

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna's meeting with Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in Calcutta

Chapter I

Vidyasagar's residence

It is Saturday, 5 August 1882, the sixth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Shravana. It is about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Sri Ramakrishna is going to Badurbagan by carriage on the main road in Calcutta to visit Vidyasagar at his house. Bhavanath, Hazra and M. accompany him.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in Kamarpukur, a village in the Hooghly district situated near Beersingh, Vidyasagar's the native village. Since childhood, Sri Ramakrishna has heard of Vidyasagar's acts of charity. In the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, he learned of his scholarship and compassionate nature. M. is a teacher in Vidyasagar's school. Learning this, Thakur asked him, "Will you take me to see Vidyasagar? I would like very much to meet him." M. spoke to Vidyasagar, who was delighted and asked M. to come on Saturday at four o'clock. Vidyasagar had asked him, "What kind of a paramahansa is he? Does he wear gerua¹?" M. had replied, "No sir, he is a unique person. He wears a red-bordered dhoti and a short coat, a shirt and varnished slippers. He lives in a room in Rasmani's

¹ Ochre-colored cloth of a sannyasin

Kali Temple. He sleeps on a wooden cot with only a bedspread and a mosquito net. Outwardly there is no sign of holiness, but inwardly he knows nothing but the Lord. Day and night he meditates on Him.”

The carriage starts from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Having crossed the bridge, it soon reaches Amherst Street through Shyambazar. When the devotees tell Thakur that the carriage is nearing Badurbagan, Thakur begins to talk like a child full of joy. However, there is a sudden change in his mood as the carriage reaches Amherst Street. It seems to be a prelude to his going into divine ecstasy.

As the carriage approaches Rammohan Roy’s garden house, M. hasn’t noticed the change in Thakur’s mood. Hurriedly he exclaims, “This is Rammohan Roy’s house.” Thakur is annoyed and says, “Such things don’t appeal to me now. I don’t care about them.” He is passing into divine ecstasy.

The carriage stops at the gate to Vidyasagar’s house. It is a two-story building of British taste. The building sits in the middle of the plot and has a wall on all four sides. The gate and the front door are on the western side of the house, the gate to the south of the door. Between the western wall and the two-storied building are flowering trees and plants. One climbs upstairs after passing through the western ground floor room. Vidyasagar is on the upper floor. At the top of the staircase is a room on the north, to its east a hall. Vidyasagar’s bedroom is to the southeast of the hall. There is another room on the south. All the rooms are full of precious books. Most of the books are beautifully bound and artistically arranged in bookshelves that line the wall. On the eastern side of the hall are a few chairs and a table. Vidyasagar sits there facing west when he works. When he has visitors, they also sit around the table. There is stationery visible – paper, pen, inkpot, blotting paper, several letters, a bound cashbook, files, and a few books Vidyasagar is reading. Exactly

to the south of the wooden divan is a bedstead where he sleeps.

What is written on the letters lying on the table under the paperweight? Perhaps a widow has written, "My minor child is without a father. There is nobody to take care of him. You will have to look after him." Someone else might have written, "You went to Kharmata, so we didn't get our monthly allowance. This caused us great distress." Another poor person may have written, "I have been admitted to your school on a full scholarship, but I have no means to buy books." Yet another person might write, "My family hasn't the means to feed itself. Kindly arrange a job for me." A teacher from the school perhaps has written, "My sister has lost her husband and her whole burden has fallen on my shoulders. My salary is too meagre to meet expenses." Yet another has perhaps written from a foreign country, "I am in trouble here. You are a friend of the poor. Kindly send me some money and save me from impending distress." And yet another has written, "Settlement must be made on such-and-such date. Kindly come on this day and settle the dispute."

Thakur descends from the carriage. M. leads him to the house. Walking through flowering trees on the way to the house, Thakur touches the buttons of his shirt and asks M. in a childlike manner, "My shirt is unbuttoned. Is there any harm in it?" He is dressed in a broadcloth shirt and a red-bordered dhoti with one end over his shoulder. He has varnished slippers on his feet. M. says, "Please don't worry about it. You will not offend anyone. You needn't button your shirt." Just as a child feels reassured after an explanation, Thakur's mind is at peace.

Chapter II

Vidyasagar

Having climbed the staircase, Thakur enters the first room with the devotees (the room just to the north). Vidyasagar is seated at the north end of the room facing south. In front of him is a long rectangular polished table. On the east side of the table is a bench with a back. A number of chairs have been placed to the south and west of the table. Vidyasagar is talking to some of his friends.

As Thakur enters, Vidyasagar stands up to greet him. Thakur stands near the eastern edge of the table facing west with his right hand on the table. Behind him is the bench. He looks at Vidyasagar as though he were a former acquaintance. He laughs in ecstasy.

Vidyasagar must be sixty-two or sixty-three years old. He is sixteen or seventeen years older than Sri Ramakrishna. He is clad in a white-bordered dhoti, a short-sleeved flannel shirt, and is wearing slippers. He has an Orissa-cut¹ hairstyle. His gleaming white false teeth show when he talks. Short in stature, Vidyasagar has a very large head and a broad forehead. He is a brahmin, so he wears a holy thread around his neck.

Vidyasagar is a man of many facets. One of his great loves is of learning. One day he actually began to weep when he said to M, “How much I wanted to continue my studies! But it was not to be. I was so entangled in worldly affairs, I didn’t have time.’

A second love is for all beings. Vidyasagar is an ocean of compassion. Seeing a calf deprived of its mother’s milk, he could not drink milk for many years – not until his health declined considerably. He does not travel in a carriage, because the horse

¹ The lower part of the head is shaved

pulling it cannot speak of its burden. One day he saw a workman lying on the road struck by cholera, his basket lying near. He picked the man up, brought him home, and nursed him.

A third love is independence. Because of a disagreement with his proprietors, Vidyasagar resigned from the post of Principal of the Sanskrit College.

His fourth characteristic is that he does not care for social decorum. He loved a teacher. At the time of his daughter's marriage, Vidyasagar went to the feast¹ with a gift of cloth under his arm.

A fifth love is devotion to his mother. She had said to him, "Iswar, if you don't come to the marriage of your brother, I will feel very bad." On strength of will, Vidyasagar walked on foot all the way from Calcutta to his village of Beersingh. On the way he had to cross the Damodar river and there was no boat available, so he swam across. He presented himself before his mother, dripping wet, the very night of the marriage. He said, "Mother, here I am!"

Vidyasagar's adoration of Sri Ramakrishna – their conversation

Entering into an ecstatic mood, Thakur stands quiet for quite some time. To control his ecstasy, he now and then says, "I want a drink of water." The boys of the household, relatives and friends of Vidyasagar, quickly gather around.

Thakur is about to sit on the bench, still absorbed in ecstasy. A boy of seventeen or eighteen is already sitting there. He has come to Vidyasagar to ask help with his studies. In such a spiritual mood, with the insight of a rishi, Thakur is able to understand what the boy is thinking. He moves away

¹ On the ceremony of taking the last meal by a Hindu bride on the night immediately preceding the wedding day

a little and says, in ecstasy, “Mother, this boy has great attachment to worldly life, your world of ignorance. This boy belongs to the world of ignorance.”

Does Thakur mean that it is ironic for the boy to study to make money instead of to acquire the knowledge of Brahman?

Vidyasagar anxiously asks somebody to bring water. He asks M., “Will he take some refreshments?” M. replies, “Yes sir, please bring something.” Vidyasagar leaves hurriedly and returns with numerous sweets. He says, “These are from Burdwan.” Some of them are offered to Thakur. Hazra and Bhavanath also take some. When M. is offered them, Vidyasagar says, “He is a child of this house. There is no formality with him.” Thakur speaks of a particular young man who has been sitting in front of him. He says, “This boy possesses good sattvic qualities. Inwardly he is full of pith and marrow¹. He is like the Phalgu river with a bed which appears dried up – but dig a little and you find an active current of water underneath.”

After taking some sweets, Thakur talks with Vidyasagar, a smile playing on his face. Soon the whole room is full of people. Some are seated, others stand.

Sri Ramakrishna — Today I have come to the ocean². Until now I have come across canals, lakes, and rivers. Now I see the ocean. (All laugh.) [Thakur is referring to the literal meaning of Vidyasagar, which is the ‘ocean of knowledge’.]

Vidyasagar (laughing) — Then, sir, you are welcome to take some salt water. (Laughter.)

¹ *Antasarra*

² Sagar

Sri Ramakrishna — No, my dear sir, you are surely not the salt ocean. You are not the ocean of avidya¹. You are the ocean of vidya², the ocean of milk! (All laugh.)

Vidyasagar — Sir, you may say so if you like.

Thakur speaks while Vidyasagar remains silent.

Sattvic actions of Vidyasagar – “You, too, are a perfected man”

“Your actions are sattvic by nature. It is the rajas of sattva. Sattva makes one do works of compassion. When a work is done out of compassion, though it is rajasic, it is the rajas of sattva. There is no harm in it. Shukadeva and others were compassionate in order to teach humanity – to teach about God to humanity. It is good that you are giving food and education. These charitable acts lead to God-realization if undertaken selflessly. They who act to earn a name or religious merit are not selfless in their actions. But you deserve to be called a perfect man.”

Vidyasagar — How is that, sir?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Potatoes and rice aren't tender until they're siddha (well-boiled). Your kindness for others has made you soft and tender of heart³. (Laughter.)

¹ Ignorance which leads one away from God

² True knowledge leading Godward

³ The word siddha either means 'well-boiled' or a 'perfect man'; hence, Thakur's pun

Vidyasagar (laughing) — But kalai pulse when siddha (well-boiled), gets harder! Is that not so? (Everybody laughs.)

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you are no such thing. You are not a mere pundit – dry and hard and good for nothing. A vulture soars high in the sky, but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pits where the carcasses of animals are burned. They who are pundits due to learning are scholars in name – but they are attached to ‘lust and gold’ – they look for decomposed corpses, just like a vulture. Fondness for the world is avidya; compassion, devotion, love of God, non-attachment¹, are the wealth of vidya.

Vidyasagar listens to Thakur silently. Everyone gazes fixedly at the blissful personage and drinks the nectar of his words.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna – jnana yoga and Vedanta

Vidyasagar is a very learned man. When he was a student in the Sanskrit College, he was at the top of his class. He secured first position and won a gold medal and a scholarship. Gradually he reached the position of Principal of the Sanskrit College. He was a specialist in Sanskrit grammar and poetic literature. He learned English by resolute self-effort.

Vidyasagar did not instruct anyone in religion. He had studied philosophy but when M. once asked him what he thought of Hindu philosophy, he replied, “I think that what they wanted to explain, they were unable to explain.” However, he would perform all

¹ Vairagya

Hindu rituals, such as funeral ceremonies. He wore the sacred thread around his neck and whenever he wrote a letter in Bengali, he wrote as a letterhead: "Sri Sri Hari Sharanam" (Lord, I take refuge in You).

Another day Vidyasagar had told M. his idea about God. He said, "He cannot be known. So what is our duty? In my opinion it is to conduct ourselves in such a way that if others followed us, the earth would become heaven. Everyone must try to do good to the world."

While talking of vidya and avidya, Thakur speaks of the knowledge of Brahman. Vidyasagar, a very learned man who has studied the six Hindu systems of philosophy, has perhaps concluded that it is impossible to know anything about God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brahman is beyond vidya and avidya. He transcends maya.

Problem of evil – Brahman is unattached¹ – pain and sorrow only relevant to the embodied soul

"There are both vidya maya and avidya maya in the world. There are jnana and bhakti – as well as 'lust and greed'. There is righteousness, and there is unrighteousness; there is good as well as evil. But Brahman is not concerned with all these. Good and bad belong to embodied beings, as does righteousness and unrighteousness. God is not affected by them.

"It is like the light of a lamp. You may read the *Bhagavata* with the help of that light. You can also forge a document with criminal intent in the

¹ *Nirlipta*

same light. In both cases the lamp remains unaffected.

“The sun sheds light on the good as well as on the wicked.

“You may then ask, how do you explain sorrow, sin, restlessness and the like? The answer is that they only concern embodied beings. Brahman is above and beyond them. There is poison in the fangs of a snake, but the poison doesn’t affect it – though when the snake bites a creature, it dies.”

**Brahman is indescribable and impossible to verbalize¹
(the unknown and the unknowable)**

“What Brahman is cannot be described. Everything – the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Tantras* and the six systems of philosophy – has been defiled, like the leavings of food. For when one reads the scriptures, one must use the vocal organs and this causes them to be in touch with the mouth, so to speak. Thus they have all been defiled, like the leavings of food. The one exception is Brahman. No one in this world has yet been able to give proper and adequate expression to God the Absolute.”

Vidyasagar (to his friends) — Oh, this is beautiful. I must say I have learned something today.

Sri Ramakrishna — A man had two sons. He placed both of them under the care of a preceptor to acquire the knowledge of Brahman. After many

¹ *Avyapadesyam*

years both of them returned from the guru's house and saluted their father. The father wished to see how deeply they had understood the knowledge of Brahman (jnana). He asked the elder son, 'Son, you have studied the scriptures. Tell me what God the Absolute is.' The elder son quoted several verses from the *Vedas* to explain the nature of Brahman. His father remained silent. When the father put the question to his younger son, the boy hung his head and sat quite mute. He uttered not a word. The father said happily, 'Son, you indeed have understood a little about God the Absolute. What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words.'

"Man thinks that he has known God. An ant came to a mountain of sugar. It ate one particle of sugar and was filled. It took another particle and, as it went its way, it thought that the next time it would take the whole mountain home. Such, alas, is the condition of insignificant man. Men don't know that Brahman is beyond mind and speech.

"Who can know God, however great that man may be? Shukadeva and other holy sages were at best ants of the larger sort (big black ants). They might have been able to carry eight or ten grains of sugar in their mouths."

**Brahman is indeed Sat-chit-ananda¹ – Nirvikalpa
Samadhi and Brahmajnana**

"Do you know how the *Vedas* and the *Puranas* have expressed God? If a person asks a man what he has seen after he has been to the ocean, he exclaims,

¹ Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute

‘Ha! Oh, what I saw! What a disturbance! What waves!’ It is the same in the case of Brahman. The *Vedas* say, ‘He is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, the image of Bliss.’ Shukadeva and other rishis, standing on the shore of the ocean of Brahman, saw and touched Him. According to some, these people did not go into the ocean, for no one can return after going into it.

“One attains Brahmajnana in the state of samadhi – one has the vision of Brahman. In that state the process of thinking completely stops; one is struck dumb. Nobody has the power to explain Brahman in words.

“A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. (All laugh). But it could provide no information. As soon as it went into the ocean, it dissolved. Who could give the report?”

A person asks, “Does a man who has attained Brahmajnana, having become established in samadhi, remain ever-silent?”

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vidyasagar) — Shankaracharya retained his ‘I of knowledge’ to impart instruction to mankind. The man who has the vision of Brahman becomes silent. One reasons only as long as one has not seen Him. Clarified butter in a pan set over fire makes a sizzling sound as long as the water in it has not dried up. When it is well heated, it produces no sound. However, when you throw unbaked flour cake¹ in it, it again begins to make a sizzling sound. When the cake is

¹ *Luchi*

sufficiently cooked, the butter no longer makes a sound. In the same way a man comes down from samadhi to impart instruction to mankind, and then he talks.

“A bee buzzes as long as it doesn't sit on a flower. But when it settles down on the flower and begins to drink honey, it becomes silent. Intoxicated by drinking honey, it may again buzz.

“When you lower a pitcher into a pool of water, it produces a gurgling sound. But when the pitcher is full, there is no sound. (All laugh.) When water is poured from this pitcher again into another, one again hears a gurgling sound.” (Laughter.)

Chapter IV

Jnana and vijnana – reconciliation of Non-dualism¹, Qualified non-dualism² and Dualism³

Sri Ramakrishna — The rishis attained Brahmajnana⁴. But if you have the slightest desire for worldly things, you cannot attain the knowledge of Brahman. What an effort the rishis made! They would leave their ashram in the morning to meditate and contemplate on God alone throughout the day. And then they ate only roots and fruit at night when they returned to their ashram. They would guard themselves from seeing, hearing, and

¹ Advaitavada

² Vishishtadvaita

³ Dvaitavada

⁴ Transcendental knowledge of God

touching other worldly things. Only then did they realize Brahman as their own inner Self¹.

“In the age of Kali, life is dependent on food and one cannot rid oneself of body-consciousness. It’s not right in this state of mind to say, ‘Soham².’ One attends to worldly affairs and then says, ‘I am Brahman’ – this is not right. They who cannot rid themselves of worldly matters, they who cannot free themselves from the idea of ‘I-ness’, should keep the I-ness of the ‘servant I,’ or the ‘devotee I’. One can also attain Him by the path of love and devotion for God.

“The jnani gets rid of his worldly identity by saying, ‘Not this, not this,’ and thus attains the knowledge of Brahman. It is like one who reaches the roof by leaving one step after another behind. But the vijnani has a special contact with Him and sees more than the jnani. He sees that the steps are made of the same material as the roof – bricks, brick dust and lime. He sees that He who has realized Brahman by saying, ‘Not this, not this’, has Himself become the living beings and the universe. The vijnani sees that He who is attributeless is also with attributes.

“A man cannot stay on the roof a long time. He comes down from the roof. They who have attained samadhi and had the vision of Brahman see when they come down that He Himself has become all living beings and the universe. Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti – one cannot stay long at ti [the highest note]. One cannot rid one’s self of I-ness. On

¹ *Bodhebodha*

² I am He

coming down from samadhi, one sees that He is me, and that He has become the entire universe and its living beings. This is vijnana.

“The path of the jnani¹ is one way to attain God. The path of knowledge combined with devotion is another way. So also is there the path of devotion (bhakti). The path of Jnana Yoga is as true as the path of Bhakti Yoga. One can reach God through various paths. But as long as one retains the ego, it is easier and more straightforward to follow the path of love and devotion.

“The vijnani sees that Brahman is immovable and actionless, like Mount Sumeru. The entire universe is made of His three gunas – of sattva, rajas and tamas – but He is unattached to them.

“The vijnani sees that He who is Brahman² is also Bhagavan³. He who is beyond attributes is also the Lord of six supernatural powers. His powers are the world and its living beings, the mind and intellect, love⁴, dispassion⁵ and divine knowledge. (Laughing) What kind of gentleman has no hearth and home, who might even have been forced to sell it? (Laughter.) The Lord possesses the six supernatural powers. Had God no dispassion, who would accept Him?” (General laughter.)

¹ Man of knowledge

² God the Absolute

³ The Personal God

⁴ Bhakti

⁵ Vairagya

God is present in all as all-pervading power¹ – but there is special manifestation of His power in some

“See how wonderful the world is! How many different things there are in this universe: the sun, the moon and the planets! How many kinds of creatures there are: big, small, good and bad! Some have more power, others less.”

Vidyasagar — Has God given more power to some and less to others?

Sri Ramakrishna — He dwells in all beings as the all-pervading Power. He is present even in an ant. But there is a special manifestation of His power in some. If that were not true, how could one man defeat ten, while another person tries to run away from even one? Why do people have regard for you? Have you grown two horns? (Laughter.) Compared to others, you have more compassion and learning. This is why they have regard for you and come to see you. Don't you agree?

Vidyasagar smiles.

Mere learning and book learning are in vain – love and devotion for God is the one thing needful

Sri Ramakrishna — Mere learning is of no avail. It is for finding the means for attaining Him and knowing Him that one reads books. A sadhu had a book with him. Somebody asked him what it was about. The sadhu opened it and on every page was written, ‘Om, Rama’. Nothing else.

¹ *Vibhu*

“What is the message of the *Gita*? What you hear when you say the word ten times. By repeating it ten times, *Gita* becomes ‘*tyagi*’¹. And this is what the *Gita* teaches: Oh man, giving up everything, strive to realize God. Whether one is a sadhu or a householder, one must get rid of all attachments in the mind.

“Chaitanyadeva, in the course of his pilgrimage through South India, came across a person reading the *Gita*. Another man sat a little away from him, listening and shedding tears. How bitterly he was weeping! Chaitanyadeva asked him, ‘Do you understand all this?’ He replied, ‘No, Master, I do not understand these verses.’ The former then asked why he was in tears. The devotee said, ‘I see Arjuna’s chariot; in it the Lord and Arjuna are talking. This is what fills my eyes with tears of joy and love.’

Chapter V

The secret of dualism

Sri Ramakrishna — Why does the vijnani practice love and devotion to God? The answer is that one cannot get rid of I-ness. Though one’s ego disappears in the state of samadhi, it reappears. The ego of an ordinary man does not leave him. Cut the Ashwattha plant and the next day you will see it sprout again. (All laugh.)

¹ One who has given up the world for the sake of God – riches, honours, work with attachment, sensual pleasures etc.

“Even after attaining knowledge, I-ness reappears, nobody knows from where. You see a tiger in a dream. Even when you wake up, you find your heart still racing. All of man’s trouble is due to this I-ness. The bullock bellows, ‘*Hamba, hamba*’ (I, I). That is why it undergoes such tribulation. It is yoked to the plough, its body is exposed to the sun and rain, and then a butcher slaughters it. After that, shoes are made with its skin. Moreover, it is used to make drums and it is beaten mercilessly. (Laughter.)

“Even then, it is not spared. Last of all, strings are made with its intestines and the carder makes bows to card cotton. Then it no longer says, ‘I, I.’ Instead it says ‘*Tuhu Tuhu*’ (you, you). It is only when it says ‘You, you’ that it is spared. ‘Oh Lord, I am Your servant, You are my Master. I am your son, you are my Mother.’

“Rama asked Hanuman, ‘With what attitude do you look on me?’ Hanuman replied, ‘Rama, when I have the feeling of ‘I’, I look upon you as the whole and myself as your part; you are the Master and I your servant. And Rama, when I attain the knowledge of the Absolute, I see that You are I and I am You.’

“The idea of Master and servant is good. The ego won’t vanish, so let the rascal remain a ‘servant I.’”

Instruction to Vidyasagar: I and mine are ignorance

“I and mine: these are both born of ignorance. My house, my money, my learning, all these are my

riches – this feeling is a result of ignorance. Oh Lord, You are the doer and all these belong to You – house, family, sons, children, acquaintances, and friends. Such a feeling arises from knowledge.

“One must always remember death. Death will be the end of everything. You have come here to perform some actions, the way villagers come to Calcutta from their village to work. If a visitor comes to a rich man’s garden, the keeper of the garden says, ‘This is our garden and this our pond.’ But if the proprietor dismisses the keeper because of some error he has committed, he is not entitled to take away even his mango-wood box – it is sent to him through the gatekeeper. (Laughter.)

“God laughs on two occasions. One, when a physician says to the mother of his patient, ‘Mother, you needn’t fear. I will cure your son.’ The Lord says to Himself, ‘I am taking his life and this fellow says that he is going to save him.’ The physician thinks that he is the doer. He doesn’t know that it is God alone who is the doer. The Lord also laughs when two brothers divide land between themselves, measuring it with a cord and saying ‘This side is mine and that yours.’ God laughs, saying to Himself, ‘This world, the whole universe, is Mine, but these fellows say: this plot of land is mine and that is yours.’”

The way: faith, love and devotion¹ for God

“Can He be known by reasoning? Be His servant, take refuge in Him and call upon Him.

¹ Bhakti

(Smiling, to Vidyasagar) “Well, what is your attitude?”

Vidyasagar smiles gently. He says, “I will tell you one day when we are alone.” (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He cannot be known by learning and reasoning.

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing, intoxicated with divine love.

God is unknowable and limitless

Is there anybody who knows Kali, She who is the consort of *Kala*¹? Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her.

A yogi meditates on Her at the Muladhara² and Sahasrara³.

A goose and a gander go around in this wilderness of lotuses and sport with each other. They are *Kala* and His consort.

My Divine Mother is the most beloved of Shiva, even as Sita is the most beloved of Rama.

She appears in Her majesty in each ghat⁴ as an individual, just as She pleases. She is Ichhamai⁵.

It is Mahakala that knows the greatness of my Divine Mother – greatness, which is hidden from the view of ordinary beings. Who else can know Her?

¹ Spirit of Eternity

² Muladhara is the first lotus with four petals and is the root of the Sushumna in the spine. The Kundalini is coiled up at the Muladhara lotus.

³ Sahasrara is the lotus of a thousand petals which is the goal of the spiritual energy (Shakti) awakened by the yogi at the Muladhara. When the Shakti reaches the Sahasrara and becomes united with Shiva or Brahman, the result is samadhi, Brahmajnana.

⁴ Finite being

⁵ She has Her own way in everything

My Divine Mother gives birth to the Universe – now think of Her greatness!

Says Prasad [the psalmist]: ‘To think that one can know Her is to think that one can swim across the mighty ocean. People can only laugh at the idea.’

I understand this well enough with my mind; alas, my heart does not. It is a dwarf aspiring to reach the moon.

“See, Mother Kali’s womb contains the entire universe. How can you know Her greatness? And then it says, ‘Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her.’ You cannot attain Her by scholarship.”

The omnipotence of faith – faith in the Lord and the vilest sin

“You need to have faith, love and devotion for the Lord. Listen to this – how powerful is faith! A person wanted to go across the sea from Ceylon [now Sri Lanka]. Bibhishana said, ‘Take this and take care that it is tied to the end of your cloth. This will enable you to walk across the ocean in safety. But mind, never try to open it to look at it, for you will go under the water the moment you open it.’ This fellow walked the ocean for some time in perfect safety. Such is the omnipotence of faith. However, after crossing a part of the way, he began to wonder what precious thing Bibhishana had tied to the end of his cloth that could take him across the water. Thinking this, he opened the knot of cloth and found only the name of ‘Rama’ written on a leaf. He said to himself: Oh, just this! Thinking this, he sank into the water.

“They say that Hanuman had so much faith in the name of Rama that he was able to leap over the sea by virtue of his faith. On the other hand, Rama had to build a bridge to cross it [from the Indian mainland to Sri Lanka].

“If you have faith in Him, even if you commit a sin or the vilest crime, there is no danger.”

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna assumes the attitude of a devotee and, intoxicated with divine fervour, begins to sing of the great importance of faith –

O Divine Mother, if I die with the name of Durga on my lips,

I shall see, O Shankari¹, how could You not redeem me?

If I kill a cow, or a brahmin, or destroy a child in the womb;

If I indulge in drinking wine and the like, or kill a woman,

For all these sins I care not the least,

As I can raise myself to the exalted position of Brahman.

End of life is to love the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna — Faith and bhakti²! One can attain Him easily through love and devotion. He can be grasped through the ecstasy of love³.

¹ Giver of all good

² Love, devotion, prayerfulness and self-surrender

³ Bhava

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing another song –

O my mind! What are you doing to realize that Being?
You are groping about like a mad man in a dark room!

He can be grasped only through ecstatic love; it is
impossible to grasp Him otherwise.

Do try your best to bring under your control the moon,
which is the doorkeeper at the house (the Microcosm).

In a house are various rooms, among them a vault
where the Divine treasure is kept hidden.

Once the moon is under your control, you may,
secretly like a thief, work your way to the treasure in
the vault and make it your own.

But when the moon is beyond your control and it is
daybreak, the treasure in the vault is hidden from
you.

Go to the six schools of philosophy. You will not find
that Being there! Nor in the *Tantras*¹ or the *Vedas*!

That Being is fond of the sweet syrup of love and
dwells within as everlasting joy.

With a view to that love a great yogi practices, one
decade after another, meditation for reunion with the
Universal Soul.

Once this love springs up in his [the yogi's] heart, he
draws the Supreme Being near, much as the
loadstone draws the iron.

Says Prasad: "The Being whom I call my Mother and
try to realize, shall I tell Her real name²?"

Would that not be breaking my (sacred) cooking-pot in
the courtyard of the house (or in the market-place)
before the eyes of an unfeeling multitude? Guess, O

¹ Religious philosophy identified with the worship of Shakti for the attainment
of the Godhead

² Brahman of the Vedanta both *Saguna* and *Nirguna*, Personal-Impersonal

my mind, who that Being is, by the hints I have given.’

Thakur in the state of samadhi

As he is singing, Thakur goes into samadhi. His hands are folded, his body is erect and motionless, his eyes unblinking. He sits on the same bench facing west, his legs stretched out. Full of curiosity, everyone watches his wondrous state.

Thakur now returns to normal consciousness. Heaving a deep sigh, he smiles and says, “Feeling and devotion mean to love Him. He who is Brahman I call the Mother.”

“Ramprasad asks the mind to guess by a hint. He asks you to understand that He who is called Brahman in the *Vedas* is addressed by him as the Mother. He who is without attributes¹ also has attributes². He who is Brahman is indeed Shakti. When I see Him inactive, I call Him Brahman; and when I think of Him creating, preserving and destroying, I call Him the Primal Power, or Kali.

“Brahman and His Power are inseparable. Example, fire and its burning power. Mention fire, and its power to burn comes to mind. Mention the power to burn, and fire comes to mind. When you accept one, you have accepted the other as well.

“That Being is addressed as the Mother – isn’t the Mother a great object of love? If you are able to love the Lord, you will attain Him. Divine feeling, faith, love and devotion are needed! Listen to this song –

¹ Nirguna

² Saguna

The way: faith in the beginning followed by love and devotion

By meditating on Him, you attain the state of divine feeling.

One gains according to one's feeling – this is the fundamental truth.

If the mind can dip into the reservoir of the nectar of Kali's feet,

Worship, oblations¹, sacrifices and other Vedic rites are of no avail.

“ ‘The mind can dip’ means to love Him intensely. ‘The reservoir of nectar’ is the lake of immortality. Man does not die when he drowns there. He becomes immortal. Some think that by thinking of God too much, one loses one's sanity. That is not so. He is the lake of immortality. The *Vedas* have declared Him to be ‘immortal’. When one plunges into this lake, one does not die but instead becomes immortal.”

Karma Yoga and selfless work² – helping the world

Sri Ramakrishna and the European ideal of work

“Worship, oblations, sacrifices and such Vedic rites are of no use whatever. When you develop love for Him, all these actions of worship are mostly unnecessary. As long as there is a lack of breeze, there is the need of a fan. But if the southern wind blows, the fan may be put aside. What need is a fan then?

¹ Homa

² *Nishkama* karma

“All the activities you are performing are good. But if you can give up the idea that you are the doer, if you can perform these actions in a selfless way, it would be very good. By performing work in a selfless manner, one gradually develops love and devotion for God. And by continuing to do work without expectation of any reward, one realizes Him.

“However, the more you develop love and devotion for Him, the less work you will have to perform. When the daughter-in-law of the household is in the family way, her mother-in-law reduces her duties. The nearer she approaches her delivery, the less are the duties she is given by her mother-in-law. In the last month of pregnancy, she is given no work lest the childbirth be in jeopardy. (Laughter.) All the work you have undertaken is good. Performing work without any expectation of reward purifies the mind and increases your love for God. It is only by loving Him that you can realize Him. It is not man who does good to the world, it is God Himself who does it. He has created the sun and the moon; He has given affection to the hearts of parents; He has given compassion to the great; He has given devotion to sadhus and devotees. He who works without any selfish desire does good to himself.”

The aim of selfless work is God-realization

“There is gold buried within your heart, but you do not yet know it. It is covered by a little mud. Once you discover it, all other activities will be lessened. When the daughter-in-law has given birth to a

child, she is busy with it; she busies herself with the baby alone. Her mother-in-law doesn't let her do household chores. (All laugh.)

“Go forward. A woodcutter went to cut wood. A brahmachari said to him, ‘Go forward.’ And he saw sandalwood trees when he did. After a few days he remembered that the brahmachari had asked him to go forward, he didn't say to stop at the sandalwood trees. As he went on, he came across a silver mine. And after a few days, when he went still further, he came across a gold mine. Still further, he found diamonds and gems. Gaining all these, he became very wealthy.

“Work without expectation of any reward¹ develops love for God within. Then one attains Him by His grace. One can see the Lord, one can talk to Him the way I am talking to you.” (All laugh.)

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace

Everybody is listening to Sri Ramakrishna, still and silent, as though the Goddess Saraswati² herself were seated on his tongue and addressing Vidyasagar for the good of humanity. It is 9:00 p.m. Thakur will leave now.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing to Vidyasagar) — I needn't have said all this, for you know it. It is only that you are not aware of it. (Laughter.) In the

¹ *Nishkama* karma

² Goddess of knowledge and learning

treasure of the Lord of the ocean¹ are many jewels. But the presiding God of the sea is not aware of them.

Vidyasagar (laughing) — You may say so.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Again you will find that some gentlemen do not even know the names of their domestic servants. (Everybody laughs.) These gentlemen are too important to be on terms of familiarity with the valuables of the house.

Hearing this conversation, everyone is very happy. They are all silent for some time. Addressing Vidyasagar, he speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Come to the garden once, Rasmani's garden. It's a charming place. So grand! So beautiful!

Vidyasagar — Certainly. You have been so kind to come. Is it not my duty, too, to pay you a visit?

Sri Ramakrishna — Visit to me! Oh, for shame, for shame!

Vidyasagar — But why? Please explain to me.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — We are but fishing boats, small and light and able to travel canals and marshes and also big rivers. But you are a big ship! Who knows but that you may run against a sandbank if you venture there! (All laugh.)

¹ Varuna

Vidyasagar smiles but says nothing. Thakur laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — But even ships can navigate there at this time.

Vidyasagar (smiling) — Yes, it is the rainy season.
(All laugh.)

M. (to himself) — It is the season of the rains of new love. During a new love affair, one does not distinguish between honour and disgrace.

Thakur rises to leave, along with his devotees. Vidyasagar also stands with his relatives and friends. He will see Thakur off in the carriage.

Why does Sri Ramakrishna stand there? He is repeating the seed mantra¹ on his fingers. While doing this, he becomes absorbed in ecstasy – the ocean of motiveless grace as he is. Perhaps he is praying to the Mother for the spiritual welfare of the saintly Vidyasagar before leaving him.

Thakur and the devotees now go downstairs, one of them holding his hand. Vidyasagar leads with his group of friends. He has a lamp in his hand and shows the way. It is the sixth day of the dark fortnight in the lunar month of Shravana. The moon is not yet in the sky. All walk toward the gate through the dark garden in the dim light of the lamp.

Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees reach the gate, where they are struck by a beautiful sight. They see before them a bearded man of fair complexion, 36 or 37 years old, in Bengali dress, a white turban that Sikhs wear, clad in a dhoti, long shirt and socks, but no shoulder cloth. They see that as he comes into the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, he lies prostrate before

¹ Mula mantra

him with his turban on his head. When he rises, Thakur says, “Oh it’s you, Balaram! So late at night?”

Balaram (smiling) — I came a long time ago and have been waiting here.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why didn’t you come in?

Balaram — Sir, everybody was listening to you. I didn’t want to disturb you by going inside. (Saying this, Balaram laughs.)

Thakur gets into the carriage, along with the devotees.

Vidyasagar (sweetly to M.) — Shall I pay the carriage fare?

M. — You needn’t worry. It has already been taken care of.

Vidyasagar and the others salute Thakur.

The carriage begins to roll north. Its destination is the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Those he leaves stand gazing at the carriage even now. They seem to be wondering who this saintly man is who has such an intense love for God and who visits the homes of ordinary beings, telling them that the aim of life is to love God.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna with the Devotees at Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

‘Lust and greed’ are indeed obstacles in the path of yoga¹ – practicing spiritual disciplines and the secret of yoga

Sri Ramakrishna is living with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is Thursday, 24 August 1882, the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Shravana.

These days Hazra, Ramlal, Rakhai and other devotees are staying with Thakur. Ramlal is Thakur’s nephew and works as a priest at the Kali Temple. When he arrives, M. sees that Thakur and Hazra are standing on the long northeastern verandah talking. M. prostrates before Thakur and takes the dust of his feet.

Thakur is smiling. He says to M., “I would like to visit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar again. A painter first draws a rough sketch [for the Durga Puja] and later fills in the colours. The image is first made with clay, and then is given a second coat. After that it is plastered and, at last, it is painted with a brush. This is done one step at a time. Iswar Vidyasagar is ready in every aspect, but it is hidden. He has done so much humanitarian work, but he doesn’t know what is within himself. Gold lies hidden inside him. When he knows that the Lord resides within, he will give up all his activities and call upon Him with a yearning heart.”

¹ Communion with God

Thakur stands talking to M., sometimes pacing the verandah back and forth.

Spiritual practice – to quell the storm and tempest of ‘lust and greed’

Sri Ramakrishna —To know what is inside, a little spiritual practice is needed.

M. — Will one always have to perform spiritual practices?

Sri Ramakrishna — No, in the beginning you must be up and doing, but you don’t have to work so hard later on. As long as there are storms, tempests and rough water, the boat has to be steered along zigzag routes; so long does the boatman stand and hold the rudder – but he no longer does so when he is past them. When the boat rounds a bend and a favourable wind blows, he can sit down and relax and just touch the rudder. Then he prepares to hoist the sail and sits down for a smoke. There is peace when the storm and tempest of ‘lust and greed’ pass.

Sri Ramakrishna and essence of yoga – fall from yoga – state of yoga – steady and unwavering like the flame of a lamp in a windless place – obstacle in yoga

“Some people show signs of yoga. But even they have to be careful. ‘Lust and greed’ are the obstacles to yoga. They make one deviate from yoga and fall into worldliness – if there is still any desire for sense enjoyment. When this desire is fulfilled, the person will again turn toward the Lord – he

will again attain the state of yoga. Do you know what a '*satka kal*' is, the spring trap for fish?"

M. — No sir, I haven't seen one.

Sri Ramakrishna — You can see it in the countryside. A string with a hook is attached to a bent bamboo pole. Bait is tied to the hook. When a fish swallows the bait, the bamboo stick suddenly springs up. It regains its upright position.

"If you place a weight in one of the pans of a small scale, the lower needle moves away from the upper needle. Man's mind is the lower needle, the Lord is the upper needle. When the lower needle aligns with the upper needle, there is yoga.

"If the mind is restless, yoga is not possible. The wind of the world always distracts the flame of the mind. When the flame does not waver, one attains a perfect state of yoga.

" 'Lust and greed' are obstacles to yoga. You must discriminate: what is there in a woman's body but blood, flesh, fat, intestines, worms, urine, faeces and so on. Why love such a body?

"I used to assume a rajasic attitude in order to renounce worldly things. I developed a craving to put on pure gold-embroidered robes¹, to wear a ring and to smoke the hubble-bubble through a long pipe. I dressed myself in a robe embroidered with pure gold. He (Mathur Babu) bought it for me. After some time I said to my mind, 'Oh mind, so this is a pure gold-embroidered robe!' Then I took it

¹ Sari

off and threw it away – I didn't like it any more. In the same way, I said to myself, 'Oh mind, this is what is known as a shawl and a ring. And this is what is called smoking a hubble-bubble through a long pipe.' When I threw them away, I didn't want to have anything to do with them again.

It is almost dusk. Thakur is talking with Mani alone on the southeastern verandah near the door to his room.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — The mind of a yogi is always fixed on the Lord, ever absorbed in the Atman. You know it as soon as you see his eyes; they gaze in wonder. They look like the eyes of a bird hatching her eggs. Her entire mind is centered on the eggs. She sees outwardly only in name. Can you show me such a picture of a bird?

Mani — I will try to find one, sir.

Chapter II

Conversation between the Guru and the disciple – secret talk

It is already dusk. The lamps in the Kali Temple, the Radhakanta Temple, and all other rooms have been lit by the lamplighter¹. Thakur is sitting on his smaller cot as he meditates on the Mother of the Universe. Afterwards he repeats the name of the Lord. Incense has been burnt in his room. On one side a light burns on a lamp stand. After awhile, conch shells and bells sound. Arati is being performed

¹ *Faras*

in the Kali Temple. It is the tenth day of the bright fortnight. The moon shines brightly.

A short time after the arati, Sri Ramakrishna, still seated on the smaller cot, talks privately to Mani about different things. Mani sits on the floor.

You have the right to work, but not to its fruit¹

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — You must work without the expectation of any reward. The work that Iswar Vidyasagar is doing is good. He is trying to perform work selflessly.

Mani — Yes sir. Can one attain the Lord while performing work? Can Rama² and kama³ coexist? The other day I read this Hindi saying:

‘Where there is Rama there is no desire, and where there is desire, there is no Rama.’

Sri Ramakrishna — Everybody performs karma. Repeating His name and singing His glories are also work. Even the non-dualists’ meditation on ‘I am He’ is also work. It is work to exhale. There is no way to give up action. So work, but surrender its result to the Lord.

Mani — Sir, is it all right to try to earn more money?

Sri Ramakrishna — You can, if you spend it in spiritual pursuit. You may earn more – but you must make the right use of it. Earning cannot be

¹ Karmaṇyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana. (Gita 2:47)

² One of the incarnations of God

³ Desire

the ideal – the ideal is to serve the Lord. If money is used in the service of the Lord, there is no harm in it.

Mani — Well sir, how long does one have duties toward one's family?

Sri Ramakrishna — Make sure that they are not in want of food and clothing. But there is no need to take your children's burden when they can stand on their own feet. When a young bird learns to find grain for itself, it is pecked away by its mother when it approaches her for food.

Mani — How long must one work?

Sri Ramakrishna — The blossom falls off when the fruit is ripe. When you have attained the Lord, you don't have to work any longer. You won't even want to.

“When a drunkard drinks too much liquor, he loses his senses – but if he has taken two or three drinks, he can carry on with his work. The nearer one advances toward the Lord, the more He lessens one's duties. There is no danger in this. When the daughter-in-law in the family conceives, her mother-in-law gradually reduces her work. In the last month of her pregnancy, the mother-in-law doesn't let her work at all. After the birth of the baby, she remains busy with it all the time.

“One has peace only when one has finished all karma at hand. When a housewife has finished her cooking, the serving of meals and other household

chores, and goes to take her bath, she doesn't return, even if you call for her."

What is meant by attaining the Lord and having His vision? What is the way?

Mani — Sir, what is meant by attaining the Lord? What is a vision of the Lord? What are the means?

Sri Ramakrishna — The Vaishnavas say there are stages on the path to the realization of the Lord. There are beginners¹, aspirants², perfected ones³ and the most perfect of the perfected⁴. He who has just begun to walk the path is a beginner. He who practices spiritual disciplines – worship, japa, meditation and chanting His name – is an aspirant. He who has had the inner experience of God⁵ is perfected. The Vedanta illustrates it this way: A gentleman is lying in a dark room. Somebody gropes in the dark to reach him. His hand touches a couch and he says, 'No, this is not he.' Then he touches the window. This is not he. Then he touches the door and again says to himself, 'No, not he.' 'Not this, not this, not this.' At last his hand touches the gentleman. Then he says, 'That's it! Here is the gentleman.' It means that he is now conscious of the gentleman's actual 'existence'. He has reached the gentleman – but he hasn't known him intimately.

¹ *Pravartaka*

² *Sadhaka*

³ *Siddha*

⁴ *Siddha of the siddhas*

⁵ *Bodhebodhe*

“There is yet another class, that of the most perfect of the perfect. It is another state to have an intimate acquaintance with the gentleman – to become intimately acquainted with the Lord through love and devotion. The perfect has no doubt attained the Lord, but the most perfect of the perfect has become intimately acquainted with Him.

“You have to establish a specific kind of relationship with the Lord to attain Him: of *shanta*¹, *dasya*², *sakhya*³, *vatsalya*⁴ or *madhura*⁵.

“*Shanta* – the rishis had this calm attitude. They didn’t desire worldly enjoyment. It is also the single-minded devotion⁶ of a wife toward her husband. She feels that her husband is the embodiment of beauty and love.

“*Dasya* – this was Hanuman’s attitude. He served Rama with the strength of a lion. A wife also has this attitude: she serves her husband from the bottom of her heart. A mother has this attitude to some extent. Yashoda had it.

“*Sakhya* – the attitude of a friend. ‘Come, sit beside me.’ Sridama and others sometimes gave Sri Krishna a bite from the fruit they were eating and at other times they rode on his shoulders.

“*Vatsalya* – this was Yashoda’s attitude. To some extent a wife also has it toward her husband.

¹ Serene attitude

² A servant toward his master

³ Attitude of a friend

⁴ Attitude of a mother toward her child

⁵ Attitude of a sweetheart

⁶ Nishtha

She feeds him from the bottom of her heart. And she is only satisfied when her son has eaten his fill. Yashoda would wander around with butter in her hand to feed Krishna.

“*Madhura* – as that of Radha. The wife also has this attitude. It includes all other attitudes – *shanta, dasya, sakhya* and *vatsalya*.”

Mani — Does one have the vision of the Lord with these very eyes?

Sri Ramakrishna — He can't be seen by these physical eyes. By practicing spiritual disciplines, one develops a special body of love¹ which has eyes and ears of ecstatic love. One sees Him with these eyes and listens to Him with these ears. Then one even develops a sexual organ of ecstatic love.

Hearing this, Mani laughs boisterously. Thakur is not irritated and continues –

Sri Ramakrishna — One enjoys communion² with the Atman by this body of ecstatic love.

Mani again becomes grave.

Sri Ramakrishna — This does not happen without having intense love for God. When one develops intense love, one sees everything filled with God. Just like in severe jaundice everything appears yellow.

¹ *Prema*: ecstatic love

² *Ramana*: romance, lit. intercourse

“It is then that one has the special feeling, ‘I am indeed He.’ A fellow who is drunk says, ‘I am indeed Kali.’

“Intoxicated with ecstatic love, the gopis said, ‘I am Krishna.’

“By meditating on God night and day, one sees Him everywhere. Just as after you concentrate on the flame of a lamp, you begin to see flames everywhere.”

Is God-realization some mistake of the mind? A doubtful person is ruined¹

Mani thinks to himself that this flame is not the real flame.

Thakur, who could read a man’s mind², says, “Nobody can become unconscious by meditating on Consciousness.” Shivanath said that the head begins to reel if one meditates on the Lord too much. I said to him, “Can one become unconscious by meditating on Consciousness?”

Mani — Sir, I now understand that. It’s not meditation on a transitory object. How can a man become unconscious by meditating on the real Self of eternal Consciousness?

Sri Ramakrishna (happily) — That’s His grace. Without His grace, one’s doubts do not vanish.

“Without the vision of the Atman, doubts are not dispelled.

¹ Samśayātmā vinaśyati (Gita 4:40)

² Antaryami

“There is no fear when His grace dawns. A son holding his father’s hand can fall down. But if the father holds the son’s hand, there is no fear. All difficulties are resolved if, out of His grace, He dispels one’s doubts and grants His vision. And if one continues to call upon Him with a heart full of yearning, and continues to practice spiritual disciplines to attain Him, His grace dawns. When a mother sees her child running around restlessly [seeking her], she feels compassion for it. She who was hiding herself, now comes and reveals herself.”

Mani is wondering why God makes one run around restlessly. Thakur immediately says, “It is Her will that there should be some running around. Only then is there fun. He has created this universe in sport. That is what Mahamaya is. One must, therefore, take refuge in that Mother, the embodiment of Shakti (Power). One has been bound in the meshes of maya. By tearing its net, one can have the vision of the Lord.”

Primal Energy¹, Mahamaya and worship of Shakti

Sri Ramakrishna — To obtain His grace, one must keep the Primal Energy, Shakti, pleased. She Herself is indeed Mahamaya. By enchanting the world, She creates, preserves and dissolves. It is She who has deluded our spiritual awareness. One can enter the door only when She allows us through. When one is outside, one can see only outer objects – one cannot know the Supreme Eternal Person, Sat-chit-ananda². Therefore the *Puranas* state: Brahma and other gods sang hymns

¹ Adyashakti

² Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute

of praise to Mahamaya at the time of the assassination of demons Madhu and Kaitabha¹.

“Shakti is at the root of the universe. She includes both knowledge² and ignorance³. Ignorance deludes and enchants – it leads to ‘lust and greed’. On the other hand, love and devotion, compassion, jnana and prema⁴, which take one to the Lord, come from knowledge (vidya).

“You have to placate avidya. That is the purpose of the worship of Shakti.

“In order to please Her, there are different attitudes with which to worship Her – the attitude of a handmaid, the heroic attitude, and the attitude of a child.

“The heroic attitude is romantic, having intercourse⁵ with Her to please Her.

“The discipline of the worship of Shakti is very difficult to practice. One cannot deceive or cheat Her.

“I lived for two years in the attitude of a handmaid and companion of the Divine Mother. But my attitude is that of a child to its mother. I look at women’s breasts as though they were my mother’s.

¹ Mother, You are the mystic words ‘Svaha’ and ‘Vashat’ uttered while performing *homa* and *yajna*. You are Svadha, the mystic word, uttered during observance of *shraddha*.

You are the inmost Self of the mantra. You are the nectar of immortality. O Everlasting One, You are the three lengths of time for pronouncing a vowel sound. (For complete song, see Volume II, Section XIX, Chapter VI)

² Vidya

³ Avidya

⁴ Ecstatic love

⁵ Ramana

“Every woman is a form of Shakti. In the west [northwest India], a bridegroom holds a knife in his hand at the time of marriage; in Bengal he holds a nutcracker. It means that, with the help of his bride, the embodiment of Shakti, the bridegroom is going to cut the bonds of illusion¹. This is the heroic attitude. I have never worshipped in this attitude. I have the attitude of a child.

“A bride is the embodiment of Shakti. Haven’t you noticed, at a marriage ritual that the bridegroom sits behind like a fool? While the bride sits undaunted!”

One forgets worldly wealth on having God’s vision – several branches of knowledge and worldly education – religion and science – sattvic jnana and rajasic jnana

Sri Ramakrishna — After God-realization one forgets His external riches, the glories of His world. On seeing Him, one no longer remembers His riches. When a devotee has lost himself in the Bliss of the Lord, he is rid of all calculation. When one sees Narendra, one doesn’t bother to ask, ‘What is your name? Where do you live?’ Where is the time to ask him such questions? Someone asked Hanuman the date of a particular day. Hanuman replied, ‘Brother, I neither know the day of the week, nor the date, nor the constellation of stars. I only meditate on Rama.’”

¹ Maya

Section III

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar Temple on the Vijaya Festival Day

Chapter I

Meditation on the image made of Spirit, and on one's mother

Sri Ramakrishna is staying at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is about 9:00 o'clock. He is resting on the smaller cot and Mani is sitting on the floor talking to him.

It is Sunday, 22 October 1882, the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Aswin – Vijaya day. Rakhal is staying with Thakur these days; Narendra and Bhavanath visit him from time to time. Ramlal, Thakur's nephew, and Hazra are also staying with him. Ram, Manomohan, Suresh, M. and Balaram visit him almost every week. Baburam has visited him only once or twice.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you have [Durga] puja holidays?

Mani — Yes sir. I went to Keshab Sen's house all three days – the seventh, the eighth and the puja day of the ninth.

Sri Ramakrishna — You did indeed!

Mani — I heard a beautiful explanation of Durga Puja from him.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did you hear? Tell me.

Mani — Service was being performed daily at Keshab's house – till ten or eleven. During a service, he gave this explanation of Durga Puja. He said, 'If you attain the Mother, if you can install Mother Durga in the temple of your heart, Goddess Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartika and Ganesha follow. Lakshmi is wealth; Saraswati is knowledge; Kartika is courage; and Ganesha represents success. All these gods and goddesses arrive of their own accord if the Mother comes.'

**Narendra and other intimate disciples of Sri
Ramakrishna**

Sri Ramakrishna heard a description of Keshab Sen's entire service from Mani; intermittently he asked a few questions. Then he said, "Don't go here and there. Come only here."

"They who are intimately connected with me must only come here. Narendra, Bhavanath and Rakhal are my intimate disciples. They are not ordinary people. Serve them a meal one day. What do you think of Narendra?"

Mani — Very highly, Sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Just see what qualities Narendra has! He sings well, he can play musical instruments, and he is well-educated. He has also conquered his senses. He says he won't marry. His mind has been turned towards God since childhood.

Sri Ramakrishna talks with Mani about other things.

**God with form or without form – meditation on image
made of spirit, and on one's mother**

Sri Ramakrishna — How are you faring in your meditation these days? Do you like God with form or God without form?

Mani — Sir, at present my mind is not drawn to God with form. But, then, I can't concentrate on the formless God either!

Sri Ramakrishna — So, you see? The mind doesn't become concentrated on the formless God in the beginning. At this stage, meditation on God with form is good.

Mani — Is it right to meditate on clay images?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why clay? They are images made of spirit.

Mani — But sir, one still has to think of the hands and feet and so on. On the other hand I say to myself that in the beginning, the mind won't concentrate except on a form – you said so – but He can assume various forms. May one meditate on the form of one's own mother?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, she is the guru¹. She is the embodiment of the All-Blissful Mother.

Mani is silent, but after awhile he asks Thakur –

¹ Sri Ramakrishna means that the mother should be adored and highly respected

Mani — What do you see when you meditate on the formless God? Can it be described?

Sri Ramakrishna (after a short reflection) — You know what it's like?

Saying this, Thakur is silent. Then he gives a special description of what one experiences when having a vision of God with form as well as the formless God. He pauses again.

Sri Ramakrishna — The fact is that you need to practice spiritual disciplines to understand. If you want to take jewels from a locked room, you have to make some effort to find the key to open the lock. Then you can remove the jewels from it. If you just stand before a locked room thinking, 'I have now opened the door, now broken the strong-box and now taken the jewels out' – such reflection is of no avail. One must practice spiritual disciplines.

Chapter II

God is infinite and so is Thakur – all are paths – visit to Vrindavan

The jnani believes in infinite incarnations of God – aspirant who doesn't desire to move around¹ – why pilgrimages?

Sri Ramakrishna — Jnanis meditate on the formless God. They don't believe in the incarnation of God. Arjuna sang a hymn of praise to Sri Krishna, 'You are Brahman Absolute.' Krishna said

¹ Kutichaka: an aspirant who settles down peacefully at one place on an *asana*

to him, 'Would you like to see whether or not I am the Absolute Brahman? Come with me.' Saying this, he took Arjuna to a particular place and said, 'What do you see?' Arjuna said, 'I see a big tree with clusters of fruit similar to black berries.' Krishna said, 'Come closer and you will see that these are not clusters of black fruit. Innumerable clusters of Krishnas, like me, are hanging there. That is to say, the same tree of the Absolute Brahman yields numberless incarnations of God.'

"Kavirdas was inclined to believe in the formless God. Referring to Krishna, he would remark, 'How can I meditate on him? The milkmaids used to clap while he danced like a monkey.' (Smiling) I am a believer in God with form when I am with those who believe in God with form. And I am a believer in the formless God when I am with those who hold this belief."

Mani (smiling) — You, too, are infinite, like Him of whom we are talking. It is impossible to limit you.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — You have understood! Do you know what one should do? One should practice the disciplines of all religions. One should tread each of their paths. Does a piece in Indian chess reach home unless it moves to all the squares? When it reaches home, no other piece can overtake it.

Mani — That is true.

Sri Ramakrishna — There are two classes of yogis: the *vahudakas* and the *kutichakas*. The sadhu who

visits many places of pilgrimage and hasn't yet attained peace of mind is a *vahudaka*. But the yogi who has stilled his mind after visiting several places, who has found peace of mind, fixes an asana¹ for himself and doesn't move from it. He feels joy only when he sits at that same place. He doesn't feel the need to go on pilgrimage. If he goes to holy places at all, it is to get inspiration.

“I had to practice disciplines of all the religions: Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. I also followed the paths of the Shaktas, Vaishnavas, Vedantists and other sects. I saw that it was the same Lord toward whom everybody was moving. Only their paths were different.

“I have gone on pilgrimages, but one time I suffered a great deal. I went with Mathur's family to Kashi and was sitting in Raja Babu's drawing room. They were all talking about worldly affairs – about money, land, and what not. Hearing them, I began to weep. I said, ‘Divine Mother, where have you brought me? I was much better off at Dakshineswar.’ In Prayag I saw that the pond, the durva grass, plants, and the tamarind leaves were all the same as here! The only difference was that the excreta of the people of the west [Uttar Pradesh, west of Bengal] appeared like husk². (Thakur and Mani laugh.)

¹ Meditation seat

² Kashi and Allahabad are both in Uttar Pradesh, which is west of Bengal (Dakshineswar). Thakur is saying that there is no difference in locality, there is only difference in regard to worldly people (such as he saw in Raja Babu's drawing room) and those interested in God; i.e. what one takes in, one gives out: if one is only concerned with coarse, worldly things, one expresses what is coarse.

“Undoubtedly one gets inspiration in a place of pilgrimage. I went to Vrindavan with Mathur Babu. In the party were ladies of Mathur Babu’s family and also Hriday. Just seeing the Kaliyadaman ghat, I felt inspired and was overwhelmed with divine emotion. Hriday used to bathe me at this ghat of the Jamuna as one bathes a child.

“In the evening I would go for a stroll on the bank of the Jamuna. Cows would be returning from pasture, coming across the sandbank of the Jamuna. Just seeing them, I was inspired with Krishna. I began to run around like an intoxicated person, crying, ‘Where are you Krishna, where ...’

“I went to Shyamkunda and Radhakunda in a palanquin. I got down from it to see Mount Govardhan. No sooner did I see it than I was overwhelmed with divine emotion. I ran to the top of it and lost external consciousness. Then the residents of Vraja carried me down. I was overwhelmed with divine emotion to see the plains, the plants, trees and deer on the way to Shyamkunda and Radhakunda. My clothes became wet with tears. I said to myself, ‘Oh Krishna! Everything is here – but I am not able to find you!’ I sat in the palanquin without the strength to utter a word. I sat quietly. Hriday, following the palanquin, told the palanquin bearers to be very careful.

“Gangama was leading a highly spiritual life. She was very old and lived alone in a hut near Nidhuvan. Seeing my spiritual state and ecstasy, she said, ‘He is the very embodiment of Radha.’ She

called me ‘dulali’¹. Being with her, I forgot everything – to eat, or to return home. Hriday sometimes brought food from home to feed me. Gangama also prepared some food for me.

“Gangama used to go into ecstasy. People would gather to watch her in her ecstatic state. Once she climbed up on Hriday’s shoulders in a state of ecstasy.

“I didn’t feel like leaving Gangama and returning to Calcutta. Arrangements were made for me to stay with her. I was to eat double-boiled rice. Gangama would have her bedding on one side of the room and I on the other. All this was arranged. Hriday then said, ‘You are suffering badly from indigestion. Who will look after you?’ Gangama said, ‘Why, I will look after him! I will nurse him.’ Hriday pulled me toward him by one hand and Gangama dragged me toward her by the other. Just then I was reminded of my mother. She was staying all alone in the Nahabat at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. Thus I could not stay. I said, ‘No, I shall have to return.’

“There is such a nice spiritual atmosphere in Vrindavan. When new pilgrims arrive, the boys of Vraja say, ‘Repeat the name of the Lord and open your purse!’ ”

About eleven o’clock Sri Ramakrishna takes the prasada² of Mother Kali. After relaxing for awhile at midday, he spends the afternoon in conversation with the devotees. Now and then he utters, “Om,” or “Ha, Chaitanya!”

¹ A dear little girl

² Sacramental food

Evening arati¹ has been performed in the shrine. It is Vijaya Day – Sri Ramakrishna comes to the Kali Temple. After he has paid his obeisance to the Mother, the devotees take the dust of his feet. Ramlal has performed the arati of Mother Kali. Sri Ramakrishna calls out to him, “Hey, Ramlal. Where is it?”

An offering of Indian hemp² has been made to Mother Kali. Sri Ramakrishna calls Ramlal because he wishes to touch the consecrated hemp with his hand. He asks him to distribute a little to every devotee.

Chapter III

At the Dakshineswar Kali Temple with Balaram and other devotees – instructions to Balaram

Physical signs – speaking the truth – harmony of religions – ‘lust and greed’ constitute maya³

It is Tuesday afternoon, 24 October, the time about 3:00 or 4:00 o’clock. Thakur is standing close to the food-shelf. Balaram and M. have arrived from Calcutta in a carriage and have made obeisance to him. When they sit down after saluting him, Thakur says with a smile, “I came to take some food from the shelf. No sooner did I touch the food with my hand than a lizard fell on my body⁴! I immediately pulled my hand back.” (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, yes! You must believe in all these things. Just see, Rakhal is suffering, and

¹ Singing devotional songs together with the waving of lights before the sacred images

² Siddhi

³ Nescience

⁴ The dropping of a lizard is believed to be a bad omen

I, too, feel pain in my limbs. Do you know what's the matter? When I was leaving my bed, I saw¹ a certain person's face and thought that Rakhal was coming! (All laugh.) Oh, yes! You must notice all these physical signs. Narendra brought a friend who was blind in one eye – not totally blind. However, I said to myself, 'Just by chance Narendra has brought such trouble with him!'

“There is a certain person who visits here, but I can't eat any of the food he brings. He works in an office on a salary of twenty rupees a month – and earns an extra twenty rupees by submitting fraudulent bills. He tells lies. I don't talk to him very long. Sometimes he doesn't go to his office for three or four days and stays here. Do you know why? He wants to get another job through my recommendation.”

Balaram belongs to a family of devout Vaishnavas. His father, an old man, is a pious devotee. He has a tuft of hair on his head and wears a string of tulsi beads around his neck; he constantly repeats the name of the Lord on his rosary. The family has a big estate in Orissa. Besides, they have built shrines to Radha-Krishna in Kothar, Vrindavan and many other places, where worship and service of the deities is performed. They have built [free] guesthouses there as well. Balaram is a recent visitor to Sri Ramakrishna, who imparts instructions to him during the course of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — A certain person visited me the other day. I hear that he may be a slave to his hag of a wife. Why doesn't one see God? The reason is

¹ Orthodox Hindus believe that the first face in the morning indicates whether the day will be good or bad

that 'lust and greed' form a veil. How could he say in your presence, 'A paramahansa¹ visited my father and my father cooked a chicken for him!' (Balaram laughs.) I am in such a spiritual state that I can only eat a little fish gravy if it is first offered to the Divine Mother. But I can't eat meat offered to the Mother. I only taste it with the tip of my finger, lest the Mother should be cross with me. (All laugh.)

**His earlier story – on the way to Burdwan – journeys
through his native countryside – he hears Nakur
Acharya's songs**

"Well, can you explain the state of my mind? I was going to my village [Kamarpukur] by bullock cart from Burdwan. Suddenly a storm arose and it began to rain heavily. A group of people came and gathered around the cart. My companions told me they were dacoits. So I began to repeat the Lord's name. Sometimes I repeated Rama's name, sometimes Kali's, and then Hanuman's. I repeated all these names. What do you think of this?"

Is Sri Ramakrishna hinting that there is but one God with numberless names; that followers of different religions and sects quarrel with each other in vain?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Balaram) — Maya is only 'lust and greed'. By living in the midst of them for a few days, one loses spiritual awareness but feels that all is well. A scavenger carries a pot of excreta and in course of time, doesn't feel any repulsion for it. One gradually acquires love and devotion for God

¹ Orthodox Hindus are forbidden to eat chicken, or meat

by practicing the chanting of the Lord's name and glories.

(To M.) — One should not be ashamed of repeating the Lord's name. One does not succeed as long as one has these three: shame, hatred and fear.

“They sing very nice kirtans in that part of the country. They sing them to the accompaniment of a drum. The song of Nakur Acharya is wonderful indeed. (To Balaram) Don't you have a temple in Vrindavan where worship and service to the deity is performed?”

Balaram — Yes, sir. We have a grove where Krishna¹ is worshipped.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have been to Vrindavan. Nidhu grove is a very nice place.

¹ Shyam Sunder

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna on the Main Road to Calcutta with his Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna leaves the Dakshineswar Kali Temple by carriage. He is on his way to Calcutta, accompanied by Ramlal and a couple of devotees. As soon as he is out of the gate, he sees M. approaching on foot with four *fazli*¹ mangoes in his hand. He asks for the carriage to stop. Mani salutes him, placing his head on the carriage.

Saturday, 21 July 1883, the first day of the dark fortnight of Ashada. It is about four o'clock. Thakur is going to Adhar's home, then to Jadu Mallick's and, last of all, to Khelat Ghosh's.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to Mani) — Why don't you come with us? We're going to Adhar Sen's home.

Saying, "As you wish," M. gets into the carriage.

Mani is English-educated and did not formerly believe in *samskaras*, but a few days ago he admitted to Thakur that the reason Adhar had so much love and devotion² for him was because of his *samskaras*³. However, when he returned home and thought about it, he decided that he still did not have full faith in the idea of inherited tendencies of past lives. It is to

¹ A species of mango grown in Malda

² Bhakti

³ Tendencies inherited from one's past births

tell Thakur this that he has come to see him today.
Thakur speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what do you think of Adhar?

Mani — Sir, he has great love for you.

Sri Ramakrishna — Adhar thinks very highly of you.

Mani is silent for awhile. Then he raises the subject of past life samskaras.

One understands nothing of God – very secret talk

Mani — I don't have much faith in the idea of previous life samskaras. Will it retard my love and devotion to God in any way?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is enough to have the faith that everything is possible in His creation. Don't allow the idea to come to your mind that what you think is the only truth and that what everyone else thinks is false. Then God Himself will make you understand.

“How can a man understand His activities? They are limitless. Don't even try to understand them. I have heard that anything is possible in His creation. So instead of worrying about these things, I only meditate on God. One day Hanuman was asked the date. He said, ‘I don't know either the day or the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.’

“Can one ever understand His works? God is so near to us – yet we don’t know Him. Balaram did not recognize Krishna as the Lord.”

Mani — Yes, sir. You said the same thing about Bhishma Deva.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, yes. Please tell me what I said about him.

Mani — Bhishma Deva wept as he lay on a bed of arrows. The Pandavas said to Sri Krishna, ‘Brother, how strange this is! So spiritually wise is our grandfather¹ and yet he weeps at the thought of death.’ Sri Krishna replied, ‘Please ask him why he is crying.’ Bhishma said, ‘I am crying because I fail to understand anything of God doings. Krishna, you accompany the Pandavas wherever they go, protecting them at every step. Even then, there is no end to their troubles.’

Sri Ramakrishna — God has hidden everything with His maya. He doesn’t let you understand anything. ‘Lust and greed’ constitute maya. Only he who removes the veil of maya can behold His vision. I was explaining to somebody that God is truly amazing, when He suddenly showed me a pond in the countryside (Kamarpukur). A person pushed aside the green scum covering the surface and drank the water below. The water was as clear as crystal. This showed that Sat-chit-ananda is covered by the maya of ‘green scum’. Only he who can remove the scum can have His vision.

¹ *Pitamah*

“Listen – I’ll tell you a great secret. While I was answering the call of nature in the Jhautala (willow grove), I saw in front of me something that looked like the door of a secret chamber. I couldn’t see what was inside it. I tried to make a hole with a nail knife, but I couldn’t. The moment I would make a hole, the earth would fall back and fill it up. At long last I was able to make a big opening.”

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna paused. After awhile, he says, “These are lofty spiritual matters. Look, somebody is pressing my mouth to stop me from divulging them.”

“I saw with my own eyes God’s presence in the female genital organ. I saw Him once in the mating of a dog and a bitch.”

“The universe is conscious on account of God’s Consciousness. At times I see His Consciousness flashing in small fish.”

The carriage reaches the Darmahata crossing at Shovabazar. Thakur adds –

“Sometimes I see the universe permeated with Consciousness just as the earth is soaked with rain water.

“Though I have seen so much, I am not puffed up with pride.”

Mani (with a smile) — For you to speak of pride!

Sri Ramakrishna — Truly, I swear to you that I never feel the least pride.

Mani — There was a man in Greece by the name of Socrates. A voice from heaven announced that he was the wisest of all men. Socrates was amazed. He reflected on it a long time in solitude before he understood. Then he told his friends, ‘Now I have understood that I know nothing.’ People think they have gained so much knowledge. The fact is that all men are ignorant.

Sri Ramakrishna — Now and then I say to myself, ‘What do I know that so many people visit me?’ Vaishnavcharan was a great pundit. He used to say, ‘Whatever you say tallies with the scriptures. Then why do I visit you? I want to hear it from your lips.’

Mani — All your words tally with the scriptures. Navadvip Goswami in Panihati also said that the other day. You said, ‘By repeating the words ‘Gita’ a number of times, it becomes ‘*tyagi*’¹. Actually it gets reversed to ‘*tagi*’, but Navadvip Goswami said that ‘*tagi*’ and ‘*tyagi*’ convey the same meaning. They are both derived from the root ‘tag’.

Sri Ramakrishna — Does anyone resemble me – any pundit or sadhu?

Mani — God has made you with His own hands, but He has made others by machine – according to the law of creation.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing, to Ramlal and others)
— Hello! See what he says!

¹ Man of renunciation

Thakur's laughter continues. At last he says, "Truly, I swear, I don't feel the least pride."

Mani — Education does one good thing in that one realizes: I know nothing and I am nothing.

Sri Ramakrishna — True, very true. I am nothing, I am nothing indeed. Well, do you believe in Western astronomy?

Mani — According to it, new discoveries can be made. Noting the irregular movement of Uranus, with the help of a telescope, the brightly shining new planet Neptune has been discovered. And a new calculation can be made about the eclipse.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it is possible.

The carriage is rolling on and has almost reached Adhar's house. Thakur says to Mani –

"Stick to truth. It will lead to God-realization."

Mani — And you said yet another thing to Navadvip Goswami, 'O Lord, I want You! See that You do not enchant me by the splendour of Your world-bewitching maya. I want You!'

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes. This is what one must say sincerely.

Chapter II

In the joy of devotional songs¹ at Adhar Sen's house

Sri Ramakrishna has come to Adhar Sen's house. Ramlal, M., Adhar and many other devotees are seated near him in the parlour. Three or four people of the neighbourhood have come to see Thakur. Rakhhal lives with his father in Calcutta.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Adhar) — Have you not informed Rakhhal that I was coming?

Adhar — Yes sir, I told him.

Noticing Thakur's eagerness to see Rakhhal, Adhar sends a man in his carriage to fetch him, though he does not mention it.

Adhar sits close to Thakur. He was very eager to see Thakur today, but such a visit was not planned. He has arrived by the Lord's will.

Adhar — You haven't been here for such a long time! I cried for you today, shedding tears.

Sri Ramakrishna (happily, smiling) — Did you really?

It is already dusk. The parlour has been lit. Thakur folds his hands and pays his obeisance to the Mother of the Universe; perhaps he mentally repeats the *mulamantra*². Now he chants the Name in a sweet voice: Govinda, Govinda, Sat-chit-ananda, Haribol! Haribol! Repeating the holy Name, he showers nectar

¹ Kirtan

² An esoteric word or words of great power repeated during prayer and meditation

all around. The devotees drink the nectar of the Name, speechless with wonder. Ramlal now sings –

You have enchanted the whole world, O Mother. You, the enchantress of Shiva Himself.

O Mother, sitting on the great lotus in the Muladhara, You enjoy Yourself, playing the vina¹.

In the machine of the human body, You manifest Yourself. With Your great mantra, You pierce the three gunas which reside in the three nadis, or nerves, of the Sushumna, Ida and Pingala.

You provide energy to the three musical scales.

You abide in the six-petalled lotus of Svadhisthana as Bhairava musical mode².

You illuminate as Mallhar³ raga in the Manipura and as the Vasanta⁴ raga in the lotus of the heart.

You reside as Hindola musical mode in the Vishuddha chakra, and in the Ajna lotus as eardrum. You pierce the seventy-three melodies with the three octaves: keynote, metre and tempo.

O Mahamaya, you easily bind all creatures with the net of infatuation.

You become absorbed in the Supreme Consciousness and establish there as lightning.

Nanda Kumar says: who knows for certain what Your quintessence is? But you sing like the cuckoo and Your essence is the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas.

Ramlal sings another song –

¹ A stringed musical instrument

² Raga

³ Indian musical mode of rainy season

⁴ An Indian musical mode

O Bhavani, I have heard Your fear-dispelling Name, so I have placed my burden on You this time. Redeem me or not, as You wish.

You, O Mother, hold the entire universe, and You are immanent in it. Who knows whether you are Kali or Radha?

O Mother, You dwell in all beings. As Kundalini, You abide in the Muladhara lotus of four petals.

You rise through the Sushumna and reach the Vajrasana¹ of the six-petalled lotus of Svadhithana.

Then O Divine Mother, You go upward to the ten-petalled blue lotus of the Manipura centre at the navel.

O Mother, the begetter, You live among the lotuses on the path of the Sushumna. O Lady of lotuses!

Above it, there is the charming red lotus with twelve petals in the reservoir of nectar. If you open it with Your lotus feet, all darkness of the heart is dispelled.

Above that, in the region of the throat is the smoke-hued sixteen-petalled lotus of the void, the source of water.

When this void is experienced, the universe is dissolved in the Void.

Above it, at the forehead, is the two-petalled lotus. When the mind remains ever lodged there, staying on the two petals, it wants to witness the sport of existence.

Above this centre, at the top of the head at a most charming spot, is the thousand-petalled lotus. There the Supreme Shiva Himself dwells.

O Mother, You abide there near Shiva as Primeval Energy, a woman who has conquered the senses. The great yogis and munis meditate on You as the daughter of the Lord of the mountains.

¹ A centre in the Sushumna

You are the Shakti of Shiva. Pray destroy my cravings so that I am not born again in this world.

O Mother, You are Primordial Power. You are the five elements¹, and You are also beyond the five elements.

You take a form for the sake of the devotees in the creation, and You are indeed formless even when the five elements are dissolved.

Vision of Formless Sat-chit-ananda² – piercing the six spiritual centres and attainment of samadhi

Ramlal sings –

Above it in the region of the throat is the smoke-hued sixteen-petalled lotus of a void, the source of water.

When this void is experienced, the universe is dissolved in the Void.

Sri Ramakrishna then says to M., “Listen, this is known as the vision of the formless Sat-chit-ananda. When the Vishuddha centre is pierced, one sees all as *akasa*³.”

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — After crossing over the maya of the universe and created beings, one reaches the Nitya⁴. Passing beyond the sound *nada*⁵, one attains samadhi. While practicing the spiritual discipline of repeating ‘Om,’ one goes beyond the *nada* sound and attains samadhi.

¹ Earth, water, fire, air and ether

² Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute

³ Ether, the subtlest of the five elements, the vehicle of life and sound

⁴ The Absolute

⁵ This sound rises from the navel and originates in the Supreme Brahman

Chapter III

Jadu Mallick's house – before Goddess Simhavahini – in samadhi

Adhar treats Thakur to fruits and sweets in his house. Thakur says, "I have to go to Jadu Mallick's house today."

Thakur arrives at Jadu Mallick's house. It is the first lunar day of the dark fortnight in the month of Ashada. The night is bathed in moonlight. Thakur comes with the devotees to the room in which Goddess Simhavahini is daily worshipped. Having been adorned with sandal paste, garlands and flowers, the Mother looks supremely graceful. A priest is sitting in front of Her. A lamp is lighted in front of the image. Thakur asks one of his intimate companions to offer a rupee to the Goddess and salute Her; it is a Hindu custom to make an offering when one visits a deity.

Thakur stands before the Goddess Simhavahini with folded hands. Behind him the devotees also stand with folded hands.

Thakur looks a long time at the Goddess.

How wonderful! While looking at Her, he suddenly passes into samadhi. He stands there motionless, like an image of stone, without blinking.

After a long time he exhales a long breath. His samadhi breaks. He says, as if drunk, "Mother, I am bidding good-bye." But he cannot move. He stands there in the same mood.

Next he says to Ramlal, "Sing that song. Then I will be restored to normal." Ramlal sings, "You have enchanted the whole world, O Mother. You, the enchantress of Shiva Himself."

The song comes to an end.

Now, accompanied by the devotees, Thakur walks toward the parlour. On his way, he says, “Mother, please dwell in my heart!”

Jadu Mallick is seated with his friends in the parlour. Thakur is still in a divine mood. As he enters, he sings –

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive me of bliss¹.

As the song ends, he says to Jadu, still intoxicated in the same spiritual mood, “Tell me, sir, what shall I sing?” Shall I sing this song, “Am I a weakling, delivered in the eighth month of conception?” Saying this, Thakur sings –

Song –

Mother, am I your eight-month² old son?

I am not afraid of Your eyes shot red with anger.

Your red feet are my wealth – the same feet Shiva keeps on His breast.

Whenever I ask for Your wealth, I am put off by deceit.

I have put away in my heart Shiva’s hand-written deed.

This time I am going to take my case to the Lord’s court and win it by just one submission.

I’ll make You see how a son can fight a case.

Says Ramprasad, ‘When a son goes to court against his mother, it is so exciting!’

I will be pacified only when You take me in Your arms to quiet me.

¹ For complete song, refer Volume I, Section XIV, Chapter Three

² A premature child delivered in eighth month of conception who is generally weak

The lawsuit between the Mother and son shall gain great momentum, says Ramprasad.

I shall only rest when the Mother, having pardoned me, raises me in Her arms.

When his mood comes down a little, he says, "I will eat the Divine Mother's prasad."

Mother Simhavahini's prasad is given to Thakur.

Jadu Mallick is sitting with a number of his friends and relatives on chairs close to Thakur. Some of them are flatterers.

Thakur sits on a chair facing Jadu Mallick and talks with him in a happy mood. Some of Thakur's devotees are in an adjacent room. M. and a couple of devotees sit near him.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Well, why do you keep court jesters with you?

Jadu (smiling) — Won't you redeem them even if they are?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — The Ganges doesn't purify wine casks that float in it!

Sticking to truth and Sri Ramakrishna – a man must keep his word

Jadu had promised Thakur that he would arrange for a recital of the Chandi in his house. Many days have elapsed, but the recital has not taken place.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what about the recital of the Chandi?

Jadu — I was busy with so many engagements, I couldn't arrange for it.

Sri Ramakrishna — What! A man has to keep his word!

“The words of a man and an elephant's tusks do not go back.

“A man must keep his word. What do you say?”

Jadu (smiling) — That is so.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are a calculating man. You calculate profit and loss before you start a work. A brahmin's cow must eat little, produce a lot of cow dung, and yield pails of milk. (All laugh.)

Thakur says to Jadu after awhile, “I now understand your nature. You are like the stone of Ramjiwanpur, half of which is hot and the other half cold. You have your mind on the Lord and also in the world.”

Thakur eats the prasad of the Divine Mother – fruits and sweets – along with the devotees. Now he leaves to go to Khelat Ghosh's house.

Chapter IV

Auspicious visit at Khelat Ghosh's house – instruction to a Vaishnava

Sri Ramakrishna enters Khelat Ghosh's house about ten at night. The house and its big courtyard are bathed in moonlight. As he enters the house, Thakur passes into a spiritual mood. Ramlal, M. and a couple of devotees are with him. There are rooms on all four sides of the big courtyard. The inner apartments are

reached by climbing two flights of stairs and walking some distance through a verandah to the south, then turning east, and again some distance to the west.

It looked like there was nobody in the house, in the big rooms, or the long verandah in front.

Thakur is taken to the northeastern room and given a seat. He is still in ecstasy. The devotee who lives in the house and who had invited Thakur comes in to greet him. He is a Vaishnava; his body is marked with sandal paste, and he carries a small rosary bag. He is old. He is a relative of Khelat Ghosh. He sometimes visits Dakshineswar to see Thakur, though some Vaishnavas are very narrow-minded and disparage Shaktas and jnanis. Thakur now talks.

Sri Ramakrishna's harmony of religions – the Religion of Love

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Vaishnava devotee and others) — It's not right to think that only my religion is right and all others are wrong. There is but one God, one without a second. Different people call Him by various names. Some call Him God, others Allah, some call Him Krishna, some Shiva, and some Brahman. Say there is a reservoir containing water. At one of its bathing ghats people call it *jal*, at another water, and at yet another *pani*. Hindus call it *jal*, Christians call it water, and Muslims call it *pani*. Yet there is only one substance. As many religions, so many paths — every religion is a path which leads to the Lord. It is like rivers coming from different directions but uniting in the same ocean.

“Sat-chit-ananda is the only truth established in the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras*. In the

Vedas, He is Sat-chit-ananda Brahman; in the *Puranas* Sat-chit-ananda Krishna, Ram and so on; and in the Tantra, He is Sat-chit-ananda Shiva. Sat-chit-ananda Brahman, Sat-chit-ananda Krishna and Sat-chit-ananda Shiva are one and the same.”

They all sit silent.

The Vaishnava Devotee — Sir, why should I meditate on God?

**Instructions to the Vaishnava – who is a *jivanmukta*¹?
Who is a superior devotee? Signs of one who has had
His vision**

Sri Ramakrishna — If one truly has this understanding, one is already liberated in his lifetime. But not everybody has such faith. They only talk. Worldly people have heard that God exists and everything happens by His will. But they don't have faith in it.

“Do you know what the God of worldly people is like? Like children who swear by God while quarrelling. They have heard the word from their elderly aunts who are quarrelling.

“Can everybody understand Him? He has created good people as well as bad, devotees as well as non-devotees. He has created believers in God and non-believers. There is such variety in His sport! There is a greater manifestation of His Power at one place than another. There is a greater reflection of the light of the sun on water than on

¹ One liberated in this very life

the earth, and again there is more of its reflection in a mirror than on water.

“Besides, there are classes of devotees: superior devotees, mediocre devotees and inferior devotees. The *Gita* speaks of all this.”

The Vaishnava — True, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — The inferior devotee says, ‘God exists up there in the sky very far away.’ The mediocre devotee says, ‘God is present in all beings as Consciousness, as life.’ The superior devotee says, ‘God Himself has become everything. All that I see are the different forms of God. He Himself has become maya¹, the universe and living beings — nothing exists apart from Him.’

Sri Ramakrishna — One does not attain this state unless one has seen God. But there are signs of whether a man has attained His vision. Sometimes he laughs, weeps, dances, or sings like a mad man. Sometimes he behaves like a child — like a five-year old child: guileless, generous, without vanity, not attached to anything, not subject to any of the gunas and always blissful. At other times he behaves like a ghoul: he does not discriminate between purity and impurity; he sees no difference between right conduct and wrong. Or at times he becomes inert, as if he had the glimpse of something unique. So he cannot do any work; he is not able to strive for anything.

¹ Nescience

Is Sri Ramakrishna referring to all the states he has gone through?

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Vaishnava devotee) — ‘You and Yours’ comes from spiritual knowledge¹; the feeling of ‘I and mine’ is ignorance.

“Oh Lord, You are the doer, I am a non-doer – this is Knowledge. Oh Lord, all belongs to You – body, mind, home, family, the universe and its living beings – they are all Yours, nothing belongs to me. This feeling is Knowledge.

“An ignorant man says, ‘The Lord exists there, very far away.’ The man of Knowledge², on the other hand, knows that the Lord exists ‘here, here indeed,’ so very near, within the heart, as the *antaryami*³. And that He has assumed each of the various forms that are.”

¹ Jnana

² Jnani

³ The Inner Controller

Section V

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees

Chapter I

Instructions to Manimohan¹ – signs of the vision of Brahman – yoga of meditation²

Sri Ramakrishna, seated on the smaller cot, is meditating inside the mosquito net. It is seven or eight o'clock at night. M. is seated on the floor. Hari Babu, one of his friends, has come with him. It is Monday, 20 August 1883, the second day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana.

Hazra is living at Dakshineswar these days. Rakhai is often there too, though he sometimes stays with Adhar Sen. Narendra, Bhavanath, Adhar, Balaram, Ram, Manomohan, M. and others visit overnight almost every week.

Hriday, who had been of great service to Thakur, is now ill at his village home. Thakur is very anxious to hear about him. A devotee gave ten rupees to Ram Chatterji to send to Hriday, but Thakur was not present and does not know about it. This devotee has brought a tumbler, having been asked by Thakur, "Bring a tumbler for drinking water for the devotees' use."

Hari Babu, M.'s friend, lost his wife some eleven years ago; he has not remarried. He serves his father, mother, brother and sister, for whom he has great love and affection. He is twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old. Thakur comes out of his

¹ Referring to M.

² Dhyana Yoga, or communion with God by meditation

mosquito net when the devotees arrive and take their seats. M. and the other devotees prostrate to salute him. The mosquito net is now removed from the cot. Sitting on the smaller cot, Thakur talks to them.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I was meditating inside the mosquito net. I thought to myself that God is only a form one imagines during meditation, so I didn't enjoy it. One is successful when God reveals Himself all of a sudden – in a flash. So then I said to myself, 'Who is it that meditates, and on whom does he meditate?'

M. — Yes, sir. You said that He Himself has become everything – the universe and its living beings. That even he who meditates is also God.

Sri Ramakrishna — And one cannot do anything unless He makes one do it. One meditates only when God makes it possible for one to meditate. What is your opinion?

M. — Sir, there is no 'I-consciousness' in you, that is why you feel this way. Only he who has no ego has this understanding.

Sri Ramakrishna — But it is good to retain this much ego: 'I am His servant.' As long as one thinks that one does anything, the attitude 'I am your servant and you are my Master' is good. It is good to cherish the relationship of servant and Master when one feels that one is performing activities.

Manimohan [M.] continually reflects on the nature of the Supreme Brahman. Thakur talks to him about it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brahman¹ is like *akasa*², without any modification. It is like fire, which has no colour. Only by His Power has He taken up various forms. Sattva, rajas and tamas are the three qualities of God's Power. If you put something white in fire, it appears white; if you put something red, it appears red; if black, the fire appears black. Brahman is beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. What He is cannot be expressed in words — He is beyond speech. What remains when you continue the practice of saying, 'Not this, not this'³ is the essence of Bliss, is Brahman.

“The husband of a young girl has arrived and is sitting with other young men of his age in the outer room. The girl and her companions of the same age are peeping through the grill of a window. The companions don't know her husband, so they ask her, 'Is that your husband?' The girl smiles a little and says, 'No.' Pointing to another person, the girls ask, 'Is that one your husband?' She again says, 'No.' Again they point at a third person and ask her, 'Is that your husband?' She again says, 'No.' At last they point to her husband and ask, 'Is that your husband?' Then the girl says neither 'yes' nor 'no' — she only smiles suddenly with a short catch of her breath; she remains silent. Her companions then know that he is her husband. When one attains the knowledge of Brahman, one becomes silent.”

¹ The Absolute

² Ether

³ Neti, neti

Company of the holy – duties of a householder

(To Mani) “Well, why do I talk so much?”

Mani — You talk to awaken the spiritual consciousness of the devotees. You yourself say that if one puts unbaked *luchi*¹ in boiling ghee, it makes a sizzling sound.

Thakur talks about Hazra to M.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know what the nature of a saintly person is? He doesn't hurt anybody, he doesn't harass anybody. Some people have such a nature that, when invited to a feast, they say they would like a special seat. If one has genuine love and devotion for the Lord, one does not take a false step, does not give trouble to others for nothing.

“It is not right to keep the company of bad people. You must keep some distance from them. You must save yourself from them. (To Mani) What do you say?”

Mani — Sir, the company of wicked people brings the mind way down. But, as you say, it is different with heroes.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is that?

Mani — If you throw a stick into a fire burning feebly, it goes out. But when the fire is blazing, you may throw a plantain tree into it and nothing

¹ Fried bread

happens to the fire – though the tree is burnt to ashes.

Sri Ramakrishna asks M. about his friend Hari Babu.

M. — He has come to see you. His wife died a long time ago.

Sri Ramakrishna [to Hari Babu] — What are you doing these days?

M. — Nothing in particular. But at home he serves his brother and sister and parents with great care.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What is this! You have become a ‘pumpkin-cutting elder uncle’. You are neither a man of the world nor a devotee of God¹. This is not right. In some homes an old man is busy day and night only with the children of the family. Sitting in the parlour, he smokes his hubble-bubble and does no work – except that sometimes he goes inside the house and cuts a pumpkin for the family. The ladies of the family don’t cut pumpkin; they send him word through the boys to come in and cut it for them. The old man cuts the pumpkin into two. It is the only work this man has to do. That’s why he is called a ‘pumpkin-cutting elder uncle’.

“Please do ‘this’ as well as ‘that’. Attend to worldly duties, but keep your mind at the lotus feet of the Lord. And when you are alone, read

¹ Hari

devotional scriptures like *Srimad Bhagavata*, or *Chaitanya Charitamrita*.”

It is almost ten at night. The Kali Temple has not yet been closed. M. walks through the courtyard, talking with Ram Chatterji. First he pays obeisance in the Radhakanta Temple and then in Mother Kali’s shrine. The moon appears in the sky. It is the second day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana. The courtyard and the temple spire look beautiful.

M. returns to Thakur’s room where he sees him seated for dinner. He is facing south. His meal consists of some farina pudding and one or two *luchis*. After some time, M. and his friend salute Thakur and take their leave. They will return to Calcutta tonight.

Chapter II

Dialogue between Guru and disciple – secret talk

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot in his room talking alone with Mani. Mani is sitting on the floor. It is Friday, 7 September 1883, the sixth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Bhadra. It is about 7:30 in the evening.

Sri Ramakrishna — I went to Calcutta the other day. While going along in the carriage, I saw that everyone’s attention was on lower things. They were all worried for their stomachs – they were running around to earn a living. They all had their minds on ‘lust and greed’. Only one or two people had fixed their sight on higher things, had their minds turned toward God.

Mani — The present times add to our worry about the upkeep of the stomach. Imitating the English, people are drawn more and more to creature comforts. Thus their wants have increased.

Sri Ramakrishna — What do the English think about God?

Mani — They believe in the formless God.

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna sees no difference in the state of Brahmajnana¹ – he sees the same Consciousness pervading all: the English, Hindus, depressed classes, in animals, in insects, excreta, urine, and in all elements

Sri Ramakrishna — We, too, have the same belief.

Both of them are silent for awhile. Thakur now describes his state of Brahmajnana.

Sri Ramakrishna — One day I saw that it was all one Consciousness that pervades everything – without any distinction. At first I was shown several men and some animals and other creatures – among them were the educated rich, Englishmen, Muslims, myself, a *chandala*², a dog and a Muslim with a long beard holding a porcelain plate of rice in his hand. He put the rice from the plate into everybody's mouth. I tasted a little too.

“Another day I was shown excreta, urine, cereal and all kinds of foodstuff. Suddenly the soul emerged from within [my body] and tasted all of

¹ Knowledge of the Absolute

² A man who cremates; a scavenger

them – like the flame of a fire. It was just like a tongue licking each article one by one. It tasted everything, including the excreta and urine. I was thus shown that it is all one, without any difference.”

**His earlier story – vision of his intimate disciples – is
Thakur an avatar?**

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Another day the devotees who visit me here – my intimate disciples, my very own – were revealed to me. Thereafter, as soon as the conch shell and the bells of the evening worship sounded, I would climb to the roof of the Kuthi and cry aloud with yearning, ‘I say, where are you people? Please, come here! I am dying to see you!’

“Well, what do you feel about all these visions of mine?”

Mani — God is playing His sport in your body. I have understood that you are the instrument and He the Being who uses the instrument. He has created every other creature as if with a machine, but He has created you with His own hands.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, Hazra says that one acquires the six divine powers after God-realization.

Mani — They who want pure love and devotion for God do not care for these powers.

Sri Ramakrishna — Perhaps Hazra was a poor man in his previous birth and that is why he is so very

keen to have riches. He asks me what I talk about with the cook. He says, 'By talking to the treasurer of the temple, I can get you whatever you want!' (Mani laughs loudly).

(Laughing) "That is how he talks about these things. I listen to him silently."

**A devotee can easily comprehend that God incarnated
as a man – powers and sweetness**

Mani — You have said several times that the pure devotee does not want to see His grandeur. The pure devotee likes to see God as Gopala¹. First, God becomes the magnet and the devotee the needle. In the end the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. In other words, God becomes small to the devotee.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is like the sun at dawn. One can look at it easily – it doesn't dazzle the eyes. Instead, the eyes are satisfied. God becomes tender for the sake of His devotees. He appears before them, leaving His powers behind.

Both of them are silent.

Mani — Why should your visions not be real? If they are not real, then the whole world is all the more unreal – for it is the same mind that is the instrument of perception. All these visions come to your pure mind, and our minds see worldly things.

¹ Baby Krishna

Sri Ramakrishna — Now I see you understand well that the world is ephemeral. Well, tell me, what do you think of Hazra?

Mani — Oh, he is a man of a particular type. (Thakur laughs.)

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, do you know anybody similar to me?

Mani — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Any paramahansa¹ similar to me?

Mani — No, sir. You are incomparable.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Have you heard of the ‘achina tree’?

Mani — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is a special kind of tree, but nobody can recognize it.

Mani — Sir, you cannot be recognized either. The more one understands you, the more he will progress.

Mani is silent and says to himself, “Thakur has talked of the ‘sun at dawn’ and the ‘achina tree’. Do these indicate an incarnation of God? Is it God’s sport as a human being? Is Thakur himself an incarnation? Is that why he used to stand on the roof of the Kuthi and call out with yearning to his intimate disciples, ‘I say, where are you all? Please come!’ ”

¹ Highest class of saints who have attained supreme knowledge and sanctity

Section VI

At the Dakshineswar Temple with Ratan and other Devotees

**Sri Ramakrishna has but one thought and one word –
that trick is the best trick**

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot in his room at the Kali Temple. He is smiling and talking with the devotees. They have all eaten. It must be one or two o'clock.

It is Sunday, 9 September 1883, the 7th day of the bright fortnight in the month of Bhadra. Rakhal, M. and Ratan are sitting on the floor. Now and then Ramlal, Ram Chatterji and Hazra enter the room, sit for awhile and then leave. Ratan manages Jadu Mallick's garden estate. He is devoted to Thakur and occasionally visits him. Thakur is talking to him now. Ratan says, "A theatrical performance by Nilkantha will be staged at Jadu Mallick's Calcutta house."

Ratan — You must come and see it. He has sent you word that a theatrical performance will be staged.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is good. I want to go. Oh, how full of love and devotion Nilkantha's songs are!

A Devotee — Right, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — When he sings, he is bathed in tears. (To Ratan) I wonder if I might stay the night there.

Ratan — That would be very nice.

Ram Chatterji and the other devotees ask about the incident of a theft of sandals at Jadu Mallick's house.

Ratan — The golden sandals of the Deity were stolen from Jadu Mallick's house. There is a great uproar in the house. They will use a charmed plate to detect the thief. Everybody will sit and the plate will move in the direction of the thief.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — How does the plate move? Does it move by itself?

Ratan — No. A person presses it with his hand.

A Devotee — It is a kind of 'sleight of hand' – it's a trick.

Sri Ramakrishna — Only that cleverness by which God is realized is real cleverness – that trick is the best trick¹.

¹ Sā cāturi cāturi

Chapter II

Tantrik spiritual discipline and Sri Ramakrishna's filial attitude

The conversation goes on. In the meantime some Bengali gentlemen enter Thakur's room, salute him and sit down. One of them is already acquainted with Thakur. These gentlemen practice the Tantrik disciplines of five ingredients¹. Thakur can tell what is in another's mind², he knows what attitude one holds. He has also heard that one of them performs a sinful act in the name of religion: he is having an illicit affair with the widow of the brother of a big man. In the name of religion he practices the disciplines of the five ingredients with her.

Sri Ramakrishna practices the filial attitude. He considers every woman his mother; he even sees the form of the Mother of the Universe in a prostitute.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Where is Achalananda? Kalikinkar came here the other day and also someone called Singhi. (To M. and others) Achalananda and his disciples have a different attitude from mine. I have the attitude of a child.

The visiting gentlemen remain silent.

His earlier story – Tantrik disciplines practiced by Achalananda

Sri Ramakrishna — I have the attitude of a child. Achalananda used to stay here at times. He would drink a lot of consecrated wine. Hearing that I had

¹ The use of meat, fish, wine, money and sexual intercourse

² *Antaryami*

the attitude of a child, he insisted, ‘Why don’t you practice heroic disciplines with a woman? Don’t you believe in Shiva’s school of thought? Shiva authored the Tantra – it includes spiritual disciplines in all the different attitudes. The disciplines of the attitude of a ‘hero’ is also prescribed.’

“I replied, ‘I don’t know, my dear sir. I don’t like such things at all. I have the attitude of a child.’”

Duties of a father – Sri Ramakrishna denigrates occult powers and the five ingredients – the right use of money

“Achalananda didn’t support his children. He used to say to me, ‘God will look after the children, for such is His will.’ I would remain silent. But I say, who will bring up the children? By giving up his wife and children, perhaps he has found a way to earn money. People might think that he has renounced everything. In this way a lot of money might come his way.

“To practice spiritual disciplines to win a lawsuit, or to earn a lot of money – or to help somebody win a lawsuit, or to procure property! These are matters of very low intelligence!

“Money should be utilized to buy food and a home to live in; in the service of deities, sadhus and devotees; and to help a poor man one may meet. This is making the right use of money. Money is not meant to be used for enjoying luxuries, or to provide bodily comforts, or to earn name and fame.

“People practice the disciplines of the five ingredients of the Tantrik school to attain occult powers. But it is an act of very low intelligence! Krishna said to Arjuna, ‘Friend, even if you attain one of the eight occult powers, you will add to your power – but you will not attain Me by it.’ Occult powers don’t free you from maya. Maya begets egotism. What low intelligence! What use is it to take three glasses of wine from a contemptible place, or to win a lawsuit [with the use of occult powers]?”

What use is it to practice hatha yoga to increase the span of life?

“The body, money and so on are all ephemeral. Why worry so much about them? Look at the hatha yogis. Their only concern is how to add years to their lives. They don’t aim at realizing God. They practice hatha yoga exercises like neti¹ and dhoti² – they merely take milk through a tube and clean their stomachs.

“There was a goldsmith whose tongue turned up and stuck to his palate. He looked like the picture of a man in *Jada* samadhi. He became motionless. He remained like this for many days. People began to visit and worship him. After a number of years his tongue suddenly relaxed and he regained normal consciousness. Then he even resumed his goldsmith profession. (All laugh.)

“All these things concern the body. They almost never relate one to the Lord. The brother of

¹ Cleaning of nose with water

² A method of cleaning entrails with water

Shalagram (a dealer in tabasheer¹) knew eighty-two yoga postures. He would talk about his yoga samadhi, but in his mind he would secretly yearn for 'lust and gold'. He saw a bank note worth many thousands of rupees belonging to Diwan Madan Bhatt lying somewhere. Tempted by greed, he swallowed it in the hope that he could take it out later [by some yogic procedure]. That note was recovered from him – and he was jailed for three years. In my guilelessness I had thought that he had made a lot of spiritual progress! I swear it!"

**His earlier story – Mahendra Pal is returned his money
– Bhagavati, the oil woman – his contempt for the
Kartabhaja sect's practicing sadhana with women as
partners**

"Mahendra Pal of Sinthi gave five rupees to Ramlal. When he left, Ramlal told me. I asked him why he had given the money. Ramlal replied, 'It is meant to be used here.' It occurred to me, 'We owe the milkman. Good, we can pay off some of what we owe.' My Divine Mother! I was lying on the bed that night and suddenly I got up. It felt like a cat was scratching inside my chest. I immediately went to Ramlal and asked him, 'For whom did he give the money? Is it for your aunt²?' Ramlal replied, 'No, it is meant for you.' Then I said to him. 'No, go and return the money immediately. If you don't, I will have no peace.'

"Rising early in the morning, Ramlal went and returned the money. Then I was at peace.

¹ Hard substance extracted from bamboo joints and used medicinally; sugar of bamboo

² Referring to Holy Mother

“There was Bhagavati, the oil woman of the Kartabhaja sect, in the village (Kamarpukur). The men of the sect practice spiritual disciplines with women as their partners. The women cannot practice sadhana and bhajan without a man. This man is called ‘Ragakrishna’¹. The man asks thrice, ‘Have you attained Krishna?’ Each of the three times the woman says, ‘Yes, I have.’

“Bhagavati belonged to the *shudra* caste [a low caste], she was an oil woman. Everybody would take the dust of her feet and salute her. This enraged the landlord. I once saw him. He sent a wicked man to her. Seduced by him, she gave birth to a boy.

“Once a big man came to me. He said, ‘Sir, do something so that I may somehow win my lawsuit. I have come here because I have heard a lot about you.’ I said, ‘My dear sir, I am not that kind of person. You have made a mistake. You must go to Achalananda for this purpose.’

“He who has genuine love and devotion to God does not care for wealth, health and such things. He reflects that the austerities and repetition of God’s name are not for creature comforts, for name and fame, or for wealth. All these are ephemeral – just a matter of two days.”

The visiting gentlemen now rise, salute, and say, “May we leave?” They depart. Sri Ramakrishna smiles a little and says to M., “A thief never listens to religion.” (All laugh.)

¹ Ideal of love

Chapter III

Faith in oneself has its basis in one's belief in God

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, says to Mani) — Well, what do you think of Narendra?

Mani — Sir, he is fine.

Sri Ramakrishna — You see, his understanding matches his learning. And then he is good at singing and playing musical instruments. Besides that, he has perfect control over his senses. He says that he will not marry.

Mani — You said that he who thinks too much of sin becomes a sinner and can't lift himself up. That I am the son of God – with this faith one makes quick progress in spiritual life.

His earlier story – faith of Krishnakishore – faith of Haladhari's father

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, faith indeed!

“What faith Krishnakishore has! He used to say, ‘I have taken His name once, how can sin touch me? I have become pure and sinless.’ Haladhari said, ‘Ajamilā went out to practice austerities to attain Narayana¹. Can one obtain His grace without austerity? What use is it just to say “Narayana” once?’ How angry Krishnakishore was to hear him say that! Krishnakishore had come to

¹ A name of Vishnu

the garden to pick flowers. He didn't even look at Haladhari's face.

“Haladhari's father was a great devotee. Taking his bath in waist deep water, he would recite a mantra 'red-hued and four-faced' and meditate on it. Then he would shed tears of ecstatic love¹.

“Once a sadhu came to the Ariadaha bathing ghat. We talked of going to see him. Haladhari said, 'What use is it to see the cage made of the five gross elements?' Later, when Krishnakishore heard this, he said, 'What did he say? That it would be of no use to see a sadhu? He who repeats the name of Krishna, or he who repeats the name of Rama, develops a body made of Spirit. He sees everything permeated with divine consciousness. Krishna is the embodiment of Spirit and so is His Abode.' He said, 'If you take the name of Krishna or of Rama only once, you gain the fruit of a hundred evening services.' While dying, one of his sons uttered the name of Rama. Krishnakishore said, 'He uttered the name of Rama, so he has nothing to worry about.' But sometimes he wept in grief for the loss of his son.

“When Krishnakishore felt thirsty in Vrindavan, he said to a cobbler, 'Say the name of Shiva.' Uttering 'Shiva,' he drew water for Krishnakishore. Such an orthodox brahmin and he took that water. What faith!

¹ Prema

“One may perform worship, repetition of the Name, sandhya¹ and other ritual practices, but they yield nothing unless one has faith in God. What do you say?”

Mani — True, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I have seen people coming to the Ganges ghat to take a bath and talking about nothing but worldly matters. A widowed aunt says, ‘Mother, they can’t celebrate Durga Puja without me. I even have to mould the image. I have to organize everything whenever there is a marriage in the family. Only then is it conducted properly. I have to arrange the flowerbed for the bride and the groom, and even supervise the catechu garden.’

Mani — How can we blame them for it? How else will they pass the time?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — People have a shrine on the roof of the house where they worship Narayana. Women prepare flower offerings and grind sandal paste in the shrine, but they don’t talk a word about God. They talk about such things as what is to be cooked today, whether they could get the right stuff in the market, such-and-such a dish was tasty yesterday, that boy is a cousin, what job one has, and ‘Don’t ask how I am doing. My Hari is not here.’

¹ Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon, and sunset by orthodox Hindus

“Imagine, they talk of all these worldly things in the shrine even at the time of worship!”

Mani — Sir, generally speaking, that is so. As you say, he who has love for God doesn't have to perform worship and sandhya¹ for long.

Chapter IV

What is God's Spirit Form? After Brahmajnana comes vijnana – God alone is the substance

Thakur is talking alone with Mani.

Mani — Sir, if it is God Himself who has become everything, then why are there so many different feelings?

Sri Ramakrishna — He dwells in all beings as the All-pervasive Being². But there is a special manifestation of His power in some. In some, there is more power of knowledge³; in others, more power of ignorance⁴. Moreover, some have more of His Power than others. Haven't you noticed that there are gamblers and swindlers? And there are also people as ferocious as tigers. I say that the swindler is Narayana, and so is the tiger.

¹ Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon, and sunset by orthodox Hindus

² *Vibhu*

³ *Vidya Shakti*

⁴ *Avidya Shakti*

Mani (smiling) — Yes, sir. We must salute them from a distance. If you were to come near the tiger Narayana and embrace it, it would devour you.

Sri Ramakrishna — God and His Power – nothing else exists except Brahman and His Power. While singing a hymn of praise to Ramachandra, Narada said, ‘Oh Rama, you yourself are Shiva and Sita is Bhagavati; You are Brahma and Sita is Brahmani; you are Indra and Sita is Indrani. You are Narayana [Vishnu] and Sita is Lakshmi. You are the symbol of all that is masculine, and Sita of all that is feminine.’

Mani — And what is God’s Spirit form like?

Sri Ramakrishna reflects for awhile and then says in a whisper, “Do you know what it’s like? It’s like water. You can know it only if you practice spiritual disciplines.”

“You must believe in God’s form. When you attain the knowledge of the Absolute¹, you realize that there is nothing separate – Brahman and His Power are one, like fire and its power to burn. The moment you think of fire, its burning power comes to mind. And the moment you think of the burning power, you think of the fire. It is like milk and its whiteness, water and its wetness.

“But there is something beyond knowledge of the Absolute. After jnana, comes vijnana. He who is aware of knowledge is also aware of ignorance. Vaishishtha was smitten with grief at the death of

¹ Brahmajnana

his hundred sons. When Lakshmana asked Rama about it, Rama said, ‘Brother, go beyond knowledge and ignorance.’ He who has knowledge also has ignorance. If a thorn pricks your foot, you have to use another thorn to take out the first. Having done that, you throw both thorns away.”

Mani — Should one throw away both knowledge and ignorance?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, that is why vijnana is necessary.

“Just see, he who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. He who knows happiness also knows sorrow. He who is aware of virtue is also aware of vice. He who knows good also knows bad. He who knows what purity is, also knows impurity. He who is conscious of ‘I’ is also conscious of ‘you’.

“Vijnana means knowing God in a special way. The awareness, the belief, that there is fire in wood is knowledge. To cook rice on the fire, eat it and be strong is called vijnana. To have the inner experience of the real nature of Atman¹ is knowledge. To talk with Him, to enjoy yourself with Him – in the attitude of a son, a friend, a servant, or a lover – this is vijnana. Being able to see that God has become the universe and its creatures is known as vijnana.

“According to one school of thought, God cannot be seen. Is God outside you, that you can see Him? One can only see oneself. When a ship enters

¹ Bodhebodha

the 'black waters', it does not return. It does not come back to report what it experienced.”

Mani — As you say, when one climbs to the top of the monument, one loses sight of everything below: carriage and horse, men and women, houses, rooms, doors, shops, offices and the rest.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, these days I don't visit the Kali Temple. Am I committing an offence? Narendra used to say, 'He still visits the Kali Temple!'

Mani — Sir, you have new and different states of mind every day. How can you commit an offence?

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, someone told Sen about Hriday: 'Hriday is very ill. Please bring two pieces of dhoti and two long shirts for him. We shall send them to his village (Seor).' Sen brought just two rupees. Now tell me what that means. He has so much money and he only brought this sum. Do say something.

Mani — Sir, those who seek to realize God, who aim at attaining knowledge, cannot act in this [miserly] way.

Sri Ramakrishna — God alone is the Substance; all else is meaningless.

Section VII

Sri Ramakrishna is Invited to Calcutta

Chapter I

Thakur's auspicious visit to the house of Ishan Mukherji

The sweet sound of the morning arati is heard in the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. The waving of lights is accompanied by a morning symphony of sanai and other musical instruments¹. Thakur stands up and repeats God's name in his sweet voice. He salutes the pictures of the gods and goddesses in the room one by one. Then he goes to the circular verandah to the west of his room to have darshan² of the holy Ganges and offers his obeisance to it. Some devotees are staying with him. Finishing their morning ablutions, they enter one by one to salute Sri Ramakrishna.

Rakhal is living with Thakur these days. Baburam arrived the previous evening. Mani has been staying with Thakur for the last fourteen days.

It is Thursday, 27 December 1883, the 13th lunar day of the dark fortnight of the month of Agrahayana. Having completed his bath very early in the morning, Thakur is preparing to go to Calcutta.

He calls out to Mani, "I have been invited to Ishan's house today. Baburam will come with me. You come too."

Mani prepares to go with him.

¹ *Roshan chowki*

² Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness

It is winter. The carriage in which Thakur will travel stops near the nahabat at 8:00 o'clock. All the trees are flowering and the Ganges flows by in front. Joy seems to emanate from all directions. Sri Ramakrishna stands close to the pictures of the deities in his room and salutes them. Repeating the name of the Mother, he gets into the carriage for the journey. With him are Baburam and Mani. They have brought a warm cloth to cover Thakur's body, a warm cap to cover his head and ears, and a little bag of spices. Being winter, they will dress Thakur in warm clothes for the evening.

Thakur is smiling. He enjoys himself throughout the trip. At 9:00 o'clock the carriage enters Calcutta and reaches the road crossing the Machhua Bazaar that passes through Shyambazar. Mani knows the location of Ishan's house. Taking a turn at the street crossing, he asks the coachman to stop when they reach Ishan's house.

Ishan and his relatives come out to joyfully welcome Thakur. He is taken to the lower parlour where he sits down with the devotees.

After polite enquiries, Thakur talks to Shrish, Ishan's son. Shrish, having passed his M.A., L.L.B. examinations, is working as an attorney in Alipur. He secured first position at the University as a result of his Entrance and F.A. examinations – he scored at the top of all the candidates. He is now about thirty years old. His humility matches his scholarship: outwardly he seems to know nothing. He folds his hands to salute Thakur. Mani introduces Shrish to him, saying that a man of such calm disposition is hard to find.

**Panacea for the bonds of action¹ and sinful actions –
Karma Yoga**

Sri Ramakrishna (to Shrish) — What are you doing these days?

Shrish — Sir, I practice law in Alipur.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — For such a man to be a lawyer! (To Shrish) Do you have any question to ask?

“How does one live in the world without attachment?”

Shrish — Sir, one has to do so many unrighteous acts working in the world. Some actions are evil, others are righteous. Are they the result of our past actions that we are impelled to perform them?

Sri Ramakrishna — How long must one perform actions? As long as one does not realize God. One gains everything when one has attained Him. Then one goes beyond virtue and vice.

“When the fruit appears, the flower drops off. It is for making the fruit that the flower appears.

“How long must one perform sandhya and other rituals? As long as the hair on the body does not stand on end and the eyes do not fill with tears while repeating the name of God. Both these states are the signs of God-realization; they indicate pure love and devotion.

¹ Karma

“Having realized God, one goes beyond virtue and vice.”

Says Prasad: I bow my head before both desire and enjoyment,

And having solved the mystery that Kali is the same as the Absolute, I have given up righteousness and unrighteousness.

“The nearer you approach God, the more He lessens your work. When the daughter-in-law in a household conceives, her mother-in-law gradually decreases her work. As soon as she reaches the ninth month of pregnancy, she ceases to work. When the baby is born, she only busies herself playing with it and enjoying herself with it.”

Shrish — It is very difficult to proceed toward God while living a householder’s life.

Instructions to a householder – yoga of practice¹ and spiritual discipline in a solitary place

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, what about the yoga of practice? In the countryside [Kamarpukur], the women of carpenter families sell flattened rice. Let me tell you how alert they are when they attend to their work. The pestle of the husking-machine falls constantly into the mortar. With one hand, the woman pushes paddy into the mortar and with the other, suckles a baby in her lap. In the meantime, a customer arrives and she attends to the sale while the pestle goes on pounding the paddy in the mortar. She says to the customer, ‘Look, you owe

¹ *Abhyasa Yoga*

me so much money. Pay me and you can take your stuff.’

“Just see, she attends to all these things at the same time: suckling the child, pushing the paddy into the mortar while the pestle is pounding it, separating flattened rice from the powdered husk and taking it out of the mortar – and then talking to the buyer. This is what is known as the yoga of practice. Fifteen annas¹ of her mind are tied to the falling pestle of the husking-machine lest it should pound her hand. With one anna of her mind she suckles the baby and attends to the buyer. Similarly, those who lead a family life, a householder’s life, must give fifteen annas of the mind to God. Otherwise, they will face complete ruination and fall into the hands of Death. One must attend to worldly duties with one anna of the mind.

“One can lead a family life after attaining knowledge. But one must first attain it. If you keep the milk of your mind in the water of the world, it will get mixed with water. You must first turn the milk of your mind into curd by placing it in a solitary nook and churn it to take out the butter. Then you can put it in the water of the world.

“It is enough if that much is done. Spiritual practice is needed. It is essential that an aspirant live in solitude in the initial stages of practice. When an Ashwattha tree is only a plant, it must be fenced, otherwise a goat or a cow may eat it. But when it grows a thick trunk, the fence can be

¹ Sixteen annas make one Rupee, one complement

removed. Then even if an elephant is tied to it, no harm can be done to the tree.

“So in the early stage of spiritual life, one must go away and live in solitude from time to time. Spiritual discipline is needed. One wants to eat rice. Is it possible to get cooked rice by just saying there is fire in the wood and rice is cooked over this fire? Fire is produced when one rubs one piece of wood against another.

“One becomes intoxicated and feels joy when one eats hemp. Does one become intoxicated and feel joy, if one doesn’t eat it, if one does nothing but mutter, ‘Hemp, hemp?’”

God-realization is the aim of life – worldly and spiritual knowledge – drinking milk

“However much one may have studied books, it is all futile unless one has love and devotion¹ for God, unless one has the desire to realize Him. A mere pundit without discrimination² and non-attachment³ has his attention fixed on ‘lust and greed’. A vulture soars high in the sky but its eyes remain fixed on the charnel pits where carcasses of animals are burnt.

“The knowledge which leads one to the realization of God is real knowledge. All else is futile.

“Well, what is your idea of God?”

¹ Bhakti

² Viveka

³ Vairagya

Shrish — I have only understood this much — that there is an All-knowing Person, by seeing whose creation one can know how much wisdom He has. Just take this illustration — what skill God shows to save the lives of fish and other aquatic creatures in a cold country! The colder it is, the more the water contracts. But how wonderful! A little before it turns into ice, the water becomes lighter and expands. Thus fish can survive in the coldest of seasons in the water of a lake. The whole of the upper layer turns into ice, but underneath the water remains liquid. If a very cold wind blows, it only affects the upper surface of ice. The water below it remains warm.

Sri Ramakrishna — That God exists may be known by looking at the universe. But it is one thing to hear about Him, another to see Him, and yet another to talk to Him. Some have heard of milk, others have seen it, and yet others have drunk it. One is happy to see milk, one becomes strong and nourished by drinking it. One attains peace only when one sees God; one feels bliss and becomes strengthened only by talking to Him.

**Desire for salvation and yearning for God depends on
the right time**

Shrish — I don't get time to call on God.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — It is true that unless the time is ripe, nothing comes to pass. A boy said to his mother before going to sleep, 'Mother, please wake me up when I feel the call of nature.' The

mother said, ‘Son, its pressure will wake you up. I don’t have to wake you.’

“God has already decided what each one shall receive. A mother-in-law used to give a certain amount of rice to her daughters-in-law, measuring it with an earthen cup. The girls did not get enough rice. One day, to the great joy of the girls, the cup broke. The mother-in-law then said, ‘You may dance and shout, my children, but I can measure the amount very well with the palm of my hand.’ ”

Give your power of attorney to the Lord

(To Shrish) “What else can you do? Surrender everything at His feet and give Him the general power of attorney. Let Him do what He considers best for you. If you place your responsibility on a great man, he will never do you any harm.

“Of course, spiritual practice is needed. But there are two kinds of spiritual aspirants. One has the nature of a young monkey, and the other the nature of a kitten. A young monkey somehow manages to cling to its mother. Likewise, some aspirants think that in order to attain God, they have to repeat the Name so many times, meditate for a certain period, and perform a certain amount of penance. This kind of aspirant tries to hold God by his own effort.

“On the other hand, the kitten itself cannot hold onto its mother. All it does is lie where it is and mew to call its mother – let the mother do what she likes. The mother cat sometimes puts it on a bed – or she may put it next to a woodpile. The mother will put it in her mouth and place it

anywhere she likes. The kitten doesn't know how to hold its mother. Likewise, there are some aspirants who do not calculate how much spiritual practice they do: how many times to repeat the Name, how long to meditate, and so on. They only weep and call upon Him with great yearning. Hearing their cries, God cannot stay away, but appears before them to grant His vision."

Chapter II

It is already late. The master of the house is preparing food for Thakur, so he is very busy. He goes inside the house to look after the meal preparation and to make other arrangements.

It is time to eat, so Thakur is a bit concerned. He walks up and down the room. But he still wears a smile on his face. Now and then he talks to Keshab, the musician.

God is the Doer – yet man is responsible for his own actions

Keshab, the musician — So God is both the 'instrument' and the 'cause'. Duryodhana said, 'Oh Krishna!¹ I act as You, seated within my heart, make me act.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Yes, it is He who makes us do everything. He indeed is the Doer; man is only an instrument.

"But this, too, is true: one has to reap the fruit of one's actions. Eat red chilies and you will feel a

¹ He called him Hrishikesh

burning in your stomach. It is God who has ordained that eating red chilies should give the burning sensation. If you do an evil deed, you will bear the result.

“But he who has attained God, who has gained the Lord’s vision, can commit no sin. An expert musician cannot sing a false note. An expert musician sings only the correct notes of the octave: do, re, mi, fa.”

The meal is ready to be served. Thakur goes inside the house, accompanied by the devotees, and takes his seat. Several varieties of dishes and many delicious sweets have been prepared in the house of this brahmin devotee.

It is about three o’clock. After eating, Sri Ramakrishna comes back to Ishan’s parlour and sits down. Shrish and M. sit close to him. Thakur resumes his conversation with Shrish.

Sri Ramakrishna — What is your attitude? Is it the attitude of Soham, or of the Master and the servant?

Is jnana yoga or bhakti yoga for the householder?

“The attitude of the Master and servant is very good for householders. One must act. How can one have the attitude ‘I am He’ in that state? He who says, ‘I am He’ considers the world a dream, his body and mind also a dream, even his I-ness a dream. That is why, with this attitude, he is unable to perform worldly duties. For him the attitude of a servant of the Lord is very good.

“Hanuman had the attitude of a servant. Hanuman said to Rama, ‘Rama, sometimes I consider You to be the Whole¹ and myself a portion of That, that You are the Master and I am Your servant. But when I attain the knowledge of the Highest Truth², I realize that You are none other than I, and I none other than You.’

“When you have attained the highest Knowledge, you may have the attitude of Soham – but it is an attitude far removed from the ordinary man’s experience.”

Shrish — True, sir. With the feeling of being the servant of God, a man is free from all anxieties and worries. He is fully dependent on the Lord. A dog is very devoted to its master, so it lives in peace by surrendering itself completely to him.

**God is with form as well as without form – great
importance of Name**

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, which do you like – God with form or the formless God? Do you know the truth? He who is formless also takes a form. To a devotee, He appears as a form. It is like a boundless expanse of water, a mighty ocean, without any shore or bank. Some of the water is frozen into ice at some places – the water turns into ice due to extreme cold. Similarly, a devotee has the vision of God with form with the cooling influence of his love and devotion for Him. And when the sun rises, the ice melts and becomes the same water as before.

¹ Purna; perfect

² Tattva jnana

Similarly, when a devotee treads the path of Self-knowledge¹, or the path of discrimination, he does not see the aspect of God with form any longer. Then all is formless. When the sun of Self-knowledge rises, the ice of God's form melts away.

“But see, the Being who is formless has Himself taken up a form.”

It is dusk. Thakur rises to return to Dakshineswar. He stands and talks to Ishan on an open porch south of the parlour. Someone remarks that repeating God's Name does not always seem to bear fruit.

Ishan says, “What do you mean? Though the seed of the Ashwattha tree is tiny, it contains within it a very big tree. It is only that the tree is not visible for a long time.”

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, yes. It takes a long time to see the effect.

Ishan is an unattached householder – state of a paramahansa

Ishan's house is located east of the house of his father-in-law, Kshetranath Chatterji. There is a path connecting the houses. Thakur stands at the gate of the Chatterji house. Ishan comes with his family to see him off by carriage.

Thakur says to Ishan, “You are living in the household like a mud fish. It lives in the mud of a pond, but the mud doesn't stain its body.”

“There are both knowledge² and ignorance³ in this world of maya. Whom do I call a

¹ Jnana

² Vidya

³ Avidya

paramahansa? He who, like a swan, can take the milk from a mixture of water and milk by separating the water from the milk; he who, like an ant, can take the sugar from a mixture of sugar and sand, leaving aside the sand.”

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and the harmony of religions – sin does not affect an *Ishvarakoti*¹

It is twilight. Thakur has arrived at the house of his devotee, Ramchandra Dutta. After visiting him, he will go back to Dakshineswar.

A lamp is lit in the parlour where Thakur is sitting with his devotees. He is talking with Mahendra Goswami. Goswami lives in the same neighborhood. Thakur is fond of him. When he visits Ram, the Goswami usually comes to see him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Both Vaishnavas² and Shaktas³ have the same goal. It is only their paths that are different. True Vaishnavas do not run down Shakti.

Goswami (laughing) — Hara [Shiva] and Parvati are our Father and Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Thank you⁴. Yes, Father and Mother!

¹ Eternally free and perfect souls, born on earth for the good of mankind, with at least some of the characteristics of an avatar

² Worshippers of Vishnu

³ Worshippers of Shakti

⁴ Sri Ramakrishna said ‘Thank You’ in English

Goswami — Besides, to criticize anybody, especially for a Vaishnava, is a sin – it is a Vaishnava transgression. All sins can be forgiven – but not this transgression.

Sri Ramakrishna — Not everybody is touched by sin. The *Ishvarakoti* is not affected by sin. For example, an incarnation of God like Chaitanyadeva.

“If a boy holds his father’s hand while he walks on the balk of a field, he can fall into the ditch. But if the father holds the boy’s hand, he can never fall.

“Listen, I asked the Mother for pure love and devotion¹. I said to the Mother, ‘Here is Your righteousness², here is Your unrighteousness³. Take them and grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your purity and also Your impurity, only grant me pure love. Mother, here is Your vice and here is your virtue, only grant me pure love and devotion.’”

Goswami — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — You should pay respect to all religions. But there is something called single-minded devotion⁴. You may salute everybody, but when you love someone with your heart and soul, it is known as single-minded devotion.

¹ Bhakti

² Dharma

³ Adharma

⁴ *Nishtha bhakti*

“Hanuman liked no other form than that of Rama.

“The milkmaids¹ had such single-minded devotion that they didn’t want to see Krishna of Dwaraka with a turban on his head.

“A wife renders service to her husband’s younger and elder brothers, like washing their feet and setting places for them to eat. But the way she serves her husband, she serves nobody else. She has a special relationship with her husband.”

Ram treats Thakur with sweets and other refreshments.

Thakur is ready to start for Dakshineswar. He takes the shawl and cap from M. The cap covering his ears is made of baize. Thakur gets into the carriage with the devotees. Ram and other devotees help him sit down. M. also climbs into the carriage to return to Dakshineswar.

¹ Gopis

Section VIII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and other devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the smaller cot in his aforesaid room by the Kali Temple. He is listening to devotional songs being sung by Trailokya Sanyal of the Brahmo Samaj.

It is Sunday, 2 March, 1884, 20th Falgun, the fifth day of the bright fortnight, 1290 B.Y. Devotees, including Narendra, Surendra (Mitra) and others, are sitting on the floor listening to the songs.

Narendra's father was an advocate of the High Court. After his passing away, the family has fallen into such dire straits that they sometimes have nothing to eat. Because of these difficult circumstances, Narendra is greatly troubled.

Thakur has not recovered fully from his broken arm. It has been in a splint for many days.

Trailokya is singing a hymn about the Divine Mother. He is saying through the song, "O Mother, take me on your lap and hold me to Your bosom, covering me with the end of your sari."

Let me lie covered in Your lap, O Divine Mother.

May I see your face and cry, "Mother, Mother."

Immersed in the sweetness of Bliss and Consciousness¹, overwhelmed by the sleep of the Great Communion,

May I gaze on You with unblinking eyes and retain Your form in my mind's eye.

I am frightened by the sight and sounds (of this world) and cry bitterly because of this fright.

Hold me to Your bosom, having covered me with the end of Your cloth, O Divine Mother.

As Thakur listens to the song, he sheds tears of divine love and exclaims, "Ah! What feeling!"

Trailokya sings again –

O Hari, You are the destroyer of my shame.

(Please fulfill my wish.)

Who but You can save the honour of Your devotee, O Lord²?

You are the Master of my soul, the support of my life. I am Your slave forever.

Bigger measure of kirtan

I have made Your feet my haven. Giving up all ideas of caste and ancestry, I have given up all fear and shame.

Tell me, O Lord, where can this wayfarer go?

Now I have lost reputation for Your sake. How people in the world find frivolous fault with me!

Because I love You, I am reprimanded at home.

All my shame and mistakes are now Yours. Take them or leave them, they are Your responsibility.

O Lord Hari! The honour of Your slave is Your honour.

¹ Chidananda

² Bhagavan

O Lord of my heart, I derive all honour from You. Do as You will, O Lord.

Smaller measure of kirtan

Taking me from home, enchant me with Your love, O Lord Hari! Give me shelter at Your feet.

Feed me with the honey of Your divine love day after day. O friend of my soul, redeem your Premdas.

Sri Ramakrishna again sheds tears of divine love and then sits on the floor. He begins to sing a song of Ramprasad.

All fame and dishonour, all sweetness and bitterness, belong to You, O Divine Mother!

Why do You ruin my joy and sweetness, O Goddess of all joy and bliss?

Thakur says to Trailokya, “Ah, how sweet your songs are! Your songs are authentic. Only he who goes to the sea can bring sea water and show it to others.”

Trailokya sings again –

O Lord, You sing and You dance and You Yourself keep the beat.

Man is only a witness to it; foolishly does he think, ‘Me and mine.’

The life of man is only the shadow of a puppeteer’s marionette. Only if he walks Your path can he become a god.

You are the driver of the machine of this body. You are the charioteer of the chariot of the Atman. A human being makes mistakes, thinking he has free will.

You are the Lord of the heart, the Soul of the soul, and the Mainstay of all. You can transform an unholy person into a saint by the Power of your holiness.

**The Absolute is identical with the phenomenal world –
perfect knowledge¹, or vijnana**

When the song ends, Thakur speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and others) — It is Lord Hari who is the Master, and He Himself is the servant – this is the attitude of a man of perfect knowledge. First following the path of ‘not this, not this,’ one realizes that the Lord is the only Reality and all else is illusory. Then one sees that it is the Lord Himself who has become everything – that the Lord Himself has become maya: living beings and the universe. The *Puranas* say that evolution is followed by involution. For example, take the bel-fruit. It has a shell, seeds and kernel. Throw away the shell and seeds and you have the kernel. But if you want to know the weight of the bel-fruit, it will not do to throw away the shell and the seeds. That is why, after negating the universe and its living beings to reach Sat-chit-ananda, one sees that He Himself has become the entire universe and its living beings. The kernel belongs to the bel-fruit, just as the seeds and shell do. Butter is a part of milk, just as buttermilk is; they belong to the same substance.

“Even so, one may ask how Sat-chit-ananda has become so hard – touch the earth and you find it hard. The answer is that blood and semen are fluids, but they produce such a big creature as man. It is possible for God to do anything.

¹ Purna jnana

“One must first reach the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda and then, coming down, observe these things.”

World does not exist without God – distinction between a yogi and a devotee

“It is God alone who has become everything. The world does not exist apart from God. Having studied the *Vedas* from his guru, Ramachandra felt a spirit of dispassion¹. He said, ‘If the world is like a dream, one might as well renounce it.’ Dasharatha [his father] became frightened at this. He sent guru Vaishishtha to dissuade Rama. Vaishishtha said, ‘Rama, why do you talk of giving up the world? Please tell me, does the world exist apart from God? If you can convince me that the world is not born of God, you may renounce it.’ Rama was silenced; he could give no reply.

“All elements are finally dissolved into the ether². At the time of creation, ether evolves into *mahat*³, and from *mahat* emerges the ego. The world is created in this order. It is the process of involution and evolution. The devotee accepts everything. He accepts not only the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda, but also the phenomenal world and its creatures.

“The yogi, however, treads another path. He reaches the Supreme Atman⁴ but does not return. He becomes united with the Supreme Atman.

¹ Vairagya

² *Akasa*; the subtlest of the five elements

³ Cosmic Intelligence

⁴ Paramatman

“He who sees the Lord in one limited area only is a man of ‘partial wisdom’. He believes that God does not exist beyond that particular thing.

“There are three classes of devotees. The inferior class of devotee says, ‘God is out there’ – in other words, he points to heaven. The mediocre devotee says, God resides within the heart as its Inner Controller¹. And the highest class of devotee says, ‘God has become everything. Indeed, all I see are His various forms.’ Narendra used to make fun of this, saying, ‘He indeed has become all – so He is the pot and the pan.’” (All laugh.)

Doubts vanish after God-vision – leads to renunciation of work – omnipresent² Shiva

“All doubts vanish when one sees God. It is one thing to hear about God and quite another thing to have His vision. Through hearing alone, one cannot have one hundred percent faith. However, by having a direct vision of God, one is wholly convinced.

“After God-realization one gives up formal worship. I have given up that kind of worship. I used to worship in the Kali Temple. It was suddenly revealed to me that everything is made of pure Spirit – the *koshakushi*³, the altar and the door-frame – everything made of Spirit; men, birds and beasts all made of Spirit. So I began to shower

¹ *Antaryami*

² *Virat*; the all-pervading Spirit in the form of the universe

³ A kosha is a small water container, a kushi is a small spoon for removing water from it. Both are usually made of copper and are used in ritualistic worship.

flowers all around like a crazy man. I began to worship anything and everything I saw.

“One day when I was offering bel-leaves on the head of Shiva, it was revealed to me that the vast universe itself, *Virat*, is Shiva. Then I stopped worshipping the image of Shiva. And when I was picking flowers, it was suddenly revealed to me that every flowering plant is like a bouquet.”

**Distinction between joy of poetry and God-realization –
‘no poetry, O Lord of the Universe’**

Trailokya — Oh, how beautiful God’s creation is!

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh no, it was revealed to me in a flash, not through calculation. It was shown to me that every flowering plant is a bouquet decorating the Universal Form of God¹. I stopped picking flowers from that day. I see men in the same way. God indeed moves around in the form of a human body. I see it like a pillow floating on a wave, rising and falling to and fro. Lifted by the wave, it rises; and it descends again with the tide.

**Why did Thakur take up a human body? Thakur’s
desire**

“The body is momentary; God is the only Reality. The body now is and the next moment it is not. Many years ago, when I was suffering terribly from dysentery, Hriday said, ‘Do ask the Divine Mother to cure you.’ I felt ashamed to ask Her to cure my illness. Instead I said, ‘Mother, I saw a human

¹ *Virat*

skeleton in the Asiatic Society. Oh Mother, it was given a human shape by joining the bones with wires. Pray fortify my body a little so that I can sing Your glories and repeat Your Name.’

“Why this desire to live? After killing Ravana, Rama and Lakshmana entered Lanka. When they entered Ravana’s palace, they saw Ravana’s mother, Nikasha, running away. Lakshmana was surprised and asked Rama, ‘Rama, Nikasha’s whole clan has perished, but she still has so much attraction for life.’ Calling her to him, Rama said, ‘Do not be afraid! Why were you running away?’ Nikasha said, ‘Rama, I was not fleeing out of fear. I have been able to see so much of your divine sport because my life was spared. If I live still longer, how much more of it I will witness! That is why I desire to live.’

“If one has no desires, the body does not last.

(Smiling) “I had one or two desires. I said, ‘Mother, grant me the company of those who have renounced ‘lust and greed.’ I also said, ‘I would like to keep the company of Your jnanis and devotees. So grant me a little strength that I may be able to move around a little and visit people here and there.’ But She did not grant me the strength to move about.”

Trailokya (smiling) — Have your desires been fulfilled?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — A few remain. (All laugh.)

‘The body is indeed ephemeral. When I broke my arm, I said to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother it gives me so much pain!’ A carriage and its driver were then revealed to me. One or two screws of the carriage had fallen out. The carriage moved as the driver moved it. The carriage had no power of its own.

“Then why do I try to take care of my body? So that I may enjoy myself with God. So that I may repeat His name and sing His glories. So that I may move about here and there to associate with His devotees and jnanis.”

Chapter II

In the company of Narendra and others – Narendra in happiness and sorrow – happiness and misery related to the body

Narendra is sitting on the floor in front of Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and the devotees) — The body is indeed subject to happiness and sorrow. Take the case of Narendra – his father has died and, as a result, his family is in a dire state. Nothing seems able to solve his problems. Sometimes God keeps one in happiness, at other times in misery.

Trailokya — Sir, the Lord will be merciful to him (Narendra).

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — When? No one remains hungry in Annapurna's home at Kashi, yet some have to wait for food until evening.

“Hriday asked Sambhu Mallick for some money. Sambhu Mallick held the views of the English. He said, ‘Why should I give you money? You can earn your livelihood by working. Anyway, you are earning something. But if somebody is extremely poor, it is a different matter. The purpose of charity is fulfilled when one gives to the blind, the lame, or the handicapped.’ Then Hriday said, ‘Sir, then I don't want your money. I pray to the Lord that I do not become blind, handicapped or extremely poor. I don't want you to have to give, nor do I wish to receive.’”

**Narendra and atheism – the Lord's way of work and
Bhishma Deva**

Thakur speaks as if piqued that the Lord has not yet shown mercy to Narendra. He looks affectionately at Narendra every now and then.

Narendra — I am studying atheism.

Sri Ramakrishna — There are both theism and atheism. Why not study the former?

Surendra — The Lord is just. He will certainly look after His devotee.

Sri Ramakrishna — The scriptures say that one who has given in charity in a previous life gains wealth in this life. Even so, do you know how it is? This world is God's maya. And there is a lot of

confusion in the domain of maya. It is all incomprehensible.

“The ways of the Lord are inscrutable. Bhishma Deva was lying on a bed of arrows. The Pandavas, accompanied by Krishna, went to see him. After awhile Bhishma began to weep. The Pandavas said to Krishna, ‘Krishna, how amazing! Grandfather Bhishma¹ is one of the eight *Vasus*². There is no man of spiritual wisdom like him. Yet he weeps during his last moments.’ Krishna replied, ‘Bhishma is not weeping because of that. Ask him why he weeps.’ When asked, Bhishma replied, ‘Krishna, I have not been able to understand the ways of God at all. I am weeping because I see that Narayana Himself is a constant companion of the Pandavas – still there is no end to their trials and tribulations. When I reflect on this, I realize that it is impossible to understand anything of God’s ways.’”

Pure Atman is immutable like Mount Sumeru

“God revealed to me that the Paramatman, which is described as the pure Atman in the *Vedas*, is immutable, like Mount Sumeru, unattached and beyond happiness and sorrow. There is great confusion about the working of His maya. No one can say what event will come after this, or if this will produce that.”

¹ *Pitamah*

² A compact group of eight *devas* (gods)

Surendra (smiling) — If one gives away in charity in a previous life and gets wealth in the next, then we should give in charity now.

Sri Ramakrishna — He who has money should give in charity. (To Trailokya) Jaygopal Sen is a wealthy man, so he should give in charity. It is contemptible that he doesn't do so. Some people are miserly even when they are rich. Nobody is sure who will enjoy his riches after he dies.

“Jaygopal came here the other day. He comes by carriage. The carriage carried a broken lantern and was driven by a horse that looked like it had come straight from the charnel house. The coachman looked as if he had just been discharged from the Medical College Hospital. And he brought two rotten pomegranates!” (All laugh.)

Surendra — Jaygopal Babu belongs to the Brahma Samaj. It seems that Keshab's Brahma Samaj has no worthwhile men now. Vijay Goswami, Shivanath and some others have founded the Sadharan Brahma Samaj.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Govinda Adhikari would not keep good actors in his theatre for the *yatras*¹, lest he should have to share the profit with them.

“The other day I saw one of Keshab's disciples. A play was being staged at Keshab's house. I saw that fellow dancing with his son in his arms. I

¹ Religious theatrical performances

understand that he delivers lectures. There is no knowing who is going to teach him!”

Trailokya sings: The waves of love and bliss are rising high in the sea of Knowledge and Bliss Absolute¹.

The song over, Sri Ramakrishna says to Trailokya, “Do please sing that song: O Mother, make me mad with Thy love.”

¹ *Chidananda*

Section IX

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Pundit Shashadhar and other Devotees

Chapter I

Kali is Brahman – Brahman, the Absolute, and His Power are inseparable

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in the aforesaid room on a mat spread on the floor. Pundit Shashadhar is seated close to him. Many devotees are sharing the mat with them. Others are sitting on the bare floor. Surendra, Baburam, M., Harish, Latu, Hazra, Mani Mallick and other devotees are present. Thakur is talking about Pundit Padmalochan, who was the court pundit for the King of Burdwan. It is about four o'clock in the afternoon.

It is Monday, 30 June 1884. Pundit Shashadhar had met and talked with Thakur in Calcutta six days ago, on the day of the holy Rathayatra¹. Today he has come to Dakshineswar, accompanied by Bhudhar Chatterji and his elder brother. Pundit Shashadhar is staying with his brother in Calcutta.

The Pundit follows the path of jnana yoga. Thakur is explaining to him that both the Absolute and the phenomenal world belong to the same Being. One who is Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute has assumed various forms to perform His divine sport. While talking of these things, Thakur loses external consciousness. He speaks, intoxicated

¹ The Car festival

by a divine mood. He says to the Pundit, “Brother, the Absolute is immutable, immovable like Mount Sumeru. But He who is ‘immovable’ is also ‘movable’.”

Drunk with the joy of ecstatic love, Thakur begins to sing. His divinely sweet voice puts to shame even the voice of the celestial musicians¹. He sings song after song –

Song –

Is there anybody who knows Kali, She, the consort of *Kala*²? Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her.

The yogi meditates on Her at the Muladhara³ and Sahasrara⁴.

A goose and a gander move around in this wilderness of lotuses, accompanying one another. They are *Kala* and His consort.

My Divine Mother is the most beloved of Shiva (the Absolute), even as Sita is the most beloved of Rama.

She appears in Her majesty in each finite being⁵ as an individual, just as She pleases. She is Ichhamai⁶.

Mahakala (the Spirit of Eternity, the Absolute) knows the greatness of my Divine Mother – greatness which is hidden from the view of ordinary beings. Who else can know Her so well?

My Divine Mother gives birth to the Universe – now think of Her greatness!

¹ Gandharvas

² The Spirit of Eternity

³ Muladhara is the first lotus with four petals and is the root of the Sushumna in the spine. The Kundalini is coiled up at the Muladhara lotus.

⁴ Sahasrara is the lotus of a thousand petals, which is the goal of the spiritual energy (Shakti) awakened by the yogi at the Muladhara. When the Shakti reaches the Sahasrara and becomes united with Shiva or Brahman, the result is samadhi, Brahmajnana.

⁵ Ghat

⁶ She has Her own way in everything

Says Prasad (the poet): 'To think that one can know Her is to think that one can swim across the mighty ocean. One can only laugh at the idea.'

I understand this well enough with my mind; alas, my heart will not see it. It is a dwarf aspiring to reach the moon.

Song –

Is the Divine Mother the daughter of such an ordinary mother,

By repeating whose name, Mahesh (Shiva) remains alive even after drinking deadly poison¹?

By whose glance, creation, preservation and dissolution come about?

She who keeps the infinite universe in Her belly,

By whom the gods free themselves of their duties by taking refuge at Her feet,

Underneath whose feet Mahadeva, the God of gods, lies prostrate?

Song –

Is my Divine Mother only the chaste wife of Shiva, the Absolute?

She to whom the God of Death² pays his obeisance?

Killing foes in the garb of the naked one, She stands on the breast of Mahakala.

O my mind, do tell me how it happens that She kicks the chest of Her Master.

Says Prasad, take the sport of the Divine Mother as wild and violent.

O mind, aspire with care and your intellect will be purified.

¹ The gods and demons churned the ocean to obtain the nectar of immortality. The churning also produced deadly poison. To save mankind from the poison, Lord Shiva drank it all.

² *Kala*

Song –

I don't take ordinary wine. I say, 'Victory to Kali'¹ and drink the wine of Everlasting Bliss.

When I repeat the Mother's name, it intoxicates my mind and people call me a drunkard.

Taking the Guru's seed mantra and having added the spice of worldly action² to it,

My mind becomes drunk by taking only drops of the wine distilled by spiritual wisdom³.

The container [body] is full of His seed mantra, which I purify by uttering Tara, the name of Divine Mother.

Says Prasad, by drinking such a Wine of Everlasting Bliss, one obtains the four pursuits of life (righteousness, wealth, fulfillment of desire and liberation⁴).

Song –

Can everybody gain the treasure of Mother Shyama?

This foolish mind does not know how priceless this inherited treasure is.

Even with all his penance, indeed rare is Shiva's vision of Her.

Only when the mind is intoxicated, can one attain the crimson feet of the Divine Mother.

Thakur's state of ecstasy relaxes somewhat. He stops singing and is silent for awhile, then he gets up and sits down on the smaller cot.

The Pundit is charmed to hear the songs. He says to Thakur humbly, "Is there going to be any more singing?"

¹ Jai Kali

² Pravritti

³ Jnana

⁴ The four fruits: Dharma, artha, kama and moksha

After a short time Thakur resumes singing –

Song –

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of misdeeds made it fall circling to the ground.

Maya's pull made it heavy and I could not raise it again.

It became entangled in the string of love for wife and children.

Alas! The framework of jnana [of the kite] is rent. One may pull it upwards, but it falls down.

It has lost its bow, so how can it fly? The six passions¹ have overpowered it.

It was tied to the string of bhakti. While playing, it fell into illusion.

O Nareschandra! Rather than weep or laugh, it was better not to have played at all.

Song –

This time I have given my whole mind.

I have learned divine fervour² from one well versed in it.

O Mother, I have found a man from a country which has no night.

And now I can no longer distinguish day from night.

I have rendered barren all ritualistic devotions.

Song –

I have surrendered myself at the Fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama any more?

¹ Lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride and envy

² Bhava

I have tied to the top tuft of my hair the almighty
mantra of the name of Kali,

Having sold my body in the mart of the world, I have
bought the name of Durga.

Hearing “I have bought the name of Durga,” the
Pundit begins to shed tears. Thakur sings again –

Song –

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree¹, the name of
Mother Kali, in my heart.

I am waiting to open my heart to Yama² to show him
the name of Kali residing there.

I have thrown out the six bad beings³ that were
dwelling in my body.

Says Ramprasad, I am prepared to start my journey of
life, taking the name of Durga.

Song –

O my mind, abide by yourself,

Do not go to any other’s house.

Search within yourself,

You will find there all you seek.

Having sung this song, Thakur says, “Bhakti is better
than mukti (liberation).”

Song –

I am not hesitant to grant mukti (liberation); I
hesitate to grant pure bhakti.

Who wins pure love surpasses all. He is served by all.

He triumphs over the three worlds.

¹ *Kalpataru*

² King of Death

³ Six passions, namely lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride and envy

Listen, O Chandravali¹, I will tell you of love.

One may gain liberation, but rare indeed is bhakti.

Because of bhakti, I became King Bali's doorkeeper in the nether world.

Only in Vrindavan can one find pure love.

Except for cowherd boys and milkmaids, no one knows its secret.

Because of bhakti in Nanda's house, taking him as my father, I carried his burden on my head.

Chapter II

Study of scriptures and learning are futile – austerities are essential – man of vijnana

The Pundit has studied the *Vedas* and other scriptures. He enjoys discussing philosophy. Thakur, seated on the smaller cot, looks at him and instructs him during the course of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Pundit) — Certainly there are the *Vedas* and other scriptures. But unless one practices spiritual disciplines and austerities, it is not possible to realize God.

“One cannot see God in the six systems of philosophy, or in the *Vedas*, or the *Tantras*.

“Even so, one should understand the scriptures and act according to their injunctions. Once a person lost a letter and couldn't remember where he had left it. He began to look for it with a lamp. Two or three people set themselves to the task of searching for it and at last it was found. The message of the letter was, ‘Send five seers of

¹ One of the gopis at Vrindavan

sandesh¹ and a piece of wearing-cloth².’ Having read it, the man threw the letter away, for it was no longer of any use. Now he only had to buy five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth and send them.”

**The art of teaching – comparison between reading,
hearing and seeing**

“Higher than reading is hearing and higher than hearing is seeing. One internalizes more when one hears from the lips of the guru, or from a holy man. Then one doesn’t have to think about the non-essential part of the scriptures.

“Hanuman said, ‘Brother, I don’t know the phases of the moon, or the position of the planets. I only contemplate Rama.’

“Seeing is far better than hearing. All doubts vanish when you see. The scriptures talk of so many things. It is all futile without having the direct vision of God, without having love and devotion for His lotus feet, without purification of the heart. The almanac forecasts twenty measures of rainfall. But squeeze the almanac and not a single drop of water falls out. Not even one drop falls.”

**How long does one have to reason? Till one realizes
God – who is a vijnani?**

“How long does one have to reason about the text of the scriptures? As long as one does not have the

¹ A kind of sweetmeat in Bengal made of cheese and sugar

² Dhoti

direct realization of God. How long does the bee hum? As long as it does not sit on a flower. When it sits on a flower to drink honey, it doesn't make any sound.

“The truth is that one may talk with others even after God-realization. But this conversation only revolves around the divine Bliss of God – it is like a drunkard crying, ‘Victory to Kali.’¹ Besides, even a bee hums indistinctly after sipping honey from a flower.”

Is Thakur perhaps hinting of his own state by referring to a vijnani?

“The jnani reasons, ‘Not this, not this.’ Reasoning in this way, he reaches a point of Divine Bliss, and that is Brahman.

“What is the nature of a jnani? He follows the injunctions of the scriptures.

“Once I was taken to Chanak and met a number of sadhus. Some of them were sewing. (All laugh.) They left their sewing when they saw us. They sat cross-legged and began to talk to us. (All laugh.)

“A jnani does not talk about spiritual things unless you broach the subject of God. He will normally ask you, ‘How are you doing now? Is all well in the family?’

“But the vijnani conducts himself differently. He doesn't care about anything – maybe his

¹ Thakur means that the drunkard can hardly say anything other than ‘Victory to Kali,’ on account of his drunkenness.

wearing cloth is off, or held under his arm as children will do.

“He who knows that the Lord exists is a jnani. He who knows that there is fire in firewood is a man of knowledge. But the vijnani is he who makes fire with the wood, cooks his food over it, and eats to his fill.

“The eight fetters¹ fall off the vijnani. He only retains the semblance of lust, anger and the rest.”

The Pundit — ‘bhidyate hradayagranthi chidyante sarvasamśayāḥ.’ The knots of the heart are cut and all doubts vanish.

**His earlier story – visit to Krishnakishore’s house –
Thakur’s state of a vijnani**

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes. A ship was sailing on the ocean. Suddenly all its iron joints, nails, and screws began to fall out. It was passing a mound of magnetic stone, so all the iron began to loosen.

“I used to visit Krishnakishore’s house. One day when I went to his house, he asked me, ‘Why do you chew betel leaf?’ I said, ‘If I feel like it, I will chew betel-leaf, look at myself in the mirror, or dance naked among a thousand females.’ Krishnakishore’s wife scolded him, saying, ‘You don’t know how to talk to people! What have you said to Ramakrishna?’

“In this state [of vijnana], passions like lust, anger and the rest are burnt up, though the

¹ Hatred, shame, fear, lineage, pride of good conduct, secretiveness, caste and grief

physical body remains the same. One looks just like anybody else. But inside one has become hollow and absolutely pure.”

A Devotee — Does the body last after God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, in the case of a few people, the body remains alive to do some work – to instruct mankind. Sins vanish with a dip in the Ganges and one attains liberation. But one is not cured of one’s blindness. Of course, one does not have to be reborn again and again to reap the fruit of sinful actions, which would otherwise have resulted in several rebirths. One has to live till the momentum of the actions of previous births has been exhausted. However, the impetus of current actions¹ does not give rise to future births. In the case of such a person, when passions like lust and anger have been burned up, the body remains to perform a few actions.

The Pundit — This is called samskara².

Sri Ramakrishna — The vijnani always sees the presence of God. That is why he is in such a relaxed state of mind. He sees God even with his eyes open. At times he comes down from the Absolute³ to the phenomenal world⁴, and at other times he goes up from the phenomenal world to the Absolute.

¹ After God-realization

² Tendencies inherited from one’s past births

³ Nitya

⁴ Lila

The Pundit — I don't understand this concept.

Sri Ramakrishna — The jnani reaches the Eternal and Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda by discriminating, 'Not this, not this¹.' He reasons, saying to himself, 'God is not the embodied being, He is neither the universe nor the twenty-four cosmic principles².' Reasoning thus, he reaches the Absolute and sees that God has become everything and dwells in all – embodied beings, the universe, and the twenty-four cosmic principles.

“One must curdle milk and churn it to extract butter. However, when you have taken the butter out, you observe that the butter indeed belongs to the buttermilk and the buttermilk belongs to the butter. The bark of a tree belongs to the pith and the pith belongs to the bark.”

The Pundit (to Bhudhar, smiling) — Did you understand? It is very difficult to comprehend.

Sri Ramakrishna — When there is butter, there must also be buttermilk. If you think butter, the idea of buttermilk also comes to mind – for the reason that there can be no butter without buttermilk. Therefore, when you accept the Absolute³, you have also to accept the phenomenal world⁴. It is a case of involution and evolution. One

¹ Neti, neti

² They are the following, viz. – the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air, space); the five pranas (vital airs) (prana, udana, samana, vyana, apana); the five organs of sense; the five organs of work; the mind; the determinative faculty (buddhi); the ego; chitta (mind-stuff)

³ Nitya

⁴ Lila

attains this state after having the direct realization of both aspects of God: Personal and Impersonal. The Personal God is symbolic of Consciousness and the Impersonal God is the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda.

“God indeed has become everything. Therefore, ‘the world is a mansion of joy’ for the vijnani. For the jnani, however, this world is ‘a veil of deception’. Ramprasad called it ‘a veil of deception’. That is why somebody rejoined –

This world is indeed a thing of joy; let me eat and drink and be merry.

O physician¹, you are a fool! You only see things on the surface – and I have understood the secret.

King Janaka, the great royal sage, was he inferior in any respect to the holy man who has given up the world?

Oh no, it was he who was loyal to both matter and Spirit, who realized God and at the same time drank his cup of milk. (Laughter.)

“The vijnani has enjoyed the Bliss of God in a special way. Some have heard of milk, others have seen it, and yet there are some who have drunk it. The vijnani has drunk milk, enjoyed it, and been nourished by it.”

Thakur remains silent for awhile and asks the Pundit to have a smoke. The Pundit goes to the long southeastern verandah to smoke.

¹ Ramprasad belonged to the caste of physician.

Chapter III

Jnana and vijnana – Thakur and the rishis of the *Vedas*

The Pundit returns and sits on the floor with the devotees. Thakur, seated on the smaller cot, resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Pundit) — I say this to you. There are three kinds of joy: the joy of worldly enjoyment¹, the joy of worship² and the bliss of Brahman³. The joy of ‘lust and gold’ is the joy of worldly enjoyment, it is the joy in which worldly people always remain occupied. The joy of worship is that which one enjoys when chanting the name and glories of God. And the bliss of Brahman is the joy of the vision of God⁴. The rishis became free-willed⁵ after experiencing the bliss of Brahman.

“Chaitanyadeva used to experience three kinds of spiritual states: the inmost state, the semi-conscious state, and the conscious state. In the inmost state, he would have the vision of God and pass into samadhi – he would attain the state of *Jada* Samadhi. In the semi-conscious state, he would retain partial awareness of the external world. And in the conscious state, he would sing the name and glories of God.”

Hazra (to the Pundit) — So all your doubts are now resolved.

¹ *Vishyananda*

² *Bhajananda*

³ *Brahmananda*

⁴ Bhagavan

⁵ That is, they could step beyond rules and regulations

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Pundit) — What is samadhi? In samadhi, the mind becomes merged with the Absolute. The jnani passes into *Jada* Samadhi – in it, I-consciousness vanishes. The samadhi experienced in bhakti yoga is called *Chetana* Samadhi. In it, one retains the ego of the servant and Master relationship, the ego of lover and Beloved, or the ego of enjoyer and Bliss. The Lord is the Master and the devotee is the servant; the Lord is the Beloved and the devotee the lover; the Lord is the Fountain of Bliss and the devotee its enjoyer. The devotee does not want to become sugar; he wants to eat and enjoy it.

The Pundit — What will happen if God dissolves the ego completely, if He makes sugar of the devotee?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Feel free to say what you have on your mind. ‘Be frank for once, mother Kaushalya¹.’ (All laugh.) Don’t the scriptures talk of Narada, Sanaka, Sanatana, Sananda and Sanatkumara?

The Pundit — Yes sir, the scriptures mention them.

Sri Ramakrishna — Though they were jnanis, they retained their ego of devotion. Haven’t you read the *Bhagavata*?

The Pundit — I have read it partially, but not all of it.

¹ A reference to an episode in the Ramayana about Kaushalya, the mother of Rama

Sri Ramakrishna — Pray to God. He is compassionate. Will He not listen to the words of His devotee? He is the wish-fulfilling tree¹. Approach Him and ask: He will grant your wish.

The Pundit — I haven't thought much about it before. Now I understand.

Sri Ramakrishna — After one attains knowledge of the Absolute, God permits a little ego to remain. This ego is the 'I of the devotee,' or the 'I of knowledge'. It is with this 'I' that one enjoys His infinite play. Rubbing the pestle for a long time, it was reduced to a very small size. But when it fell into the forest of willows, it brought the destruction of the entire clan of Yadus². That is why the vijnani keeps the 'I of devotion' or the 'I of knowledge', to enjoy the Bliss of God and to teach mankind.

¹ *Kalpataru*

² The childhood friends of Samba, one of Krishna's sons, playfully disguised him as a pregnant woman by dressing him in female clothes and hanging an iron pestle below his waist. They presented him before a group of ascetics and asked them what sort of child the woman would give birth to. Enraged that a joke had been played on them, the munis proclaimed a curse that the iron pestle would be the ruin of the entire clan of Yadus. Fearfully, the boys took the pestle to the ocean and rubbed it for a very long time. The particles that fell from it, on striking the ground, became strong willow reeds. The boys threw the last piece of pestle into the sea.

In the meantime Krishna's clan, the Yadus, had become overbearingly vain and arrogant and they began to fight among themselves. At last they took the powerful willow reeds sprung from the pestle dust and, with them as weapons, fought each other to the death. Krishna, having decided that it was time that he also pass on, bade his father and his wives farewell and seated himself under a tree for meditation. Only one of his legs was not obscured by the leafy and outreaching branches of the tree. A hunter mistook him for a deer and killed him with an arrow, the point of which was the last piece from the pestle that had been thrown into the sea. Thus did the munis' curse find fulfillment.

Rishis had timid natures and were easily frightened – a new light on the Vedanta

“The rishis were timid and easily frightened. Do you know what their attitude was? ‘Let me somehow get my own salvation; who knows what will happen in the future? So who can think for others?’ A piece of dry or rotten wood somehow is able to float on water, but if even a bird sits on it, it sinks. A heavy log¹ not only floats, but also carries a number of animals. A steamship crosses the ocean and also takes people across.

“Religious teachers like Narada are vijnanis; they are more courageous than other rishis. They are like expert checker players who call out, ‘What do you want, a six or a five of the dice?’ And lo! Each time he throws the right number! What an expert player! And this fellow twirls his mustaches as he plays!

“Jnanis are afraid. They are like amateur chess players who are anxious to move a piece to the safety zone. The vijnani, on the other hand, has no fear of anything. He has had a direct vision of both aspects of God, Personal and Impersonal. He has talked, communed, with God – he has enjoyed the Bliss of God.

“The vijnani feels Bliss when, through contemplating God, his mind merges in the Indivisible². Again he is in Bliss when he keeps his mind on the divine play, the phenomenal world, without his mind being merged in the Absolute.

¹ Bahaduri wood

² Akhanda

“A mere jnani is monotonous. He only discriminates, ‘Not this, not that; all this is like a dream.’ ‘I have raised both my hands¹’. That is why I accept everything [both the Absolute and the phenomenal world].

“A woman went to see her weaver friend who was spinning yarn of different kinds of silk. The weaver friend was very happy to see her. She said, ‘Friend, I am so happy that you have visited my home; I cannot express my joy. Let me get some refreshments for you.’ The weaver friend went out of the room. While she was away, her visitor was tempted by multi-coloured yarn of silk. She hid a bundle of it under her arm. The weaver came back with the refreshments and served them to her with great enthusiasm. But looking at her silk yarn, she understood that her friend had pinched a bundle of it. She thought of a stratagem to recover her yarn.

“She said, ‘Friend, we have not seen each other for a long time. This is a very happy day. Let’s dance together.’ The visitor friend said, ‘Yes friend, I, too, feel great joy.’ So they began to dance. The hostess saw that her friend was dancing without raising her arms. She said, ‘Come, friend, let’s dance with our arms raised, it’s such a happy day today!’ The visitor friend began to dance, but keeping one arm raised and the other pressing her side. The hostess said, ‘My dear, what is this, dancing with only one arm raised! Let us dance with both hands raised. See how I am dancing with both hands raised?’ But the visitor laughed, still danced pressing one arm to her side, with the other

¹ Refer to the parable next to understand this statement

raised. She continued to dance and said, ‘One dances as one knows, friend.’

“I don’t press one arm to my side. Both of my hands are free. I have no fear. I accept both the Absolute and the phenomenal world, the Nitya and the lila.”

Does Thakur mean that the jnani cannot dance with both hands raised because of his desire for name and fame, and desire for liberation? Does he mean that the jnani cannot accept both the Absolute and the phenomenal world and fears that he might get bound, but that the vijnani has no such fear?

Sri Ramakrishna — I said to Keshab Sen that he could not succeed spiritually without renouncing his ego. He said, ‘If I do that, I won’t be able to keep my organization intact.’ Then I said to him: I am only asking you to renounce the ‘unripe I’, the ‘rascal I’. There is no harm in retaining the ‘ripe I’, the ‘I of a child’, the ‘I of God’s servant’ and the ‘I of knowledge’. The ‘I of a worldly man,’ the ‘I of ignorance¹,’ and the ‘unripe I’ are like a stick which divides the water of the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda into two parts. On the other hand, the ‘I of God’s servant,’ the ‘child’s I,’ or the ‘I of knowledge’ is like a line drawn on the surface of water. One clearly sees that there is one expanse of water. The line appears to divide the water into two, but in reality one sees one expanse of water.

“Shankaracharya retained the ‘I of knowledge’ to teach mankind.”

¹ Avidya

**After attaining the knowledge of the Absolute, some
retain the ‘ego of a devotee’ – attitude of gopis**

“God retains the ‘I of knowledge,’ or the ‘I of a devotee’ in many people, even after they attain the knowledge of the Absolute. Hanuman had the attitude of a servant of God, of a devotee, after having the direct vision of both aspects of God, Personal and Impersonal. He said to Ramachandra, ‘Rama, at times I think of You as the whole and myself as a part of You. Sometimes I say to myself that I am Your servant and You the Master. And then, Rama, when I attain the Highest Knowledge, I see that You indeed are I and I am You.’

“Suffering the pangs of separation from Krishna, Yashoda went to Radha. Noticing her distress, Radha revealed her real nature to Yashoda, saying, ‘Krishna is *Chidatma*, Absolute Consciousness, and I am *Chitshakti*, His Primal Power. Mother, ask me for a boon.’ Yashoda said, ‘Mother, I don’t want knowledge of the Absolute. Only grant the boon that I may always see the form of Gopala¹ in my meditation, that I may ever associate with the company of Krishna’s devotees, that I may serve the devotees of God, and that I may always chant the name and glories of God.’

“The gopis once wished to see the divine form of the Lord. Krishna asked them to dive into the Jamuna. As they dived, they found themselves in Vaikuntha² where they had the vision of the Lord endowed with six divine powers. But the gopis did

¹ Baby Krishna

² The abode of Vishnu

not like it. They said to Krishna, ‘We only want to see our Gopala, we only want to serve him – please grant this, we want nothing else.’

“Before going to Mathura, Krishna tried to impart the knowledge of the Absolute to the gopis. He said, ‘I am within and without every being. Why should you see only one of my forms?’ The gopis said, ‘Krishna, are you thinking of leaving us? Is that the reason you are imparting the knowledge of the Absolute?’

“Do you know what the attitude of the gopis is? We belong to Radha and Radha belongs to us.”

A Devotee — Does this ‘I of a devotee’ ever disappear altogether?

Sri Ramakrishna and the Vedanta

Sri Ramakrishna — The ‘I of a devotee’ does disappear completely at times. Having attained the knowledge of the Absolute, one merges into samadhi. I, too, lose I-consciousness, but not all the time. Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti – one cannot stay long at ti [the highest note]. One has to come down again to the lower notes. I say to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, please don’t give me the knowledge of the Absolute.’ Formerly many believers in the Personal God used to visit me. Since then the Brahmajnanis¹ have started arriving. During that period I would remain in samadhi most of the time, having lost all external consciousness. And when I would regain outer

¹ Members of the Brahma Samaj who believed in the Formless Brahman

consciousness, I would pray to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, please don’t give me the knowledge of the Absolute.’

The Pundit — Does God listen to our prayers?

Sri Ramakrishna — The Lord is a kalpataru, the wish-fulfilling tree. You will certainly receive whatever you ask of Him. But you have to stand near the kalpataru when you ask for something. Only then is your wish fulfilled.

“But then there is something special. God knows one’s inner feelings. Whatever one cherishes while practicing spiritual disciplines indeed comes to pass – as one desires, so one gains. A magician showed his magic feats to a king and now and then he said, ‘Oh king, give me money, give me cloth.’ As he said this, his tongue twisted and got stuck to his palate. At once he had suspension of breath¹. Now he could neither speak, nor make any sound, and he became motionless. Thinking him dead, they made a brick grave and buried him in that posture. A thousand years later someone dug up that grave. People saw a person seated in the grave merged in samadhi. Taking him as a holy man, they began to worship him. When they shook and moved him, his tongue became detached from his palate. The fellow then regained outer-consciousness and shouted, ‘Just see my magic! See my feats! Oh king! Give, give me money, give me cloth.’

“I would cry and say to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, destroy my tendency to reason!’ ”

¹ Kumbhaka

The Pundit — Did you, too, have it (the tendency to reason)?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, at one time.

The Pundit — If you tell us how you got rid of this tendency to reason, we might also free ourselves. How did you get rid of it?

Sri Ramakrishna — It just happened, somehow.

Chapter IV

Aim of life is God-realization – the paths to it

God's splendour and the joy of His Bliss – some people don't want the knowledge of His splendour

Thakur is silent for awhile before he resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — The Lord is a kalpataru, a wish-fulfilling tree. One should pray standing near it. Then one receives whatever one asks of Him.

“How many things has the Lord created! He has created the limitless universe; why do I need to know of His limitless splendours? If you have the desire to know them, first attain God, then He Himself will tell you about them. Why do you need to know how many buildings and how many company shares Jadu Mallick has? What you must do is to somehow talk with this gentleman, even though you have to leap over a ditch or entreat him or be pushed aside by his gatekeeper. After becoming acquainted with him, he will tell you all

about his wealth if you ask him. Moreover, when you have talked to the gentleman, his officials will also show you respect. (All laugh.)

“There are some who don’t want to know about God’s splendours. Why do I care to know how many litres of wine are in the tavern? I become intoxicated by only one bottle of wine. Why should I desire the knowledge of God’s splendours? I am already intoxicated with just a little wine.”

Path of Jnana Yoga is very difficult – avataras and the like are ever-perfect¹

“Bhakti yoga and Jnana Yoga are both paths to realize God. You may take any path and you will reach Him. The path of bhakti is an easy path. The path of jnana and discrimination, however, is difficult.

“Why reason which of the paths is better? I have been talking to Vijay about it for many days. I said to him, ‘A person used to pray: Oh Lord, please tell me who You are and what Your attributes are.’

“The path of knowledge and discrimination is difficult. Parvati, revealing Her different forms to her father, Giriraj², said: ‘Father, if you want the knowledge of Brahman, associate with holy men.’

“It is not possible to express Brahman in words. The *Rama Gita* says that Brahman can be described only by indirect hints. It is like saying that the ‘cowherd village’ overlooks the Ganges. By saying that the ‘cowherd village’ overlooks the

¹ *Nityasiddhas*

² Himalaya, the king of mountains

Ganges, one indirectly states that the ‘cowherd village’ is on the bank of the Ganges.

“Why should one not attain the direct realization of the formless Brahman? But it is exceedingly difficult. When one renounces all sense-objects – of form, taste, smell, speech and touch – and the mind is merged, only then one attains the inner experience of God¹. But then one knows only this much about Brahman, that It exists.”

The Pundit — ‘astīyopalabdhavya’ – God is experienced as Existence.

Sri Ramakrishna — One must establish a relationship with God to attain Him – either the attitude of a hero, or of a female lover of the Lord², or of a handmaid, or of a child.

Mani Mallick — Only then can one be steadfast in one’s spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna — I lived with the attitude of a female companion of God for many days. I used to say, ‘I am the maidservant of the All-Blissful Mother, Brahmamayi. Oh handmaids, make me your handmaiden. Saying that I am the maidservant of Brahmamayi, I will walk about proudly.’

“There are some who realize God without practicing spiritual disciplines. They are known as *nityasiddhas*, or ever-perfect. On the other hand,

¹ *Bodhebodha*

² Sakhi; gopi of Vraja

those who realize God after practicing spiritual disciplines¹, such as repetition of the Name and other austerities, are called *sadhanasiddha*, perfected by spiritual disciplines. However, there are some devotees who are perfected by God’s grace; they are called *kripasiddha*. For example, when a lamp is brought inside a room that has been lying dark for a thousand years, it is illuminated in a moment.

“And then there are some devotees who suddenly attain God-vision; they are called *hathasiddha*. For example, a poor man’s son is suddenly noticed by a rich man. The aristocrat gives him his daughter in marriage, along with land, house, carriage, servants and maids – he now owns them all.

“And then some devotees are perfected in a dream; they are called *svapnasiddha*. They attain the vision of God in a dream.”

Surendra (laughing) — Then I’ll go to sleep now. I’ll wake up an aristocrat.

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately) — You are already an aristocrat. Add the vowel ‘a’ to the letter ‘k,’ it becomes ‘ka’. It is futile to add another vowel ‘a’ to it. But even if you do, it will still be ‘ka’. (All laugh.)

“The *nityasiddha* is of an altogether different class. He is, for instance, like tinder stick². Rub it a little and it produces fire. Even without rubbing, it

¹ Sadhana

² *Arani* wood; a special kind of wood that produces fire by rubbing

gives fire. The *nityasiddha* realizes God with very little spiritual disciplines, sometimes without performing any spiritual practices at all.

“However, the *nityasiddha*, does practice spiritual disciplines after attaining God. He is like the pumpkin or the gourd plants which first bear fruit, and then flowers.”

The Pundit, hearing of ‘the pumpkin or gourd plant bearing fruit first,’ laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna — And the *nityasiddha* is like the homa bird. Its mother soars high up in the sky. When the chick is born, it falls toward the earth. It grows wings and opens its eyes during the fall – but before striking the ground and hurting itself, it rushes up toward its mother, screaming, ‘Where are you mother, where?’ Remember, Prahlada shed streams of tears of love as soon as he wrote the alphabet ‘K’¹.

Is Thakur describing his own state by his illustration of the tinder stick and the homa bird, in relation to the *Nityasiddha*?

Thakur seems very happy to see the humility of the Pundit. He talks to the devotees about the Pundit’s good nature.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — He has a very fine nature. It is not difficult to drive a nail into a mud wall. But when you try to drive it into a stone wall, its point breaks and no hole appears in the stone. There are people whose spiritual

¹ The alphabet ‘K’ reminded Prahlada of Krishna, his Chosen Ideal

consciousness is not awakened, though they may hear about God a thousand times. They are like a crocodile whose hide remains unaffected even when hit by a sword.

Spiritual practice is better than learning and scholarship – discrimination¹

The Pundit — One can injure a crocodile by thrusting a spear into its belly. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What use is it to read so many scriptures? It is philosophy! (All laugh.)

The Pundit (smiling) — Yes, it is mere philosophy.

Sri Ramakrishna — What use is it to talk a lot? When learning archery, one first aims at a banana tree, then at a reed, next a wick, and then at a flying bird.

“That is why one should first concentrate the mind on the Personal God.

“And then there are devotees who have gone beyond the three gunas. They are called *trigunatita* devotees. For example, Narada and others like him are nitya devotees, devoted to God eternally. Such devotees consider Krishna as the embodiment of Spirit², His Abode as Spirit, and His devotee as Spirit too. To them the Lord is eternal³, His devotee is eternal and His abode is eternal too.

¹ Viveka

² Chinmaya

³ Nitya

“Those who reason and discriminate, saying, ‘Not this, not this,’ don’t believe in God-incarnate¹. Hazra says well: the Divine Incarnation is for the devotee and not for the jnani. The jnani is content with the attitude of ‘Soham².’”

Thakur and the devotees remain silent for awhile.
Now the Pundit speaks.

The Pundit — Sir, how does one get rid of an insensitive attitude — when one sees someone laughing and the mind thinks of the muscles and nerves? Or when seeing someone in sorrow, the mind goes to the nervous system?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — That is why Narayan Shastri used to say that studying scriptures has its pitfalls. Arguing and reasoning may bring about a downfall.

The Pundit — Sir, is there no way out? Please clarify a little.

Sri Ramakrishna — There is a way out. It is discrimination. A song says³ —

Ask — about the Lord — the son called viveka who knows the Real (God) from the unreal phenomenal world.

“The way is: discrimination, nonattachment⁴, and love for God. Without practicing discrimination, one

¹ Avatar

² I am He

³ For complete song, refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter VI of this book

⁴ Vairagya

cannot make a correct statement. Samadhyayi, after expounding religion for some time, said, ‘God is devoid of sweetness and bliss.’ That is like saying, ‘There is a cowshed full of horses at my maternal uncle’s house.’ Do horses live in cowsheds?

(Smiling) “You have now become a *chanabara*¹. It will not only be good for you to remain soaked in syrup for three or four days, but also good for others. Just for three or four days.”

The Pundit (smiling) — The *chanabara* has been burnt into coal.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — No, no. It has taken the brown colour of a cockroach.

Hazra — It has been fried well. It will now soak up the syrup nicely.

**His earlier story – instruction by Totapuri –
significance of the *Gita* – yearn for God**

Sri Ramakrishna — You see, there is no need to read the scriptures a lot. Too much reading inclines one to reason and argue. The Naked One (Totapuri) taught me that the essence of the *Gita* is what you hear when the word *Gita* is repeated ten times. In other words, by repeating ‘*Gita*’ ten times, it becomes ‘*tyagi*,’ renunciation.

“The path is to cultivate discrimination, nonattachment, and love for the Lord. What kind of

¹ Bengali sweetmeat made of fried cheese

love? Such love that you yearn for Him with heart and soul, the way a cow runs longingly after her calf.”

The Pundit — The *Vedas* say exactly the same thing: ‘We call on You the way the cow bellows for its calf.’

Sri Ramakrishna — Weep with yearning for God. If one can renounce everything through developing discrimination and nonattachment, one can have the direct vision of God.

“That yearning brings about God-intoxication, whether you follow the path of knowledge, or of love and devotion. The sage Durvasa was mad with the Knowledge of God.

“There is a great deal of difference between the jnana of a householder and that of an all-renouncing sannyasin. The knowledge of the householder is like the light of an earthen lamp that only lights the room. The householder cannot understand beyond his body, home and family. But the knowledge of an all-renouncing sannyasin is like the radiance of the sun. One can see both inside and outside the room with its light. Chaitanyadeva’s knowledge was like that of the sun — the radiance of the sun of knowledge. Further, he was also endowed with the soothing light of the moon of love and devotion. He had both the Knowledge of the Absolute and ecstatic love for God.”

Is Thakur describing his own state by referring to the state of Chaitanyadeva?

**Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga – bhakti according to
Narada in the age of Kali**

“Affirmation¹ and negation². Love, devotion and feeling for God³ is a positive path; the negative path⁴ is different. You are talking of the path of negation. But it creates a difficult situation in that the guru and the disciple do not see one another as different. Shukadeva went to Janaka for instruction about the knowledge of Brahman. Janaka said, ‘First you have to make an offering of the teacher’s fee⁵. When you have attained the knowledge of Brahman, you will not make any offering because then there will remain no difference between guru and disciple.’

“Both the path of affirmation and negation are ways to realize the same goal – there are numberless beliefs and numerous paths. But there is a special point. According to Narada, bhakti is the injunction for the age of Kali. On this path one first develops love and devotion to God, then it matures into bhava⁶. Higher than bhava is mahabhava⁷ and prema⁸. An ordinary mortal does not attain mahabhava and prema. He who has attained it has attained the Substance, namely realized God.”

¹ *Bhavamukha chaitanya*

² *Abhavamukha chaitanya*

³ Bhakti

⁴ Knowledge and discrimination

⁵ Dakshina

⁶ Matured bhakti, a state of ecstasy

⁷ The highest manifestation of divine love

⁸ Ecstatic love; a state in which the devotee forgets the world and his own body

The Pundit — Sir, when one teaches, one must explain in different ways.

Sri Ramakrishna — When you preach, eliminate the ‘head and tail’¹.

Chapter V

Kali is Brahman, Brahman and his Power are inseparable – harmony of all religions

The Pundit is talking to Mani Mallick, who is a member of the Brahmo Samaj. The Pundit raises strong arguments about the good and bad aspects of the Brahmo Samaj. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot and watches them talk. He smiles. Sometimes he intervenes. “This is the tamasic aspect of sattva²,” he says, “the heroic attitude. This too is needed. One should not keep quiet at the sight of injustice and untruth. You may find that an unchaste woman is trying to take you from your spirituality. You then must assume the heroic attitude. You must say, ‘Why, you witch, you’re trying to harm my spiritual life! I’ll cut you into two pieces right now!’”

Thakur then laughs and says, “Mani Mallick’s faith in Brahmo doctrines is long standing. You wish to convert him to your views. Is it easy to change old tendencies so quickly? There was a Hindu who was a great devotee. He used to worship the Mother of the Universe³ and repeat Her name constantly. When the Muslims conquered the country, they caught this devotee and converted him to Islam, saying, ‘You are now a Muslim. Say Allah. You must only repeat the name of Allah.’ The fellow began to repeat, ‘Allah, Allah,’ with great difficulty. At times he uttered,

¹ That is, focus on the essential thing

² Qualities that lead Godward

³ Jagadamba

‘Jagadamba’ (the name of the Mother of the Universe) in spite of himself. At that, the Muslims decided to kill him. He cried, ‘Save me, Sheikh! Please don’t kill me. I am trying hard to repeat the name of your Allah. But our Mother of the Universe has filled me up to my throat. She is pushing your Allah out.’ (All laugh.)

(To the Pundit, smiling) “Please don’t say anything to Mani Mallick.”

“You know how it is. People have different tastes and can only digest certain kinds of foods. God has created various religions, various faiths – for people of differing capacities. Not everybody is qualified for the knowledge of Brahman. So He has made provision for the worship of God with form. A mother brings home fish for her children and cooks it differently – as fish with curry, as fish sauce and fish with fried rice¹. Not everyone can digest fish with fried rice, so she makes fish curry for him who has a weak stomach. Others like fish sauce, or fried fish. Just as there are people of different temperaments, there is also a difference in their fitness and capacity.”

All remain silent. Thakur says to the Pundit, “Go have the darshan of the deity. Then take a stroll in the garden for awhile.”

It is half past five. The Pundit and his friend rise. They will visit the shrine. Some devotees accompany them.

After some time Thakur and M. walk down together toward the brick ghat on the bank of the

¹ Pilau

Ganges. Thakur says to M., “Baburam now says: What shall I gain by studying?”

Thakur meets the Pundit on the bank of the Ganges. He says, “Are you not going to the Kali Temple? I came to make sure that you do go.” The Pundit is a little embarrassed and says, “Sir, let’s go together to have the darshan of the deity.”

Smiling broadly, Sri Ramakrishna walks toward the Kali Temple through the courtyard. He says, “Listen to a song.” He begins to sing sweetly.

Is my Mother really black? The Naked One, of black hue, illumines my heart.

Reaching the courtyard of the chandni, he says again, “One of the songs says” –

Lighting the fire of jnana in the chamber,

Look at the Mother, the embodiment of Brahman.

Reaching the shrine, Thakur lies prostrate in obeisance. Hibiscus flowers and vilwa leaves have been placed at the holy lotus feet of the Mother. She, the three-eyed one, looks at the devotees with eyes full of affection. Her hand is raised to assure fearlessness. The Mother is clad in a Benares sari with jewelry.

Viewing the holy image, the elder brother of Bhudhar remarks, “I have heard that it was made by the sculptor, Nabin.” Thakur says, “I don’t know about that. What I know is that She is the image of Spirit.”

Thakur, accompanied by the devotees, walks through the natmandir toward the south. Seeing the block for sacrificing goats, the Pundit remarks, “The Mother is not able to see the goats being slaughtered.” (All laugh.)

Chapter VI

Thakur is now returning to his room. He says to Baburam, “Come with us.” M. also joins them.

It is dusk. Thakur comes to the circular verandah west of his room and sits down. He is absorbed in divine emotion – semi-conscious to the external world. Close to him are Baburam and M.

Thakur is having difficulties these days for lack of personal service. Rakhal does not live here now. There are others, but they cannot touch Thakur in all his spiritual states [while offering service]. Thakur says to Baburam with a sign, “Do stay with me. I cannot allow just anybody to touch me in this state. It would be nice if you would stay here¹.”

God-realization and giving up work – a new ‘pot’ – householder devotee and unchaste woman

The Pundit has returned to Thakur’s room after visiting the shrine. From the western circular verandah, Thakur says to him, “Have a little water to drink.” The Pundit says, “I have not yet performed the evening worship.” Immediately Thakur rises and sings, intoxicated with divine emotion –

What is the need of visiting Gaya, Ganges, Prabhas,
Kashi, Kanchi or such holy places

If the lips can utter, ‘Kali, Kali’, Kali,’ when life ebbs
away?

He who calls on Kali at the three hours of dawn, noon
and dusk needs no daily ritualistic worship.

Worship itself follows his footsteps, but can never
overtake him.

¹ Baburam was the embodiment of purity, so could help Thakur with personal service

He can no longer concern himself with repetition of the Name, yajna, worship, or sacrificial fire.

For Madan¹ all worship and rituals mean the blood-red feet of the Mother, the embodiment of Brahman.

Intoxicated with divine love, Thakur says, “How long does one have to perform sandhya²? As long as the mind does not merge in Him when repeating ‘Om’.”

The Pundit — So I will have some water, I can perform sandhya later.

Sri Ramakrishna — I don’t want to disturb the current of your personal routine. One does not renounce till the time is ripe. When the fruit is ripe, the flower falls off by itself. One should not push and tug at a coconut when it is not ripe – that would injure the tree.

Surendra is getting ready to go home. He invites his friends to come along, so that he can take them in his carriage.

Surendra — Mahendra, are you coming?

Thakur is absorbed in ecstasy – he has not come back fully to the normal state of consciousness. He says to Surendra in this state, “Don’t carry more people than your horse can draw.” Surendra pays his obeisance and leaves.

The Pundit leaves to perform evening service. M. and Baburam have to go to Calcutta and they are paying their obeisance to Thakur, who is still in ecstasy.

¹ Author of the song

² Daily service morning, noon and evening, as laid down for the twice-born

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I can hardly speak. You must wait for awhile.

M. sits down, waiting for Thakur's command. Thakur beckons Baburam to sit. Baburam says to M., "Let's stay a little longer." Thakur says, "Fan me a little." Baburam fans him, so does M.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., affectionately) — Why don't you visit more often?

M. — Sir, there is no particular reason. I have been busy at home.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yesterday I came to know Baburam's spiritual ideal. That is why I insist on keeping him here. A bird hatches its egg at the right hour. Do you know who they are¹? They are pure Atman, not yet fallen into the trap of 'lust and greed'.

M. — True, sir. He has no stain yet.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is like a new pot [of clay]. Milk will not sour when put in it.

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — I feel the need to keep Baburam here. I am put in various spiritual states and it is essential that such a person stay with me. Baburam says, 'I can manage to stay permanently only gradually. Otherwise, it will create difficulties

¹ Young men like Baburam who are pure in heart

at home; they will raise a row.' I say to him, 'Come on Saturdays and Sundays.'

By this time the Pundit has returned from performing evening service. He is accompanied by Bhudhar and his elder brother¹. They are ready to eat some refreshments now.

Bhudhar's elder brother says, "Please let us know if we will succeed in spiritual life. What is the way for us?"

Sri Ramakrishna — You are a *mumukshu*². One attains the Lord when one develops yearning for Him. Don't eat the food offered at the death ceremony³. You must live with your family like an unchaste woman. An unchaste woman attends to all her household work with full attention, but her mind remains tied night and day to her paramour. Attend to all your household work, but always keep your mind on the Lord.

The Pundit is eating his refreshments. Thakur asks him to sit to eat.

After the Pundit has finished, Sri Ramakrishna says to him, "You have read the *Gita*, no doubt. It says that there is a special power of God in one who is honoured and respected by all."

The Pundit — Whatever being is glorious, prosperous or powerful, know that to have sprung but from a spark of My splendour⁴.

¹ The elder brother of Bhudar spent his last days alone in a very holy mood at Kashi. He constantly thought about Thakur during those days.

² One with a burning desire for liberation

³ Shraddha

⁴ Yadyadvibhūtimatsattvaṁ śrīmadūrjitameva vā. (Gita 10:41)

Sri Ramakrishna — You have, no doubt, the power of His spark within yourself.

The Pundit — Shall I persevere in the vows that I have taken?

Thakur, reluctantly says, “Yes, you must.” Then he changes the topic to sidetrack the issue.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must accept Shakti¹. Vidyasagar asked, ‘Has God given more power to some?’ I replied, ‘Otherwise, how can one man defeat a hundred men? Why is Queen Victoria respected and honoured if not because of God’s power?’ Then I asked him whether he agreed to this fact. He replied, ‘Yes, I do.’

The Pundit rises to take leave of Thakur and offers him his obeisance by touching his head to the floor. His companions and friends also salute Thakur.

Thakur says, “Please come again. A hemp smoker is happy to be in the company of another hemp smoker. He may even embrace him. When he sees other people, he hides his face from them. A cow licks the body of its own calf. The others, she pushes away with her horns.” (All laugh.)

When the Pundit has left, Thakur laughs and says, “He has become ‘diluted’ in one day. Did you notice his humility, how he accepted everything?”

It is the 7th day of the bright fortnight in the month of Ashada. The rays of the moon fall onto the western verandah. Thakur is still sitting there. M. salutes him. Thakur asks affectionately, “Are you leaving?”

¹ Power of Brahman, personification of the Primal Energy

M. — Yes, sir, I would like to take your leave.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have been thinking that I would visit the homes of the devotees one by one. I shall visit your house one day. What do you say?

M. — That would be very nice, sir.

Section X

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees

Chapter I

Sannyasins should not hoard – Thakur is ‘intoxicated with divine love, full to the brim’

Sri Ramakrishna is at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. He is sitting on the smaller cot in his room, facing east. Devotees are seated on the floor. It is 9 November 1884, 25th of Kartik, the 7th day of the dark fortnight.

It is about midday when M. arrives. He watches the other devotees gather. Vijaykrishna Goswami is accompanied by a number of Brahma devotees. Ram Chakravarty, the priest, is also there. A little later Mahimacharan, Narayan, and Kishori arrive. They are followed by many other devotees.

It is early winter. Thakur had been in need of a shirt and had asked M. for one. M. has brought one shirt of broadcloth and another of a heavier cloth. Thakur had not asked him to bring the thicker shirt.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You had better take that one back and wear it yourself. There is no harm in it. Tell me, what kind of shirt did I ask you to bring?

M. — You asked me to bring an ordinary shirt. You didn't ask me to bring the heavier one.

Sri Ramakrishna — Then please take it back.

(To Vijay and others) “You see, Dwarika Babu gave me a shawl. Later, some Hindustanis [from northwest India] also brought one. I could not accept it.”

Thakur was going to say something more when Vijay began to talk.

Vijay — That is right, sir. One should only accept what is needed. And there must be a man to give it. Who but a man will give?

Sri Ramakrishna — It’s only the Lord who gives. A mother-in-law said to her daughter-in-law, ‘Oh, my child, everybody has an attendant to serve him. It would be nice if there were someone to massage your feet.’ Her daughter-in-law answered, ‘Lord Hari will massage my feet. I do not need anyone else.’ She said this in a spirit of devotion and love for God.

“A fakir went to Emperor Akbar to ask him for money. The Emperor was offering prayers¹ saying, ‘Oh Allah, give me wealth and riches.’ Hearing this, the fakir started to leave, but the Emperor beckoned him to sit down. After he had finished his prayers, he asked the fakir why he had been going to leave. He replied, ‘You were praying for wealth and riches. I thought that if I have to beg, why ask a beggar, why not Allah?’ ”

Vijay — I saw a sadhu in Gaya who never made any effort to obtain food for himself. One day he wanted to feed some devotees. Special wheat flour

¹ Namaz

and clarified butter arrived from somewhere. There were fruits and other foods, too.

Storing for future and three classes of holy men¹

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay and others) — There are three classes of sadhus: superior, mediocre and inferior. The superior class makes no effort to obtain food. The mediocre and the inferior kinds of holy men — among them *dandis*² — beg for alms, saying, ‘Namo Narayana,’ and stand patiently waiting. The inferior sadhus kick up a row if they are not given alms. (All laugh.)

“The superior sadhu has the nature of a python. It does not move — it sits at one place and food comes to it. A young sadhu, who had been a brahmachari from boyhood, went to beg alms. A girl came up to give him some food. Seeing her prominent breasts, the sadhu thought she had abscesses on her chest. He asked about them. The ladies of the family explained to him that the Lord would provide milk through her breasts for an infant to be born to her. The Lord had provided for all this beforehand. Hearing this, the young sadhu was amazed. He said, ‘So there is no need for me to beg for alms. I, too, will have food provided without asking.’”

Some devotees think to themselves, “It will be all right if we, too, make no effort.”

¹ Sadhus

² A sect of sannyasins who always carry a staff with them

Sri Ramakrishna — He who feels the need for effort will have to make it.

Vijay — There is a beautiful story in the Bhaktamala.

Sri Ramakrishna — Please tell it.

Vijay — Would you please tell it yourself?

Sri Ramakrishna — No, you should tell it. I don't remember it well. In the beginning, one should hear these things, so earlier I used to hear all this.

Thakur's state of mind – contemplation on Rama – signs of highest spiritual knowledge¹ and ecstatic love

Sri Ramakrishna — I am in a different state of mind now. Hanuman said, 'I don't know the lunar date, nor the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.'

“The chatak bird wants only pure water. It may be dying of thirst, but it must fly high in the sky and drink there. The Ganges, the Jamuna and the seven seas are all full of water, but it will not drink the water of the earth.

“Rama and Lakshmana visited Pampa lake. Lakshmana saw a crow trying again and again to drink water, but it did not actually drink. When asked about it, Rama said, 'Brother, this crow is a great devotee of God. It repeats the name of Rama night and day. It is dying of thirst, yet it is not

¹ Purna jnana

drinking because it thinks that if it drinks, its repetition of the Name will be interrupted. On a full moon night, I asked Haladhari, ‘Brother, is it the night of the new moon?’ (All laugh.)

(Smiling) “Yes, it is true. I had heard that a characteristic of perfect spiritual knowledge is that one does not distinguish the nights of the full moon¹ and the new moon². How could Haladhari believe it? He said, ‘This is the age of Kali. He cannot distinguish between the new moon and full moon. And people still respect him!’ ”

While Thakur is talking, Mahimacharan enters.

Sri Ramakrishna (respectfully) — Come in. Please come in. Take a seat.

(To Vijay and the other devotees) “In such a state of mind, one doesn’t remember dates. The other day there was a religious festival at Beni Pal’s garden. I forgot the date. I don’t remember the last day of the month, when I am going to repeat the Lord’s Name with great earnestness³. (After reflecting for a few minutes) But I do remember that a certain person is coming to see me.”

Where does Sri Ramakrishna’s mind dwell – God-realization and inspiration

“Such a state comes when one’s mind is fixed one hundred percent on the Lord. Rama said to Hanuman, ‘You have brought a report about Sita.

¹ Purnima

² Amavasya

³ It is auspicious to repeat the Name of God on the last day of the month

How did you find her? Please tell me.’ Hanuman said, ‘Rama, I saw that it was only Sita’s body lying there – no mind or soul in it. She has surrendered her whole mind and soul at your feet, so it was only her body lying there. The God of death¹ was hovering around, but he was helpless. It was just her body lying there; there was no mind or soul in it.’

“One acquires the nature of the ideal one meditates upon. By meditating on the Lord night and day, one attains His nature. A salt doll went to fathom the ocean; it became one with it.

“What is the purpose of studying holy books or scriptures? It is the realization of God. Somebody opened a sadhu’s book to see what was in it. There was nothing written but the name of Rama – on every page. Nothing else.

“When one develops love for God, one feels spiritually inspired by small things. One reaps the fruit of millions of sandhyas², by just pronouncing the name of Rama once.

“A peacock is inspired to see clouds – it spreads its wings and dances full of joy. Radha also used to become inspired when she saw a cloud. The memory of Krishna would awaken in her mind.

“Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was passing close to the village of Mera. He heard that drums were made of the clay from that village. He was completely overwhelmed with divine emotion

¹ *Kala*; Yama

² Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon and sunset by orthodox Hindus

because drums are played at the time of the devotional singing of the Lord's name.

“Who gets such divine inspiration? One who is rid of worldly wisdom. When the sap of attachment is completely dried up, one attains the inspiration of God in no time. A wet match stick will not strike fire, even if you rub it a thousand times. But when it is dry, it at once strikes fire when rubbed just a little.”

After God-realization, self-surrender comes, and a steady wisdom in sorrow and death

“The body, of course, is subject to happiness and sorrow. He who has realized God surrenders his mind, body, prana¹ and soul, all these, to Him. Before taking a dip in Pampa lake, Rama and Lakshmana thrust their bows into the earth near the lake. After his bath Lakshmana saw that his bow was smeared with blood. Seeing it, Rama said, ‘Look, brother, some living being seems to have been injured.’ Lakshmana dug in the earth and saw a big frog half dead. Full of compassion, Rama said, ‘Why didn’t you make a noise? We would have tried to save you! When a snake seizes you, you croak loudly!’ The frog said, ‘Rama, when I am seized by a snake, I croak loudly, ‘Rama save me, save me! Oh Rama!’ Now when I see that Rama himself is killing me, I don’t say anything.’”

¹ Vital breath

Chapter II

How to remain in one's real Self? Why is the path of union with God through knowledge¹ difficult?

Thakur is silent for awhile and is looking at Mahima and the other devotees.

Thakur has heard that Mahimacharan does not believe in the idea of the guru, so he changes the topic of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — One should have faith in the words of the guru. There is no need to consider the guru's character. A saying goes, 'Though my guru visits a tavern, he is yet my ever blissful guru.'

"A person was reading the *Chandi Bhagavata*. He read, 'The broom is no doubt dirty, yet it cleans.'"

Mahimacharan often discusses the Vedanta. His goal is to attain the knowledge of Brahman. He follows the path of jnana, so he discriminates continuously.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — The goal of the jnani is to know the nature of his own real Self. This is jnana. And it is this that is also called liberation. One's own real Self is Parabrahman². Parabrahman and 'I' are one. But one does not know this because of the veil of maya.

"I said to Harish, 'One does not have to do more than this: some basketfuls of earth are lying over gold; all you have to do is remove the earth. That is all.'

¹ Jnana yoga

² The Supreme Brahman

“Devotees retain their I-consciousness, but not jnanis. The Naked One (Totapuri) used to teach how to live in one’s own real Self: merge the mind in the intellect and the intellect in the Atman. Then you will be established in the real nature of the Atman.

“But one’s ‘I’ continues to persist, it does not leave. For instance, think of a limitless sheet of water. There is water all around – above, below, in front, behind, right and left. Within this sheet of water is a pot full of water. Though there is water outside and inside, the pot still remains – one’s ‘I’ is like this pot.”

**His earlier story – thunderbolt in the Kali Temple –
body and character of the knower of Brahman**

“A jnani’s body does not undergo any change after attaining Knowledge. The fire of spiritual knowledge, however, does burn up enemies like lust and the other passions. Long ago a thunderbolt struck the Kali Temple in a rainstorm. I went out and saw that the doors were not affected, but the heads of the screws were broken. The body can be likened to the doors, and such attachments as lust to the screws.

“A jnani only likes spiritual talk. He is greatly troubled to hear about worldly things. A man of the world is in a different class. His turban of ignorance never disappears. He resumes the same worldly talk after having taken a detour for awhile.

“The *Vedas* talk of the seven spiritual planes. When the mind of the jnani rises to the fifth plane, he likes to hear nothing but talk on God. He cannot

talk of anything else – only words of knowledge come as instruction from his mouth.”

Is Sri Ramakrishna describing his own state? He adds, “The *Vedas* talk of Sat-chit-ananda Brahman. That Brahman is neither one nor two. It is between one and two. One can neither say, ‘It exists’ nor ‘It does not exist’. It is between ‘existence’ and ‘non-existence’.”

Sri Ramakrishna and union with God by the path of love and devotion¹ – loving devotion brings God-realization

Sri Ramakrishna — One attains God by developing an intense attachment², or by cultivating love for Him. Devotion acquired through ritualistic worship³ goes as easily as it comes. What is ritualistic worship? It consists of repeating the Name so many times a day, meditating for a certain period of time, performing so many sacrifices⁴ and homa for a certain duration, worshipping with so many articles, and repeating a certain mantra during puja – it is as easy to lose as to get. So many people say, ‘Oh brother, I have eaten nothing but *havishya*⁵ for so long; I have worshipped the Deity so many times at my home – but to what avail?’

“But intense devotion⁶ is never lost. Who gains such passionate devotion? He who has performed

¹ Bhakti Yoga

² Raga Bhakti

³ *Vaidhi bhakti*

⁴ Yajna

⁵ A holy food consisting of boiled rice with clarified butter

⁶ Raga Bhakti

many austerities in an earlier life, or he who is ever-perfect¹. It is like, while clearing weeds and rubbish in a dilapidated house, one comes across a fountain fitted with a pipe. It was lying covered by earth and red dust but as soon as they are removed, water begins to gush out.

“They who have intense devotion do not say, ‘Brother, I have lived on *havishya* for so long, but what have I gained?’ They who take up farming for the first time, give up their land if they fail to get a crop. But a hereditary farmer will persist in farming, whether there is a crop or not. Their ancestors have practiced farming, so they know that farming will bring them food.

“They who have intense devotion have real and sincere love for God. He takes their burden on Himself. When you are admitted to a hospital, the physician does not discharge you until you are cured.

“They who are held by the Lord need have no fear. A boy who holds his father’s hand while walking on the balk of a field may fall if he loosens his grip for lack of caution. But if the father is holding the hand of his son, he does not fall.”

**One talks only of God when one develops loving
devotion – renunciation of the world and living as a
householder**

“What is not possible when one has faith in God? He who has genuine faith believes in God with form and the Formless One – Rama, Krishna, and

¹ *Nityasiddha*

Bhagavati (Mother of the Universe) – in all of them.

“When I was going to my village (Kamarpukur), a hailstorm began. There was also the danger of dacoits lurking in the fields. I began to utter the names of all the deities: Rama, Krishna and Bhagavati. And then I called out, ‘Hanuman!’ I called out the names of all the gods and goddesses. What does that mean?”

“Do you know what it is like? When a servant or a maid goes to the market to buy supplies, he counts money taken from the master, saying, ‘Here is money for potatoes, here is money for brinjals and this money is for fish.’ The money for all the articles is taken separately – and then mixed up.

“When one develops love for God, one likes to talk only of Him. One begins to speak and to hear only of one’s beloved.

“A worldly person’s mouth begins to water if somebody praises his son. The father immediately says, ‘I say, bring some water for your uncle to wash his feet.’

“They who like guavas are very happy to hear good things about them. If, however, someone talks disparagingly of them, he might suddenly say, ‘Oh! Has anybody in your fourteen ancestral generations ever grown guavas?’ ”

Thakur is saying the following to Mahimacharan since the latter is a householder.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — Why renounce the world altogether? It is enough if one gets rid of

attachment. But you need to practice spiritual disciplines. You have to fight with your senses.

“Besides, it is more convenient to fight a battle from within the fort. One receives a lot of help from the fort. The world is a place for enjoyment. One should enjoy it, and then quickly give up one article of enjoyment after the other. Once I had a desire to wear a golden chain around my waist. I even got one and put it on – but I took it off immediately.

“I ate some onion and began to discriminate in this way – my mind, this is what is called onion. I moved it around in my mouth for awhile, first on one side and then on the other. I spat it out after making it touch the mouth on all sides.”

Chapter III

In the joy of devotional songs

A musician is coming today for community singing of hymns¹.

Thakur asks the devotees every now and then, “Where is the musician?”

Mahima — We are quite all right as we are.

Sri Ramakrishna — But why, my dear sir? We get this all year long.

Somebody from outside the room says, “The singing party has come! The musician has arrived!”

¹ Kirtan

Full of joy, Sri Ramakrishna asks, “Where is he?”

A mat is spread on the long southeastern verandah of the room. Sri Ramakrishna says, “Sprinkle a little Ganges water. So many worldly people have walked this verandah.”

The wife and daughters of Pyari Babu, a resident of Bali, arrive after visiting the Kali Temple. They wish to hear the kirtan when they see the preparations being made for it. Someone says to Thakur, “They are asking if there is enough space for them in the room. Can they sit here?” Listening to the devotional songs, Thakur says, “No, no.” He means that there is not enough room.

Just at this moment Narayan arrives. He salutes Thakur.

Thakur says to him, “Why have you come? You had such a beating from the members of your family.” Narayan goes toward Thakur’s room. Seeing this, Thakur beckons Baburam to give him something to eat.

Narayan enters the room. Suddenly Thakur rises and follows. He wants to feed Narayan with his own hands. After doing so, he comes back and sits on the verandah where the devotional songs are being sung.

Chapter IV

Thakur enjoys devotional songs in the company of devotees

A number of devotees have arrived: Vijay Goswami, Mahimacharan, Narayan, Adhar, M., the Younger Gopal, and some others. Rakhal and Balaram are still in holy Vrindavan.

It is between three and four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is listening to the songs on the verandah. Narayan comes and sits close to him. Other devotees surround them.

At this moment Adhar enters. Thakur seems excited to see him. When Adhar sits down, after having paid his obeisance, Thakur beckons him to come nearer.

The musicians finish singing and the session comes to a close. The devotees stroll in the garden. Some of them go toward the temples of Mother Kali and Radhakanta to see the evening services¹.

When evening worship is over, the devotees return to Thakur's room.

They again arrange for the singing of hymns in Thakur's room. Thakur is full of enthusiasm. He says, "Bring a lamp." Two lamps light the room brightly.

Thakur says to Vijay, "Why are you sitting there? Move over here."

The tempo of the kirtan rises in crescendo. Thakur becomes intoxicated and begins to dance. The devotees surround him and also dance. Vijay's cloth drops off while he is dancing. He is not conscious of it.

When the song ends, Vijay looks for his key, which he had dropped somewhere. Thakur says, "A special divine sound resounds here." Saying this, he laughs and then says to Vijay, "Why bother about it?" (In other words, Vijay has nothing to do with keys anymore.)

Kishori salutes Thakur and takes his leave. Thakur, full of affection for him, touches his chest with his hand and says, "Do come again." His words are full of tenderness. After awhile Mani and Gopal come and salute him – they are also preparing to leave. Thakur speaks to them with the same

¹ Arati

affection, as if his words were dripping honey. He says, “Leave tomorrow morning. You may catch cold at night.”

In the company of devotees

Mani and Gopal do not leave, but decide to stay the night. They sit on the floor with a couple of other devotees. After awhile, Sri Ramakrishna says to Ram Chakravarty, “Ram, where is the other foot mat that was here?”

Thakur has not had time to rest the whole day. Where could he go, leaving the devotees behind? Now he goes out for awhile. Returning to his room, he sees Mani writing down the words of a song being spoken by Ramlal.

Redeem me, O Redeeming Mother!

I am so afraid of Yama, the god of death.

Thakur asks Mani what he is writing. Being told that it is a particular song, he says, “This is a very long song.”

Thakur takes a little farina pudding with one or two *luchis*¹ at night. He asks Ramlal, “Do you have any more farina pudding?”

Having written a line or two, Mani does not write any more of the words of the song.

Thakur, sitting on a small carpet on the floor, eats the pudding.

Then he returns to the smaller cot and sits there, while M. sits down on the foot mat lying near the cot and talks to him. When he talks about Narayan, Thakur becomes absorbed in divine emotion.

¹ Fried bread

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you see Narayan today?

M. — Yes sir. His eyes were full of tears. I felt like weeping when I saw his face.

Sri Ramakrishna — I feel the love a parent feels for his child¹ when I see him. They thrash him at home for coming here. He has nobody to defend him. [A song goes —]

O Kubja², there is none who can make you understand.

There is nobody to defend Radha.

M. (smiling) — The other day he left his books at Haripada's house and came here.

Sri Ramakrishna — It was not right for him to do that.

Thakur is silent. After awhile he talks again.

Sri Ramakrishna — You see, he has much substance in him. Otherwise, how could I have been drawn to him even though I was listening to the singing of hymns? I left the devotional singing to come to the room to see him — such a thing has never happened before.

Thakur is silent. After awhile he speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna — In a state of ecstasy, I asked him how he was. He just said, 'I am very happy.'

¹ *Vatsalya*

² The hunchback woman

(To M.) Buy something for him to eat from time to time – feed him lovingly, as a son.

Sri Ramakrishna now talks about Tejchandra.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Ask him what he thinks of me – does he think of me as a jnani? I heard that Tejchandra is very reserved. (To Gopal) Look, tell Tejchandra to come here on Saturdays and Tuesdays.

Thakur is sitting on the floor, eating farina pudding. A lamp is burning on a lamp-stand close to him. M. is sitting close by. Thakur says, “Are there any sweets?” M. had brought sandesh made of fresh raw sugar. He says to Ramlal, “Some sandesh is lying on the shelf.”

Sri Ramakrishna — Where is the sandesh? Bring it here.

M. looks on the shelf for the sandesh, rather confused. He does not find it there. It all seems to have been served to the devotees. Embarrassed, he comes back and sits again near Thakur. Thakur speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, I may visit your school once.

M. guesses that Thakur wants to visit the school to see Narayan. So, he says, “It would be all right for you to visit our home.”

Sri Ramakrishna — No, I am thinking of something else. Do you know what? I want to see if there are other worthy boys in your school.

M. — You must certainly visit the school. Others visit, so you can also visit the school.

Having finished his meal, Thakur sits on the smaller cot. A devotee prepares a smoke for him. Thakur smokes. In the meantime M. and Gopal, still on the verandah, eat chapattis, lentils and other refreshments. They decide to sleep in the nahabat.

After the meal M. sits on the foot mat near the cot.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — If there are pots and pans in the nahabat, you may sleep in this room.

M. — Very well, sir.

Chapter V

With the attendant

It is ten or eleven at night. Thakur is resting on the smaller cot, leaning against a pillow. Mani is sitting on the floor while Thakur talks to him. A lamp is burning near the wall of the room on the lamp-stand mentioned before.

Thakur is the ocean of motiveless grace. He allows Mani to serve him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look, my feet are aching. Can you massage them a little?

Mani sits next to Thakur's feet on the smaller cot and, taking his two feet on his lap, strokes them gently. Thakur talks to him every now and then.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — How did you like the conversation today?

Mani — Sir, it was very good.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Did you like the story about Emperor Akbar?

Mani — Yes, sir. It was very good.

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me what you liked about it.

Mani — A fakir went to see Emperor Akbar while Akbar was offering Namaz. In his prayers he was asking the Lord for wealth and riches. Hearing this, the fakir tried to leave the room quietly. When asked by Akbar why he was leaving, he said, 'If I have to beg, why should I beg of a beggar?'

Sri Ramakrishna — And what else did we talk about?

Mani — We talked a lot about saving for the future.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did we say about saving for the future?

Mani — As long as one feels he should make an effort, he should make the effort. How nicely you told us about hoarding in Sinti!

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me about it.

Mani — God takes upon himself the burden of one who depends on Him — like a guardian taking the whole burden of a minor. And this we heard: a young boy cannot find for himself a place to sit at a feast. Somebody else shows him a seat to partake of the feast.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, that isn't correct. When a father holds the hand of his son and leads him, the son does not fall.

Mani — And today you talked of three types of sadhus. A superior sadhu is one who does not move about seeking his food. You also talked of a young sadhu who, when he saw the breasts of a girl, said, 'Why does she have sores on her chest?' You also said many other wonderful things — these were the last things you talked about.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What were they?

Mani — One was the fable of the crow of Pampa lake. It repeated the name of Rama night and day, so when it went to the lake to quench its thirst, it couldn't drink the water. And about the book of a particular sadhu — only 'Om, Rama' was written on every page of the book. And also what Hanuman said to Rama.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did he say?

Mani — He said that he had come there after seeing Sita. But only her body was lying there; her

mind and soul were both surrendered at Rama's feet.

“And you also told the story of the chatak bird. It does not drink any water but pure water [of rain that falls at a particular conjunction of stars].

“And about Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga.”

Sri Ramakrishna — What was that?

Mani — As long as one is conscious of 'the pot,' the idea that 'I am a pot' persists. As long as one is conscious of one's 'I,' one cherishes the idea, 'I am a devotee, You are Bhagavan.'

Sri Ramakrishna — No. Whether you are conscious of 'the pot' or not, 'the pot' continues to exist. The 'I' doesn't leave you. Reason it out a thousand times, one's 'ego' does not vanish.

Mani is silent for awhile. He again talks.

Mani — You had a conversation with Ishan Mukherji in the Kali Temple. I was very fortunate to be present to hear it.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Yes. Let me hear what we talked about.

Mani — You said that work is only the first chapter of human life. You asked Sambhu Mallick, 'Suppose the Lord appears before you, will you ask Him to provide hospitals and dispensaries?'

“And you said something else that was special – God doesn’t reveal Himself as long as one is attached to work. You said this to Keshab Sen.”

Sri Ramakrishna — What?

Mani — As long as a child sucks on a pacifier, forgetful of its mother, the latter finishes her cooking. But when the child throws the pacifier away and begins to cry, the mother takes the rice pot off the fire and goes to the child.

“And you talked about something else, too, that day. Lakshmana asked, ‘Where can one see God?’ After explaining in many ways, Rama said, ‘Brother, when you see burning love and devotion¹ in a man – when he laughs, cries, dances and sings, intoxicated with ecstatic love – know that I dwell there.’”

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah! How beautiful!

Thakur is silent for awhile.

Mani — You talked to Ishan only about turning away from worldliness. Since then many people have gained some awareness and are inclined to reduce their duties. You said, ‘Ravana died in Lanka while Behula cried her heart out².’

Thakur laughs loudly.

¹ *Urjita bhakti*

² Behula was unrelated to Ravana and lived many years later. This saying shows how man gives way to totally irrelevant matters.

Mani (very humbly) — Well, sir, isn't it right to reduce one's duties and the hustle and bustle of life?

Sri Ramakrishna — But it is a different matter if you come across a sadhu or a poor man. You must serve him.

Mani — And that day you spoke rightly to Ishan about his flatterers – that they are like vultures falling on a carcass. You once said this to Pundit Padmalochan too.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, I said this to Vamandas of Ulo.

After awhile, Mani sits on the foot mat near the smaller cot.

Thakur feels sleepy. He says to Mani, "You may go and rest now. Where is Gopal? Please shut the door."

The next day is Monday. Sri Ramakrishna has left his bed very early in the morning to chant the holy names of the deities. Now and then he glances at the Ganges. The morning arati is being performed in the temples of Kali and Radhakanta. Mani has slept on the floor in Thakur's room. He, too, has left his bed to watch and hear the worships.

After his morning oblations, he comes and sits near Thakur.

Thakur has finished his bath. He goes to the Kali Temple with Mani. Thakur asks him to lock the door of his room.

Reaching the Kali Temple, Thakur takes a seat. He offers flowers, sometimes on his own head, sometimes at the lotus feet of Mother Kali. He fans

the Mother with the *chamara*¹. Then he returns to his room and asks Mani to unlock the door. He enters the room and sits down on the smaller cot. He is absorbed in divine ecstasy and repeats the holy name of the deity. Mani sits alone on the floor.

Now Thakur begins to sing. Intoxicated with divine emotion, is he trying to teach Mani, through the song, that Kali is none other than Brahman? And that Kali is both with attributes and without attributes? And She is without form and She is also with infinite forms?

Song – Is there anybody who knows Kali, She who is the consort of *Kala*²? Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her³.

Song – All this is the sport of my mad Mother (whose *maya*⁴ has deluded the three worlds). All this is the infallible secret play of that lady⁵.

Song — O Kali, who can know You? You have infinite forms.

You are Supreme Knowledge, You are timeless and primeval; You are the breaker of the bonds of the world.

You are Shiva's consort. You enthrall the mind of Govinda. You are the bestower of divine knowledge and of salvation. You fulfill the desires of the mind.

You are Sri Radha who resides in the heart of Sri Krishna. You are the daughter of the mountains. O Sarada, grant us a boon.

Song – O Mother, the Redeemer, take me across quickly this time.

¹ A fan made of the white hair from the tail of the chamari yak, used in Hindu ritual worship

² The Spirit of Eternity

³ For complete song, see Section I, Chapter V of this volume

⁴ Nescience

⁵ For complete song, see Section XX, Chapter II of Volume II

I am dying in fear of the God of Death¹.

O, Mother of the Universe, preserver and enchantress of the world, and its begetter.

You took birth from Yashoda's womb and participated in the Lord's divine sport.

As Radha You sported and enjoyed Yourself in Vrindavan with Krishna, the beloved of Vraja.

Full of sweetness, You took delight in the rasa and participated in the divine sport.

You are Shiva's consort; You are the Mother, the heartthrob of Govinda. You dwell in the heart and give spiritual salvation.

You are eternal. You are Ishani, ever full of bliss; You assume all forms; You have attributes and yet You are attributeless. You are ever the beloved of Shiva. Who can know Your greatness?

Mani thinks to himself: If Thakur would only sing this song –

O Mother, I have seen Your crimson feet.

I shall now never forget You, even though You may try to trick me.

How wonderful! As soon as the idea of the song comes to M.'s mind, Thakur sings it. After some time Thakur asks M., "Well, what do you think of my present state of mind?"

Mani (smiling) — You are in your natural and simple state² of mind.

Thakur sings the refrain of a song –

Till one is simple at heart, one cannot reach God, the Simple One.

¹ Yama

² Sahaja

Section XI

Sri Ramakrishna Attends a Play about Prahlada's Life

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

Today Sri Ramakrishna has come to the Star Theatre to see a play about Prahlada's life. He is accompanied by M., Baburam, Narayan and others. The Star Theatre is on Beadon Street. (Later, the Emerald Theatre and Classic Theatre were performed on this stage.)

It is Sunday, 14 December 1884, the 30th of Agrahayana, the 12th day of the dark fortnight. Sri Ramakrishna is seated in a box facing north. The theatre is brightly lit. M., Baburam and Narayan are sitting close to Sri Ramakrishna. Girish has just come to the box. The play has not yet begun. Thakur speaks to Girish.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Ah! You write very good plays!

Girish — But sir, I have not internalized them. I have just written them.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, you have internalized them. The other day I told you that no one can sketch a divine character without love and devotion for God in his heart.

“Assimilation of spiritual truths is a must. I went to see the play ‘*Nava Vrindavan*’ at Keshab’s

house. A Deputy Magistrate who earned eight hundred rupees a month was present. Everybody said, 'He is well versed in the scriptures.' But he was extremely busy with his son – he was very anxious that the boy have a good seat and a nice view of the stage. He did not pay any attention to the spiritual talk that was going on. The son kept asking him questions: 'Father, What is this? What is that?' He was very restless because of the boy. He had only read books; he had not internalized their ideas."

Girish — At times I ask myself, 'Why should I engage myself with the theatre and its activities any more?'

Sri Ramakrishna — No, you must continue. Mankind will learn from your plays.

The play starts. Prahlada has come to school to learn to read and write. At the sight of Prahlada, Thakur affectionately says, "Prahlada, oh, Prahlada!" And he immediately goes into samadhi.

Thakur begins to weep when he sees Prahlada under the feet of an elephant. He again weeps when he sees Prahlada thrown into a furnace.

Lakshmi and Narayana are seated in Goloka¹. Narayana is worried about Prahlada. Watching this scene, Thakur again goes into samadhi.

¹ The heavenly abode of Vishnu

Chapter II

Talk on spiritual matters with the devotees

Signs of God-realization and the way to know God – three classes of devotees

After the play is over, Thakur is taken to Girish's private room in the theatre. Girish asks him, "Would you care to see the play 'Confusion in Marriage'?" Thakur says, "No, why see that after Prahlada's life? I once said to a troupe of actors from Orissa, 'End a performance with religious talk.' It was so nice to hear about God. That it should be followed by 'Confusion in Marriage!' Such a worldly topic! It would take us back to where we started – we would return to our original attitude in the end."

Thakur is talking of God with Girish and other devotees. Girish asks him, "Sir, how did you like the play?"

Sri Ramakrishna — I saw that He Himself had become all of it. I saw the actors in the play as the very presence of the All-Blissful Mother. I saw the actors playing the parts of the cowherds in Goloka as the manifestation of Narayana Himself. He Himself had become all. But whether or not one has genuinely seen God is indicated by certain signs. One such sign is that one is in bliss – he shows no hesitancy. Such a person is like an ocean that has waves on its surface, but deep, still waters below. He who has attained the vision of God acts sometimes like a mad man and sometimes like an unclean spirit¹. He doesn't distinguish between purity and impurity. Sometimes he acts like an

¹ *Pisacha*

inert object, for he becomes speechless when he sees God both within and without. Sometimes he is like a child wandering around freely with no attachment, [naked] with his cloth under his arm. He sometimes frolics like a boy, at other times he conducts himself as a young man, working or teaching mankind with the strength of a lion.

“An embodied being¹ cannot see the Lord because of his ego. When the sky is overcast, one cannot see the sun. But because one cannot see the sun does not mean that there is no sun. The sun certainly exists.

“But there is no harm in the ego of a child; on the contrary, it is beneficial. If you eat spinach greens you may fall ill, but hinc² leaves are good for the health. So hinc should not be considered in the same category as spinach greens. Sugar candy, similarly, should not be thought of as an ordinary sweet. Sweets bring indigestion, but sugar candy does not produce phlegm.

“That is why I said to Keshab Sen, ‘If I tell you more than I have already said, you will not be able to hold your organization together.’ Keshab was frightened. Then I said to him, ‘There is no harm in the ‘ego of a child,’ or the ‘ego of a servant.’

“Those who have realized God see that it is God who has become the universe and its living beings. He has become all. They are superior devotees.”

¹ Jiva

² A kind of aquatic plant eaten as leaves

Girish (smiling) — God has become all – but a little ego persists that is not harmful.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Right, there is no harm in it. This little bit of ego exists to enjoy God. It is only when there is the distinction between me and you that one can enjoy – like in the attitude of the Master and the servant.

“And then there are mediocre devotees. They see that God exists in everyone as the Inner Controller¹. The devotee of the lowest class says, ‘God exists. He dwells there, beyond, in the sky.’ (All laugh.)

“When I saw the cowherd boys in Goloka, I felt that God had become everything. He who has seen Him knows truly that God Himself is the doer, that He indeed does everything.”

Girish — Sir, I have understood that well, that it is indeed God who does everything.

Sri Ramakrishna — I say, ‘Mother, I am an instrument and You are the Being who uses the instrument. I am inert and You make me conscious. I act as You make me act. I speak as You make me speak.’ The ignorant man says, ‘I am responsible for doing some actions and God is responsible for others.’”

¹ *Antaryami*

Karma Yoga purifies one's mind-stuff¹ – why harp on sin? *Ahetuki*² devotion

Girish — Sir, since I am not really doing anything (it is God who works), why should I work at all?

Sri Ramakrishna — No, my dear, work is good. If you have prepared the soil, it will grow whatever you sow in it. But work must be performed without any expectation of reward³.

“There are two kinds of paramahamsas: one follows the path of jnana, the other follows the path of intense love for God⁴. Jnanis are self-seeking – their goal is their own realization. The paramahamsa who follows the path of love, like Shukadeva, first attains God and then teaches mankind. There are some who wipe their mouths after eating a mango, and then there are those who share it with others. There are people who bring baskets and spades to dig a shallow well, and when they have dug it, they throw the spades and baskets in the well. There are others who save their baskets and spades so that others of the community may use them. Shukadeva and others like him preserve their ‘baskets and spades’ for the use of others. (To Girish) You must keep them for the use of others.”

Girish — Please bless me, sir.

¹ Chitta

² Love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul

³ *Nishkama* karma

⁴ Prema

Sri Ramakrishna — Have faith in the name of the Divine Mother and you will attain everything.

Girish — But I am a sinner.

Sri Ramakrishna — The rascal who repeats, 'Sin, sin,' becomes a sinner.

Girish — Sir, the spot where I sit becomes impure.

Sri Ramakrishna — What do you mean? If a light is brought into a room that has been dark for a thousand years, does it take long to light the room? Is it not illuminated immediately?

Girish — You have blessed me.

Sri Ramakrishna — If you believe it sincerely. What more can I say? As for me, I merely eat, drink and repeat the Divine Mother's name.

Girish — I am not so sincere. Please give me sincerity.

Sri Ramakrishna — Who am I? Had there been Narada or Shukadeva...

Girish — I cannot see Narada before me. What I receive comes directly from you.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Well, you have faith!

Everyone remains silent for awhile. Now they begin to talk again.

Girish — I have only one special desire: spontaneous love for God¹.

Sri Ramakrishna — Only Ishvarakotis have such love. It is not for ordinary men.

Everyone sits silently. Thakur begins to sing absent-mindedly. His gaze is turned upward.

Does everyone attain the treasure of Shyama? Does everyone get the treasure of Kali?

The ignorant mind does not know what She is.

Even Shiva with all his austerities cannot fix his mind on Her crimson feet.

The riches and wealth of Indra and the other gods is a trifle compared to Her love.

If Mother Shyama turns to one and casts Her glance, one lives in eternal Bliss.

The kings of yogis, the best of munis, and Indra are unable to meditate on Her feet.

But the worthless Kamalakanta still yearns for Her feet.

Girish — But the worthless Kamalakanta still yearns for Her feet.

Chapter III

The way to realize God – yearn for Him

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — One attains God when one has developed intense dispassion². One's heart and soul must yearn for Him. A disciple

¹ *Ahetuki bhakti*

² *Vairagya*

asked his guru how he could attain God. The guru told him to come with him. He took him to a pond and held him under water. After awhile he released him and asked, 'How did you feel under water?' The disciple answered, 'I was panting for breath – as though I were going to die!' The guru said, 'Now listen, you will attain God when your heart and soul are just as restless for Him.'

"So I say that God can be attained when one combines the force of these three attractions: the worldly man's attraction for his possessions, the chaste wife's attraction for her husband, and the attraction of a mother for her child. One immediately attains the vision of God when one loves Him with the combined force of these three attractions.

Call on Mother Shyama, O my mind, with a real cry!

I shall see then that She will not hold Herself from me.

"God will certainly grant His vision if you call on Him with real longing."

Harmony of Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga – bhakti according to Narada enjoined for the age of Kali

"The other day I told you the meaning of bhakti – to worship God with your body, mind and speech. 'With the body' means to worship and serve Him with your hands, to go to His shrine with your feet, to hear the chanting of His name and glories with your ears, and to see His image with your eyes. 'With the mind' means to contemplate and meditate on Him constantly, and to remember and think

about His divine sport. ‘With speech’ means to sing hymns and chant His name and glories.

“Bhakti, according to Narada, is suited for the age of Kali: One must constantly chant His name and glories. Those who have no time should single-mindedly chant His name morning and evening, repeating, ‘Haribol¹, Haribol,’ while clapping their hands.

“There is no pride in the ego of devotion². It does not create ignorance; on the contrary, it helps one to realize God. This ego is not to be counted as an ordinary ego – just as hinche greens are not ordinary greens, which make you ill. By eating hinche leaves, one is cured of an excess of bile³ – it does one good. Sugar candy is not like ordinary sweets. Sweets are generally harmful, but sugar candy removes acidity.

“Single-minded devotion⁴ leads to love for God. When love for God matures, one goes into bhava⁵. When it becomes intense, one goes into Mahabhava⁶. And lastly one develops prema⁷.

“Prema is a cord which ties one to the Lord – He cannot escape when one develops prema. An ordinary man can only attain bhava. Only an *Ishvarakoti* can have Mahabhava and prema. Chaitanyadeva attained it.

¹ A Vaishnava expression meaning “Chant the Lord’s name”

² Bhakti

³ One of the humours of the body, namely pitta

⁴ Nishtha bhakti

⁵ Ecstasy

⁶ Highest manifestation of divine love

⁷ A state in which the devotee forgets the world and his own body

“What is Jnana Yoga? It is the path by which one realizes the nature of one's own real Self – the awareness that Brahman is one's own real Self.

“Prahlada would sometimes be aware of his identity with Brahman; at other times, he would see God as one Being and himself as another – in the latter state he would remain in a mood of love and devotion for God.

“Hanuman said, ‘O Rama, sometimes I see that You are the whole and I a part of You. At other times I see that You are the Lord and I am Your servant. But Rama, when I attain the knowledge of Reality¹, I perceive that You are indeed I and I am You.’”

Girish — Ah!

Can one attain God even in family life?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why can't one attain God in family life! But one must develop discrimination² and non-attachment³. The Lord is the Reality and all else is ephemeral – for two days only. This idea must become firmly established in the mind. Swimming on the surface will not do. One must dive deep.

Saying this, Thakur sings –

Dive deep, dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the sea of Beauty.

Search the deepest regions in the sea;

¹ Tattvajnana

² Viveka

³ Vairagya

There you will find the jewel, the wealth of prema (intense love of God).

Within your heart is Vrindavan, the abode of God who is love.

Search and look; search and look; search and look. You will find it.

Then shall burn without ceasing the lamp of divine wisdom.

Who is that Being who steers the boat on land – on land, on solid ground?

Kabir says, ‘Listen, listen, listen! Meditate on the hallowed feet of the Guru (Divine preceptor).’

“And then one must remember this – there is the danger of the crocodiles of lust and the other passions.”

Girish — But I am not afraid of Yama, the god of death.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, but there is the danger of crocodiles – of lust and the rest. That is why one must first rub one’s body with turmeric and then dive – that turmeric is discrimination and non-attachment.

“Only a few attain the knowledge of God¹ in family life. Two kinds of yogis are mentioned: the hidden yogi and the visible yogi. Those who have renounced the world are visible yogis; everyone can recognize them. The hidden yogi cannot be recognized. For example, a maidservant attends to all the work at her master’s house, but her mind

¹ Jnana

remains on her children at home. And then as I told you, a woman of easy virtue attends to all her household chores with great enthusiasm – but her mind remains attached to her paramour. It is very difficult to cultivate discrimination and non-attachment. One cannot easily get rid of the feeling 'I am the doer and all these belong to me'. I saw a Deputy Magistrate who earned a salary of eight hundred rupees a month. A religious discourse was being conducted, but he did not pay the least attention to it. He had brought his son with him and was busy the entire time arranging a good seat for him. And I know another man, I shall not name him, who used to repeat the name of God diligently, but gave false evidence for ten thousand rupees. That is why I say that it is possible to attain God even in the world – but only if you cultivate discrimination and non-attachment.”

Sinners and afflicted, and Sri Ramakrishna

Girish — What will happen to this sinner [meaning himself]?

Thakur fixes his gaze upward and begins to sing this tune in a touching manner –

O my mind! Contemplate Krishna, who gives beauty to man.

You will completely get rid of the fear of Yama.

By contemplating Him, all anxieties and worries of the world vanish.

They who meditate on Tribhanga (the thrice-bent one, Krishna) cross the waves of the world in the twinkling of an eye.

Why have you come to this earth, O my mind?

What will you gain by infusing bad inclinations and defiling your heart?

Says Dasharathi, it is not right that He will drown you.

He who unites his heart with His attains the eternal feet of the Lord.

(To Girish) — ‘Cross the waves of the world in the twinkling of an eye.’

Worship of Mahamaya, the Primordial Power, and the power of attorney

“One attains the vision of God only when Mahamaya¹ steps aside from the door. What you need is the grace of Mahamaya. That is why God’s Power² is worshipped. You see, God is so very near, and yet one does not know Him because Mahamaya stands between. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were walking along [in the forest during their exile]. Rama was leading, Sita was in the middle and Lakshmana was behind her. Rama was only two and a half cubits away, yet Lakshmana could not see him.

“One must cherish a particular attitude toward God while worshipping Him. I have three attitudes: the attitude of a child, the attitude of a maidservant, and the attitude of a female lover of the Lord³. I had the attitude of a maidservant and of a female companion for a long time. I used to dress myself like a woman in a sari and scarf, and I

¹ The Great Power of illusion, or nescience

² Shakti

³ Sakhi bhava

used to put on jewelry. The attitude of a child is very good.

“The ‘heroic’ attitude (of a lover) is not good. The shaven-headed Vaishnava monks and nuns¹, and couples in Tantrik worship² practice the ‘heroic’ attitude – in other words, the male aspirant looks upon the female as Prakriti, and tries to please her through intercourse with her. This kind of attitude often brings a downfall.”

Girish — I had the same attitude once.

Thakur is worried and looks seriously at Girish.

Girish — This is my little obstacle. Please tell me what to do.

Sri Ramakrishna (after thinking for awhile) — Give God your general power of attorney. Let Him do what He wills.

Chapter IV

**God-realization comes after developing sattva guna –
Sat-chit-ananda³ or bliss of divine inebriation⁴**

Sri Ramakrishna is talking about the young boy devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish and others) — In meditation I saw the traits of the young devotees.

¹ *Nedas and nedis*

² Bhairavas and Bhairavis

³ Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute

⁴ *Karanananda*

They have no thought of owning a house; they have no desire to enjoy female companionship. Even those who are married don't sleep with their wives. Do you know what that means? Unless one is rid of rajas and attains pure sattva, the mind does not become fixed on God. And one does not feel love for Him. Nor can one realize Him.

Girish — You have blessed me.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is that? I only said that you would succeed if you were sincere.

While talking, Thakur exclaims, “Anandamayi!¹ Anandamayi!” and passes into samadhi. He remains in that state for a long time. Returning to a somewhat normal state of consciousness, he says, “Where are those rascals?” M. calls Baburam to him.

Glancing at Baburam and the other devotees, Thakur becomes intoxicated with ecstatic love and says, “The bliss of Sat-chit-ananda is indeed good, but what about the bliss of divine inebriation?” Saying this, he begins to sing –

This time I have given my full attention.

I have learned divine fervour² from one well-versed in it.

O Mother, I have found a man from the country which has no night.

And now I can no longer distinguish day and night.

I have rendered barren all ritualistic devotions.

My sleep is broken. Why should I sleep anymore?

I am awake in the sacrifice of yoga.

¹ All-Blissful Divine Mother

² Bhava

Having received the sleep of yoga from You, I have put sleep to sleep.

I have given myself permanent colour with the help of borax and sulphur¹.

Both eyes brush the floor of the temple of my mind.

Says Ramprasad: Knowing the truth that Kali is the Supreme Brahman,

I bowed before both bhakti and salvation, and gave up all ideas of what is righteousness² and what is unrighteousness³.

Thakur sings another song –

What need is there of going to the Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi and Kanchi if the lips can utter 'Kali, Kali' when my life ebbs away?

He who utters Kali in all the three sandhyas⁴ needs no daily ritualistic worship.

Worship itself follows his footsteps but can never overtake him.

Charity, kindness and vows no longer appeal to him.

For Madan, the poet, all worship means the red feet of the Blissful Mother.

Who can know the qualities of the holy name of Kali,

The praises of which are sung by the God of gods, Mahadeva Himself?

“While praying to the Divine Mother, I used to say to Her, ‘Mother, I want nothing else. Pray grant me pure love and devotion⁵.’ ”

¹ Borax and sulphur render paint permanent

² Dharma

³ Adharma

⁴ At dawn, noon and twilight hour

⁵ Bhakti

Thakur is happy to see Girish in a calm mood. He says to him, “This mood of yours is very good. Such a simple and natural¹ mood is best.”

Thakur is seated in the room of the manager of the theatre. Somebody enters and asks him, “Would you like to see the play ‘Confusion in Marriage’? The play is beginning now.”

Thakur says to Girish, “What have you done? Why did you stage a play ‘Confusion in Marriage’ after ‘Life of Prahlada’? It is like serving a bitter vegetable dish² after serving cheese pudding.”

Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace, and women of easy virtue

At the end of the play, Girish instructs the actresses to come and salute Thakur. They all prostrate before him. Some devotees stand nearby, others are sitting as they watch. They are amazed that some of the actresses touch Thakur’s feet. When they do, Thakur says, full of tenderness, “Mother, please stop. Please don’t do that, Mother.”

When they have saluted him and left, Thakur says to the devotees, “All indeed are God in different forms.”

Now Thakur gets into the carriage. Girish and other devotees accompany him and help him sit down.

While getting in, Thakur becomes absorbed in deep samadhi.

Narayan and some other devotees also get into the carriage. It leaves for Dakshineswar.

¹ Sahaja

² Prepared with bitter gourd and other vegetables without adding spices and served in Bengal prior to meals

Section XII

Sri Ramakrishna with the Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar with devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is happy in the company of the devotees. Baburam, the Younger Naren, Paltu, Haripada and a few others are seated on the floor. A young brahmin who has been staying with Sri Ramakrishna for two or three days is also there. It is Saturday, 7 March 1885, 25th day of Phalgun; the time is about 3 o' clock. It is the 7th day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra

The Holy Mother is living in the nahabat these days. Occasionally she comes to Sri Ramakrishna's room to serve him. Mohini Mohan has arrived by hired carriage with his wife and Navin Babu's mother.

The ladies have gone to the nahabat to have the darshan of the Holy Mother and salute her. They have stayed there. They will pay their obeisance to Sri Ramakrishna when the male devotees have gone. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. As he looks at the young devotees, his face beams with joy.

Rakhal is not living in Dakshineswar at the present time. He had been in Vrindaban with Balaram for some months. Since his return, he lived at home.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Rakhal is on 'pension' these days. Since his return from

Vrindaban, he has been staying at home. His wife is there. But he says, ‘I will not take a job, even if I am paid a thousand rupees a month.’

“One day when he was resting here he said, ‘I don’t even like you.’ Such was the exalted state of his mind then.

“Bhavanath is married, but he only talks of spiritual matters with his wife.

“Both of them pass their time talking about God. When I said to him, ‘Have fun with your wife,’ he spoke sharply in anger, ‘What! Shall we live a life of frivolity?’ ”

Sri Ramakrishna is now talking about Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna to the devotees — I haven’t felt the same strong longing for the Younger Naren that I have for Narendra. But the Younger Naren doesn’t have as much yearning as Narendra has.

(To Haripada) “Do you go to Girish Ghosh’s house?”

Haripada — His house is quite close to ours. I often go there.

Sri Ramakrishna — Does Narendra go?

Haripada — Yes, sometimes I see him there.

Sri Ramakrishna — What is his opinion of Girish Ghosh’s view (about Divine Incarnation)?

Haripada — He (Narendra) was defeated in argument.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. He said, 'Girish Ghosh has so much faith, why should I argue with him?'

The brother of Judge Anukul Mukhopadhaya's son-in-law has arrived.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know Narendra?

The brother of the son-in-law — Yes sir. Narendra is an intelligent boy.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Since he has praise for Narendra, he himself must be a good man. Narendra came the other day. He and Trailokya sang, but I found their songs insipid.

Baburam and guarding 'both the worldly and the spiritual' – go beyond knowledge and ignorance

Sri Ramakrishna looks at Baburam and speaks. Baburam is in the entrance class (tenth) in the school where M. is teaching.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Baburam) — Where are your books? Don't you want to study? (To M.) He wants to cling to both the worldly and the spiritual.

"This is very difficult. What use is it to know God only a little? Even Vaishishtha, though a rishi, suffered at the death of his son. Seeing this, Lakshmana was surprised and asked Rama about it. Rama said, 'Brother, what is strange? He who has knowledge also has ignorance.' When a thorn is

embedded in your foot, you have to look for another thorn to pull out the first one. Having done that, you should throw away both thorns. The thorn of jnana is needed to get rid of the thorn of ignorance. And then you should go beyond both.”

Baburam (laughing) — That’s what I want.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — But my boy, can you do it while holding to both? If you really want that, come away.

Baburam (laughing) — Pull me away.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — It was different when Rakhal was here. His father had agreed to it. It would create such a disturbance if these boys lived here.

(To Baburam) “You are faint-hearted. You don’t have enough courage. Just see what the younger Naren says – that he would come again immediately.”

Now Sri Ramakrishna goes and sits with the young devotees on a mat spread on the floor. M. is nearby.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I am looking for one who has renounced lust and greed. When I find some young man, I think that perhaps he might stay with me, but everyone has an excuse.

“A ghost was looking for a companion. If a person dies an unnatural death on Saturday or Tuesday, he becomes a ghost. So, as soon as this

ghost saw that somebody had fallen from the roof or had swooned on one of these days, he would run to him, hoping that the fellow, through an unnatural death, would turn into a ghost and keep him company. But as luck would have it, he saw each one of them survive. He did not find a companion.

“Just see, Rakhal is always talking about his wife. He says, ‘What will happen to her?’ When I put my hand on Narendra’s chest, he half fainted and said, ‘Oh! What have you done to me? I have my father and mother!’

“Why has the Divine Mother kept me in this state? Chaitanyadeva embraced sannyasa – so that everybody would pay him obeisance. Whoever salutes an Incarnation, even once, is liberated.”

Mohini Mohan has brought some sandesh in a straw container for Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna — To whom does this sandesh belong?

Baburam pointed to Mohini Mohan.

Sri Ramakrishna utters “Om,” and touches the sandesh; then he eats a little of it, transforming it into prasad, and gives it to the devotees. To everyone’s surprise, he feeds Naren and a couple of other devotees with his own hand.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — This has significance. The Lord is more manifest in pure souls. When I used to go to the countryside (Kamarpukur), I would feed some of the boys in this way. Chiney Shankhari would say, ‘Why doesn’t he feed us that way?’ How could I? Some of them had affairs with

their brother's wife or some other women. How could I feed them?

Chapter II

His great word about devotees in samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna is swimming in a sea of joy with his devotees around. He sits on the small cot and imitates the manners of a woman kirtan singer¹. The woman singer is in her best dress. She stands, holding a coloured handkerchief in her hand, and coughs as if it were natural and then spits, raising her nose ring. When any important person comes in, she welcomes him, "Come in please," while still singing. At times she raises her arms and uncovers her amulet, armband, bracelet and other jewelry for everyone to see.

Seeing Sri Ramakrishna's imitation, all the devotees burst into laughter. Paltu can't control his laughter. Thakur looks at him and says to M., "Isn't he a child? He is beside himself with laughter!"

Sri Ramakrishna (to Paltu, laughing) — Don't tell your father all this. What little regard he has for me will disappear. He is an 'Englishman²'.

Gossip during japa and dip in the Ganges

(To the devotees) "So many talk about worldly things during their daily prayers and devotions.

"Without uttering a word, keeping their mouths shut, they speak by signs: bring this, take

¹ Kirtaniya

² He means English educated

that away, 'Uh, Huh'. They do all these kinds of things. (Laughter.)

“And some bargain for fish with fishermen while counting their beads. Doing japa, with a finger they point out a particular fish. A ripe time indeed to settle their accounts! (All laugh.)

“Some of them go for a bath in the Ganges, but instead of thinking of God, they gossip about different worldly matters: ‘Your son has been married, what jewelry did they give as a dowry?... So-and-so is very ill... Has so-and-so returned from her father in-law’s house?... So-and-so came to see the girl (for matrimonial purposes). She would give a lot in dowry and have a very festive wedding ceremony... Harish is such a loving boy. He can’t live without me for even a moment... I couldn’t come these many days because I had to settle the marriage of such-and-such girl. I was so busy, you see.’ All this gossip.

“Just see, they have come for a holy dip in the Ganges and talk only about worldly things.”

Sri Ramakrishna looks steadily at Naren and soon goes into samadhi. Is he seeing the presence of God in a pure soul?

The devotees watch Sri Ramakrishna, this image of samadhi. There had been so much laughter, but now the room is still, as if no one were there. His body is motionless, his eyes fixed, and he is sitting with folded hands, as in a picture.

After awhile his samadhi breaks. His breathing had stopped; now he heaves a long sigh. Slowly he gains external consciousness. He looks at the devotees.

He is still in ecstasy. He addresses each devotee to some extent – about his state of mind, or what he will attain. (To the Younger Naren) “I had great longing to see you. You will attain the goal. Do come here once in awhile. Well, what do you prefer? Knowledge, or love and devotion for God?”

The Younger Naren — Only love and devotion for God.

Sri Ramakrishna — To whom will he offer his love, if he doesn’t know Him? (Pointing at M. and laughing) If you don’t know him, how can you offer him your love? (To M.) But since a pure soul has said that he wants only love and devotion, it certainly has some meaning.

“Without inborn tendencies², love and devotion for God does not come spontaneously. This is the mark of prema-bhakti. Jnana-bhakti is love of God based on reasoning. (To the Younger Naren) Let me see your body. Take off your shirt. Let me see. If your chest is fairly broad, you will succeed. Do come here now and then.”

Sri Ramakrishna is still in divine ecstasy. He affectionately addresses each devotee, saying –

(To Paltu) “You, too, will succeed spiritually. But it will take a little more time.”

(To Baburam) “Why don’t I pull you here? Because it would create a row in the end.

¹ Bhakti

² Samskaras

(To Mohini Mohan) “You are already there. Only a little remains. When that is done, all household duties will fall off. But should all of them fall off?”

Saying this, Thakur looks affectionately at him, as if to read the feelings of the innermost recesses of his mind. Was Mohini Mohan thinking that one should give up everything for the sake of God? After awhile Sri Ramakrishna adds, “God keeps a teacher of the holy word¹ tied by a single string. Otherwise, who would propagate the holy word? He keeps this bond to enable him to teach humanity. The Divine Mother has kept you in the world just for this.”

Now he addresses the young brahmin.

**Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga – the state of the
Brahmajnani and that of the liberated in this very life**

Sri Ramakrishna (to the young man) — Give up knowledge and reasoning. Take up bhakti instead. Bhakti is the essence. Have you already been here for three days?

The Young Brahmin (folding his hands) — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Have faith. Depend on Her. Having done this, you will not have to do anything. Mother Kali will do everything.

“Knowledge can go to the outer gate. But love and devotion can enter the palace. The pure soul is unattached. He has both knowledge and ignorance within him, but he is not attached to either. There is fragrance in the air, sometimes good and

¹ The Bhagavata Pundit

sometimes foul, but the air is free from both. Vyasadeva was going to cross the Jamuna. The milkmaids came to the same crossing. They had to go to the other side to sell curds, milk and butter, but there was no boat. How were they to cross? They were standing there wondering how they could cross.

“Just then Vyasadeva said, ‘I am very hungry.’ The milkmaids fed him with milk, cream, and butter. Vyasadeva finished almost all they had.

“Addressing the river Jamuna, Vyasadeva then said, ‘Oh Jamuna! If I have not eaten anything, may your waters part and make a path for us to cross over.’ And this is exactly what happened. The Jamuna divided itself, leaving a path between the waters. Vyasadeva and the gopis crossed over the river by this path.

“The significance of Vyasadeva’s words, that he had eaten nothing, is that he was a pure soul and the pure soul is unattached – it is beyond nature. It has neither hunger nor thirst, neither birth nor death; it is deathless, it never grows old – like mount Sumeru.

“He who has attained this knowledge of Brahman is liberated in this very life. He rightly realizes that the body and the Soul are separate.

“After God-realization one’s identification with the body disappears. One realizes that the body and the Soul are separate – like a dry coconut. When the milk inside it dries up, the kernel becomes separate from the shell. The Atman continues to move about in the body. As soon as the water of

worldliness dries up, one realizes the Self – one knows that the Atman is separate from the body. An unripe betel nut and an unripe almond cannot be separated from their shells.

“But when they are mature, the betel nut and the almond are separate from their shells. When ripe, the juice is dried up. Similarly, on realizing Brahman, the water of worldliness dries up.

“But this knowledge is very difficult to attain. Brahmajnana is not attained by just talking. Some people pretend to have attained it. (Laughing) A certain person used to tell lies, but he said, ‘I have attained Brahmajnana.’ When reprimanded, he retorted, ‘But why not? This world is like a dream. If it is all illusion, is the truth otherwise? Falsehood is, of course, false – but truthfulness is also false.’” (All laugh.)

Chapter III

For establishment of righteousness, I am born age after age¹ – a mystic talk

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with his devotees on a mat spread on the floor. He is smiling. He says to the devotees, “Please stroke my feet a little.” The devotees render him this service. (Laughing to M.) “This service has great significance.”

Placing his hand on his chest, he continues, “If there is anything here, this service will erase all ignorance and illusion completely.”

Then suddenly he goes into a profound mood – perhaps he will reveal a mystic experience.

¹ Dharmasamsthapanarthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge (Gita 4 : 8)

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — There is no outsider here. The other day when Harish was here, I saw Sat-chit-ananda come out of this sheathe¹. It said, ‘I incarnate myself age after age.’ I thought perhaps I was giving vent to my own thoughts, but I kept silent. Again Sat-chit-ananda spoke and said that Chaitanya had also worshipped Shakti.

The devotees listen to Sri Ramakrishna in amazement. Some of them wonder whether God – Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute – is Himself seated before them in the form of Sri Ramakrishna, whether God has once again incarnated Himself.

Addressing M., Sri Ramakrishna says, “I saw His perfect and full manifestation. But His supreme splendour was manifested through the quality of sattva.”

The devotees are speechless with wonder as they listen to him.

Yogamaya – the Primordial Power – and the worldly sport of the avatar

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I said to the Mother (of the Universe), ‘I can no longer talk much.’ And I said, ‘Grant, Oh Mother, that a person may attain awakening by just a touch.’ Such is the supreme power of Yogamaya, She can perform this magic. In Her sport in Vrindavan, Yogamaya performed this magical feat. It was by Her power that Subol brought Radha to meet Krishna. Yogamaya – that is, Primeval Power – has this power to attract. I have made use of the same power.

¹ Sri Ramakrishna’s body

“Well, do you think they who come here gain something?”

M. — Yes, sir. Why else would they come?

Sri Ramakrishna — How do you know?

M. (laughing) — Everybody says, ‘Whoever goes to him never returns to the world.’

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — A big frog fell into the clutches of a non-poisonous snake. The snake could neither swallow it nor let it go. The frog suffered such pain – it croaked continuously. This was pain from a non-poisonous snake. Had it been caught by a cobra, it would have quieted down after a single croak. (All laugh.)

(To the young boy devotees) “Please read the book by Trailokya called *Bhakti Chaitanya Chandrika*. Get a copy from him. It contains beautiful facts about Chaitanyadeva.”

A Particular Devotee — Will he give it to us?

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Why not? If there is a big crop of green melons in the field, the farmer can easily give away two or three. (All laugh.) Why won't he give it to you?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Paltu) — Come here now and then.

Paltu — I shall come to visit you whenever possible.

Sri Ramakrishna — Come and see me in Calcutta when I go there.

Paltu — I shall try.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is the answer of a calculating mind.

Paltu — If I didn't say that I would try, it would have been a lie.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I don't think they lie in what they say. They are not free (to move at will).

Sri Ramakrishna is talking to Haripada.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Haripada) — Why doesn't Mahendra Mukherji come?

Haripada — I'm not quite sure.

M. (laughing) — He practices jnana yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. The other day he promised to send his carriage for us to see (the play) 'the Life of Prahlada'. But he didn't. Maybe that is why he doesn't come.

M. — One day he went to see Mahima Chakravarty and talked with him. It seems that he often visits him.

Sri Ramakrishna — But why? Mahima also talks of love and devotion to God. How nicely he chants the

hymn, 'What is the need of austerities if God is worshipped with love?'

M. (laughing) — He [Mahima] repeats the hymn when you ask him to.

Girish Ghosh has just begun to visit Sri Ramakrishna. These days he talks of nothing but Sri Ramakrishna.

Hari — Girish Ghosh sees many visions these days. When he leaves this place, he remains absorbed in spiritual moods — and he sees many things.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is possible. When one goes to the Ganges, one sees many things: boats, ships and what not.

Hari — Girish Ghosh says, 'I will now engage myself only in work. I will sit down with pen and ink at a certain time every morning. And the whole day keep writing.' He says this, but he can't do it. As soon as he sees us, he only talks about you. You asked for Narendra to be brought here. Girish Babu said, 'I will arrange a carriage for him.'

It is now five. The Younger Naren is going home. Standing alone on the long northeastern verandah, Sri Ramakrishna is giving him various instructions. After some time, the Younger Naren salutes Thakur and leaves. Many other devotees also leave.

Sitting on the smaller cot, Sri Ramakrishna talks with Mohini. Mohini's wife has almost gone mad because of the death of her son. She laughs, then she cries. But when she comes to Dakshineswar to see Sri Ramakrishna, she becomes peaceful.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is your wife?

Mohini — She becomes peaceful here. But at home she sometimes makes a terrible disturbance. The other day she wanted to commit suicide.

Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna worries for some time. Mohini says humbly to him, “Do please say a word or two to her.”

Sri Ramakrishna — Don’t let her cook. It heats the brain. And she must not be left alone.

Chapter IV

The strange state of sannyasa of Sri Ramakrishna – conversation with Tarak

It is already dusk. Preparations are being made for arati in the temple. A lamp has been lit and incense burnt in Sri Ramakrishna’s room. Sitting on the smaller cot, Thakur has offered obeisance to the Mother of the Universe and is chanting Her Name. There is no one in the room except M.

Sri Ramakrishna rises, so does M. too. Pointing at the western and the northern doors of the room, Thakur says to M., “Please shut those doors.” M. shuts the doors and goes to Sri Ramakrishna, who is on the verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna says, “I would like to go to Kali’s shrine.” Saying this, he holds M.’s hand. Leaning on him, he reaches the platform of Kali’s shrine. Before sitting down, he says to M, “Please call Baburam.” M. fetches Baburam.

Having had the darshan of Kali, Sri Ramakrishna now returns to his room, walking

through the middle of the extensive courtyard. He chants, "Mother, Mother Rajarajeshvari."

Returning to his room, Sri Ramakrishna sits down on his small cot. He is in a particularly strange state of mind. He cannot touch anything metal. He says, "It seems that the Divine Mother is taking my mind completely off material riches." He takes water in an earthen vessel. Since he cannot touch the metallic pot used for washing, he has asked the devotees to bring an earthen pot. The moment he touches a metal pot or plate, his hand aches as if pricked by a horned fish.

Prasanna has brought a number of utensils; they are very small. Laughing, Sri Ramakrishna says, "The utensils are very small, but this boy is good. He stripped naked in front of me when I asked him to. How childlike!"

The devotee and woman; beware, sadhu

Tarak of Belgharia and a friend have arrived.

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot. A lamp is burning in the room. A couple of devotees are there, including M.

Tarak is married. His parents don't allow him to visit Sri Ramakrishna. His home is in Bowbazar, Calcutta. Tarak stays at home most of the time. Sri Ramakrishna is very fond of him. Tarak's companion is somewhat lazy (tamasic). He is inclined to ridicule religion and Sri Ramakrishna. Tarak is about 27 years old. When he arrives, Tarak prostrates before Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Tarak's friend) — Why don't you go to see the temple?

Tarak's Friend — I have already seen it.

Sri Ramakrishna — All right. What do you think of Tarak's visiting here?

Tarak's Friend — You know best.

Sri Ramakrishna (pointing at M.) — He is a headmaster.

Tarak's Friend — Oh!

Sri Ramakrishna makes polite enquiries of Tarak and talks to him about a lot of things. After a long spiritual talk, Tarak wants to leave. Sri Ramakrishna cautions him about several things.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Tarak) — Beware, sadhu! Beware of 'lust and greed'. Once you are drowned in the maya of lust, it is impossible to rise. There is a deep whirlpool in the Vishalakshi river. He who falls into it once can never again rise out of it. Please come again.

Tarak — My people won't let me.

A Devotee — If somebody's mother says, 'Don't go to Dakshineswar and swears, 'You will be drinking my blood if you ever go there...'

**One may go against the advice of one's superior for
God's sake**

Sri Ramakrishna — The mother who says such a thing is not a mother. She is the image of ignorance. There is no harm in not listening to such a mother. Such a mother places hurdles in the way of God-realization. There is no harm in disobeying

the Guru for the sake of God. Bharata did not listen to Kaikeyi for the sake of Rama. The gopis did not listen to their husbands when they forbade them the darshan of Krishna. Prahlada did not listen to his father. King Bali did not listen to his guru, Shukracharya, for love of God. Bibhishana did not listen to Ravana, his elder brother, to reach Rama.

“You must listen to everything they say except in the matter of walking the path to God. Let me see your hand.”

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna seems to weigh Tarak’s hand. After awhile he says, “There is a little hurdle. But it will pass in time. Pray to Him and visit this place now and then. You will get rid of it. Have you rented the Bowbazar house in Calcutta?”

Tarak — Not I. They have done it.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Is it you or they? Are you afraid of the ‘tiger’?

By ‘tiger’ Sri Ramakrishna means women [of non-divine nature, who take the mind toward darkness and away from God].

Sri Ramakrishna lies down on the smaller cot. Perhaps he is thinking of the welfare of Tarak. Suddenly he says to M., “Why am I so worried about him?”

M. does not say anything. Perhaps he is thinking what to say. Sri Ramakrishna insists on a reply, “Do speak up.”

In the meantime Mohini Mohan’s wife enters the room, salutes Sri Ramakrishna, and sits to one side. Thakur is talking to M. about Tarak’s companion.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why did Tarak bring him here?

M. — It is a long distance, so he brought a companion with him.

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna addresses Mohini's wife, "One becomes a she-ghost when one dies an unnatural death. Beware. You must control your mind. After hearing so much and seeing so much, is it going to end this way ultimately?"

Mohini is taking leave of Thakur. He lies prostrate on the ground. His wife also salutes Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna stands near the northern door of his room. The wife, covering her head, says something to him in a low voice.

Sri Ramakrishna — You wish to stay here?

The Wife — Yes, I want to come and stay in the nahabat with the Holy Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is good. But when you talk of dying, I am frightened — the Ganges is flowing so near.

Section XIII

Sri Ramakrishna at a Devotee's House in Calcutta

Chapter I

With his intimate disciples at Balaram Basu's house

It is long past three o'clock. Being the month of Chaitra it is very hot. Sri Ramakrishna is seated in Balaram's drawing room with one or two devotees; he is talking to M.

It is Monday, 6 April 1885; 25th of Chaitra, the seventh day of the dark fortnight. Thakur has come to Calcutta to a devotee's house. He will meet with his intimate disciples and visit Devendra on Nimu Goswami street.

Telling the truth and Sri Ramakrishna – the Younger Naren, Baburam and Purna

Thakur remains intoxicated day and night with ecstatic love for God – constantly absorbed in spiritual mood or in samadhi. His mind is totally unaware of the external world. His only interest is that his intimate disciples know the Self. He is like a parent, anxious about his weak or disabled children, always thinking how they might grow into manhood. Or he is like a bird always engaged in nurturing its young.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I had promised that I would come at three o'clock – that's why I'm here. But it's very hot.

M. — It is, sir. You have been quite inconvenienced.

The devotees fan Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have come to see the Younger Naren and Baburam. Why haven't you brought Purna?

M. — He doesn't want to come to a gathering of devotees. He is afraid you might talk well of him before others and that members of his family will hear about it.

**Pundits and holy men impart different instructions –
company of sadhus**

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, that's true. I won't talk about him from now on. You are giving religious instruction to Purna. That is very good.

M. — Well, Vidyasagar's book *Selection* says the same: love the Lord with body, mind and soul¹. If we instruct our students in this way, the proprietors of the school are displeased. What should we do then?

Sri Ramakrishna — There are many ideas written in books. But the authors of the books do not assimilate the ideas themselves. It is only by keeping the company of holy men² that one can internalize them. It is only when a holy man with genuine renunciation instructs them that people

¹ With all thy soul love God above,
And as thyself thy neighbour love

² Sadhus

listen. When a mere pundit writes a book or lectures, people do not assimilate much. If a doctor with a pot of treacle by his side says to a patient, 'Don't eat treacle,' the patient doesn't listen to him.

"Well, how do you find Purna? Does he sometimes go into ecstatic moods?"

M. — No, I haven't found any outer signs of ecstasy in him. One day I told him what you had said.

Sri Ramakrishna — About what?

M. — What you had said — that an 'ordinary receptacle' can't contain ecstasy. A 'big receptacle' can enter into a deep ecstatic mood, but it does not show outwardly. As, you said, the surface of a big lake remains undisturbed when an elephant enters it, but when the elephant goes into a small pond, it produces a lot of commotion and the water splashes over the edges of the pond.

Sri Ramakrishna — Outwardly Purna would not show signs of ecstasy. He is an unusual 'receptacle'. All his signs are good. What do you say?

M. — He has beautiful, bright and prominent eyes.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not enough that his eyes are bright. Spiritual eyes are different. Well, did you ask him what happened to him after meeting me?

M. — Yes, we did talk about that. For the last four or five days he has been saying that whenever he

thinks about God and repeats His name, tears flow from his eyes and the hair on his body stands on end.

Sri Ramakrishna — What more is needed?

Thakur and M. are both silent. After awhile M. says, “There he stands.”

Sri Ramakrishna — Who?

M. — It is Purna. It appears that he is standing at the door of his house. If any of us passes that way, he comes running to salute us.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah! Ah!

Thakur leans against a pillow to rest. M. had brought a twelve year old boy with him. He is a student at M.’s school. His name is Kshirode.

M. says, “This boy is very good. It makes him very happy to hear about God.”

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He has the eyes of a deer.

The boy touches Thakur’s feet and prostrates to salute him. He gently strokes Thakur’s feet in a very devotional manner. Thakur talks about the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Rakhai is living at home now. He is not well; he has a boil. I hear that he is probably going to have a child.

Paltu and Binode are seated in front of him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Paltu, smiling) — What did you say to your father? (To M.) He spoke up to his father when his father told him not to come here. (To Paltu) What did you say to him?

Paltu — I said, 'Yes I go to him. Is that wrong?' (Thakur and M. laugh). If I have to, I'll say this even more strongly.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to M.) — No. Should he go that far?

M. — I agree, sir. He should not go that far. (Thakur laughs.)

Sri Ramakrishna (to Binode) — How are you? Why haven't you come [to Dakshineswar]?

Binode — Sir, I almost went, but I was afraid. I have not been well.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must come. The breeze there is bracing. It would help you recover.

The Younger Naren has arrived. Thakur is going out to wash. The Younger Naren carries some water and a hand towel for him. M. is with them.

The Younger Naren washes Thakur's feet in the northern corner of the western verandah [of Balaram's house]. M. stands near him.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is very hot.

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — How do you live in such a small room? Isn't it hot on the upper floor?

M. — Yes, sir. It is very hot.

Sri Ramakrishna — Besides, your wife has some disease of the brain. She should be kept in a cool place.

M. — Yes, sir. I have told her to sleep downstairs.

Thakur comes again to the drawing room and sits down. He says to M., “Why didn't you come [to Dakshineswar] last Sunday?”

M. — Sir, there was nobody else at home. My wife is suffering from the disease of the brain and there was nobody to look after her in my absence.

Now Thakur goes to Devendra's house on Nimu Goswami Street. He is accompanied by the Younger Naren, M. and one or two other devotees. He is talking about Purna; he is anxious about him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — He is a great 'receptacle'. Were it not so, could he have made me do japa for his welfare? But Purna doesn't know anything about that.

M. and the other devotees are speechless with wonder to hear that Thakur should have performed japa of the bija mantra¹ for Purna.

¹ A mystic word or words of great power to be recited silently within

Sri Ramakrishna — It would have been nice if you had brought him here with you today. Why didn't you?

Seeing the Younger Naren laugh, Thakur and the devotees also begin to laugh. Thakur points to him in a happy mood and says to M., "Look. Just see how naive he looks when he laughs, as if he knows nothing. He has no desire in his mind for anything; he does not want any of these three – property, wife, or money. One does not realize God unless 'lust and greed' have vanished from the mind."

Thakur is proceeding toward Devendra's house. Once he told Devendra in Dakshineswar that he was thinking of visiting him at his house. Devendra had said, "I came today specifically to ask you to. Kindly come this very Sunday." Thakur had said, "But you are not earning much. Don't invite many people. And it is so costly to hire a carriage." Devendra had laughed and replied, "What does it matter if my income is small? 'One must eat ghee even though one has to borrow. One must, however, definitely eat ghee.' " Hearing this, Thakur began to laugh. He couldn't control his laughter.

When he reaches the house, Thakur says, "Devendra, please don't prepare anything special for me to eat – just an ordinary meal will do. I am not feeling very well today."

Chapter II

In Devendra's house with devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in the drawing room on the ground floor of Devendra's house. The devotees sit around him. It is already dusk. A lamp has been lit in the room. The Younger Naren, Ram, M., Girish, Devendra, Akshay, Upendra and other devotees are sitting close to him. Thakur is looking at a young

devotee and is beaming with joy. While instructing him, Thakur says to the other devotees, “He has no desire for any of the three things which bind one to the world – property, money, or wife. When one keeps one’s mind on these three, one cannot establish union with God. And he had a vision, too.” (To the devotee) “Tell me, what did you see?”

Renouncing ‘lust and greed’ and joy of Brahman

The Devotee (smiling) — I saw many pots of excreta. Some people were sitting on them and some sat a little away.

Sri Ramakrishna — He has seen the plight of worldly people who are forgetful of God. That is why he is developing renunciation for these things. Need one whose mind is freed from the attachment to ‘lust and greed’ worry about anything?

“Oh, how strange! I had to perform so much repetition of the Name and meditation to get rid of these desires. How is it that he has absolutely freed his mind from desire so quickly? Is it so easy to get rid of lust? Oh, what a sensation I felt in my chest even six months after starting my spiritual practices! I would lie under a tree and weep. I cried to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother! If I experience the feeling of lust, I will cut my throat with a knife!’

(To the devotees) “If the mind is free from ‘lust and greed,’ what else remains to be attained? Then one enjoys only the joy of Brahman.”

Sashi¹ had just begun visiting Thakur. He was a first year B.A. student at Vidyasagar's college. Thakur now talks about him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — As for that young man who visits, I see that for some time his mind will be attracted by money. However, I also see others who are not at all interested in it. Some of the young men will not marry.

The devotees listen to him without saying a word.

Who can recognize an incarnation of God?

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Unless you have rid your mind completely of 'lust and greed,' you cannot recognize an incarnation of God. Somebody asked an eggplant merchant to evaluate a diamond. He said, 'I can give you ten seers of eggplants for it — nothing more than that.' (All laugh.) The Younger Naren laughs loudly.

Thakur notices that the Younger Naren has understood the essence of these words.

Sri Ramakrishna — What a subtle mind he has! The Naked One² could understand just as quickly — whether it was the *Gita*, or the *Bhagavata*, or some other scripture.

¹ Later Swami Ramakrishnananda

² Nangta; Totapuri

**Dispassion from childhood is wonderful indeed – how
can a prostitute be redeemed?**

Sri Ramakrishna — It is indeed wonderful for one to renounce ‘lust and greed’ from one’s childhood. Very few people develop such renunciation. And without it one is like a mango pecked by a kite – the fruit can’t be used in the service of the deity. Even eating it yourself is risky.

“If a man who has committed many sins earlier in his life repeats the name of God in his old age, it is better than doing nothing.

“The mother of a certain Mallick comes from a very big family. She asked me whether a prostitute could be redeemed. She had herself led that kind of life in her earlier days – that’s why she asked me. I said to her: Yes, she can be redeemed if she weeps with a sincere heart and intense longing and repents, vowing, ‘I shall not repeat it.’ Just repeating the Lord’s name will not be of any help. One has to weep with a sincere heart.”

Chapter III

**Thakur in the joy of devotional songs and in samadhi
at Devendra’s house**

The singing of devotional songs is going on, accompanied by drum and cymbals. The musician sings –

O! What a wonderful sight have I seen in Keshab Bharati’s cottage!

O brother! A beautiful light glows on the face of Gauranga and he sheds a hundred streams of tears of love for God.

Gaur, surcharged with divine love, mad like an intoxicated elephant, sometimes dances and sings, and at other times rolls in the dust. His eyes are flooded with tears.

He is weeping and uttering Hari. And he is rending the mortal world and heaven with his thunderous voice. And then, taking a straw between his teeth¹ and folding his hands, he begs for liberation from slavery.

Shaving off his curly hair, he dons the cloth of a yogi. One's heart begins to melt on seeing the gush of his loving devotion for God.

Having been smitten by human sorrow, he has renounced his all and has come to dole out ecstatic love for God.

Premdas wishes only that he could become the slave of Sri Chaitanya's feet and move from door to door.

While listening to the song, Thakur becomes absorbed in ecstasy². The musician is describing the state of the gopis of Vraja who are suffering the pangs of separation from Sri Krishna.

The gopis of Vraja find Madhava³ in a madhavi⁴ bower –

O madhavi, give me my Madhava. Give, do give; give me my Madhava.

Give me my Madhava and make me your slave forever.

Just as water is life for fish, Madhava is my life breath.

¹ A Vaishnava expression meaning extreme humility, in that the cow, which chews straw, is the humblest of creatures

² Bhava

³ An appellation of Sri Krishna

⁴ A spring creeper with fragrant flowers

You have hidden him away. Knowing us to be helpless and innocent, you have hidden him from us.

I cannot live, O madhavi! without Madhava. I cannot do without the sight of my Madhava.

Now and then Sri Ramakrishna adds his own lines during the song, “How far is Mathura where dwells the beloved of my soul?”

Thakur goes into samadhi. His body is motionless. For a long time he remains in this state.

Now he returns to normal consciousness to some extent. He is, however, still absorbed in ecstasy. In this state he talks about the devotees and speaks to the Divine Mother now and then.

Sri Ramakrishna (still in ecstasy) — Mother, please attract him to You. I cannot worry about him any more. (To M.) As for your relative¹, he attracts my mind a little.

(To Girish) “You may go on using abusive language and vulgar words for a little longer. Let it continue. It is good that all this comes out of you. For people suffering from blood poisoning, the more it comes out, the better.

“There is noise when one is getting rid of *upashis*². Firewood crackles when it burns. When it is totally burnt, it makes no sound.

“You will become more and more pure every day. You will rise higher and higher every day. People will be wonderstruck to see you. I may not be able to come here frequently. Be that as it may, you will attain by yourself.”

¹ M.’s brother-in-law

² Limiting adjuncts

The ecstasy of Sri Ramakrishna is becoming more and more intense. He again talks to the Divine Mother, "Mother, what is heroic in making a good man even better? Mother, what will You accomplish in killing an already dead man? Your greatness lies in killing one who is standing erect."

Stabilizing himself a little, Thakur suddenly speaks somewhat loudly to the Divine Mother, "I have come from Dakshineswar. I am coming back, Mother."

It is like a child replying to his mother's call from a distance. Thakur is again motionless. He sits still in samadhi. The devotees gaze at him fixedly without saying a word.

Thakur speaks again in ecstasy, "I shall not eat any more *luchi*¹." One or two Vaishnava priests² of the neighbourhood had come. They rise and depart.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in the company of devotees at Devendra's house

Sri Ramakrishna is talking happily with the devotees. Being the month of Chaitra, it is very hot. Devendra has made some ice cream³. He is serving it to Thakur and the devotees. The devotees thoroughly enjoy the ice cream. Mani says in a whisper, "Encore! Encore!" Everybody laughs. At the sight of the ice cream, Thakur is as happy as a child.

Sri Ramakrishna — The devotional songs were nicely sung. How beautifully they described the state of the gopis, 'O madhavi, give me my

¹ Fried bread

² Goswamis

³ Kulfi

Madhava.’ This is the state of the gopis intoxicated with ecstatic love. How wonderful! They are mad for Krishna!

A devotee points at another and says, “He has the attitude of a female friend¹, the attitude of a gopi.”

Ram — He has within himself both: the *madhura bhava*² and intense jnana bhava³.

Sri Ramakrishna — What are you talking about?

Thakur now speaks of Surendra.

Ram — I sent him word, but he didn’t come.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is so busy working, he can’t come.

A Particular Devotee — Ram Babu has been writing about you.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What is he writing?

The Devotee — He has written on the love and devotion⁴ of the Paramahansa.

Sri Ramakrishna — Very good. It will bring Ram name and fame.

¹ Sakhi

² The attitude of a lover

³ One who follows the path of Knowledge

⁴ Bhakti

Girish (smiling) — He has written it as your disciple.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have no disciple, or anything like that. I am the servant of the servant of Rama.

Some people of the neighbourhood have arrived, but Thakur is not pleased to see them. He says, "What kind of place is this? I find no one spiritual here."

Devendra now takes Thakur inside his house. Refreshments are ready to be served. Thakur goes in. However, he returns with a smile on his face and takes a seat in the sitting room. The devotees are sitting close by. Upendra¹ and Akshay², seated on either side of Thakur, are gently stroking his feet. Thakur talks about the ladies of Devendra's family. He says, "Nice ladies. They are from the countryside, so they are full of love and devotion for God."

Thakur is rejoicing in the company of the Self³. He sings happily. What is his state of mind as he sings? He has entered into a joyous mood, so he sings many songs.

Song –

Unless you are simple, you cannot recognize the Simple One⁴.

Song –

O wandering sannyasin, stop for awhile. Hold your begging bowl and stop. Let me see your illumined face.

¹ Upendranath Mukherji is a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna

² Akshay Kumar Sen is poet devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. He authored Sri Ramakrishna Punthi (Life of Sri Ramakrishna in verses), and thus immortalized himself. His birthplace is Maynapur village at Bankura district.

³ *Atmarama*

⁴ Sahaja, meaning God

Song –

A fakir¹, ever absorbed in the Divine, has arrived.
Alike is his holiness to both Hindus and *Pir*² of the
Muslims.

Girish salutes Thakur and leaves. Thakur returns his
salute with a namaskar.

Devendra and other devotees take Thakur to
the carriage.

Returning, Devendra sees a person from his
neighbourhood sleeping on a wooden cot in the
courtyard south of his living room. He calls out, “Rise.
Please get up.” Rubbing his eyes, the fellow gets up
and asks, “Has the paramahansa arrived?”
Everybody bursts into laughter. This fellow came to
meet Thakur even before he had arrived. Feeling hot,
he lay on a mat-covered bench in the open courtyard.
Thakur proceeds toward Dakshineswar. He says
happily to M., “We ate plenty of ice cream! Please
bring four or five cones for me when you visit.” And
he adds, “My mind is being attracted by some of these
young men now – the Younger Naren, Purna, and
your relative.”

M. — Do you mean Dwija?

Sri Ramakrishna — Dwija is, of course, one of
them. My mind is now going to the elder brother.

M. — Oh!

Thakur goes happily along in the carriage.

¹ A mendicant ascetic

² A Muslim saint

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna in the Company of Devotees at Balaram's House

Chapter I

Thakur's description of his spiritual practices

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees in Balaram's sitting room in Calcutta. Girish, M. and Balaram are present. One by one the Younger Naren, Paltu, Dwija, Purna, Mahendra Mukherji and a number of other devotees arrive. Trailokya Sanyal, Gopal Sen and several other devotees of the Brahma Samaj show up, one after the other. Many women devotees have come. Seated behind a straw curtain, they have the darshan of Thakur. Mohini's wife¹ is there. She is nearly mad with grief for her dead son. She and many others stricken with sorrow have the faith that they will find peace by coming in contact with Thakur.

It is Sunday, 12 April 1885, the first of Vaishakh, the 13th day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra. The time is about three o'clock.

When he enters, M. sees Thakur sitting with the devotees. He is describing his own spiritual practices and a variety of states of mind. M. salutes Thakur and sits close to him at his bidding.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — At the time (of spiritual practices) when I meditated I used to see a real person sitting close to me with a trident

¹ M.'s wife

in his hand. He threatened to strike me with the trident if I didn't fix my mind at the lotus feet of God, to pierce my chest and kill me if my mind was not fixed on God.

**Union of the Absolute¹ and the phenomenal world² –
Purusha and Prakriti – Yoga of Discrimination³**

“Sometimes the Divine Mother would put me in such a state that my mind would descend from the Absolute to the phenomenal world. At other times it would rise from the phenomenal world to the Absolute.

“When my mind descended to the phenomenal world, I would meditate on Rama and Sita day and night. And I would constantly have the image of their forms before me. I used to go around holding Ramlala⁴. Sometimes I would give him a bath and other times feed him. And yet other times I was absorbed in the mood of Radha and Krishna. I would see their forms constantly before me. And then again my mind would be filled with the mood of Gauranga – he represents the harmonization of the two ideals, Purusha and Prakriti. In this mood I always saw the form of Gauranga. Later, this state also changed. Leaving the phenomenal world, my mind would ascend to the Absolute. I found no distinction between the ordinary sajina plant and the sacred tulsi. I no longer liked seeing the forms of God. I said to them, ‘You, too, cause a feeling of separation’ – so I let the forms go. I removed all the

¹ Nitya

² Lila

³ Viveka

⁴ Image of baby Rama made of eight metals

paintings and images of the deities that were in my room. I began to meditate on the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda, the Primal Purusha. I had the attitude of a handmaiden – the maid of Purusha.

“I have practiced all kinds of spiritual disciplines. There are three classes – sattvic, rajasic and tamasic. In the sattvic practices, one calls upon Him with intense yearning, or simply repeats His sacred name without expecting any result. In rajasic disciplines one practices various kinds of exercises – purascharana¹, visits to places of pilgrimage, a certain duration of panchatapa², worship with sixteen articles, and so forth. The aspirant who practices tamasic sadhana takes recourse to the qualities of tamas. Such an aspirant calls out, ‘Victory to Kali! Why will You not grant me Your vision? I’ll cut my throat with a knife if You do not reveal Yourself to me!’ The last kind of discipline is not morally pure – it is like the practices prescribed in the *Tantra*.

“During this time (of sadhana), I used to have strange visions. I distinctly saw the communion of the Atman. A person resembling me entered my body and communed with each one of the six lotuses. The petals of the six lotuses were closed. As he communed with each of them, the lotuses bloomed, one after the other – they opened and turned upward. In this way all the lotuses – of the Muladhara, the Svadhisthana, the Anahata, the Vishuddha, the Ajna and the Sahasrara – opened.

¹ The performance of japa a certain number of times each day, methodically increasing and decreasing the amount

² Practicing japa and meditation seated within five fires

They were facing downward, but then they turned up. I perceived this phenomenon very clearly.”

**Discipline of Dhyana Yoga – like an unwavering lamp
flame in a windless place**

“During the practice of spiritual disciplines when I meditated, I would think of the flame of a lamp set in a windless place – the flame did not flicker in the least.

“In deep meditation the awareness of the outside world completely vanishes. A hunter was aiming at a bird while a bridal procession was passing nearby. What lights, bands, carriages and horses were in the procession! They all passed close to him, but the hunter was quite unaware of them. He did not know that a bridegroom had passed that way in a procession.

“A man was fishing alone on the bank of a pond. After a long time the float moved – at times it even dipped down. Taking the fishing rod in his hand, he tried to pull it up. Just at that moment a wayfarer stopped and asked, ‘Sir, can you please tell me where Mr. Bannerji lives?’ The fisherman did not reply. Fishing rod in hand, he was now trying to pull in his catch. The stranger repeated his question loudly, ‘Sir, can you please tell me where such-and-such Bannerji lives?’ But our fisherman was unaware of the outside world – his hand was trembling and his eyes fixed on the float. The wayfarer left in a huff. When he had gone quite some distance, the fisherman’s float sank and he pulled the fish out onto dry land. Wiping his face with a hand towel, he shouted to the stranger, ‘Hey,

brother! Listen.' The wayfarer didn't want to return, but he came back after hearing the fisherman shout for some time. He said, 'But, sir, why are you calling me now?' The fisherman replied, 'What were you asking me?' The wayfarer said, 'I repeated my question so many times and now you ask me what I was saying.' The fisherman said, 'The float was bobbing, so I didn't hear anything you said.'

"Such concentration is developed in meditation that a person sees nothing and hears nothing. He is not even aware of touch. A snake can wriggle over his body, but he does not know it – neither the one who is meditating, nor the snake, are aware of each other.

"The sense organs cease to function during deep meditation. The mind does not look outward. It is as if the door of the outermost room of the house is shut. There are five organs of sense – form, taste, smell, touch and speech – they are left outside.

"At the beginning of meditation, sense objects appear before the mind. In deep meditation they cease to form any impression – they are left outside. During meditation, I used to have many different kinds of visions. I saw before me a heap of rupees, a shawl, a big tray full of sandesh and two females with big round nose rings. I asked my mind, 'Oh my mind, what do you want? Do you want to enjoy them awhile?' The mind said, 'No, I don't want anything. I want nothing but the lotus feet of God.' I saw the inside and outside of the women, like one sees objects in a glass room. I saw

inside their bodies: the intestines, blood, excreta, worms, phlegm, mucus, saliva and urine – all these.”

Eight occult powers and Sri Ramakrishna – profession of the guru and prostitution

At times Girish talks of curing disease by repeating Thakur’s name.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish and the other devotees) — Only people of small intellect pray for occult powers – to cure a disease, to win a lawsuit, to walk on water, all these kind of things. A pure devotee wants nothing but the lotus feet of God. One day Hriday said to me, ‘Uncle, ask the Divine Mother for some powers, for some occult powers.’ I have a childlike nature. While practicing japa in the Kali Temple I said to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, Hriday wants me to ask You for some occult powers.’ The Divine Mother at once showed me an old prostitute who came in front of me and sat on her heels with her back to me. She was a woman of about forty with large hips. She wore a black-bordered sari and noisily defecated. The Divine Mother showed me by this that all occult powers are like the excreta of an old prostitute. I then went to Hriday and scolded him, saying, ‘Why did you teach me such a prayer! It is because of you that I had this bad experience.’

“People with a little occult power gain name, fame and authority over others. Many of them want to be Gurus to attain recognition and have disciples and attendants. People may say, “Gurucharan’s brother is having a wonderful time these days. So

many people visit him and he has several disciples and attendants. His home is filled with goods. Many people give him presents. And if he wants, since he has the power, he can feed a multitude!

“Being a guru is like practicing the profession of prostitution. One sells oneself for such trifling things as money, name, fame and creature comforts. The body, mind and soul, which are meant to realize God¹, should not be pulled down for insignificant things. Someone said, ‘Savi is on top of the world these days – she is so well off! She has rented a house and has so many things: cow dung cakes², a wooden cot, some cooking utensils, bedding, finely woven mats and pillows. Many men are under her spell and visit her often.’ In other words, Savi has taken to prostitution. That is why she has all these conveniences. Before, she was a maid in a respectable household. Now she has become a prostitute. She has ruined herself for such insignificant things.”

**Temptations during the spiritual practices of Sri
Ramakrishna – knowledge of Brahman and intellect of
differentiation**

Sri Ramakrishna and Islam

“During my spiritual practices, while meditating, I used to see many other kinds of visions. Once I was meditating under the bel tree. Sin, taking the form of a man, appeared before me and tried to tempt me in different ways. He had come in the form of a

¹ Nātmanamavasādayet (Gita 6:5)

² Used as fuel to cook food

white soldier. He wanted to tempt me with money, name and fame, sexual pleasure and different kinds of powers. I began to call out to the Divine Mother – this is a great secret – She revealed Herself to me and I asked Her to kill him. I still remember that form of the Divine Mother, that world-enchanting form, the form of Krishnamayi¹. The whole universe seemed to move at Her glance.”

Thakur stops talking. Later on, however, he says, “I have so much else that I am not being allowed to talk about – it is as if someone is shutting my mouth.”

“Tulsi and the ordinary sajina plants appeared the same to me. My understanding of differentiation was taken away. I was meditating under the foot of a banyan tree. I was shown a Muslim with a beard who brought some cooked rice on a porcelain plate. He fed some of it to the *malechhas*² and then gave a little to me. The Divine Mother revealed to me: There is only One, without a second – it is Sat-chit-ananda alone who has assumed different forms. God Himself has become the living beings and the phenomenal world – indeed everything. It is He who has become food.”

**Sri Ramakrishna in a childlike mood, enters into
ecstasy**

(To Girish, M. and others) “I have the nature of a child. Hriday said to me, ‘Uncle, ask the Divine Mother for some occult powers.’ At once I went to the temple to ask for it. I was kept in such a state

¹ She was in the form of a young daughter of Balaram Bose

² A non-Hindu

that I had to listen to the person who lived with me. A small child sees darkness all around if there is no one near; I was put in such a state. I felt my life draining away unless Hriday was near me. Just see, the same mood is coming over me now. As I am talking, I am feeling inspired by God."

While speaking, Thakur goes into ecstasy. He loses all consciousness of time and place. He tries hard to control this divine mood. In ecstasy he says, "I still see you people. But I feel that you have been sitting here forever. I don't remember when you came or where you are."

Thakur remains still for a long time.

Returning somewhat to normal consciousness, he says, "I want some water." Thakur generally says this at the end of his samadhi, to bring his mind to a lower plane of consciousness. Girish is a newcomer and doesn't understand this. He starts to bring water. Thakur stops him, saying, "No, my dear, I am not able to drink water now." Thakur and the devotees remain silent for some time. Then he talks.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — My dear sir, have I been wrong to talk of all these (secret) things?

What can M. say in reply? He remains silent. Thakur then says, "Mother, how can it be wrong? I say all this to instill faith in others." After a long time, he says entreatingly to M., "Will you arrange a meeting with him?" (He refers to Purna)

M. (hesitatingly) — Sir, I will send word to him right now.

Sri Ramakrishna (eagerly) — The end (of the cord) is here.

Does Thakur mean that Purna is the last of his intimate disciples? There is almost no one after him.

Chapter II

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna’s mahabhava – Brahmani’s service to him

Addressing Girish, M. and the others, Thakur describes his own experience of mahabhava.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — The joy that one feels after that experience equals the pain of separation before it. Mahabhava – that is, divine ecstasy – disturbs the body and the mind violently. It is like a big elephant pushing its way into a straw cottage. The whole house is shaken. It may even fall to pieces.

“The burning fire that one feels when one is separated from God is not ordinary. When Rupa and Sanatana¹ sat under a tree in that state, the leaves of the tree became scorched. I lay unconscious for three days in that state. I could not move. I lay in one spot. When consciousness returned, she (the Brahmani²) held me and took me for a bath. But I could not stand the touch of her hand on my body, so my body was covered completely with a heavy sheet. Then the Brahmani held me with her hand on the sheet and led me. The earth that had stuck to my body when I lay on the ground was baked.

¹ Both were two great disciples of Chaitanya

² A Brahmin woman who was one of Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual preceptors

“In that state I felt as though a ploughshare were sticking through my spine. I cried out, ‘I am dying, I am dying!’ But afterwards I was filled with great joy.”

The devotees listen to this description of Mahabhava in amazement.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — You people don't have to go that far. My ecstasy serves only as an example. You involve yourself with so many things, but I have only one interest. I enjoy nothing but God. It is His will. (Smiling) There are trees with only one branch, just as there are other trees with five branches. (All laugh.)

“My experiences are only for illustration. As for you, live in the world – but without attachment. Some mud will stick to your body, but you must wipe it off as a mudfish wipes off mud. You will swim in muddy waters – even then your body should not be stained.”

Girish (smiling) — You, too, have married. (Laughter.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I married for the sake of samskara¹, but how could I live a worldly life? They put the sacred thread around my neck, but it dropped off. I couldn't keep it on. According to one school of thought, Sukadeva also married. He had a daughter, too – all for the sake of samskara. (All laugh.)

¹ Marriage is one of the ten samskaras, or purification rites in Hindu religion

“The world is nothing but ‘lust and greed’ – they make one forget God.”

Girish — How can one free oneself from ‘lust and greed’?

Sri Ramakrishna — Pray to Him with intense longing, pray that you develop the faculty of discrimination. God is the only Reality and all else is transitory – this is discrimination. One must purify water by passing it through a fine sieve. The dirt in the water remains on one side and the clean water passes to the other side of the sieve. Apply the sieve of discrimination to the world. Know Him and live a family life. It will then be the world of spirituality¹.

“Just see what bewitching power women have, the ones who are manifestations of ignorance², who tend to take one away from God. They make worthless fools of men. When I see a man and a woman sitting together, I say to myself, ‘Oh, they are doomed!’ (Glancing at M.) Haru was such a good-looking boy, but a witch possessed him. ‘Oh Haru, where are you? Where have you gone? I say, where is Haru!’ People saw him sitting quietly under a banyan tree – he had lost his beauty, his strength and his joy. The witch who lives in the banyan tree had cast her spell on him.

“If a wife says, ‘Go there for awhile,’ the fellow immediately rises to take leave. And if she says, ‘Sit down,’ he at once takes his seat.

¹ Vidya

² Avidya

“A certain job-seeker became frustrated, continually visiting the manager of an office for a job and not getting it. The manager said to him, ‘There is no vacancy now, but come from time to time and enquire about it.’ In this way a number of days passed and the candidate became thoroughly disappointed. He shared his frustration with a friend. The friend said, ‘How dumb you are! Why do you wear out your shoes visiting him again and again? You must contact Golap and you’ll get a job in no time.’ The candidate said, ‘All right, I will go see her right now.’ Golap was the manager’s mistress. The candidate met her and said, ‘Mother, unless you help me, I won’t get a job. I am in great distress. I am a brahmin’s son, where else shall I go? Mother, I have been without work for so many days! My children are starving without food. Just a word from you and I will get a job.’ Golap asked the brahmin’s son, ‘Child, whom should I talk to?’ She began to think, ‘Ah, the poor brahmin. He is in great trouble.’ The candidate said, ‘Just say a word for me to the manager. Surely I will get a job then.’ Golap said, ‘I will speak to the manager this very day and arrange everything.’ The next morning a person came to the candidate’s house and said, “Please come to the manager’s office. He has recommended you to his English boss¹, saying, ‘He is a very competent person and has been appointed to the job. He will contribute a great deal to the business.’”

¹ Sahib

“Everybody is deluded by ‘lust and greed’. But I don’t like all that. Truly, I swear that I know about nothing but God.”

Chapter III

Speaking truth is austerity for the age of Kali – *Ishvarakoti*¹ and *jivakoti*

A Devotee — A new cult by the name of ‘Nava Hullol’ has been started. Lalit Chatterji is one of its members.

Sri Ramakrishna — There are so many views. Every belief is a path to reach God. But everybody thinks that only his belief is right, that only his watch is giving the right time.

Girish (to M.) — What does Pope say? ‘It is with our judgments² etc.’

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I say, what does it mean?

M. — Everybody thinks that his watch gives the right time. But watches of different people seldom say the same.

Sri Ramakrishna — Even so, howsoever the watches may give incorrect time, the sun always

¹ Eternally free and perfect souls

² It is our judgments as with our watches. None goes just alike, yet each believes his own.

moves correctly. One should match the time of the watch with the sun.

A Devotee — A certain devotee frequently tells lies.

Sri Ramakrishna — Speaking the truth is the austerity for the age of Kali. The other [ancient] austerities are not easy to practice in this age. By sticking to truth, one attains God. Tulsidas says —

Telling the truth, taking refuge in Him, and
considering other men's wives as your mothers,

If these do not take you to Lord Hari, think of Tulsi as
a liar.

“Keshab Sen agreed to pay the debt of his father. Anyone else would never have accepted it, for there was no record in writing. I went to Devendra's Samaj in Jorashanko and saw Keshab seated on the dais meditating. He was very young then. I told Mathur Babu that only the ‘float’ of this young man, out of all those meditating, had dipped under water. The ‘fish’ approached the ‘bait’ and circled around it.

“A person — I shall not name him — gave a false statement in court for ten thousand rupees. He asked me to make an offering to Mother Kali to win his lawsuit. Childish as I was, I made the offering to Her. He had just said to me, ‘Father, make this offering to the Mother.’”

The Devotee — What a mean fellow indeed!

Sri Ramakrishna — But he had so much faith in me that he believed the Divine Mother would grant his prayer if I made the offering.

Referring to Lalit Babu's talk, Sri Ramakrishna says:

“Is it possible to get rid of one's pride? There are only a few people who are without pride. Balaram is one of them. (Pointing to a devotee) And this person too. Had they been anybody else, they would have parted their hair on one side and shown other traits of tamas, puffed up with the ego of learning. The fat brahmin still has a little pride. (To M.) Isn't Mahima Chakravarty very learned?”

M. — Yes, sir. He has read many books.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I wish he would have a conversation with Girish Ghosh. We could then observe a discussion.

Girish (smiling) — Didn't he seem to say that anybody can become Sri Krishna by practicing spiritual disciplines?

Sri Ramakrishna — Not exactly. But something like that.

The Devotee — Sir, can everybody become like Sri Krishna?

Sri Ramakrishna — Incarnations of God or those born with some of their characteristics are called *Ishvarakotis*. Ordinary men are called *jivas*, or *jivakotis*. The latter can attain God by practicing

spiritual disciplines, but they don't return to normal consciousness after attaining samadhi.

“The *Ishvarakoti* is like the son of a king. He has the keys to all seven stories of the palace – he can climb to all seven floors and come down at his will. A *jivakoti* is like a junior official. He can only go to a small area in the seven-storied palace – that is all.

Harmony of jnana and bhakti

“Janaka was a jnani – he attained divine knowledge by practicing spiritual disciplines. Sukadeva, however, was the very embodiment of divine knowledge.”

Girish — Ah!

Sri Ramakrishna — Sukadeva did not attain divine knowledge by practicing austerities. Narada, like Sukadeva, had the knowledge of Brahman, but he retained love and devotion for God in order to teach mankind. Sometimes Prahlada was in the mood of ‘Soham¹,’ and at other times he thought of himself as a servant, or as a child, of God. Hanuman was also like that.

“All cannot attain such a lofty state just by wishing it. Some bamboos are hollower than others; some are more solid inside.”

¹ I am He

Chapter IV

‘Lust and greed’ and intense dispassion¹

A Devotee — If all your experiences are just examples for us, what should we do?

Sri Ramakrishna — Intense dispassion is essential to attain God. You must renounce immediately what you think is an obstacle in your way to God. You cannot pass over it, saying, ‘It can be dealt with later.’ ‘Lust and greed’ are hurdles on the way. You must take your mind off them.

“It will not do to lack enthusiasm or diligence. A person with a small towel on his shoulder was going for a bath. His wife said, ‘You are worthless. You are getting old and yet you have not been able to give up anything. You cannot live without me even for a day. Look at such-and-such person. What a man of renunciation he is!’

Husband — Why, what has he given up?

Wife — He has sixteen wives and he is renouncing them one by one. You will never be able to renounce.

Husband — Renouncing one by one! Oh, silly woman, he will not be able to renounce. If a man genuinely wants to renounce, does he do it bit by bit?

¹ Vairagya

Wife (smiling) — Even so, he is better than you.

Husband — Silly woman, you don't understand. He cannot renounce. But I can. See? I am leaving.

“This is intense dispassion. No sooner does one attain discrimination than one renounces. He left with just a hand towel on his shoulder. He didn't come back to settle household affairs. He did not turn back even once to look at his home.

“A person who wishes to renounce must have great will power. He must be reckless, like a dacoit. A dacoit shouts, ‘Kill, loot, murder!’ before he commits a robbery.

“What should you do? Cultivate love and devotion for God and so pass your days.

“Unable to find Krishna, Yashoda became nearly insane with grief and went to see Radha. Seeing her grief, Radha appeared before her in the form of the Primal Power. She said, ‘Mother, ask me for a boon.’ Yashoda replied, ‘What boon can I ask? Just grant that I may serve Krishna in body, mind and speech, that I may behold His devotees with these eyes, and go with these feet wherever He is enacting His divine sport, and that I may serve Him and His devotees with these hands. Let all my sense organs be engaged in the service of Him alone.’”

As Thakur speaks these words, he is about to pass again into divine ecstasy. All of a sudden he says, “Kali is the embodiment of destruction! No, She is Nitya Kali¹!”

¹ The Eternal Divine Mother

Thakur controls his ecstasy with great difficulty. He takes a little water and then again begins to talk of Yashoda. Mahendra Mukherji enters. He and his younger brother, Priya Mukherji, have only recently started visiting Thakur. Mahendra has a flour mill and other businesses. His brother is an engineer. Both have assistants to look after their work, so they have a great deal of leisure. Mahendra must be thirty-six or thirty-seven, and his brother about two years younger. Their home is in Kedeti village and they also have a house at Baghbazar in Calcutta. A young devotee named Hari accompanies them on their visits to Thakur. He is married, but he has great love and devotion for Thakur. Mahendra has not been to Dakshineswar for quite some time, nor has Hari. Mahendra is fair in complexion, medium in build, and always has a smile on his face. He prostrates before Thakur. Hari also offers his salutations.

Sri Ramakrishna — Hello! Why haven't you come to Dakshineswar for such a long time?

Mahendra — Sir, I was away in Kedeti – away from Calcutta.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? You have no children. You don't have to work for anybody. Still you have no leisure. It is disgusting!

The devotees remain silent. Mahendra is somewhat embarrassed.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahendra) — Why do I say this to you? You are guileless and generous at heart. And you have love and devotion for God.

Mahendra — Sir, it is for my benefit that you have said it.

Sadhus looking for money – the attachment for children

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — You don't have to put anything in the collection plate for the performance¹ here. That is why Jadu's mother says, 'All other sadhus only ask for something. But it is different with you, sir.' Worldly people are annoyed if they have to spend money.

“A theatrical performance was being given at a certain place. One fellow was very keen to see it. Peeping through the crowd, he saw people paying for it in a collection plate. He quietly stole away. Another performance was being staged somewhere else. He went there and, after inquiry, found that no collection would be taken. Soon a big crowd gathered. He pushed people with both hands and his elbows to enter. He found himself a good seat and, twirling his moustaches, sat down to listen. (Laughter.)

“And you have no children to distract your mind. A Deputy Magistrate was getting a salary of eight hundred rupees a month. He went to Keshab Sen's house to see a play (Nava Vrindavan). I was there. Rakhali and many other devotees had gone with me and were sitting close to me. Rakhali left his seat for a few minutes and the Deputy Magistrate came, sat down, and made his young child sit on Rakhali's seat. I said, 'Please don't take

¹ Yatra

this seat.' My state of mind was such that I would obey anybody who was sitting close to me. That is why I had seated Rakhal beside me. All through the play the Deputy talked to his son. The rascal did not look at the play even once. I have heard, too, that he is a slave to his wife. When she wants him to stand, he stands up; and when she asks him to sit, he sits down. And he didn't see the performance for that snub-nosed monkey of a son! Do you meditate?"

Mahendra — Yes sir, I meditate a little.

Sri Ramakrishna — You will visit Dakshineswar some time, won't you?

Mahendra (smiling) — Sir, you know very well where I have knots. Please straighten them out.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — First make a visit; then I can press you and see where you have developed the knots. Why don't you visit?

Mahendra — I can't come because of the great pressure of work. Besides, I have to visit my Kedeti house [in the countryside] sometimes.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahendra, pointing his finger at the devotees) — Don't these people have homes? Have they no work? How do they make it?

Bondage of wife

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hari) — Why don't you come to Dakshineswar? Is it because your wife has returned to live with you?

Hari — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Then why have you forgotten?

Hari — Sir, I fell ill.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — He has gotten thin, but his love and devotion to God¹ hasn't diminished. Who can even fathom the depth of his devotion! But it is of a somewhat troublesome nature! (Laughter.)

Thakur calls a devotee's wife by the name of 'Habi's mother'. The brother of Habi's mother has arrived. He is a college student and is about twenty. He has to leave to play cricket, so he rises. His younger brother is also a devotee of Thakur. He leaves with him. In a little while, Dwija returns. Thakur asks him, "Didn't you go with them?"

A certain devotee says, "Perhaps he has returned because he wants to hear the music."

Today Trailokya, a Brahmo devotee, is to sing devotional songs. Paltu arrives. Thakur says, "Look, Paltu has arrived."

Purna, another young devotee, has also arrived. Thakur has been able to get him here only after great difficulty. The members of his family strongly object to his visiting Thakur. He studies in class five in the school where M. teaches. The boy

¹ Bhakti

prostrates before Thakur. The latter makes him sit beside him and talks to him in whispers. Only M. is seated near them. The other devotees are talking of different things. Girish, sitting on the other side of the room, is reading a biography of Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Purna) — Come nearer.

Girish (to M.) — Who is this boy?

M. (irritated) — He is a boy, what else?

Girish (smiling) — I need no ghost to tell me that!

M. is afraid that others will know who he is, which might create a row in Purna's house and M. himself might get blamed. This is also the reason Thakur is talking to the boy in whispers.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you practice all that I told you to?

The Boy — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you see anything in your dreams – a flame, the light of a torch, a married woman, a cremation ground? It is good to see these things.

The Boy — I dreamed about you. You were seated and you said something.

Sri Ramakrishna — What was I saying? Please tell me some of it.

The Boy — I don't remember now.

Sri Ramakrishna — Never mind. But it's very good. You will make progress spiritually. You do feel attracted to me, don't you?

After awhile Thakur says, "Won't you go there?" (to Dakshineswar)? The boy says, "I can't say if I will or not."

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? Don't you have a relative living there?

The Boy — Yes, sir, I have. But it wouldn't be convenient for me to go there.

Girish is reading Keshab Sen's biography written by Trailokya of the Brahmo Samaj. The book says, "The Paramahansa Deva was initially very averse to the world, but he has changed his mind since meeting Keshab. The Paramahansa now says that it is possible to lead a spiritual life in the household too." Some devotees who read this have brought it to Thakur's notice. They want to discuss it with Trailokya. All the passages from the book have been read out to Thakur.

Thakur's state – giving up company of devotees

Seeing the book in Girish's hands, Thakur says to Girish, M., Ram and the other devotees, "These people are busy living a worldly life, so they are harping on 'world'. They are living in 'lust and greed'. When one has realized God, one doesn't talk like this. After attaining the bliss of God, the world becomes like the droppings of a crow. I had brushed it all away in the beginning. I had not only given up the company of worldly people, but at times I even kept myself away from devotees. I noticed that the devotees were dying one by one, and my heart began

to writhe with pain. But now I do live in the company of a few devotees.”

Chapter V

Thakur enjoys devotional songs in company of devotees

Girish has gone home. He will return.

Trailokya arrives with Jaygopal Sen. They offer salutations to Thakur and sit down. Thakur makes polite enquiries of them. The Younger Naren arrives and salutes Thakur by prostrating on the ground. Thakur asks him, “Why didn’t you come this Saturday?” Trailokya is going to sing now.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah, that day you sang the song of the All-Blissful Mother! What a nice song! The songs of other people seem insipid to me. That day I didn’t even like Narendra’s singing. Please sing the same song again.

Trailokya sings: Victory to Sachi’s son!

Thakur leaves to wash. Women devotees are sitting behind a screen, eagerly awaiting him. He will go see them so they can have his darshan¹. Trailokya’s song continues.

Returning from the room, Thakur says to Trailokya, “Please sing for awhile the song about the All-Blissful Mother.” Trailokya sings –

Divine Mother, how great is Your love for Your human children!

O Mother! Streams of the tears of ecstatic love flow from our eyes as soon as we remember You.

¹ Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness.

I have been guilty of transgressing Your laws since I was born.

Even so, You cast a loving glance from Your beautiful face and call upon me with such sweet words.

As I remember You, tears of ecstatic love begin to flow from my eyes.

Mother, I can no longer bear the burden of your ecstatic love!

My soul, having pierced my heart, cries to feel Your affection and love.

Mother, please accept me under the shelter of Your holy feet!

Listening to the song, the Younger Naren becomes merged in deep meditation. He sits there like a log of wood. Thakur says to M., "Just see what deep meditation he has plunged into! He has absolutely lost outer consciousness."

The song ends. Thakur asks Trailokya to sing, 'O Mother, make me mad with Thy love. What need is there for knowledge or reason?'¹

Ram says, "Let us repeat the name of Hari." Trailokya sings –

O my mind, utter the name of Hari just once, do repeat His name.

Repeat the name of Hari. Let us go beyond the sea of this world.

M. says in a whisper, "O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers..."

Thakur, too, asks for this song to be sung. Trailokya and the devotees all sing together –

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers are so full of compassion.

¹ For complete song see Volume I, Section XII

Thakur joins them in singing. As soon as the song ends, he sings another song –

Behold the two brothers¹ who shed tears on chanting Hari's name have come.

They who ask for prema (ecstatic love) even after receiving blows, these two brothers have come.

They who are Kanai and Balai of Vraja, these two brothers have come.

They who embrace even the pariah, these two brothers have come.

Just after this song is over, Thakur sings another song –

Behold, the whole of Nadia is shaking under the waves of the divine love of Gaur!

Thakur then adds –

Who are they passing, chanting 'Haribol, Haribol' with their lips?

O Madhai, please go and find out.

It seems Gaur and Nitai are going.

They who have golden anklets on their feet,

They who have shaven heads and rags on their bodies,

O Brother, they almost look mad!

The Younger Naren takes his leave.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must show great devotion to your parents. But if they are an obstacle on the way to God, don't obey them. Have determination and say, 'Oh, you rascal!'

¹ Gauranga and Nityananda

The Younger Naren — Truly, I am not in the least afraid of them.

Girish returns. Thakur introduces him to Trailokya, saying, "Please talk to each other for awhile." After they had had a little talk, he says to Trailokya, "Sing that song once again." Trailokya sings —

Victory to Sachi's son, Gaur, a mine of qualities, the love jewel, the sea of the joy of ecstasy.

What a lovely and charming form of golden hue! The joy of the eyes reflecting a beauty even greater than the stalk of a water lily.

His long arms reaching below his knees. The two delicate hands stretched out in love.

Face, like a beautiful lotus, drowned in the essence of love.

The locks of his hair waving in the air. Beautiful cheeks surcharged with the love of Hari. Unmatched attraction.

Merged in mahabhava, saturated with the nectar of Hari. And the hair of the body in horripilation with love.

Like a mad elephant, of golden complexion, all limbs surcharged with emotion, full of the love of God.

Always singing the praises of Hari, a hero of the nectar of love. He brings the light of joy in holy hearts; He is the sea of devotion for Chaitanya.

O, addressing the pariah as a brother, he embraces him with love, his eyes watering.

'Where is Hari, the treasure of my heart?' So saying, he weeps. He perspires and trembles and gives out thunderous cries.

The hair on his body stands on end. His lotus-like body looks so beautiful, having rolled in the dust.

It is the home of the nectar of Hari's sport. He is the spring of the nectar of bhakti, a friend of the helpless, Gaur of Bengal.

Blessed you are, Sri Chaitanya, the moon of love.

Hearing that Gauranga laughs, weeps, dances and sings, Thakur stands up, absorbed in ecstasy. He is completely unconscious of the external world.

Partially returning to normal consciousness, he says most humbly to Trailokya, "Please sing that song once: 'Oh, what have I seen...'"

Trailokya sings –

What an exquisite bright form of Sri Gauranga – his eyes streaming with the tears of love – have I seen in Keshab Bharati's hut!

The song ends. It is already twilight. Thakur is now seated with the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — There are no musical instruments here. The song becomes lively when sung in accompaniment with a good musical instrument. (Smiling) Do you know how Balaram arranges a festival? Like a miserly brahmin whose cow should eat a little but yield milk in torrents! (All laugh.) Balaram has this kind of attitude: sing your own songs and play your own instruments. (All laugh.)

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna and spiritual life – take to worldly pursuits after God-realization

It is already dusk. Lights have been lit in Balaram's parlour and on the verandah. Sri Ramakrishna

salutes the Mother of the Universe, repeats the *mulamantra*¹ and chants Her Name. He is surrounded by devotees listening to the sweet name of God chanted by him. Girish, M., Balaram, Trailokya and many other devotees are still there. They want to discuss with Trailokya the section in the book 'Biography of Keshab' which talks of the change in the attitude of Thakur. Girish initiates the conversation.

Girish says to Trailokya, "You have written about the change in attitude of Sri Ramakrishna concerning worldly life. It is not really correct."

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and the devotees) — Having enjoyed 'this' joy, one doesn't like the 'other' joy. Having tasted divine bliss, the joy of the world appears to be tasteless. If a man gets a shawl, he doesn't care for broadcloth.

Trailokya — I referred to people who wanted to lead a family life. I didn't say anything about renunciators.

Sri Ramakrishna — What are you talking about? People who harp on 'worldly duties,' if once taste the bliss of God do not like anything else. Their duties are reduced. Gradually, as they derive more bliss from spiritual life, they simply cannot perform their worldly duties. They seek that divine bliss alone. What are worldly pleasures and sexual joy compared to the bliss of God? Having once tasted the bliss of God, one runs after it madly — whether one can preserve one's worldly life or not.

¹ An esoteric word or words of great power repeated during prayer and meditation

“The chatak bird is dying of thirst. The seven oceans and all the rivers and reservoirs are full of water, but it does not drink from them. Its parched throat is almost cracking from thirst, yet it does not drink! It sits with its mouth wide open waiting just for the rainwater of the Svati¹ constellation of stars. All waters are dry except the water of the Svati constellation.”

Two annas of wine and saving both sides

“He says, ‘I shall hold to both God and the world.’ Taking a small quantity of wine, a man may be pleasantly intoxicated and also conscious of the world. But can he be both after getting well drunk?

“One likes nothing else after experiencing the bliss of God. Any matter relating to ‘lust and greed’ then falls like a stone on the chest. (Thakur chants to the tune of the kirtan) ‘It is different with others, but I like nothing else.’ When one becomes mad with love for God, he is not attracted by money and the rest.”

Trailokya — One certainly requires money to live in the world. One even has to hoard. There are so many things to spend money on – charity...

Sri Ramakrishna — What do you mean? That you have to accumulate money first, and then seek God? And you talk of charity and compassion! One spends thousands of rupees on the marriage of one’s daughter – while his neighbours may be starving. How difficult he finds it to give them two fistfuls of

¹ The fifteenth of the twenty-seven zodiacal stars according to Hindu astronomy

rice! He calculates so much before giving them anything. He says to himself, 'People may be starving, but what can I do? Let the rascals live or die. What I care about is whether the members of my family are living comfortably.' One merely talks of compassion for all living beings!

Trailokya — There have been good householders too – for instance, Pundarika Vidyanidhi, the devotee of Chaitanyadeva. He lived the life of a householder.

Sri Ramakrishna — He was intoxicated up to his neck with the wine of divine love. Had he drunk a little more, he would not have been able to lead the life of a householder.

Trailokya doesn't say anything in reply. M. says aside to Girish, "So, what he has written is not correct."

Girish (to Trailokya) — Then it is not true, what you have written.

Trailokya — Why so? One can practice spiritual life in the household. Doesn't he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] say that?

Sri Ramakrishna — Spiritual life in the household is possible. But one should first attain the knowledge of God¹ before entering family life – one should first realize God before living as a householder. Then 'even though one may swim in the black waters of lamp-black, the body will not be

¹ Jnana

stained.’ One can then live like a mudfish. The household life which one leads after God-realization is a world of spirituality¹. There is no ‘lust and greed’ in it – only devotion, devotee and God². I, too, have a wife. I also have a few utensils in my room. I, too, feed a few vagabonds. And when devotees like Habi’s mother come to visit, I also worry about them.

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna and avatarhood

A Devotee (to Trailokya) — I read in your book that you do not believe in divine incarnations. You said this with reference to Chaitanyadeva.

Trailokya — Chaitanyadeva himself protested against the idea of divine incarnation. When Advaita and the other devotees in Puri sang a song saying, ‘He indeed is God,’ Chaitanyadeva shut the door of his room. God has infinite glories. As he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] says, the devotee is the living room of God. Does it mean that if the living room is well decorated, there is no splendour anywhere else?

Girish — He says that ecstatic love³ alone is the essence of God. We need the person who is the conduit of this ecstatic love. He says that cow’s milk flows through the udder, so we need the udder. No

¹ Vidya

² Bhakti, bhakta and Bhagavan

³ Prema

other parts of the cow's body are important to us – its forefeet, its legs, its horns, and so on.

Trailokya — The milk of God's ecstatic love is channeled through various conduits. He has infinite powers.

Girish — Can any other power match His ecstatic love?

Trailokya — It is possible if He who has the power wants it. Everything has sprung out of His power.

Girish — All may be His power, but there is also the power of nescience, or ignorance¹.

Trailokya — What is ignorance? Does such a thing as ignorance exist? It is merely a negation. For example, darkness is the negation of light. God's ecstatic love is invaluable – just a drop of it is like an ocean for us. But if you say that ecstatic love is the last word about God, it would mean that He can be limited.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and the other devotees) — Yes, yes. That is true, of course. But if I take even a small quantity of wine, I become intoxicated. What need is there to find out how many gallons of wine there are in the tavern? What need is there for us to find out about the infinite powers of God?

¹ Avidya

Girish (to Trailokya) — Do you believe in the incarnation of God?

Trailokya — God incarnates Himself in his devotee. Infinite power does not manifest, it is simply impossible. It cannot manifest itself in any person.

Girish — We can serve our children as ‘Brahma Gopala’¹. Why can’t we worship a spiritually elevated personality by calling him God?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya) — Why do you bother yourself with infinity? Do I need to touch your whole body to touch you? If you wish to take a dip in the Ganges, do you have to touch the water of the Ganges from Hardwar to Gangasagar? ‘All troubles cease when the ego dies’. As long as one retains the feeling of ‘I’, so long one is conscious of differentiation. Nobody can know, nobody can express by word of mouth, what remains after the ego vanishes. Only that which exists remains. One cannot tell by word of mouth that this much power is manifested in this man and the remainder in another. Imagine the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda in which an earthen pot of ego is immersed. As long as there is the earthen pot, so long is the water divided into two parts – the water inside the pot and the water outside. The moment the pot breaks, it is all one stretch of water. One cannot even say this. Who remains to tell?

After this discussion, Thakur has a sweet conversation with Trailokya.

¹ A name of God; baby Krishna

Sri Ramakrishna — Are you having a good time?

Trailokya — Well, the moment I get up from here, I'll become the same old self. Right now I am feeling very inspired.

Sri Ramakrishna — There is no danger of thorns, if one is wearing shoes. One has no fear of 'lust and greed' when one knows that 'God is the only Reality and all else ephemeral.'

Balaram takes Trailokya to another room when he is asked to serve the latter some refreshments. Sri Ramakrishna describes to the devotees the state of mind of Trailokya and people of his views. It is 9:00 p.m.

Who can recognize an incarnation of God?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish, Mani and other devotees) — Do you know what these people are like? A frog in a small well who has never seen dry land. It only knows its own small well. It will never believe that there is dry land. He has not tasted the bliss of God, so he goes on harping about the world.

(To Girish) "Why do you waste your breath on these people? They are living both a worldly and a spiritual life. Unless one has tasted the bliss of God, one cannot understand that bliss. Can one explain sex pleasure to a boy of five? Worldly people talk about God only from hearsay. Children, hearing their two old aunts quarrelling, learn to say, 'I believe in God,' 'I swear by God ...'

"Let it be. It is not their fault. Can everybody conceive of Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss

Absolute? Only twelve rishis were able to recognize Ramachandra as an incarnation of God – others could not understand. Some took him as an ordinary human being, others as a sadhu. Only a few knew him as an avatar.

“A person values an article according to his own wealth. A gentleman asked his servant to take a diamond to the market. ‘When you come back,’ he said, ‘tell me how much each trader is willing to pay for it. First take it to an egg-plant seller.’ The servant went to a trader in egg-plants. He examined it to evaluate it and said, ‘Brother, I can give you nine seers of egg-plants for it.’ The servant said, ‘Brother, make it a little more. Give me ten seers of egg-plant.’ The egg-plant seller said, ‘I have already offered more than the market rate. You may give it to me if the price suits you.’ The servant laughed. He returned the diamond to his master and told him, ‘The egg-plant seller will not give more than nine seers of egg-plants, not one more. He said that he had already offered more than the market rate.’

“The gentleman laughed and said, ‘Well, take the diamond now to a cloth merchant. This fellow deals in egg-plant. What does he know? The cloth merchant is wealthier. Let’s see what he says.’ The servant went to the cloth merchant and said, ‘Sir, would you care to buy this diamond? How much would you pay for it?’ The cloth merchant said, ‘Well, you have brought something very nice. It can be made into a beautiful piece of jewelry. Brother, I can pay nine hundred rupees for it.’ The servant said, ‘If you give a little higher quote, I can give it to you. Let it be a thousand rupees, if not more.’

The cloth merchant said, 'Brother, don't bargain any more. I have already quoted higher than the market price. I can't pay a rupee higher than nine hundred rupees.' The servant returned to the master and said, laughing, 'The cloth merchant could not give a rupee more than nine hundred. He even said that he has already offered more than the market rate.' The master laughed and said, 'Now take it to a jeweler. Let us see what he says.' The servant went to a jeweler and the moment the jeweler glanced at it, he said, 'I can offer a hundred thousand rupees.'"

Godmen¹ and ordinary human beings

"These people talk of practicing religion while leading a worldly life. It is like a person who has shut himself in a room – with all the doors and windows closed – with just a small hole for a little light to come in from the roof. Can one see the sun with a roof overhead? What will he do with only a little light? 'Lust and greed' constitute the roof. Can one see the sun unless the roof is removed? Worldly people have, as it were, shut themselves inside a room.

"Incarnations of God are *Ishvarakotis*. They walk freely in the open – they are never bound to the world, they never imprison themselves. Theirs is not a gross 'I' – like that of worldly people. The 'I' of worldly people is bound – it is bound within the four walls, with a roof overhead. They can see nothing outside. The 'I' of an incarnation of God is the subtle 'I'. One can always see God through this

¹ Ishvarakotis

'T'. It is as if a person is standing within a four-walled enclosure. There is a limitless field on all sides. If there is a hole in the wall, one can see everything on the other side. If the hole is big enough one can even go out and return through it. The 'T' of the avatar is like this wall with a hole. Even while he remains on this side of the wall, he can see a limitless space beyond it. It means that he can always live in communion with God, even when he is in a human body. And then when he wills, he can merge into samadhi, having gone out of the big hole in the wall. If the hole is big enough, he can even visit and revisit. He can come down to the worldly plane even after passing into samadhi."

The devotees sit speechless listening to Thakur describe avatarhood.

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram Basu's House in Calcutta

Chapter I

Narendra and Hazra

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees in Balaram's parlour on the second floor of the house. He is smiling. A number of devotees, including Narendra, M., Bhavanath, Purna, Paltu, the Younger Naren, Girish, Ram Babu, Dwija, and Binode are sitting around him.

It is Saturday, 9 May 1885, three o'clock in the afternoon; the tenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Vaishakh.

Balaram is not at home. Being unwell, he has gone to Monghyr for a change of climate. His eldest daughter (who is now deceased¹) has invited Thakur and the devotees and has celebrated their coming with a feast. Thakur rests awhile after the meal.

Thakur repeatedly asks M., "Please tell me whether I am large-hearted." Bhavanath laughs and says, "What will he say? He will keep quiet."

A beggar from north India has arrived to sing. The devotees listen to one or two of his songs. Narendra likes them. He says to the singer, "Do sing more."

¹ She was deceased at the time of M.'s writing of this Volume

Sri Ramakrishna — Enough! Stop! We don't want any more songs. Where is the money? (To Narendra) You asked him to sing, but who will pay!

A Devotee (smiling) — Sir, he takes you to be a rich man, the way you are leaning against that bolster. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He may also think I am ill.

The topic of conversation now drifts to Hazra's egotism. Hazra had been compelled to leave the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar.

Narendra — Hazra now admits he was egotistic.

Sri Ramakrishna — Don't believe him. He says that so he can return to Dakshineswar. (To the devotees) Only Narendra says that Hazra is 'a grand person'.

Narendra — I still say so.

Sri Ramakrishna — But why, even when you have heard so many bad things about him?

Narendra — He has a few faults, but he has many more good qualities.

Sri Ramakrishna — He does have single-minded devotion¹ to his ideal.

¹ Nishtha

“He says to me, ‘You don’t like me now, but later you will want my company.’ A goswami of Srerampore came the other day. He is a descendent of Advaita Goswami¹. I wanted him to stay on for a day or two. I asked him respectfully to stay at Dakshineswar. Hazra said, ‘Send him to stay with the treasurer of the temple.’ What he meant was that the goswami might ask for some milk or food and that he would have to share with him. I said, ‘You rascal! I myself prostrate before him because he is a goswami. You, on the other hand, live a worldly life, holding on to ‘lust and greed,’ and do all sorts of pranks. You perform a little japa and become egotistical. Don’t you feel ashamed of yourself?’

“Sattva guna leads one to the Lord. Rajo guna and tamo guna take one away from Him. Sattva is described as white, rajas as red, and tamas as black. One day I asked Hazra to tell me how much sattva each one of us possessed. He said, ‘It is sixteen annas² in the case of Narendra, and eighteen annas in my case.’ I asked him, ‘How about me?’ He said, ‘You still have tinges of red – sattva guna is only twelve annas in your case.’ (All laugh.)

“Hazra used to sit and perform japa at Dakshineswar. While telling his beads, he would also try to make money from the visitors. He had incurred a debt of several thousand rupees in his native village. Talking of the brahmin cook, he remarked, ‘Do I care to talk to people like that?’ ”

¹ An intimate disciple of Chaitanyadeva

² Sixteen annas make one Rupee, or one complement

**Desire is an obstacle to God-realization – God has
nature of a child**

“You know what the truth is? Even if you have the least desire, you cannot attain God. The progress of actions can be very subtle. Say you have to thread a needle. It will not enter the eye of the needle if there is the least fibre sticking out.

“Why does one not attain God even after telling the beads for thirty years? If one has a festering wound, powerful measures have to be applied to cure it. Ordinary medicine alone does not cure the wound.

“Howsoever much religious discipline you may practice, you will not achieve spiritual perfection if you have desires. However, this fact is also true: You can attain perfection at once by the Lord’s grace and compassion. Just as all darkness is dispelled in a moment when a light is brought into a room that has been dark for a thousand years.

“Say a poor man’s son has attracted the attention of a big man. The latter gives his daughter in marriage to him. Immediately he has everything: a house, furniture, a horse-drawn carriage, maids and attendants, clothes and other comforts.”

A Devotee — Sir, how does one receive God’s grace?

Sri Ramakrishna — God has the nature of a child. Think of a boy holding jewels in the end piece of his cloth. A number of people are passing by. Many of them ask him to give them the jewels. Placing his hand on the cloth and turning his face away, the

boy says, 'No, I will not give you any.' But he may run after someone else who has not asked him for the jewels and give all of them away.

**Renunciation brings God-Realization – his earlier story
– attitude of Mathur Babu**

Sri Ramakrishna — One cannot realize God unless one renounces.

“But who will accept my words? I am looking for a companion – a companion with the same attitude as mine. When I see a devout devotee, I say to myself, 'Perhaps he will accept my ideal.' But later I see that he has become quite a different man.

“A ghost was looking for a companion. One becomes a ghost if one dies an unnatural death either on Tuesdays or Saturdays. Whenever this ghost found that somebody was dying an unnatural death on a Saturday or a Tuesday, he would run to him. He thought to himself that he was perhaps now going to have a companion. But no sooner did he come near the ghost than he saw the man getting up. Perhaps he had fallen from a roof and had lost consciousness, but didn't die.

“Once Mathur Babu was in an ecstatic mood. He remained intoxicated, unable to do any work. Everybody said, 'Who will manage his estate if he remains like this?' They thought that the younger Bhattacharya (Sri Ramakrishna) had cast a spell on him.”

**Narendra loses outer consciousness – two stories of the
guru and the disciple**

“On one of Narendra’s first visits to Dakshineswar, he lost outer consciousness when I touched his chest with my hand. Regaining consciousness, he began to weep and said, ‘I say, why did you do this to me? Sir, I have my father, I have my mother.’ This ‘me’ and ‘mine’ comes from ignorance.

“A guru said to his disciple, ‘The world is illusory, so leave it and come away with me.’ The disciple replied, ‘But Master, all these people love me a great deal – my father, my mother, my wife. How can I leave them to accompany you?’ The guru said to him, ‘Although you repeat ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ and you say that they all love you, you are very much mistaken. I am going to teach you a trick of deception. Try it and you will know whether they genuinely love you or not.’ Saying this, the guru put a pill in the disciple’s hand and said, ‘Take this and you will look like you are dead, but you will not lose consciousness and you will be able to hear and see everything. When I visit you, you will gradually regain normal consciousness.’

“The disciple did exactly as he was told. There was weeping and wailing in the house. The mother, the wife, everyone began to weep, having fallen on the ground. Just then a brahmin came and asked them what had happened. They all replied that the man had died. The brahmin felt his pulse and said, ‘What? He is not dead. I will give him some medicine. As soon as he takes it, he will be cured.’ Every member of the family felt as if they had been granted something very precious. ‘But,’ the

brahmin continued, 'there is a condition. Somebody has to take the medicine before it is given to him. And that person will die. I see that he has so many loving relatives; someone will surely take it. His mother and wife are wailing so bitterly. One of them will certainly take it.'

"At once the wailing stopped and there was silence. The mother said, 'It is such a big family. If I die, who will look after them all?' She was very worried. The wife who was weeping and wailing just a few moments ago, saying, 'Oh my elder sister, I have fallen into big trouble,' now said, 'What had to happen to him has already come to pass. I have small children. Who will look after them if I die?'

"The disciple saw and heard everything. He stood up at once and said, 'Master, let us go. I will follow you.' (All laugh.)

"Another disciple said to his guru, 'My wife serves me so well, Master. I can't leave her behind to follow you.' This disciple practiced hatha yoga. The guru taught him a ruse, too. One day there was a lot of weeping and wailing in the house. The neighbours came and saw the practitioner of hatha yoga seated on a small carpet in the house, his body stiff and twisted. Everybody thought that he had breathed his last. His wife was crying and had fallen on the ground, saying: 'Oh mother, what catastrophe has befallen me! How have you provided for our future? Oh my friends, I never imagined I would meet with such a fate.' In the meantime her relatives brought a cot to take him out of the room.

“But then a problem arose. He could not be taken through the door since his body was stiff and twisted. A neighbour ran and brought an axe and began to chop the door frame. The wife was weeping bitterly. Hearing the sound of wood being chopped, she came running and, still weeping, asked, ‘What are you doing?’ He said, ‘The body can’t be taken out, so we are chopping away the door frame.’ ‘Please,’ the wife said, ‘don’t do this. I am a widow now. There is nobody to look after me and I have to bring up these children. If the door is chopped, I will not be able to replace it. I say, he is already dead. You must chop off his hands and feet.’ Hearing this, the hatha yogi stood up. The effect of the medicine had worn off. He stood up and said, ‘You mean woman! You are going to chop off my hands and feet?’ Saying this, he renounced home and went away with his guru. (All laugh.)

“In most cases mourning is a pretense. When a woman has to wail, she first removes her nose ring and other ornaments. She locks them safely in a box. Then she comes out, falls on the ground and wails, beating her breast, ‘Oh my friends! What misfortune has befallen me!’ ”

Chapter II

Narendra and others discuss incarnation of God in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna

Narendra — How can I believe, without proof, that the Lord incarnates Himself as a human being?

Girish — Faith in itself is sufficient proof. This article is lying here. What is the proof? Your faith alone is the proof.

A Certain Devotee — Have philosophers been able to prove that the external world exists outside us? They only say we have an irresistible belief in it.

Girish (to Narendra) — Even if the Lord came before you, you wouldn't believe it. You might say, 'This man says that God Himself has incarnated in him — but he is surely an impostor.'

The topic of discussion is now whether the heavenly gods are immortal.

Narendra — Where is the proof?

Girish — Even if you saw them in front of you, you wouldn't believe them.

Narendra — I want proof that they existed in past ages.

Mani whispers something to Paltu.

Paltu (smiling, to Narendra) — What is the need for immortals to be without a beginning? For one to be immortal, one has only to be without end.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Narendra is the son of a lawyer, and Paltu of a deputy magistrate. (All laugh.)

All are silent for awhile.

Jogin (smiling, to Girish and other devotees) — He (Thakur) does not accept Narendra's opinions any more.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Once I said to Narendra that the chatak bird drinks no water except rainwater. Narendra said that the chatak drinks ordinary water too. Then I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, are my words not true?' I was terribly worried. Narendra came on another day. He saw some birds fluttering in the room. Seeing them he said, 'There they are! There they are!' I asked, 'What?' He replied, 'The same chatak birds.' I saw that they were only bats. Since then I don't accept what he says. (All laugh.)

Is vision of the form a delusion of the mind?

Sri Ramakrishna — Narendra said to me in Jadu Mallick's garden, 'The visions of God that you see are all hallucinations.' Amazed, I said to him, 'But they speak to me!' Narendra said, 'Such delusions happen.' Then I went to the Divine Mother and implored Her with tears, 'Mother, what is this? Is it all false? Narendra said so.' The Divine Mother then showed me Consciousness, Indivisible Consciousness, and said, 'If your visions are illusions, why do they tally with facts?' Then I said to Narendra, 'Rascal, you are robbing me of my faith! Don't come here again.'

**Sri Ramakrishna – scriptures and word of God –
revelation**

The discussion continues. Narendra is arguing. He is twenty-two years and four months old.

Narendra (to Girish, M. and others) — How can I put my faith in religious texts? The *Mahanirvana Tantra* says at one place that a person goes to hell if he doesn't attain the knowledge of Brahman. Then at another place it says, 'There is no salvation without worshipping Parvati, the Divine Mother.' In the *Manusamhita*, Manu writes about himself, while Moses describes his own death in the Pentateuch.

"The *Samkhya* philosophy says God does not exist for the reason that His existence cannot be proved. It also says, 'One must believe in the injunctions of the *Vedas*, that the *Vedas* are eternal scriptures.'

"I don't deny what the scriptures say. I just don't understand them, so please explain them to me. People have explained the scriptures based on their own interpretation. Which opinion shall I accept? A white light looks red when it goes through a red medium, and green when it passes through green glass."

A Certain Devotee — The Lord has said so in the *Gita*.

Sri Ramakrishna — The *Gita* is the essence of all scriptures. A sannyasin may or may not have any other book, but he must have a pocket *Gita* with him.

A Certain Devotee — The *Gita* contains the words of Sri Krishna.

Narendra — The *Gita* contain the words of Sri Krishna – or any other fellow!

Sri Ramakrishna listens to these words of Narendra in amazement.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is a very good discussion.

“There are two interpretations of religious texts: the literal and the real. One should only take the real – that which tallies with the words of God. There is a great difference between what you read in a letter and what you hear from the lips of the letter writer. A religious text is like the words of a letter, and the Lord’s word is like the words of the letter writer. I accept nothing till I have seen that it agrees with the Divine Mother’s words.”

The discussion again turns to God-incarnate¹.

Narendra — It is enough if one has faith in God. There is no need for me to know where God is strolling, or what He is doing. Infinite is the universe and infinite are God’s incarnations.

Hearing the words “Infinite is the universe and infinite are God’s incarnations,” Sri Ramakrishna bows with folded hands and says, “Ah.”

Mani whispers something to Bhavanath.

Bhavanath — He says, ‘If one has not seen an elephant, how can he know whether or not it can pass through the eye of a needle? Similarly, if one has not known God, how can one know by

¹ Avatar

reasoning whether God can incarnate Himself as a human being?’

Sri Ramakrishna — Everything is possible for God. It is He who casts the spell. The magician can thrust a dagger into his throat and take it out again. He can even swallow pieces of brick!

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and work – his state of knowledge of Brahman

A Devotee — The members of the Brahmo Samaj say that the duties of family life should be performed. One should not renounce them.

Girish — Yes, I read that in their paper, the *Sulabha Samachar*. It says that. But one is not able to perform all the actions required to know God. How, then, can he think of performing other worldly duties?

Sri Ramakrishna smiles a little and, looking at M. beckons with a sign of his eye, as if to say, “What he says is right.”

M. has understood that performing duties¹ is very difficult.

Purna has arrived.

Sri Ramakrishna — Who told you about my being here?

¹ *Karmakanda*

Purna — Sarada.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the women devotees present)
— Please give him (Purna) some refreshments.

Now Narendra would like to sing to Sri Ramakrishna
and the devotees.

Narendra sings –

Song –

The mountain, the ocean and the firmament thunder.
O Rudra, wake up!

You are the God of gods, the Supreme God, you are
the *Kala* (death) of *kala* (time), You are the Supreme
Kala.

O Shankara Shiva, the lord of justice, take away my
sins.

Song –

O refuge of the lowly, Your holy name is beautiful
indeed!

A current of nectar flows within it. One who hears it
becomes at peace.

Song –

O mind, why don't you call upon Him who removes
the fear of danger?

What an irony that you remain ever intoxicated with
the world, which is nothing but an illusion!

Your wealth, your kith and kin will not last. Why
forget Him?

Give up the insignificant and worship the substantial.
Your trials of the world will end.

Listen attentively to these words of good, and retain
them in your heart.

Repeat the name of Hari on your lips and proclaim
Him ever and anon.

If you wish to cross over the ocean of the world, give
up your sense attachments.

And surrendering your body, mind and soul to Him,
worship Him.

Paltu — Will you sing that song?

Narendra — Which one?

Paltu —

When I have seen Your peerless face beaming with
intense love,

What fear of earthly woes and frowns of catastrophe!

Narendra sings the song –

When I have seen Your peerless face beaming with
intense love,

What fear of earthly woes and frowns of catastrophe!

Just as the first ray of the dawning sun dispels
darkness,

So too, O Lord, when Your blessed radiance brightens
the heart,

Its sweet consolation acts as a balm to the grief-
stricken heart of the devotee.

When I ponder in my heart Your ecstatic love and
Your grace,

I cannot restrain my tears of joy; they overflow my
heart.

Victory to You, Gracious One, victory to You!

Singing about Your intense love for the devotee,

Let my life-breath ebb away while I perform Your work.

He sings another song at M.'s request. M. and many other devotees sit with folded hands listening to this song.

Song –

O my mind, drink the wine of Hari's nectar and be intoxicated.

Roll on the ground, weeping and chanting, 'Hari, Hari.'

Let the name of Hari thunder deep in the firmament.

Raise both of your arms and dance, crying, 'Hari, Hari.'

Go to people's doors and dole out the name of Hari.

Swim day and night in the nectar of the joy of God's love, and sing Hari's name.

Let your supreme desire be fulfilled and lowly desires be destroyed.

Song –

O my mind, meditate on Lord Hari, the rarefied spirit, the spotless one...

Song –

Wondrous and supreme is Your creation...

Song –

The sun and the moon blaze like lamps and the stars dazzle like diamonds in the dish of the sky.

The soft Malaya breeze is the incense and the wind moves to and fro as a fan before your holy face.

The whole forest has burst into brightness. All the vegetation in the forest is glowing with light.

What a unique worship of Yours is this! You, the breaker of world bonds, Your worship!

The *Anahata Shabda*, the uncaused sound, constitutes the drum beat.

Song –

Fix your mind, O man, on the Primal Purusha, the Stainless One...

At the request of Narayan, Narendra sings again –

O my Mother! Come, do come. You are my sweetheart, You, the marionette of my life breath.

Mother! Please take your seat in my heart and let me gaze at You.

I have been looking at Your face since my birth.

You, of course, know, my Mother, what sorrows I have passed through.

Pray, open the lotus of my heart and reveal Yourself in it, O Goddess of joy and bliss.

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi – in the state of knowledge of Brahman

Narendra sings a song of his own choice.

Song –

O my Mother! Your effulgent form shines in pitch darkness.

Therefore the yogi meditates in the mountain cave.

Sri Ramakrishna is going into samadhi as he listens to this song of samadhi. Narendra sings the song time and again –

O my mind, drink the wine of Hari's nectar and be intoxicated.

Sri Ramakrishna is absorbed in divine ecstasy. He is sitting on a pillow, leaning against the wall and

facing north, his feet hanging down. The devotees surround him on all sides.

Thakur is talking alone with the Divine Mother, absorbed in ecstasy. He says, “I shall go after taking my meal. You have come? Have you found your lodging, left Your baggage there, and then come out?”

Is Thakur saying that the Divine Mother has arrived? Are Thakur and the Divine Mother separate from each other?

Sri Ramakrishna says, “I don’t like anybody’s company now. Mother, why should I hear devotional songs? They will draw part of my mind to the outside world.”

Thakur is gradually regaining outer consciousness. He looks at the devotees and says, “I used to wonder why people kept fish alive in a pot. I would say to myself, ‘How cruel they are,’ as they would kill it later. When the state of my mind began to change, I noticed that the body was nothing but a pillowcase. It doesn’t matter if it survives or not. There is no difference if it goes.”

Bhavanath — So, can one kill a human being, murder him?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, one can do it in that state of mind¹. But not everybody attains this state, the state of the knowledge of Brahman.

“One enjoys God’s love and the devotee only when one comes down a step or two (from samadhi).

“In God there is both knowledge² and ignorance³. Vidya maya takes one toward the Lord,

¹ The Atman is not killed when the body is slain

² Vidya ³ Avidya

avidya maya takes one away from Him. Spiritual knowledge, love and devotion for God¹, compassion and dispassion belong to the realm of vidya. By resorting to them, one draws near to God.

“And if one takes a step up, one reaches Him – attains the knowledge of Brahman. In this state one clearly perceives that God Himself has become everything. He sees no difference between acceptance and denial. He cannot be angry with anyone.

“I was going by carriage when I saw two prostitutes standing on a verandah. I took them as the embodiment of the Mother of the Universe Herself. So I bowed to them.

“When I first attained this state, I could neither worship Mother Kali nor offer Her food to eat. Haladhari and Hriday said, ‘The manager of the temple says that if the priest [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] does not offer food to the deity, what else might he do?’ When I heard these malicious words, I simply laughed – I didn't feel the least irritated.

“After attaining the knowledge of Brahman, one should move about enjoying the divine sport. A sadhu was walking through a city enjoying its sights. He met another sadhu, an acquaintance of his. The latter said, ‘You are walking around enjoying yourself, but where is your baggage? I hope nobody has stolen it from you.’ The former said, ‘No, my luggage is not stolen. I first arranged for lodging, and then placed it safely in the room

¹ Bhakti

and locked it. Now I am going around enjoying the sights in the city.’” (All laugh.)

Bhavanath — This is a very lofty idea.

Mani (to himself) — To enjoy the divine sport after attaining the knowledge of Brahman! To come down to the plane of the phenomenal world after attaining samadhi!

Sri Ramakrishna (to M. and others) — Is it easy to attain the knowledge of Brahman? It is not possible until the mind is completely annihilated. A guru said to his disciple, ‘Give me your mind and I will give you divine knowledge.’ The Naked One (Totapuri) used to say, ‘Don’t let your mind scatter.’

Biology – ‘Natural Law’ in the spiritual world

“In this state, one likes nothing but talk about God and the company of devotees.

(To Ram) “You are a doctor. You know that medicine works only when it mixes with the blood. Similarly, in the state of the knowledge of Brahman, one sees God both within and without. One sees that He has become the body, the mind, the vital breath and the soul.”

Mani (to himself) — Assimilation!

Sri Ramakrishna — One attains the state of Brahmajnana when the mind is annihilated. When the mind vanishes, one’s ego is wiped out – that which goes on repeating ‘I,’ ‘T’. One reaches this

state through the path of love and devotion for God as well as through the path of divine knowledge, that is to say the path of discrimination. The jnani reasons saying, 'Not this, not this,' – that is to say, 'it is all maya, like a dream.' This world is 'not this, not this,' – it is just maya. When the world disappears, only the individual remains – that is, the pot of 'I-consciousness' remains.

“Imagine that there are ten pots full of water. They all reflect the sun. How many suns do you see?”

A Devotee — Ten reflected suns and one true sun.

Sri Ramakrishna — Imagine now that one of these pots breaks. How many suns do you see?

The Devotee — Nine reflected suns. And, of course, the real sun.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, suppose nine pots are broken. How many suns will you see?

The Devotee — One reflected image of the sun and the true sun.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — What remains after the last pot is broken?

Girish — That real sun, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. There are no words to describe what remains. It is what really is. When there is no reflected sun, how can you say that

there is the real sun? In the state of samadhi the ‘I’ vanishes. What a man sees then, cannot be expressed in words when he comes down to a lower plane.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna heartens the devotees with hope and promises

It is twilight. Lamps are lit in Balaram’s parlour. Sri Ramakrishna is still in an ecstatic mood. Devotees surround him. He says in his state of ecstasy:

“I am saying this to you as no outsider is present here. He who sincerely tries to know God will realize Him. He will assuredly know Him. He who yearns for God and seeks nothing but Him will succeed.

“All the devotees of the inner circle have already come. The devotees who will come later will belong to the outer circle. They will also go there [to Dakshineswar] every now and then. The Divine Mother will instruct them, ‘Do this. Call on God in this way.’

God alone is the guru – the only way for the embodied being to attain liberation

“Why doesn’t the mind of embodied being turn toward God? The attraction (of Mahamaya) is much stronger than that of God. The orderly of a judge is more powerful than the judge. (All laugh.)

“Rama said to Narada, ‘Narada, I am very happy to hear your hymn of praise. Please ask for a

boon from me.' Narada said, 'Rama, grant that I may have devotion¹ to your lotus feet and faith². And grant that I may never be enchanted by your world-bewitching maya.' Rama said, 'So be it. Please ask for another boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, I don't want anything else.'

"Everyone is enchanted by His world-bewitching maya. Even when God takes up a human body, He too is enchanted by maya. Rama wandered about weeping in search of Sita. Bound by the five elements, even Brahman laments.

"Even so, remember, if God wills He can liberate Himself at once."

Bhavanath — A railway guard, of his own will, shuts himself in a coach, but he can come out whenever he wants to.

Sri Ramakrishna — *Ishvarakotis*, such as divine incarnations, can be liberated whenever they want. But ordinary human beings cannot. Embodied beings are bound by 'lust and greed'. They have shut the doors and windows of their houses and fastened them tightly with screws. How can they come out?

Bhavanath (smiling) — They are like third class railway passengers. They are locked in their compartments; they can't get out.

¹ Bhakti

² Shraddha

Girish — If a man is bound in this way from all sides, then what is the way for him?

Sri Ramakrishna — He has nothing to fear if God, having come down as the guru, cuts asunder the bonds of maya.

Is Thakur hinting that he himself has taken up a human body in the form of the Guru and is breaking the bonds of maya?

Section XVI

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at the House of a Devotee

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at Ram's house

Sri Ramakrishna has come to Ram's house. He is sitting in the ground floor parlour surrounded by devotees. He is smiling and full of joy talking to them.

It is Saturday, 23 May 1885. The 10th day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha. The time is about five o'clock. Mahima is sitting in front of Thakur. M. is on his left side and Paltu, Bhavanath, Nityagopal and Harmohan sit around them. When Sri Ramakrishna had entered the room, he had enquired after the welfare of the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Hasn't the Younger Naren arrived yet?

The Younger Naren appears in a few minutes.

Sri Ramakrishna — And that person hasn't come?

M. — Who, sir?

Sri Ramakrishna — Kishori. And aren't Girish Ghosh and Narendra coming?

Narendra soon arrives and salutes Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — It would have been nice if Kedar (Chatterji) had come. He agrees with Girish Ghosh. (Laughing, to Mahima) He, too, says the same [that Sri Ramakrishna is an incarnation of God.]

A kirtan is being arranged in the room. With folded hands, the musician says, “Please give your permission to start singing.”

Thakur says, “I wish to have some water first.”

After having refreshments, he takes some spice powder from a small bag and asks M. to close the bag.

The kirtan starts. The sound of the drum puts Thakur in an ecstatic mood. As he hears ‘Gaur Chandrika,’ he merges completely in samadhi.

Nityagopal is close to him. Thakur stretches his legs out on Nityagopal’s lap. Nityagopal is also passing into ecstasy. All the devotees watching his state of samadhi are speechless with wonder.

Yoga, subjective and objective – identity of the Absolute, the soul and the cosmos

Partially returning to outer-consciousness, Thakur speaks, “Descending from the Absolute to the phenomenal and ascending from the phenomenal to the Absolute.” (To Nityagopal) “Which one do you like?”

Nityagopal (humbly) — Both are good.

Sri Ramakrishna says, shutting his eyes, “Is God visible only in this way? Is it that He is visible only when you shut your eyes, and He does not exist when you don’t? The Absolute belongs to the same Reality as the phenomenal world; the phenomenal world belongs to the same Reality as the Absolute.”

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — I say this to you, my dear, just once.

Mahimacharan — Sir, both are by the will of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Some people climb seven stories and cannot come down. But some, having climbed the seven stories, can come down – and ascend again as well.

“Uddhava said to the gopis, ‘He whom you call Krishna dwells in all beings and the elements – He has become the world and its creatures.’

“So I ask: Is meditation possible only with eyes shut? Is it not possible with eyes open?”

Mahima — I have a question to ask.

A Devotee — Doesn't he need to attain Nirvana¹ sometime?

His earlier story – Totapuri wept – is Nirvana the end of life?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not essential to attain Nirvana. There is, in fact, the Eternal Krishna² and there are His eternal devotees. Krishna³ is the embodiment of Consciousness, and His realm is Consciousness too.

“There is the moon and there are stars. Just so, where there is the Eternal Krishna, there are also His eternal devotees. Don't you yourself say, ‘If

¹ Total annihilation of the ego

² Nitya Krishna

³ Shyam

the Lord is seen both within and without, what is the need for austerity¹? I told you that if a devotee is born of Vishnu, his seed of love and devotion for God does not vanish. I fell into the hands of a jnani. He taught me Vedanta for eleven months. But the seed of bhakti did not die in me. Wherever my mind would go, it came back to repeat, ‘Mother, Mother.’ The Naked One² would weep when he heard me sing devotional songs. He would say, ‘Oh, how wonderful!’ See, he was such a big jnani and even he was moved to tears! (To the Younger Naren and others) Once the seed of bhakti has fallen into your heart, it cannot but sprout. Gradually you will see its tree, its fruit and its flowers.

“ ‘The pestle will destroy the whole clan³. The pestle was rubbed a great deal, until most of it was ground away. Yet a little piece of it still remained. And the whole dynasty of the Yadus was annihilated with that small piece of pestle⁴. Reason and argue a thousand times, but if you have the seed of love and devotion for the Lord within, you will come back and chant ‘Hari, Haribol.’ ”

The devotees listen to Sri Ramakrishna without uttering a word. Laughing, Thakur asks Mahimacharan, “What do you like most?”

¹ Refer Narada Pancharatra to find the complete text of this hymn.

If Hari is both inside and outside what need is there of penance. And if He is not there, what need of penance? If you worship Hari, what need is there of penance? And if you do not, what need of penance? So, O brahmin, get disengaged, dear boy. What is the need of penance? Go at once to Shankara, the sea of jnana. Attain deep devotion for Hari, which the Vaishnavas speak of.

² Totapuri

³ Mūsalam kulanāśanam

⁴ Reference: a story in the Mahabharata in which a curse on a pestle destroyed the Jadu clan

Mahima (smiling) — Nothing. However, I like mangoes.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Would you eat them all yourself? Or would you share with others?

Mahima (smiling) — I have no great desire to share. It is enough for me to eat them myself.

Sri Ramakrishna's correct attitude

Sri Ramakrishna — But do you know what my attitude is? Is God not visible when I open my eyes? I accept both the Absolute¹ and the phenomenal².

“When one has realized God, one knows that He Himself is self-existent³ as well as the All-pervading in the form of the universe⁴. He is the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and He has also become the world and its living beings.”

Mere knowledge of scriptures is illusory – direct knowledge is obtained by practice of spiritual disciplines

“The practice of spiritual disciplines is essential. Mere study of scriptures does no good. I found Vidyasagar very learned. But to what end? Didn't you see that his only joy was to teach boys how to read and write? He has never tasted the Bliss of God. What will mere study do? What does one

¹ Nitya

² Lila

³ *Svarata*; He alone exists, without any support

⁴ *Virat*

assimilate of the injunctions of the scriptures? The almanac says there will be twenty measures of rainfall, but however much you press the almanac, not a drop of water comes from it.”

Mahima — There are so many duties that one has to do in the world. Where is the time for the practice of spiritual disciplines?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, don't you yourself say that the world is like a dream?

“Seeing the ocean in front of him, Lakshmana took a bow and arrow in his hand and said angrily, ‘I am going to kill Varuna¹. This ocean keeps us from going to Lanka.’ Rama explained to him, saying, ‘All that you see is like a dream, ephemeral. The ocean is ephemeral – and so is your anger.’ To dispel the unreal with the unreal is illusory too.”

Mahimacharan remains quiet.

Karma Yoga or Bhakti Yoga? Who is the Sadguru?

Mahimacharan has many household duties to perform. Also, he has founded a new school – for the purpose of doing good to humanity.

Sri Ramakrishna now talks about other things.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — Sambhu said to me, ‘I want to spend this money on acts of public good – to build schools and dispensaries, construct roads and build bathing ghats on the river.’ I said, ‘It will be good if you can do it without expecting

¹ The presiding deity of the waters

any return. But it is very difficult to work without any selfish motive. Some desire somehow creeps in. I ask you this: If the Lord reveals Himself to you, will you pray to Him for such things as schools, dispensaries and hospitals?’

A Particular Devotee — Sir, what is the way for worldly people?

Sri Ramakrishna — Keeping the company of holy men and listening to spiritual talk.

“Worldly people are intoxicated – they are inebriated with ‘lust and greed’. A drunkard gradually comes to his senses if he is fed rice water in small quantities at regular intervals.

“And one must listen to the instructions of a Sadguru¹. There are signs of a Sadguru. One should listen about Kashi from one who has visited Kashi, who has seen it. A man of mere learning will be of no help. One should not listen to the instructions of a pundit who has not realized that the world is ephemeral. Only a pundit who has gained discrimination and dispassion² has the right to instruct mankind.

“Samadhyayi said that the Lord is totally devoid of sweetness, love and bliss³. He called Him joyless and tasteless who is the very fountain of love and bliss⁴! Somebody said, ‘My maternal uncle keeps a cowshed full of horses.’ (Everybody laughs.)

¹ A perfected Master; a genuine spiritual preceptor

² Viveka and vairagya

³ *Neeras*

⁴ *Rasaswaroop*

‘I’ and ‘mine’ constitute ignorance – jnana and vijnana

“Worldly people are intoxicated with worldliness. They are always thinking: ‘I am the doer of all these actions. And this home and family are mine.’ Baring his teeth, a man says, ‘What will happen to them (wife and children)? How will they manage without me? Who will look after my wife, my family?’ Rakhal said, ‘What will happen to my wife?’ ”

Harmohan — Did Rakhal say that?

Sri Ramakrishna — What else could he do? He who has knowledge also has ignorance. Lakshmana said to Rama, ‘Rama, how strange! Even a saint like Vaishishtha Deva is suffering the bereavement of his son!’ Rama said, ‘Brother, he who has knowledge also has ignorance. You must go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.’

“Take, for example, a person whose foot is pierced by a thorn. He finds another thorn to take out the first one. After he has removed the former with the help of the latter, he throws away both thorns. To pull out the thorn of ignorance, one has to use the thorn of knowledge. When one throws away both the thorns of knowledge and ignorance, one attains vijnana. Assimilating the idea that the Lord exists, one has to know Him in a special way. One must talk to Him intimately. This is vijnana. That is why Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, ‘You must go beyond the three gunas.’

“To attain vijnana, one has to take refuge in vidya maya¹. Vidya maya includes the discrimination that the Lord is the Reality and the world ephemeral – this idea, in other words, constitutes discrimination and non-attachment. Besides, vidya maya also includes chanting His Name and glories, meditation, keeping the company of holy people, prayer, and so on. Vidya maya is like the last few steps leading to the roof – climb a step or two more and you are on the roof. To be on the roof is God-realization.”

**Worldly people and young men who have renounced
'lust and greed'**

“Worldly people are intoxicated – inebriated with ‘lust and greed’. They have lost their awareness. That is why I am fond of the young men. ‘Lust and greed’ have not yet entered their minds. They are ‘good receptacles’ and can be of use in the Lord’s work. Worldly people are full of worthless stuff. They are like bony fish – trying to eliminate the bones, one is left with nothing in the end, very little meat.

“They are like mangoes struck by a hail storm. They can be eaten only when purified by sprinkling them with Ganges water. They cannot, generally speaking, be offered in the worship of the Deity. If one has to use them at all, one has to take recourse to the knowledge of Brahman, that is to say, tell the mind that God Himself has become everything.”

¹ Vidya maya is the aspect of maya which leads man closer to the realization of Brahman

A Theosophist gentleman has arrived with Aswini Kumar Dutta and the son of Behari Bhaduri. The Mukherji brothers come in and salute Thakur. Arrangements for a kirtan have been made in the courtyard. At the sound of the drum, Sri Ramakrishna leaves the room and comes to the courtyard. The devotees follow him and take their seats there.

Bhavanath introduces Aswini to Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur introduces M. to Aswini by pointing at him. They are both in conversation when Narendra arrives and sits down. Thakur says to Aswini, "This is Narendra."

Section XVII

Sri Ramakrishna with Captain, Narendra and other Devotees, at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Beginning of Sri Ramakrishna's throat ailment

Sri Ramakrishna is resting in his room at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. Saturday, 13 June 1885, the first day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha. It is the last day¹ of the month of Jaishtha. The time is three o'clock. After his midday meal, Thakur is having a siesta on the smaller of the two cots.

A pundit is sitting on a mat on the floor. A sorrow-stricken brahmin woman² is standing near the northern door of the room. Kishori and a neighbour of Akhil, with a boy from Assam, are also present. M. enters and salutes Thakur. He is accompanied by Dwija and others.

Sri Ramakrishna is not well. He is feeling cold because of a lump in his throat. This is the beginning of his throat disease.

Because of extreme heat, M. has also not been feeling well. He has not been able to come regularly to Dakshineswar to see Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna — I say, you have arrived. The bel-fruit you sent me is very good. How are you?

¹ Sankranti

² Golap-ma (Golap Sundari Devi), a companion and friend of Holy Mother

M. — I am feeling a little better now.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is very hot. Eat some ice now and then. I am feeling unwell, too, my dear, because of this extreme heat. I have eaten too much ice cream, so I have developed a lump in my throat. I have never experienced such a bad smell in my saliva before.

“I said to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, please cure me. I will not eat ice cream again.’

“Then I said to Her that I wouldn’t eat ice either.”

**Sri Ramakrishna and holding on to truth – the state of
a jnani and a devotee of God**

“When I have promised the Divine Mother, ‘I will not eat it,’ I won’t. But sometimes I forget and make a mistake. I once said that I wouldn’t eat fish on Sundays, but one day I ate it by mistake.

“However, I never break my promise knowingly. The other day I asked a devotee to take my wash pot to the Jhautala (willow grove). As he had to go elsewhere, somebody else brought the pot. After answering the call of nature, I noticed that it was somebody else holding the wash pot. I could not use the water from the pot. What was I to do? I stood there with some clay in my hand [to use as soap] until the first man brought water for me.

“When I renounced everything by offering flowers at the lotus feet of the Divine Mother, I said to Her, ‘Here, Mother. Take your purity and take your impurity, take both your righteousness and

unrighteousness. Here, Mother, take your sin and virtuous deeds. Here, take your good and take your evil. But pray grant me pure love and devotion for God.' I could not say to Her, 'Here, Mother, take your truthfulness and take your falsehood' – I couldn't do that."

A particular devotee brought some ice. Thakur asks M. again and again, "Well, my dear, should I eat it?"

M. says humbly, "Sir, please don't eat it until you have consulted the Divine Mother."

Sri Ramakrishna did not take the ice.

Sri Ramakrishna — Purity and impurity are for a devotee, not for a man of knowledge. Vijay's mother-in-law said, 'Well, what have I attained? Even now I cannot eat just anybody's food.' I said to her, 'Does one attain spiritual knowledge by eating everyone's food? A dog eats anything and everything. Does that mean the dog possesses spiritual wisdom?'

(To M.) "Why do I eat different kinds of food? Lest I become monotonous and be forced to part from them (the devotees).

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'If I talk to you of higher spiritual ideas, your organization and group of devotees will break up.'

"In the state of divine knowledge, groups and organizations are illusory – like a dream.

"I gave up eating fish. In the beginning I used to suffer, but later on I got used to it. If someone burns a bird's nest, it flies hither and thither, taking shelter in the sky. If one genuinely realizes

that the body and the world are unreal, one's soul attains samadhi.

“Earlier I experienced a state of mind similar to that of a jnani. I didn't enjoy people. I would hear that a jnani or a devotee lived in Hathkhola. After a few days, I would learn that he had died. So I didn't enjoy people any more. After that incident, the Divine Mother brought my mind down and rested it in devotion, in love for God and devotees.”

M. listens with wonder to the change in Thakur's state of mind. Thakur is now telling the devotees why the Lord incarnates Himself as a human being.

Secret meaning of the avatar and his divine sport as a human being – Dwija and past samskaras

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Do you know why the Lord incarnates Himself as a person? It is because one can hear God's words only from the lips of a man. Devotees enjoy His divine bliss and taste His sweetness through a human body.

“But there is some manifestation of God's power in all devotees. It is like getting a little taste of something you have been sucking for a long time, or like extracting a little honey from a flower after much sucking. (To M.) Did you understand this?”

M. — Yes, sir. I understand it well.

Thakur talks to Dwija. He is fifteen or sixteen years old. His father has married a second time. Dwija occasionally accompanies M. to see Thakur. Thakur is very fond of him. Dwija says that his father did not want him to come to Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Dwija) — Do your brothers also hold me in low esteem?

Dwija does not reply.

M. — After experiencing a couple of blows from the world, any low esteem they entertain for you will be knocked out.

Sri Ramakrishna — They are already receiving blows, since they have a stepmother.

Everyone is silent.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You should introduce him (Dwija) to Purna.

M. — All right, I will. (To Dwija) You must go to Panihati.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes. I ask everybody to go to Panihati. (To M.) Will you go?

Thakur will attend the celebrations at Panihati, so he is asking the devotees to go too.

M. — Sir, I do want to go.

Sri Ramakrishna — We will have to take a big boat, so it won't rock. Will Girish Ghosh be there?

Everlasting Yea and Everlasting Nay

Thakur looks at Dwija.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, there are so many young men. How is it that only he comes here? Tell me. He certainly has some good past samskaras¹.

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Samskaras – he has done good deeds in his past life. One is guileless in one's last life. In that life one experiences the madness of extreme spiritual joy.

“But, do you know what? It is His will. It is by His ‘Yea’ that everything happens in this world. When He says, ‘Nay,’ it all comes to a halt.

“Why should one man not bless another? Because nothing happens by man's will. It is by God's will alone that everything happens.

“The other day I went to Captain's house. I saw some young men walking along the road. They were different. There was one nineteen or twenty years old who had parted his hair on the side and he was whistling as he walked along. As he walked, someone said, ‘Nagendra! Kshirode!’

“I saw another person steeped in deep *tamas*. He was whistling – that itself made him rather arrogant. (To Dwija) Why should one who has attained spiritual knowledge be afraid of criticism? His firm and steadfast understanding² is like a

¹ Tendencies from past lives

² *Kutastha* intellect

blacksmith's anvil – any number of hammer blows does not affect it.

“I saw the father of such-and-such person walking up the road.”

M. — He is a very guileless man.

Sri Ramakrishna — But he has red eyes.

**Captain's character and Sri Ramakrishna – union of
Purusha¹ and Prakriti²**

Thakur had visited Captain's home – he is talking of this visit. Captain had criticized all the young men who visit Thakur. Perhaps he had been influenced by Hazra.

Sri Ramakrishna — I had a talk with Captain. I told him that there was nothing [in the universe] but Purusha and Prakriti. Narada said, 'Rama, all the men you see are all parts of You and all women are parts of Sita.'

“Captain was very happy to hear this. He said, 'You alone have attained true knowledge. Being parts of Rama, all men are Rama. And being parts of Sita, all women are Sita.'

“No sooner had he said this than he began talking ill of the young men. He said, 'They study English. They eat anything and everything indiscriminately. And these boys visit you regularly

¹ The Self, the Absolute, Spirit. Pure Consciousness, the witness of the changes of Prakriti

² Primordial Nature, composed of the gunas, the material of the universe of mind and matter

– this is not good. It can be harmful to you. Hazra is a very special person – a good man. Please don't let these young men visit you so frequently.' At first I said, 'What can I do if they come?'

"Then I gave him a good dressing down. His daughter began to laugh. I said, 'He who has worldly wisdom is very far from the Lord. If a person has no worldliness, the Lord remains in his grip – very close to him indeed.' Speaking of Rakhal, Captain said, 'He eats in anyone's house.' Perhaps he heard it from Hazra. I said to him, 'A man can perform any amount of repetition of the Name and austerities, but if he remains possessed of worldly thoughts, he can never attain God. On the other hand, if a person eats pork but his mind remains attached to the Lord, he is blessed indeed. Such a person gradually attains the Lord – there is no doubt about it. Hazra practices so much repetition of the Name and austerities, but he tries to earn money as a broker while he is practicing!'

"Captain then said, 'True. What you are saying is indeed true.' So I said to him, 'Just a few minutes ago you said that all men were parts of Rama and so they are Rama. And that all women, being parts of Sita, are Sita. And now you say this.'

"Captain said, 'Yes, that is true. But even you do not love everybody.'

"I said, 'Water is God¹. There is water all around. But one kind of water is used for drinking, the other for bathing, and yet another for washing dirty things. Your wife and daughter who are

¹ Apo Narayana

sitting in front of me are the very personification of the All-Blissful Mother¹.’ Captain then said, ‘Yes, yes. This is true!’ And he proceeded to touch my feet again and again.”

Having said this, Thakur begins to laugh. Then he tells how many good qualities Captain has.

Sri Ramakrishna — Captain is a man of many virtues — he regularly performs daily rituals, he himself worships the family deity, he repeats the sacred mantras while taking his bath. How many more devotions Captain observes! He is a great man of ritual — worship, repetition of Name, arati and chanting of sacred hymns — he attends to all these daily devotions.

Captain and learning – Captain and Thakur’s state

“I reprimanded Captain. I said, ‘You are being messed up by your study of books. Don’t read anymore.’

“Captain described my state of being as that of a bird soaring in the firmament. There are these two — the Supreme Soul² and the individual soul³. The individual soul is like a bird and the Supreme Soul is like the sky, the sky of Consciousness⁴. Captain said, ‘Your individual soul soars in the sky of Consciousness and thus you enter into samadhi.’ (Smiling) Captain spoke ill of Bengalis. He said, ‘Bengalis are blockheads. The gem [meaning Sri

¹ Anandamayi

² Paramatman

³ Jivatman

⁴ Chidakasa

Ramakrishna] lives close by but they do not recognize it.’”

Householder devotee and Sri Ramakrishna – how long does one have to practice ritualistic worship¹?

“Captain’s father was a very great devotee. He was a subadar in the British army. He would attend to worship at the proper time. Even on the battlefield, he would worship Shiva with one hand and use a sword and gun with the other.

(To M.) “But you know what? Day and night Captain is engaged in worldly work. Whenever I go to his home, I find him surrounded by his wife and children. Besides, he also has his ledger of accounts open from time to time. Truly, his mind goes to the Lord, but only for a short time. He is like a man suffering from delirium. He remains diseased, though he regains consciousness for awhile. Then he shouts out, ‘I want water, I want water to drink!’ As soon as he is given water, he goes into delirium again and has no awareness of the outside world. I said to Captain, ‘You are a ritualistic worshipper.’ Captain said, ‘Sir, I feel so much joy in worship and things like that. There is no other way for worldly people but ritualistic worship.’

“I said, ‘But does one have to perform ritualistic worship forever? How long does a bee buzz around a flower? As long as it has not alighted on it. It stops buzzing when it sips the honey.’ Captain said, ‘Can we people, like you, renounce worship and ritualistic devotions?’ But he does not

¹ Karma

say the same thing all the time. Sometimes he says that everything is inert, at other times that all is Consciousness. I say, 'Is there anything inert? Everything indeed is Consciousness.' ”

Purna and M. – forced marriage and Sri Ramakrishna's opinion

Thakur asks M. about Purna.

Sri Ramakrishna — If I see Purna once more, my yearning to see him will decrease. How intelligent he is! He is greatly attracted to me. He says, 'How my heart, too, longs to see you.' (To M.) His parents have removed him from your school. Will that harm you?

M. — If he (Vidyasagar¹) says that Purna has been taken away from the school because of me, I have an explanation to give him.

Sri Ramakrishna — What will you say?

M. — I will just say this: Association with the holy enables one to contemplate the Lord. This is not a wrong thing to do, in any respect. In fact, the textbooks the school has prescribed say, 'One must love the Lord with heart and soul.'

Thakur laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna — I sent for the Younger Naren when I was at Captain's house. I asked him, 'Where is your house? Let's go there.' He said, 'Do come,

¹ The founder of the school

please.’ But he was nervous when he walked with me, lest his father should know about it. (All laugh.)

(To Akhil’s neighbour) “Well, you haven’t been here for many days – it may be seven or eight months.”

The Neighbour — Yes, sir. It must be a year.

Sri Ramakrishna — A gentleman used to visit with you.

The Neighbour — Yes, sir. Nilmani Babu.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why doesn’t he come any more? Ask him to visit me. Please arrange it. (Seeing a child with him) Who is this boy?

The Neighbour — His home is in Assam.

Sri Ramakrishna — Where is Assam? In what direction?

Dwija is talking about Ashu. Ashu’s father is going to arrange his marriage, but Ashu doesn’t want to marry.

Sri Ramakrishna — Just see, he doesn’t want to marry. He is being forced.

Thakur instructs a devotee to show regard for his elder brother, “An elder brother is like one’s father. You must give him due consideration and respect.”

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and essence of Radhika – the essence of birth and death

A pundit is sitting with the devotees. He is from the northwestern region of India.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to M.) — He is a great scholar of the Bhagavata.

M. and the devotees look at the pundit.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the pundit) — Well, what is Yogamaya?

The pundit gives an explanation.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why isn't Radhika called Yogamaya?

The pundit gives a reply to this question. Thakur then explains it himself –

“Radhika is the very embodiment of pure sattvic love, while Yogamaya contains all three qualities – sattva, rajas and tamas. Radhika has nothing but very pure sattva within. (To M.) Narendra now accepts Radha to a great extent. He says, ‘If one wants to learn how to love Sat-chit-ananda, he must learn it from Radha.’

“Sat-chit-ananda has Himself created Radha to taste divine bliss. Radha was created from Sat-chit-ananda Krishna. Sat-chit-ananda Krishna Himself is the ‘container’ and He Himself is the

‘contained’ in the form of Radha – in order to taste His own Bliss, or to enjoy Bliss by loving Sat-chit-ananda.

“The scriptures of the Vaishnavas say: Radha did not open her eyes after taking birth. In other words, she did not want to see any person other than Krishna. When Yashoda went to see Radhika with Krishna in her arms, Radha opened her eyes to behold Krishna. Being playful, Krishna had placed his hand on Radha’s eyes. (To the boy from Assam) Have you seen infants touching others’ eyes with their hands?”

**Difference between worldly men and pure-souled
young men**

The pundit takes his leave.

The Pundit — I must go home now.

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately) — Have you saved any money?

The Pundit — The market is very depressed these days. Employment is not available.

In a few minutes the pundit offers his obeisance to Thakur and leaves.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Just see what a great difference there is between worldly men and these young men [who visit me]! This pundit talks day and night about money. He has come to Calcutta to earn a living. Otherwise, the members of his family will have nothing to live on. That is why he has to

knock on so many doors. When will he get time to meditate on God with a concentrated mind? On the other hand, these young men have no 'lust and greed' in their minds. They can give their minds to God whenever they like.

"These young men do not have attachment for the worldly people. Rakhal used to say at times, 'I feel frightened at the sight of a worldly person approaching me.'

"When I first had spiritual experiences, I used to close the door of my room when I saw a worldly person."

**Sorrow at the bereavement of a son or a daughter, and
Sri Ramakrishna – his earlier story**

"I had such great affection for Ram Mallick in my native village. But when he came here, I couldn't even touch him.

"I was so very fond of him in my childhood. We were together day and night. We used to sleep together. I was sixteen or seventeen years old then. People would say, 'If one of them were a woman, they would marry each other.' We used to play together at his house. I remember all those days. His relatives used to arrive by palanquin. The palanquin men would repeat, '*Hinjoda! Hinjoda!*'"

"I sent word to him through many people to come see me. He is now running a shop in Chanak. He came here the other day and stayed for two days.

¹ Meaning pull the palanquin with force

“Ram told me, ‘I had no child of my own. I brought up my brother’s son, but he died.’ He heaved a big sigh when he said this. Tears flowed down his cheeks. He has suffered a great loss at the death of his nephew.

“And then he said that because she had no child of her own, his wife gave all her love and affection to the nephew. She was now overwhelmed by grief. I have been telling her, ‘You are crazy! What can you gain by grieving? Would you like to go to Kashi?’

“When he called his wife crazy, I found him absolutely ‘diluted’. I could not touch him. I could see that there was nothing [no substance] in him.”

While Thakur is saying all this in connection with bereavement, the sorrow-stricken brahmin woman stands near the northern door of the room. She is a widow. She had given her only daughter in marriage to a man from an important family. Her daughter’s husband, Upadhikari, with the title of Raja, was a resident of Calcutta and a landlord¹. Whenever the girl visited her paternal home, security men accompanied her. Seeing this, the mother felt very elated. Some days ago that daughter died.

Standing there, the brahmin woman hears the account of the bereavement of Ram Mallick at the death of his nephew. Mad with grief, seeking some relief, she has been running to see Sri Ramakrishna from her home in Baghbazar for many days. She has hoped that Thakur would be able to prescribe some means for overcoming such inconsolable sorrow. Thakur continues –

¹ Zemindar

Sri Ramakrishna (to the brahmin woman and the other devotees) — A fellow came here the other day. He sat for only a short time before he said, ‘Let me go now and see my moon-faced¹ son.’

“I couldn’t control myself anymore. I said: You fool! Leave this place! Is the face of your son more moon-like than that of the Lord?”

Truth about birth and death – magic of magician

(To M.) “The fact is, God is the Reality and all else is ephemeral. Living beings, the universe, house and home, children and family – they are all the magic of the magician. The magician beats his drum with a stick and cries out, ‘See my magic! See this trick!’ As soon as he takes the lid off his pot, a number of birds fly out into the sky. Only the magician is real; all his tricks are ephemeral – they are here now, but there is no trace of them in a little while.

“Shiva sits on Mount Kailas with Nandi, his bull, close to him. Suddenly there is a great sound. Nandi, the bull, asks, ‘Maharaj, where is the sound coming from?’ Shiva says, ‘Ravana is born. That is how this sound is produced.’ After awhile there is another frightening sound. Nandi asks, ‘Now what is this sound?’ Shiva laughs and says, ‘Ravana has now been slain.’ Birth and death are both like the magic of the magician. They are here now and then gone in a little while. Only God is real, all else is ephemeral. Only the water is real, its bubbles are

¹ It is a term of endearment that means lovely and sweet face

only momentary. The bubbles merge in the water, from where they arose.

“God is like a mighty ocean and living beings like bubbles in the ocean – they are born out of it and are dissolved back into it.

“Sons and daughters – they are like five or six small bubbles round a big bubble.

“Indeed, God is the Reality. Now you must endeavour to develop love and devotion¹ for Him and find how to attain Him. What use is your grieving?”

They are all silent. The brahmin woman says, “I must leave now.”

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately) — Are you leaving? The sun is very hot. Why don't you go with them later in the carriage?

It is the last day of the month of Jaishtha, about three or four o'clock. It is very hot. A devotee has brought a new sandalwood fan for Thakur. He is very happy to receive it and exclaims, “Oh, how very nice! Om Tat Sat! Kali!” Saying this, he first fans the deities with it. Then he says to M., “Just see what a fine breeze it generates!” M. thoroughly enjoys it.

¹ Bhakti

Chapter III

The ripe 'I,' or the servant 'I'

Captain has arrived with his sons.

Thakur says to Kishori, "Show them around the temple."

M. speaks to Captain.

M., Dwija and other devotees are sitting on the floor. The teacher from Damdama is there. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot facing north. He asks Captain to sit in front of him on one side of the same cot.

Sri Ramakrishna — I told them about you, about your great devotion — so much worship, and about your various kinds of arati.

Captain (shyly) — What worship and arati can I perform? Who am I?

Sri Ramakrishna — The harmful ego is the one that is attached to 'lust and greed'. There is no harm in having the 'I' of a servant of the Lord. Nor is there any harm in a child's 'I' — the child is not subject to any guna (qualities of nature). One moment he fights, and the next he loves. He builds a dollhouse with great care, and then suddenly tears it down. There is no harm in the servant's 'I' or the child's 'I'. This 'I' is not to be counted as ego. Like sugar candy which, though sweet, is not like other sweets. While other sweets bring indigestion, sugar candy brings relief. Or like 'Omkar' — it is not like other sounds.

“It is with this ‘ego’ that one loves Sat-chit-ananda. The ego cannot be gotten rid of – so one must cling to the ‘I of a servant,’ or ‘I of a devotee.’ Otherwise, how can a man live? What love the gopis had! (To Captain) Tell us something about the gopis. You read the Bhagavata a lot.”

Captain — Even when Sri Krishna was in Vrindavan and had no riches or splendour, the gopis loved him more than their own hearts and souls. That is why Krishna said, ‘How can I repay the debt I owe them – the gopis who have surrendered their all to me – body, mind and soul.’

Sri Ramakrishna is becoming absorbed in ecstasy. Saying, “Govinda, Govinda,” he is becoming completely absorbed! He has almost lost outer-consciousness. In wonder, Captain mutters, “How blessed!”

Captain and all the other devotees gather to watch Sri Ramakrishna in this wondrous state of ecstatic love. They sit perfectly still, gazing at him, until he regains normal consciousness.

Sri Ramakrishna — And what after that?

Captain — He [Krishna] is not reached by yogis. It is difficult for even yogis to reach Him¹ – but He is attained by such love as the gopis had. He who was not attained by years of communion by the yogis, the gopis reached effortlessly.

¹ Yogibhiragamyam

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He ate with the gopis, played with them, cried and demanded much of them — all this He did.

Bankim and biography of Sri Krishna – avatarhood

A devotee says, “Bankim has written a biography of Krishna.”

Sri Ramakrishna — Bankim accepts Sri Krishna, but not Radha.

Captain — It seems that he doesn't accept the divine sport of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — And he also says that lust and other passions are necessary.

Teacher from Damdama — Bankim has written in the *Navajivan* (magazine) that the purpose of religion is to energize the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions of man.

Captain — He says that lust and other passions are necessary but he doesn't accept the divine sport of God. God incarnated Himself as a human being in Vrindavan to enact the sport of Radha and Krishna. Why doesn't he accept it?

Avatar is full manifestation of Brahman – difference between mere book-learning and realization

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — The newspaper does not talk of these things. How, then, could he accept such ideas?

“Someone said to his friend, ‘Yesterday I was passing through a certain neighbourhood when I saw a house crash to the ground.’ The friend said, ‘Wait a minute. Let me check the newspaper.’ There was no mention in the paper of a building having crashed to the ground. So the fellow said, ‘Well, the paper doesn’t mention it, so it’s of no significance.’ The first man said, ‘But I saw it myself!’ His friend said, ‘That might be true, but since it’s not in the paper, how can I believe it?’ How could Bankim believe that God incarnates as a human being to enact His divine sport? Such ideas aren’t in the English education. It is very difficult to comprehend how God fully and perfectly manifests himself in human form. Isn’t that true? It is the manifestation of the Infinite in three and a half cubits!”

Captain — One says, ‘*kṛṣṇastu bhagavān svayam*,’ – Krishna is God Himself – but you have to use the terms ‘whole’ and ‘partial’ manifestation to describe Him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Whole and partial manifestation are like fire and its sparks. An Incarnation of God is for the sake of the devotee and not for the man of knowledge¹. The Adhyatma Ramayana says: Oh, Rama, You are the all-pervading Spirit and You, Yourself, are everything pervaded. *‘vācyavācakabhedena tvameva parameśavara’* – Oh Supreme Lord, You are

¹ Jnani

distinguished as the *vachaka*, the signifying symbol, and *vachya*, the object signified.

Captain — The signifying symbol means the pervading Spirit, and the object signified means what is pervaded.

Sri Ramakrishna — The pervaded being, in other words, means a finite form, God incarnating Himself as a human being.

Chapter IV

Egoism is the cause of one's destruction and obstacle in God-realization

Everybody is seated while Sri Ramakrishna talks to Captain and the devotees. Jaygopal Sen and Trailokya of the Brahmo Samaj arrive. They salute Thakur and sit down. Thakur glances at Trailokya and smiles.

Sri Ramakrishna — One does not see God because of one's pride. This stump of a tree of egotism is barring the door of the Lord's room. Unless one jumps over the stump, one cannot enter His room.

“A man had acquired the power to tame ghosts. No sooner did he summon a ghost than it appeared. It said, ‘Tell me what work you want me to do. The moment you can't give me any work, I will break your neck.’ Whatever work the man had to do, he asked the ghost to do. At last there was no more work to be done. Then the ghost said to the man, ‘I will now break your neck.’ The man said, ‘Wait a minute. I will be right back.’ Saying this, he

went to his revered guru. ‘Sir, I am in great trouble,’ he said, ‘what should I do?’ The guru said, ‘Ask him to straighten this curly hair.’ The ghost worked at it day and night. But can tightly curled hair ever be straightened? It remains curly. Egoism also seems to go away for awhile, but it soon returns.

“The Lord’s grace does not dawn until one gets rid of egoism.

“When there is a festival in a house, the master of the house appoints a person to be in charge of the store-room. He does not enter it when the person in charge is present. But when the latter leaves the store-room, the master locks it and takes charge of it himself.

“Only a minor is given a guardian. When a child cannot safeguard his wealth and property, the king assumes the responsibility for it on his behalf. Unless one rids oneself of ego, the Lord does not take up one’s burdens and responsibilities.

“Once Lord Narayana (Vishnu) and Lakshmi (his consort) were sitting in Vaikuntha. Lakshmi was gently stroking his feet. The Lord suddenly jumped up. Lakshmi asked him, ‘Where are you going, Lord?’ Narayana said, ‘One of my devotees is in great danger. I am going to save him.’ Saying this, Narayana went out. But he immediately returned. Lakshmi exclaimed, ‘Lord, you have returned so soon!’ Narayana laughed and said, ‘A devotee overwhelmed with ecstatic love for Me was walking down the road. Washermen were putting out clothes to dry. The devotee trampled the clothes. Seeing it, the washermen came with a stick

to beat him. That is why I went to protect him.’ Lakshmi asked, ‘But then why have you returned?’ Narayana laughed and said, ‘I saw the devotee himself picking up a brick to throw at the washermen. (All laugh.) So I didn’t have to go save him.’”

His earlier story – Keshab and Gauri – let there be the attitude of a servant after attaining the state of Soham

“I said to Keshab Sen, ‘You must get rid of your ego.’ Keshab answered, ‘But sir, then how would I keep my group together?’

“I said, ‘What lack of understanding you have! Please give up the ‘unripe I’ which attaches you to ‘lust and greed’. I am not asking you to give up your ‘ripe I,’ the ‘I of a servant,’ or the ‘I of a devotee’. ‘I am the servant of the Lord,’ ‘I am the Lord’s son’ – is the ‘ripe I’. There is no harm in it.”

Trailokya — It is very difficult to get rid of the ego. A man thinks he has known the highest truth.

Sri Ramakrishna — So that he would not later develop egoism, Gauri would never say, ‘I’. Instead he would say, ‘this.’ I, too, began saying, ‘this,’ following his example. Instead of saying that I had eaten, I would say, ‘This has eaten.’ Noticing it, Mathur Babu one day said, ‘What is this, my dear sir? Why do you speak like this? Let those people who have egotism do it, but you don’t have I-consciousness. There is no need for you to speak in this way.’

“I said to Keshab, ‘The ego will not vanish, so one must live with the attitude of a servant, a servant of God. Prahlada had both attitudes. At times he would feel, ‘You are I and I am You’ – that is, the attitude of ‘Soham.’ When his sense of I-consciousness would return, he would cherish the idea, ‘I am Your servant and You are my Master.’ When one has been firmly established in the attitude of ‘Soham,’ one should later live with the attitude of a servant – as, ‘I am the servant of God.’”

Signs of having attained the knowledge of Brahman – ‘I of a devotee’ – renunciation of work

(To Captain) “There are some signs by which one recognizes a person who has attained the knowledge of Brahman. The *Srimad Bhagavata* talks of four states of a man of spiritual knowledge: He appears like (1) a child, (2) an inert object, (3) a crazy man, and (4) a ghoul. Sometimes he acts like a five-year-old child. And sometimes he acts like a mad man.

“At times he lives like an inert object. In this state he cannot attend to work – all work drops off. If you say that Janaka and others did not renounce work, the fact is that in that period of time people used to give their responsibilities to subordinate officers and thus freed themselves of worry. Moreover, people then had intense faith.”

Sri Ramakrishna is talking of renunciation of work. Yet he is also saying to those who are attached to duties to attend to them in a detached spirit.

Sri Ramakrishna — After attaining Knowledge one cannot do much work.

Trailokya — Why? Pavhari Baba is such a great yogi, but he settles people's quarrels and disputes. He even decides their lawsuits.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, yes, that's true. Dr. Durgacharan was a great drunkard – he used to drink twenty-four hours a day. But he was precise when he worked. He made no mistakes when treating his patients. There is no harm in attending to work after attaining love and devotion¹ for God. But it is exceedingly difficult – it needs intense practice of spiritual disciplines.

“It is God who does everything. We are only His instruments. The Sikhs said in front of the Kali Temple, ‘The Lord is compassionate.’ I asked them, ‘Compassionate to whom?’ The Sikhs said, ‘Why, to us, Master.’ I said, ‘We are all His children. What does compassion to one's own children mean? He looks after His children. If He didn't, are people from the neighbourhood² supposed to?’ Well, those who call Him compassionate don't understand that we are God's own.”

Captain — True, sir. They forget that they are God's own.

¹ Bhakti

² Thakur mentions Vamanpara

**The devotee and performing worship and other rituals
– God, the gracious loving Lord of the devotees – a
perfect jnani**

Sri Ramakrishna — Should we not, then, say that God is kind and compassionate? As long as we practice spiritual disciplines, we should call Him compassionate. But when one has realized God, one rightly feels that He is one's own Father or Mother. As long as one has not realized God, one feels distant from Him – like somebody else's child.

“During the stage of practicing spiritual disciplines, one should describe God by all of His attributes. One day Hazra said to Narendra, ‘God is infinite, so is His splendour. Does He care to eat your sandesh or banana? Does He want to listen to your songs? These are all illusions of the mind.’

“Narendra immediately fell down ten cubits [spiritually]. I said to Hazra, ‘What a scoundrel you are! If you talk to youngsters like this, what will they do?’ Once a man loses love and devotion for God¹, what remains for him to live by? God has infinite splendour, yet He is under the control of His devotee. The gate-keeper of a rich man comes to a meeting of the master and his friends; he stands on one side of the room. He has something in his hand covered with a piece of cloth. He is very hesitant. The master asks him, ‘What is the matter, gate-keeper? What do you have in your hand?’ The gate-keeper places a custard apple before the master hesitantly and says to him, ‘I wish for you to eat it.’ The master, touched by the devotion and

¹ Bhakti

feelings of the gate-keeper, takes the custard apple with great reverence and says, 'Ah! It is a custard apple of such good quality! Where did you get it? You must have taken a great deal of trouble to find it!'

"God is under the control of His devotee. Duryodhana showed great love and respect for Sri Krishna and said, 'Please stay here and have your meal.' The Lord, however, went to Vidur's cottage. He is the gracious, loving Lord of the devotees. He ate Vidur's simple rice and vegetables as if they were ambrosia.

"A perfect jnani has this sign – he sometimes behaves like a ghoul. He doesn't care what he eats or drinks, he doesn't discriminate between purity and impurity. In fact, the perfect jnani and the absolutely crazy person may look alike externally. The perfect jnani might not recite the holy mantras while taking a dip in the Ganges. He may have placed all the flowers indiscriminately at the feet of the deity while performing worship and left without uttering any sacred mantras."

Man of karma and Sri Ramakrishna – how long does one have to perform work?

"As long as one craves worldly enjoyment, one cannot renounce work. One has to perform work as long as one desires pleasure.

"A bird sat absent-mindedly on the mast of a ship. The ship was sailing on the Ganges until it finally reached the mighty ocean. The bird then came to its senses. It looked all around and could see no landmark or shore. It flew toward the north,

hoping to reach land. Having flown a long distance, it grew tired, but could still see no landmark. What could it do? It returned to the ship and sat on the mast again.

“After some time the bird flew away again – this time toward the east. It couldn’t see anything in the east either – there was only a vast sheet of water. It became extremely tired and again returned to the mast of the ship and perched there. After resting for a long time, it went to the south and then to the west. When it found no sign of land anywhere, it sat on the mast again and flew no more. It sat there peacefully. Now it had no feeling of urgency, restlessness, or anxiety in its mind. Being at peace, it made no more effort to fly.”

Captain — Ah, what a nice illustration!

One develops deep longing for God when desire for worldly pleasures has ceased – it leads to God-realization

Sri Ramakrishna — Worldly people become exhausted after wandering around in all directions seeking happiness. When attached to ‘lust and greed’ they only suffer pain and grief. Then they develop dispassion¹ and renunciation. Most people cannot renounce unless they have enjoyed the pleasures of the world. There are two kinds of spiritual aspirants: *kutichaka* and *vahudaka*. Religious aspirants of the latter class visit numerous places of pilgrimage – they cannot settle at one place for any length of time. They drink the

¹ Vairagya

water from many different holy places. When their restlessness ceases by constant roaming about, they build themselves a hut and settle down. Then they meditate on God free from worry and effort.

“What is there in the world to enjoy? ‘Lust and greed’ only bring momentary pleasures. One moment there is pleasure, the next it is no more.

“The world is like a cloudy sky pouring rain; generally one cannot see the sun. There is sorrow the greater part of life. The clouds of ‘lust and greed’ do not let one see the sun.

“Some people ask me, ‘Sir, why has the Lord created such a world? Is there no way out for us?’ ”

The way – yearning and renunciation

“I say, why shouldn’t there be a way? Take refuge in God and pray to Him with a yearning heart for a favourable breeze to give you an auspicious opportunity. God definitely listens to the prayers of one who calls on Him with a longing heart.

“The son of a man was critically ill. His father went to various people asking with great yearning for a remedy. Somebody said, ‘He will be cured if you can arrange this: That the water of the svati nakshatra¹ fall into a skull; that a frog drink that water; that a snake chase and pounce upon the frog; that the venom of the snake falls into the skull as the frog escapes its bite. If you give a little of that poison water to the patient, he should get well.’

¹ A particular conjunction of stars

“With great longing this fellow set out in search of the medicine during the svati constellation of stars. It was raining. He implored the Lord longingly, ‘Lord, please let me locate a skull. It is raining during the svati constellation of stars.’ Then he added to his prayer, ‘I appeal to you, Oh Savior. Grant that I may also find a frog and a snake.’ He had such great yearning that he found them all immediately. In no time the snake chased the frog. As it was going to bite the frog, its poison fell into the skull.

“If you surrender to the Lord and call on Him with a heart full of yearning, He is bound to listen and take care of everything for you.”

Captain — What an illustration!

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, God does make everything favourable. It may be possible that one is not married and so is able to devote his entire mind to the Lord. Or perhaps his brother begins to earn (money), or his son grows up, so that he is relieved of household responsibilities. In that case he can effortlessly give one hundred percent of his mind to God. But without renouncing ‘lust and greed,’ one does not succeed. It is only by renunciation that ignorance¹ is dispelled. When the rays of the sun fall on a lens, many objects burn. On the other hand, if you take the lens inside a room where there is no sunlight, nothing is burned – you have to come out of the room to use the lens.

¹ Ajnana

**One can enter household life after realizing God, like
Janaka and others**

“Some people lead householder lives after attaining spiritual knowledge. They are able to see both the inside and outside of the room. The light of spiritual knowledge illumines the household, by virtue of which they can discriminate between what is good and what is bad, what is eternal and what is ephemeral.

“The ignorant who live in the world without having faith in God are like people living in a house made of mud walls. They can see only a little of the inside of the house in its dim light. But those who live a householder’s life after attaining spiritual knowledge, having realized God, are like people living in a house made of glass. They can see both inside and outside the house. The light of the sun of Knowledge lights up the inside of the house well. Such a man sees everything inside the house very clearly – what is good and what is bad, what is permanent and what is transitory.

“God is the only doer, we are just His instruments.

“That is why the jnani should also be free from ego. The author of *Mahimastava*¹ was proud to have written this hymn. But his pride was crushed when Shiva’s bull bared his teeth. He saw that each one of its teeth was one of the sacred verses² written by him. Do you know what this means? All

¹ A hymn to Lord Shiva

² Mantras

sacred verses have existed since eternity – he had only brought them to light.

“It is not good to be a professional guru. One cannot become a religious teacher without receiving a command from God. He who says that he is a guru is a man of low intelligence. Haven’t you noticed the pans of a weighing scale? The pan that is lighter goes higher. The person who considers himself higher is, in fact, lighter [of lesser substance]. Everyone wants to be a guru – a disciple is hard to find.”

Trailokya is sitting on the floor toward the northern side of the smaller cot. He is going to sing a devotional song. Sri Ramakrishna says, “Ah, how nicely you sing!” Trailokya sings to the accompaniment of a tanpura –

Song –

We have given our hearts to You; You indeed are everything that exists.

Song –

You are my everything, O Lord! The support of my life and its quintessence.

But for You there is none in the three worlds whom I can call my own.

Listening to the song, Thakur is becoming overwhelmed with divine ecstasy. He says, “Ah! Ah! You indeed are everything that exists.”

The song ends. It is six o’clock. Thakur goes toward the Jhautala for a wash. M. accompanies him.

Thakur laughs and talks while he is walking along. Suddenly he says to M., “Oh, you people have not eaten anything! None of you have!”

Sri Ramakrishna is eager to serve prasad to the devotees.

Narendra and Sri Ramakrishna

Thakur is going to Calcutta in the evening. Returning from the Jhautala, he says to M., "In whose carriage will I go to Calcutta?"

It is evening. A lamp is lighted in Thakur's room and incense is burned. Lamps have also been lit everywhere in the temples and buildings. A symphony of sanai and other instruments is being played. Arati will now be performed in the twelve Shiva temples, in the Vishnu temple, and in Mother Kali's temple.

Sitting on the smaller cot, Sri Ramakrishna chants the name of the deities and then meditates on the Divine Mother. The evening worship is over. Thakur begins pacing up and down the room, occasionally talking with the devotees. He consults M. about his visit to Calcutta.

Narendra arrives, accompanied by Sarat and one or two other young devotees. Lying prostrate on the ground, they salute Thakur.

Seeing Narendra, Thakur's heart overflows with love and affection. Touching Narendra's face as one would a child's, he caresses him and says affectionately, "Ah, you have come!"

Thakur stands in the middle of the room facing west. Narendra and the other young men salute him and sit facing east in front of him. They talk. Turning to M. Thakur says, "Should we go to Calcutta, now that Narendra has come? I sent someone to fetch him. Should we go then? What do you think?"

M. — Whatever you wish. Let's not go today.

Sri Ramakrishna — All right. I'll go tomorrow – if not by boat, then by carriage. (To the other devotees) It is already dark. You may leave now.

The devotees salute Thakur one by one and leave.

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna at Devotees' Homes in Calcutta

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram's house

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in Balaram's parlour with the devotees. It is about three o'clock in the afternoon. He is smiling. Binode, Rakhal, M. and a few others are sitting near him. The Younger Naren arrives.

It is Tuesday, 28 July 1885, the first lunar day of the dark fortnight of the month of Ashada. Thakur had come to Balaram's house in the morning and had taken his midday meal there with the devotees. Sri Jagannath Deva is the deity worshipped at Balaram's house, so Thakur says that the food at Balaram's house is very pure.

Narayan and some other devotees had told Sri Ramakrishna that there were several pictures of gods and goddesses at Nanda Bose's house. Thakur is going there this afternoon to see the pictures. A brahmin woman¹ devoted to Sri Ramakrishna lives near Nanda Bose's house. The brahmin woman, deeply afflicted with sorrow at the death of her daughter, occasionally visits him at Dakshineswar. She has invited Thakur with intense longing to visit her house. Thakur will visit her, as well as the home of Ganu's mother, another devotee.

Whenever Thakur comes to Balaram's house, he sends word to the young boy devotees to come there to see him. He sends the message through other

¹ Golap-ma (Golap Sundari Devi), a companion and friend of Holy Mother

devotees. Once the Younger Naren said to Sri Ramakrishna, “I am so busy with work, I can’t always come to see you. I have to study for my examinations.” When the Younger Naren arrives, Thakur talks to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Younger Naren) — I didn’t send for you today.

The Younger Naren (laughing) — What can be done about it now?

Sri Ramakrishna — I don’t want your studies to suffer. You should come to see me when you are free.

Thakur says this as though he were annoyed with a loved one.

The palanquin has arrived. Thakur will now go to Nanda Bose’s house.

Chanting the name of the Lord, he gets into the palanquin. He is wearing black, varnished slippers and a red-bordered dhoti. He has no shawl. Mani places the slippers on one side of the palanquin and walks along with it on foot. Paresh soon joins him.

The palanquin enters the gate of Nanda Bose’s house. Crossing its spacious courtyard, the palanquin stops in front of the residence.

Some members of the family come and salute Thakur. Thakur asks M. to give him the slippers. Then he gets out of the palanquin and goes to the hall on the upper floor. It is a very spacious room. Pictures of gods and goddesses hang on all sides.

The master of the house and his brother, Pasupati, talk with Thakur. After some time the devotees who had followed the palanquin join them in the hall. Atul, Girish’s brother, is there, as well as

Prasanna's father, who is a frequent visitor to Nanda's house.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna's gracious visit to the house of Nanda Bose

Sri Ramakrishna gets up to look at the pictures of gods and goddesses. M. and many other devotees stand around him. Pasupati, Nanda's brother, accompanies him and explains the pictures.

Thakur first sees the picture of Vishnu with four arms. As soon as he sees it, he is overwhelmed with divine ecstasy. He had been standing, but now he sits down. He remains absorbed in this spiritual mood for some time.

The second picture is of the gracious and loving Lord of the devotees, Sri Ramachandra.

Sri Rama, placing his hand on Hanuman's head, is blessing him. Hanuman's eyes are fixed on Sri Rama's lotus feet. Sri Ramakrishna gazes at this image for a long time. Full of divine emotion, he says, "Ah! Ah!"

The third picture is of Sri Krishna standing with a flute to his lips under the kadamba tree.

The fourth picture is of Vamana¹ with an umbrella over his head, going to Bali's yajna. Sri Ramakrishna utters, "Vamana," and then fixes his eyes on him.

Having seen the picture of Narasimha², Thakur looks at one of Sri Krishna in the cow pasture. He is tending his cows with his cowherd friends on the bank of the Jamuna at Vrindavan.

¹ Vamana, the dwarf – an incarnation of Vishnu

² God incarnated as half lion and half man to protect Prahlada

Mani exclaims, “Oh, a very nice picture!”

Seeing the seventh picture, Thakur says, “Dhumavati.” The eighth is of Shorashi; the ninth of Bhuvaneshvari; the tenth of Tara and the eleventh of Kali. Thakur says, “All these pictures depict the terrible aspects of the Divine Mother. They should not be kept at home, but if they are, they should be worshipped. You are very fortunate to be able to keep them in your house.”

Looking at the picture of Mother Annapurna, Thakur says in an ecstatic mood, “Grand! Grand!”

The next painting is of Radha dressed as a king. She is seated on a throne in the nikunja grove surrounded by her milkmaid friends [as attendants]. Sri Krishna is standing at the gate of the grove dressed as a gatekeeper.

Then there is a picture of the festival in which Sri Krishna is swung in a cradle¹. Thakur looks at the next for a long time – it is the image of Saraswati² inside a glass case. The goddess is holding a vina³ and singing raga and ragini⁴ in ecstasy.

Having seen the pictures, Thakur goes back to the master of the house and says to him, “We have had such joy today. Grand! You are a real and devout Hindu. Instead of keeping English pictures, you have these. How surprising!”

Nanda Bose is seated. He says respectfully to Thakur, “Please sit down. Why are you standing?”

Sri Ramakrishna (sitting) — These are very important pictures. You are a real Hindu.

Nanda Bose — I have European pictures too.

¹ Dol

² Vinapani, the goddess of learning and music

³ A stringed musical instrument

⁴ An Indian musical mode

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — But they are different. You haven't the same attitude toward European pictures.

A picture of Keshab Sen's Navavidhan is hanging on one wall of the room. Suresh Mitra had had it painted. He is one of Thakur's beloved disciples. In this picture the Paramahansa Deva is showing Keshab the followers of different religions going toward God on different paths – the difference is only in paths.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah! This picture was painted for Surendra¹.

Prasanna's Father (smiling) — You, too, are in the picture.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — It is a unique portrait; it contains all the beliefs. It is an ideal for modern times.

While speaking, Thakur is suddenly becoming absorbed in divine ecstasy. He talks to the Mother of the Universe.

After awhile he says, as if intoxicated, "I am not unconscious." Looking around the house, he says, "It is a big building. But what is in it? Bricks, wood and clay."

In a few minutes he says, "I am so happy to see all these pictures of gods and goddesses." Then he adds, "Images of the terrible aspects of the Divine Mother – Kali, or Tara (the consort of Shiva who lives in the cremation ground among corpses) – should not

¹ The name by which Thakur addressed Suresh Mitra

be kept in a household. If you do, they must be worshipped.”

Pasupati (smiling) — It will be as long as He wills it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Of course that’s true. But it is good to keep the mind on God. It is not good to forget Him.

Nanda Bose — But one does not want to think of Him!

Sri Ramakrishna — One thinks of Him by His grace.

Nanda Bose — But God does not seem to grant His grace. Does He have the power to bestow grace?

Is God indeed the doer – or is the work itself God?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I see, you think like the pundits do – one reaps the fruit of one’s actions. Give up this idea. By taking refuge in the Lord, one’s duties and karmas cease to exist. Taking flowers in my hand, I used to say to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, here is Your sin and here Your holy deeds. I want neither; pray grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your good and here Your evil. I want neither good nor evil; pray grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your righteousness, here Your unrighteousness. I want neither of them; pray grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your Knowledge, here is Your ignorance. I want neither knowledge nor ignorance; pray grant me pure love

and devotion. Here is Your purity, here Your impurity. Pray grant me pure love and devotion.'

Nanda Bose — Can God change the law?

Sri Ramakrishna — What do you mean? He is the Lord of all — He can do anything and everything. He who has made the law can change it.

Does awakening come when one has done away with worldly enjoyments, or is it by His grace?

“But you can talk that way. Since you crave worldly enjoyments, you may say so. There is a view that a man doesn't attain spiritual awakening until his desire for worldly enjoyments is over. But what is there to enjoy? The pleasures of 'lust and greed' are momentary — this moment they exist and the next moment they disappear. What is there in 'lust and greed'? Its enjoyment is like eating a hog-plum that is all stone and rind. Eat it and you get colic. The moment you swallow sweet sandesh, it is gone.”

Is God partial? Why is there ignorance? It is His sweet will

Nanda Bose is silent for a few minutes. Then he says, “Oh yes! People no doubt talk that way. But is God partial? If one can succeed by His grace, it is obvious that He is partial.”

Sri Ramakrishna — God Himself has become everything. He Himself has become living beings, the universe — everything. When one attains

Absolute Knowledge¹ one realizes this. He has become the mind, the intellect, the body – and the twenty-four cosmic principles. To whom, then, can He be partial?

Nanda Bose — Why has He taken so many forms? Why is there knowledge in one place and ignorance in another?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is His sweet will.

Atul — Kedar (Chatterji) said something nice. Somebody asked him, ‘Why did God create the world?’ He replied, ‘I was not present at the meeting in which He planned His creation.’ (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — It is God’s will.

Saying this, Thakur sings –

All is Your will, O Mother Tara! You have Your own way in doing everything!

You do Your works, O Mother! People, however, say that they do it.

You bind the elephant in the mud, and You make the lame cross the hills.

To some You grant the seat of Brahman, and others You take down,

I am the instrument, You are the operator; I am the dwelling, You are the dweller within.

I am the chariot, You are the Charioteer; I move as You make me move.

I speak as You make me speak.

¹ Purna jnana

“She is the All-Blissful Mother. She creates, preserves and dissolves in Her sport. There are numberless beings, but only one or two of them attain salvation – that alone makes Her happy. ‘She claps and laughs when She sees one or two kites out of millions breaking free of their strings.’ Likewise, some people are being entangled in the world and some are being liberated.

“In the sea of the world, so many boats, O mind, sail, while others sink.”

Nanda Bose — That is Her sweet will. But what about us, who are suffering so much?

Sri Ramakrishna — Do ‘you’ really exist? It is She who has become everything. As long as one does not know Her, one goes on repeating, ‘I, I.’

“Everyone will know Her – everyone will indeed be liberated. Some people get their meal in the morning, others at midday and yet others in the evening – but no one will remain hungry. Indeed, everyone will realize his own true nature.”

Pasupati — True, sir. It seems that He Himself has become everything.

Sri Ramakrishna — Just try to find out what you are. Are you bones and flesh, or blood, or the intestines? Looking for ‘I’, you find ‘You’ – in other words, there is nothing inside you but God’s power. There is no ‘I’, only ‘You’. You have so much wealth, but you have no egotism. It is not possible to get rid of ‘I’ altogether. So if the ‘I’ does not vanish, let the rascal remain as the servant of God. (All laugh.) It

is good to have the pride of being a devotee of God, or His son, or the servant of God. The ‘I’ which is attached to ‘lust and greed’ is the ‘unripe I’. One must renounce such an ego.

Hearing such a clear elucidation of egoism, the master of the house and the others are delighted.

Pride of wealth and self-forgetfulness

Sri Ramakrishna — There are two signs of a person who has attained spiritual knowledge. First, he has no pride; second, he develops a serene attitude. You have both these signs, so you must have received the grace of God.

“When one has too much wealth, one forgets God. That is the nature of wealth. Jadu Mallick has become very wealthy. He doesn’t talk much about God these days. Earlier he used to speak so nicely about the Lord.

“ ‘Lust and greed’ are a kind of intoxicant. When one is drunk, one fails to recognize one’s own maternal and paternal uncles. One may even say to them, ‘Cursed be your family...’ A drunkard can’t distinguish between his superiors and inferiors.”

Nanda Bose — That is true.

**Theosophy – salvation through momentary communion
with God – practicing pure love and devotion**

Pasupati — Sir, what do you think about Spiritualism and Theosophy? And about the solar world and the lunar world and the world of planets?

Sri Ramakrishna — I don't know, my dear. But why worry about all these calculations? Eat mangoes. What is the use of knowing how many mango trees, how many branches, how many millions of leaves are in the garden? I have come to the garden to eat mangoes. Let me eat and go.

“A man has no desire to know all these useless details when he develops spiritual awakening, when he knows God. In delirium what nonsense one speaks: ‘I shall eat five seers of cooked rice. I shall drink a pitcher of water.’ The physician says to such a patient, ‘Yes, yes, you want all this. All right, you may eat it.’ Saying which, the physician goes on with his smoke. But he listens to the patient when he is no longer delirious.”

Pasupati — Our delirium might last forever!

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? Fix your mind on God. You will attain spiritual awakening.

Pasupati (smiling) — Our communion with God is momentary – no longer than the time it takes to smoke. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — So what. Even a momentary communion with God gives liberation.

“Ahalya said, ‘Rama, may I be born as the offspring of a pig, or any other being, but pray grant that I may fix my mind at Thy lotus feet and develop pure love and devotion for Thee.’

“Narada said, ‘Rama, I want no other boon from You. Only grant pure love and devotion. And

may I never be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya. Pray, bless me.’ When one sincerely prays to Him, one can fix one’s mind on Him – then one does develop pure love and devotion at His lotus feet.”

Sin and the after-life – thought of God at the time of death – King Bharata

“ ‘Shall we ever get rid of our delirium? What will happen to us? We are sinners’ – one must give up such ideas. (To Nanda Bose) Let there be this faith: Since I have called on the name of Rama, how can there be any sin in me?”

Nanda Bose — Does an after-life exist? Is one punished for one’s sins?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why don’t you eat mangoes! What need do you have to calculate all these things – does an after-life exist or not? What use is it to talk about such things?

“Please eat mangoes. ‘Mango,’ or love and devotion for God, is the one thing essential.”

Nanda Bose — Where are mango trees? Where can I get them?

Sri Ramakrishna — Trees? He exists as the eternal and infinite Brahman. He does exist, He is permanent. The fact is that He is the wish-fulfilling tree¹ of heaven.

¹ *Kalpataru*

O my mind, pick up the four fruits from under the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali.

“You must go to the wish-fulfilling tree and pray to it. Then alone can you obtain the fruit – then only will the fruit fall to the ground. You can then gather it and bring it with you. The four fruits are: righteousness, economic security, fulfillment of legitimate desires and liberation¹.

“Jnanis seek the fruit of liberation and devotees want love and devotion for God – love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul. They are not interested in righteousness, economic security and fulfillment of desires.

“You ask about the after-life. According to the *Gita*, one becomes what one thinks of at the hour of death. King Bharata quit his mortal frame remorsefully repeating, ‘Deer, deer’ because he was grieving over his pet deer. So he was born as a deer in the next birth. For this reason, day and night one should practice repetition of the Name², meditation, worship and other spiritual exercises. Only then, by virtue of practice, will one think of the Lord at the hour of death. That is how one attains the real nature of God after death.

“Keshab Sen also asked me about the after-life. I said to him too, ‘What need have you for all these calculations?’ And I added, ‘As long as one does not realize God, one has to repeatedly come to this world.’ A potter dries his earthen pots and lids by putting them in the sun. If they are trampled by

¹ *Dharma, artha, kama and moksha*

² *Japa*

goats or sheep, he throws away the baked and broken pots. However, he mixes the unbaked ones with more clay and moulds them again into new vessels on the potter's wheel."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and his blessings on a householder – signs of rajas

The master of the house has shown no sign of offering refreshments to Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna himself mentions it, saying –

"Let's have something to eat. I said to Jadu's mother the other day, 'Look here, please offer me something to eat.' Otherwise, it brings harm to the family."

The master of the house orders some sweets. Thakur eats them. Nanda Bose and the others look intently at him. They notice how Sri Ramakrishna conducts himself.

Sri Ramakrishna now wishes to wash his hands. The sweets had been on a plate placed on a sheet on the carpet, so he could not wash his hands on it. A servant brings a brass bowl for him to use.

The brass bowl is a sign of rajas. Thakur exclaims, "Please take it away." The master of the house says to him, "Please wash your hands."

Thakur is preoccupied with some other thought. He asks, "What? Do I have to wash my hands?"

Thakur rises and goes to the southern verandah. He asks Mani to pour water on his hands. Mani does so from a pitcher with a spout. Sri

Ramakrishna dries his hand with his own cloth and returns to his seat. Some betel leaves have been brought on a platter for the gentleman guests. Thakur does not take it when a betel leaf from this platter, which had already been offered to the other guests, is offered to him.

Offering food ritualistically to one's ideal deity – love and devotion for God mixed with knowledge, and pure love

Nanda Bose (to Sri Ramakrishna) — May I ask you something?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What?

Nanda Bose — Why didn't you take the betel leaf? Everything else went fine, but you seemed unreasonable about that.

Sri Ramakrishna — I take food only after offering it to God.

Nanda Bose — But it would have been eaten by God!

Sri Ramakrishna — The path of jnana is one and the path of love and devotion for God¹ another. The school of jnana evaluates everything by applying the knowledge of Brahman². In the path of love and devotion, one differentiates a little.

Nanda Bose — But you did not act correctly.

¹ Bhakti

² The jnani believes in Oneness of God in all objects and does not distinguish between holy and unholy

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — That is my own particular attitude. What you say is also right.

Thakur is cautioning the master of the house about flatterers.

Sri Ramakrishna — Here is one particular caution. Your courtier friends hover around you for their own selfish ends. (To Prasanna's father) Do you live here?

Prasanna's Father — No sir, I live in the neighbourhood. Would you care for a smoke?

Sri Ramakrishna (humbly) — No, you may smoke. I don't feel like smoking.

Nanda Bose has a very big house. That is why Thakur says to him, "Jadu's house is not this big. I told him so the other day."

Nanda Basu — He has built a new house at Jorashanko.

Thakur now encourages Nanda Bose.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Nanda Bose) — It is not a small matter that, though living in the world, you have kept your mind on God. Those who have renounced the world do have to call on God – what bravery is there in that? He indeed is blessed who calls on Him though living in the world. Such a person has to remove a twenty maund stone to be able to find something.

“One should take recourse to a particular attitude when calling upon God. Hanuman had the attitude of bhakti mixed with knowledge, Narada had pure love and devotion for God.

“Rama asked Hanuman, ‘Hanuman, what is your attitude when you worship me?’ Hanuman said, ‘Sometimes I see that You are the whole and I a part of You. At other times, I see that You are the Master and I am Your servant. And Rama, when I have the knowledge of Absolute Truth, I see that You are I and I am You.’

“Rama said to Narada, ‘Please ask me for a boon.’ Narada said, ‘Rama, please grant only that I may have pure love and devotion for Your lotus feet and that I may never be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya.’”

Thakur now wishes to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Nanda Bose) — According to the *Gita*, the person who is recognized as great by the world has a special power of God in him. You have divine power.

Nanda Bose — All people are endowed with equal power.

Sri Ramakrishna (irritated) — All of you people have just this one thing to say! Can all people have equal power? Though it is the same Omnipresent God¹ who is present in every being, the

¹ *Vibhu*

manifestation of His powers are different in different beings.

“Vidyasagar also said the same thing, ‘Has God given more power to some and less to others?’ I said in reply, ‘If there was no difference between power in different people, why should we come to see you? Have you grown two horns on your head?’ ”

Thakur now rises, as do the devotees. Pasupati gets up and accompanies them to the door.

Section XIX

Sri Ramakrishna at Devotees' Homes in Calcutta

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the home of a grief-stricken brahmin woman¹

Thakur arrives in Baghbazar, to an old brick house belonging to a grieving brahmin woman. Upon entering, there is a cowshed to the left. There is space on the roof for sitting. Here, people have formed rows, some standing, while others are seated. They are all eager to have a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna.

The brahmin woman and her sister are widows. Their brothers also live in the house with their families. The brahmin woman has suffered inconsolable grief at the loss of her only daughter. She has been hard at work the whole day in preparation for Thakur's setting his holy feet in her home. While Thakur was at Nanda Bose's house, she had been going in and out of her house anxiously awaiting his arrival. Thakur had told her that he would come to her house after visiting Nanda Bose. Because he was delayed, she wondered if he would come at all.

Thakur sits with the devotees on the roof, where seating arrangements have been made. M., Narayan, Jogen Sen, Devendra and Jogin sit close to him on a mat. Soon the Younger Naren and many other devotees join them. The brahmin woman's sister comes to the roof and offers salutations to Thakur, saying, "My sister has just gone to Nanda

¹ Golap-ma (Golap Sundari Devi), a companion and friend of Holy Mother

Bose's house to find out why there is so much delay in your coming. She will return soon."

Hearing a sound downstairs, she says, "It is my sister coming." She looked for her, but the sister had not yet returned.

Thakur is smiling, sitting there surrounded by devotees.

M. (to Devendra) — What a wonderful sight! Young and old, men and women, all standing in rows, eager to see Sri Ramakrishna and hear his words.

Devendra (to Sri Ramakrishna) — M. says that this place is better than Nanda Bose's. How great is their love and devotion for God!

Thakur laughs.

Now the brahmin woman's sister says, "Here comes sister!"

The brahmin woman comes and salutes Thakur. Then she is unable to decide what to say or do.

Beside herself with emotion, she says, "Oh my dear, I am not going to survive this joy. All of you, please tell me how I can save myself! When my Chandi [daughter] visited me, she was accompanied by armed men to guard her on the road. Even then I didn't feel such joy as now. I don't feel the least grief at Chandi's death. I was afraid that he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] would not come and I had decided to throw everything I had prepared into the Ganges. And I wouldn't speak to him any more. I would only go once where he visited and see him from a distance, then I would return home."

"Let me go and tell everybody, 'Come! Come! See my joy!' Let me show Jogin how fortunate I am!"

Still overwhelmed with joy, the brahmin woman says, "Sir, a labourer paid a rupee for a lottery ticket and won a hundred thousand rupees. The moment he heard that he had won all that money, he died of joy. He really died. It is the same with me. Please bless me, friends, or I will surely die."

Seeing her intense joy and ecstatic state, M. is fascinated. He goes to take the dust of her feet. "What are you doing?" she exclaims. Instead, she salutes M.

The brahmin woman is delighted to see the devotees in her home. She says, "I am glad to see all of you here. I have brought the Younger Naren. I said to him, 'Without you, who would make us laugh?' " While she was talking, her sister came and said anxiously, "Come, sister. How can you keep standing there? Come downstairs. How can I manage by myself?"

The brahmin woman is absorbed in joy. She looks at Thakur and the devotees. How can she leave them and go downstairs?

After some conversation, full of devotion, she takes Thakur to another room and offers him sweets and other refreshments. The devotees also have refreshments on the roof.

It is about 8:00 p.m. and Thakur is ready to leave. One goes west through a room downstairs to a verandah in the courtyard. With the cowshed on the right, one comes to the main gate. When Thakur goes with the devotees through the verandah toward the main gate, the brahmin woman calls out, "I say, sister-in-law, come quickly and take the dust of his feet!" Both the brahmin woman's sister-in-law and one of her brothers salute Sri Ramakrishna.

The brahmin woman says to Thakur, "This is one of my brothers. He is a fool!"

Sri Ramakrishna — No, no. They are all good people.

A person shows the path with a lantern, but some places are not sufficiently lit.

The Younger Naren calls out loudly, “Bring the light here! Show the light here! You haven’t lit the path well enough.” (All laugh.)

At the cowshed, the brahmin woman says to Thakur, “This is my house for cows.” Thakur stops for awhile in front of the cowshed. The devotees are all around him. Mani prostrates before Thakur to salute him and takes the dust of his feet.

Thakur will now visit Ganu’s mother¹.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at the home of Ganu’s mother

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in the living room of Ganu’s mother’s house. It is on the ground floor. Next to the street, it is used as a concert room. Several young men now and then play music for Thakur’s entertainment.

It is half past eight in the evening. It is the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Ashada. The sky, the house and the main road are all bathed in moonlight. The devotees had come in with Thakur and taken their seats in the room.

The brahmin woman, who has accompanied them, first goes inside the house and then comes and stands at the door of the living room. A number of boys from the neighbourhood look at Thakur through its windows. When they hear of his arrival, people of

¹ Yogin-ma (Yogindra Mohini Biswas), Holy Mother's confidant and friend

the neighborhood, young and old, come eagerly to see the great saint.

Seeing more and more boys peeping in from the windows, the Younger Naren says, "I say, why are you all here? Go home, please." But Sri Ramakrishna says affectionately, "No, no. Please stay."

From time to time Thakur chants, "Hari Om! Hari Om!"

An asana has been placed over an ordinary cotton carpet. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on it. Some young musicians who have brought their instruments are asked to sing some songs. When they can't find comfortable seats, Thakur asks them to sit close to him on the cotton carpet.

He says, "Why don't you sit here? Here, I am making room." Saying this, he gathers up his asana. The boys sing –

Song –

O Keshab, wandering in the groves and glades,
bestow Your grace on this distressed soul.

O Madhava, charmer of the mind, holding a magic
flute.

(Say Haribol, Haribol, Haribol, O my mind)

You are the youth of Vraja, the tamer of Kalia and the
dispeller of the fear of the distressed.

With eyes askance, the peacock feather aslant in the
crest, the charmer of Radha's heart.

The lifter of Mount Govardhan, bedecked with sylvan
flowers, O Damodar, the destroyer of the pride of
Kamsa.

O Shyam, sporting and dancing with the gopis!

(Say Haribol, Haribol, Haribol, O my mind)

Song –

Come, O mother Uma, my life...

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, what a great song! What a nice violin! How well it was played!

One of the young men played the flute. Thakur points to him and the other young man with his finger and says, “They make a nice pair.”

The concert continued. Pleased with the music, Thakur says, “How nice! Beautiful indeed!”

Pointing to one young man, he says, “He can play all the instruments.”

Then he says to M., “They are all good people.”

When the song is over, Thakur says to the devotees, “You sing some songs, too.” The brahmin woman is standing near the door. She says, “None of them can sing – except perhaps Mahima Babu. But he won’t sing in front of him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna].”

The Young Man — Why? I even sing before my father.

The Younger Naren (laughing loudly) — But he has not advanced that far.

Everyone laughs. In a few minutes the brahmin woman comes and says, “Please come inside.” Sri Ramakrishna asks, “Why?”

The Brahmin Woman — Refreshments are to be served there. Kindly go inside.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why don’t you bring them here?

The Brahmin Woman — Ganu’s mother says, “If he once gives the dust of his feet in the house, it will

turn into Kashi. Then even dying in the house will no longer be a problem for me.”

Sri Ramakrishna enters the inner apartments with the brahmin woman and the young men. The devotees pace up and down in the moonlight. M. and Binode talk to one another as they stroll the main path south of the house.

Chapter III

Secret message – ‘the three are indeed one’

Sri Ramakrishna is resting in the room to the west of the parlour in Balaram's house. He would like to take a nap. It was already late in the evening when Thakur returned to Balaram's house from the home of Ganu's mother – it must have been about 10:45 p.m.

Thakur says, “Jogin, please massage my feet gently for awhile.”

Mani is seated close by.

While Jogin gently strokes his feet, Thakur says, “I am feeling hungry. I would like to have a little farina pudding.”

The brahmin woman has also accompanied Thakur to Balaram's house. Her brother can play the *banya*¹ and the tabla beautifully. Seeing her again, Thakur says, “The next time Naren or any other singer comes, we will invite her brother to come too.”

Thakur takes a little farina pudding. Gradually Jogin and the other devotees leave the room. Mani is gently stroking his feet. Thakur talks with him.

¹ A semi-circular percussion instrument played along with tabla

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, how happy they were (the brahmin woman and her relatives).

Mani — How wonderful! The same thing happened at the time of Jesus Christ. They, too, were devotees, and sisters – Martha and Mary.

Sri Ramakrishna (eagerly) — What is their story? Please tell me.

Mani — Jesus Christ had gone to their house just as you did, with his devotees. One of the sisters was filled with the joy of ecstasy to see him – as the song of Gaur says:

Drowned forever, never to return, my eyes sank in the ocean's depths.

Forgetting to swim in the sea of Gaur's beauty, my mind went to the bottom of the sea.

“The other sister was preparing the food all by herself. Becoming fretful over how much she had to do, she came to Christ and complained to him, ‘Lord, just look at this. How unfair of my elder sister! She is sitting here alone quietly and I am having to do all the work all by myself.’

“Jesus said, ‘Blessed is your sister to have attained the one thing needful in life (that is, ecstatic love of God).’”

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what do you feel when you see all this?

Mani — I feel that the three persons are indeed one — Jesus Christ, Chaitanyadeva and you — are one person.

Sri Ramakrishna — Of course, one. What is there except one? It is He alone who dwells in this body.

After saying this, Sri Ramakrishna points to his own body — as if to say that the Lord has incarnated Himself and is dwelling in his body.

M. — You explained the other day how God incarnates on earth.

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me what I said.

Mani — You said, for instance, that there is a vast open and desolate field. In front of it is a wall that one cannot see through. But there is a small round hole in this wall. Through it, one can see a little of the infinite expanse of the field.

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me, what is this 'hole'?

Mani — You are that 'hole'. Through you, one can see everything — one can see that vast infinite expanse.

Sri Ramakrishna, very pleased, pats Mani and says, "It is very good that you have understood."

Mani — As a matter of fact, it is particularly difficult to understand. We are unable to comprehend how God, Perfect Brahman, can dwell in such a small body.

Sri Ramakrishna — ‘I say, no one has recognized Him who roams from home to home in the guise of a mad man.’

Mani — And you were talking of Jesus.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did I say?

Mani — You had passed into bhava samadhi when you saw the picture of Jesus at Jadu Mallick’s garden house. You saw Jesus come out of the picture and enter into you.

Thakur remains silent for awhile. Then he says more to Mani, “Perhaps there is a meaning in the disease that I have contracted in my throat – that I should not make myself appear light before all, so that I would not go to all sorts of places and sing and dance.”

Thakur talks about Dwija. He asks, “Didn’t Dwija come today?”

Mani — I asked him to come. He was supposed to. I don’t know why he hasn’t.

Sri Ramakrishna — He has great love for me. Well, he must belong to the intimate circle of devotees here, mustn’t he?

Mani — Yes, sir, it must be. Otherwise, how could he have so much love?

Mani enters the mosquito net and fans Thakur.

Turning a little toward him, Thakur continues talking. The topic is that God incarnates in the human body to enact His divine sport.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is your spiritual ideal. At one time I didn't see divine forms. That state passed, and now I don't have visions often.

Mani — I like His play as a human being the best of all, His divine sport.

Sri Ramakrishna — That alone is enough to succeed. And you see [His play in] me?

Is Sri Ramakrishna saying that the Lord has incarnated Himself as a human being in his person and is enacting His divine sport?

Section XX

Thakur with the Devotees on the Holy Vijaya Dashami Day

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Shyampukur house

It is the holy Vijaya Dashami day, 18 October 1885. Thakur is staying at the Shyampukur house¹. He is unwell. A physician has come from Calcutta to treat him. The devotees stay there to serve him. None of them has yet renounced the world – they come from their family homes.

Surendra's love and devotion to God – 'Divine Mother must reside in the heart'

It is winter, eight o'clock in the morning. Thakur is not feeling well. He is sitting on his bed acting like a five-year-old child who knows nothing but his mother. Surendra arrives and sits down. Navagopal, M. and some other devotees are already present. Surendra has celebrated the Durga Puja at his home. Thakur had not been able to go but had sent his devotees to have the darshan of the image. It is now Vijaya day² and Surendra is feeling sad (at the impending separation from the Divine Mother, as on this day Her image will be immersed in the waters of the Ganges.)

Surendra — I ran away from the house.

¹ Thakur's illness could not be attended properly at Dakshineswar, so his devotees had rented a house in the Shyampukur area of Calcutta

² The fourth day of the worship

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Though the image may be immersed in water, let the Divine Mother reside in the heart.

Quietly repeating, “Mother, Mother,” Surendra says a few things about the Supreme Goddess.

Thakur looks at him and sheds tears. Looking at M., he says in a voice choked with emotion, “What bhakti! What love and devotion he feels for God!”

Sri Ramakrishna — Around seven or seven-thirty yesterday evening, I had a vision of the worship hall in your home. The image of the deity was bathed in divine light. This place and your worship hall were joined by a stream of light that illumined both places.

Surendra — At that time I was crying ‘Mother, Mother’ in the worship hall. My elder brothers had gone upstairs, leaving me alone. I felt that the Mother said, ‘I will come again.’

Sri Ramakrishna and the *Bhagavad Gita*

It is nearly eleven in the morning. Thakur has eaten the food prescribed for him. Mani is pouring water into his palms so that he can rinse his mouth.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Rakhai fell sick eating gram lentils. It is good to eat only sattvic food. Haven’t you read that in the *Gita*? Do you read the *Gita*?

Mani — Yes, sir. The *Gita* speaks of moderation in diet. It talks of sattvic food, rajasic food and tamasic food. It also talks of sattvic kindness,

rajasic kindness and tamasic kindness. And it describes the sattvic ego and so on.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you have a copy of the *Gita*?

Mani — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — It contains the essence of all the scriptures.

Mani — Yes, sir. It speaks of realizing God by following various ways. Just as you say that one can reach Him by a number of paths — of knowledge, of love and devotion, of action and of meditation¹.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you understand the meaning of Karma Yoga? It is to surrender the fruit of all actions to God.

Mani — Sir, the *Gita* does say that. It also says that work can be performed in three different ways.

Sri Ramakrishna — In what three different ways?

Mani — One, to attain knowledge; two, to teach others; and three, according to one's own nature.

Thakur takes a betel leaf after rinsing his mouth. He offers a piece of it from his mouth to Mani as prasad².

¹ Jnana, bhakti, karma and dhyana

² Sacramental food

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna, Sir Humphrey Davy and the concept of avatar

Thakur is talking to M. about Doctor Sarkar. The previous day M. had gone to the Doctor's house to report Thakur's condition.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did he talk about with you?

M. — The Doctor has many books in his house. I was reading one of them while I sat there. Then I started reading it aloud to the Doctor. The book was by Sir Humphrey Davy. It talked of the need of an incarnation of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Indeed! What did you say to him?

M. — One passage in the book says that the Divine Truth must be made human truth to be appreciated by us. That is why an incarnation of God is necessary.

Sri Ramakrishna — Very good. All this is very nice.

M. — The foreign author gave this illustration: one cannot gaze at the sun, but one can look at its reflected rays.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, nice idea. Anything else?

M. — In another passage it says that true jnana (knowledge) is nothing but faith.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is a grand idea! One who has faith, surely has everything.

M. — The author had dreamt of Roman gods and goddesses.

Sri Ramakrishna — Have such books really been published? It is God Himself at work there. Did you talk of anything else?

**Sri Ramakrishna and 'doing welfare work,' or Karma
Yoga**

M. — He says that he works for the welfare of the world. That is why I told him what you said.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What did I say?

M. — You talked of Sambhu Mallick. He had said to you: 'I want to build hospitals, dispensaries, and schools with my money. That will benefit many.' I told the Doctor what you had said to him: Suppose God appears before you. Will you ask Him to build hospitals, dispensaries and schools for you? And I said another thing to the Doctor.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it is a different class of people who are born for work. What else did you say?

M. — I said: If your aim is to have the darshan of Mother Kali in the temple, what will you gain by

giving in charity to a mendicant? Rather, try the best you can to have the darshan of Kali. After that, you can give in charity as much as you like.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you talk about anything else?

The devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and victory over lust

M. — We agreed that many of those who visit you have conquered lust. The Doctor said, ‘In my case, too, lust has vanished – did you know?’ I said, ‘You are indeed a great man. That you have conquered lust is not surprising. But it is amazing that even insignificant and ordinary people influenced by him [Sri Ramakrishna] have conquered their passions.’ Then I told him what you said to Girish Ghosh.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What did I say to him?

M. — You said to Girish: ‘The Doctor hasn’t been able to change your mind.’ You said that with reference to his calling you an incarnation of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Please talk to the Doctor about divine incarnation – that he who liberates is God-incarnate. The scriptures talk of ten avatars, or twenty-four avatars, and also of innumerable incarnations of God.

Gradually giving up drinking altogether

M. — The Doctor asks a lot about Girish Ghosh. He keeps asking, ‘Has Girish Ghosh given up drinking altogether?’ He keeps a sharp eye on him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you tell Girish about it?

M. — Yes, sir, I did. And I talked to him about his giving up drinking.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did he say to you?

M. — He said, ‘I take your words as those of Thakur, so I accept them. I cannot, however, promise anything.’

Sri Ramakrishna (happily) — Kalipada told me that he has given up drinking altogether.

Chapter III

Identity of the Absolute or Universal Ego and the phenomenal world

It is afternoon. Doctor Sarkar has arrived. Amrita (the Doctor’s son) and Hem have come with him. Narendra and other devotees are present. Thakur is talking privately with Amrita. He asks him, “Are you able to meditate?” He adds, “Do you know what one experiences in meditation? The mind becomes like a continuous flow of oil – one has just one thought, that of God. No other thought intrudes.” Now Thakur talks to everyone else.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — Your son doesn't believe in the incarnation of God. That's all right. It doesn't matter if he believes it or not.

“Your son is a nice boy. Why shouldn't he be? Can an ordinary mango be borne by a [fine] ‘Bombay’ mango tree? How great is his faith in God! He whose mind dwells in God is truly a man¹ – that is, *mana-hosha* (of awakened mind). He whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened knows clearly that God is eternal and everything else is ephemeral. He is a man with an awakened mind. Your son does not believe in divine incarnation. There is no harm in that.

“It is enough if one believes that God exists and the universe and its living beings are the manifestations of His power. It is like a rich man and his garden.

“Some say there are ten avatars, some say twenty-four avatars, others that there are innumerable incarnations of God. Wherever you see a special manifestation of His power, God has incarnated Himself. This is my belief.

“And there is another view, according to which God has become everything – whatever you see. Take, for example, the bel-fruit – it consists of three parts: seeds, rind and kernel. The Absolute belongs to the same Being to whom the phenomenal world belongs. And the phenomenal world belongs to the same Being to whom the Absolute belongs. Disavowing the Absolute, you simply cannot understand the phenomenal world – because the

¹ That is *manushya*

phenomenal world does exist. Only by transcending it step by step can one reach the Absolute.

“As long as one entertains the feeling of I-consciousness, one cannot go beyond the phenomenal world. By negating the Relative while meditating, saying, ‘Not this, not this¹,’ one reaches the Absolute. But nothing can really be denied, as I gave you the illustration of the bel-fruit.”

The Doctor — That is certainly true.

Sri Ramakrishna — Kacha passed into Nirvikalpa samadhi. When his samadhi ended, someone asked him, ‘What do you see now?’ Kacha said, ‘I see that the world is one with Him. Everything is filled with God. It is God who has become all that I see. I do not know what to reject and what to accept.’

“Do you know what I think? Having attained the vision of the Absolute, together with the phenomenal world, one should live with the attitude of being a servant of God. Hanuman saw both God with form and without form. Thereafter, he lived with the attitude of a servant of God, as His devotee.”

Mani (to himself) — One must accept both the Absolute² and the phenomenal world³. Since the Vedanta philosophy has reached Germany, some of the European philosophers have accepted this line of thought. Thakur, however, says, ‘One does not

¹ Neti, neti

² Nitya

³ Lila

attain the vision of the Absolute and the phenomenal world without renouncing everything, without renouncing 'lust and greed'. One has to totally renounce; one must have absolute non-attachment to the world.' This is the crucial difference between him and such [European] philosophers as Hegel.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna and doctrine of avatar – reconciliation of free will and predestination

The Doctor says that God has created us, and the soul of all of us will make infinite progress. He does not accept that one person is greater than another. That is why he doesn't believe in an incarnation of God.

The Doctor — One makes infinite progress! If that is not so, why live five or seven years more? I would rather hang myself with a rope.

“What is an incarnation of God? Why should I prostrate at the feet of a person who has to ease himself and urinate? But yes, I accept that God's light reflects in man.”

Girish (laughing) — Have you seen God's light?

Before the Doctor answers, he hesitates for a moment. A friend sitting close to him whispers something to him.

The Doctor — You have only seen the reflection, nothing else.

Girish — I see it! I see the light! I shall prove that Sri Krishna is an avatar. If I fail, I will cut out my tongue!

Only a person suffering from mental aberration or delirium reasons – reasoning stops in the state of perfect knowledge

Sri Ramakrishna — The conversation you have just had carries no weight.

“It is just like the raving of a person suffering from delirium. Such a diseased person says, ‘I wish to drink a pitcher of water and eat a pot of boiled rice.’ The physician says to him, ‘Yes, all right. We will give you whatever you want after you have taken the prescribed medicine.’

“When butter is heated, it makes a crackling sound. But when it is thoroughly boiled, the crackling sound ceases. As a man’s mind is, so is his conception of God. I have seen portraits of rich people – the queen and so forth – hanging on the walls of rich people’s homes. But devotees have images of deities hung in their houses.

“Lakshmana said, ‘Rama, Vaishishtha is a great sage¹ but even he grieved at the death of his son.’ Rama replied, ‘Brother, he who has knowledge also has ignorance; he who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. Go beyond both knowledge and ignorance². One attains such a state only when one knows God intimately – this is what is known as vijnana.

¹ Rishi

² Jnana and ajnana

“When a thorn digs into one’s foot, one must take another thorn to take it out. Afterwards, you throw them both away. By removing the thorn of ignorance with the thorn of knowledge, one should throw away both the thorns of knowledge and ignorance.

“There is a sign of perfect knowledge. One stops reasoning. Just as I said that butter, when heated, crackles until it is thoroughly boiled.”

The Doctor — But can one retain perfect knowledge permanently? If God has become everything, why are you behaving like a paramahansa? And why do these people come here to serve you? Why don’t you sit quietly and not say a word?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Water is water, whether it is still or moving. It remains water when it is in waves.

Voice of God or conscience – mahout as Narayana

“There is something else. Why should I not listen to what the mahout Narayana says? The guru said to his disciple that everyone was God. A mad elephant was approaching. Putting his faith in the words of his guru, that the elephant was Narayana too, the disciple did not move away. The mahout shouted, ‘Everyone, please get away! Do get away!’ But the disciple did not move. The elephant picked him up and threw him to the ground and then went its way. The disciple did not die. He regained consciousness when water was poured into his mouth. Asked why he didn’t move away, he said,

'My revered guru said that everything is Narayana.' The guru then said, 'Son, why didn't you listen to the mahout Narayana?' God resides within as pure mind and pure intellect. I am the machine, God is the operator. I am the house and He is the indweller. It is God who is the mahout Narayana."

The Doctor — I ask you this, 'Why, then, do you ask me to cure your illness?'

Sri Ramakrishna — I talk that way as long as I am conscious of the 'jar' of the 'ego'. Imagine an immense ocean of water. A jar is immersed in the ocean. The jar then has water inside and outside it. The water in the jar does not become one with the water outside until the jar is broken. God Himself has kept this jar of I-consciousness in me.

Who am I?

The Doctor — What is this 'I' that you are talking about? You must explain it. Is God playing tricks on us?

Girish — Sir, how do you know that He is not playing tricks?

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — It is certainly God who has kept this 'I' in us – it is His play, His lila. A king has four sons (who are all princes) but, playing with each other, one takes the role of a minister, another a police officer, and so forth. Though a son of a king, he plays the role of a police officer.

(To the Doctor) “Listen. When one has a direct vision of the Atman, one accepts all this. All doubts vanish when one has vision of God.”

**Son-ship and the Father – Sri Ramakrishna and Jnana
Yoga**

The Doctor — Does one ever get rid of all doubts?

Sri Ramakrishna — Just learn this much from me. If you wish to learn more, pray to God about it in a solitary corner. Ask Him why He has created all this.

“A boy can only give a beggar a cup of rice as alms. If the beggar asks for train fare, the master of the house must be called. (The Doctor is silent.)

“Well, you like to reason and discuss things. I will reason with you, but please listen to me. A jnani does not believe in the incarnation of God. Krishna said to Arjuna, ‘You call me an avatar time and again. Let me show you something. Come with me.’ Arjuna accompanied him for some distance, then Krishna asked, ‘What do you see?’ Arjuna said, ‘A big tree with black berries hanging in clusters.’ Sri Krishna said, ‘They are not black berries. Go a few steps nearer and look at them.’ Arjuna then saw that they were clusters of Krishnas hanging on the tree. Krishna said, ‘Do you see how many Krishnas like me exist there?’

“Kavirdas said of Sri Krishna, ‘The gopis clapped their hands and he danced like a monkey.’

“The nearer you approach God, the fewer of His attributes you notice. A devotee first had the

vision of God with ten arms. Going nearer, he saw that God had six arms. When he advanced still closer, he only saw Gopala¹ with two arms. The closer he went to God, the less he saw His splendour and glories. At last he saw only divine light – there was no visible attribute.

“Listen a little to Vedantic reasoning. A magician came to a king to show him his magic feats. When he moved a little to one side, the king saw that a rider on horseback was coming. He was well-dressed and held weapons in his hands. The king and the audience in the court began to wonder what, in fact, was real. Evidently the horse was not real, nor the robes or weapons. Finally they saw that the only reality was a rider standing there alone. The significance of this is that Brahman alone is Real and the world is illusory. When you reason, nothing whatsoever remains.”

The Doctor — I have no objection to this.

The world and the scarecrow

Sri Ramakrishna — However, it is not easy to dispel the illusion that the world is real. It persists even after one attains divine knowledge. A person sees a tiger in a dream. He wakes up and the dream ends. But his heart continues to pound.

“Some thieves went to a farm to steal. A man’s figure made of straw had been put there to frighten intruders. The thieves could not persuade themselves to enter. One of them went closer and

¹ Baby Krishna

found that it was only a scarecrow. He came back to the other thieves and told them there was nothing to fear, but they still refused to go – they told him that their hearts were beating violently. The thief then laid the scarecrow down on the ground and said, ‘It is nothing, it is nothing.’ This is the process of ‘*Neti, neti*’¹.”

The Doctor — These are all very nice words.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — What kind of words?

The Doctor — Fine.

Sri Ramakrishna — Say, ‘thank you’² at least once.

The Doctor — But don’t you understand what feelings there are in my heart? And I take such trouble to come here to see you!

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — No, my dear, it is not that. Say something for the benefit of the ignorant. Bibhishana did not want to become the king of Lanka [after Ravana was killed by Rama]. He said, ‘What would I get by being a king after I have obtained you?’ Rama said, ‘Bibhishana, become king for the benefit of the ignorant. Become a king to instruct those who ask what riches you have gained by serving Rama so much.’

The Doctor — Are there ignorant people here?

¹ Not this, not this

² The words ‘thank you’ were said by Sri Ramakrishna in English

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) —Yes, yes, you have oysters and snails here as well as conch shells. (All laugh.)

Chapter V

Purusha and Prakriti – eligibility of taking spiritual instructions

The Doctor gives two globules of medicine to Thakur, saying, “I give you both globules: one is Purusha and the other Prakriti.” (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Yes, they live side by side. Haven’t you seen pigeons? They can’t live apart from one another. Where there is Prakriti, there is Purusha; and where there is Purusha, there is Prakriti.

It is the Vijaya Dashami day today. Thakur asks the Doctor to have some sweets on the occasion. The devotees serve him sweets.

The Doctor (while eating) — I ‘thank you’ for the sweets. It is not for the instructions you have given today. Why should I give that ‘thank you’ in words?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Fix your mind on God. What more can I say? Meditate a little. (Pointing to the Younger Naren) Just see, his mind becomes absolutely merged in God. Those things I told you ...

The Doctor — Tell these people too.

Sri Ramakrishna — It all depends on one's capacity to digest. Can everyone understand all I have told you? I can't talk to everyone as I talked to you. A mother has brought home some fish to cook. Her children do not have the same digestion, so for one she prepares pulao and for the others fish curry — the latter have poor digestion. (All laugh.)

The Doctor leaves. It is Vijaya Dashami today. All the devotees pay obeisance to Thakur by prostrating on the ground and taking the dust of his feet. Then they embrace one another. They are beyond themselves with joy. In this happiness, they forget that Thakur is seriously ill. Their embracing and enjoying of sweets continues for a long time. The Younger Naren, M. and few other devotees sit with Thakur. He talks happily with them. The topic of conversation is the change in Dr. Sarkar.

Sri Ramakrishna — I shall not have to instruct the Doctor much more.

“When a tree is almost axed in two, the person who is felling it stands some distance away after his last blow. In a little while the tree falls by itself.”

The Younger Naren (smiling) — All these are principles!

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Hasn't the Doctor changed a great deal?

M. — Yes, sir. When he comes here, he becomes stupefied. He doesn't even talk about the medicine he will give you. When we remind him of it, he says, 'Yes, yes, he has to be given medicine.'

Some of the devotees are singing in the parlour.

When they return to the room where Thakur is sitting, he says to them, "You were singing. Why was the song not in rhythm? I once heard of a man who was perfect at losing the beat – you sang like him." (They all laugh.)

A boy, the Younger Naren's relative, has arrived. He is dressed as a dandy and is wearing glasses. Thakur is talking to the Younger Naren.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look here. A boy with a pleated robe was going by here. The way he was walking! He would remove his scarf to show the pleats on the front of his dress. Then he would look around to see if anybody had noticed him. When he walked, his hips seemed to be out of joint. (All laugh.) Just look at him.

"A peacock makes a show of its feathers – but it has hideous feet. (All laugh.) The camel is so ugly. Everything about it is ugly!"

Naren's Relative — But it conduct's itself well.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it does. But it eats thorny bushes. Though its mouth bleeds, it continues to eat them. A worldly person loses his son and soon after pines for another.

Section XXI

Sri Ramakrishna at the Shyampukur House

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Shyampukur house in Calcutta with devotees

It is Friday, 30 October 1885, the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Aswin, 15th of Kartik. Sri Ramakrishna has come to Shyampukur for treatment. He is in his room on the upper story. It is 9 o'clock. He is talking with M. privately. M. will soon go to Doctor Sarkar to report Thakur's pain in the throat and to bring him to the Shyampukur house. Thakur is so very sick, yet his only concern is the welfare of his devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., smiling) — Purna came to see me this morning. He has such a good nature. Manindra has a feminine attitude¹. How amazing! After reading the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* he is inclined toward the attitude of a gopi², or a female lover of the Lord³ — as though God is male and he female.

M. — Yes, sir

Purna Chandra is a schoolboy, 15 or 16 years old. Thakur is very eager to see him, but Purna's family

¹ Prakriti bhava

² Milkmaid at Vraja

³ Sakhi

does not let him visit. One time he became so eager to see Purna that he went at night from Dakshineswar to M.'s house in Calcutta. M. brought Purna there to meet with Thakur. After a long conversation about how to call on God, Thakur had returned to Dakshineswar.

Manindra is also 15 or 16 years old. He is called Khoka¹ by the devotees – they still call him by this name [referring to the time the book was written]. He dances, absorbed with divine ecstasy, when he hears the chanting of the name and glories of God.

Chapter II

The Doctor and M.

It is between ten and ten-thirty. M. has gone to Doctor Sarkar's house. There is a verandah, which adjoins the parlour on the first floor and overlooks a path. There they sit on a wooden bench and talk. In front of the Doctor is a glass aquarium in which goldfish are swimming. Now and then the Doctor throws pieces of the green husk of cardamoms in the water. He also throws little balls of refined wheat flour, which he has made, to the open roof for sparrows and other birds to eat. M. watches him.

The Doctor (laughing, to M.) — Look at the goldfish watching me. They don't see the green cardamom husks I have thrown them. So I say that mere love and devotion² will get you nowhere. You need knowledge³ too. (M. laughs.) Look. The sparrows flew away when I threw the wheat balls at them. They were frightened. They gained no love and

¹ Baby

² Bhakti

³ Jnana

devotion because they have no knowledge. They don't know that wheat balls are food.

The Doctor goes to the drawing room. Books fill shelves all around the room. He takes a little rest while M. browses through the books and even reads a little. At last, he picks up the book *Life of Jesus* written by Canon Farrar. He reads it for some time.

The Doctor says something now and then. He asks M. to read the correspondence about the homeopathic hospital, which had come into existence after many problems. He says, "You will find this correspondence in the *Calcutta Journal of Medicine* of 1876." The Doctor has great love for homeopathy.

M. picks up a book with the title *Munger's New Theology*. The Doctor notices it.

The Doctor — Munger has based his principles on very nice reasoning and logic. Your Chaitanya has said one thing, the Buddha and Jesus Christ have stated something else. You put your faith in their words simply because these people have said so.

M. (smiling) — So we should not believe in Chaitanya, or Buddha, but we should believe in Munger.

The Doctor — All right, whatever you say.

M. — People have to quote someone as the authority; that is how Munger became established. (The Doctor smiles.)

The Doctor gets into the carriage with M. The carriage proceeds toward Shyampukur. It is midday. The Doctor and M. continue talking while the

carriage moves on. They talk about Doctor Bhaduri who also comes to treat Thakur now and then.

M. (smiling) — Talking about you, Bhaduri said, ‘He has to begin over again as a brick-bat.’

The Doctor — What do you mean?

M. — You don’t believe in great spiritual personalities¹, subtle bodies and all that. Apparently Doctor Bhaduri is a Theosophist. Besides, you don’t believe in the divine sport of incarnations of God. Therefore, he jokingly says about you, ‘He will not be born as a human being in the next birth, not even as a creature, nor as an animal, tree or plant. He will have to start as a piece of brick. Then, after many, many births, he might some day assume a human body.’

The Doctor — Good gracious!

M. — He further says that the knowledge of science that you have acquired is illusory – it is here now, but it may disappear the next moment. He gives an illustration. There are two wells. One of them receives its water from an underground spring. The other well has no spring; it is filled with rainwater. The water in the latter well cannot last long. Your knowledge of science will also dry up like the rainwater in the well.

The Doctor (smiling) — Really!

¹ Mahatmas

The carriage reaches Cornwallis Street. Doctor Sarkar picks up Doctor Pratap, who had visited Thakur the previous day.

Chapter III

Instructions to Doctor Sarkar – meditation of a jnani¹

Thakur is seated in the same second story room with some devotees. He is talking with Doctor Sarkar and Doctor Pratap.

Dr. Sarkar (to Sri Ramakrishna) — So you had *kashi*² again? (Smiling) It is, however, good to visit Kashi. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — It brings liberation³, dear. But I don't want liberation, I want only love and devotion for God⁴. (The doctors and the devotees laugh.)

Pratap is the son-in-law of Dr. Bhaduri. When he sees Pratap, Thakur speaks highly of Bhaduri.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Pratap) — Ah, what a person he has turned into! He contemplates God, observes purity in conduct, and accepts both attitudes of formless God and God with form.

M. is very keen to discuss Dr. Bhaduri's saying that Dr. Sarkar would be born again as a brickbat. He whispers to the Younger Naren just loud enough that

¹ Man of Knowledge

² Pun upon the word that means both coughing and Benares, another name of Kashi

³ Mukti

⁴ Bhakti

Thakur can hear, “Do you remember what Bhaduri said about bricks and brickbats?”

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to Dr. Sarkar) — Do you know what he said about you? Since you don’t believe in these things, you will have to start all over again by becoming a brickbat in the next cycle¹. (All laugh.)

Dr. Sarkar (smiling) — So I will start again as a stone or a brick and assume a human body after many, many births. Even after I have come to this place [referring to Sri Ramakrishna], I will still have to start all over again with bricks and pieces of brick! (The Doctor and others laugh.)

Thakur is so sick. Even so, he goes into divine moods. And he always talks of spiritual things – such is the trend of the conversation.

Pratap — I saw you yesterday in an ecstatic mood.

Sri Ramakrishna — It came by itself. It wasn’t much.

Dr. Sarkar — It is not good for you to talk with others now, and go into divine ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — I saw you yesterday in my ecstasy. I saw that you are a mine of knowledge, but it is absolutely dry knowledge. I didn’t find the taste of divine bliss in it. (To Pratap) If he (Dr. Sarkar) once tastes the joy of divine bliss,

¹ *Manvantar*, the period of millions of years of Manu

he will see everything, above and below, filled with it. Then he will not say that only what he says is right and what others say is wrong. Then his lips will cease uttering sharp and aggressive words.

**Goal of life – his earlier story – instructions of the
Naked One**

The devotees are all silent. Thakur suddenly becomes absorbed in divine ecstasy and speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Doctor Sarkar) — I say, Mahendra Babu, why do you harp on money? You talk so much of your wife and of name and fame. Give all these up and direct your mind to God with full concentration. Enjoy the bliss of God.

Doctor Sarkar does not utter a word. Everyone else is also silent.

Sri Ramakrishna — The Naked One¹ used to tell how the jnani meditates. There is an expanse of water stretching everywhere – all regions above and below are full of water. The individual soul is like a fish swimming joyfully in this water. One actually sees this when one really meditates.

“There is a boundless expanse of ocean with no limit to its water. Now imagine a pot in the ocean. There is water both inside and outside the pot. The jnani sees that there is the same Paramatman both within and without. Then what is the pot? It is the I-consciousness. Because of the pot, water seems to be divided into two parts – as if one part of the

¹ Totapuri

water is inside the pot and the other outside. As long as one's 'pot of ego' persists, one feels this way. But when the ego vanishes, what remains is that which is. It cannot be spoken in words.

“Do you know another way the jnani meditates? There is the boundless sky with a bird flying in it joyfully with extended wings. That is the sky of consciousness, and the Atman is the bird. The bird is not within a cage – it is flying in the sky of consciousness. Its joy is limitless¹.”

The devotees hear of the yoga of meditation² in amazement. After a short time, Pratap resumes the conversation.

Pratap (to Dr. Sarkar) — If you reflect on it, you find it is all only a shadow.

Dr. Sarkar — For a shadow to be there, three objects are necessary: the sun, the object reflected, and the reflection. There can't be a shadow without an object. You say that God is real and the creation unreal. The creation is real too.

Pratap — Well, just as one sees a shadow in a mirror, similarly one sees this world in the mirror of the mind.

The Doctor — Can there be a shadow without an object?

¹ Compare P.B. Shelley's 'To a Skylark'

² Dhyana yoga

Naren — Why, God is the object! (The Doctor is silent.)

Universal consciousness and science – God alone is the Doer

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — You have said a very nice thing: that one goes into bhava samadhi¹ when the mind is in union with God². Only you have said this, no one else has said it.

“Shivanath says, ‘Too much contemplation of God deranges one’s brain.’ He says, ‘By meditating on the universal consciousness, one loses consciousness.’ God is the very Self of consciousness! That one should lose the power of consciousness by meditating on Him through whose consciousness one is conscious of the world!

“As for your science – by combining this substance with that, it becomes that; and by mixing such and such a substance with that produces this. One can definitely get robbed of one’s consciousness by thinking of those things – it is just the grinding of gross objects together.”

Dr. Sarkar — One can see God in those things.

Mani — One can see God all the more clearly in a man, and even more clearly in a spiritually elevated person. There is a greater manifestation of God in great souls.

¹ *Bhava-avashtha*, the highest spiritual state of absorption just before the mind merges in the Absolute Oneness

² Yoga

Dr. Sarkar — Yes, no doubt in man.

Sri Ramakrishna — Can man get robbed of his consciousness by contemplating God? By God's consciousness even inert things gain consciousness – it is behind the movement of hands, feet and body. One says the body is moving, but doesn't know that it is God who is moving it. One says that the hand has been scalded by water. The water does not scald anything. It is the heat in the water, the fire in the water, that scalds the hand.

“Rice is boiling in a pot. Eggplant and potatoes are bobbing up and down in it. A little boy seeing them says, ‘The eggplant and potatoes are dancing.’ He doesn't know that there is fire underneath. People say that the sense organs do their work of themselves. They don't know that inside dwells God, whose very nature is consciousness.”

Doctor Sarkar rises to take his leave. Sri Ramakrishna stands up, too.

Dr. Sarkar — One calls upon God¹ in adversity. One willingly says *tuhu, tuhu* (Thou, Thou – the sound of the carding bow). You speak as you do because you have this disease in your throat. As you yourself say, you have fallen into the hands of a carder. You had better speak to the carder about it. I am just quoting your own words.

Sri Ramakrishna — What can I say?

¹ Madhusudana

Dr. Sarkar — We dwell in God's lap and defecate in His arms. Why not speak about our illness to Him?

Sri Ramakrishna — Quite right. Sometimes I try – but I cannot.

The Doctor — Why should it be necessary to say anything to Him? Doesn't God know it?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — A Muslim was loudly calling out, 'O Allah! O Allah!' during his offering of Namaz. Someone said to him, 'Why are you shouting so loudly when you are calling upon Allah? He can hear even the sound of little anklets on an ant's feet!'

**Signs of a yogi – yogi is introverted – saint
Vilwamangal**

Sri Ramakrishna — When the mind is united with God, one sees God very near. One sees God within one's own heart.

“But then it is true that the more one is established in union with God, the greater one's mind withdraws itself from external objects. The holy scripture *Bhaktamala* talks of a devotee (Vilwamangal) who used to visit a prostitute. One day he was going to visit her very late at night. The shraddha ceremony of his parents at home had delayed him. He was carrying the shraddha food for the prostitute. His mind was so focused on her that he was not aware where he was walking. A yogi was seated on the path, meditating on God with his eyes closed. Vilwamangal was about to step on the yogi. The yogi cried out in anger, 'Can't you see I

am meditating on God and you are about to walk on my body?’ Vilwamangal said, ‘I beg your pardon, but I want to ask you something. I have lost all awareness thinking of a prostitute, whereas you are meditating on God and yet are fully aware of external things. What kind of meditation is that?’ Vilwamangal in time renounced his household and went away to worship God. He said to the prostitute, ‘You are my guru. You have taught me how one must love the Lord.’ He addressed the prostitute as his mother and gave her up.”

Dr. Sarkar — This is the Tantrik form of worship, when one considers the woman with whom one cohabits¹ as one’s mother.

Worldly man has no right to instruct mankind

Sri Ramakrishna — Look here, listen to a story. There was a king who used to listen to the reading of the *Bhagavata* from a pundit every day. After the reading, the pundit would ask the king, ‘Sir, have you understood it?’ The king would reply, ‘You must understand it yourself first.’ And when he returned home the pundit would ask himself, ‘Why does the king say this every day? I explain everything to him so clearly, yet he repeats, ‘Understand it yourself first.’ What does it mean?’ The pundit used to practice spiritual disciplines. After some days he realized that God alone is real and that everything else – hearth and home, wealth, family, relatives, name and fame – are all unreal. When he realized that all things in the world are illusory, he

¹ *Ramani*

renounced it. However, when leaving, he asked a man, 'Please tell the king that I have now understood.'

“And listen to another story. Someone wanted to engage a scholar well versed in the Bhagavata to come daily and read *Srimad Bhagavata* to him. But he couldn't find such a scholar. After a great search, a person came to him and said, 'Sir, I have found an excellent pundit of the Bhagavata.' The man said, 'Very good! Please bring him.' His friend said, 'But there is a complication. The man has a number of ploughs and bullocks; he is busy with them all day long. He has to look after his farm – he has no leisure at all.' The man who was seeking the scholar of the Bhagavata said, 'Oh Brother, I don't want a pundit of the holy word who has to look after ploughs and bullocks. I am looking for a man who has leisure and can tell me about the Lord.' (To the Doctor) Do you understand?”

The Doctor remains silent.

Mere learning and the Doctor

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you want to know the truth? Mere learning and scholarship benefit one not at all. Pundits know so much and hear a lot of things – the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras*. But of what avail is mere learning? Discrimination and non-attachment are necessary. One must listen to him alone who has attained discrimination and non-attachment. Of what use are the words of those who have made the world their main goal in life?

“What happens when you read the *Gita*? If you repeat the word *Gita* ten times, it becomes *tagi*¹. Only he who has renounced his attachment to ‘lust and greed’ and who can direct a hundred percent of his love to God can understand the essence of the *Gita*. One doesn’t have to read the whole of the *Gita*. Just say, ‘*Tagi, tagi,*’ and it is done.”

Dr. Sarkar — *Tagi* needs the extra letter ‘y’ to become *tyagi* [the correct Sanskrit word for a renouncer].

Mani — Goswami Navadvip said to Thakur that one can do without adding the letter ‘y’. When Thakur attended the festival at Panihati, Goswami Navadvip talked to him about this context of the *Gita*. The Goswami said, ‘By the root ‘tag’ it becomes ‘taga’. Add the ‘i’ suffix to tag and it becomes ‘tagi’. Both ‘tagi’ and ‘tyagi’ convey the same meaning.’

Dr. Sarkar — Someone told me what Radha means. He asked me whether I knew the meaning of the word Radha. He said, ‘It is what it becomes when you reverse the word; in other words, it means ‘dhara,’ ‘dhara’². (All laugh.) (Smiling) Let us stop here today at ‘dhara’.

¹ A man of renunciation

² A word which has no particular meaning. The doctor was making fun of a play on words.

Chapter IV

Worldly knowledge and science

The Doctor has gone. M. comes and sits close to Sri Ramakrishna. They talk quietly together. M. had been to the Doctor's house. He speaks of what they talked about there.

M. (to Sri Ramakrishna) — The Doctor was feeding his goldfish with the husk of green cardamom and sparrows with balls of refined wheat flour. He said, 'See, they didn't see the cardamom husk, so they left. First of all, one needs to have knowledge¹; love and devotion² will follow. As soon as the flour balls were thrown at the birds, one or two flew away. They didn't have the knowledge that the balls were food, therefore they gained no devotion.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — This kind of knowledge is called worldly knowledge — the knowledge of science.

M. — He then said, 'I will not put faith in words just because a Chaitanya, or a Buddha, or a Jesus Christ said them.'

"A grandson has been born to him. He praised his daughter-in-law. He said, 'I don't notice her in the house at all, she is so quiet and bashful.'"

Sri Ramakrishna — He has been thinking of this place [meaning himself], so slowly he is gaining

¹ Jnana

² Bhakti

faith and respect. Is it possible to get rid of one's ego altogether? He is so learned, enjoys such name and fame – and he has a lot of money! Yet he does not show disrespect for what he hears here.

Chapter V

Descent of divine power, or ever-blissful state

It is five o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the same upper story room. The devotees are sitting quietly around him. Many of them are outsiders. No words are spoken.

M. is seated close to Sri Ramakrishna. He talks with him quietly on one or two topics. Thakur wants to wear his long shirt – M. helps him to put it on.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You see, now I don't have to practice meditation or other spiritual disciplines as much. I become aware of the Indivisible Being all at once. Now I see Him alone.

M. is silent and so is everybody else in the room. After awhile Thakur says something else to him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you are seeing all these people sitting quietly and looking at me. They don't talk, nor do they sing. What do they see in me?

Is Thakur hinting that the Divine Power of the Lord has incarnated in him? Is that why so many people are attracted to him, why the devotees are gazing at him speechless with wonder?

In reply, M says, "Sir, all these people have already heard a lot about you. Now they are seeing what they have never seen before – an ever-blissful

childlike nature, with no ego, and intoxicated with ecstatic love for God. The other day you went to Ishan Mukherji's house and paced the outer room. I was there with you. Someone said about you, 'I have never seen such a blissful person before.'"

M. stops talking. It is again completely quiet in the room. After some time Thakur speaks to M. in his sweet voice.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, how is the Doctor doing? Is he now accepting more ideas from here?

M. — How can an imperishable seed be lost? It must sprout somewhere some time. I still laugh at what happened the other day.

Sri Ramakrishna — What was that?

M. — You said, 'Jadu Mallick becomes so absent-minded that he can't tell whether there is salt in his food or not. If anybody tells him there is no salt in such and such item, he exclaims, 'Why, what? No salt?' ' You told the Doctor about it. He also used to say, 'I become so absent-minded.' You made him understand that his absent-mindedness comes from thinking of worldly things; it is not because of meditation on God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Will he not reflect on these words?

M. — How can he help but think about them? But he remains busy in numerous activities, so he forgets many things. Today, too, you replied to him

nicely when he said, ‘In Tantric discipline one looks on the *ramani*¹ as mother.’

Sri Ramakrishna — What did I say?

M. — You talked about the Bhagavata pundit who owned a number of ploughs and bullocks. (Sri Ramakrishna laughs.) And you told the story of the king who said to the pundit, ‘First understand it yourself.’ (Sri Ramakrishna laughs.)

“And you also talked about the *Gita*, that the main message of the *Gita* is renunciation of ‘lust and greed’ – giving up attachment to ‘lust and greed’. You said to the Doctor that being a householder (without renouncing them), one could teach nothing. It seems he didn’t understand. He changed the subject by saying, ‘Dhara dhara’ in the end and left.”

Thakur is worried about the welfare of the devotees. He is worried about Purna and Manindra, two of his young devotees. He has sent Manindra to talk to Purna.

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna talks about the basic truth of Radha and Krishna – everything is possible – the Absolute and the phenomenal

It is evening. A lamp is burning in Sri Ramakrishna’s room. Many devotees and visitors who have come to see Thakur are seated in the same room some distance away from him. Thakur is introspective and

¹ Woman with whom one cohabits

not talking to anyone. Those who are sitting in the room are also silent and meditating on God.

After awhile, Narendra arrives with a friend. Narendra introduces him, "He is a friend of mine. He has written several books. He wrote *Kiranmayi*." The author of *Kiranmayi* salutes Sri Ramakrishna and takes a seat. He would like to talk with Thakur.

Narendra — He has written about Radha and Krishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the author) — What have you written, my dear? Tell me a little, let me hear.

The Author — Radha and Krishna are the supreme Brahman – they are a dot of Om. From this very Supreme Brahman, Radha and Krishna, has emerged Vishnu. From Vishnu have sprung Purusha and Prakriti – Shiva and Durga.

Sri Ramakrishna — Beautiful! Nanda Ghosh had the vision of the Eternal¹ Radha. Radha sported in Vrindavan in her aspect of Love². Chandravali was Radha's aspect of the Seductress³.

"The Seductress and the Love Radha. Advance further and there is the Eternal Radha. When you peel an onion, you find the outermost skin red. Then comes pink. Then white. There is nothing more to peel off. This is the real nature of the Eternal Radha – where reasoning 'not this, not this' ends.

¹ Nitya

² Prema

³ Kama

“Radha and Krishna have two aspects: the Absolute and the Phenomenal – like the sun and its rays. The sun represents the Absolute and its rays signify the phenomenal world.

“A pure-hearted devotee sometimes dwells on the Absolute and at times on the phenomenal world. The Absolute and the phenomenal belong to the same Reality. It is all one – neither two nor many.”

The Author — Sir, why do they say ‘the Krishna of Vrindavan’ and ‘the Krishna of Mathura’¹?

Sri Ramakrishna — That is according to the goswamis. The scholars of upper India [west Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab] don’t think this way. To them, there is only Krishna, and no Radha. The Krishna of Dwaraka is not associated with Radha.

The Author — Sir, Radha and Krishna are themselves the Supreme Brahman.

Sri Ramakrishna — Beautifully said. But everything is possible for God. He is indeed with form and also formless. He is both the individual² and the universal³. He is Brahman, and He is Shakti.

“There is no end to God – no limit. Everything is possible for God. However high kites and

¹ Sri Krishna of Vrindavan where he exhibited rasa lila is always associated with Radha and the gopis, whereas Sri Krishna of Mathura and Dwaraka, where he was the king, is not associated with Radha

² *Svarata*

³ *Virat*

vultures fly, they cannot touch the top of the sky. If you ask what Brahman is like, well, it is not possible to describe in words. Even if one has realized Brahman, one cannot explain. If someone were to ask what clarified butter is like, the only answer to is, 'Clarified butter is like clarified butter.' The only analogy of Brahman is Brahman; nothing else."

Section XXII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Shyampukur House

Chapter I

With devotees at the Shyampukur House on Kali Puja Day

Sri Ramakrishna is standing in the southern room on the second floor of the Shyampukur house. It is nine o'clock. He is dressed in a freshly laundered cloth and wears a sandal paste mark on his forehead.

At the behest of Thakur, M. has brought some prasad from the Siddheshwari Kali Temple. Holding it in his hand, Thakur very devotedly eats some and touches a little to his forehead. Before eating, he takes off his sandals. He says to M., "Very nice prasad."

It is Friday, 6 November 1885, the Amavasya¹ of the month of Aswin. Kali's worship will be performed today.

Thakur had asked M. to offer morning worship to Mother Siddheshwari Kali at Thanthania – with flowers, green coconut, sugar and sandesh. After taking a bath, M. had gone barefoot to the puja and offered worship. He has now come to Thakur, still barefoot, with the prasad.

Thakur had also asked him to purchase books of the songs of Ramprasad and Kamalakanta to give to Doctor Sarkar.

M. says, "I have brought the books. They have the songs of Ramprasad and Kamalakanta." Sri

¹ The darkest night of the month

Ramakrishna says, “All these songs shall enter his (Doctor Sarkar’s) mind.”

Song – O my mind, why are you reasoning so much about Him, like a mad man in a dark room?

It is an emotional matter. Can you catch it without emotion?

Song – Who knows what Kali is like? Even the six systems of philosophy¹ cannot give a glimpse of Her.

Song — O my mind, you do not know how to farm. This human land has remained unattended. If you had cultivated it, it would have yielded gold.

Song – Come, O mind! Let us go for a walk.

At the foot of the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali, you will get the four fruits – righteousness², wealth³, fulfillment of desires⁴ and liberation⁵.

M. — Yes, sir.

Thakur paces the room with M. He has slippers on his feet. He is so sick, but his face is beaming.

Sri Ramakrishna — This song is nice too: ‘The world is a veil of deception.’ And the other one, ‘This world is a mart of joy. Come, brother, let us enjoy ourselves in the mart.’

M. — Yes, sir.

¹ Six Systems of Hindu Philosophy: Samkhya of Kapila, Yoga of Patanjali, Vaisesika of Kanada, Nyaya of Gautama, Purva Mimamsa of Jaimini, and Vedanta of Badarayana

² Dharma

³ Artha

⁴ Kama

⁵ Moksha

Thakur's body suddenly jerks. He at once takes off his slippers and stands motionless. He enters into deep samadhi. It is the day of the worship of the Mother of the Universe. Is it because of this that he frequently starts and goes into samadhi? After a long time, he exhales a long breath, as if it were with great difficulty that he controls his ecstatic state.

Chapter II

With devotees on the Kali Puja day

Thakur is seated with the devotees in the same second floor room. It is ten o'clock. He is seated on the bed, leaning against a pillow. Devotees sit around him: Ram, Rakhai, Niranjana, Kalipada, M. and many others. The topic of conversation is Hriday Mukherji, a son of Thakur's sister.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram and others) — Hriday is still talking about land. When he was in Dakshineswar, he said, 'Give me a shawl or I will take you to court.'

"The Divine Mother removed him. Whenever visitors came, he would ask them for money. Had he continued to stay, all those people would have stopped coming [to Dakshineswar]. The Mother took him away.

" 'Go¹' also began to act like that. He began to find fault with others. If he was to accompany me in the carriage, he would delay our departure. He would become upset when other young men would come to see me. If I went to Calcutta to visit them,

¹ Reference to Rakhai, through his association with Sri Krishna as gopal, a cowherd boy

he would say, ‘Are they going to renounce the world that you go to see them?’ Before giving refreshments to everyone, I would say to him out of fear, ‘Eat, and give some to them.’ It seemed to me that he would not stay.

“Then I said to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, don’t take him away altogether like you did Hriday.’ Later I heard that he was going to Vrindavan.

“If ‘Go’ had stayed on at that time, none of these young men would have come to me. When he went to Vrindavan, the boys started visiting me.”

‘Go’ (humbly) — Sir, that was not in my mind.

Ram Dutta — Can you understand your mind as he can?

‘Go’ remains silent.

Sri Ramakrishna (to ‘Go’) — Why do you behave this way? I love you more than a father loves his child.

“Now keep quiet. You no longer have that attitude.”

After talking with the devotees, when they had gone to the other room, Thakur called ‘Go’ and asked him, “Are you thinking about something?”

‘Go’ — No, sir.

Thakur says to M., “It is the Kali Puja day. It would be nice to make some arrangements for the worship. Go tell the devotees. Ask them if they have brought a stalk of jute for fuel.”

M. goes to the parlour and speaks to the devotees about it. Kalipada and the others begin to make arrangements for the worship.

The Doctor comes to see Thakur at about two o'clock. A teacher named Nilmani is with him. A number of devotees are seated around Thakur: Girish, Kalipada, Nirranjan, Rakhal, Khoka (Manindra), Latu, M. and others. After talking a little to the Doctor about his sickness and medicine, Thakur smiles and says to him, “We have these books for you.”

M. gives both books to the Doctor.

The Doctor wants to hear some songs. At Thakur's request, M. and another devotee sing some songs of Ramprasad –

Song – How can you, O my mind, know His essence, groping like a mad man in a dark room?

Song – Who knows what Kali is? Even the six systems of philosophy cannot give a glimpse of Her.

Song – O my mind, you do not know how to farm.

Song – Come, my mind! Let us go for a walk.

The Doctor says to Girish, “Your song is good – the one about the vina. It is from Buddha's life.”

Thakur beckons Girish and Kalipada to sing. They chant the song –

This is my beloved vina, in which I have intertwined a garland of strings.

He who plays the vina carefully, ever gets nectar from it.

If you are able to sing a song of inspiration having a nice musical note, sweet melody flows out in a hundred streams.

The vina does not play music by stretching or breaking its soft string, or by loosening a string.

Song – I want peace. Where can I get it?

Where have I come from and to what do I swim?

I go and return repeatedly. How much I laugh and weep!

So I ask myself, where should I go?

Who is making me play? And why should I play at all?

Even though I am awake, I am asleep – as if by a spell.

What darkness is this? Will there ever be a dawn?

I am running ceaselessly, like a strong current of wind.

I do not know who has come from where, why he has come, and where he is being taken.

I swim and swim, and reach so many countries. A din of the cries of distress surrounds me.

So many come and go, laughing and singing – now they are here, then they are not.

What has brought me here and what work have I engaged myself in? Who knows what play is being staged.

Can the current of water stop? Where am I to go? Is there no bank?

O Consciousness, make me conscious!

Who is conscious? When will this dream of mine end?

If you have become awakened, do not sleep again. This deep darkness is very frightening.

Dispel the darkness, Lord! And bring light, O Lord.

Except for You, there is no way, so I pray for refuge at Thy feet.

Song –

Hold me, Nitai. Today my soul is writhing terribly.

Nitai is now ready to give Hari's name to all embodied beings.

It is like a wave rising on the river of ecstatic love; and I am now sinking into this wave.

Nitai, to whom shall I convey my inner feelings of distress?

I am becoming immersed in the sorrows of embodied souls.

Song –

Come, let us call 'Hari, Hari' with a heart full of devotion.

Come on, Jagai and Madhai, let us dance.

Song –

Come, let us enjoy the intense love of the teen-aged Radha. A tide of intense love is flowing!

Love is flowing in a hundred waves. One receives as much as one wants.

The lass of ecstatic love is heartily dispensing love of her own will.

Call out 'Hari' in the intense love of Radha.

She intoxicates my soul with ecstatic love.

She makes one dance on the wave of prema. Come, come on, in the love of Radha, call out 'Hari'!

Two or three devotees go into ecstasy listening to the songs – among them are Khoka (Manindra) and Latu, who had been sitting beside Niranjan. After the songs

are over, Thakur talks with the Doctor about other things. The previous day, Pratap (Majumdar) had given the medicine nux vomica to Thakur. Hearing this, the Doctor becomes upset.

The Doctor — I am not dead yet! Why nux vomica?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — No, let only your avidya¹ die.

The Doctor — I have never had avidya.

The Doctor takes avidya to mean a woman of easy virtue.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Oh, no. Mother ignorance² of a sannyasin dies giving birth to discrimination³ as her son. When mother ignorance dies giving birth to the son, impurity [because of the death] develops in the house. So they say that the sannyasin must not be touched.

Hariballav enters. Thakur says to him, “I am happy to see you.” Hariballav is a very humble person. He takes his seat on the bare floor, not the mat, and then fans Thakur. He is a noted attorney in Cuttack.

Nilmani, the teacher, is seated nearby. Thakur, out of consideration for him, says, “It’s a great day for me today.” After awhile, the Doctor and his friend, Nilmani, leave. Hariballav, who is also leaving, says, “I shall come again.”

¹ Ignorance

² Avidya

³ Viveka

Chapter III

Worship of Sri Kali (worship of the Mother of the Universe in the person of Thakur)

It is Amavasya in autumn, time 7:00 p.m. All arrangements for the worship have been done in the same second floor room. The devotees have brought Thakur flowers of different kinds, sandal paste, vilwa leaves, hibiscus flowers, milk pudding and sweets of various kinds. Thakur is sitting, surrounded by devotees: Sarat, Sashi, Ram, Girish, Chunilal, M., Rakhal, Niranjan, the Younger Naren, and Behari among others.

Thakur says, "Bring some incense." After awhile he offers all the articles to the Mother of the Universe. M. is seated close to him. Thakur glances at him and says, "All of you, meditate for awhile." They all meditate for some time.

Soon after, Girish offers a garland of flowers at Thakur's feet. M. also offers flowers and incense. He is followed by Rakhal. Ram, too, offers flowers at his feet.

Niranjan offers flowers at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, chanting, 'Brahmamayi, Brahmamayi,' and prostrates himself touching his head to Sri Ramakrishna's feet. They all repeat, "Victory to the Mother! Victory to the Mother!"

In no time, Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi. How wonderful! The devotees see an amazing transformation. Thakur's face is resplendent with celestial light. Both of his hands grant fearlessness to the devotees. His body is motionless and he has lost outer consciousness. He sits facing north. Has the Mother of the Universe Herself manifested Herself through him?

Everyone is speechless gazing at this wonderful form of the Mother of the Universe granting fearlessness to Her devotees.

They now chant a hymn of praise. Each of them sings the hymn individually, and then in unison.

Girish sings the following hymn –

Who is this woman of the colour of dark blue clouds in the celestial assembly of gods?

Who is She, standing with both red lotus feet on Shiva's chest?

Who is She whose toe-nails shine with the light of the moon?

Her feet shine as so many suns. Her face is radiant with a soft smile, but then She thunders in a loud voice.

He sings the following song as well –

You redeem the helpless, You are the Saviour from one's sins, and You contain the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas.

You, who create, preserve and dissolve, are with form as well as Formless, O my Mother. You are indeed manifested in all forms.

You, Yourself, are Kali, Tara and the great Primordial Power.

You, Yourself, incarnate as avatar in the form of a fish, a tortoise and a boar.

You, Yourself, are earth, water, fire and air.

You, Yourself, are ethereal space, You indeed are Mother of the Absolute.

The votaries of the systems of philosophy of Samkhya, Patanjali, Mimamsa and Nyaya,

Think of You alone and meditate on You.

Vaisheshika and Vedanta are confused and have not been able to know You until now.

In order to comprehend You, spiritual aspirants define you with beginning and end, and identify You with adjuncts.

Taking up the five forms of Ganesha and others (Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Bhavani and Ganesha), You are able to deceive *Kala* and dispel the fears of the world.

You are always present in the three periods of time: past, present and future.

For the votary of God with form, You manifest with form.

And for the worshipper of the Formless, you manifest without form.

Some say that Brahman is all-illuminating. You are that daughter of the mountain.

When a person transcends his mind, he calls you Parabrahman.

After this is the state of Turiya, which is beyond speech.

You are all, O Mother Tara – immanent in the three worlds.

Behari now chants this hymn –

O my Mother, seated on a corpse, listen to my prayer.

O Mother, when they perform my *antarjali*¹ (at death), please appear before me.

Then I'll pick hibiscus flowers from the forests of my heart.

¹ The Hindu rite of keeping immersed the lower part of the body of a dying person in a holy river

And Mother, mixing them with the sandal paste of divine love, I will make an offering of them at Your feet.

Mani sings, accompanied by the devotees –

All is Your will, O Mother Tara! You are free to will.

You do all works in the world, Mother! People say that they do it.

You mire the elephant in mud and make the lame cross hills.

To some You grant the seat of Indra, and others You take downward.

I am the machine and You are the operator.

I am the house and You are the resident.

I am the chariot and You are the charioteer.

I move as You make me move.

Song –

By Your compassion, O Mother, people are going across and being liberated.

Unsurpassable obstacles like mountains – all hurdles – are removed.

You are the mine of blessings – You are always dispensing goodness.

Why, then, am I worried so about the good or bad result of anything?

Song –

O Mother! You are the very image of joy and bliss. Pray do not rob me of my happiness.

Song –

O my Mother! Your effulgent form shines forth in pitch darkness.

Thakur comes down to normal consciousness. He asks for the following song to be sung –

Song – In what moods do you remain, Mother Shyama, the river of nectar?

The song over, Thakur asks for this song to be sung –

Song – The Divine Mother is lost in an ecstasy of joy in the company of Shiva.

Though She staggers, She does not fall.

Thakur takes a little farina pudding to make the devotees happy but, suddenly overwhelmed with divine emotion, he loses outer consciousness.

After some time the devotees all salute him, take some prasad, and go to the parlour. They eat the prasad there, full of joy. Thakur sends word that the worship of Kali would be performed tonight at Surendra's house and that they should go there to participate.

Enjoying themselves on the way, the devotees reach Surendra's house on Simla street. With affection, Surendra takes them upstairs to the parlour. He asks them to be seated. The atmosphere is one of celebration, with everyone singing or playing a musical instrument.

It is past midnight before they take prasad and return home.

Section XXIII

With Devotees at the Cossipore Garden House

Chapter I

Narendra's yearning for the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the second story room of the Cossipore garden house. He is telling M. that Ram Chatterji had come from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple to enquire after his health. He asks M. whether it is very cold at Dakshineswar.

It is Monday, 4 January 1886. 21st of Pausha, the 14th day of the dark fortnight, 4:00 p.m.

Narendra comes in and sits down. Thakur glances at him from time to time and smiles – it is as though he were beside himself with love and affection for Narendra. He tells Mani with a sign, “He wept.” Thakur remains quiet for awhile. Then he says by signs to Mani that Narendra had cried all the way from home.

Everyone is silent; then Narendra speaks –

Narendra — I am thinking of going there today.

Sri Ramakrishna — Where?

Narendra — To Dakshineswar. Tonight I will light a fire under the bel tree and meditate.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. Those people (the proprietors) will not allow it. The Panchavati is a

nice place. Many sadhus have practiced the repetition of God's name and meditation.

“But it is very cold there, and dark.”

Everyone is silent. Thakur continues.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra, smiling) — Won't you study?

Narendra (looking at Thakur and Mani) — I wish I had some medicine that would make me forget everything that I have studied.

The Elder Gopal is there. He says, “I will go with him.” Kalipada Ghosh had brought a box of grapes for Thakur; it is lying beside him. He distributes the grapes to the devotees. First he gives some to Narendra, then to Hari. Then he pours them on the floor so the devotees may gather as many as they like.

Chapter II

Narendra's yearning for the Lord and his intense dispassion¹

It is already evening. Narendra, sitting downstairs smoking, tells Mani privately how his soul is yearning for the Lord.

Narendra (to Mani) — I was meditating here last Saturday. Suddenly there was a strange sensation in my chest.

¹ Vairagya; non-attachment to things of the world

Mani — Waking of the Kundalini!

Narendra — It must be that. I clearly perceived the Ida¹ and the Pingala² nerves. I asked Hazra to place his hand on my chest to feel the sensation.

“Yesterday, Sunday, I went upstairs to see him [Sri Ramakrishna] and told him about it.

“I said, ‘Everyone else has attained realization; please give me some. Everyone else has attained it. Should I be the only one not to succeed?’ ”

Mani — What did he say to you?

Narendra — He said, ‘Please come here after settling your family affairs. You will get everything. What do you want?’

**Sri Ramakrishna and the Vedanta – accept both the
Absolute and the phenomenal**

“I said, ‘I want to remain absorbed in samadhi for three or four days. I want only to rise now and then to eat a little food.’

“He said, ‘You are very small-minded! There is a state higher than this! Don’t you yourself sing, “You are all that is”?’ ”

Mani — Yes. He always says, ‘He Himself has become all that you see when you come down from samadhi – He Himself has become the universe and its living beings. A God-man³ can attain that state.’

¹ A spiritual column of nerves on the left of the spinal cord

² A spiritual column of nerves on the right of the spinal cord

³ *Ishvarakoti*

He says, ‘If an ordinary human being¹ attains samadhi, he cannot come down from it.’

Narendra — He said, ‘Go and settle things in your household. It is possible for you to attain a state higher than samadhi.’

“I went home this morning. Everybody began to scold me. They said, ‘Why are you roaming around creating confusion? Your law examination is very near and you don’t study. Instead you roam around aimlessly.’”

Mani — Did your mother say anything?

Narendra — No. She wanted to feed me. There was venison. I ate it, though I didn’t feel like it.

Mani — And then?

Narendra — I went to the home of my grandmother to study. When I began to read, I felt a peculiar pain, as if studies were something frightful. My chest began to palpitate wildly! I have never wept so bitterly!

“I threw the books away and ran out onto the road. My shoes fell off somewhere. I ran close to a haystack and got covered with hay. I kept running down the road to Cossipore.”

Narendra is silent for awhile. Then he continues.

¹ *Jivakoti*

Narendra — I have begun to feel worse since reading the *Vivekachudamani*. Shankaracharya says that three things – human birth, the desire for liberation, and the refuge of a great spiritual soul – come to one if he has done great spiritual practice and is very fortunate.

“I began to reflect: I have indeed achieved all three things. As a result of great austerities, I have been born as a human being; as a result of the same, I have developed the desire for liberation; and it is because of so much spiritual practice that I have been able to meet a great saint.”

Mani — Ah!

Narendra — I don't like worldly life any more. I don't like those who live a worldly life – except for one or two devotees...

Narendra suddenly stops talking. He has developed intense dispassion. His heart is pining for God. He continues –

Narendra (to Mani) — You have attained peace, while my soul is so troubled! You are indeed blessed.

Mani is silent. He does not reply. He reflects: Thakur said, 'One must yearn for the Lord, only then does one attain His vision.' Soon after dusk, Mani goes to the room upstairs. He finds Thakur asleep.

It is about 9:00 p.m. Niranjan and Sashi are sitting beside Thakur, who is now awake. Every now and then he talks of Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna — How wonderful Narendra’s state of mind is! You see, in the beginning this same Narendra did not accept God with form. Do you see how his heart is pining for the Lord now? Someone asked his guru, ‘How can one realize God?’ The guru said, ‘Come with me, I’ll show you in what state He can be attained.’ Saying this, he took the disciple to a pond where he immersed him and held his head under water. After some time he released the disciple and asked him, ‘How did you feel?’ The disciple said, ‘I felt I was going to die!’ It is like this with Narendra.

“When one’s heart pines for God, know that God-realization is not far away. At dawn – when the eastern sky is red – one knows that the sun is soon going to rise.”

Thakur’s condition is worse today. He is suffering so much – yet he talks of all these things about Narendra, though mostly in signs.

Narendra has gone to Dakshineswar tonight. It is pitch dark – the beginning of the Amavasya¹. One or two devotees have gone with him. Mani is staying for the night at the garden house. He dreams that he is seated among sannyasins.

Chapter III

Intense dispassion of the devotees – living in the world and suffering in hell

The next day is Tuesday, 5 January, 22nd day of Pausha. The Amavasya lingers for a long time. It is

¹ The darkest night of the month

four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his bed. He is talking to Mani alone.

Sri Ramakrishna — If Kshirode goes on pilgrimage to Gangasagar, please buy him a blanket.

M. — Yes, sir.

Thakur is quiet for awhile. He resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, can you tell me what is happening to these young men? One is running to Sri Puri¹, while the other is going on pilgrimage to Gangasagar.

“They are all renouncing their homes and coming here. Look at Narendra. When such intense dispassion develops, the world appears to be a deep well and one's relatives as venomous snakes.”

Mani — Sir, there is so much suffering in the world.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is the suffering of hell – from the moment of one's very birth! Don't you see what trouble it is to have a wife and children?

Mani — Yes, sir. And you also said that those people (who have not entered family life) owe nothing to the world and expect nothing from it. Others remain entangled in the world to satisfy their expectations and carry out their obligations.

¹ Kshetra

Sri Ramakrishna — Have you observed Niranjan? His attitude is, ‘Take what is yours, and give me what is mine’ – that’s all. He has no further relationship with the world. He has no attachment to it.

“Indeed ‘lust and greed’ is worldly life. Just see, if one has money, one wishes to keep it.”

Mani bursts out laughing. Thakur laughs too.

Mani — One calculates so much before taking the money out. (Both of them laugh.) But you said at Dakshineswar that one lives in the world very differently if one has gone beyond the three gunas¹ [sattva, rajas and tamas].

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, one becomes like a child.

Mani — True, sir. But it is exceedingly difficult. It requires a great deal of will power.

Thakur is silent for awhile.

Mani — Yesterday when they had gone (to Dakshineswar) to meditate, I had a dream.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did you dream?

Mani — I dreamt that Narendra and some others had become sannyasins. They were sitting around a fire. I, too, was seated with them. They were

¹ *Trigunatita*

puffing tobacco smoke. I said that it smelled like Indian hemp¹.

Who is a sannyasin? Thakur's pain and the state of a child

Sri Ramakrishna — It is enough if one renounces in the mind. That too makes one a sannyasin.

Thakur doesn't say any more. Then he talks about other things.

Sri Ramakrishna — But one has to set fire to one's desires. Only then can one succeed.

Mani — You said to the pundit of the Marwaris from Burrabazar that you had the desire for love and devotion to God. Perhaps the desire for bhakti is not to be counted as a desire.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is like hinche leaves, which are not counted as greens. Hinche controls an excess of bile.

“Well, there was so much joy and ecstasy before. Where has all that gone?”

Mani — I feel that you have attained the state of *trigunatita*², spoken of in the *Gita*. Sattva, rajas and tamas are performing their functions, but you, yourself, are unattached. You are not even attached to the sattva guna.

¹ Ganja

² Beyond the three gunas

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, I have been kept in the state of a child.

“Well, will my body survive this illness?”

Thakur and Mani remain silent. Narendra comes up from downstairs. He is going home and will return after settling family affairs.

Since the death of his father, Narendra’s mother and brothers have been in great difficulties. At times they don’t have enough to eat. Narendra is their only hope. He has to take a job and provide them food. But he has not been able to take his law examination because he is in a state of intense dispassion. He is going to Calcutta today to make arrangements for his family. A friend of his will lend him hundred rupees. That will take care of their rations for three months.

Narendra — I am leaving for home now. (To Mani) I am going by way of Mahima Chakravarty’s home. Would you like to come with me?

Mani doesn’t want to go. Thakur looks at him and asks Narendra, “Why?”

Narendra — I am going that way. I will visit him and chat for awhile.

Thakur looks intently at Narendra.

Narendra — A friend who comes here has said he would lend me hundred rupees. I am going to arrange for the needs of my family for three months with this amount.

Thakur is silent. He looks at Mani.

Mani (to Narendra) — No, you go on. I will go later.

Section XXIV

Sri Ramakrishna at the Cossipore Garden House with His Intimate Companions

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has taken up a body for the sake of his devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is staying at the Cossipore Garden House. It is evening. Thakur is not well. He is sitting in the second story hall facing north. Both Narendra and Rakhal are gently stroking his feet. Mani is seated close by. Thakur beckons him to also gently massage his feet. Mani does so.

It is Sunday, 14 March 1886, 2nd of Chaitra and the 9th day of the bright fortnight in the month of Falgun. On the previous Sunday, worship was performed in the garden in commemoration of Thakur's birthday. Last year, his birthday was celebrated at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple with grandeur. This time he is ill and the devotees are drowned in a sea of grief. They performed worship, but with little celebration.

The devotees are always present at the garden house to serve Thakur. The Holy Mother is engaged around the clock attending him. Many of the young devotees stay with him: Narendra, Rakhal, Nirranjan, Sarat, Sashi, Baburam, Jogin, Kali, Latu and others.

The older devotees stay here occasionally, but they come almost daily to have his darshan and to enquire about his health. Tarak and Gopal of Sinthi are here all the time, as well as the Younger Gopal.

Thakur is particularly unwell today. It is midnight on the 9th day of the bright fortnight. The whole garden appears lit up with joy by the moon's light. Thakur is suffering intense pain, so the sight of the pure rays of the moon does not bring joy to the hearts of the devotees. They feel as though they were in a very beautiful town that is being besieged by enemy troops. Except for the rustling of leaves by the touch of a spring breeze, it is completely silent. Thakur lies on his bed in the hall upstairs. His suffering is great. He cannot sleep. One or two devotees sit silently, close to him to attend to his needs. He is feeling sleepy at times and seems to doze off.

Is it slumber, or mahayoga¹ – the state wherein established, he is not shaken even by the heaviest affliction²? Is he in the state of communion with God?

M. is seated nearby. Thakur beckons him to come closer. Even stones would melt to see Thakur's suffering. With great difficulty he whispers to M., "I am undergoing all this suffering because you people will weep otherwise. This mortal frame will go if you all say, 'He is suffering so much; let his body go.'"

These words rend the hearts of the devotees. That he who is their father and mother, he who protects and provides for them, should say this! They are all silent. Some of them think to themselves, "This is crucifixion – sacrificing the body for the sake of the devotees."

It is dead of night and Thakur's disease is getting worse. What can be done? A messenger is sent to Calcutta. Girish brings Doctor Upendra and Navagopal Kaviraj that very night.

The devotees are seated close to Thakur. Feeling slightly better, he says, "The body certainly

¹ Supreme yoga experience

² Yasminsthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate (Gita 6:22)

has to undergo suffering. But I clearly see that it is made up of the five elements¹.”

Looking at Girish, he says, “I am seeing so many forms of God. This (his own) is among them.”

Chapter II

In samadhi

The morning of the next day, Monday, 15 March 1886, 3rd day of Chaitra, time about seven or eight. Thakur’s health is a bit more stable. He talks to the devotees in whispers and signs. Narendra, Rakhal, M., Latu, Gopal of Sinthi and others are sitting with him.

The devotees have no words. They sit silently in deep grief, remembering the state of Thakur’s health the previous night.

Thakur has visions – the Lord, creatures and the universe

Sri Ramakrishna (gazing at M., to the devotees) — Do you know what I see? God has become everything – human beings and all the other creatures that I see. They appear to be made of leather, while He Himself, from inside, moves the hands, the feet and the heads. It is the same as I once saw before – houses, gardens, garden paths all made of wax. Also cows, everything – all made up of the same wax material.

“I see that God Himself is the executioner, the sacrificial victim and also the sacrificial block.”

¹ Earth, water, fire, air and ether

What is Thakur saying? That, after being deeply aggrieved for humanity, he is sacrificing his body for them?

“The Lord Himself has become the executioner, the sacrificial victim and the sacrificial block.” While saying this, Thakur is overcome with divine emotion and exclaims, “Ah! Ah!”

Again he enters samadhi, losing all outer-consciousness. The devotees sit silent, not knowing what to do.

Returning to partial consciousness, Thakur says, “Now I am not suffering at all. I am my former self.”

Seeing this state beyond happiness and sorrow, the devotees are wonderstruck. Gazing at Loto, Thakur says –

“This Loto is sitting with his head resting on his hand. I see the Lord Himself sitting there with His head resting on His hand.”

Thakur looks at the devotees and his heart seems to melt with love and affection for them. He caresses Rakhai and Narendra as one does little children, by touching and stroking their faces with his hand.

Why there is an end to Sri Ramakrishna’s divine sport

After awhile Thakur says to M., “Had this body lasted a few days more, many people would have been illumined.” He is silent again.

He resumes, “God is not going to preserve it.”

The devotees wonder what Thakur is going to say next. Then he repeats, “God will not preserve this body lest – everyone knows me to be guileless and foolish person – I might give away spiritual wealth to all, simple person that I am. The fact is that in the

age of Kali, people don't practice meditation and repetition of God's Name."

Rakhal (lovingly) — Please speak to God, that He may preserve your body.

Sri Ramakrishna — That would only be if the Lord wills.

Narendra — Your will and the Lord's will have become one.

Thakur is silent for awhile, as if reflecting on something.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra, Rakhal and the others) — But then, nothing will happen, even if I say so.

"I see that it has all become one. In fear of her sister-in-law, Radha said to Krishna, 'Please dwell in my heart.' But later on, when she yearned for a glimpse of Krishna, a yearning like that of a kitten which continues scratching its paws, He did not come out of her heart."

Rakhal (to the devotees, in a sweet voice) — He is talking about the incarnation of God as Gauranga.

Chapter III

Secret talk – Sri Ramakrishna and his intimate companions

The devotees sit motionless and silent. Thakur looks at them lovingly and places his hand on his heart. What is he going to say?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and the others) — They are both inside this [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]: One, He Himself...

The devotees wait to hear what he is going to say next.

Sri Ramakrishna — One, He Himself – and the other, the devotee. The devotee broke his arm and it is he who is suffering from illness. Do you understand?

The devotees sit silently.

Sri Ramakrishna — Whom shall I tell? Who will understand what I say?

After awhile, Thakur speaks again.

“He incarnates as a human being, as God-incarnate, and is accompanied by devotees [intimate companions]. The devotees depart with him.”

Rakhal — ‘But please don’t leave us now!’

Thakur smiles sweetly and says, “A troupe of bauls¹ came out of the blue – they danced, they sang, and then they suddenly left. They came and then left. No one recognized them.” (Thakur and the devotees smile momentarily.)

After remaining silent for few moments, Thakur speaks again –

“When one takes up a body, there is bound to be suffering.

“I say time and again, ‘May I not have to return [to the mortal world]!’

“Even so, the fact remains that one does not enjoy a meal of urada lentils and rice at home after having enjoyed a feast.

“Besides, this assuming of a human body is for the sake of the devotees.”

Is Sri Ramakrishna saying that he enjoys the offerings and the invitations of the devotees? That he enjoys himself in their company?

**Narendra’s knowledge, and love and devotion for God –
Narendra’s renunciation of the world**

Thakur looks lovingly at Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — A pariah was carrying a load of meat. Shankaracharya passed that way after a dip in the Ganges. The pariah suddenly touched him. Shankara became upset and said, ‘You have touched me!’ The pariah replied, ‘Lord, neither have I touched you, nor you me.

¹ Minstrels

Please reflect: Are you the body, or the mind, or the intellect? Reason out what you are. The pure Atman remains unattached to everything. It is not stained by any of the three gunas, sattva, rajas, or tamas.

“Do you know what Brahman is like? He is like the air. There are smells, both good and bad, in the air. The air, however, is not affected by them.”

Narendra — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brahman is beyond the three gunas and beyond maya – He is beyond the power of nescience¹ and also beyond the power leading toward God². ‘Lust and greed’ are nescience. Knowledge, dispassion and love and devotion for God – all these are the splendours of power leading Godward. Shankaracharya kept the ‘maya of knowledge’. The feeling of concern that you and these people entertain for me is indeed the ‘maya of knowledge’.

“Following the path of the ‘maya of knowledge’ step by step, one attains the knowledge of Brahman. ‘The maya of knowledge’ is like the last few steps of the stairs. Only the roof remains beyond. Some people like to climb up and down the staircase even after reaching the roof. They retain the ‘ego of knowledge’ even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman – in order to instruct mankind, to taste the bliss of divine love, and to enjoy the company of devotees.”

¹ Avidya maya

² Vidya maya; maya of knowledge

Narendra and the other devotees are silent. Is Thakur describing his own state of mind?

Narendra — Some people get angry with me when I talk of renunciation.

Sri Ramakrishna (in a sweet voice) — But renunciation is necessary.

Pointing at parts of his body, Thakur says, “When an object is covered with another object, don’t you have to remove the top object to get the lower one? Can you reach one without removing the other?”

Narendra — Right, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (sweetly, to Narendra) — When one sees that everything is filled with God, can one see anything else?

Narendra — Does one have to renounce the world?

Sri Ramakrishna — As I said, what else can one see after having the glimpse of everything filled with God? The world is not visible then.

“But one must renounce in the mind. No one who comes here is a worldly person. Some of them had a slight desire – to live with women. (Rakhal, M. and others smile a little). That desire is now fulfilled.”

Narendra and the heroic attitude¹

Thakur looks lovingly at Narendra and becomes completely filled with joy. Glancing at the devotees, he says, “Wonderful!” Narendra smiles and asks Thakur, “What is wonderful?”

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — You are renouncing very nicely.

Narendra and the devotees look silently at Thakur. Rakhal then speaks.

Rakhal (smiling, to Thakur) — Narendra understands you pretty well.

Thakur laughs and says, “Yes, I have noticed that there are many others, too, who understand me.” (To M.) “Am I right?”

M. — Yes, sir.

Thakur gazes at Narendra and Mani. With his finger he draws the attention of the other devotees to them. At first, he points at Narendra and then at Mani. Rakhal has understood Thakur’s hint and speaks –

Rakhal (smiling, to Sri Ramakrishna) — You are saying that Narendra has the heroic attitude, while he [M.] that of the handmaid of God. (Thakur laughs.)

Narendra (smiling) — He [M.] doesn’t talk much and is timid. Is that why you say that?

¹ The fearless attitude of burning faith

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to Narendra) — Well, what about my attitude?

Narendra — You have both attitudes, the heroic as well the attitude of handmaid of God.

Who is Sri Ramakrishna?

Thakur becomes filled with ecstasy when he hears this. Placing his hand on his chest, he mutters –

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and the other devotees) — I see that whatever exists has emerged out of this.

He asks Narendra by a sign what he has understood.

Narendra — Every created object has come from within you.

Sri Ramakrishna (joyfully, to Rakhal) — Did you hear what he said?

Thakur asks Narendra to sing a song. Narendra hums a tune and then sings. He is in a mood of renunciation:

Transitory is human life, like drops of water dancing on lotus leaves,

The company of a holy man even for a moment serves as a boat to take one across the sea of this world.

When he has sung a couple of lines, Thakur says to Narendra by a sign, “What is this? What is this? It is a very ordinary idea.”

Now Narendra sings a song expressing the attitude of a gopi.

O, my friend, where has the divine lover of Vraja gone? Do you not see that the separation from Him will kill me?

Artless daughter of a milkman as I am, He has forgotten me and made love to others more beautiful than I!

Who knew, my dear friends, that a lover so tender, so divine, would go begging for external beauty.

Fool I was to have forgotten myself at the sight of His heavenly beauty and to have held His feet fast to my throbbing bosom!

O, now I must consign this body to a watery grave in the Jamuna! Or take poison and put an end to my miserable existence!

Or give me a creeper from the woods to fasten round my neck; let me thus die by hanging from a young Tamal tree, dark brown like Him;

Failing all this, let me repeat day and night the sweet name of the beloved: Shyam¹, Shyam, Shyam, Shyam, and stop not until this body ceases to breathe.

Hearing the song, Thakur and the devotees are deeply touched. Tears of divine love roll down Thakur's and Rakhal's cheeks. Narendra is intoxicated with the love of the gopis of Vraja. He sings another song, humming its tune like a devotional hymn –

O, my beloved! O beloved, mine!

What do I say to you, O what do I say?

(Foolish woman that I am and never a favourite of Fortune)

You are the mirror to be held by my hands, You are the flower for my head!

O, I shall make You a flower and wear You in my hair.

¹ A name of Sri Krishna

I shall hide You, hide You, O my beloved, under my braided hair.

Worn under the hair, no one shall see You.

O, You are cooling collyrium for the eyes.

You are the betel leaf chewed with nuts and sweet fragrant spices for the mouth.

I shall make You, O my beloved, my Shyam, collyrium for the eyes, and thus wear You.

They shall think I have painted my eyes with dark-brown pigment and shall not find You.

You are the cool fragrant sandal paste for the body, and the necklace for the neck.

I shall cool, O my Beloved, my body, mind and soul with You, my dark-brown sandal paste!

And I shall make You my necklace and wear You round my neck and on my bosom and next to my heart.

To the body, You are life! To the house, You are the one thing that one cannot do without.

To me, O my Beloved, You are verily what wings are to the bird – what water is to the fish.

Section XXV

Sri Ramakrishna at Cossipore Garden House with Narendra and other Devotees

Chapter I

The Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna is living with devotees at the Cossipore Garden House. Today is Friday, five o'clock, 9 April 1886, the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra.

Narendra, Kali, Niranjan and M. are sitting on the floor talking.

Niranjan (to M.) — I hear that Vidyasagar is going to start a new school. Why don't you try to arrange some employment there for Narendra?

Narendra — I have had enough of service under Vidyasagar.

Narendra has just returned from Bodh-Gaya, where he saw an image of Buddha. He had become merged in deep meditation before it. A new tree has grown up in the same spot as the bodhi-tree under which the Buddha had practiced austerities and attained nirvana. He saw it while he was there. Kali says, "One day Narendra sang a song at Umesh Babu's house in Gaya, to the accompaniment of a drum. He sang a kheyal, a dhrupada and so forth."

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on a bed in the hall. A good part of the night has elapsed. Mani is sitting

with him alone, fanning him. Latu comes in and sits down.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Please bring a chadar¹ and a pair of slippers.

Mani — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Latu) — The chadar is worth ten annas, and then there is the pair of slippers. How much will both of them cost?

Latu — One rupee ten annas.

Thakur asks Mani by a sign to note the price.

Narendra comes in and sits down. Sashi, Rakhai and one or two other devotees also come in and take their seats. Thakur asks Narendra to gently massage his feet.

Sri Ramakrishna asks Narendra by a sign, whether he has had anything to eat.

Was the Buddha an atheist? ‘The state beyond theism and atheism’

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to M.) — He went there (to Bodh-Gaya).

M. (to Narendra) — What did the Buddha believe in?

¹ A long piece of cloth worn over the upper part of the body, often draped as a shawl

Narendra — He could not express in words what he attained from spiritual practices. So everybody says he was an atheist.

Sri Ramakrishna (by signs) — Why an atheist? No, he was not an atheist. It is only that he could not express his experience in words. Do you know what a Buddha is? To become one with bodha (enlightenment) by continually meditating on it — to become transformed into Pure Intelligence Itself.

Narendra — Yes, sir. There are three classes of buddhas: the Buddha, the Arahāt and the Boddhisattva.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is indeed God's play — a new and special divine sport.

“Why should he be an atheist? It is a state between ‘is’ and ‘is not’ in which one realizes one's own Real Self.”

Narendra (to M.) — It is the state in which contradictions meet. Hydrogen and oxygen produce refreshing water; the same hydrogen and oxygen are used in the Oxy-hydrogen blowpipe.

“It is the state in which both the performance of work and the renunciation of work is possible — in other words, it is performing *nishkama* karma, or work without the desire for its fruits.

“Worldly people who are involved with sense objects believe in the ‘existence’ of the universe, while the Mayavadins, illusionists, believe that

nothing exists. Buddha's state was beyond 'existence' and 'non-existence'."

Sri Ramakrishna — 'Existence' and 'non-existence' are the attributes of prakriti (nature). Reality is beyond both 'existence' and 'non-existence'.

The devotees remain silent for awhile. Thakur speaks again.

Narendra and the kindness and dispassion of the Buddha

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — What did Buddha say?

Narendra — He did not comment on whether God 'exists' or not. He only preached compassion.

"A hawk took hold of a bird and was about to eat it. The Buddha cut a piece of flesh from his own body and gave it to the hawk to save the prey's life."

Sri Ramakrishna is again silent. Narendra talks more about the Buddha with great enthusiasm.

Narendra — Oh, what dispassion! Though Buddha was a prince, he renounced everything. What can those who possess nothing, who have no riches, renounce?

"After attaining nirvana, Buddha once visited his home and persuaded his wife and son and other members of the royal family to adopt a life of dispassion. What renunciation he had! Compare this with the conduct of Vyasadeva, who dissuaded

Shukadeva from giving up the world. He said to him, ‘Son, practice religion as a householder.’”

Thakur is silent. He still does not comment.

Narendra — Buddha did not believe either in divine power¹, or in love and devotion for God². He sought only nirvana. What dispassion! When he sat under the bodhi-tree to meditate, he said, ‘ihaiva śuśyute meṁ śarīram.’ In other words, if I do not attain nirvana, then let my body dry up here. Such firm resolve!

“Indeed, it is the body that is mischievous! Is it possible to do anything without bringing it under control?”

Sashi — But you say that eating meat develops sattva. You insist that meat-eating is good.

Narendra — I eat meat just as I relish eating rice. I can eat rice alone, even without salt.

After awhile, Sri Ramakrishna talks. By signs, he enquires about the Buddha.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did Buddha have a tuft of hair on his head?

Narendra — No, sir. He has hair that looks like strings of rudraksha beads coiled a number of times on top of his head.

¹ Shakti

² Bhakti

Sri Ramakrishna — And his eyes?

Narendra — His eyes are lost in samadhi.

Direct vision of Sri Ramakrishna: ‘I am indeed He’

Thakur is silent. Narendra and the other devotees have fixed their eyes on him. Suddenly he smiles a little and begins to talk again to Narendra. Mani is fanning him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — Well, don’t you have everything here – lentil pulse, gram pulse and even tamarind?

Narendra — After experiencing all those states, you are staying on a lower plane now.

Mani (to himself) — He is in the state of a devotee now – after living all the states.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is as if someone keeps pulling me down to a lower plane.

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna takes the fan from Mani’s hand and resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — The way I see this fan directly in front of me, in exactly the same way, I have the sight of God. And I have also seen...

Saying this, Thakur brings his hand over his heart and says to Narendra by a sign, “Tell me what I said.”

Narendra — I have understood it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Let me see what you heard

Narendra — I didn't hear you clearly.

Sri Ramakrishna repeats with a sign, "I have seen that He (the Lord) and the Being who resides within the heart are one and the same person."

Narendra — Yes, yes. Soham (I am He).

Sri Ramakrishna — But there is a thin line dividing the two — (the ego of the devotee) so that I may enjoy the divine play.

Narendra (to M.) — When a great soul attains salvation, he continues to live in the world for the welfare of mankind. He retains his ego, and his body is subjected to pleasure and pain.

"For instance, consider the work of a porter. People like us do the work of a porter under compulsion, but great souls work willingly as porters."

Sri Ramakrishna and grace of the Guru

Everyone is silent again. Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace, speaks again. He is explaining to Narendra and the others more about himself.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and the other devotees) — One can see the roof, but it is very difficult to climb onto it.

Narendra — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — But if someone has already reached the roof, he can pull another person up with a rope.

Five kinds of samadhi of Sri Ramakrishna

“A sadhu from Rishikesh visited here. He said to me, ‘How wonderful! I have seen five kinds of samadhi in you.’

“At times, it is like a monkey: The spiritual current jumps like a monkey in the tree of the body, from one branch to another, leading to samadhi.

“At other times it is like a fish: Just as a fish swims swiftly in water, the spiritual current moves up inside the body and brings about samadhi.

“And sometimes it is like a bird: Like a bird it is sometimes on this branch of the tree of the body and sometimes it hops to another branch.

“At times it is like an ant: The spiritual current creeps up slowly within like an ant. When it reaches the Sahasrara (the thousand-petalled lotus in the top of the head), one attains samadhi.

“And sometimes it is like a snake: In other words, the spiritual current moves in a wriggling motion like a snake and brings about samadhi when it reaches the Sahasrara.”

Rakhal (to the devotees) — Let us stop. There has been too much conversation. It will aggravate his illness.

Section XXVI

**Sri Ramakrishna at the Cossipore
Garden House with his Intimate
Companions**

Chapter I

At Cossipore Garden house with devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is lying on his bed in the second story room of the Cossipore Garden house. Sashi and Mani are in the room. Thakur asks Mani by a sign to fan him. He does so.

It is 5 or 6 o'clock in the afternoon on Monday, 12 April 1886; Sankranti of the month of Chaitra, the day of the worship of Vasanti Mahalakshmi; the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra, 31st Chaitra.

There is a fair in this residential neighbourhood celebrating the last day of the Bengali year with a special worship of Shiva. Thakur had sent a devotee to buy some articles there. He has returned.

Sri Ramakrishna — What have you brought?

The Devotee — Sugar drops worth a pice, a vegetable knife¹ worth two pice and a spoon worth two pice.

Sri Ramakrishna — What about the [other] knife?

¹ Large knife fixed at right angle on a piece of wood used to cut vegetables and fish

The Devotee — He would not sell it for two pice.

Sri Ramakrishna (excitedly) — Please go quickly and buy it.

M. is strolling around downstairs. Narendra and Tarak have returned from Calcutta. They visited Girish Ghosh's house and other places.

Tarak — Today we ate a lot of meat and other heavy food.

Narendra — The mind has gone down a great deal. Let us practice some austerity.

(To M.) “What slavery to the body and the mind! We are just like porters. As if the body and the mind do not belong to me, but to someone else.”

It is getting dark. Light has been brought to the upper room, as well as to other parts of the house. Thakur is sitting on the bed facing north. He is contemplating the Mother of the Universe. After some time Fakir, who belongs to the family of Balaram's priest, recites from the holy book the hymn, ‘Dissolver of sins¹,’ which addresses the Divine Mother. He is sitting in front of Thakur.

I suffered great distress in the womb of my mother before I was born.

But even after being born, I did not take refuge at Your feet, nor did I worship them.

Though born again and again, I didn't take You as my refuge, nor did I serve You.

Formidable Goddess, pray excuse my sins.

¹ *Apradha bhanjan*

Sashi, Mani and one or two other devotees are in the room.

The recitation of the hymn is over. Sri Ramakrishna bows down with folded hands in a mood of great devotion and reverence.

Mani is fanning him. Thakur says to him by a sign, "Please bring a stone bowl for me." With his hand he indicates the shape of the bowl to Mani. Then he says, "It should hold a quarter litre of milk. And it should be white stone."

Mani — Right, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — When I eat vegetable soup in other bowls, it smells of fish.

Chapter II

Does an *Ishvarakoti* bear the result of his actions? Is he bound by destiny? Yogavashishtha

The next day, Ram Naomi, Tuesday, 13 April 1886, the first of Vaishakh. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his bed in the second story room. It is between 8 and 9 in the morning. Mani had stayed the night. He took a dip in the Ganges in the morning, then came to Thakur and prostrated before him. Ram Dutta also came and saluted Thakur, then took his seat. Ram has brought a garland of flowers, which he offers to Thakur. Most of the devotees are downstairs; only one or two are present in Thakur's room. Ram is talking to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — How do you find me?

Ram — You have everything in you. Soon the conversation will be your illness.

Sri Ramakrishna smiles and asks Ram by a sign, “The topic will be my illness?”

Thakur’s slippers pinch his feet. Doctor Rajendra Dutta asks him for the measurement of his feet so he can get slippers made to fit. The measurement is taken¹.

Sri Ramakrishna asks Mani by a sign, “What about the stone bowl?” Mani rises at once. He wants to leave for Calcutta to buy one.

Sri Ramakrishna says, “Please don’t bother now. Leave it.”

Mani — Sir, these devotees are going to Calcutta. I can go with them.

Mani buys a white stone bowl from a shop in the new market at the Jorashanko crossing. It is already midday when he returns to the Cossipore Garden House. He comes to Thakur to salute him and places the bowl before him. Thakur looks at the white stone bowl and holds it in his hand. Dr. Rajendra Dutta, Dr. Sreenath, Rakhai Haldar and several other devotees come in. Dr. Sreenath holds a copy of the *Gita* in his hand. Rakhai, Sashi, the Younger Naren and the other devotees are in the room. The doctors hear the news of Thakur’s illness.

Dr. Sreenath (to his friends) — We are all subject to prakriti. Nobody can evade the fruit of his actions! One has to reap the *prarabdha*²!

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, when one repeats God’s Name, meditates on Him and surrenders to Him...

¹ These slippers are worshipped in the Belur Math now

² Stored-up karma from past lives which has begun to bear fruit in the present life

Dr. Sreenath — Sir, where will the effect of *prarabdha* go — the effect of one's actions of so many earlier births?

Sri Ramakrishna — Certainly one must, to some extent, reap the fruit of one's actions. But by virtue of the repetition of God's Name, a lot of the bondage of actions is dispelled. Maybe one had to be born blind in seven births because of his actions of previous births. But after a dip in the Ganges, which brings liberation, maybe this fellow remained blind for the rest of his life, but he was not born another six times.

Dr. Sreenath — But, sir, the holy books say that there is no way to free oneself from the result of one's actions. (Dr. Sreenath was ready to argue.)

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Please tell him that there is a great deal of difference between an *Ishvarakoti* and a *jivakoti*¹. An *Ishvarakoti* does not commit any sin. Why don't you say this to him?

Mani remains silent. He says to Rakhal, "Please talk to him about this."

After awhile the doctors leave. Thakur talks to Rakhal Haldar.

Haldar — Dr. Sreenath studies the *Vedanta*. He reads the *Yogavashishtha*.

¹ An ordinary human being

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not good to live as a householder and still hold the view that ‘everything is like a dream’.

A Devotee — Kalidasa says, ‘That fellow, too, discusses the *Vedanta*, but he has lost all his wealth in a law suit.’

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — To say that it is all maya and then to sue in a court of law? (To Rakhal) Mukherji of Janai also used to talk big, but later he understood. If I were well, I would talk to him [Dr. Sreenath] a little longer. Can one attain divine knowledge just by repeating ‘knowledge, knowledge’?

Sri Ramakrishna’s hair stands on end when he notices those who have conquered lust

Haldar — I have heard so many things about divine knowledge, but now all I need is a little love and devotion for God. The other day I came to you with a question. You have answered it.

Sri Ramakrishna (eagerly) — What was it?

Haldar — Sir, when this young man arrived, you said that he had mastered his senses.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, my dear. Worldly thoughts have not entered into him at all. He says he doesn’t know what lust is.

(To Mani) “Touch me. The hair of my body is standing on end.”

Reminded of such a pure state devoid of the least trace of lust, the hair on Thakur's body stands on end. God is present where there is no lust. Is Thakur being inspired by God-consciousness thinking of this?

Rakhal Haldar takes his leave.

Sri Ramakrishna is still sitting with the devotees. A crazy woman creates a row, insisting on seeing him. This woman entertains the attitude of a lover¹. She often visits the garden house and suddenly rushes up to Thakur's room. Even when the devotees beat her, she doesn't stop.

Sashi — I will push her out if the 'crazy woman' comes again.

Sri Ramakrishna (in a voice full of compassion) — No, my dear. Let her come. She will leave by herself.

Rakhal — Before, I would feel jealous when I saw so many other people visiting him. But he was kind enough to make me realize that my guru was the Guru of the whole world. Has he incarnated just for our sake?

Sashi — No, not at all, but why bother him when he is sick? She causes such a row!

Rakhal — Well, everyone creates some kind of row. Have all the visitors who have come to him attained perfection before coming? We do not harm them. Narendra and others – what were they like when they first came? How many arguments Narendra used to raise!

¹ *Madhura bhava*

Sashi — Whatever Narendra said, he carried out in action.

Rakhal — How much Dr. Sarkar argued! On test, no one is without guilt.

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately, to Rakhal) — Will you eat something?

Rakhal — I won't eat now.

Sri Ramakrishna is asking Mani with a sign whether he will eat here today.

Rakhal — Why don't you? He is asking you to.

Thakur is sitting with the devotees naked, like a child of five. Just now the crazy woman climbs up the stairs and stands at the door.

Mani (in a whisper to Sashi) — Ask her to bow to him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] and leave. There is no need to say anything more.

Sashi sends the crazy woman downstairs.

It is the first day of the new year. A number of women devotees have arrived. They offer salutations to Thakur and the Holy Mother and receive their blessings. The wives of Balaram and of Manomohan and the Brahmin woman of Baghbazar are among them. Some of them have brought their children.

The women devotees come to the second story room to pay their respects to Thakur. Some of them offer flowers and vermilion powder at the lotus feet of Thakur. Two girls, nine or ten years old, sing a hymn to Sri Ramakrishna –

Song –

I want to attain peace. But where can I find it?

Where have I come from and to where am I floating away?

I go and come back time and again; I cry and laugh so much.

O brother, I am always asking myself where I should go.

Song –

O my vina, chant the name of Lord Hari.

Song –

Look, O young lady! He is coming before you, He who has slanting eyes and holds a flute in his hand¹.

Song –

O my tongue! Ever repeat the name of Durga.

Who but She will save you during trials and tribulations?

Sri Ramakrishna says by signs, “O my Mother! How beautifully she sings!”

The brahmin woman has the nature of a child. Thakur laughs and says to Rakhai by a sign, “Why don’t you ask her to sing?” The brahmin woman sings. The devotees smile.

O Hari! I shall play with You today.

I have found you alone today in the Nidhu grove [at Vrindavan].

The two girls go downstairs.

¹ Meaning Sri Krishna

It is evening. Mani and a couple of devotees are sitting near Thakur. Narendra enters the room. As Sri Ramakrishna rightly says, Narendra appears as if he is carrying an unsheathed sword when he moves about.

Hard disciplines for the monk and Narendra

Narendra comes in and sits beside Thakur. He expresses his aversion to women within Thakur's hearing. He says that keeping the company of women is a serious obstacle to God-realization.

Sri Ramakrishna doesn't say anything; he just listens to Narendra.

Narendra continues, "I want peace. I don't even care for God." Sri Ramakrishna stares at him without saying a word. Narendra chants, "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, the Infinite."

It is 8:00 p.m. Thakur is sitting on his bed. A couple of devotees are sitting in front of him. Surendra has come to see him after completing his office work. He brings four oranges and two flower garlands. First he gazes at Thakur and then at the devotees. He tells them what is in his heart.

Surendra (glancing at Mani and the others) — I have come from the office after finishing my work. I said to myself, 'I shouldn't stand on two boats at the same time. I had better finish my work before going there.' Today is the first day of the year¹ and it is also Tuesday². Yet I didn't go to Kalighat. I thought, it would be enough to see him who is Kali Herself and who has rightly known Kali.'

Sri Ramakrishna smiles a little.

¹ Vaishakh

² An auspicious day for worshipping the Divine Mother

Surendra — I have been told that one should take flowers and fruits when one visits the guru or a sadhu. That is why I have brought these things. I have spent money for you; God alone sees into one's mind. There are some who feel uncomfortable when they have to spend even a pice for the sake of God. And there are some who do not mind spending a thousand rupees. God sees the devotion in a devotee's heart and accepts the offering.

Thakur nods his agreement that Surendra is right. Surendra adds, "I couldn't come to see you yesterday, the last day of the year¹. But I decorated your picture with flowers."

Sri Ramakrishna tells Mani by a sign, "Oh, what love and devotion!"

Surendra — I bought these two garlands for you on my way here. They cost four annas.

Almost all the devotees have left. Thakur asks Mani to gently massage his feet and to fan him.

¹ Sankranti

Appendix

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna's first monastery – dispassion and spiritual practices of Narendra and other devotees

Baranagore Math. Narendra and other devotees have gathered together after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna. Surendra's holy desire has made it possible to provide a home for them in Baranagore. It is now transformed into a monastery. Gurudeva Sri Ramakrishna is daily served and worshipped in a shrine. Narendra and other devotees have resolved not to return to worldly life. They say, "How can we return home when he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] asked us to renounce 'lust and greed'?" Sashi has taken up the responsibility of the daily worship of Thakur. Narendra is looking after his brother disciples, who look to him for guidance. Narendra has said, "We will have to practice spiritual disciplines, or it will not be possible to realize God." He, with his brother disciples, have taken up the practice of a variety of spiritual disciplines. They have initiated themselves into various austerities described in the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras* to rid the mind of any kind of backsliding in the future. In practicing spiritual disciplines, they sometimes sit alone under a tree, at other times singly in the cremation ground, and at times on the bank of the Ganges. They spend the day in repetition of the Name and in meditation, sometimes in the monastery in the meditation room. At times, they join together in joyfully dancing and singing hymns. Everybody, Narendra in particular, yearns to realize God. Sometimes he says, "Shall I starve myself to death to see God? By what means can I attain Him?"

Latu, Tarak and the Elder Gopal did not have homes to return to. Surendra rented the first monastery in their name, saying, “Brothers, establish Thakur’s shrine here and we will all visit you from time to time for peace and solace.” Fired with the spirit of dispassion, the young devotees soon moved in, never to return home.

Narendra, Rakhai, Niranjana, Baburam, Sarat, Sashi and Kali were the first to stay there. Subodh and Prasanna joined them after a few days. Jogin and Latu were in Vrindavan, but they joined a year later. Gangadhar frequently visited the monastery. He could not live without seeing Narendra. He introduced the arati hymn, ‘Jai Shiva Omkara¹’ to the monastery. From time to time the brothers of the monastery also sang the victory chant, ‘Victory to the Guru.’ It was taught to them by Gangadhar as well, when he returned from Tibet. Two other devotees of Thakur, Hari and Tulsi, used to visit the monastery regularly to see Narendra and the others. After a few days they, too, stayed.

Reminiscences of Narendra and Sri Ramakrishna’s love for him

Friday, 25 March 1887. M. has come with Devendra to see the brothers of the monastery. M. often comes to see them and sometimes even stays overnight. He came last Saturday and stayed for three days – Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The brothers of the monastery, particularly Narendra, are charged with an intense spirit of dispassion. That is why M. eagerly comes to see them so frequently.

It is late in the evening. M. will stay at the monastery tonight.

After dusk, Sashi lights a lamp in the shrine and burns incense, repeating the sweet name of the Lord. Taking the same incense, he goes to all the

¹ Victory to Shiva Omkara

rooms of the monastery and offers his obeisance to all the images in each room.

Sashi now performs arati. Folding their hands, the brothers of the monastery, M. and Devendra watch it and sing the arati hymn with him: Victory to Shiva Shankara, victory to Shiva Shankara! To Brahma, Vishnu and Sadashiva! Redeem, redeem, redeem, Mahadeva!

Narendra and M. are engaged in conversation. Narendra is telling M. his reminiscences of meetings with Thakur. Narendra is now 24 years and two months old.

Narendra — When I started visiting him, one day in ecstasy he said to me, ‘So you have come!’

“I said to myself, ‘How wonderful! He acts as though he has known me a long time.’ Then he asked me, ‘Do you see a light?’

“I replied, ‘Yes, sir. Before I sleep, I sense a special light revolving near my forehead.’”

M. — Do you still see it?

Narendra — I used to see it frequently. Once in Jadu Mallick's dining room, Sri Ramakrishna touched me and said something to himself. I lost outer-consciousness. I remained in that intoxication for a month.

“Hearing that I was going to marry, he held the feet of the Mother of the Universe and wept. After weeping for a long time, he said, ‘Mother, give a turn to this situation. Don't let Narendra sink!’

“When my father passed away, my mother and brothers didn’t have enough to eat. During that time, one day I went to see him with Annada Guha.

“He said to Annada Guha, ‘Narendra has lost his father. He is in great trouble. It would be good if his friends helped him with money now.’

“I was upset with him. After Annada Guha left, I asked him, ‘Why did you say all that to him?’ Thus rebuked, he began to weep and said, ‘Oh, for you I can beg from door to door!’

“He conquered us by showering his love and affection.”

M. — There is not the slightest doubt about it. His love was unconditional.

Narendra — One day when I was alone with him, he told me something – there was no one else present. Please don’t tell this to anybody else.

M. — No, I won’t. What did he say?

Narendra — He said, ‘I cannot resort to occult powers. Let me do it through you. What do you say?’ I told him, ‘No. This cannot be done.’

“I used to contradict what he would say. You must have heard this from him yourself. He used to have visions of divine forms and I would say to him, ‘All these are hallucinations.’

“He told me, ‘Oh, I used to shout from the rooftop of the Kuthi, “Where are all you devotees? Come to me! I am about to die without seeing you

people!" The Divine Mother had told me that the devotees would come. See, everything She said is turning out to be true.'

"What could I say then? I just kept quiet."

Narendra is the abode of Indivisible¹ – Narendra's ego

"One day he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] closed the door to his room and told Devendra Babu and Girish about me, saying, 'If I tell him his true nature, he will quit his mortal frame.'"

M. — Yes, I heard that. He said it to us, too, a number of times. Didn't you once enter into such a state² when you were staying in the Cossipore Garden house?

Narendra — In the state I experienced, I had no body; I could only see my face. Thakur was in the room upstairs – I had the experience on the ground floor. I began to weep and said, 'What has happened to me?' The Elder Gopal went upstairs and told Thakur that I was weeping.

"When I saw him, he said, 'Now you have known, but I am keeping the key.' I asked what had happened to me.

"Glancing at the other devotees, he said, 'When he comes to know of his real Self, he will not keep his body. I am keeping him in ignorance.'

¹ Akhanda

² Nirvikalpa samadhi

“One day he said, ‘You can see Krishna in your heart if you want.’ I said, ‘I know no Krishna or anyone like him.’ (Narendra and M. laugh.)

“And then there is something peculiar. When I see some people or objects, sometimes I feel as if I have known them for many past lives – as if they are my acquaintances. When I went to Sarat’s house on Amherst Street, I said to him, ‘I feel as though I have known this house completely. The passages in the house and the rooms, I feel that I have known for many days.’

“If I did something of my own free will, he (Thakur) would never say anything to me. Did you know that I was a member of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj?”

M. — Yes, I knew it.

Narendra — He knew that girls also used to visit the Brahmo Samaj. A man cannot meditate when there are girls around, so he would criticize such a practice. But he would not say anything to me.

“But one day he said, ‘Don’t tell Rakhal that you are a member of the Samaj. He will then want to become a member too.’ ”

M. — You have greater will power. That is why he didn’t forbid you.

Narendra — I have attained this state of mind after having faced so many trials and tribulations! Master Mahashay, you haven’t had to face such troubles in life. I now think that without facing

trials and tribulations, one cannot resign oneself [to the will of God], attain absolute dependence on God.

“But how soft and lacking in ego you are! What humility! Would you please tell me how I can have humility?”

M. — About your ego, Thakur said, ‘Whose ego is it after all?’

Narendra — What does that mean?

M. — A gopi friend¹ of Radhika told her, ‘You have become proud. That’s why you were rude to Krishna.’ Another gopi friend said, ‘Yes, it is true that Radhika is proud. But what is she proud of? She is proud that Krishna is her Lord. Krishna himself gave this pride to her.’ This is what Thakur meant – that the Lord Himself has given you this ego so He can get a lot of work done through you.

Narendra — But I shout repeatedly from every corner that I have no troubles.

M. (smiling) — Yes, please shout to your heart’s content. (Both of them laugh.)

Now the conversation turns to other devotees – to Vijay Goswami and others.

Narendra — He said about Vijay Goswami, ‘He is knocking at the door.’

¹ Sakhi

M. — In other words, he has not been able to enter the room yet.

“But Vijay Goswami said to Thakur at Shyampukur, ‘I saw you in Dhaka in this form, in this very body.’

“You were there when he said this.”

Narendra — Devendra Babu and Ram Babu will both renounce the world — they are trying very hard. Ram Babu says privately that he will give up the world after two years.

M. — After two years? After making provision for his sons and daughters perhaps.

Narendra — He might rent out his house and buy a small one for himself. Others will arrange his daughter’s marriage and so forth.

M. — Isn’t Gopal in a nice state of mind?

Narendra — What do you mean?

M. — He goes into such deep ecstasy — while chanting the name of God, the hair on his body stands on end and he sheds tears of joy.

Narendra — Does one become great by going into ecstasy?

“How much greater personalities are Kali, Sarat, Sashi and Sarada compared to Gopal! How great is their renunciation! Gopal does not accept him (Sri Ramakrishna), does he?”

M. — Even he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] said that Gopal didn't belong to his intimate circle of devotees. But I noticed that he had great love and devotion for Thakur.

Narendra — What did you notice?

M. — On my first visit to Dakshineswar, after the devotees had left Thakur's room, I saw Gopal when I came out of the room. With folded hands he was kneeling on the red brick-dust path before Thakur, who was standing there. The moon was shining brightly. It was on the red brick-dust path to the north of the northern veranda of Thakur's room. No one else was there. It seemed to me that Gopal had taken refuge and Thakur was reassuring him.

Narendra — I didn't see it.

M. — Thakur used to say now and then, 'Gopal is in the state of a paramahansa.' But I also remember well that Thakur forbade him to visit women devotees. He cautioned him a number of times about this.

Narendra — Well, he told me, 'If Gopal is in the state of a paramahansa, why does he keep money with him?' He also said, 'He doesn't belong to my inner circle of devotees. They who are my own will regularly visit me.'

“That is why he used to be cross with Babu. He was in the constant company of Gopal and didn't visit Thakur frequently enough.

“He told me, ‘Gopal has attained spiritual perfection – perfection achieved suddenly. However, he doesn’t belong to this intimate circle. Had he been my own, why did I not weep in yearning to see him?’ Some people are claiming him as an incarnation of Nityananda. But Thakur said on several occasions, ‘I am indeed Advaita, Chaitanya and Nityananda – all three in one receptacle.’ ”

Chapter II

Thakur instructs Narendra to teach mankind

Two devotees are sitting in Kali Tapasvi’s room in the monastery. One of them is a householder, the other a monk. They are the same age – twenty-four or twenty-five. They are talking when M. arrives. He plans to stay in the monastery for three days.

Friday, 8 April, Good Friday. Time about eight o’clock. M. enters the room and then goes to Thakur’s shrine to pay his obeisance. Later, he meets Narendra, Rakhai and other devotees. Then he comes and sits in this room, talking to both the devotees and listening to their conversation. The householder devotee has the desire to renounce family life. The brother of the monastery is trying to dissuade him.

The Devotee who has Renounced — Please finish the little karma that remains to be done. If you attend to it for a little while, it will end.

“A person was told that he would go to hell. He asked a friend what hell was like. The friend got a piece of chalk and began to draw hell on the ground. As soon as he had finished drawing it, the fellow rolled over it and said, ‘I have now reaped my actions of living in hell.’

The Householder Devotee — I don't like worldly life. Oh, how happy you are here!

The Devotee who has Renounced — Why do you talk so much about it? Go out and enjoy the world to your fill.

Sashi performs worship in Thakur's shrine after nine o'clock.

It is about eleven o'clock. The brothers of the monastery return, after a dip in the Ganges. They put on clean cloths and enter the shrine one by one to pay obeisance to Thakur and to meditate.

After food has been offered to Thakur, the brothers of the monastery sit down to eat it. M. eats with them.

It is now twilight. Arati is performed after incense is burnt. Rakhal, Sashi, the Elder Gopal and Harish are sitting in the 'Demons' room¹. M. is also there. Rakhal asks that great care be taken while keeping Thakur's food.

Rakhal (to Sashi and the others) — One day I took my meal before Thakur ate. Looking at me, he said, 'I can't even look at your face! Why did you do such a thing?' I began to cry.

The Elder Gopal — Once at Cossipore I breathed heavily on his food. He said, 'This food cannot be eaten.'

M. is pacing the verandah upstairs with Narendra. They are talking about a number of things.

¹ The brothers of the monastery call themselves *danas* and *daityas* (ghosts and demons) and the room where they meet they call 'the room of the danas,' or the 'demons' room'

Narendra says, “You know very well that I didn’t accept anything.”

M. — Are you talking about the forms of God?

Narendra — In the beginning I didn’t accept many of the things he said. One day he said to me, ‘Then why do you come here?’

“I told him, ‘I come here to see you, not to listen to your words.’”

M. — What did he say?

Narendra — He was very happy.

The next day, Saturday, 9 April 1887. After offering food to Thakur, the brothers of the monastery eat and then rest awhile. Narendra and M. sit along together under a tree in the garden to the west of the monastery and talk. Narendra tells M. the story of his meeting Thakur. Narendra is twenty-four, M. is thirty-two.

M. — You remember your first meeting with him very well, don’t you?

Narendra — Yes. I met him in his room at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. I sang these two songs that day –

Song –

O my mind, return to Your abode.

Why are you wandering aimlessly in a foreign land –
this world – in the guise of a foreigner?

The five senses¹ and the elements² are alien to you – none is your own.

Entangling yourself in the love and affection of strangers, why are you forgetting your near and dear One?

Take the path to Reality and light the lamp of intense love for God for a moment.

Preserve sacred wealth carefully and secretly.

The robbers – greed and infatuation – can rob you of your wealth.

O mind, guard yourself most carefully with sama³ and yama⁴.

The company of sadhus and the Name are like an inn on the road. Take rest there when you tire on the way.

If you lose your way, ask the residents of the inn for the directions.

If, on the path, you come across an image of fear, call on the King with your heart and soul.

On that path, the King wields great authority. Even Yama (God of death) fears His regime.

Song –

Will my life end in vain? O Lord, day and night I fervently gaze down the path of hope.

You are the Lord of the three worlds. And I am a beggar and an orphan.

How can I say to You to come and reside in my heart?

¹ Form, taste, smell, sound and touch

² Earth, water, fire, air and ether

³ Control of the mind

⁴ Self-restraint. Patanjali cites five yamas or restrains. They are: (1) abstinence from injury in any form; (2) truthfulness; (3) continence; (4) non-stealing and non-covetousness; and (5) abstinence from possessiveness, accepting only what is absolutely necessary (ahimsa, satya, brahmacharya, asteya, aparigraha).

I keep the doors of the cottage of my heart open at all times.

Pray, come here once and bring peace to it.

M. — What did Thakur say after hearing the song?

Narendra — He went into an ecstatic mood. He asked Ram Babu and others, ‘Who is this boy? He sang so beautifully!’ Thakur asked me to come again.

M. — Where did you meet him the next time?

Narendra — At Rajmohan’s house. And then again at Dakshineswar. When he saw me on that visit, he began to chant a hymn of praise for me, absorbed in ecstasy. Finishing it, he said, ‘Narayana, You have come down in this body for me!’

“But please don’t tell this to anybody.”

M. — What else did he say?

Narendra — He said, “You have come down in a human body for my sake. I had said to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, how can I go down to earth? With whom shall I talk? Mother, how can I live on earth without associating with pure devotees who have renounced ‘lust and greed’?” He also said, “You came here and woke me up one night. You said to me, ‘I have come.’ ” I knew nothing of the sort. I was in deep sleep in my Calcutta house.

M. — In other words, you were present as well as absent at the same time – like the Lord is both with form and formless.

Narendra — But please don't tell this to anyone.

Thakur directs Narendra to teach mankind

Narendra — He transmitted spiritual power¹ to me at Cossipore.

M. — Is that when you used to meditate under the tree before a lighted fire – at the Cossipore garden house?

Narendra — Yes. I asked Kali to hold my hand for awhile. Kali said, 'What a shock traveled through my body when I touched you!'

“Promise that you won't tell this to anybody. Let it remain between us.”

M. — There is a special reason for transmitting power to you. You will accomplish great work. One day he wrote on a piece of paper, 'Naren will teach humanity.'

Narendra — But I told him that I would do no such thing.

“He said, 'Your very bones will do it.' He made me responsible for Sarat. He has now developed

¹ Shakti

great yearning for God. His kundalini¹ has awakened.”

M. — May dead leaves not now choke It. Thakur used to say – you perhaps remember – that fish make holes in the lake to rest in. When dead leaves accumulate in them, the fish can't stay there.

Narendra, the Abode of Indivisible

Narendra — He used to call me Narayana.

M. — I know he called you Narayana.

Narendra — During his illness, he would not let me pour water for washing his hands after evacuation.

“At Cossipore, he said, ‘The key is with me. He will give up his body when he comes to know his real Self.’”

M. — Wasn't that the day you went into that state²?

Narendra — At the time I felt I had no body, that I only had a face. I was studying law at home to prepare for my examination. Suddenly it came to me, why was I doing all that?

M. — Was Thakur at Cossipore then?

Narendra — Yes. I came out of the house like a crazy person. He asked what I wanted. I said, ‘I

¹ Spiritual energy lying dormant at the base of the spine

² Nirvikalpa Samadhi

would like to remain in samadhi.' He said to me, 'You are a man of very low intelligence! There is something beyond samadhi. Samadhi is much lower.'

M. — Yes, he would say, 'Vijnana is higher than jnana' — like going up and down a ladder after reaching the roof.

Narendra — Kali talks of jnana all the time. I scold him, saying, 'Why talk about knowledge? First let your love and devotion for God ripen and mature.'

"He told Tarak Babu at Dakshineswar, 'Spiritual emotion¹ and devotion² are by no means the last thing.'"

M. — Please tell me what else he said about you.

Narendra — He had such great faith in my words that when I said to him, 'The forms of gods and goddesses that you see are all hallucinations,' he went to the Divine Mother and asked Her, 'Mother, Narendra said all these things. Are they all delusions of the mind?' Afterwards he told me, 'The Divine Mother has said that all of them are true.'

"He said — perhaps you can remember — 'Hearing you sing, (placing his hand on his heart) what is here inside begins to steadily listen to it — like a snake hissing and raising its hood when it hears the snake charmer.'

¹ Bhava

² Bhakti

“But Master Mahashay, though he said so many nice things about me, what have I attained spiritually?”

M. — You are now dressed as Shiva, so you don't have to touch money. Do you remember Thakur's tale?

Narendra — Please tell me.

M. — A quick-change artist was playing the role of Shiva in someone's house. The master of the house where he went offered him a rupee. He didn't accept it. He went home, removed Shiva's dress, and came back to ask for the rupee. The family asked him, 'Why didn't you accept it before?' He said, 'I was then playing the role of Shiva – a sannyasin – I couldn't touch money.'

Hearing this, Narendra laughed for a long time.

M. — You are now in the role of a physician. The whole responsibility is on your shoulders. You have to make men of all the brothers of the monastery.

Narendra — The spiritual disciplines that we practice are in accordance with his teachings. How strange that Ram Babu should taunt us about them. He says, 'We have seen him. What need is there to practice more spiritual disciplines now?'

M. — Let everyone act according to his belief.

Narendra — But he (Thakur) asked us to carry out spiritual practices.

Now Narendra talks more of Thakur's love.

Narendra — How much he pleaded with the Divine Mother for me! We had nothing to eat — after the death of my father. We were passing through extremely tough times in the house. At that time he prayed to the Divine Mother to give me money.

M. — I know. You told me about that.

Narendra — We didn't get the money. Thakur said, 'The Divine Mother says that coarse grain and cloth can be arranged — only rice and lentils can be granted.'

“He entertained so much love for me — yet if an impure idea came to my mind, he would immediately know about it. When I used to wander about with Annada, I sometimes associated with impure people. Then, when I went to see him, he would not take food from my hand. His hand would rise a little to take it and then stop. During his illness his hand reached close to his mouth, but not farther than that. He then said, 'You have not yet attained.'

“Many times I become skeptical about the existence of God. At Baburam's house, I felt that nothing exists — that no God, or anything like Him, exists.”

M. — Thakur would say that he, too, used to have such moods at times.

Both of them are silent. M. says, “Blessed you all are! You think about Him day and night.” Narendra

replied, “But I can’t see Him! I don’t yet have the desire to give up my body!”

It is evening. Niranjan has returned from holy Puri dham¹ a few moments ago. The brothers of the monastery and M. express joy to see him. He begins to tell them about his visit to Puri. Niranjan is 25 or 26 years old. After the evening worship, some of them are meditating. Since Niranjan has returned, many of them go and sit in the bigger room (the room of the Demons) to talk. At nine in the evening, Sashi offers food to Sri Thakur and puts him to bed.

The brothers of the monastery sit for their evening meal with Niranjan. They have chapati², a vegetable and some zaggery for their dinner. And then they have a little prasad of farina pudding.

¹ Place of pilgrimage

² Flat whole wheat bread