakenly, now that all is lost, you come whimpering to ask me whether the terms of affection in which I address you meant nothing from the beginning. Far from it! Rest assured that I have always desired you, as you (pitiful fool) desired me. The difference is that I am the stronger. I think they will give you to me now; or a bit of you. Love you? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on.

You have let a soul slip through your fingers. Instead of the Miserific Vision and permanent residence with us — the Enemy. The howl of sharpened famine for that loss echoes at this moment through all the levels of the Kingdom of Noise down to the very Thrown itself. It makes me mad to think of it! The more one thinks of it, the worse it becomes. He got through so easily! No gradual misgivings, no doctor's sentence, no nursing home, no operating theatre, no false hopes of life; sheer, instantaneous liberation. One moment it seemed to be all our world: the

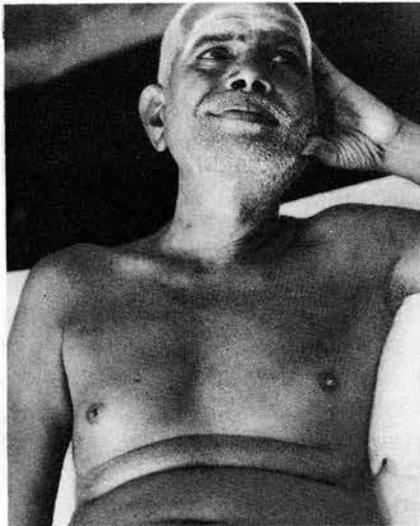
scream of bombs, the fall of houses, the stink and taste of high explosive on the lips and in the lungs, the feet burning with weariness, the heart cold with horrors, the brain reeling, the legs aching; next moment all this was gone, gone like a bad dream, never again to be of any account. Defeated, outmaneuvered fool! The degradation of it! Next to the curse of useless tempters like yourself, the greatest curse upon us is the failure of our Intelligence Department. If only we could find out what He is really up to! Alas, alas! Sometimes I am almost in despair. All that sustains me is the conviction that our Realism, our rejection (in



the face of all temptations) of all silly nonsense and claptrap, *must* win in the end. Meanwhile, I have you to settle with. Most truly do I sign myself,

Your increasingly and ravenously affectionate Uncle,

Screwtape



F.H. Humphreys — The First Western Seeker

By A. R. Natarajan

RAMANA'S purpose was fulfilled through his chosen men. This is not to say he made a selection nor is it to say that his grace was given more to some and less to others; but it was all part of the divine plan. We say chosen for we can see in retrospect how they were instruments for spreading his message. Undoubtedly one such person was F.H. Humphreys who came to serve as an official in the Indian Police Service but has become a household name among Ramana devotees and seekers of truth. Is there any basis for this assertion? Yes. Firstly, from the word 'Go', as soon as he landed in Bombay, he was led on to Ramana, as it were. While convalescing in a Bombay hospital he had a clear vision of Narasimhayya who was to be his Telugu Munshi. Narasimhayya was a disciple of Ganapati Muni and he regarded Ramana as God incarnate. It is difficult to over-emphasise the importance of this, for Humphreys was out in search of a 'Master'. His keenness to find one quickly could well have led him astray to the lesser gods. But thanks to Ramana's protection from the beginning, through that vision at Bombay, as soon as he landed in India, he was caught in the tiger's grip of Sadguru Ramana. Soon after he started his lessons in Telugu at Vellore, Humphreys had his second vision, this time of Ganapati Muni. But for this, it would have been difficult for a person like Humphreys, with a strong occult bent of mind, who on his own claim was a member of a mythic society in his previous life, to have remained in the Ramana fold. For slipping away is so easy and

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staying on course so tough. The culmination of his vision came soon enough. It happened towards the end of 1911. During one of his Telugu classes he asked for a paper and pencil and drew a picture of a mountain cave with a sage standing at its entrance, thus giving a picturesque description of a dream vision he had the previous night. It was of Ramana standing in front of the Virupaksha cave. These successive visions, the first one of his teacher who was a disciple of the Muni, then that of the Muni, and finally that of Ramana are clear enough evidence that he was Ramana's man from the very beginning.

What other indication do we have of Humphreys being one of the 'inner circle'? Whatever he learnt from Ramana was in the presence of persons who helped in recording it. Was it not the work of the divine hand for preserving the conversations for posterity? His first visit was in November 1911 in the company of Narasimhayya and the Muni, who had prepared him for it by emphasising, "It is not I but the Maharshi who does these things." Just prior to the visit the Muni counselled silent preparedness, "Hush!



F.H. Humphreys

We must be quiet now. We are drawing near him." Narasimhayya has recorded what happened at this interview. Many important and crucial points for *sadhana* emerged, as we shall see later. On his second visit soon thereafter, A.S. Krishnaswami Aiyar (then a District Munsiff) was present and acted as an interpreter. The record of Humphreys' third visit, which in many ways is the best from the seeker's point of view, is available. We have Humphreys' own reporting of it to Felicia Scatterd who in turn published it in the *International Psychic Gazette*. Why should every conversation be recorded contemporaneously and also be published, unless Humphreys had a special place in Ramana's scheme of things?

Also of importance is the fact that from the beginning Humphreys felt he was a disciple of Ramana. To quote him, "In a few sentences of broken English and in Telugu, he conveyed worlds of meaning and taught me direct, and made me his *chela*." In the spiritual field where attitude is so important for learning, the reverential and fresh approach of Humphreys has given us much material of great value. Humphreys was barely twenty-one at the time he came to Ramana. So we notice an uninhibited spontaneity in his interviews with Ramana, and a special charm in the way Ramana clarified his doubts.

Some points stand out, such as Ramana's remarks: "Help yourself, you will help the world"; "No master ever cared a rap for occult powers for he has no need for them in his daily life"; "From now onwards let your whole thought in meditation be not on the act of seeing nor on what you see, but immovably on That which sees"; "The Master cannot help being perpetually in the state of Being. He can use the mind, body and intellect without falling back into the delusion of separate consciousness"; "God is everything and everything is God"; "How can you best worship God? Why, by not trying to worship Him but by giving up your whole self to Him"; "You say 'I', 'I want to know'. Tell me who is that 'I'. Know first that 'I' and then you

will know everything". The teaching is always clear and precise, for Humphreys was ripe and ready to receive it.

We also owe to Humphreys some very beautiful descriptions of Ramana in such choice expressions: "For half an hour I looked him in the eyes, which never changed their expression of deep contemplation... I could only feel that his body was not the man. He was merely a sitting, motionless corpse from which God was radiating terrifically... You can imagine nothing more beautiful than his smile."

The contact of Humphreys with Ramana was apparently confined to these extraordinary visits. But one does not have to remain long with or be in constant touch with a Sadguru. We have the case of Satyamangalam Venkataramier who visited Ramana only once in Virupaksha cave and he has sung his enchanting and endearing *Ramana Stuti Panchagam*, whose fascination grows with every reading or singing of it. We have also the case of an American visitor recorded by T.P.R. He came all the way from the USA and only for a few hours, but was fully satisfied that the purpose of his visit had been served. The Master knows all the needs and the devotee is taken care of appropriately. This sensitivity is evident in Humphreys' second visit. He had come by motorbike a long distance from Vellore and was both thirsty and hungry. Ramana saw to it that he first had coconut-water to quench his thirst, and made him eat some food, fruit, etc. Knowing of his difficulty in eating with his hands he also gave him a coconut spoon to eat with! He kept talking to him and blessed Humphreys with his benign smile. This done, he cleared all his doubts in spiritual matters.

It is said that Humphreys retired prematurely from police service and became a monk in later years. These changes were only in his avocation, from the onlooker's viewpoint. For one can see that Ramana had made him whole by his lucid explanation of what true religious spirit is, and what true attainment is. There is little doubt that Ramana had blessed Humphreys with it.



Rembrandt's copy of da Vinci's "The Last Supper", engraving

Crucifixion and Resurrection

By Roslyn S. Teicher

**Christ is Risen!
Indeed He is Arisen!**

* * *

**Christ is risen from the dead,
Trampling down Death by death,
And among those in the tombs bestowing life!**

ON Easter, and all through the following week, in every Orthodox Church in the world, these chants, joyously sung by priest, choir and congregation, ring out again and again to proclaim the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ. Throughout the Church year the main events of Christ's life have been re-enacted and relived by the entire congregation. Now, during Holy Week (the week preceding Easter), the worshipper relives Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Palm or Holy Sunday), the Last Supper, His arrest, trial, conviction, Crucifixion and the magnificent, miraculous Resurrection — Easter, the Feast of Feasts. In this active participation in the Church services, not as a commemoration of events of the past, but as a living experience of the present, the worshipper enters

into the sublime mystery of Christ. Birth we have all experienced. It can be passed off. But here, in a few unbelievably intense days, the believer enters into something altogether new: the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

In regarding these re-enactments as the Christian Mysteries, one finds roots extending into the far distant past. The ancient world searched for rebirth everywhere, and it is a recurring if not predominant theme in most of the early religions, not the least being that of the great Egyptians. The idea was not at all strange to the Jews, whose calendar even at the time of Christ went back more than 3,000 years. When a man from another faith became a Jew and had been accepted into Judaism by prayer and baptism,

he was regarded as being reborn. A convert who embraces Judaism, said the rabbis, is like a newborn child. So radical was this change that the sins he had committed before his reception were all washed away, for now he was a different person.

The ancient Greeks knew also about this idea of rebirth, and there were many mystery religions in which it is the central theme, particularly around the time of Christ. These mystery religions were all founded on the story of some suffering, dying and rising god, and the story was played out as a passion play¹. The initiate had a long course of preparation, instruction, asceticism and fasting. The drama was then played out with appropriate music, incense, costumes and ritual objects — everything to draw the initiate's entire mind and emotions into the drama in which he was not an observer, but a participant. As it was played out, the worshipper's aim was to become one with the god in such a way that he passed through the god's suffering and shared the god's death, triumph over it and, ultimately, his divine immortality. The mystery religions thus offered mystic union with their particular god. When that union was achieved, the initiate was, in the language of the mysteries, a "twice-born". The Hermetic mysteries had as part of their basic belief: "There can be no salvation without regeneration." This finds its echo in the New Testament, where Christ says, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." (*John* 3:5) The famous Roman philosopher Apuleius, who went through one such Hermetic initiation, wrote that he had undergone a "voluntary death" and that thereby he attained his "spiritual birthday" and was, "as it were, reborn". Further, many of the mystery initiations made use of the succession of day and night and held their ceremonies at midnight, when the day has "died", and continued until dawn, when it is again "reborn". To this day both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches celebrate the Easter Liturgy at midnight, and in the Orthodox Church the service traditionally continues until dawn, when a ritual feast is held.

Indeed, the idea of death and rebirth (or re-creation) is a persistent one throughout the New Testament. Christ speaks of His imminent death innumerable times throughout the Gospels, and uses the theme in many of His parables. "Except a grain of corn fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." (*John* 12:24) St. Paul often refers to new Christians as "babes in Christ", and he writes that if any person is *in* Christ, it is as if he has been created all over again. In *Galatians* 6:15 Paul again writes that in Christ there is a new creation, while in *Hebrews* 5:12-14 he asserts that an individual who is at the first beginnings of the Christian faith is regarded as a child. And Christ Himself assured His followers that, "Except ye...become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of God". (*Matthew* 18:3) Thus, when the apostles brought Christianity to the world with their message of death and rebirth or resurrection, it was accepted as a concept not at all foreign to the minds of the people and, as history has proven, seems to have brought them that for which they were fervently seeking. With the spread of Christianity, the pagan mystery religions died out and gave place to the Christian Mystery, which survives to this day.

A number of Christian sects grew alongside what finally became "mainstream" Christianity. Although they ultimately died out, the ones which draw our attention here are certain groups of Christian gnostics that emphasised the authority of personal experience over blind faith, and viewed Christ's life on a symbolical or cosmic rather than earthly level. They said, for instance, that a person who experiences the resurrection does not meet Christ raised physically back to life; rather, he encounters Him on a spiritual level. Some gnostics went further and called the belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus a "faith of fools". It was not, they insisted,

¹ In this sense "passion" refers to the sufferings of a god (or Christ Himself, as in "Christ's passion") prior to and including his death.

a unique event, but merely symbolised how Christ's Presence could be experienced in the present moment. "Those who say they will die [physically] first and then rise are in error." (*Gospel of Philip* 73:1-3 NHL 144)² In the *Treatise on Resurrection* (47:18-49 and 48:34-38 NHL 53), we find that the resurrection is regarded as the moment of enlightenment. "It is the revealing of what truly exists ... and a migration into newness." "Are you, the real you, mere corruption?...Why do you not examine your own self and see that you have arisen?" Many Valentinians, a particular group of Christian gnostics, took the view that Jesus did not suffer on the cross. In their *Acts of John* 101, Jesus says, about His crucifixion, "I have suffered none of the things which they say of Me". In the *Apocalypse of Peter* 81:4-24, we find: "The Saviour said to me, 'He whom you saw being glad and laughing above the cross is the living Jesus. But he into whose hands and feet they are driving the nails is the fleshy part.'..." Followers of Valentinus interpreted suffering in a different way. Insofar as Jesus was the son of man, being human He suffered and died on the cross like the rest of humanity. (*Treatise on Resurrection* 44:13-45) But since He was also the son of God, the divine spirit within Him could not die. In that sense He transcended suffering and death. Followers of Ramana Maharshi will find this statement strongly reminiscent of what Sri Bhagavan answered to Major Chadwick when the latter asked him, "Why did Jesus call out 'My God! My God!' while being crucified?"

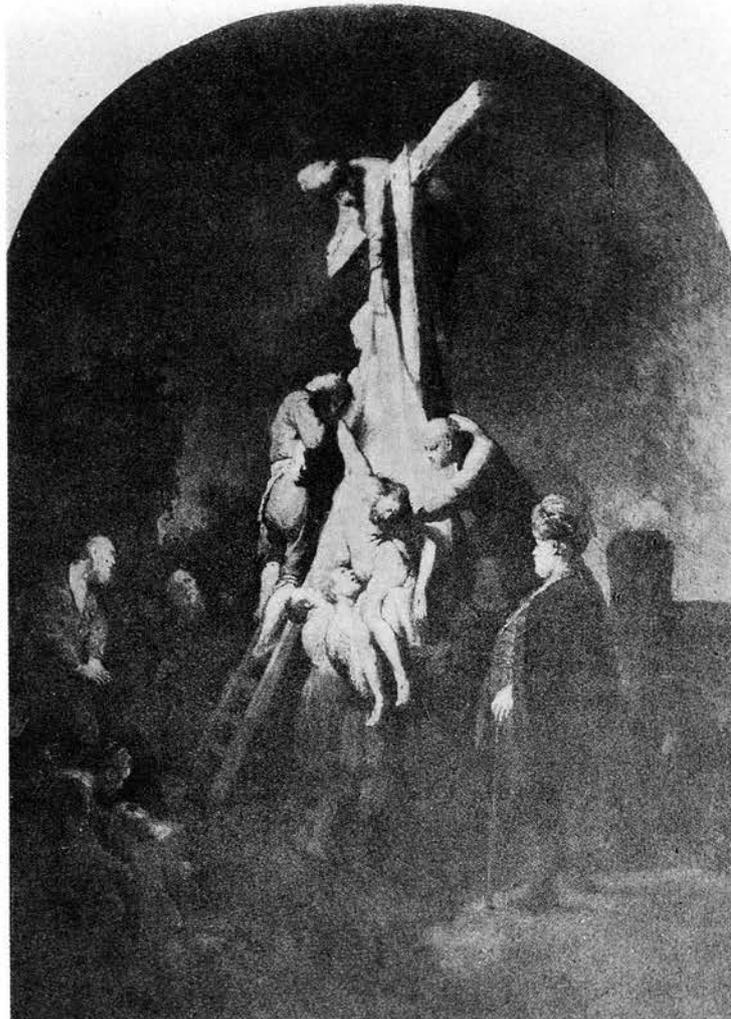
A *jnani* has attained liberation even while alive, here and now. It is immaterial as to how, where and when he leaves his body. Some *janis* may appear to suffer, others may be in *samadhi*, still others may disappear from sight before death. But that makes no difference to their *jnana*. Such suffering is apparent only to the onlooker and not to the *jnani*, for he has already transcended the mistaken identity of the Self with the body. (*Talks* 87)

Before looking further into what Sri Bhagavan

and others have to say who do not follow the common interpretation given by mainline Christian theology, it will be beneficial to examine the theme of Crucifixion and Resurrection as it can be experienced by the devout believer in the fulness of his faith.

It is held by most Christian denominations that Christ suffered and died on the cross to vicariously atone for the sins of humanity, thereby becoming its Saviour. If one believes this fully, one is saved. Many contemporary seekers have found this tenet of vicarious atonement extremely difficult to accept, and have sought in other traditions for their spiritual fulfillment. Interestingly, after their study of Hinduism, Buddhism, or other Eastern philosophy, they are able to find a depth of meaning in their own tradition, hitherto undiscernible by them. In Mahayana Buddhism, for instance, which many Christians find very appealing, there is the tradition of the bodhisattvas, those who, on the edge of liberation, turn back to help humanity, vowing not to leave "until the last little one has come Home". If there are such beings, would not such a sacrifice be a sort of crucifixion? And would it not be a suffering made gladly for the benefit of the world? In this way, especially as emphasised in the rituals of the Orthodox Church, we find a Christ who is eternally born, eternally crucified, and eternally resurrected simultaneously in the present moment. In the Orthodox Church, there are no statues or three-dimensional objects of worship, but there is always a life-sized icon (a sacred, symbolical picture) of Christ crucified placed in a corner of the church. At its base is a level surface or box of sand. Worshippers in a state of suffering are wont to kneel there, offer a lighted candle at the Saviour's feet, and pray to Him for comfort, for the strength to bear their own cross. Why, one might ask, should an individual in trouble pray before the image of One who is in even greater trouble? The answer is that it is exactly because

² All quotations from gnostic texts are taken from *The Nag Hammadi Library*, the published collection of gnostic writings found in Egypt in 1946.



Rembrandt's Christ being taken down from the Cross

the worshipper *feels* this eternity of Christ, and *knows* that as He made it to the other shore, so, too, will the believer who takes faith in this, and endures his cross of the moment.

This brings us to the image of the cross, the mystical symbol of Christianity. In numerous places in the Gospels, Christ says, "Take up thy cross and follow Me." These statements occur long before the Crucifixion. What does it mean to a Christian to "bear his cross"? In Christ's Passion, that is, His sufferings in the events from His arrest to His death on the cross, every detail is symbolical. Regarding "bearing one's cross", Christ has set the example. When he is arrested and harrangued, he is silent, knowing that He is

fulfilling what has been set before Him by God. When He is whipped and mocked and a crown of thorns placed on his head to humiliate Him as "King of the Jews", He is silent and at peace. When He is cross-examined by one who cannot possibly understand the import of His teachings, He is silent, and when He is sentenced to crucifixion, He is silent. It was customary for the victim to carry his own cross to the place of crucifixion. In the case of Christ, He must bear it up a hill called Golgotha. Already exhausted by whippings and beatings, He stumbles several times on His way up the Mount. A man named Simon of Cyrene is then drawn from the crowd to carry the cross up the Mount for Christ. Here we have the symbolism of bearing one's own

cross and also of helping others to bear theirs, a fundamental tenet of Christian belief.

A Hindu once asked why Christians call Good Friday, the day of Christ's Crucifixion, "good". It ought, he thought, to be "Bad Friday". But to a Christian, the entire image of the Crucifixion is so pregnant with meaning: the *promise* of the Resurrection — and without the Crucifixion there can be no Resurrection — that, for him, this day is good. It should be noted that in most other languages it is referred to as Holy Friday, and for the same reasons. Before going on, it must be added that the English word "Easter" originally derives from an Old English word for a goddess and her festival which, coinciding as it must have with the Resurrection of Christ (always celebrated in the spring, the season of the rebirth of nature from the "death" of winter) must have influenced the naming of the festival in English by those who converted the people there. In most other languages the word used denotes either resurrection or Passover, the Jewish feast at which Christ was crucified. In Russian, for instance, Easter Sunday is called simply *Voskreseniye* — Resurrection.

In returning to our examination of the symbolism of the cross in Christianity, we come to the ritual blessing by making the sign of the cross, observed by Catholics and Orthodox Christians. An individual touches with his right hand first the forehead, then a point at the lower end of the torso, and then first one shoulder, then the other. A priest may do this to a parishoner, a parent to a child, or one may so bless himself. Traditionally, one is using the gesture to affirm one's faith, saying along with it the words, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." With these words and gestures, the believer affirms that Christ died on the cross for our salvation and that, by believing in Him, he is saved. But there is more to it than that for the earnest Christian. It also means: I bear my cross as Christ did. He came through and was reborn, and so too will I be if I bear my cross after His example.

Sri Bhagavan has an even loftier view: In two

places in *Talks* (no. 86 and 396) he refers to it:

The body is the cross. Jesus, the son of man, is the ego or I-am-the-body idea. When he is crucified he is resurrected as the Glorious Self — Jesus, the Son of God!

"Give up thy life if thou wouldst live."

* * *

Christ is the ego. The cross is the body. When the ego is crucified, and it perishes, what survives is Absolute Being (God), (c.f., "I and the Father are one." — [John 10:30]) and this glorious survival is called Resurrection.

It will be interesting to turn now to the writings of a contemporary Catholic mystic who, judging from her book, *The Experience of No-Self*³, went through this great transition and, knowing nothing of Eastern philosophy, describes her experience in her own words. The fact that she is a devout Catholic who went beyond what her theology said was humanly possible, lends a feeling of authority to her candid and homely description. Her path all her life, she writes, was the path of silence. Having found "the stillpoint within", she learned to abide there for longer and longer periods of time. In the end, her dualistic experience of union with God, the ultimate attainment in this life, according to Christianity, "exploded" as all sense of a personal self fell away. She describes what we call in Sanskrit *manonasa*, the destruction of the mind, as the loss of the mind's ability to "turn back on itself." With the disappearance of self as object, she also lost God as object, something for which she was entirely unprepared. It was in this void, this loss of God as object, that she was reminded of Christ's cry on the cross: "My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?" and realised its significance. As Sri Bhagavan often remarked, as long as one considers oneself real, God too is real. Ms. Roberts, in living her own

³ Bernadette Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1984.

"crucifixion" as described by Sri Bhagavan to Major Chadwick, experienced what appeared to be a desertion by God, and thus understood Christ's cry: He was passing through the experience Himself.

Here we can truly identify with this man on the cross who willingly gave up his self, his powers, his union with God, to show us that God lies beyond not only our petty, secular notion of self, but our most divine notions as well. Until there is no self, I do not see how it is possible to ... ever "see".

What she means by "seeing" is what Sri Bhagavan refers to as the *sahaja sthiti*, the state where, the mind being totally annihilated, the ego dead, there are no longer any "others", there is only the Self. Ms. Roberts writes:

Until this point is reached, God remains an object....For me, at least, this is the true meaning and message of Christ where, even more than his words, he showed by his death what each of us will have to go through to see — to be resurrected — to be free, free [of the only sin there is], which is the self.... Christ did not overcome our individual self for us; he only showed us by his death what we too will have to go through.... The particular type of seeing I refer to as the resurrection is the seeing of God, not as object, but as pure subject.

One of her further observations is that a personal self cannot and does not love God at all, "because 'that' which loves God in ourselves is God Himself.... Only God is love, and for this love to fully realize itself, self must step aside. And not only do we not need a self to love God, but for the same reason, we do not need a mind to know Him; that in us which knows God is God Himself."

In referring to Christ's Ascension forty days after His Resurrection, she sees this, for the Christian, as a still further step. The Ascension she regards as Christ's final dissolution into the fullness of God.

With the dissolution of his human form —

EFFORTLESSNESS

To a man who hesitated to embark on the spiritual quest for fear of the effort and renunciation, the Master said: "How much effort and renunciation does it take to open one's eyes and see?"

— in *One Minute Wisdom* by
Anthony de Mello, S.J.

seemingly into thin air — Christ suddenly becomes everywhere: the God within and without, as well as all form in which the manifested and unmanifested have fruition and become One....The final step is when ... all aspects of God are seen as One and all that is.

One is reminded at this point of Sri Bhagavan's assurance and affirmation: "Where could I go? I am here." And the fact that his death has not diminished the number or fervour of his devotees and followers of his teachings. On the contrary, people are experiencing his *sannidhi* (presence) on all parts of the globe.

Crucifixion and resurrection, then, can be looked at from many angles, each yielding a wealth of inspiration. One can see how these mysteries are revered by the devout Christian, and yet can be appreciated beyond the limits of mainstream Christianity. When the Christ in us has risen, the self will be dead, and what survives, as Sri Bhagavan said, is Absolute Being. Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection become, then, more than two events in passing time, held sacred by a particular religion: they become indications of the rites of passage common to all humanity.

Christianity in the Light of Vedanta

By Fr Bede Griffiths

ONE of the most remarkable phenomena of recent times has been the meeting of different religions all over the world. Each religion grew up in its own cultural setting: Hinduism in India, Buddhism first in India and then all over the Far East, Islam in Arabia and then over North Africa and the Middle East, Christianity in Palestine and then over Europe and America. But it is only today that people belonging to different religious traditions are mixing freely in all five continents and each religion is challenged to relate itself to the other religious traditions of the world. For some, especially the Semitic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, this can be a painful experience, as they have each considered themselves to be the one true religion. But today theologians are being forced to view their own religious traditions in the context of other traditions and a new ecumenical theology is emerging.

Christianity grew up in Palestine in a Semitic culture speaking Hebrew and Aramaic, and following the traditions and customs of ancient Israel. But in the very first century of its development it moved out into the Greco-Roman world and its scriptures were written in Greek. For fifteen hundred years it was practically con-

finied to Europe and the Middle East and only in the sixteenth century began to spread to America and the European colonies in Asia and Africa. As a result the structures of the Christian churches, both of doctrine and of organisation, are basically Greco-Roman structures built on the foundation of the Biblical revelation.

In the course of extending over a thousand years an elaborate structure of doctrine and organisation was built up, based on Greek philosophy and Roman law. This basic structure remains to this day, but as the Church encounters the different religious traditions, especially of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, this basis is being called in question, and Christianity today has to learn to see itself in the light of Vedanta, Mahayana Buddhism and the Sufi tradition in Islam.

This is a task which is only just beginning, but already one can discern the outlines of a new understanding of the Church. We must remember that Christianity began as a small charismatic group of Jews inspired by a new spirit and only gradually developed its ecclesiastical structures in the Greco-Roman world. It is these structures which are now being called in question as

Christianity encounters the spirituality of Asia, especially that of Vedanta. Christian theology was based on the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, which was certainly very profound, but Vedanta offers a philosophy of even greater depth. The heart of Hindu philosophy is to be found in the concept of Advaita, of non-duality. Beyond all the structures of rational thought and all conceptual systems there is a transcendent and yet immanent reality beyond word and thought and it is in the experience of this reality, of Brahman and Atman in Hindu terms, that ultimate Truth and Reality is to be found.

Fortunately there is in the Christian tradition under the influence of Neo-Platonism a similar conception, which was developed by a Syrian monk, who took the name of Dionysius the Areopagite, in the sixth century. The teaching of Dionysius was accepted by St Thomas Aquinas, the great doctor of the medieval Church, as an authentic expression of Christian mysticism. According to Dionysius, we have to transcend all images and concepts, even the concept of being itself, if we want to know God, the ultimate truth and reality. There is therefore in the Christian tradition a doctrine similar to that of Sankara and it is at this point that the Hindu and Christian traditions can meet. As long as we remain

THE FULLNESS

By Kavita Erica Byrd

You saturate our hearts
Until they burst—
My own true Self,
Your beauty beyond forms,
Shared with us all—
Is both the sun and shower that falls
From the place our hearts
evaporate.....

on the level of images and concepts, we will always find differences. It is only in the mystical experience of transcendent reality that we can rise above all differences, all dualisms, which divide the different religious traditions. Each religion has its own unique insight into the supreme reality and expresses it in different images and concepts. But beyond all such differences there is the ultimate truth, whether it is known as Brahman or Atman, in Buddhism as Nirvana or Sunyata or in Islam as Al Haqq. Today we are learning to value all these insights and to relate them to our own particular belief and practice.

SPIRITUALITY

The devotee knelt to be initiated into discipleship. The guru whispered the sacred *mantra* into his ear, warning him not to reveal it to anyone.

"What will happen if I do?" asked the devotee.

Said the guru, "Anyone you reveal the *mantra* to will be liberated from the bondage of ignorance and suffering, but you yourself will be excluded from discipleship and suffer damnation."

No sooner had he heard those words than the devotee rushed to the marketplace, collected a large crowd around him and repeated the sacred *mantra* for all to hear.

The disciples later reported this to the guru and demanded that the man be expelled from the monastery for his disobedience.

The guru smiled and said, "He has no need of anything I can teach. His action has shown him to be a guru in his own right."

— from *The Prayer of the Frog* by Anthon de Mello, S.J.



Icon of the Madonna and Christ

The Elders and Mysticism of the Russian Orthodox Church

By Mikhail Mikhailovich Bogolyudiev

THE leaders of virtually all Christian sects claim to derive their authority from being lineal spiritual descendents of the apostles whom Jesus selected to be His immediate disciples. These original disciples empowered their own successors by putting their hands on their heads and blessing them in their work. They in turn blessed the next generation, and so it went on down to the present day. All bishops and priests who received their authority in this way form part of what is called 'The Apostolic Succession'. Churches which are products of this lineage teach that no one is qualified to be a priest or an ordained minister unless he can trace his empowering lineage back to the apostles, and beyond them to Christ Himself.

And yet there is another kind of ministry, fully accepted by many sects and denominations,

whose authority comes directly from God rather than through a human lineage. Just as Hinduism accepts that devotees who realise the Self can become teaching Gurus, even though they may not come from any accepted *parampara*, and what is more, that they can teach with the divine authority which stems from their own inner experience of God, Christianity too recognises that the Holy Spirit may occasionally empower ordinary people to start public ministries of their own, without being sanctioned by any Church authority. The New Testament speaks of *charismata* (I Corinthians 12:28-30), which are gifts conferred directly by the Holy Spirit, and they include the gift of healing, the gift of performing miracles, the gift of prophecy, and the gift of teaching and preaching. Those who receive the gifts are not, unless they are ordained priests, permitted to perform sacred church

rituals, but, empowered by the Holy Spirit, they are allowed to bear witness to Christ in many other ways.

One such group is the *startsi*¹ or 'elders' of the Russian Orthodox Church. A *starets* is a man of spiritual discernment and wisdom whom others, either monks or people of the world, adopt as their guide and spiritual director. A *starets* is not someone who goes out into the world with a religious message or an ideal he wants to fulfil, he is someone who, however hard he tries to hide himself, finds that people flock to him for spiritual advice and sustenance. As Ramakrishna once noted: when a flower blooms, it does not need to go out looking for bees — they will flock, uninvited, to the flower. In the Russian tradition the *starets* may also be an ordained priest, but more frequently the Spirit has selected lay monks to do His work. The chosen *starets* is not appointed to his post by any human agency — he simply assumes it when people start spontaneously coming to him for guidance. The *starets*' special gift or *charisma* is to see in a concrete and practical way what the will of God is in relation to each person who comes to see him.

The tradition is an ancient one and the Russian Church traces its origin back to the time of St Anthony, a fourth century monk who is regarded by both Eastern and Western Churches as one of the founding fathers of Christian monasticism.

St Anthony spent many years as a recluse in the Egyptian desert, engaging himself in penance and perpetual prayer. One cannot rule out the possibility that he also did some form of self-enquiry during this period, for in one of his letters, written years later, he wrote, 'know yourself... he who knows himself knows God'. The technique of self-enquiry was certainly known and practised in that era because Monimus, a Christian mystic whose words are known to have been circulated in the third century, had been teaching:

Abandon the search for God and the creation

and other matters of a similar sort. Look for Him by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who is within you who makes everything his own and says, 'My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body'. Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate. If you carefully investigate these matters you will find Him in yourself.²

In his middle age, those who knew about St Anthony suddenly decided that it was time for him to become a teacher. St Athanasius, a contemporary of his, recorded what happened:

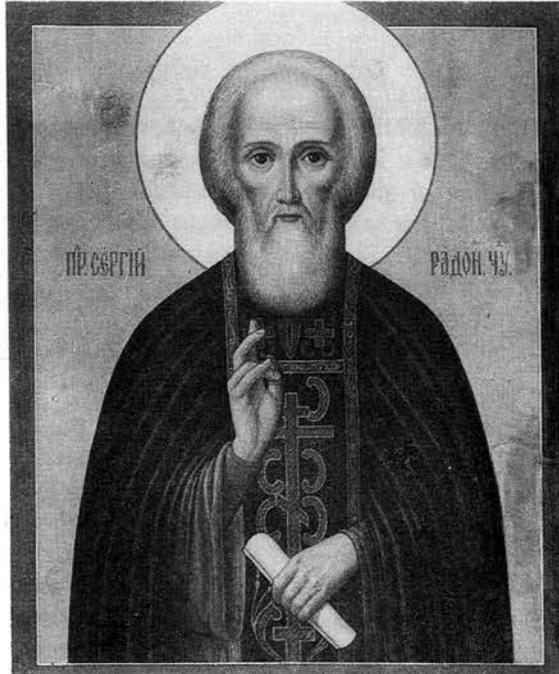
When many possessed the desire and will to emulate his asceticism, and some of his friends came and tore down and forcefully removed the fortress door [which guarded his privacy], Anthony came forth as though from some shrine.... He healed many of those present who suffered from bodily ailments, ... urging everyone to prefer nothing in the world above the love of Christ.³

Here is the prototype for the career of a *starets*: first there is the call from God to renounce the world and seek Him in some desolate place; then there are years of solitude in which the *starets-to-be* perfects himself; finally, when the recluse has found God and experienced Him directly, visitors begin to come for blessings and advice. Often a *starets* is initially unwilling to abandon his life of seclusion, but when the crowds grow to the point where, as in the case of St Anthony, they literally tear his door down, he acknowledges that the Holy Spirit has empowered him to start a ministry.

¹ In the Greek Orthodox Church the term 'Geron' means 'old man'. The Russian equivalent, 'starets', is usually translated as 'elder'. The plural is *startsi*. The Eastern or 'Orthodox' Church, to which the Russian Church belongs, and the Western or Roman Catholic Church drifted apart about 1,000 years ago, unable to agree on matters of doctrine and Church authority. They are still separate.

² Cited in Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, a fourth century polemic against gnosticism.

³ Athanasius, *Life of St Anthony*.



Icon of St. Sergei of Radonezh, the patron Saint of Russia

There is one other point on which St Anthony set an example. St Athanasius, his biographer, noted that in his formative years in the desert St Anthony 'Prayed constantly, since he had learned to pray unceasingly in private'. St Anthony had adopted this practice and this way of life in order to conform to two key Bible verses which were to be the basic instruction for all the hermit monks of Russia in the centuries to come:

And [said Jesus] when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father. (Matthew 6:5-6)

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Russia's patron saint, St Sergei of Radonezh (?1314-92) was also a *starets* and his life resembled in many ways that of St Anthony. In early manhood he withdrew into the forests of Siberia — in wildness and inaccessibility the Rus-

sian equivalent of the Egyptian desert — to undertake a life of solitary prayer. Like St Anthony, he had to battle with an assortment of 'demons' and innumerable 'temptations of the flesh'. After several years his hermitage was discovered, spiritual seekers came to him, and he took on the role of a *starets*. Unlike St Anthony, who encouraged spiritual aspirants to live in solitary hermitages and to pray alone, St Sergei founded a monastery, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, and encouraged new monks to come and stay with him. Within a few years it was one of the biggest monasteries in all the country.

St Sergei endeared himself to his contemporaries and to all future generations of Russian Christians by his simplicity and his humility. Like Ramana Maharshi he enjoyed doing menial chores, and even when he was abbot of an enormous monastery and one of the most famous spiritual figures in the country, he was often to be found, covered with mud, in the kitchen garden. He also, like Bhagavan, disliked waste and he enjoyed using things which other people had thrown away:

His clothing was old, worn, dirty and patched. Once they had in the monastery an ugly,

stained bad bit of cloth which all the brethren threw aside; one brother had it, kept it for a while and discarded it; so did another and a third, and so on to the seventh. But the saint did not despise it. He gratefully took it, cut it out and made himself a habit which he wore, not with disdain but with gratitude, for a whole year till it was worn out and full of holes.⁴

Devotees of Bhagavan will probably recall an incident, reported by Echammal (*Letters* 2:56), which took place at Virupaksha Cave. A new visitor arrived and found Bhagavan working alone on the construction of a mud bench. Taking him to be a coolie, the man asked where the Swami was. Bhagavan felt unable to announce 'I am the Swami' and so he said that the Swami had gone out. Echammal found the new man walking down the hill, disappointed at not having had *darshan*, and brought him back and introduced him. Here is a remarkably similar account from the life of St Sergei:

One day a Christian from a nearby village, who had never seen the saint, came to visit him. The abbot [Sergei] was digging in the garden. The visitor looked about and asked, 'Where is Sergei? Where is the wonderful and famous man?'

A brother replied, 'In the garden digging; wait a while until he comes in.'

The visitor, growing impatient, peeped through an aperture and perceived the saint, his face covered with sweat, his clothes shabby, patched and full of holes. And he could not believe that this was he of whom he had heard. When the saint came from the garden, the monks informed him, 'This is he whom you wish to see'.

The visitor turned from the saint and mocked at him [the monk who had pointed him out]: 'I came to see a prophet and you point out to me a needy-looking beggar. I see no glory, no majesty, no honour about him... he is but a needy, indigent beggar.'

The brethren, reporting to the abbot, said,

'We hardly dare tell you, reverend father, and we would send away your guest as a good-for-nothing rude fellow. He has been discourteous and disrespectful about you, reproaches us, and will not listen to us.'

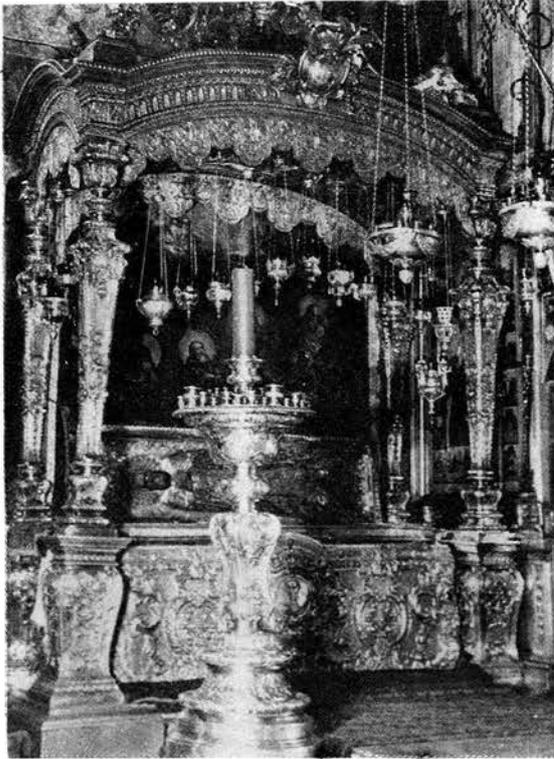
The holy man, fixing his eyes on the brethren, and seeing their confusion, said to them, 'Do not do so, brethren, for he did not come to see you. He came to visit me.' And since he expected no obeisance from his visitor, he went towards him, humbly bowing low on the ground before him, and blessed and praised him for his right judgement.⁵ Then, taking him by the hand, the saint sat him down at his right hand and bade him partake of food and drink. The visitor expressed his regret at not seeing Sergei, whom he had taken the trouble to come and visit; and his wish had not been fulfilled. The saint remarked, 'Be not sad about it, for such is God's grace that no one ever leaves this place with a heavy heart'.

As he spoke a neighbouring prince arrived at the monastery, with great pomp, accompanied by a retinue of other aristocrats, servants and attendants. The armed attendants who preceded the prince took the visitor by the shoulders and removed him out of sight of the prince and of Sergei. The prince then advanced and, from a distance, made a low obeisance to Sergei. The saint gave him his blessing and, after bestowing a kiss on him, they both sat down while everyone else remained standing. The visitor thrust his way through, and going up to one of those standing by, asked, 'Who is the monk sitting on the prince's right hand? Tell me.'

The man turned to him and said, 'Are you a stranger here? Have you not indeed heard of blessed Father Sergei? It is he speaking with the prince.'

⁴ Epiphanius, *The Life, Acts and Miracles of our Revered and Holy Father Abbot Sergei*.

⁵ That is, Sergei is agreeing with the man's opinion that he, Sergei, is nothing but an 'indigent beggar'.



The tomb of St. Sergei in the Monastery of the Trinity and St. Sergei

Upon hearing this the visitor was overcome with remorse, and after the prince's departure, taking several of the brethren to intercede for him, and making a low obeisance before the abbot, he said, 'Father, I am but a sinner and a great offender. Forgive me and help my unbelief.'⁶

Sergei, of course, accepted the apology. The man became one of the saint's followers and eventually became a monk in one of his monasteries.

The nineteenth century produced a number of outstanding and famous *startsi*. One hermitage alone, that of Optino, produced a succession of *startsi* whose spiritual influence extended over the whole length of Russia. Leonid (1768-1841), Macarius (1788-1860) and Ambrose (1812-91) brought, through their saintliness, spirituality to the masses and even influenced such famous writers as Gogol, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. The remarkable figure of Father Zossima, who appears as a *starets* in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, is the most celebrated fictional *starets*, and it is gener-

ally thought that Dostoyevsky created his character as a composite of the various *startsi* of Optino.

The nineteenth century saw a great revival in Orthodox Russian spirituality, and thousands of people took to a nomadic life, not unlike that of an Indian *sannyasin*, in which they walked the highways of Russia, saying their prayers, begging their food as they went, and seeking out *startsi* who could help them develop their inner spiritual life. One writer of the period, Ivan Kireyevsky, summed up the prevailing mood when he wrote: 'There is one thing more important than all possible books and ideas, and that is to find an orthodox *starets* before whom you can lay each of your thoughts, and from whom you can hear not your own opinion but the judgement of the holy fathers. God be praised, such *startsi* have not yet disappeared in Russia.'

The most well-known of these seekers was the anonymous author of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, a Russian peasant who walked the length and breadth of Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century, repeating the Jesus prayer throughout his waking day. The prayer, which evolved over the centuries, had, by the nineteenth century, reached its final form: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' The continuous repetition of this prayer was the principal *sadhana* of the three Optino *startsi*, and it was taken up by virtually all seekers of the era who wanted a means of experiencing God's grace. It was not just a *japa*, it was a *sadhana* of the whole body. The repetition was synchronised with the breath, and in the more advanced stages of the practice it was also synchronised with the heart-beat. After a period of strenuous practice, often lasting many years, practitioners found that the prayer took them over. It would proceed effortlessly, of its own accord, even sometimes continuing during sleep, and it would fill the practitioners with love, peace

⁶ Epiphanius, *op. cit.*

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The Great Cathedral of the Dormition in the Monastery of the Trinity and St. Sergei

and the grace of the Holy Spirit. In a few mature souls it culminated in a union with God.

The most famous of the nineteenth century *startsi* was undoubtedly St Seraphim, an extraordinary man who only taught for seven years between 1825 and 1832. He entered the Sarov monastery when he was nineteen and spent fifteen years as a normal monk, studying, praying, and helping out in the communal life of the monastery. Then, feeling a need for solitude and prayer, he moved to a hut in the woods where he meditated and prayed in solitude from 1794 to 1804. At the end of this period he was beaten up by some passing thieves so severely that his body became permanently bent. Undaunted, after five months of recuperation in the monastery, he returned to the wilderness and intensified his *sadhana*. He took to standing on a rock and praying incessantly. Except for short breaks to feed himself and to attend to the other needs of his body, he stood perpetually for 1,000 days (1804-07) on a large stone in the forest, using one stone during the day and another at night. At the end of this period the abbot of his monastery died and Seraphim was offered the job.

He declined, preferring instead to remain out in the forest in solitude and complete silence. He spoke to no one, not even the brother who brought him food. Years later he explained why he had remained silent for so long:

Most of all he [a seeker] must adorn himself with silence. As Ambrose of Milan says, by silence have I seen many saved, by many words, not one. Again one of the Fathers says, 'Silence is the sacrament of the world to come, words are the weapons of this world'.⁷

In 1810 his legs had become so weakened by the practice of continuously standing in prayer, day and night, that he had to return to the monastery to be looked after by his fellow monks. He had himself shut up in a cell and continued his life of silent prayer, never going out and never speaking. There was no relaxation of his asceticism, for he had no bed and no form of heating to ward off the extremes of the Russian winter. He rarely lay down to sleep,

⁷ Nikolai Motovilov, *Conversations with St Seraphim on the Aim of Christian Life*.

preferring instead to sleep sitting on the floor, with his back against a wall, or, even more ascetically, on his knees. In addition to his praying, he completed each day 1,000 obeisances to an icon of the Virgin Mary, the only image in the room. He emerged briefly in 1815 to bless a couple who had come to visit him, but his long period of silent seclusion did not end till 1825, nearly thirty years after he had begun his life as a recluse. For the last seven years of his life he received everyone who came to see him between dawn and evening, performed many miraculous cures and gave advice on the many personal problems that were brought to him. He could clearly see into the hearts and minds of his visitors, for he would often supply appropriate answers before the visitors had even had a chance to speak about their problems. In the final years of his life it was not uncommon for thousands to visit him every day.

Although Seraphim had tortured his body in order to gain his spiritual goal and to subdue his desires, he was, in the years of his teaching career, a happy jolly man who taught that perfection could be attained by anyone who took the trouble to keep his mind on God by repeating continuously three or four prayers or affirmations of faith. He encouraged the use of the Lord's prayer, the 'Hail Mary', the repetition of the Nicene Creed (the central statement of Christian faith) and above all, the prayer of Jesus.

'O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' In this be all thy attention and learning. Walking and sitting, working and standing in Church, coming and going, let this unending cry be on thy lips and in thy heart. With it thou shalt find peace, thou shalt acquire spiritual and physical purity, in thee will abide the Holy Spirit, the fount of all good things, who will guide thy life in holiness, in all piety and purity.

Those who have truly decided to serve the Lord God must have practice in the remembrance of God and in ceaseless prayer to Jesus. When the mind and heart are united in prayer and the thoughts of the soul are not

NOISE

Each day the Master would be inundated with questions that he would reply to seriously, playfully, gently, firmly.

One disciple always sat through each session in silence.

When someone questioned her about it, she said, "I hardly hear a word he says. I am too distracted by his silence."

— in *One Minute Wisdom* by Anthony de Mello, S.J.

scattered, then the heart is warmed with a spiritual warmth, wherein shines the light of Christ, filling with peace and joy the whole inner man.⁸

Towards the end of 1832 Seraphim felt that he would soon pass away. He constructed his own coffin, said farewell to his bishop and even gave him some candles which were to be lit at the funeral service. Early in the morning of January 2nd, 1833, his cell accidentally caught fire. When the fire was extinguished, Seraphim was found dead, kneeling in prayer before his icon of the Virgin Mary. The lethal fire had failed to disturb him in his devotions. Knowing that many people had come to depend on him for guidance and succour, he left a message for his spiritual children:

When I am no more, come to my grave. As you have time, come. The oftener the better! All that is in your soul, whatever may have befallen you, come to me and bring all your grief to my grave. Bending to earth, as to a living thing, tell all and I shall hear you. All your sorrow will fly away and pass. As you ever spoke with the living, speak here! For you I live and shall live for ever!⁹

(To be continued in the next issue)

⁸ A.F. Dobbie-Bateman, *St Seraphim of Sarov*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

THE SACRED FLAME

By Selma Lagerlof

Christian Legends

Editor's Introduction

Continued from our previous issue, "The Sacred Flame" is a beautiful allegory of the Quest. Although set in a Christian motif, it is universally applicable to aspirants on all paths.

In the key figures of the story, Raniero and Francesca, we see the base animal nature of man, apparently incorrigible and invincible, pitted against the seeming weakness and impotence of his higher nature, "the still small voice within".

Raniero, a Florentine bully, is married to the well-bred Francesca. His repeated acts of extreme brutishness put an intolerable strain on Francesca's love for him, and she returns to her father's house. Raniero is determined to win her back but, unable to live in the same city as his wife who has abandoned him, he leaves Florence, becoming a soldier of fortune of some renown.

Before leaving Florence, he makes a vow to the Madonna in the cathedral, to present Her with the best and the rarest of whatever he won in every battle. Despite his rich success, Francesca is unmoved. Raniero takes the Cross, joins the Crusades and departs for the Orient, hoping to win not only castles and land but also his estranged wife.

On the night following the capture of Jerusalem, there is great rejoicing in the Crusaders' camp. Raniero is the hero of the hour, honoured by being allowed to be the first to light his candle from the sacred candles which burn on the altar before Christ's tomb.

As the evening of boisterous revelry wears on, a "fool" wandering all over the camp and amusing people with his pranks, comes into Raniero's tent and is given permission to narrate a comic story. The barbed truths and left-handed compliments of the wily fool find their mark and soon the company is rolling in merriment, for the butt of this mocking humour is the formidable Raniero himself.

Furious, and in the mood to undertake the wildest projects, just to put an end to their laughter, Raniero declares that he will indeed carry to the Madonna in Florence the most precious thing he has won in this battle — the sacred candle-flame which he was permitted to light at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the presence of the whole corps.

Raniero is quite beside himself and does not consider his words. "I shall travel alone," he says. But with this declaration, Raniero has carried his point. Everyone in the tent has ceased laughing. Terrified, they sit and stare at him.

"Why don't you laugh any more?" asks Raniero. "This undertaking surely can't be anything but a child's game for a brave man."

Part I

III

The next morning at dawn Raniero mounted his horse. He was in full armour, but over it he had thrown a coarse pilgrim cloak, so that the iron dress should not become overheated by exposure to the sun's rays. He was armed with a sword and a battle-club, and rode a good horse. He held in his hand a burning candle, and to the saddle he had tied a couple of bundles of long wax candles, so the flame should not die out for lack of nourishment.

Raniero rode slowly through the long, encumbered tent street, and thus far all went well. It was still so early that the mists which had arisen from the deep dales surrounding Jerusalem were not dispersed, and Raniero rode forward as in a white night. The whole troop slept, and Raniero passed the guards easily. None of them called out his name, for the mist prevented their seeing him, and the roads were covered with a dust-like soil a foot high, which made the horse's tramp inaudible.

Raniero was soon outside the camp and started on the road which led to Joppa. Here it was smoother, but he rode very slowly now, because of the candle, which burned feebly in the thick mist. Big insects kept dashing against the flame. Raniero had all he could do guarding it, but he was in the best of spirits and thought all the while that the mission which he had undertaken was so easy a child could manage it.

Meanwhile, the horse grew weary of the slow pace, and began to trot. The flame began to flicker in the wind. It didn't help that Raniero tried to shield it with his hand and with cloak. He saw that it was about to be extinguished.

But he had no desire to abandon the project so soon. He stopped the horse, sat still a moment, and pondered. Then he dismounted and tried sitting backwards, so that his body shielded

the flame from the wind. In this way he succeeded in keeping it burning; but he realized now that the journey would be more difficult than he had thought at the beginning.

When he had passed the mountains which surround Jerusalem, the fog lifted. He rode forward now in the greatest solitude. There were no people, houses, green trees, nor plants, only bare rocks.

Here Raniero was attacked by robbers. They were idle folk, who followed the camp without permission, and lived by theft and plunder. They had lain in hiding behind a hill, and Raniero — who rode backwards — had not seen them until they had surrounded him and brandished their swords at him.

There were about twelve men. They looked wretched, and rode poor horses. Raniero saw at once that it would not be difficult for him to break through this company and ride on. But after his proud boast of the night before, he was unwilling to abandon his undertaking easily.

He saw no other means of escape than to compromise with the robbers. He told them that since he was armed and rode a good horse, it might be difficult to overpower him if he defended himself. And as he was bound by a vow, he did not wish to offer resistance, but they could take whatever they wanted, without a struggle, if only they promised not to put out his light.

The robbers had expected a hard struggle, and were very happy over Raniero's proposal, and began immediately to plunder him. They took from him armour and steed, weapons and money. The only thing they let him keep were the course cloak and the two bundles of wax candles. They kept their sacred promise, also, not to put out the candle flame.

One of them mounted Raniero's horse. When he noticed what a fine animal it was, he felt a little sorry for the rider. He called out to him: "Come, come — must not be too cruel toward



a Christian. You shall have my old horse to ride."

It was a miserable old screw of a horse. It moved as stiffly and with as much difficulty, as if it were made of wood.

When the robbers had gone at last, and Raniero had mounted the wretched horse, he said to himself: "I must have become bewitched by this candle flame. For its sake I must now travel along the roads like a crazy beggar."

He knew it would be wise for him to turn back, because the undertaking was really impracticable. But such an intense yearning to accomplish it had come over him that he could not resist the desire to go on. Therefore, he went farther. He saw all around him the same bare, yellowish hills.

After a while he came across a goatherd, who tended four goats. When Raniero saw the animals grazing on the barren ground, he wondered if they ate earth.

This goatherd had owned a larger flock, which had been stolen from him by the Crusaders. When he noticed a solitary Christian come riding toward him, he tried to do him all the harm he could. He rushed up to him and struck at his light with his staff. Raniero was so taken up by the flame that he could not defend himself even against a goatherd. He only drew the candle close to him to protect it. The goatherd struck at it several times more, then he paused, aston-

ished, and ceased striking. He noticed that Raniero's cloak had caught fire, but Raniero did nothing to smother the blaze, so long as the sacred flame was in danger. The goatherd looked as though he felt ashamed. For a long time he followed Raniero and in one place, where the road was very narrow, with a deep chasm on each side of it, he came up and led the horse for him.

Raniero smiled and thought that the goatherd surely regarded him as a holy man who had undertaken a voluntary penance.

Toward evening Raniero began to meet people. Rumours of the fall of Jerusalem had already spread to the coast, and a throng of people had immediately prepared to go up there. There were pilgrims who for years had awaited an opportunity to get into Jerusalem, also some newly-arrived troops; but they were mostly merchants who were hastening with provisions.

When these throngs met Raniero, who came riding backwards with a burning candle in his hand, they cried: "A madman, a madman!"

The majority were Italians; and Raniero heard how they shouted in his own tongue, "Pazzo, pazzo!" which means "a madman, a madman."

Raniero, who had been able to keep himself well in check all day, became intensely irritated by these ever-recurring shouts. Instantly he dismounted and began to chastise the offenders

with his hard fists. When they saw how heavy the blows were, they took to their heels, and Raniero stood alone on the road.

Now Raneiro was himself again. "In truth they were right to call me a madman," he said, as he looked around for the light. He did not know what he had done with it. At last he saw that it had rolled down into a hollow. The flame was extinguished, but he saw fire a gleam from a dry grass-tuft close beside it, and understood that luck was with him, for the flame had ignited the grass before it had gone out.

"This might have been an inglorious end of a deal of trouble," he thought, as he lit the candle and stepped into the saddle. He was rather mortified. It did not seem to him very probable that his journey would be a success.

In the evening Raniero reached Ramle, and rode up to a place where caravans usually had night harbour. It was a large covered yard, all around it were little stalls where travellers could put up their horses. There were no rooms, but folk could sleep beside the animals.

The place was overcrowded with people, yet the host found room for Raniero and his horse. He also gave fodder to the horse and food to the rider.

When Raniero perceived that he was well treated, he thought: "I almost believe the robbers did me a service when they took from me my armour and my horse. I shall certainly get out of the country more easily with my light burden, if they mistake me for a lunatic."

When he had led the horse into the stall, he sat down on a sheaf of straw and held the candle in his hands. It was his intention not to fall asleep, but to remain awake all night.

But he had hardly seated himself when he fell asleep. He was fearfully exhausted, and in his sleep he stretched out full length and did not wake till morning.

When he awoke he saw neither flame nor

IDOLATRY

The Master never wearied of warning his disciples about the dangers of religion. He loved to tell the story of the prophet who carried a flaming torch through the streets, saying he was going to set fire to the temple so that people would concern themselves more with the Lord than with the temple. Then he would add: "Some day I shall carry a flaming torch myself to set fire to both the temple and the Lord!"

— In *One Minute Wisdom* by
Anthony de Mello, S.J.

candle. He searched in the straw for the candle, but did not find it anywhere.

"Someone has taken it from me and extinguished it," he said. He tried to persuade himself that he was glad that all was over, and that he need not pursue an impossible undertaking.

But as he pondered, he felt a sense of emptiness and loss. He thought that never before had he so longed to succeed in anything on which he had set his mind.

He led the horse out and groomed and saddled it.

When he was ready to set out, the host who owned the caravansarai came up to him with a burning candle. He said in Frankish: "When you feel asleep last night, I had to take your light from you, but here you have it again."

Raniero betrayed nothing, but said very calmly: "It was wise of you to extinguish it."

"I have not extinguished it," said the man. "I noticed that it was burning when you arrived, and I thought it was of importance to you that it should continue to burn. If you see how much it has decreased, you will understand that it has been burning all night."

Part II

IV

When Raniero broke away from the camp at Jerusalem, he intended to travel from Joppa to Italy by sea, but changed his mind after he had been robbed of his money, and decided to make the journey by land.

It was a long journey. From Joppa he went northward along the Syrian coast. Then he rode westward along the peninsula of Asia Minor, then northward again, all the way to Constantinople. From there he still had a monotonously long distance to travel to reach Florence. During the whole journey Raniero had lived upon the contributions of the pious. They that shared their bread with him mostly were pilgrims who at this time travelled *en masse* to Jerusalem.

Regardless of the fact that he nearly always rode alone, his days were neither long nor monotonous. He always had to guard the candle flame, and on its account he never could feel at ease. It needed only a puff of breeze — a rain-drop — and there would have been an end to it.

As Raniero rode over lonely roads, and thought only about keeping the flame alive, it occurred to him that once before he had been concerned with something similar. Once before he had seen a person watch over something which was just as sensitive as a candle flame.

This recollection was so vague to him at first that he wondered if it was something he had dreamed.

But as he rode on alone through the country, it kept recurring to him that he had participated in something similar once before.

"It is as if all my life long I heard tell of nothing else," said he.

One evening he rode into a city. It was after sundown, and the housewives stood in their doorways and watched for their husbands. Then

he noticed one who was tall and slender, and had earnest eyes. She reminded him of Francesca degli Uberti.

Instantly it became clear to him what he had been pondering over. It came to him that for Francesca her love must have been as a sacred flame which she had always wished to keep burning, and which she constantly feared that Raniero would quench. He was astonished at this thought, but grew more and more certain that the matter stood thus. For the first time he began to understand why Francesca had left him, and that it was not with feats of arms he should win her back.

The journey which Raniero made was of long duration. This was in part due to the fact that he could not venture out when the weather was bad. Then he sat in some caravanserai, and guarded the candle flame. These were very trying days.

One day, when he rode over Mount Lebanon, he saw that a storm was brewing. He was riding high up among awful precipices, and a frightful distance from any human abode. Finally he saw on the summit of a rock the tomb of a Saracen saint. It was a little square stone structure with a vaulted roof. He thought it best to seek shelter there.

He had hardly entered when a snowstorm came up, which raged for two days and nights. At the same time it grew so cold that he came near freezing to death.

Raniero knew that there were heaps of branches and twigs out on the mountain, and it would not have been difficult for him to gather fuel for a fire. But he considered the candle flame which he carried very sacred, and did not wish to light anything from it, except the candles before the Blessed Virgin's Altar.

The storm increased, and at last he heard thunder and saw gleams of lightning.

Then came a flash which struck the mountain, just in front of the tomb, and set fire to a tree. And in this way he was enabled to light his

fire without having to borrow of the sacred flame.

As Raniero was riding on through a desolate portion of the Cilicians mountain district, his candles were all used up. The candles which he had brought with him from Jerusalem had long since been consumed; but still he had been able to manage because he had found Christian communities all along the way, of whom he had begged fresh candles.

But now his resources were exhausted, and he thought that this would be the end of his journey.

When the candle was so nearly burnt out that the flame scorched his hand, he jumped from his horse and gathered branches and dry leaves and lit these with the last of the flame. But up on the mountain there was very little that would ignite, and the fire would soon burn out.

While he sat and grieved because the sacred flame must die, he heard singing down the road, and a procession of pilgrims came marching up the steep path, bearing candles in their hands. They were on their way to a grotto where a holy man had lived, and Raniero followed them. Among them was a woman who was very old and had difficulty in walking, and Raniero carried her up the mountain.

When she thanked him afterwards, he made a sign to her that she should give him her candle. She did so, and several others also presented him with the candles which they carried. He extinguished the candles, hurried down the steep path, and lit one of them with the last spark from the fire lighted by the sacred flame.

One day at the noon hour it was very warm, and Raniero had lain down to sleep in a thicket. He slept soundly, and the candle stood beside him between a couple of stones. When he had been asleep a while, it began to rain, and this continued for some time, without his waking. When at last he was startled out of his sleep, the ground around him was wet, and he hardly dared glance toward the light, for fear it might be quenched.

But the light burned calmly and steadily in the rain, and Raniero saw that this was because two little birds flew and fluttered just above the flame. They caressed it with their bills, and held their wings outspread, and in this way they protected the sacred flame from the rain.

He took off his hood immediately, and hung it over the candle. Thereupon he reached out his hand for the two little birds, for he had been seized with a desire to pet them. Neither of them flew away because of him, and he could catch them.

He was very much astonished that the birds were not afraid of him. "It is because they know I have no thought except to protect that which is the most sensitive of all, that they do not fear me," thought he.

Raniero rode in the vicinity of Nicea, in Bithynia. Here he met some western gentlemen who were conducting a party of recruits to the Holy Land. In this company was Robert Taillefer, who was a wandering knight and a troubadour.

Raniero, in his torn cloak came riding along with the candle in his hand, and the warriors began as usual to shout, "A madman, a madman!" But Robert silenced them, and addressed the rider.

"Have you journeyed far in this manner?" he asked.

"I have ridden like this all the way from Jerusalem," answered Raniero.

"Has your light been extinguished many times during this journey?"

"Still the flame burns that lighted the candle with which I rode away from Jerusalem," responded Raniero.

Then Robert Taillefer said to him: "I am also one of those who carry a light, and I would that it burned always. But perchance you, who have brought your light burning all the way from Jerusalem, can tell me what I shall do that it may not become extinguished?"

Then Raniero answered: "Master, it is a

difficult task, although it appears to be of slight importance. This little flame demands of you that you shall entirely cease to think of anything else. It will not allow you to have any sweetheart — in case you should desire anything of the sort — neither would you dare on account of this flame to sit down at a revel. You cannot have aught else in your thoughts than just this flame, and must possess no other happiness. But my chief reason for advising you against making the journey which I have weathered is that you cannot for an instant feel secure. It matters not through how many perils you may have guarded the flame, you cannot for an instant think yourself secure, but must ever expect that the very next moment it may fail you."

But Robert Taillefer raised his head proudly and answered: "What you have done for your sacred flame I may do for mine."

Raniero arrived in Italy. One day he rode through lonely roads up among the mountains. A woman came running after him and begged him to give her a light from his candle. "The fire in my hut is out," she cried. "My children are hungry. Give me a light that I may heat my oven and bake bread for them!"

She reached for the burning candle, but Raniero held it back because he did not wish that anything should be lighted by that flame but the candles before the image of the Blessed Virgin.

Then the woman said to him: "Pilgrim, give me a light, for the life of my children is the flame which I am in duty bound to keep burning!" And because of these words he permitted her to light the wick of her lamp from his flame.

Several hours later he rode into a town. It lay far up on the mountain, where it was very cold. A peasant stood in the road and saw the poor wretch who came riding in his torn cloak. Instantly he stripped off the short mantle which he wore, and flung it to him. But the mantle fell directly over the candle and extinguished the flame.

Then Raniero remembered the woman who had borrowed a light of him. He turned back to her and had his candle lighted anew with sacred fire.

When he was ready to ride farther, he said to her: "You say that the sacred flame which you must guard is the life of your children. Can you tell me what name this candle's flame bears, which I have carried over long roads?"

"Where was your candle lighted?" asked the woman.

"It was lighted at Christ's sepulchre," said Raniero.

"Then it can only be called Gentleness and Love of Humanity," said she.

Raniero laughed at the answer. He thought himself a singular apostle of virtues such as these.

Raniero rode forward between beautiful blue hills. He saw he was near Florence. He was thinking that he must soon part with his light. He thought of his tent in Jerusalem, which he had left filled with trophies, and the brave soldiers who were still in Palestine, and who would be glad to have him take up the business of war once more, and bear them on to new conquests and honours.

Then he perceived that he experienced no pleasure in thinking of this, but that his thoughts were drawn in another direction.

Then he realized for the first time that he was no longer the same man who had left Jerusalem. The ride with the sacred flame had compelled him to rejoice with all who were peaceable and wise and compassionate, and to abhor the savage and war-like.

He was happy every time he thought of people who laboured peacefully in their homes, and it occurred to him that he would willingly move into his old workshop in Florence and do beautiful and artistic work.

"Truly this flame has recreated me," he

thought. "I believe it has made a new man of me."

V

It was Eastertide when Raniero rode into Florence.

He had scarcely come in through the city gate — riding backwards, with his hood drawn down over his face and the burning candle in his hand — when a beggar arose and shouted the customary "Pazzo, pazzo!"

At this cry a street gamin darted out of a doorway, and a loafer, who had had nothing else to do for a long time than to lie and gaze at the clouds, jumped to his feet. Both began shouting the same thing: "Pazzo, pazzo!"

Now that there were three who shrieked, they made a good deal of noise and so woke up all the street urchins. They came rushing out from nooks and corners. As soon as they saw Raniero, in his torn coat on the wretched horse, they shouted: "Pazzo, pazzo!"

But this was only what Raniero was accustomed to. He rode quietly up the street, seeming not to notice the shouters.

Then they were not content with merely shouting, but one of them jumped up and tried to blow out the light. Raniero raised the candle on high, trying at the same time to prod his horse, to escape the boys.

They kept even pace with him, and did everything they could to put out the light.

The more he exerted himself to protect the flame the more excited they became. They leaped upon one another's backs, puffed their cheeks out, and blew. They flung their caps at the candle. It was only because they were so numerous and crowded on one another that they did not succeed in quenching the flame.

This was the largest procession on the street. People stood at the windows and laughed. No one felt any sympathy with a madman, who wanted to defend his candle flame. It was church

hour, and many worshippers were on their way to Mass. They, too, stopped and laughed at the sport.

But now Raniero stood upright in the saddle so that he could shield the candle. He looked wild. The hood had fallen back, and they saw his face, which was wasted and pale, like a martyr's. The candle he held uplifted as high as he could.

The entire street was one great swarm of people. Even the older ones began to take part in the play. The women waved their headshaws and the men swung their caps. Every one worked to extinguish the light.

Raniero rode under the vine-covered balcony of a house. Upon this stood a woman. She leaned over the lattice-work, snatched the candle, and ran in with it. The woman was Francesca degli Uberti.

The whole populace burst into shrieks of laughter and shouts, but Raniero swayed in his saddle and fell to the ground.

As soon as he lay there stricken and unconscious, the street was emptied of people.

No one wished to take charge of the fallen man. His horse was the only creature that stopped beside him.

As soon as the crowds had got away from the street, Francesca degli Uberti came out from her house, with the burning candle in her hand. She was still pretty; her features were gentle, and her eyes were deep and earnest.

She went up to Raniero and bent over him. He lay senseless, but the instant the candle light fell upon his face, he moved and roused himself. It was apparent that the candle flame had complete power over him. When Francesca saw that he had regained his senses, she said: "Here is your candle. I snatched it from you, as I saw how anxious you were to keep it burning. I knew of no other way to help you."

Raniero had a bad fall, and was hurt. But now nothing could hold him back. He began to raise himself slowly. He wanted to walk, but

wavered, and was about to fall. Then he tried to mount his horse. Francesca helped him. "Where do you wish to go?" she asked when he sat in the saddle again. "I want to go to the cathedral," he answered. "Then I shall accompany you," she said, "for I am going to Mass." And she led the horse for him.

Francesca had recognized Raniero the very moment she saw him, but he did not see who she was, for he did not take time to notice her. He kept his gaze fixed upon the candle flame alone.

They were absolutely silent all the way. Raniero thought only of the flame, and of guarding it well these last moments. Francesca could not speak, for she felt she did not wish to be certain of that which she feared. She could not but believe that Raniero had come home insane. Although she was almost certain of this, she would rather not speak with him, in order to avoid any positive assurance.

After a while Raniero heard some one weep near him. He looked around and saw that it was Francesca degli Uberti, who walked beside him; and she wept. But Raniero saw her only for an instant, and said nothing to her. He wanted to think only of the sacred flame.

Raniero let her conduct him to the sacristy. There he dismounted. He thanked Francesca for her help, but looked all the while not upon her, but on the light. He walked alone up to the priests in the sacristy.

Francesca went into the church. It was Easter Eve, and all the candles stood unlighted upon the altars, as a symbol of mourning. Francesca thought that every flame of hope which had ever burned within her was now extinguished.

In the church there was profound solemnity. There were many priests at the altar. The canons sat in a body in the chancel, with the bishop among them.

By and by Francesca noticed there was commotion among the priests. Nearly all who were

not needed to serve at mass arose and went out into the sacristy. Finally the bishop went, too.

When Mass was over, a priest stepped up to the chancel railing and began to speak to the people. He related that Raniero di Raniero had arrived in Florence with sacred fire from Jerusalem. He narrated what the rider had endured and suffered on the way. And he praised him exceedingly.

The people sat spellbound and listened to this. Francesca had never before experienced such a blissful moment. "O God!" she sighed, "This is greater happiness than I can bear." Her tears fell as she listened.

The priest talked long and well. Finally he said in a strong, thrilling voice: "It may perchance appear like a trivial thing now, that a candle flame has been brought to Florence. But I say to you: Pray God that he will send Florence many bearers of eternal light; then she will become a great power, and be extolled as a city among cities!"

When the priest had finished speaking, the entrance doors of the church were thrown open, and a procession of canons and monks and priests marched up the centre aisle toward the altar. The bishop came last, and by his side walked Raniero, in the same cloak that he had worn during the entire journey.

But when Raniero had crossed the threshold of the cathedral, an old man arose and walked toward him. It was Oddo, the father of the journeyman who had once worked for Raniero, and had hanged himself because of him.

When this man had come up to the bishop and Raniero, he bowed to them. Thereupon he said in such a loud voice that all the church heard him: "It is a great thing for Florence that Raniero has come with sacred fire from Jerusalem. Such a thing has never before been heard of or conceived. For that reason perhaps there may be many who will say that it is not possible. Therefore, I beg that all the people may know what proofs and witnesses Raniero has brought

with him, to assure us that this is actually fire which was lighted in Jerusalem."

When Raniero heard this he said: "God help me! How can I produce witnesses? I have made the journey alone. Deserts and mountain wastes must come and testify for me."

"Raniero is an honest knight," said the bishop, "and we believe him on his word."

"Raniero must know himself that doubts will arise as to this," said Oddo. "Surely, he cannot have ridden entirely alone. His little pages could certainly testify for him."

Then Francesca degli Uberti rushed up to Raniero. "Why need we witness?" said she. "All the women in Florence would swear on oath that Raniero speaks the truth!"

Then Raniero smiled, and his countenance brightened for a moment. Thereupon he turned his thoughts and his gaze once more upon the candle flame.

There was great commotion in the church. Some said that Raniero should not be allowed to light the candles on the altar until his claim was substantiated. With this many of his old enemies sided.

Then Jacopo degli Uberti rose and spoke on Raniero's behalf. "I believe everyone here knows that no very great friendship has existed between my son-in-law and me," he said, "but now both my sons and I will answer for him. We believe he has performed this task, and we know that one who has been disposed to carry out such an undertaking is a wise, discreet, and noble-minded man, whom we are glad to receive among us."

But Oddo and many others were not disposed to let him taste of the bliss he was yearning for. They got together in a close group and it was easy to see that they did not care to withdraw their demand.

Raniero apprehended that if this should develop into a fight, they would immediately try to

get at the candle. As he kept his eyes steadily fixed upon his opponents, he raised the candle as high as he could.

He looked exhausted in the extreme, and distraught. One could see that, although he wished to hold out to the very last, he expected defeat. What mattered it to him now if he were permitted to light the candles? Oddo's word had been a death-blow. When doubt was once awakened, it would spread and increase. He fancied that Oddo had already extinguished the sacred flame for ever.

A little bird came fluttering through the great open doors into the church. It flew straight into Raniero's light. He hadn't time to snatch it aside, and the bird dashed against it and put out the flame.

Raniero's arm dropped, and tears sprang to his eyes. The first moment he felt this as a sort of relief. It was better thus than if human beings had killed it.

The little bird continued its flight into the church, fluttering confusedly hither and thither, as birds do when they come into a room.

Simultaneously a loud cry resounded throughout the church: "The bird is on fire! The sacred candle flame has set its wings on fire!"

The little bird chirped anxiously. For a few moments it fluttered about, like a flickering flame, under the high chancel arches. Then it sank suddenly and dropped dead upon the Madonna's Altar.

But the moment the bird fell upon the Altar, Raniero was standing there. He had forced his way through the church, no one had been able to stop him. From the sparks which destroyed the bird's wings he lit the candles before the Madonna's Altar.

Then the bishop raised his staff and proclaimed: "God willed it! God has testified for him!"

And all the people in the church, both his

friends and opponents, abandoned their doubts and conjectures. They cried as with one voice, transported by God's miracle: "God willed it! God has testified for him!"

Of Raniero there is now only a legend, which says he enjoyed great good fortune for the remainder of his days, and was wise, prudent and compassionate. But the people of Florence always called him Pazzo degli Ranieri, in remembrance of the fact that they had believed him insane. And this became his honorary title. He founded a dynasty, which was named Pazzi, and is called so even to this day.

It might also be worth mentioning that it became a custom in Florence, each year at Easter Eve, to celebrate a festival in memory of

Raniero's home-coming with the sacred flame, and that, on this occasion, they always let an artificial bird fly with fire through the church. This festival would most likely have been celebrated even in our day had not some changes taken place recently.

But if it be true, as many hold, that the bearers of sacred fire who have lived in Florence and have made the city one of the most glorious on earth, have taken Raniero as their model, and have thereby been encouraged to sacrifice, to suffer and endure, this may here be left untold.

For what has been done by this light, which in dark times has gone out from Jerusalem, can neither be measured nor counted.

THE ESSENE GOSPEL

"I tell you truly, your body was made not only to breathe, and eat, and think, but it was also made to enter the Holy Stream of Life. And your ears were made not only to hear the words of men, the song of birds, and the music of falling rain, but they were also made to hear the Holy Stream of Sound. And your eyes were made not only to see the rising and setting of the sun, the ripple of sheaves of grain, and the words of the Holy Scrolls, but they were also made to see the Holy Stream of Light. One day your body will return to the Earthly Mother; even also your ears and your eyes. But the Holy Stream of Life, the Holy Stream of Sound, and the Holy Stream of Light, these were never born, and can never die. Enter the Holy Streams, even that Life, that Sound, and that Light which gave you birth; that you may reach the Kingdom of the Heavenly Father and become one with Him, even as the river empties into the far-distant sea."

— Jesus Christ in *The Essene Gospel of Peace*, Book Four.

CHRISTIANITY AND YOGA: A FEW CORRELATIONS

By Dr. David Frawley

There is only one truth or reality that we must all come to understand. Just as there is only one set of natural laws governing the universe that we must all follow, so there is only one set of ethical laws and one set of spiritual laws. Only knowledge of that one truth and its laws, not as something outside ourselves, but as our own true nature, can bring us peace and happiness.

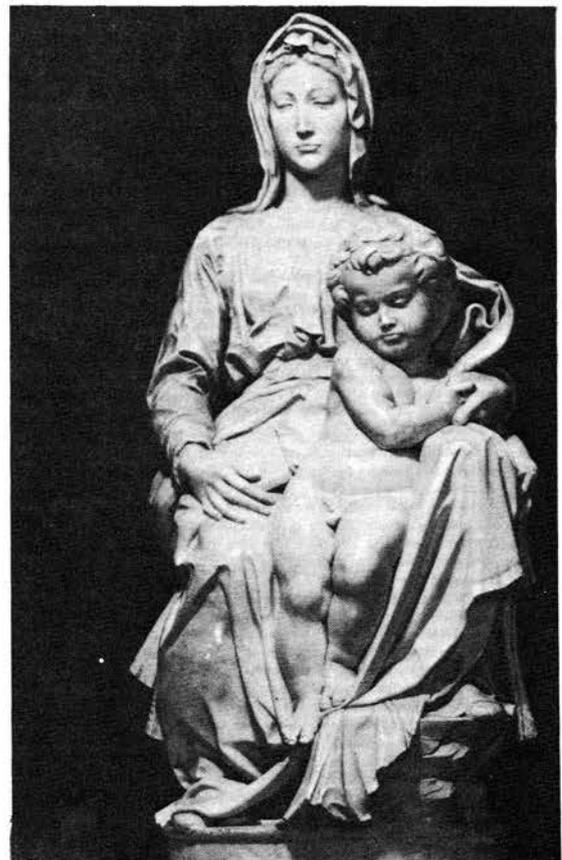
That one truth is reflected to some degree in all the religions, philosophies, and sciences of the world and is all that is really valid within them. Hence if we look deeply we can find the same spiritual truths hidden in all the religions of the world, and we see that it is these truths that constitute what is truly meaningful and liberating within these variant creeds. Such truths relate to the practice of yoga and meditation — the eternal quest for the Divine or our own true nature — not as a matter of mere belief but of direct experience. To see this, however, we must go beyond the literal interpretation of religious symbols and discern their inner truth.

In this article we will examine a few of these principles as they occur within the field of Christianity and how these relate to other traditions as well.

The Symbolism of the Virgin Birth

One of the special, doctrines and points of controversy of Christianity is the doctrine of the virgin birth. It is usually presented as a mere historical issue, a miracle that Christ was born of a virgin. Whether this is a literal or historical fact is not important. It is, however, a spiritual metaphor and this is its prime significance.

For the Divine consciousness to be born in



Mother Virgin Mary and Child Christ

the human being, the mind must first be brought into a receptive state. It must become pure, virgin, or free from the stain of thought. It must be divested of the ego or I-am-the-body concept which clouds its perception. The mind has a feminine or receptive nature and tends to mold itself after the reality it orients itself toward. If the mind is oriented to the outer or material world, it becomes unclean, or impure, caught in

the seeking of external pleasure in which it becomes corrupt. If it is oriented to the inner or spiritual reality, it becomes pure or clear, divesting itself of the residues of impressions based on external seeking which taint its perception.

Hence, for the Divine Child, or consciousness of the Divine, to be born within us, the mind must become virgin or free from thoughts, opinions, emotions, likes, dislikes and impressions of all kinds. It must become empty and void. The mind must take the form of the Divine Mother who is the primal consciousness underlying creation.

In fact, if the mind is brought to the silent or thought-free state the Divine Child must naturally and immediately take birth within it. In yoga the real work lies in purifying the mind, which could also be described as becoming the Divine Mother. The *Atman* or Divine Self is always there. Only the disturbed state of the mind, and its endless thoughts based upon the ego, prevents the perception of our true reality. For this reason many Vedantic traditions have allied themselves with the worship of the Divine Mother, not as a matter of mere custom but according to the necessity to first recreate the virgin mind. Similarly, Buddhist traditions have emphasized the voidness, *Shunyata*, which is also the Wisdom Mother, *Prajña*, of the *Budhas*.

In the Hindu tradition the divine Mother has many forms, a number of which reflect this idea of purity (like Sita, the wife of Rama, or Sati, the first incarnation of Siva's consort). Most significant perhaps is Parvati, the wife of Siva. She is symbolized by a mountain stream and represents the mind purified by the practice of meditation. The Divine Child similarly has many forms in Hinduism, but perhaps most significant in the *Puranas* is Skanda, who has not only a virgin birth, but is born indirectly, taking birth through fire, the heavenly Ganga river and the stars, before being taken on the breast of Parvati. Ramana Maharshi himself is considered to be an incarnation of Skanda or the Divine Child. He also honored the Mother consciousness and the pure, virgin, or receptive mind.

The details of the Christ-child story are different, but probably all of them can be understood according to a similar yogic understanding as indicating different aspects of the development of *Atmic* awareness. Only the child-like mind can find the truth. Only an innocent mind can really inquire into the nature of reality. Hence, to find truth we must gain the grace of the Divine Mother and ourselves become the Divine Child.

Christmas: Festival of Light

Religion and mythology often employ the symbolism of light. Light is the symbol of consciousness that illuminates all things. Darkness represents the ignorance or *Maya* which obstructs it. The Divine Son in most ancient religions is identified with the sun, which represents the Divine Light in creation. There are many such sun gods in the *Vedas*, the foremost being Vishnu himself. There were many such sun gods in the Near East also, like Osiris in Egypt, and the Persian Mithra (who is also related to the Vedic Mitra), whose religion vied with Christianity for power in ancient Rome. Christ was the last of these ancient solar Divine Son resurrection figures.

As the sun, the Divine Child is born at the winter solstice, when the solar light is renewed for the new year. He follows the path of light to return to his heavenly Father or the highest point of the light at the summer solstice. This is the Vedic and Upanishadic Path of the Gods (*Devayana*).

Vedic rituals, as well as most of those of the ancient world, follow this movement of the sun and the seasons. The movement from the winter solstice to the summer solstice symbolizes the movement of *Jivatman* or individual soul up the *sushumna* or central channel, while the movement from the summer to the winter solstice shows the downward movement. Hence the ritual reflects the practice of yoga. The Divine Sun/Son reflects the individual soul and its journey.

Christmas is well-known as an ancient winter

solstice festival which the Christians adopted. Yet we see that the symbolism of this festival agrees perfectly with the mystic meaning of the Christ child or child of light. The birth of the Divine Child thus occurs at the winter solstice and should properly be celebrated on that date. We should note that the December 25 date is an error.

Even today this festival exists in India as *Makara Sankranti* or the famous *Pongal* festival in South India. This is celebrated on January 14, but it relates originally to the time when the winter solstice occurred at the beginning of *Makara* (Capricorn), and hence it is properly a solstice festival also. This festival of the return of the light is thus something that is not limited to any religion but reflects the eternal religion or the universal approach to truth. This return of the light is also the birth of the Divine Child.

Self-sacrifice/The Crucifixion

The religion of sacrifice, such as we find in the *Vedas*, dominated the ancient world. A similar religion existed among the Jews; who also offered animal sacrifices and made various fire-offerings similar to what we find in the Hindu *Brahmanas*.

The highest sacrifice is the self-sacrifice (*Atma-yajña*) or knowledge-sacrifice (*Jñana-yajña*) — the offering of the ego, or sense of bodily identity, to the Divine — which occurs in meditation. This is the real meaning of the crucifixion. Christ as the Son of Man represents the ego-self which has to be offered so that it can be transformed into the Son of God or *Atmic* awareness. The cross symbolizes the dualities of bodily existence on which the soul suffers and from which it requires deliverance.

Similarly, the resurrection of Christ that occurs after the crucifixion symbolizes the resurrection of the *Atmic* awareness or consciousness of the Self after the death of the ego. Whether it is an historical fact or not, as in the case of the virgin birth, may not be important.

According to common Christian belief, the death of Christ redeems all humanity from its

sins. Therefore, if we believe in Christ, we will be saved from our sins. From the inner understanding, the sacrifice of Christ that redeems the sins of the world is not an act in time or that of a particular person or incarnation. Only the sacrifice of the ego or bodily consciousness can truly redeem the sins of man of the imperfections of our mortal nature. No other action can bring it about, and this we must do for ourselves. While a teacher, *guru*, or incarnation may function as an ideal or a symbol for this process or serve as the guide, they are no more than a signpost along the way, not the end of our journey. It is only the Self that delivers the Self. While many teachers and deities may symbolize that Self, we only find liberation through the Self alone, which requires going beyond all names.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi also represented this truth of self-sacrifice in his life. He pointed out the need to go beyond the ego as the fundamental thing for all human beings to do first. His inquiry into death, that brought about his realization at a young age, demonstrates the yogic meaning of the crucifixion process.

The Last Communion

The Last Communion of Christ also reflects this ancient religion of sacrifice. Christ offers bread and wine as symbols of his body and blood. This is the offering of the *Atmic* awareness for the benefit of all beings. Bread symbolizes pure being or Siva. Blood indicates Shakti or consciousness-force.

The *New Testament*, we should note, was written in Greek. Interestingly, the Greek word for body is *Soma*. Hence the Last Communion appears like a Vedic *Soma* Sacrifice. *Soma* is the mystic wine, the nectar of immortality (*ananda* or bliss), that we must partake of in order to become immortal. It flows from the crown *chakra* when melted by the flame of awareness or fire of inquiry (*Jñanagni*).

The Last Communion also reflects the importance of *Satsang* or company of the wise. When we spend time together we partake of each

other's nature. We share a common presence. This can serve to draw us to a greater state of unity with truth or reality.

The Trinity

Christianity has a trinity of the Divine Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This correlates well with the trinities of Vedic and Hindu thought. The Father is Siva who represents the transcendent aspect of Divinity, the destroyer of the worlds. The Son is Vishnu who represents the Divine Lord of the worlds, or the preserver, from whom come all the *avatars*. The Holy Spirit is Brahma, the creator, the cosmic mind.

Yet this trinity has perhaps an even more exact and older Vedic equivalent. The *Old Testament* Greek for our Heavenly Father is Pater Ouranos. He is the same as Pitar Varuna, Father Varuna of the *Vedas*, who, similar to the Semitic Father-God, is a sin-and-redemption figure in the *Vedas* also. The Divine Son in the *Vedas* is Mitra. We have already noted the similarity of Persian Mithra to Christ, and this is also true of his Vedic counterpart. The third of the Vedic trinity is Agni or the sacred fire (the flame of mindfulness or concentrated attention). Like the Holy Spirit he represents the Divine Word. The Holy Spirit moreover is also symbolized by a flame, which appeared on the heads of the disciples of Christ when the Holy Spirit entered them.

In this regard the Vedic word *Aum* has often been compared with the Christian "Amen" and the latter has been considered a mispronunciation of the former. When Christ, in the *Book of Revelations*, declares himself the Alpha and Omega (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet), some have also seen this as indicating *Om*.

Conclusion

There are many such statements in the *New Testament* that can be interpreted in a yogic way. For example, there is the statement, "If thy eye be single, thy body will be full of light." In yoga, once the awareness is concentrated on the

IMPRISONMENT

"You are so proud of your intelligence," said the Master to a disciple. "You are like the condemned man who is proud of the vastness of his prison cell."

— In *One Minute Wisdom* by Anthony de Mello, S.J.

third eye, the body does become full of light. Another example is Christ's miracle of changing water into wine at a wedding feast. The wedding symbolizes the union of the male and female aspects of the psyche. This allows the Christ consciousness or *Atmic* awareness to change the water of sensory perception into the wine of God communion.

There is also the symbolism of the twelve apostles. According to yogic symbolism there are six *chakras* of the subtle body which are dual in nature. These are the twelve disciples. Christ stands for the crown *chakra* wherein Self-realization occurs. These twelve also relate to the twelve months of the year and the twelve signs of the zodiac, with Christ representing the Sun. This is also part of the meaning of the inner zodiac.

We must remember that Biblical texts were revised several times and many other such yogic statements may have been lost in the process.

Probably the whole of the *New Testament* can be interpreted in such a spiritual light, and the original Christians probably did engage in some yoga practice. This may correlate with such ideas as Christ's visit to India.

As we move into a more global and religiously tolerant age, such correlations will again become clear and gain a more general acceptance.

THE NATIVITY OF JESUS AND ANCIENT SYMBOLISM

By Rosalind Christian

SAINTS Matthew and Luke give us the traditional story of Christ's Nativity. Mark and John take us straight to his Baptism in the Jordan. Essentially it is to Matthew that we must turn for the details. Almost all the elements are there in the first two chapters of his Gospel:

(1) Jesus is of a line of kings; (2) Mary is both virgin and mother; (3) a star proclaims the birth to wise men in the East; (4) the danger to the child from King Herod; (5) the flight into Egypt; (6) the return to Nazareth.

To this accepted pattern Luke only adds the story of the shepherds and their flocks, but of course it is an important element. I suggest that the symbolism of ancient folk tale and myth throws a great deal of light on these elements. I would like to discuss each in turn.

A Line of Kings

Jesus, Matthew is at great pains to tell us, was born into a family in which the father could claim royal descent. And yet we are seemingly told that Joseph was not Jesus's father in any real sense! So what possible point could there be in this long genealogy? Can some meaning be found? I suggest it can, through the use of ancient symbolism. For "king" we should, I believe, read traceable ancestry. A great *rishi*, as he steps into Enlightenment, realises to some degree — possibly very clearly — the karmic ancestry he carries within himself. Many, if not most, of the heroes of folk-tale and myth are princes, i.e. a line of meaningful incarnations lie behind them. Their task is to complete the work, already well begun, by winning the most beautiful, the princess, the Atman or Self.



Joseph, we are also told, was a carpenter (Matthew 13.53). Indeed, this may be another way of saying the same thing — that his ancestral inheritance was known to Jesus at his birth. The symbolism of building is very strong in the Gospels. Jesus likens himself to a temple thrown down and re-built in three days (John 2). The three brothers of the ancient Celtic story (each of whom won a kingdom) were symbolised by three trees that appeared at their birth. Is Joseph the carpenter who fells the trees and builds the temple for the Christ? Which is to say: he intuitively knows the planks and beams, so to speak, that go to erect this "temple".

Mary both Virgin and Mother

The concept of a special form of motherhood is ancient. For example, prophetic visions of the mother of a great *rishi* are noted again and again. The mother of the Buddha had a symbolically prophetic dream concerning the conception of the child. In our own age, the mother of Ramakrishna realised in a dream the greatness of the child she carried. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, had a prophetic vision (the Annunciation). We must, I think, conclude that the maternal is at its purest and most highly intuitive at the birth of a special incarnation.

The special quality of the mother and the strange nature of this birth were recognised and enshrined in story and myth by various devices. In the ancient stories of the brothers, the birth of the triplets (or twins) is almost instantaneous, thus showing a defiance of time and logic. Likewise, their horses and dogs are born on the same night, and all are fully grown and ready to set off on their adventures! This is a birth quite out of this world. Again, Zeus ("the bright one") begot several sons, but he always disguised his coming, taking the shape, for example, of a swan — a symbolic bird¹. All this is not an example of Greek immorality, as so many Westerners choose to think, but of their humour. The divine sonship can only have a symbolic explanation to us mortals.

Again, the mythology surrounding the Goddess Hera, sister and consort to Zeus, partakes of the same enigmatic quality that we find in Matthew's Gospel. "She was," the Greeks tell us, "ever virgin, ever mother." She was mother and nurse of kings. Not surprisingly, the cow was her sacred animal — so the rich herds of good karma were hers. She presided over the yoking of the oxen. She was "goddess of the yoke", and the corn, rich harvest of the plough, was designated "flowers of Hera".

Here we see many parallels with the Virgin Mary — the traditional link with the oxen and the flocks of Luke's Gospel. "Yoking", with the same root as yoga, made the ox a deeply sym-

bolic animal. Again, Hera, whose cult figure was formed from a great plank or pillar of wood, has strong links with tree symbolism. Everything suggests that she presides over the maturing and ripening of a great soul and, perhaps, his birth from duality to non-duality, the *sadhak* stepping into Enlightenment, the Zeus-experience of light.

"Ever virgin, ever mother." The ancients were never afraid of the paradox. Paradox is often the only way to present a mystery, a spiritual truth. I suggest that the same paradox is embedded in the Nativity story where we are told of the special purity of the Mother, and of the Father's bequest of a royal lineage.

The Three Wise Men Follow the Star

A star proclaimed the advent of this great *rishi* to wise men in the East. Traditionally they are three kings and/or wise men (an interesting juxtaposition of ideas). The coincidence of the movement of heavenly bodies with earthly events of great import is an ancient tenet.

The stress in the Gospel story on the number three might suggest links with the ancient symbolism of the three brothers, three paths to the summit followed over three lifetimes. The number three is a recurring motif in myth. (Zeus was one of three brothers, Varuna took three steps into the light, etc.).

In the light of this constant repetition (and the inner meaning of brother symbolism) must we not conclude that three purposeful incarnations were believed to be behind a soul's maturity? Thus, the three kings would be three earlier incarnations who glimpse the coming of the Perfect One, the Christ, and who were, spiritually speaking, the first to see the Christ. On the other hand, as Luke would have it, this sight is the prerogative of the shepherds of good karma. Of course, neither idea contradicts the other.

¹ The 'swan' in Celtic and Hindu symbolism is the bird of time, and in India also the vehicle of Brahma, the Creator.

The Infant in Danger

So accustomed have Christians become to regard the Gospels as factual (or partly so) that their symbolic import is lost. The fact is that Jesus was not the only divine incarnation to stand in danger from a mighty king. Krishna too would have died at the hands of his uncle, King Kamsa, but for a ruse by his parents. If we think of the Nativity as the entry into non-duality rather than as a real birth, then we see that this is a dangerous time. Mind is a power well able to destroy the faith of the experiencer. Mind, I suggest, is the king set to destroy the young *rishi*. C.K. Anavema Reddy gives us the Maharshi's views on this danger:

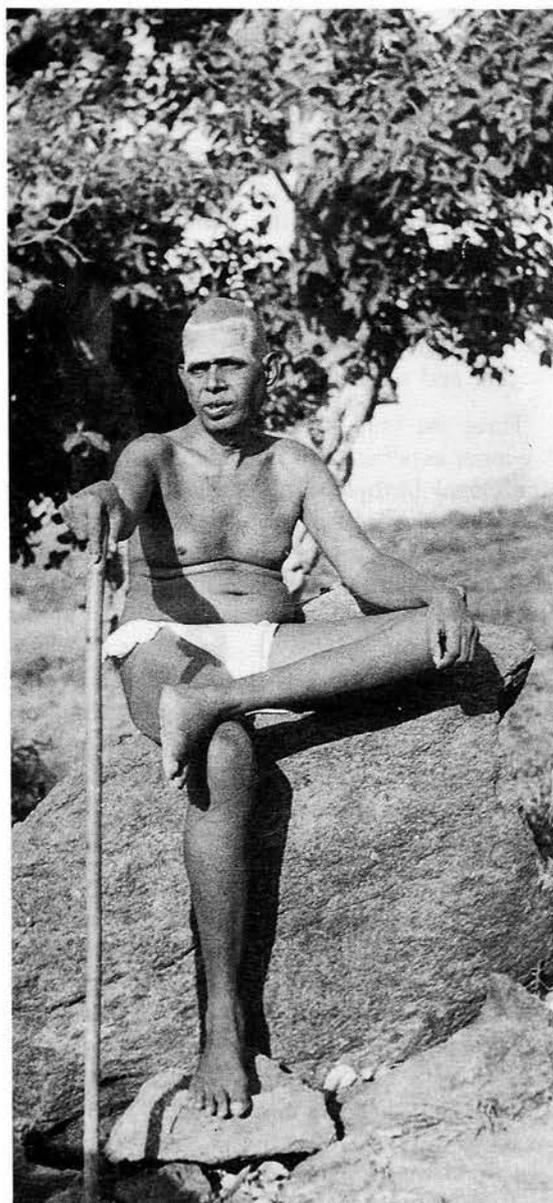
Bhagavan has often said that it was fortunate that he had not read any books on our *shastras* as they might have given rise to endless doubts and confused him when he first had his spiritual experience. Whatever he had read was *after* his experience.²

Good karma, he was wont to say, saved him from the toils and coils of intellectual learning.

Flight into Egypt and Return to Nazareth

A great *rishi* is miraculously guarded and protected from harm. Krishna was nurtured by the cowherds and Jesus's parents carried him to Egypt. This would have been a journey of some three hundred miles, partly through desert and wild country. Quite an undertaking! Are we to read this symbolically? Is Egypt (called the granary of the ancient world) the land of corn and wealth, of the harvest gathered in?

At last, hearing of the death of King Herod, Joseph and Mary return to their dwelling place, Nazareth. Jesus is often designated "of Nazareth". In fact, perhaps his birth, infancy and upbringing *all* took place in this little town. Are the Nativity at Bethlehem and the infancy in Egypt not really part of the young *rishi*'s inner experience of entry into a new realm of consciousness, non-duality? When this state is stabilised, all danger from king mind has passed.



Iconography of the Nativity

In Eastern churches, influenced by Byzantium, the iconographic representation of the Nativity took on an accepted pattern, hardly deviating from century to century, except in style and

² Quoted from an article in *The Mountain Path*, January 1972.

decorative detail. Mother and child appear at the entrance of a cave. The rocky terrain is usually heavily cracked and fissured. The reclining figure of the Virgin Mary conveys a sense of release, even weightlessness. She watches with deep absorption the bathing of the newborn infant, who also appears in the manger behind her. Joseph pays no attention to either but is in deep converse with an old man, a shepherd. In the distance the three kings are just sighted, following the star. Above, angels (many or few) are singing and worshipping.

Have we here a holy family that expresses the inner experience of Enlightenment? The cave (traditional birthplace of both Jesus and John the Baptist) was anciently always the symbol for the inner depths of human consciousness. Mary portrays Liberation and, possibly, awareness of the sound of water flowing, which, as in the baptism in the Jordan, is always emphasised. The sound of running water, writes Chandra Swami, is one of the first signs of inwardness that the dedicated *sadhak* may experience.³ A sound which, of course, is open to various interpretations: the rustle of foliage corn; the soft beating of wings, or of a fan.⁴

Elements of light are strongly present in all the icons while the pondering attitude of Joseph suggests an inward questioning as to the antecedents of the newborn Christ. "Is the experience valid," he seems to ask, "because these forerunners are good and worthy?" He, seemingly, satisfies himself that they are. The sheep are always present, and the three kings move forward in line towards the Christ. The earlier the representation (in the catacombs, for example), the more their separateness is stressed. Occasionally, the central figure looks back to the one behind, underlining the importance of knowing about his presence. They are, thus, both separate and together. The Apostles' expressions of an inner experience differ in detail but not in essentials.

The fact that the Gospels initiate their story so differently, Matthew and Luke with the Nativity, John and Mark with the Baptism, suggests

BE AS YOU ARE

By Anthony de Mello, S.J.

The spiritual quest is a journey without distance. You travel from where you are right now to where you have always been. From ignorance to recognition, for all you do is see for the first time what you have always been looking at.

Who ever heard of a path that brings you to yourself or a method that makes you what you have always been? Spirituality, after all, is only a matter of being what you really are.

to me that both are pointing in the same direction — towards a great upsurge of Spirit, an entry into a new dimension, which Jesus called the Kingdom. Matthew and Luke are at pains to express the tender and fragile condition of the young *rishi* (whatever his physical age might be). He needs nurturing in a place of safety. With the baptism experience, the young Christ reaches maturity. The dawn has given place to the blazing light of the sun.

³ "Methods and Experiences", *The Mountain Path*, July 1969, p. 151.

⁴ "His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear the threshing floor and gather grain into his barn," said the Baptist of the coming of Christ (Luke 3).

BOOK REVIEWS

SRIMAD PERIYA-PURĀNAM by S. Swaminathan, now Sri Sathchithaananda Bhārathi Swāmigal, Sri Maunaswāmi Mutt, Courtallam 627 802. Pub: the Author. pp. 100, Rs. 15/-

Twenty-five years ago a prose rendering in Tamil of Sekhizhār's *Peria Purānam* was published by B. Rama Nāyakar Sons from the Thirumagal Press, Madras - 1. This was an excellently brought out book of 448 pages of lilting Tamil prose in bold and beautiful print. This well-bound and neatly printed book was a boon for those not very much conversant with Tamil verse and yet yearning to read the story as narrated by the God-intoxicated Sekhizhār.

That was in 1967. This reviewer never dreamt then, that in 1992 he was to come upon a prose rendering of the *Peria Purānam* in impeccable English prose by another great *bhāktha*, Sri Sathchithaananda Bhārathi of Sri Mauna Swāmi Mutt, Courtāllam. The revered Swāmigal has condensed in just a 100 pages of sparkling prose the quintessential part of the lives of the 63 Saints without sacrificing a single essential detail so very necessary for the understanding and appreciation of their life immortalised in Sekhizhār's epic verse.

Readers of the *MP* and devotees of Bhagavān Ramana need no introduction to the *Peria Purānam*. It was the single book that completely transformed and transmuted the very ordinary boy Venkatarāman into the spiritual Einstein of our times -- Bhagavān Ramana Maharshi -- the Sage of Arunāchala.

There are strange parallels to this phenomenon of a single book completely transforming and transmuting an ordinary mortal into an extraordinary saint.

The atheist Annie Besant was completely transformed into a Theosophical theist by a single book: Madam Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*.

The worldly-wise Mohandās Karamchand Gāndhi after reading a single book: Ruskin's *Unto This Last* in a single train journey between Pretoria and Johannesburg, detained at his destination completely transformed into the Mahātma he was later to become.

From constant reading of only the *Old Testament* of the Bible, J. Krishnamūrti got that extraordinary power over the use and utterance of the spoken word that more than anything else gave a hitherto unknown and indefinable lustre

to his talks and a hitherto unknown and unfelt prophetic timbre to his voice.

And what if these great men, at some point of time in their lives were human, only all too human, with all the faults and foibles that the flesh is heir to? As the venerable author succinctly puts it in his preface, "These deeds (as narrated in the *Peria Purānam*) are uncommon and it is impossible for the general humanity to do such deeds... Once the Sage of Kānchi, H.H. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Swāmigal said that ordinary worldly-wise men of the present day will be tempted to brand these devotees as eccentrics for the former can hardly comprehend, much less appreciate, how a person can make over his wife to a mendicant for the mere asking or how the mother and father of their only male child can cut the child and cook the flesh to feed a mendicant who plainly confessed to his cannibalistic tastes. The moral is obvious: it is only by Lord Siva's Grace that one can appreciate the deeds of devotion performed by these great devotees...."

It is suggested to the Tamil Nadu Government to have this English prose rendering of *Peria Purānam* by S. Swāminathan (now H.H. Sathchithaananda Bhārathi Swāmigal) prescribed as a compulsory text in all the higher secondary schools in the state.

S. Jayarāman

TRANSMISSION OF THE FLAME by JEAN KLIEN: Third Millennium Publications, St. Peter Port, London, Santa Barbara, 1990 Edition.

Jean Klein, says the blurb, is a musicologist and medical doctor from central Europe, who spent many years in India studying Advaita and Yoga. Since 1960, he has been teaching in Europe and the United States.

Emma Edwards has done a great service to the questing, questioning and discriminating reader by bringing together within just 267 pages of this "flaming" book, four long dialogues held in four different centres in Europe and America. The centres are Baak in Holland, San Rafael in California, London in England and Provence in France, countries which have churned revolutionary ideas across the last three centuries, ideas which have profoundly altered the course of human history.

The prologue elicits through questions some autobiographical details about Dr Jean Klein, which cast their shadow on the rest of the book.

The dialogues were held in October 1988 in Holland, in February 1989, in California, in July 1989 in England and in September 1989 in France. In these eleven months between February 1988 and September 1989, the formulation of fundamental questions relating to the *well-being* and *well-doing* of the indivisible individual differ from place to place, but as Emma Edwards puts it beautifully in her preface, however similar or dissimilar these questions may be between themselves, they all go round the one real question, the question we cannot formulate -- the living question or (is it?) the question of living.

The living question is the question of living with psychosomatic balance in a strife-ridden topsy-turvy world with its inverted values and convoluted social mazes, reflecting in every place and tangled skein of political, social and economic instability.

Dr Jean Klein underplays the autobiographical part and each time a purely medical question is put, he refuses to answer it in an open session and puts it aside by asking the questioner to get the answer in the privacy of his clinic. This leaves a great part of the psychosomatic response to a personal problem out of the reckoning. None the less, the questions are all uninhibited and are freely and boldly put.

What is outstanding about this book is not so much the answers but the questions themselves. In this particular sense it follows the Upanishadic tradition where the Guru (whose only function is to dispel darkness) and the student who is seeking light, are both placed both physically and figuratively on a footing of absolute equality so that the tradition is transmitted without any inhibition caused by any difference in status between the teacher and the taught.

In this context Dr Klein gives an arresting definition of the word "tradition" which singles him out as a daring and original thinker. "Tradition as I see it," says Dr Klein, "means that which is Truth, that which is transmitted. That means the truth transmits the truth. You can never transmit the doctrine. The doctrine is formulated every twenty or fifty years. You could even say the doctrine appears from moment to moment. So tradition means what is transmitted. The Truth is transmitted. Ideas, doctrine can never bring transmutation. It is only the Truth that is transmitted which can bring transmutation of the psychosomatic body. The psychosomatic body on its own can never transform itself. It is only consciousness, Truth, which can transform it. So in any religious teaching there is an *exoteric* part, the *traditional* and an *esoteric* part, the *Tradition*."

Small wonder this book of dialogues has been aptly titled *Transmission of the Flame*. The flame is the flame of Truth, the flame that purifies, that removes the dross and illuminates the soul and lights the path to the Peace eternal, not in some distant future, but from moment to moment in this life on earth, the only life we know.

S. Jayarāman

MYTHS AND SYMBOLS OF VEDIC ASTROLOGY: by Bepin Behari, Edited by David Frawley, Passage Press, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1990 Edition.

This is a breathtaking book by Bepin Behari, a learned economist/Theosophist who brings to the writing of this extraordinary book the scientific attitude on which C.H. Waddington wrote a whole treatise and the scientific outlook on which Bertrand Russell wrote a veritable classic. In fact Bepin Behari's book is more for the sceptic than for the believer.

I suggest one begins to read the book with a sceptical mind and then by the time one comes to the end of the book, lo and behold, a complete transformation has taken place in one's mind in that one sees in one comprehensive sweep that the microcosm which is man is directly related through every fibre of his being to the rhythmic pulse-beat, the perfect order that prevails in the limitless macrocosm, or the universe.

The book begins with a fine exposition of astrological symbols under the section "Astrological Mythology". Astrology is a science derived from the *Veda* which literally means knowledge (from the Sanskrit root *vid*: to know). Astrology is one part of the *Vedas* and is derived from mathematical symbols dressed in the garb of mythology for easy understanding by the lay non-mathematical mind.

Part II deals with all the nine planets in nine separate sections, beginning with the Sun and ending with Ketu, the South Node.

Part III deals section by section with the 12 signs of the Zodiac and Part IV with the 27 Asterisms or Lunar Mansions or Nakshatras. These 27 Asterisms are discussed in 27 distinct and separate sections.

This vast system consisting of 9+12+27 bodies in a constant and ceaseless whirl in their particular orbits is kept faultlessly moving by a force whose other name is "Perfect Order". There is order, perfect order, rhythm, eternally perfect unceasing rhythm in the Universe as testified by the rhythmic change in the seasons, in the rhythmic rotation of the earth round the sun and the moon round the earth, and so on. The assonance and dissonance, the order and the disorder and disturbance that we see in our day to day life are all scientifically related to that unseen but not unfelt force that holds this unimaginably vast universe together in perfect order. One cannot possibly overemphasise the word "order" when one speaks or dares to speak about the universe (cf. Eddington: *The Mysterious Universe*).

The book scientifically establishes the fact that the 9 planets with the Sun at the centre, the 12 signs of the zodiac and the 27 Nakshatras together influence, control, direct, redirect the life of every individual on earth in the eternal cycle of time from birth to death to re-birth. The shaping or mis-shaping of an individual's mind, the ups and downs the individual experiences are all determined by the particular configuration of the 9+12+27

bodies of the universe at that particular point in the time cycle at which the individual is born to work out his or her karma in the world. And let it be remembered, the number of configurations wrought by this formidable combination 9+12+27 is legion.

What is more, this influence, like mutually attractive and mutually repellent magnetic waves, operates in two separate and yet complementary ways on man as representing the male principle with its characteristic vibrations and magnetic waves and woman as representative of the female principle with its special characteristic vibrations and magnetic waves.

The crux of the problem in astrology (the computation of the configurations of the 9+12+27 combination) is the calculation of the exact time of birth. The author says, "The Sun's Chariot Wheel moves in Time which is always associated with space." This raises the question of the space -- time continuum. Space and time cannot exist without energy and mass being imbedded in it and there never was time when there was no energy and mass. All these conundrums are discussed and dissolved with clarity of perception in pellucid prose by Bepin Behari. Sceptics have thereby been placed under his debt and his book is so arrestingly scientific, rational and logical that one yearns to read the other forthcoming books by the same author: 1) *A study in Astrological Occultism* 2) *Career, Relationship, Success and Vedic Astrology* 3) *The Vedic Astrologer's Hand Book Vol. I - Fundamentals* and 4) *The Vedic Astrologer's Hand Book Vol. II - Predictive Techniques*.

S. Jayarāman

THE VEDIC ORIGINS OF KARMA: Cosmos as Man in Ancient Indian Myth and Ritual: by Herman W. Tull. pp122+60, Rs.50/-.

TAPTA MARGA: Asceticism and Initiation in Vedic India: by Walter O. Kaelber. pp147+58, Rs.150/-. Both Pub. by Sri Satguru Publications, 40/5 Shakti Nagar, New Delhi - 110 007.

Nineteenth-century Western Vedic scholars, like Max Mueller, described the *Brāhmanas* for their priestly pedantry, obscure thinking, reckless imagination, and general uselessness. This was part of a tendency to deride the *Brāhmanas* as a superficial ritualism that had to be eliminated to allow the great philosophical insights of Vedānta and Buddhism to arise. It also reflected these scholars' insensitivity and lack of understanding of myth, symbol, metaphor, and ritual as teaching devices. However, a new generation of Western scholars has examined the *Brāhmanas* more thoroughly and found these views to have been in error. They have discovered within the *Brāhmanas* a clear and well-organized cosmic ritual, that attempts to recreate the entire universe in the form of ritual action, wherein ritual along with knowledge gradually leads the sacrificer to a spiritual rebirth into the realm of immortality or union with

the Cosmic Being. This has caused them to see in the *Brāhmanas* a foundation on which the *Upanishads* would naturally develop, not a system they had to reject.

1. The doctrine of karma and rebirth has often been thought of as a new invention of Upanishadic thought and a departure from Vedic ritualism. However, karma itself means ritual and is a very common term throughout Vedic literature. In the present volume the author traces the development of the term karma from the *Brāhmanas* to the *Upanishads*. He relates it to the ritualistic action of the *Brāhmanas* wherein the universe as a whole through the Cosmic Man, Prajāpati. Hence instead of seeing a cleavage between the Brāhmanical and Upanishadic doctrines of karma, he perceives an organic continuity between the two, with the Upanishadic doctrine being an inevitable result of Brāhmanical inquiry.

The author explores in detail the symbolism of the Purusha or Cosmic Man, and also that of the fire altar (Agnicayana), and their many levels of correspondence between the microcosm (man) and the macrocosm (the universe), focusing mainly in the *Shatapatha Brāhmana*.

While all the spiritual secrets of the Vedic doctrine of karma, and its subtle symbolism, may not be unravelled in this present volume, it does take the realm of Vedic studies in a positive new direction that may eventually affirm the type of spiritual and yogic interpretation of the vedic mantras and rituals that we find in the work of Sri Aurobindo or Ganapati Muni and their disciples. It is one more sign that the whole edifice of nineteenth-century Western Vedic interpretation, which regarded the texts as primitive and generally outside of later Hindu and Buddhist culture, is falling apart. The new view arising is affirming the antiquity and sophisticated nature of Vedic culture, as well as its connections with later religious thought in India.

2. The term *tapas*, which relates among other things to asceticism, like so many other terms of yogic discipline, is common in Vedic texts all the way back to the *Rig Veda*. But the tendency among scholars has been to ignore any relevance of such terms to yogic practice in earlier texts. The author of the present volume reverses this trend and shows the depth of complexity of this term and the consistency of its development through the *Vedas* and into the *Upanishads*. He relates *tapas* from ordinary heat to the highest spiritual perception, as essentially the energy of transformation. He explores the full range of naturalistic and psychological association and correspondences of the term. He relates it particularly to the process of initiation as a spiritual process. He traces the development of the term from the *Rig Veda* through the *Upanishads*.

The author treats the *Vedas* as a consistent and organically integrated "living unit", rather than a succession of texts diverging in time. This affords him a much deeper and integral insight than previous scholars who

tried to understand the Vedas according to an historical grid only. While he still sees a division between the Upanishadic *jnāna* (knowledge) and Vedic karma (ritual), he considerably bridges the gap, thus showing not so much a radical division, as an organic development from one to the other. The book is thoroughly referenced from texts involving the entire range of Vedic tradition, including *Manu Samhita* and the ritualistic Sūtra texts.

The books under review offering two new views of the *Brāhmanas* was originally published by the State University of New York Press that is doing similar high quality work in Indological studies. We should note, however, that both these works are academic in nature. They are not for a general reader or one looking for direct spiritual knowledge about the Vedic tradition. Still they are very useful for anyone who wishes to take a new look at the *Brāhmanas*, or for those who may be interested in new trends in Western Vedic scholarship.

David Frawley

SHRI ANNAMACHARYA: A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY:

By Dr. H.L. Chandrasekhara. Pub: Vidyashankara Prakashana, 30, Deviramanni Agrahar, Mysore - 570 024. pp.286 Rs.60/-.

The devotional songs of Annamacharya (originally numbering 32,000) are popular in South India. Composed mainly in Telugu and mostly in praise of Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati, they represent a class of literature which has importance from the spiritual and musical angles.

Essentially the songs are an exposition of the path of devotion and surrender in the characteristic manner of Vaishnavism. the discussion of different modes of *bhakti* and the guidance on the cultivation of spiritual qualities in general gives a practical base to the songs.

The aim of *Shri Annamacharya: A Philosophical Study* is to delineate the philosophical position of Annamacharya. It is clear that the theistic or anthropomorphic approach is prominent in the songs. Annamaya's reverence for Ramanuja and preference for Vishishtadvaita are also noteworthy features. According to Annamacharya, God or Brahman sustains, controls and owns the universe. The universe constitutes the body of Brahman. While matter is an insentient body, the individual soul is the sentient or conscious body. This is parallel to the position of Vishishtadvaita. His belief in the plurality of souls and their different identities, however, takes him nearer the standpoint of Sankhya. Notwithstanding this, his position is not identical with that of Sankhya (on account of the theistic base). In general it is the belief of the poet that God, soul and matter are three separate realities.

The authors of non-Advaitic schools avail of every possible opportunity to attack and ridicule Advaita.

Annamacharya too does this. He rejects the prime concepts of Advaita in so far as they relate to *maya*, formlessness of Brahman as well as its being bereft of qualities and the identity of *jiva* and Brahman. He has no use for the concept of the unconditioned abstract Truth or Brahman as propounded by Sankara. However, his general statements on the transitory nature of the world and the concordance between microcosmic and macrocosmic phenomena may by far-fetched interpretation be taken as proof of an approach similar to that of Advaita.

Except by way of pointing out an admixture of diverse concepts in his works, it is difficult to make any definitive statement as to what exactly constitutes the philosophy of Annamacharya. It should be remembered that while he gave expression to his philosophic convictions in his songs, he did not attempt to build any system of his own, as such.

The author is to be congratulated on his painstaking and systematic study of the works of Annamacharya and evolving a thesis out of it.

Ramamani

VIVEKANANDA: DIVINITY ON EARTH: By R. S. Ramabadrana. Pub: Vivekananda Literature Society, B-6, No.10, 2nd Main Road, Nanganallur, Madras - 600 061. pp:168. Rs.25/-.

Vivekananda was an astounding personality, to say the least. The instant success of his address to the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893 is a well-known event of recent history. Apart from bringing him and through him, the country, unparalleled international fame and recognition, it was the precursor to a wider and significant movement for spiritual revival of the West as well as the East. The world listened in wonder to Swamiji's authentic exposition of the Vedanta. Endowed with a sharp intellect and oratorical power in addition to numerous other rare qualities, there was no audience which he did not move. His writing was full of power and influenced thousands. Being a fiery patriot Vivekananda worked vigorously not only for a religious cause, but for a social one as well, aiming at nothing less than national reconstruction. He succeeded in his task.

The aim of *Vivekananda: Divinity on Earth* is to present him as a deity, or rather the personification of various deities and *avatars*. He is identified with Ganesa, Subramanya and Ayyappa, with Shakti and Shiva, that is, the chief deities. He is identified with the *avatars* Rama, Krishna and Hanuman. He is also identified with Sanatkumara, Dattatreya, Nara and Suka, with Sankara, Ramanuja and Chaitanya, that is, the great sages and spiritual teachers. He is compared with Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed and Guru Govind Singh. In all there are twenty-five such personalities chosen for identification, or near identification.

Avataravada is complex in general, and can be overdone. On account of a common thread of divinity there is always justification for comparing a spiritual personality with a deity, or deities. However, it would be difficult to establish an equivalence as such in all cases. In the present instance we can be certain about the identity of Vivekananda with the Rishi Nara, since we have the testimony of Sri Ramakrishna himself to that effect. There are specific reasons for believing that he is also a partial or full manifestation of Lord Vireswara. It is a matter of faith to take it that he is identical with other deities and avatars (as mentioned by the author) as well.

Vivekananda: Divinity on Earth sustains the interest of the reader throughout. Apart from its special purpose, the book serves the general one of being a source of information about Swamiji.

N. Ramamani

PERSPECTIVES ON RAMAKRISHNA - VIVEKANANDA VEDANTA TRADITION: Ed: M. Sivaramakrishna & Sumita Roy. Pub: Sterling Publishers, Pvt. Ltd., L-10, Green Park Extension, New Delhi, 110 016. pp:265. Rs.200/-.

This is an interesting collection of papers presented at a seminar on "Ramakrishna -- Vivekananda Vedanta Tradition and its Significance" in Hyderabad (1990). Prepared by competent scholars, they discuss the essential features of the teachings of the two masters.

Sri Ramakrishna came at a time when Indian society had succumbed to the materialistic influence of the West and religious consciousness was at a low ebb. His simple, God-centred life besides being a source of inspiration by itself was purposeful as well. Hundreds of people from all walks of life, laymen and seekers alike, felt attracted and repeatedly came to him for solace. Their lives were transformed.

His teaching had a delightful simplicity about it, given mostly in the form of homely tales, similies and parables. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the authentic record of conversations with him, is a monumental work which should stimulate any seeker. Sri Ramakrishna taught that the main duty of man was to love God. This love was to be pure, total and unmotivated. By loving and yearning for Him, one can reach and merge in Him. One can be in the world. But one should not be of it (i.e. one should not be worldly). By such detachment one's spiritual attainment will not be affected.

Vivekananda's easy familiarity with science and Western systems of thought gave him a special competence to teach the West. By his masterly exposition he proved that only Vedanta can provide the answers to fundamental questions of life and being. Science and reason could not do this. By this emphasis on the spiritual, the thinking of the West which was predominantly materialistic, was drastically altered. India itself

needed this message as badly as the West. Swamiji's speeches and writings made a deep impact on Indian society.

Swamiji's burning patriotism impelled him to take up social questions as well for discussion. He wanted a radical reformation of society so that inequalities and disabilities thrust on certain sections of it could be eliminated. He wanted moral education and character building to be integral features of the educational system. His founding of the Ramakrishna Order, with its ideals of renunciation and service to humanity, represents the crown of his achievements.

Although brief, the papers are comprehensive in scope and we have a collection of valuable material on the subject.

N. Ramani.

LOOKING INTO MIND: How to Recognize Who You Are and How You Know: by Anthony Damiani. Pub: Larson Publications, NY 14818. pp. 262 + 21, \$14.95

This is a book by Anthony Damiani, a disciple of the late Paul Brunton and expounds his philosophy. As the title indicates he considers the mind as the Sole Ultimate Reality and propounds the view that the Universe is only a thought in the mind. This school is called "mentalism".

It is well known that all philosophies evolved in different cultures can be broadly classified as Idealism and Realism. Idealism considers Mind to be the sole reality and what we call Real (or Matter or Energy) are mere thoughts in the mind. The Realists on the other hand believe that the external universe (consisting of Matter and Energy) are the real things and the mind is the effect created on our body and brain by signals emanating from the outside world. Thus, when I see a tree, I (the mind) am the observer, the tree is the observed object and the light coming from the tree into my mind through my body is the link. Generally, most Realists consider all the three as real.

However, the extreme school called Materialists consider Matter alone as the reality.

It is difficult from an ordinary man's point of view to accept either the Mentalist or the Materialist version because our feeling and what we call daily experience cannot be talked away as nothing. This 'talking away' by either of these schools is an interesting game but does not lead us anywhere. This book is quite readable on that account and the skillful use of arguments carefully conceal the fallacies. For instance, a statement is made that the thought comes before the idea. When I see a tree, my mind has already got the idea of a tree, and the picture of the tree seen through the senses comes later. There are some cases such as infantile cataract where the child is born blind and later on, by

surgery, begins to see. Till that moment, does he have the images of trees (and cats and dogs) already existing in his mind? Experience shows that after the operation, the patient has to go through the elaborate process of having someone explain and name the various things that he sees. All of us, from the very early days of childhood, undergo this process, when the image of each object we see is perceived and stored in our memory.

The *Upanishads* come to a very balanced view of the subject and tend more towards Realism than Idealism. The *Upanishads* conceive the Brahman as the Ultimate Reality, present in various forms of the observer, the observed and the link. The tree is the Brahman in material form. The Mind is the same Brahman in the abstract form, and the light, which is the link, in the Brahman in the Energy form.

In the *Taittiriya Upanishad* the student goes through every form of enquiry into reality and discovers the truth and exclaims, -- "I am the observer, I am the object and I am the connecting link. I am Brahman himself. I am greater than the gods and created prior to them".

P.P.I. Vaidyanathan

FACE TO FACE WITH THE SUPREME - (Fresh Voice of the Odd, Unknown World Preceptor): Compiled, edited and published by Bhaskaracharya, Palkulangare, Trivandrum 695 024 pp. 175 Rs.50 Overseas Rs. 100/-.

This book is a compilation of 847 sayings or aphorisms from the fresh voice of the odd and unknown Sadhu Gopala Swamy. Biographical information on this sadhu given by the writer with his 12 years of acquaintance is too scanty. The sadhu lived in Trivandrum (1900 - 1960), remained unmarried though living like other householders, and led a simple unassuming common man's life. His sayings are classified and presented in the book under review. Sadhu Gopala Swamy declares: "If there is a thing easiest of all in this world, it is the attainment of Self-realisation; because one is not required to do anything for it. Is there anything easier than remaining without doing anything?" He also warns not to abandon Maya (illusion) as unreal because Maya is the real pointer to the absolute supreme Being, and that the unreal is the real itself in disguise.

Here are some samples of his sayings:

Fire is all pervading and universal. At the same time it can be individual also. See, how it is tied up (confined) to the tip of a match stick. (p. 38)

In the infinitely great ocean of my immensity this phenomenal world comes and goes as waves and ripples. (p. 52)

I am the body.
I am not the body.
I exist both with a body and without a body.
Most obvious is the most doubtful. (p. 101)

Water flowing over water is called wave. Still a wave is water. Similarly, the self knowing the self is highest and it is called Self-realisation.

Many of the aphorisms display originality of expression. However, there are also some like the one below which is out of place in the present day space age:

Say, whether the earth is round or flat?
Scientists say that it is round only from their inferences which are complete.
Has anybody seen the earth in full view? (p. 654)

This paper-bound book of 175 pages, with many type-set errors, is exorbitantly priced.

S. Krishnaswamy

PRACTICE OF BRAHMACHARYA: (enlarged and revised edition): by Swami Sivananda. Pub: The Divine Life Society, P.O. Shivanandanagar 249192. pp. 203, Rs. 30/-.

All of Swami Sivananda's thoughts and instructions on the subject of celibacy and sex sublimation have been gathered together, thus expanding an earlier edition of this book. The author elaborates on the yogic viewpoint of Brahmacharya or celibacy and also provides a set of practices for achieving it. Separate chapters are addressed to women and to married householders. Practical suggestions with regard to diet (physical and mental), hatha yoga, prānāyāma, prayer, meditation/ auto-suggestion and other practices are made.

"It is through constant Vichāra and Brahma-Bhāvana that the mind is to be weaned from lustful thoughts.... Do not freely mix with women... Stop that lustful look.... Take wholesome Sāttvic food half stomachful.... Control the palate.... Avoid bad company, obscene pictures, novels.... cinema.... entertain mother Bhāv or Īsvari Bhāv or Ātma Bhāv towards women.... practise select Yogāsana and Prānāyāma..." Regular spiritual practice of japa, meditation or self-enquiry are advised to completely sublimate the sexual desire. The style changes from considered, informative, helpful to simplistic and evangelical.

Suresh Jain

A DICTIONARY OF ADVAITA VEDĀNTA: by Sri Harshānanda. Pub: R.K. Ashram, Bangalore 560 019. pp: 15. Rs. 15/-

Swami Harshānandāji, a senior monk of the Rāmākṛishna Order, is at present the president of the

Rāmkrishna Mission in Bangalore and has authored several books on Vedānta. The present work is meant to serve the needs of the students of Advaita Vedānta by providing useful information about the system. The work has been prepared drawing profusely from the *Vedāntasāra* of Sadānanda. The background for understanding the terms given here has been provided in two essays. The first essay gives a brief history of the school of Advaita Vedānta and presents its essential teachings in a nutshell. It also introduces the student to the Paribhāsha or terminology of Advaita and gives a brief and simple explanation of terms like Brahman, Avidya, Maya, Creation, Jiva, Sādhanas and Mukti. The essay ends with a description of post-Sankara Advaita literature tracing the development of different Prasthānas or schools of thought. The second essay summarises the salient features of Vedāntasāra. The last part of the book contains charts giving all the essential information of Advaita Vedānta as depicted in the *Vedāntasāra*. The dictionary part of the book is quite thorough and exhaustive and has dealt with the terms in a concise and simple manner without introducing too many technicalities. For a book that is meant to serve as a beginner's guide it is rather overpriced and hence may not reach those for whom it is intended.

Phani Raj

ALL ABOUT GITA: pp. 50. Rs. 3/-

ALL ABOUT KRISHNA: pp. 55. Rs. 6/-

Both by Sw. Harshānanda. Pub: Sri R.K. Ashram, Bangalore 560 019.

The *Gita* is one of the outstanding religious classics of the world and Hindus of all denominations cherish great reverence for it. In the first book the author has given a short resume of the date of Krishna and dealt with the contents of the *Gita*, chapter by chapter, in about 28 pages. This resume gives the quintessence of the *Gita* which introduces the reader to the subject dealt with in the later part. According to the author, the *Bhagavadgita* is not a systematic treatise on the Indian philosophical system; yet it is possible to deal with its subject matter on four headings viz. the cause of the universe, creation or evolution and the universe, nature of the individual and the goal of human life and means of achieving it. It is an all in all: *Upanishad*, *Brahmavidyā*, a *Yogasāstra* -- esoteric wisdom given by a teacher to a disciple on request -- the basic concept of Hindu philosophical thought about God, the *jiva* or the individual soul, the goal of life and the qualities of the *Sthitaprajna* (man of steady wisdom). The author states that the doctrine of *Avatāra* or incarnation of God is the original contribution of the *Gita* to Indian and religious literature. *All About Gita* describes the essential aspects of the *Gita*, so as to rouse the interest of the reader to know more about it -- the most translated religious classic of the world.

The monograph *All About Krishna* deals with the

story of Krishna of the *Bhagavadgita* who has influenced Indian thought, life and culture, its religion and philosophy, its mysticism, poetry, music etc. After dealing with the story of Krishna, the author has dealt at great length with the personality of Krishna. He has also tackled the spate of criticisms and abuse heaped upon Krishna by aliens to Indian culture, or decultured Indians themselves, regarding the Rāsa Leela with Gopi's at Vrindāvana and a few other aspects which appear, *prima facie*, not fair to the stature of Krishna. The author has given convincing reasons for the acts of Krishna and has defended them, saying that in the circumstances, in each case, Krishna has done the right thing, in the larger interest of all concerned.

This monograph reveals the sublime mystery surrounding Krishna -- the greatest of the incarnations.

B.N. Narayana

THE COMMENTARY OF SRI MADHVA ON ISHA AND KENA UPANISHAD: Skt. Txt. with tr. and notes. Ed. by N.D. Sonde. Pub: Vasantik Prakashan, 10, Vatsala Niwas, 65-B Linking Rd., Santa Cruz, Bombay 400 054. pp. 183, Rs. 75/-.

The great Sri Madhvacharya, founder of the Dvaita school of Vedānta was, as is well known, a great scholar and a brilliant controversialist. His vigour of mind and his massive scholarship led to the establishment of a whole school of thought which challenged the fairly well-established Advaita school of Vedānta of Sri Sankara and indeed Sri Ramanuja too on some important issues. Sri Madhva attracted a large following and at Udipi in Karnataka, we have a temple to Lord Krishna, which is exclusively worshipped by the matadhipathis of the Madhva school with a moving earnestness and *shraddha* while devotees gaze through the window of the shrine of the Lord. Sri Madhva thus laid the foundations of a new mode of self-discipline-- worship of Lord Sri Krishna and observance of vigorous complete fasting on *ekadashi* every month. *Bharatha Tatparya Nirnaya*, *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* and *Anubhashya*, *Geetha Bhashya* and *Bhashyas* on a few *Upanishads* are among the better known works of this great acharya.

Sri Sonde has, in a spirit of deepest piety and devotion, brought out this edition of Sri Madhva's *Bhashya* on two of the *Upanishads*, *Isha* and *Kena*. Both *Upanishads* have been regarded as key texts for all the three schools of Vedānta. Sri Sonde would gladly have had a Guru in flesh and blood to guide him in his spiritual studies but not finding one at hand, laid himself at the feet of Lord Sri Krishna himself!

Sri Madhva, vigorous controversialist as he is, has some odd things to say. eg.: "All *Vedas* have three-fold meaning, *Bharata* ten-fold meaning and *Vishnu Sahasranama* hundred-fold meaning"! The non-Madhva reader presumably has to reckon with multiple interpretations of sacred texts. This is surely the road, not to

light but to confusion. Even so, in practice, we are not so badly let down by the great acharya. Here goes Sri Madhva's commentary on the first verse of *Isha*:

"Self-evolved Manu with this hymn did propitiate the Resplendent One, named Yajna (sacrifice), the son of Akuti, the Vishnu Himself...."

Sri Sonde adds explanatory note: "According to Madhva, Yajna is the presiding deity. Yajna as sacrifice has important role in the Vedic metaphysics...."

On verse Two: "Not performed actions do not adhere one is not a true statement."

We have given just a sample both of the substance and form of this book. *Isha* and *Kena* will, doubtless survive this unique exercise in commentary and translation!

Prof. S. Ramaswamy

HINDUISM WITH A HUMAN FACE: ed. by M.L. Sondhi & Mādhuri Sondhi. Pub: Rāj Prakāshan, New Delhi 110 001. pp. 202, Rs. 22/-.

This is a rather haphazard collection of articles which appeared originally in *Shakti*, a journal published by the Sondhis, except for an article on *Hinduism's Human Face* by Sondhi, and another on a strategy for women's liberation by Mrs. Sondhi.

The essays are set out in five sections entitled "The Matrix of Conflict", "Religious and Philosophical Thinking", "Renewal and Renaissance", "The Gandhian Discourse" and "Humanism in the Arts". The essays on Ānanda Coomāraswāmi and Tyāgaraja in the last section are hardly at all related to the titular theme of the book. The article on Coomāraswāmi's aesthetic imagination is a particular instance of the current disgusting tendency of some writers to pretend to know a great deal by the simple process of name-dropping and irrelevant quotation. The inclusion of this essay totally lacks justification.

The opening essay by A.C. Bose is on the social ideology of the Vedas. Bose is well known for, among other things, his little book *The Call of the Vedas* in Bhavan's Book University series. He says on p.1 that the term *brāhmana* denoted one who took up intellectual and spiritual pursuits, the term *ksatriya* one who took up *Ksatra* the political career ruling and defending the state, and that modern caste has no sanction in the Vedas. The Brahmana was a votary of *satya*, truth secular and spiritual, and Kshatriya was a votary of Rita the Eternal Law that controlled and preserved the state. It would have been useful if Bose had given the Vedic basis for these assumptions. The *Purusha Sūkta* does not give any basis for Bose's view. The *Gitāchārya* who speaks specifically of the four *varnas* does refer to Guna and Karma as the basis of the division into the four

varnas. But one cannot explain away the history of caste by saying that its modern manifestations are unfaithful to the origins.

Mrs Sondhi in her article "Peace through Abstention from Conflict" quotes W.B. Callie's view that peace is a contested concept. Peace is a positive state in society not a mere state of strifelessness. It is not easily attained, much less is it easily sustained. Mrs Sondhi should think again instead of relying on B.K. Malik. Sondhi discusses the titular theme of the book in his article with a reference to the "theocratic threat and the monstrous dimensions of dehumanisation in the *satī* in Rājasthān." It is clear that until we have established factually that the *satī* was forced on the young widow, one must suspend judgement. As an ideal *satī* is the high-water mark of wifely devotion to a well-loved husband.

Those who know something of the life of widows in Rājasthān will shrink from the too cavalier condemnation of *satī* indulged in by moderns. Those who don't condemn war as the most monstrous of myriad-handed murder of multitudes not particularly involved in the disputes leading to war, must beware of facile remarks on *satī* where it is totally voluntary. Is conscription or recruitment to the armed forces for the 'defence' of one's country moral from any standpoint? If war, an instrument of resolving territorial disputes, is not immoral, how can a woman *voluntarily* ascending the funeral pyre of her deceased husband be damned as it is now the fashion to do so? Euthanasia, or *prāyopavesa* is perfectly moral. Why should anyone let the state control one's handling of one's own life? Is man a slave of the state?

The book is of extremely uneven quality but one may use it as a hodge-podge of a miscellany of ideas. Two essays by Prof. Swāminathan are particularly worth reading.

Prof. S. Rāmaswāmy

BOOKS RECEIVED

KO SAM JA? (Who AM I?) In Serbo-Croatian, pp. 30. Pub: Sri Ramanasramam.

KRIYAAVAN TARKALAT TAMIL AKARATI: Pub: Cre-A, 268 R. High Road., Madras 600 014. pp. 980, Rs. 170/-. (A pioneer and superb effort in bringing out a Tamil-Tamil-English dictionary of all words in current use in Tamil. Well illustrated. Copious examples of actual usage in sentences.)

Ashram Bulletin



Sri T.N. Venkataraman
Ashram President

Sri T.N. Venkataraman, President of Sri Ramanasramam, is ever enthusiastic to encourage those who make an effort to spread the Name and Glories of Bhagavan Ramana.

From its very inception, the President unreservedly extended his unstinting cooperation to the founding of the Mysore "Sri Ramana Jnana Kendra". Throughout the gradual construction of the Kendra temple building he bestowed keen interest.

Thanks to philanthropists like **Sri Ramachandra Khoday** and to the tireless efforts of **Sri R.S.**

Govindappa Setty, Founder Chief Secretary of the Kendra, and his brother **Sri Rama Setty** and other members of the Board, the Ramana Temple was successfully completed and declared open on April 16th by our Ashram president. Priests from Sri Ramanasramam went to Mysore to perform the rituals of inauguration for this auspicious function. All glory to Bhagavan Ramana!

* * *

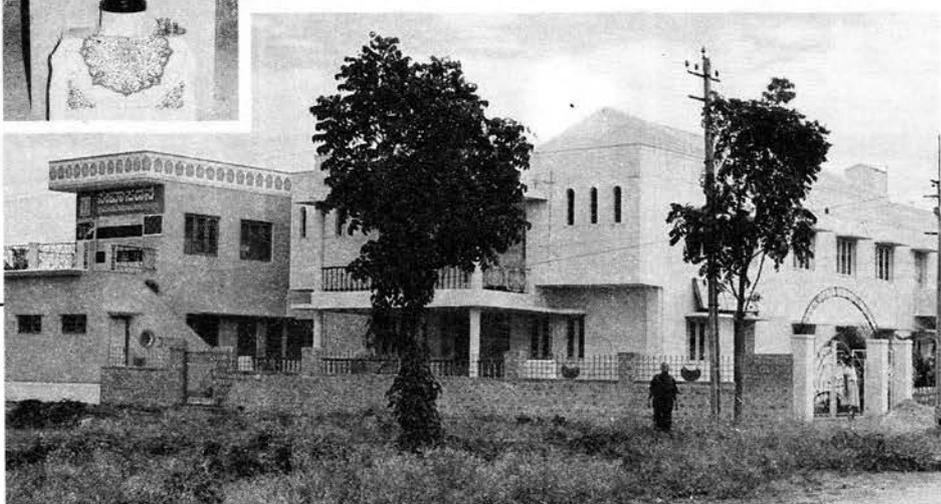
The Ashram President inaugurated the J.S. Limb Fitting Centre at a function in Tiruvannamalai on August 23rd.

* * *

On September 11th, **Sri T.N. Venkataraman**, President of Sri Ramanasramam, auspiciously opened a seminar on Vallalar Ramalinga Swami. In the morning he initiated a procession by seminar participants and the general public, and in the evening he presided over the seminar, at which scholars and local officials spoke about the Swami and his teachings.



The temple to Sri Maharshi at Mysore
(inset) Sri Bhagavan's statue at the sanctum



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MANDALABHISHEKAM

In South India, the 48th day after the *samadhi* of a great soul is observed with traditional *puja*, prayers, etc. **Sri Kunju Swami** was solemnly interred within the Ashram premises on August 7th; and on September 23rd we observed his *mandalabhishekam*, when devotees paid homage to this "child of Sri Bhagavan". Besides residents, nearly fifty devotees came from Vignana Ramaneeya Ashram, Palghat, especially to participate in the function.

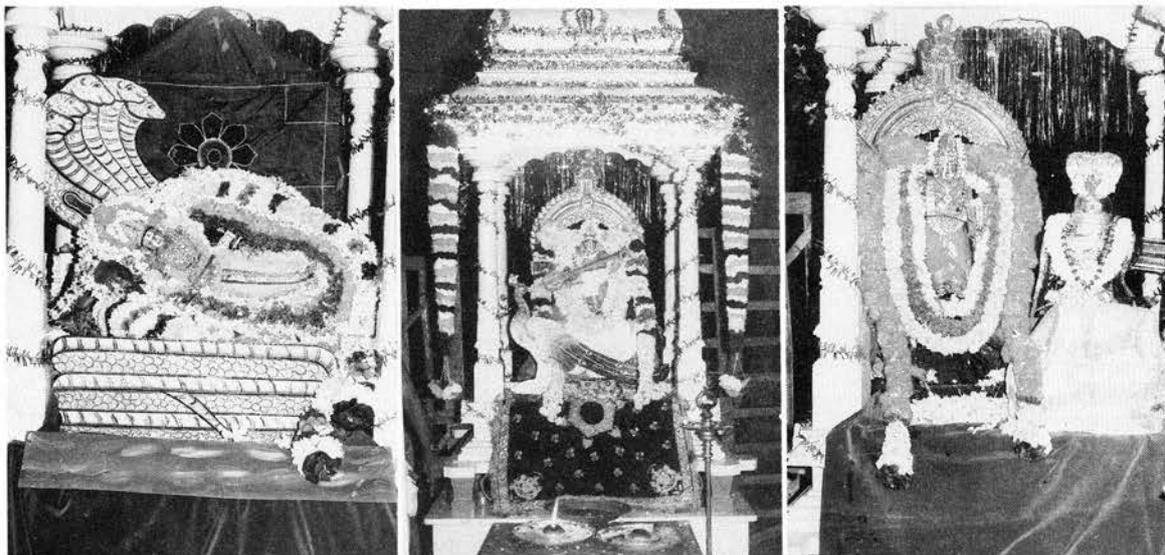
Sri Kunju Swami will always be remembered for

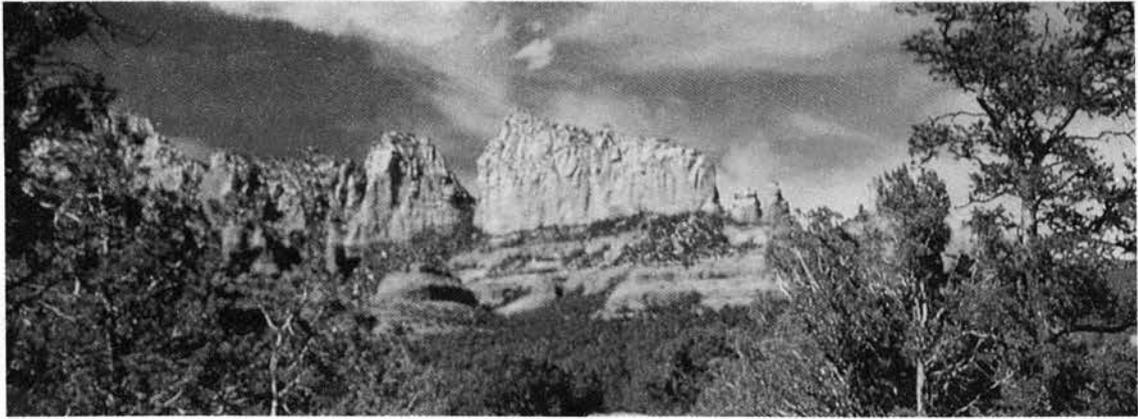
his keenness in encouraging devotees to read, assimilate and do *parayana* of Sri Bhagavan's poetic outpourings, *Nool Thirattu*, the *Collected Works* in Tamil.

Look at his humility and simplicity: Swami is teaching *Nool Thirattu*. But from the photo it appears as if he is the student and the one who is being taught looks like the teacher!

Long live **Sri Kunju Swami's** glory!

NAVARATHRI CELEBRATIONS AT THE ASHRAM





Wilson Mountain, Sedona, Arizona

A FELLOW-DEVOTEE'S HOME-COMINGS

"I see only Bhagavan in you all," says Sri Ganesan. "When I come to your homes, I feel that I am returning to my own home. How can that be? Sri Bhagavan said, 'Where could I go? I am here.' We all know that by 'here,' He meant everywhere. So when I come to your homes, I feel that I have really come home."

"What a great gift to be able to have had satsang with one of Sri Ramana's long-time devotees," write Michael and Marcie Allen, formerly of Seattle, U.S.A., now settled in New Zealand, "Sri V. Ganesan shared with us unselfishly and with such love — we are so grateful for our time with him! We appreciate his making the great effort to travel to the West to share with us and to encourage us to take to heart the beauty and profound message of the Great Sage of Arunachala."

For the past few years our Editor has been accepting invitations to visit with devotees from all over the world, to share with them in their own homes the teachings of Sri Bhagavan and his personal experiences and reminiscences of the great sage. Devotees who are not able to come to Sri Ramanasramam, yet hunger for some physial demonstration of Sri Bhagavan's presence, have been eager to meet with Sri Ganesan in his travels and gain new inspiration and impetus for their sadhana. We give below a selection of some of the letters received over the years.



* * *



Alan Jacob

"When Sri V. Ganesan arrived in London on 6th August 1990, devotees had come from France, Germany, Holland, Italy, etc. to meet him and to participate in the inauguration of the Sri Ramana Maharshi Foundation, London."

— N. Vasudevan,
London, U.K., (Dec. 1990)

* * *

"The entire committee for the inauguration gave its full cooperation to this event, and we from France were invited to take part in the Foundation's activities, which we did gratefully. I personally felt that Tiruvannamalai and the Ashram moved nearer to us, here in Europe, through Ganesan's presentation."

— Edith Deri,
Paris, France, (Dec. 1990)

"The smiling face of our friend greeted us at the Sarasota Airport on September 11th. From then on, for the next few weeks, it was a nonending stream of Arunachala's presence. Ganesan brought the presence of the Holy Hill and Sri Ramanasramam to all he met at the numerous programs arranged for his visit. But for us what we remember most is the heart-to-heart talks and evening walks basking in the quiet remembrance of the Ashram and presence of Bhagavan."

— Joan and Mathew Greenblatt,
Sarasota, U.S.A., (Dec. 1990)



At Sarasota



Gathering at Hamburg

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"It is now several weeks since you came to Berlin, but I still feel in my house the presence of Sri Bhagavan that you so graciously brought here. Your visit has greatly intensified my *sadhana* and cleared up several questions in my mind. Thank you again for coming! Those two days with you drew me back to the age-old spirituality of ancient India that is so rarely found. At a critical stage in my spiritual path you have come to reveal to me the all-embracing grace of Sri Bhagavan that I felt so very closely in your presence. Thank you!

"There is some deep significance in your coming on Guru Purnima day. It was like Bhagavan Himself coming to me, pointing out that all the different questions and teachings end up in the one question: 'Who am I?'

"Dear Ganesan, I hope that you have returned to India in good health and that we all may have the opportunity to see you again next year. It is a great task that you have undertaken, and I feel that Bhagavan's teachings are spreading widely through your continuous efforts. I am sure that there are many people who want to share the teachings of the Maharshi. Please let me now when you plan another visit to Europe so that I may arrange a seminar in Berlin. You are always welcome."

— **Cornel Christoffel**,
Berlin, Germany, (Sept. 1991)

* * *

"It is always a great joy to hear from you, in no small part because it is, simultaneously, greetings and support from Bhagavan. Hosting you and the meetings at 'Shanti' evoked the grace of wonderment and the challenge of new growth within. All came into manifestation with a flourish of love and acknowledgement from Bhagavan."

— **John Lowenstein**,
Jerome, Arizona, U.S.A.,
(Dec. 1990)

* * *

"It was a great joy and inspiration to have you here, even though it was for a short time."

— **David Frawley**
Santa Fe, U.S.A.
(Sept. 1991)



David Frawley

"What a wonderful day it was for me when you visited the Indian Cultural Institute (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan) in London recently. I cried a bucketful of tears that day! Prior to that day I had always followed Sri Ramana in a very solitary manner, so it was a great pleasure for me to meet other devotees and to see Sri Ramana celebrated in such a wonderful way. It wasn't so long ago that I assumed that Bhagavan was a relatively unknown Guru, and it was a great shock to me to discover that so many had taken their inspiration from Him. It is a funny thing, but although I am of an intellectual nature and have read avidly books on religion and Vedanta, the thing that attracts me most about Bhagavan (beyond His philosophy) are the stories people tell about Him. I was completely absorbed by your own memories of Him — as if I were actually there !!!"

— **M.M. Dillon**,
Sheerness, U.K., (Oct. 1990)

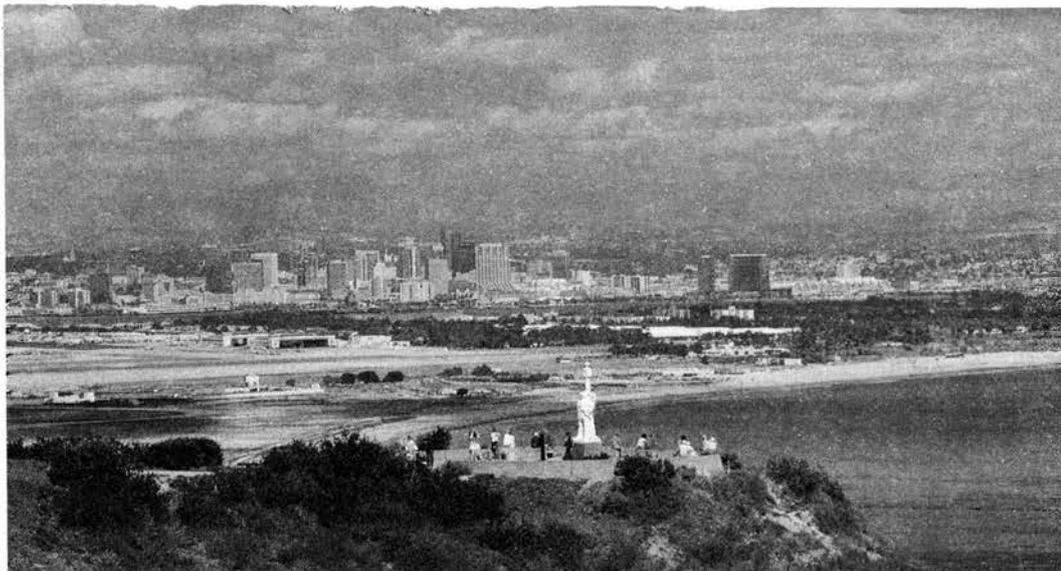
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"The *upadesa* you have brought to me from Bhagavan and, most of all, His Holy Presence, together bring me continuing happiness. I have not felt well like this for several years, and it is all Bhagavan's grace made especially effective by your visit. What more can I say, my dear brother? I would be so happy if you are able to visit us again next year."

— **Cynthia**,
Bainbridge Island, U.S.A., (Aug. 1991)

Cynthia (extreme l.) and Ralph (extreme r.)





2
3
7

A grand view of San Diego

"Today I finished your book, *Moments Remembered*. It was wonderful, connecting with Bhagavan's devotees and their experiences. It has given me a closer relationship with Him. What Pure Grace!. And what a blessing it was to have you come to our center. As you prostrated before Sri Bhagavan's picture, I felt Him acknowledging our work here, through you, as an instrument. As if it was a completion.

"Over the years we followed His direction as to how to bring His full Experience of the Heart to the Western world. The difficulties were many. Yet deep in our heart we knew he was leading us through it all until we found the center and established a home for Bhagavan's Presence to preside. Your visit confirmed it, and we are very grateful to you and the work you are doing, also following Bhagavan's Will."

— Elizabeth MacDonald,
AHAM, Asheboro, U.S.A. (Oct. 1991)

* * *

"The purpose for writing this letter is to express our appreciation for V. Ganesan's visit to Seattle from the 6th to the 16th October, 1990. The five-evening series given from the 8th to the 12th was a profound inspiration to all who attended. We all felt greatly blessed as he spoke so lucidly on the life and teachings of Sri Ramana. To share with someone who is practicing Sri Ramana's path was a great blessing. Personally, It showed us how truly important Sri Ramana and His way of life are to us. Ganesan told beautiful stories of devotees' lives and how they had been transformed by the grace of Sri Ramana."

— Michael and Marcie Allen,
Seattle, U.S.A., (Nov. 1990)

* * *

"I was happy to learn that your trip abroad was successful and fruitful. God knows that the world needs to be informed about the truth of advaitic realization and espe-

cially Bhagavan's wonderful and most effective way towards it. This will always remain man's most blessed endeavor, and for those who understand also the highest



(l. to r.) Robert Powell, Alexander Smit and Gina Powell

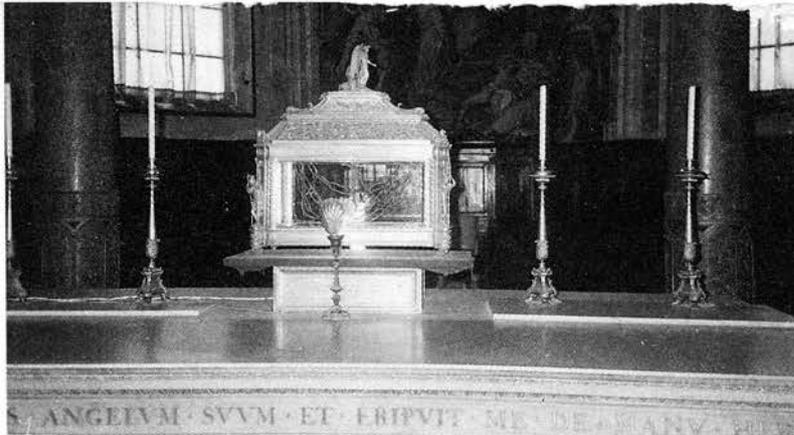
priority. It was a great honor and pleasure having you at our home, and we hope you will be able to return in the not-too-distant future."

— Robert Powell,
La Jolla, U.S.A., (Dec. 1990)



At 'Arunachala Ashrama', Nova Scotia, Canada

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St. Peter's chains at the Cathedral in Rome

"It was great, great, great to have you here and we miss you a lot. Every day we listen to your voice chanting "Ramana Ashtothra." That's our way to do our puja in our meditation room before meditating. It helps us to still the mind.

"We saw Gaetano Landoni again. He was very happy to have met you and told us that Dr. Musermann had said to

him: 'The more days elapse from that evening with Mr. Ganesan, the more important I feel that meeting was for me.' Yesterday Dr. Musermann told me himself that he was very happy to have been able to meet you. In our minds your words are working: You gave us a great lesson and we are very thankful to you."

— Olga Ammann, Como, Italy (July 1992)

* * *

"A great many thanks for having come to our Hindu Centre, for having blessed it by speaking on Bhagavan Sri Ramana, and for your very warm support in sending us such a large number of books on Sri Bhagavan. This will form a valuable addition to our small library. I have been striving very hard for the last fifteen years to develop the Hindu Centre along with a few of my close friends. I think slowly we are getting somewhere."



At Hong Kong

— Dr. V.K. Pillay, Singapore, (July 1992)

* * *

"Sri Ganesan was here with us for about a week in accordance with his original programme. We had a wonderful time in his company. We were able to organise two talks by Sri Ganesan at the premises of Chinmaya Ashram, Hong Kong. Both talks were well attended by 50 to 60 people. Besides these talks, we also organised one whole-day

retreat and another outing programme. There was good participation at both. Altogether it was a very satisfying experience for all of us. We not only heard many anecdotes which Sri Ganesan provided from Sri Bhagavan's life but also the quintessence of Sri Bhagavan's teachings was very ably explained."

— V.Panchapakesan
Hong Kong,
(May 1992)

* * *

"I really appreciate your visiting us in Japan last April. We derived much spiritual benefit from your talks and your presence amongst us. I in particular found my consciousness gradually changing from the merely intellectual to the direction pointed to by Sri Bhagavan. Now I feel that the Way of Sri Bhagavan is very easy because the accomplishment or the living example of it exists. It is Sri Bhagavan."

— Kunshi Kitagawa,
Nippon Ramana Kendra, Osaka, Japan, (June 1992)

At Shibuya City Hall, Tokyo



Obituary



T.K. Jayaraman (18-5-22—3-4-92)

Sri T.K. Jayaraman, an ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan, attained the Lotus Feet of the Lord on Friday, 3rd April, 1992. He bore his final illness with amazing fortitude and unruffled calm, absorbed in Sri Bhagavan and His works to the last.

A life-long devotee of Sri Bhagavan, Sri Jayaraman often visited Sri Ramanasramam during the lifetime of the Maharshi and after. He used to speak frequently about the indescribable peace that he enjoyed whenever he sat and meditated in the Presence of Sri Bhagavan.

He was also closely associated with Sri Muruganar, whose "Tiruvembavai" in praise of Sri Bhagavan he translated into English for the Jayanthi '91 issue of *The Mountain Path*. Just a few days before his demise, Sri Jayaraman completed his English translation of Sri Bhagavan's "Anmasakshatkaram". His translation of "Devikalottaram", which also he did only recently, will be featured in the next issue of our journal.

Affable, gentle, ever-helpful and self-effacing, Sri Jayaraman will be greatly missed not only by members of his own family, but also by the entire family of Ramana-devotees.

* * *



Kasipillai Navaratnam

Kasipillai Navaratnam, a great devotee of Sri Bhagavan for the last 58 years, was absorbed in His Lotus Feet on 8th June, 1992, at Toronto in Canada.

Navaratnam had his first darshan of Sri Bhagavan and Arunachala on December 25, 1935, and from then on had no desire to seek any other sacred place. As an accountant in the Ceylon Government Railways, he used to spend his annual leave in December every year with Sri Bhagavan. Shortly after his marriage to fellow-devotee Ratnambal, Navaratnam was to leave to join his wife in the U.K., when he learned of Sri Bhagavan's impending *Mahasamadhi*. Cancelling his plans, he rushed to Tiruvannamalai to the bedside of the Maharshi and participated in the chanting of "Arunachala Siva" as Sri Bhagavan shed His mortal frame. He afterwards participated in the *Mahasamadhi* rites also.

He is survived by his noble wife, pandit and translator, Ma Ratna Navaratnam, herself a well-known and well-loved figure at Sri Ramanasramam, who, like her late husband, has been spending her retired life in the pursuit of self-enquiry, aided by the grace of Sri Bhagavan.

Smt. Rukmini Nilakanta Rao



Smt. Rukmini came from the Giddaluru Sambasiva Rao family. Every member of this devout family holds Sri Bhagavan as the one and only God. Born in 1924, Rukmini's attachment to Bhagavan began practically from her birth, and in her younger years had the good fortune to spend much time in the Ashram and receive the personal attention of her Sat Guru. Although her mother-tongue was Telugu, Sri Muruganar encouraged her to learn Tamil, which she did, thus enabling her to read Sri Bhagavan's Tamil works and correspond with the Ashram at ease. She was absorbed into the Lotus Feet of her *Sat Guru* on 16th January 1992.

* * *

K. Sivaraj

K. Sivaraj, I.A.S. (retired), former Chief Secretary to the Government of Gujarat, and President and co-founder of the Ahmedabad Ramana Kendra, was absorbed in the Lotus Feet of Sri Bhagavan, at Bangalore.



Despite his many accomplishments in public service, Sri Sivaraj will be remembered by his fellow Ramana-bhaktas as a staunch devotee whose public life never overshadowed the spiritual, an unflinching support to others in their times of trouble, using every skill at his disposal to meet their needs. Though he himself has attained, he will be much missed by the rest of us.

* * *

Smt. V. Rajalakshmi

The beloved wife of K.V. Mama, grandson of Echammal, first came to her "Lord" Ramana on 24.6.42 as the bride selected by Echammal for her grandson with the blessings of Sri Bhagavan. During her married life she was a devout hostess to Ramana-devotees visiting her home. In her brief memoirs she has recorded interesting experiences of Sri Ramana's increasing Grace, which she concluded with the words, "My Ramana will never forsake me. He will always be with me till my last breath; and even afterwards." And with Ramana's name on her lips, she attained His Lotus Feet in absolute peace on 18.5.1992.



R. Gouthama

(17-8-40—19-6-92)



R. Gouthama, the third son of Smt. Sharada and Sri K. Ramaswami of Bangalore, reached the Holy Feet of Sri Bhagavan on Friday, June 19, 1992. Born into a devout family of Ramana-*bhaktas*, Gouthama was well-grounded in spirituality, which was only intensified by his nineteen-year stay in Chicago, U.S.A., where he was living until the time of his death.

Sri Bhagavan's Grace to Gouthama was full and complete. He spent the last months of his illness in complete *smaran* of the Lord, and his funeral, though in America, was conducted in exemplary fashion, with chanting of "Aksharamanamai", "Sat Darsanam", and "Upadesa Saram" to the last.

He is survived with heroic fortitude by his wife, his daughter, his brothers and parents, who have displayed how devotion to Sri Bhagavan can surmount the greatest of tragedies in this ephemeral world.

* * *

Maha Krishna Swami

Sri Maha Krishna Swami, beloved head of the Sao Paolo, Brazil Ramana Kendra, was absorbed in the Lotus Feet of the Lord Ramana on October 26, 1992, at the age of 56. Sri Bhagavan's name was on his lips till the last. During his time in Brazil, the Swami worked unceasingly to spread the message of the Maharshi and urge devotees along the path of self-enquiry.

* * *

Muni Sri Amarendra Vijayaji

Muni Sri Amarendra Vijayaji attained *samadhi* on 23rd June, 1992 at "Shantiniketan" near Tithal Beach, Bulsar.

Born in a Gujerati Jain family in the year 1925 at Kutch, he took *diksha* from a Jain guru in 1951 and lived a life of renunciation, *sadhana* and *tapas*.

The Muni revered Sri Bhagavan as "the most prominent saint of our century, whose life and teachings illuminated for me the path of liberation taught by Sriman Bhagavan Mahavir". His Gujerati book dedicated to Sri Bhagavan, *Atmajana and Sadhanapath*, has been a source of inspiration and a guide to many *sadhaks*.

Skandasramam Ramaswamy

Skandasramam Ramaswamy, who came to Sri Bhagavan in the 1940s, and for most of the last twenty years has taken immaculate care of Skandasramam, was absorbed into the Lotus Feet of Sri Bhagavan on October 10, 1992. Although Swami was often to be seen in meditation, he spent the better part of each day silently occupied with his *guru seva* of sweeping, cleaning and washing every corner of Skandasramam, inside and out. The ashram's famous sweet and pure water, which gushes forth from the spring found by Sri Bhagavan back around 1915, owed its continued purity to Ramaswamy's regular cleanings of the spring and cisterns. Although Ramaswamy had gone to his native village in Coimbatore to recover from a prolonged illness, he staunchly returned to Ramanasramam when he saw that the end was near. By the grace of Sri Bhagavan, he was absorbed within three weeks of his return. *Sadhaks* and *sadhus* from the Mountain and around Tiruvannamalai gathered to bid farewell to this silent and faithful servant of Sri Bhagavan.

* * *

Brahmachari Gopal Krishna

Brahmachari Gopal Krishna of Paramatma Niketan Ashram in Natuk was absorbed into the Lotus Feet of the Lord on July 6, 1992. This fervent devotee was so drawn to the spiritual life that he left medical school on the eve of his final examination. During the course of his *parivrajaka*, he was kicked, as he used to say, to Tiruvannamalai to see Sri Bhagavan. This experience was the turning point of his life. He later established Paramatma Niketan Ashram, where he taught the teachings of Ramana Maharshi and Sri Ramakrishna.

* * *

Mannu

Sri Mannu, beloved Ashram worker, was absorbed in Sri Bhagavan on 7th August, 92. Mannu first came to Sri Bhagavan in the company of his elders around 1948, when he was about 10. He hearkened from the village of Chettipattu, three kilometers from Tiruvannamalai, and the only village from which Sri Niranjanananda Swami would hire labour. He was a nephew of Krishna Konar, the first member of this village to come and work for Sri Ramanasramam. Mannu was cheerfully working in the packing department of the Ashram Book Depot at the time of his death.

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