

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna dances with devotees in the joy of ecstatic love at Balaram's house

It is about 8 or 9 p.m., seven days after the Dolayatra. Thakur is surrounded by Ram, Manomohan, Rakhal, Nityagopal and other devotees. They are all inebriated with chanting the name of God. Some of the devotees are in a state of ecstasy. In such a state, Nityagopal's chest has turned red. When they all sit down, M. salutes Thakur. He sees that Rakhal is lying down overwhelmed with ecstasy and unaware of the outside world. Thakur, putting his hand on Rakhal's chest, says, "Peace, peace." It is the second time Rakhal has experienced ecstasy. He lives with his father in Calcutta and goes to Dakshineswar from time to time to visit Thakur. At the present time he is a student in Vidyasagar's school in Shyampukur.

Thakur had said to M. in Dakshineswar, "I will visit Balaram's house in Calcutta. Please go there." That is why M. has come to see him.

It is Saturday, 11 March 1882, 28th of Falgun, the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra. Thakur has come to Balaram's house at his invitation.

The devotees sit for prasad on the verandah while Balaram stands humbly to serve them. He doesn't act like the master of the house.

M. has only recently begun to visit Sri Ramakrishna. He has not yet talked to the devotees, only with Narendra at Dakshineswar.

Harmony of religions

A few days later, Sri Ramakrishna had been sitting absorbed on the steps of the Shiva temples. It was about four or five o'clock. M. was seated near him.

A short while ago, Thakur had rested on his bedspread on the floor in his room. Nobody was yet living there to attend to his needs and he has been greatly inconvenienced since Hriday's departure. When M. came from Calcutta to see him, he talked to him while he walked to the Shiva temples. Sitting on a step of the Shiva temple opposite the temple of Sri Radhakanta, Thakur suddenly went into ecstasy at the sight of the temple.

He begins to talk to the Mother of the Universe. He says, "Mother, everybody says his watch gives the correct time. Christians, Brahmos, Hindus, Muslims, all of them say, 'Only our religion is true.' But Mother, nobody's watch is right. Who can really know You? But if someone calls on You with a longing heart, You can be reached, by Your grace, by any path. Mother, how do Christians call on You in church? Please show me once. But Mother, what will people say if I enter a Church? Maybe it will result in a hullabaloo; maybe I won't be allowed to enter the Kali temple again. So please let me see from the door of the church."

**Thakur enjoys devotional music with devotees – love of
Rakhal – ‘the wine of divine love’**

On another day [in March 1882] Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot in his room. He is a picture of joy with a smiling face. M. comes in with Kalikrishna.¹

Kalikrishna did not know where he was being taken by his friend. The friend [M.] had only said to him, “Come with me if you want to go to a grog shop. There’s a huge pitcher of wine there.” When they reached Thakur and M. had saluted him, he told Thakur everything he had said to his friend. Thakur laughs.

He says, “The bliss of devotional music and the bliss of Brahman are wine indeed – the wine of love for God. The aim of life is to develop intense love of God. Indeed, love for God is the essence. It is extremely difficult to know God through knowledge and reasoning.” Saying this, Thakur begins to sing:

Who can know what Kali is? Even the six philosophies
cannot reveal Her.

The yogi meditates on Her from the Muladhara to the
Sahasrara,

As She sports with Kala – two swans amid a wilderness of
lotuses.

Like Om, the source of all, Kali is the inner self of the yogi
who delights in the Self.

She dwells in every living creature, of Her own will and
just as She pleases.

1. Kalikrishna later became the main professor of Sanskrit and history at Vidyasagar’s College.

Kala, eternity – he alone knows the meaning of Kali, time;
who else but he can know Her as She truly is?

The universe and all living beings rest in the Mother's
womb, and you presume to know Her vastness?

Says Prasad, to think that you can know Her is as
laughable as trying to swim across the sea.

My mind understands, but alas my heart does not!
Though but a dwarf, it aspires to catch the moon.

Sri Ramakrishna says again, “The aim of life is
to love God – the way the cowherd boys and
milkmaids of Vrindavan loved Sri Krishna. When
Sri Krishna went to Mathura, the cowherd boys
wandered around weeping in sorrow at being
separated from him.”

Saying this, Thakur gazes upward and sings:

I have just seen a new cowherd boy. He holds the branch
of a young tree and in his arms he holds a new-born calf.

Says he, where is brother Kanai?

But he only mutters ‘K’ – unable to utter the complete
word, Kanai.

And his eyes are filled with tears.

Hearing this song full of love from Thakur, M.'s
eyes become filled with tears.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at a devotee's house – at Prankrishna's home

Today Sri Ramakrishna has come to Calcutta. He is
sitting with devotees in the parlour on the first floor of
Prankrishna Mukherji's Shyampukur house, having
just eaten a meal with the devotees. It is Sunday, 2
April 1882, the 14th day of the bright fortnight of

Chaitra, the time between 1 and 2 in the afternoon. Captain lives in the same neighborhood and Thakur wants to go to his house after resting at Prankrishna's. Then he wants to visit Keshab Sen in his house called the Lily Cottage., Prankrishna is sitting in his parlour. Ram, Manomohan, Kedar, Surendra, Girindra (Surendra's brother), Rakhal, Balaram, M. and other devotees are present.

Some gentlemen of the neighborhood and other invited guests are also there. They are all anxious to hear what Thakur has to say.

Thakur: "God and His glory. This world is certainly His glory. But seeing His splendour and glory, people forget everything else. They don't look for Him who is the master of all these riches. Everybody wants to enjoy 'lust and gold' – but there are more problems than enjoyment. The world is like a whirlpool of Vishalakshi. Once a boat is caught in it, nothing can save it. Or it's like a thorny bush. You pull yourself out of one thorn and get entangled with another. Once you enter a labyrinth, it's difficult to find the way out of it. A man becomes scorched in the world of lust and gold."

A Devotee: "So what's the way out?"

The way: holy company and prayer

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is a way: holy company and prayer.

"Unless you go to a doctor, you can't be cured. One day of holy company is not enough. It is always necessary, because the disease is chronic. Without going to a doctor, you don't know how to diagnose

the problem. You have to be with the doctor, here there and everywhere. Only then can you understand if it is phlegm or bile.”

The Devotee: “How is holy company useful?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Association with the holy develops fondness for God, it generates love for Him. Unless you can develop yearning for God, you won’t achieve anything. By keeping the company of holy people, the heart becomes restless for God. It’s like feeling constantly worried when somebody at home is ill, worrying how the patient can be cured. This yearning should be like a person out of work who is running around from one office to another in the search of a job. If he’s told there’s no vacancy in the office, he goes again the next day to ask if one has occurred.

“There is another way: praying with a sincere heart. He is your own. You have to say to Him, ‘Please reveal yourself to me, grant me Your vision. Why have you given birth to me?’ Sikh devotees said to me that God is kind. I said to them, ‘Why should I call Him kind? He has created us. What wonder is there that He is kind to us?’ What kindness is there in parents’ bringing up their children? He has to do it, so we should make demands on Him. He is our own father, our own mother. If the son wants his inheritance and begins to fast for it, his parents release it three years early. Again, when a boy entreats his mother for money, ‘Mother, I fall at your feet. Please give me money,’ the mother has to comply with his wishes. Seeing his insistence, she tosses a few coins at him.

“There is another benefit of holy company: only the thought of what is Real comes to mind – what is Real, what is eternal, that is, God. What is unreal is transitory: the mind should discriminate. No sooner does an elephant raise its trunk to eat the plantain tree of a stranger but the mahout goads it.”

A Neighbour: “Sir, why is there sin?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “There are all kinds of people in this world. He has created good people and He has also created the wicked. It is He who gives good as well as bad tendencies.”

Responsibility of a sinner and results of actions

The Neighbour: “So a sinner isn’t responsible for his sins.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It’s God’s law that you have to bear the consequence of sin. Won’t chili be hot if you eat it? Mathur Babu did a lot of bad things in his youth. That’s why he suffered from a number of diseases before he died. You don’t notice early on. There’s a lot of wood fuel for cooking in the Kali temple. The wet wood burns nicely in the beginning and you don’t notice water in it. But when the wood is burnt, all the water collects and it puts out the fire in the oven. That’s why you should beware of lust, anger, greed and so on. Just see how Hanuman burnt Lanka in anger. Later, he realized that Sita was in the Ashoka grove. Then he was frantic that she might come to harm.”

The Neighbour: “Why did God create wicked people?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It is His will, His sport. Both knowledge and ignorance¹ are in His maya. Darkness is necessary to show the glory of light. If lust, anger and greed are bad, why has he made them? Because he wants to create saintly people. A person becomes high-minded when his senses are subdued. What is impossible for a person who has overcome his senses? By His grace, he can even realize God. And look at it from this point of view. It’s through desire that His creation continues.

“Wicked people are needed too. When the tenants of a landlord rebelled the landlord sent Golok Choudhury. He was so cruel that the tenants trembled at his name. Everything is necessary. Sita said, ‘Rama, if there were only palatial buildings in Ayodhya, it would be so nice, but I see so many old shanties.’ Rama replied, ‘Sita, if all the houses were well built, what would the masons do?’ (*All laugh.*) God has created everything – good trees, poisonous trees, even weeds. Among animals also, there are good and bad – tigers, lions, snakes, all these and more.”

**It is possible to realize God even in household life –
everybody will attain liberation**

The Neighbour: “Sir, is it possible to attain God while living a householder’s life?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Certainly you can. But, as I said earlier, you have to keep the company of holy people and constantly pray to Him. You have to weep before Him. When the mind is washed of all impurities, God is seen. The mind is like a needle

1. Vidya and avidya.

covered with mud – God is a magnet. Until all the dirt is cleaned off, it cannot join the magnet. When you weep, all the dirt of the needle is washed off. The dirt of the needle is lust, anger, greed, bad tendencies and worldly calculation. As soon as the dirt is washed off, the magnet will pull the needle to itself. In other words, you will have the vision of God. When the mind is purified, a person attains God. Say a person has a fever – a lot of poison in the body is causing the illness – how can quinine help in such a condition?

“Why isn’t it possible to realize Him while living as a householder? The same thing – keep the company of the holy, weep and pray to Him, and live in solitude now and then. If plants on a roadside aren’t fenced, cows and goats will eat them up.”

The Neighbour: “So people who lead a householder’s life can also realize God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Everybody will attain liberation. However, a person should follow the instructions of his religious preceptor. If you take a crooked path, it will be difficult to return. Then liberation will take a long time. It’s possible that you won’t attain it in this life, it may take more births. Janaka and others lived and worked as householders – they worked, keeping God on their minds – the same way a dancing girl dances with a pot on her head. And think of the western (Indian) women. They walk along talking and laughing while they’re carrying water pots on their heads.”

The Neighbour: “You said that you should follow the instructions of the religious teacher. But how can we find a religious teacher?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Not just any kind of person can be a guru. A big log¹ floats and can carry a number of birds and animals on it. But if someone climbs on a light piece of wood, it not only sinks, but drowns whoever is on it. That’s why God incarnates in every age as a guru. Sat-chit-ananda himself is the guru.

“What is knowledge and who am I? God alone is the doer and everything else is only an instrument – this is called jnana, or spiritual knowledge. I am not a doer, I am only an instrument in His hands. That’s why I say to the Divine Mother: Mother, You are the operator, I am an instrument; You are the resident, I am the house; You are the driver, I am the carriage. I move at Your will; I do what You make me do. I speak only as You make me speak. Not I, not I, only You, only You.”

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab Sen at the Lily Cottage

From Captain’s home, Thakur goes to Keshab Sen’s house, the Lily Cottage. Many devotees are with him, including Ram, Manomohan, Surendra, and M. They are all seated in the hall on the second story. Pratap Majumdar, Trailokya and other devotees are also present.

Thakur has great affection for Keshab Sen. It was when Keshab was practicing spiritual disciplines with

1. Bahaduri.

his disciples in Belgharia – in 1875 after the festival of Magha – Thakur went to the garden to meet him. He was accompanied by Hriday, his nephew. It was in this Belgharia garden that Thakur said to Keshab, “You have cast off your tail. In other words, after renouncing everything you are able to live inside or outside the household – like a tadpole that’s lost its tail and can live both in water and on land.” He advised Keshab on many occasions later at Dakshineswar, the Lily Cottage, Brahmo Samaj and other places: God can be realized by different paths and by different religions. A person can live in the world after practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude and developing love for God. Janaka and others lived a worldly life after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. You must call on Him with a heart full of yearning, only then will He grant His vision. Worship God without form; this is very good. Attaining the knowledge of Brahman, you will have the correct understanding that God is real and all else is transitory. Brahman is real, the world unreal. The Eternal Religion¹ believes both in God with form and God without form; God is worshipped with different attitudes – the attitude of peacefulness, as servant, as friend, as parent, and as one’s beloved. During a symphony of sanai and other instruments² a musician plays one single note though he has seven holes in his pipe – while at the same time there is another musician who also has seven holes in his flute but plays different notes.

“You don’t believe in God with form. There is no harm in that. It’s enough to have single-minded devotion to the formless God. Even so, you should cultivate the longing that the believers in God with form have. When you call upon Him as Mother, your love and devotion increase. At one time you may have the attitude of a servant, at another of a friend, then of a

1. Sanatana Dharma.

2. Roshan Chowki.

parent, again as one's beloved. I have no desire, I only love Him. It's a nice attitude. It's called motiveless devotion.¹ I have asked for nothing – not money, not fame, nor respect. All I ask for is love and devotion to Your lotus feet. The Vedas, the Puranas and the Tantras talk of only one God and of His sport. This attitude contains both spiritual knowledge and love of God. You should live in the world like a maidservant. A maid attends to all the household work, but her mind is tied to her native village. She brings up the children of her master. She even addresses them as 'My Hari', 'My Rama,' but she knows they're not hers. It's necessary to practice spiritual disciplines in solitude. You will receive His grace. How many spiritual disciplines King Janaka practiced! It is only by practicing spiritual disciplines that a person can live unattached in the world.

“You deliver lectures for the good of all. But good ensues to others only if you have realized God, have had His vision. Without His command, advice has no effect. And unless you've realized God, you don't receive His command. The signs of God-realization are that the person becomes like a child, like an inanimate object, like a crazy person, a demon – like Sukadeva and others. Chaitanya Deva used to dance, sometimes like a child, at other times like a madman – he would laugh, then weep, then dance and then sing. While living in holy Puri, he remained in *jada samadhi* (like an inanimate object) for a long time.”

Keshab gradually develops reverence for Hinduism

Sri Ramakrishna instructed Keshab Sen during casual conversations in different places. Keshab Sen mentioned meeting him in Belgharia for the first time

1. Ahetuki bhakti.

in the Sunday edition of the *Indian Mirror*, 28 March, 1875.¹

The Magha festival again fell in January in 1876. The title of Keshab Sen's lecture in the Town hall was: "Brahmo Religion and What We Have learnt From it (Our Faith and Experiences)." In the discourse, he mentioned a great deal about the beauty of the Hindu Religion.²

If Sri Ramakrishna loved Keshab Sen, the latter showed love and devotion to him no less. Almost every year during the Brahmo festival and on other occasions Keshab would go to Dakshineswar to bring him to the Lily Cottage. Sometimes he would take him alone, as one of his very own, with great love and devotion to the worship room on the first floor. He would worship God in seclusion there.

1. We met Paramahansa of Dakshineswar not long ago and were charmed by the depth, penetration and simplicity of his spirit. The never ceasing metaphors and analogies in which he indulged are most of them as apt as they are beautiful. The characteristics of his mind are very opposite to those of Pandit Dayananda Saraswati, the former being too gentle, tender and contemplative, as the latter is sturdy, masculine and polemical.

– *Indian Mirror*, 28th March, 1875

Hinduism must have in it a deep source of beauty, truth and goodness to inspire such men as these.

– *Sunday Mirror*, 28th March, 1875

2. If the ancient Vedic Aryan is gratefully honoured today for having taught us the deep truth of the Nirakar, or the bodiless Spirit, the same homage is due to the later Puranic Hindu for having taught us religious feelings in all their breadth and depth.

In the days of the Vedas and the Vedanta, India was all Communion (Yoga). In the days of the Puranas, India was all emotion (Bhakti). The highest and best feelings of religion have been cultivated under the guardianship of specific divinities.

– "Our Faith and Experiences", Lectures delivered in January, 1876

Keshab invited and brought him to the Bhadra festival in 1879 and again in the *tapovan* of Belgharia. Again, he brought him to the festival at the Lily Cottage on 21st September. It was on this day that he was photographed with the Brahma devotees while in samadhi. In this photograph Thakur is standing in samadhi, held by Hriday. On 22nd October, the 6th day of Kartik, the festival of Mahalakshmi, on the 9th day of the lunar month, Keshab went to see him in Dakshineswar.

On 29 October, 1879, Wednesday, 13th day of Kartik, 1286 (B.Y.), at one in the afternoon on the day of Kojagar Purnima, Keshab went again with some devotees to Dakshineswar to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Along with his steamer, there were a barge, six boats and two small boats with about eighty devotees. They carried their pennant, flowers and leaves, and musical instruments such as khol, kartal and berry. Hriday welcomed Keshab and brought him from the steamer singing, “Who is chanting the name of Hari on the bank of the Ganges? It seems to be Nitai who is coming, inebriated with ecstatic love.” The Brahma devotees also accompanied them, singing kirtan from the Panchavati: “The image of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, beauty and bliss in body.” Thakur goes into samadhi every now and then in their midst. On this day Keshab carried out the divine service after twilight in the light of the full moon on the Bandhaghat.

After the service Thakur had said, “Please say, ‘Brahman-Atman-Bhagavan. Brahman-maya-jiva-jagat. Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.’ (Brahman, Atman and Bhagavan are one. Brahman, His maya, the world and the embodied beings are all He. God, His devotee and his word are one).”

The Brahma devotees and Keshab repeated these mantras with Sri Ramakrishna in the moonlight on the bank of the Ganges, their hearts full of love for

God. And when Sri Ramakrishna said, “Now repeat Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava (the Guru, Krishna and the worshipper are one and the same),” Keshab smiled and said, “Sir, not that far yet. If we say, Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava, people will call us too orthodox.” Sri Ramakrishna also laughed and said, “Yes indeed, you people should only go as far as you can.”

Some days later after the worship of Kali, on 13 November 1879 on 28th Kartik, Ram, Manomohan and Gopal Mitra met Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar for the first time.

One summer day in 1880 Ram and Manomohan came to the Lily Cottage to see Keshab. They were very interested to know what Keshab thought of Sri Ramakrishna. They said that when asked, Keshab told them, “The Paramahansa of Dakshineswar is no ordinary man. There is no one as great as he on earth. He is so beautiful, so extraordinary, he must be preserved with the greatest care. If this is not done he will not survive – he must be preserved the way a beautiful and valuable article is kept in a glass case.”¹

A few days later, during the festival of Magha, in January, 1881, Keshab Sen went to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Ram, Manomohan, Jaygopal Sen and many others were there.

1. Sri Ramakrishna came a second time to the Baelghar garden on 14 May, 1875, the first of Jaishtha. The Bharata Ashram libel suit ended on 30 April, 1875, 14th day of Vaishakha, 1282 (B.Y). Keshab was still there in this garden. Sri Ramakrishna had been in Kamarpukur for four months in 1880 – from Wednesday, 3 March, 21st day of Falgun to 10 October, 1880, 25th of Ashwin. During these days, they enjoyed kirtan while reading the holy books. In Seohar Shyambazar while returning, he witnessed the arati of the puja of the 7th day in the homes of the gentlemen of Koutulpur. On the way, he met some Brahma devotees sent by Keshab. Keshab was worried as he had not seen Thakur for several months.

On Friday, 15 July 1881, the first day of Shravana, 1288 (B.Y.), 1803 Shaka Samvat, Keshab again took Sri Ramakrishna on a steamer from Dakshineswar.

In 1881, when Thakur visited Manomohan and they celebrated the occasion, Keshab was also invited. He took part in the festivity. Trailokya and others sang.

Sri Ramakrishna went by invitation to the house of Rajendra Mitra in December, 1881. Keshab was also there. This house is situated on Becchu Chatterji Street in Thanthania. Rajendra, Ram and Manomohan's uncle were also there. Ram, Manomohan, the Brahma devotee Raja Mohan and Rajendra sent word to Keshab and invited him.

When Keshab received the message, he was mourning the death of his brother Aghornath. Brother Aghor, the preacher, breathed his last in Lucknow on Thursday, 8 December, the 24th day of Agrahayana. Everybody thought that Keshab would not be able to make it. However, when he received the message, Keshab said, "How is it possible? The Paramahansa is coming and I shall not be able to see him! I will certainly go. Since I am in mourning I will sit separately for my meal."

The mother of Manomohan, Shyamsundari Devi, a great devotee, had served the meal for Thakur. Ram was there. The day Sri Ramakrishna graced Rajendra's house with this visit, Surendra took him to the Chinna Bazaar in the afternoon and had him photographed. Thakur was standing in samadhi.

On the day of this festival, Mahendra Goswami read out from the Bhagavata.

The festival was celebrated in the Shimulia Brahma Samaj on the day of Maghotsava in January, 1882. The service and kirtan were performed in the open space and courtyard of Jnana Chaudhury's house. Both Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab had been invited.

It was here that Thakur heard Narendra sing for the first time and asked him to visit Dakshineswar.

On Thursday, 23 February, 1882, 12th day of Falgun, Keshab, accompanied by his devotees, visited Sri Ramakrishna again at Dakshineswar. Miss Pigot and Joseph Cook, the American clergyman, were with them. Keshab took Sri Ramakrishna for a cruise with the Brahma devotees. Mr. Cook saw Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi. Nagendra was also in the boat. Hearing about Thakur from him, M. met Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar for the first time within the next three days.

Two months later, in April, Sri Ramakrishna went to see Keshab at the Lily Cottage. A short account of this visit has been given in this section.

Sri Ramakrishna's affection for Keshab; he vows to offer a green coconut and sugar to the Mother of the Universe

Today Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the parlour of the Lily Cottage with the devotees – Sunday, 2 April 1882, 21st Chaitra, 1288 (B.Y.), 5 p.m. A message is sent to Keshab who is in an inside room. He dresses himself in a shirt and cloth and comes to salute Sri Ramakrishna. He was going to see his friend, Kalinath Basu, who was ill. But he cannot go since Sri Ramakrishna has arrived. Thakur says, "You're a very busy man. Besides, you have to write for a newspaper. You don't have time to come to Dakshineswar, so I've come here to see you. Because of your illness I vowed to offer green coconut and sugar to the Divine Mother. I said, 'Mother, if anything happens to Keshab, whom shall I talk to in Calcutta?'"

Sri Ramakrishna has a long conversation with Pratap and other Brahma devotees. Noticing M. sitting close by, he [Thakur] says to Keshab, “Why doesn’t he come to Dakshineswar? Ask him, my dear. He’s said many times that his mind is not attached to his wife and children.” It has only been a month and a few days that M. has started to visit Sri Ramakrishna. For the last few days, he has not done so. That’s why Thakur is saying this. Thakur had told him that if his visit was delayed, he should write him a letter.

Introducing Samadhyayi, the Brahma devotees say to Thakur, “He is a learned man, well-versed in the Vedas and other holy books.” Thakur says, “Yes, I can see inside him by looking through his eyes, just as the inside of a room is visible through a glass door.”

Trailokya sings. Evening lamps are lighted while he sings. The singing continues. Listening to the song, Thakur suddenly stands up and, chanting the name of the Divine Mother, goes into samadhi.

Returning somewhat to normal consciousness, he begins to dance and sing to himself:

I drink no ordinary wine, but the nectar of everlasting bliss, as I repeat “Jai Kali – to Kali, victory!”

Seeing me drunk on this wine of the mind, by drunkards am I taken for a drunk.

But my mind is drunk on drops of wine by knowledge¹ distilled from the molasses of the mantra, the guru’s gift, and by the ferment of my own determination.

1. Jnana, knowledge of God.

Filled full with the Mother's nectar is the vessel of this body, which I purify by uttering Tara's name.

Drink of this wine, says Prasad, and the four fruits of life shall be yours.¹

Thakur looks at Keshab with eyes full of affection, as if he is his very own, fearing that he may lose him; in other words, he might become entangled in worldly life. He looks at him and sings:

Afraid am I to speak the word to you; equally afraid am I not to speak it.

The fear that arises in my mind is that I may lose you, yes, be robbed of you, my wealth, my treasure!

Knowing well your mind, we shall teach you the *mantra* (holy name) that is to bring you to the Beloved.

Now ready yourself to receive that *mantra* which enabled us on many occasions to steer the ship safely to land.

“Knowing well your mind, we shall teach you the *mantra* (holy name) that is to bring you to the Beloved.’ In other words, call on God, renouncing all else. Only God is Real, all else is ephemeral. If you haven't attained Him, nothing has been achieved. This is the great secret.”

Thakur sits down again and talks to the devotees.

They prepare to serve him refreshments. A Brahma devotee is playing the piano on one side of the hall. Sri Ramakrishna smiles and goes to stand near the piano. Like a child, he looks at it. After

1. Dharma (righteousness), artha (material comfort), kama (enjoyment), and moksha (liberation).

awhile, he is taken to the inner apartments for refreshments. The ladies will salute him there.

After refreshments he boards a carriage. All the Brahmo devotees stand near the carriage. It leaves Lily Cottage for the Dakshineswar Temple.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Kedar's festival at Dakshineswar

Sri Ramakrishna is talking to Kedar and other devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is Sunday, 13 August 1882, Amavasya, 29th day of Shravana, 1289 (B.Y.), the time about five o'clock.

Kedar Chatterji's home is in Hali-shahar. He is an accountant in government service. For a long time he had been in Dhaka where Vijay Goswami used to talk endlessly about Sri Ramakrishna. Hearing about God, his eyes would become filled with tears. He used to be a member of the Brahmo Samaj.

Thakur is sitting with devotees on the southern verandah of his room. Ram, Manomohan, Surendra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, M. and many other devotees are present. Kedar is celebrating a festival. The whole day passes in joy. During the singing by a master singer whom Ram has brought, Thakur goes into samadhi. He is sitting on the smaller cot in his room. M. and other devotees are sitting at his feet.

The nature of samadhi and harmony of religions: Hindus, Muslims and Christians

When he speaks, Thakur explains the nature of samadhi. He says, "You attain samadhi when you have realized Sat-chit-ananda. Then all duty drops off. What is the use of talking about Him in that state? How long does a bee hum? Till it sits on a

flower. But giving up duties is not for an aspirant. He must practice worship, the chanting of His name, meditation, various devotions and pilgrimages.

“If a person reasons after realizing God, it’s like a bee buzzing softly while it sips honey.”

The musician sings beautifully. Sri Ramakrishna is delighted to hear him. He says to the musician, “A person who has a great talent, such as music, has a special manifestation of the power of God.”

Musician: “Sir, how can a person realize God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Love for God¹ is what is essential. God resides in everything, so whom do I call a devotee? The person whose mind ever dwells on God. This doesn’t happen if one is egoistic and proud. The water of God’s grace does not collect on the hill of ‘I-ness’; it runs off. I am only an instrument.

(To Kedar and the other devotees) “You can reach God by treading any path, all religions are true. You have to climb up onto the roof with the help of something. You can go by brick steps, by wooden steps, and you can also do it with the help of a bamboo ladder or a rope. You can even climb with the help of a bamboo pole.

“If you say that there are shortcomings and wrong conduct in their religion, I say, let it be. There are flaws in all religions. Everybody thinks his watch gives the correct time. But it is yearning

1. Bhakti.

that is essential. It is enough if you yearn for Him; love for God and attraction to Him makes for success. He is the inner controller.¹ He sees the inner attraction, the yearning of the mind. Think of a father of many boys. Some of the older ones call him baba or papa very clearly. The younger ones can only utter ba or pa. Does the father get angry with the young ones? The father knows they're calling him even though they can't pronounce his name properly. All children are equal in the eye of a father.

“And also, devotees call God by different names. But they're calling the same person. A pond has four ghats. When Hindus take water from one, they call it 'jal'; Muslims take water from another and call it 'pani'; Englishmen take it from yet another ghat and call it 'water'. And there are others who call it 'aqua'. But God is one, though his names are different.”

Chapter II

At a circus – Sri Ramakrishna and difficult problems of people in the world

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the door of Vidyasagar's school in Shyampukur in a hired hackney carriage. It is about three o'clock. He has taken M. with him, as well as Rakhal and one or two other devotees. Today is 15 November 1882, 30th of Kartik, the 5th day of the bright fortnight. The carriage gradually proceeds towards the Maidan of the fort via Chitpur Road.

1. Antaryamin.

Sri Ramakrishna is filled with joy. As though intoxicated or like a child, he leans out this side of the carriage, then the other. He talks to the devotees about the pedestrians. He says to M., “Look, I see that these people are interested in earthly things. They’re intent on their stomachs – they don’t think about God.”

Today Sri Ramakrishna is going to the Maidan to see the Wilson Circus. When they arrive, they buy the cheapest tickets of the lowest class, totaling eight annas. The devotees take him to a high gallery and sit on a bench. Thakur says happily, “Very nice. You can see well from here.” He watches different feats in the circus ring for a long time. Then he sees a horse running around the ring with an Englishwoman standing on one foot on its back. There are big iron hoops suspended over the track and when the horse nears them, it runs under them and the lady jumps through them, landing on the horse’s back again and balancing on one foot. The horse runs swiftly around the circular track again with the lady standing on its back as before.

The circus show is over. Thakur comes down from the gallery and goes with the devotees to the Maidan near the carriage. It is chilly. He is wearing a green cloth and talks to the devotees there in the maidan. One of the devotees has a small pouch of spices in his hand. The main spice is cubeb.

**First practice spiritual life, then lead family life – yoga
of practice**

Sri Ramakrishna says to M, “See how the Englishwoman stands on one foot on the horse’s back while it gallops around the ring. How difficult

it is. She's practiced it for a long time – that's how she can do it. A little carelessness on her part and she could break an arm or leg. She could even die. Family life is just as difficult. Very few people can lead it successfully, and then only by the grace of God and after having practiced spiritual disciplines. Most people can't do it. Domestic life brings much bondage. It drowns a person and makes him suffer deathlike pangs. A very few, like Janaka, were able to live in the family after practicing for a long time. Practicing spiritual disciplines is truly necessary. Without it, a person can't live rightly in the world."

Sri Ramakrishna in Balaram's house

Sri Ramakrishna gets into the carriage. It reaches the door of Balaram's house in Bosepara, Baghbazar. Thakur goes with the devotees to the parlour on the first floor. Evening lamps have been lit. Thakur talks about the circus. A number of devotees have assembled and Thakur talks about many spiritual things with them. He talks only about God.

Sri Ramakrishna, the caste system and problem of untouchables solved

Now the conversation turns to discrimination about castes. Thakur says, "There is a way to extinguish caste difference. That way is bhakti, or love for God. A devotee knows no caste. Love for God cleanses the body, the mind and soul. Gaur and Nitai spread the name of Hari and embraced all, including the pariah. A brahmin is no brahmin without love for God, and a pariah is no longer a

pariah when he has love for God. An untouchable becomes pure, sanctified, by love for God.”

A worldly man is a bound soul

Sri Ramakrishna talks about worldly men: “They are like silkworms. They can come out of their cocoons if they want to, but they’ve made them with such effort they can’t give them up. So they die there. Or they’re like fish in a trap¹ which can come out through the hole they have entered but, enjoying the sweet sound of water and swimming about with other fish, they get lost and don’t even try to come out. The lispings of children is the sweet sound of the water. The other fish are other people and the family. Only one or two swim out. They are called liberated souls.”

Thakur sings:

What charm Mahamaya has exercised
that even Brahma and Vishnu remain in the dark,
what to speak of a human being!
The bamboo ghurni trap is laid,
fish enter into them.
There is a way to exit,
but the fish do not escape.

Thakur continues: “Individual souls are like lentils fallen between millstones. They will be ground to powder. Only a few grains stick to the peg and are not crushed. So you have to take refuge next to the peg, with God. You have to call on Him,

1. Ghurni: A bamboo trap with big holes allowing fish to come in with the flow of water.

chant His name. That alone will bring you liberation. Otherwise, you will be ground in the millstone of death.¹

Thakur sings again:

Mother, having fallen into the ocean of the world, this boat of the body is sinking.

O Shankari, the tempest of delusion and the storm of attachment are gradually rising.

The helmsman of the mind is incompetent, its six boatmen² are stupid.

Having fallen into a whirlpool, I am struggling, shouting, "I sink, I sink!"

The oar of devotion is broken, the sail of faith torn, so, my boat is out of control.

What can I do? No remedy do I see.

Feeling helpless I fight the waves, I try to catch the boat of Durga's name.

Duty to wife and children

Vishwas Babu had been sitting in the room for a long time. He gets up now and leaves. He had been wealthy, but squandered it all in a depraved life. Now he doesn't even take care of his wife, daughter and family. When Balaram talked to Thakur about him, he said, "He is a spendthrift. A householder has duties and debts – to gods, to the father, to rishis, and also to the members of the family. A chaste wife must be provided for. And also children till they are grown and can stand on their own feet."

1. Kala.

2. Probably a reference to the six passions: lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy.

“Only a sadhu doesn’t have to save for the future. Birds and monks don’t save. But birds bring food in their beaks for their chicks.”

Balaram: “Now Vishwas wants to keep the company of holy men.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): “The Kamandalu of a sadhu moves around to all four holy centres of pilgrimage,¹ but it remains just as bitter as before. The malaya breeze turns every tree that it touches into sandalwood. But the cotton, the ashwattha and the hog-plum do not become sandalwood trees. Some people keep the company of sadhus to be able to smoke hemp. (*Laughter.*) Don’t the sadhus smoke hemp? So others sit with them to prepare the hemp and get some as prasad.” (*All laugh.*)

Chapter III

Visit to the six-armed image of Chaitanya and to Rajmohan’s house – Narendra

Sri Ramakrishna has come to Calcutta on the day following his visit to the circus at Fort Maidan. It is Thursday, 16 November 1882, the sixth day of the bright fortnight of Kartik, the first of Agrahayana. Reaching Calcutta, he first goes to visit the image of Chaitanya with six arms at Granhatta.² It is a centre for Vaishnava sadhus, Giridhari Das its chief priest. The six-armed Mahaprabhu has been worshipped here for some time. Thakur visits at dusk.

1. Dham.

2. Now known as Neemtala Street.

Some time after dusk, Thakur goes by hackney carriage to Rajmohan's house in Shimulia. He has been told that Narendra and other young men perform the Brahma Samaj service here. That is why he has come. M and one or two other devotees are with him. Rajmohan is an old Brahma member.

**Brahmo devotee and complete renunciation or
sannyasa**

Thakur is happy to see Narendra and says, "I'll watch how you worship." Narendra begins to sing. Priya and some other young men were present.

Worship now begins. One of the young men performs it. He prays, "Lord, grant that we may renounce everything else and become absorbed in You." It seems he has been inspired by seeing Sri Ramakrishna and so is talking of complete renunciation. M. is seated very close to Thakur and is the only one to hear him say in a very soft whisper, "Not much likelihood of that!"

Rajmohan takes the master inside the house to serve him some refreshments.

Chapter IV

**Sri Ramakrishna in the houses of Manomohan and
Surendra**

Sri Jagadhatri Puja will fall on next Sunday, 19 November 1882. Surendra has invited Thakur to his home today. He impatiently goes in and out of the house waiting for Thakur to come. Seeing M.,

1. He is probably referring to Narendra.

he says, “You have come. But where is he?” Just then Thakur arrives by carriage.

Manomohan’s house is quite close. Thakur has first gone there to rest awhile before going to Surendra’s house. In Manomohan’s parlour, he said, “God likes the devotion of a person who is humble and poor. Like a cow loves fodder mixed with oil-cake. Duryodhana showed his wealth and splendour, but the Lord didn’t go to his house. He went to Vidura’s. He is the gracious loving Lord of his devotee. He runs after a devotee the way a cow runs behind after her calf.”

Thakur sings:

The ecstasy for which the exalted yogi practices yoga,
like a magnet attracting iron does the Lord pull.

“Tears used to flow from Chaitanya’s eyes when he heard the name of Krishna. Only God is substantial, all else is illusory. The man, if he so wishes, can realize God. But he remains addicted to the enjoyment of ‘lust and greed.’ Though a snake has a jewel on its head, it is happy to eat a frog.

“Love for God is the essential thing. Who can know God through reasoning? I want love of God. Why do I need to know His boundless glories? If I can become inebriated by only one bottle of wine, why do I need to know how much wine is in the wine shop? A pot of water is enough to quench my thirst. Why do I need to know how much water is on the earth?”

**Surendra and judge Sadarwala – caste distinction.
Caste system and problem of untouchables solved –
Theosophy**

Sri Ramakrishna now arrives at Surendra's house. He goes in and sits in the parlour on the first floor. The brother of Surendra, Sadarwala, is also present. Many devotees have gathered together in the room. Thakur says to Surendra's brother, "You are a judge, that's good. But please remember that it is God's power through which everything happens. You have this high post because it is He who has granted it. People think they are great. But it is water on the roof that flows down the drain pipe which ends in the shape of a lion's mouth – it looks like the water's coming out of a lion's mouth. But see where the water is coming from. In the sky is a cloud that rains down on the roof. Then the water flows down the drain pipe and comes out through the lion's mouth."

Surendra's brother: "Sir, they talk of freedom of women in the Brahma Samaj and say, 'Discrimination between castes must be abolished.' What do you think?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "People think like that when they have first developed love for God. A strong wind raises a lot of dust. Then you can't distinguish a mango tree from other trees. You can only see well when the tempest has blown over. When the first tempest of divine love has blown over, you gradually come to see that only God is the eternal substance¹ and all else is transitory. Without the company of the holy and the practice of austerity,

1. Shreya.

you can't realize this. What good is it to read the musical notation of a drum? It is very difficult to put them in practice. What use is there in just lecturing? You have to practice austerities. Only through them will you be able to realize.

“Distinction between the castes? There is only one way to wipe it away. That way is love for God. An untouchable becomes pure. An outcaste¹ is no longer an outcaste after attaining love for God. Chaitanya Deva embraced all, including outcastes.

“Brahmos chant the name of Hari. That's very good. If you call on God with a heart full of yearning, He will shower His grace, He will be realized.

“You can reach him by any path. God is one, but he is called various names. Hindus, for example, take water from one spot at a pond and call it jal. At another spot, Christians take water and call it water, and yet at another, Muslims take water and call it pani.”

Surendra's brother: “Sir, what do you think of Theosophy?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I was told that it leads to supernatural powers – miracles. At Deomodal's house I saw a fellow who had attained mastery over a ghost. The ghost would fetch a number of different things. What shall I do with occult powers? Does it help to realize God? If God can't be attained by them, they're all illusion.”

1. Pariah.

Section III

Sri Ramakrishna at the Brahma Festival Celebrated at Mani Mallick's

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has kindly agreed to visit Mani Mallick's Sinduriapatti house in Calcutta with the devotees. A Brahma Samaj Festival is celebrated there every year. It is 4 p.m. on 26 November, 1882, the annual festival day. Vijaykrishna Goswami, many Brahma devotees, Premahand Baral and many friends of Mani's are there. M is also present.

Manilal has arranged for elaborate entertainment. The life of Prahlada will be read, followed by a Brahma worship. Then all the devotees will be served prasad.

Vijay is still a member of the Brahma Samaj. He will conduct today's service. He has not yet put on the ochre robes of a sannyasin.

Prahlada's life is being narrated. Hiranyakashipu, the father of Prahlada, speaks ill of the Lord and tortures his son repeatedly. Prahlada prays to Lord Hari with folded hands, "O Hari, grant right understanding to my father." Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to weep. Vijay and others are sitting close to him. Thakur is in a state of ecstasy.

**Sri Ramakrishna advises Vijay Goswami and other
Brahmo devotees – teaching mankind only after
attaining vision of God and His command**

After awhile, Thakur says to Vijay and other devotees, “Bhakti is the essential thing. You acquire love for God by constantly chanting His name and glories. Ah! How great is Shivanath’s love for God! Like a rasagolla.¹

“It isn’t good to think that only your religion is right and all others are wrong. A person can reach God by any path. Success is achieved by developing sincere yearning for God. As many beliefs – so many paths.

“Look here, God can be seen. He is beyond mind and speech – ‘avāñmanoagocara’. The Vedas say this. It means that He is invisible to a mind attached to worldly things. Vaishnavcharan used to say, ‘He is visible to the pure intellect and the pure mind.’² That’s why the company of the holy, prayer and the instruction of a preceptor (guru) are needed. They purify the chit (mind-stuff). That leads to God-vision. Muddy water can be cleaned by putting nirmali³ in it. So much so that you can see your own face in it. You can’t see your face in a dirty mirror.

1. A cheese ball soaked in syrup.

2. mana eva manuşyāñāñ kārāñāñ bandhamokşayoḥ |
bandhāya vişayāsaktāñ muktyai nirvişayañ smṛtamiti ||
mairāyañi upanişad 4-10

[It is indeed the mind that is cause of men's bondage and liberation. The mind attached to sense objects leads to bondage while dissociated from sense-objects, it leads to liberation. So do the wise think.]

3. A fruit that cleans water.

“You attain God’s vision by His grace, after you have attained love for Him, when your chitta has been cleansed. After God’s vision, you have to receive His command before teaching people. It’s not good to lecture before that. There’s a song that says:

O mind, what are you thinking about, sitting all alone?
Without deep love, can the moon of Gaur appear?

You have not dived into the love of Hari through your life.

Eleven bats are creating confusion within your temple day and night.

You have not installed Madhava in your temple. In vain do you make noise blowing on the conch.

“The temple of the heart must first be cleaned if you want to install the Lord’s image there to worship. Nothing has been done, you are only blowing the conch. What good is that?”

Now Vijay Goswami goes to the altar and sits down. He conducts worship according to the Brahma regulations. After that, he comes and sits close to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): “Why do you people harp so much on sin? By saying, ‘I am a sinner, I am a sinner’ a hundred times, you become a sinner. Instead, you should have such faith that, because you have chanted His name, you think, how can sin attach to me? He is our Father, He is our Mother. Just tell Him that you will not repeat the sins you have committed. Then chant His name. Purify your mind, body and tongue completely with His name.”

Chapter II

Conversation about free will with Baburam and others – Totapuri resolves to commit suicide

Sri Ramakrishna is talking in the verandah to the west of his room at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is evening. Baburam, M. and Ramdayal are with him. It is December, 1882. Baburam, Ramdayal and M. are going to stay for the night. They are on Christmas holiday. M. plans to stay on the next day. Recently Baburam has started visiting Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “A person is liberated when he realizes that everything is being done by God. Once Keshab Sen came with Sambhu Mallick. I said to him, ‘Not even a leaf flutters on a tree except by God’s will. Where is free will?’ Everything is done by the will of God. Such a big man of knowledge, Nangta¹ was! But even he went to drown himself. He was here for eleven months. He was suffering from stomach trouble. Unable to bear pain of the disease, he went to drown himself in the Ganges. There was a long body of silt near the bathing steps. No matter how far he went into the water, he didn’t feel water above his knees. He then understood and came back. Once I was severely depressed. I was going to cut my throat with a knife. So I say, ‘Mother, I am only an instrument and You are the operator; I am a chariot, You the charioteer. I move as You make me move. I do what You make me do.’”

1. Totapuri.

There is music in Thakur's room. The devotees are singing:

O Kamalapati,¹ the lover of bhakti, if you dwell in the Vrindavan of my heart, my devotion to you will be like that of chaste Radha.

My wish for liberation will be like the milkmaids, and my body will be like the village of Nanda; my love will be like that of mother Yashoda.

Hold me, hold me, O Janardhana.² Lift the Govardhan weight of my sins.³ Kill quickly the six messengers of kamsa, lust and so on.

Play on your flute of grace and tame the cows of my mind. I pray that You remain in this pasture of my heart and that I may have a glimpse of my ideal.

Dwell now and evermore with your heart full of affection for your servant under the Vanshivatta⁴ of hope.

If you say that you are a prisoner of the love of the cowherds of Braja, then this Dasharathi, bereft of all spiritual knowledge, will become a cowherd and your slave.

Then they sang:

Sing, O bird in the cage of my heart.

Sitting under the wish-fulfilling tree of Brahman,

Sing, sing Its divine qualities,

And eat the ripe fruits of righteousness, wealth, legitimate desires and freedom.

Sreenath Mishra from Nandanbagan has arrived with friends. Looking at him, Thakur says, "I see everything within him through his eyes like

1. The husband of Kamala (Goddess Lakshmi).

2. A name of Lord Vishnu; the vanquisher of the demon Jana.

3. Krishna had lifted Mount Govardhan on his finger. So, the lifting the weight of sins means to mitigate the effects of sins.

4. A banyan tree at Vrindavan under which Krishna played his flute.

you see everything through a glass door.” Sreenath, Srijnanath and the others belong to the Brahmo family of Nandan Bagan. Every year they celebrate a Brahmo festival at their house. Later, Thakur went there to take part in the festival.

After the evening arati is performed in the temple and sitting on the smaller cot in his room, Thakur meditates on God. Gradually he goes into ecstasy. When it has left him, he says, “Mother, attract him, too. He lives so very humbly. He visits You regularly.”

Is Thakur talking about Baburam?

Baburam, M., Ramdayal and some others are sitting on the floor. It is between eight and nine at night. Thakur explains the nature of different kinds of samadhi: *jada samadhi*,¹ *chetana samadhi*,² *stitha samadhi*³ and *unmana samadhi*.⁴

Vidyasagar and Genghis Khan. Is God cruel? Sri Ramakrishna’s answer

They now talk of happiness and sorrow – why has God created so much pain?

M.: “Vidyasagar says, irritated, ‘What is the use of calling on God? When Genghis Khan began looting, he took a great number of prisoners, almost a hundred thousand. The commanders of his army went to him and said, ‘Sir, what shall we give them

1. Communion with God in which the aspirant appears lifeless, like an inert object.

2. Communion with God while being conscious of I-ness, aware of a relationship with God.

3. *Stitha* samadhi means steady samadhi.

4. *Unmana* samadhi means sudden samadhi.

to eat? It's great trouble to keep them all with us. What can we do? Releasing them will also create problems.' Genghis Khan said, 'What else can we do? Just kill them all!' Thus were they ordered to be beheaded. Didn't God see this massacre? He didn't help at all. If He is there, let Him be, but I don't find any need for Him. Nothing good has come to me from Him.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can anyone understand what God is doing and for what purpose? He creates, preserves and dissolves – all of these. How can we know why He destroys? I say, 'Mother, I have no need to understand, only grant me love and devotion for Your feet.' The aim of man's life is to achieve love for God. The rest of it the Mother knows. I've come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Why do I need to sit down and count how many trees, how many branches and how many millions of leaves there are? I just eat mangoes. I don't need to keep account of trees and leaves."

Tonight Baburam, M. and Ramdayal sleep on the floor in Thakur's room.

Early in the morning, about 2 or 3 o'clock, the light in Thakur's room is lowered. Thakur, sitting on his bed, talks to them now and then.

**Sri Ramakrishna, Baburam, M. and others -
compassion and maya – hard austerities and
realization of God**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and the other devotees*):
"Look here, compassion and maya are two different things. Maya is like attachment to father, mother, brother, sister, wife and son – love for them. On the

other hand, compassion is love for everybody, the same regard for all. When you see compassion in a person, say Vidyasagar, know that it comes from God. By compassion a person serves all living beings. Maya also comes from God. He makes people serve their relatives through maya. But then, this is the point – maya makes a person ignorant – it binds. But compassion purifies the mind and gradually frees the person from bondage.

“Without purity of the mind, one cannot realize God. His grace dawns when desire, anger, greed and all that has been overcome. Let me tell you something very secret. I did many things to overcome lust. I circumambulated the ananda-asana¹ several times, saying, ‘Victory to Kali, Victory to Kali.’

“When I was 10 or 11 years old and in my village, I experienced the state of samadhi. I saw something when I was walking across a field. I was completely overwhelmed. There are signs of God-vision. You see light, feel joy, and feel the mahavayu² rising like a rocket up into the chest.”

Baburam and Ramdayal left for their homes the next day but M. stayed with Thakur through the following night. He took his meals from the temple.

1. A sexual union of man and woman according to Tantra.

2. A current felt in the spinal column when the kundalini is awakened.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with Marwari Devotees at Dakshineswar

It is afternoon. M. and a couple of devotees are here. Many Marwari¹ devotees enter and salute. They have business in Calcutta. Coming to Thakur, they say, “Kindly advise us.” Thakur laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Marwari devotees*): “Look, ‘I’ and ‘mine’ both mean ignorance. O Lord, You are the doer and everything is Yours. This is spiritual knowledge. Then how can you say that a certain thing is ‘mine’? The guard of the orchard says: It is my garden. But if he makes a mistake, the owner dismisses him. Then he doesn’t even have the courage to take his mango-wood box² with him. Desire, anger and these things don’t leave you. So turn them towards God. If you have desire, if you are greedy, have desire and greed to attain God. Reason this out and turn away from them. When an elephant begins to eat somebody’s banana plant, the mahout strikes it with his goad.

“You people are in business. You know very well that a person becomes successful only gradually. Somebody may install a castor oil factory, but when he’s earned more money, he opens a cloth shop. In the same way, a person has to proceed up the path to God. When you’ve gone higher, maybe you’ll live in solitude now and then and call upon Him more intensely.

1. People of Rajasthan who migrated to Kolkata to trade and do business there.

2. Meaning an object of trifling value.

“But then, nothing happens before its time. Some people have to experience a lot of worldly enjoyment. So it happens late. If you cut open a boil before it’s ripe, the result is the opposite of what is good. When it is ripe and oozes pus, the doctor uses his knife. A child said to its mother, ‘Wake me up when I have to go to the toilet.’ His mother replied, ‘Child, you’ll know when you have to go. I won’t have to wake you up.’” (*Everyone laugh.*)

**Telling lies in business and Marwari devotees –
chanting the name of Rama**

The Marwari devotees sometimes bring sweets, fruits, sugar candy and other things for Thakur. The sugar candy is scented with the fragrance of roses. But Thakur doesn’t eat any of these things. He says, “These people tell so many lies to make money.” He casually tells the Marwaris present, “You see, you can’t be absolutely truthful in business. There are always ups and downs. Nanak once said, ‘When I went to eat something at a worldly man’s house, I saw it stained with blood.’ Holy men should only be given pure things. Nothing earned by dishonest means should be given to them. Truth is attained by the path of truth.¹

1. satyena labhyastapasā hyeṣa ātmā

samyagiñānena brahmacaryeṇa nityam

muṇḍakopaniṣat 3-1-5

[This Atman is verily attainable through truth, concentration, complete knowledge and continence, practiced constantly.]

satyameva jayate nāṇṛtaṁ

muṇḍakopaniṣat 3-1-6

[Truth alone wins and not untruth.]

“A person should always repeat God’s name. While working, keep your mind on Him. It’s like this: I have a boil on my back. I attend to all my work, but my mind remains on the boil. Repeating Rama’s name is good. Rama, the son of Dasharatha, is also He who has created the world and who dwells in all. He is very near to you – within and without.

Rama, who was the son of Dasharatha, dwells within all.

The same Rama has created the world, this Rama is best of all.

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna in Joyful Singing at the House of Govinda Mukherji in a Village in Belgharia – With Narendra and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is visiting Govinda Mukherji in Belgharia. Today is Sunday, 18 February 1883, the 7th day of Falgun, the 12th day of the bright fortnight of Magha, the constellation of Pushya.¹ Narendra, Ram, other devotees and a neighbour are also there. By seven or eight o'clock in the morning, Thakur dances with Narendra and others during the kirtan.

Advice to people in Belgharia – why salute? Why the path of devotion?

When the singing is ended, everybody sits down. Many of them salute Thakur. Now and then he says, “Offer your salutations to God.” And he adds, “It is He Himself who dwells in all forms, though there is greater manifestation of His power in some – for example, in holy people. You might say there are wicked people as well as tigers, but you don't have to embrace God in the tiger. Just salute him from a distance and then go away. Think of water. Some water is fit for drinking and some fit for offering worship. But some is used for bathing. Also, there's water to gargle with and water used for the toilet.”

1. The 8th of the twenty-seven stars according to Hindu astronomy.

Neighbour: “Sir, what are the doctrines of Vedanta?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Vedantists say, ‘So ‘ham, I am He’ – Brahman is the Reality, the world is an illusion. The ego is also an illusion. Only the Supreme Brahman exists.

“But this I-ness doesn’t go away. So it’s good to have the feeling, ‘I am His servant,’ or ‘I am His child,’ or ‘I am His devotee.’

“For the Kaliyuga, the path of devotion is especially good. God can be realized by love and devotion. As long as you have body-consciousness, you are conscious of objects – form, taste, smell, sound, and touch. These are all sense objects. It’s very difficult to get rid of the consciousness of sense objects. As long as you are conscious of objects, you can’t say, ‘I am He.’”

“People of renunciation have less consciousness of worldly things, but worldly people are always thinking about them. So the attitude, ‘I am Thy servant’² is good for them.”

The theory of sin and the residents of Belgharia

Neighbour: “We are sinners. What will happen to us?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “When you chant God’s name, all sins of the body fly away. The bird of sin is

1. avyaktā hi gatirduḥkham dehavadbhiravāpyate ||

gītā 12-5

[for the goal of the Unmanifest is very hard for the embodied to reach.]

2. Daso ‘ham [So ‘ham means “I am He”; Daso ‘ham means “I am the servant of God”].

perched on the tree of the body. Chanting His name is like clapping your hands. As you clap, all the birds on the tree fly away. Sin flies away when you chant His name and glory.¹

“Look, water in a reservoir dug in a dry field dries up by the heat of the sun. In the same way, the water of the reservoir of sin evaporates by chanting His name and glories.

“You have to practice every day. At the circus I saw an English woman standing on the back of a horse on one foot while it galloped around the track. How much practice was necessary to achieve that!

“Weep at least once to see God.

“There are two ways: practice and love for God – that is to say, yearning to see Him.”

Singing of the six spiritual centers by the resident of Belgharia and Sri Ramakrishna’s samadhi

Thakur is having his meal with devotees on the verandah of the parlour on the first floor. It is one o’clock. No sooner is the meal over than a devotee begins to sing in the courtyard below.

Awake, awake Mother.

How long have you been asleep in the Muladhara, O Mother Kulkundalini?

Hearing the song, Thakur goes into samadhi. His whole body is stiff, his hand remaining on the plate as in a picture. There is no more eating. After

1. māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja | ahaṁ tvāṁ sarvapāpebhyo
mokṣayaiṣyāmi
gītā 18-66

[Take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate you from all sins.]

a long time, when his ecstatic mood has somewhat passed, he says, “I want to go downstairs. I want to go downstairs.”

A devotee takes him down with great care.

It was in this courtyard this morning that Thakur had danced joyfully in ecstasy while God’s name had been chanted. The carpet and seats are still there. Thakur is still in an ecstatic mood. He walks over and sits close to the singer, who has by now stopped singing. In a most humble way, Thakur says, “Sir, I would like very much to hear the Mother’s name again.”

The singer sings:

Awake, awake Mother,

How long have you been asleep in the Muladhara, O Mother Kulkundalini?

Accomplish Your work. Rise to the head where the Supreme Shiva sits on a thousand- petalled lotus.

O my Mother, piercing through the six spiritual centres, O Mother, the image of consciousness, erase the pain of my heart.

Listening to the song, Thakur goes into ecstasy again.

Chapter II

Thakur with devotees at Dakshineswar on the new moon day¹ – his maternal love for Rakhhal

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room with Rakhhal and some other devotees. Today, Friday 9

1. Amavasya.

March 1883, the 26th day of Falgun, Amavasya in the month of Magha, time about 8 or 9 in the morning.

Thakur is always inspired by the Mother of the Universe on a new moon day. He says, “‘God alone is Reality, everything else is unreal.’ The Divine Mother has enchanted everyone with Her spell.¹ Of men, most are bound. They suffer so much pain and sorrow. But they remain attached to ‘lust and greed’. Blood streams from the mouth of a camel when it eats thorny bushes. But it doesn’t stop eating them. When a woman in labour pain says, ‘My sister, I am not going to be with my husband again’ – she forgets.

“Look, nobody seeks God. Leaving aside the fruit of the pineapple, people eat the leaves.”

Devotee: “Sir, why does God keep us in worldly life?”

Why the world? To purify the mind through selfless work

Sri Ramakrishna: “The world is the field of action. A person attains spiritual knowledge through work. The guru says, ‘Do this work but don’t do that.’ He advises you to perform work without expectation of any reward.² The mind is purified through work. Whatever disease you may be suffering from will be cured when you take the medicine prescribed by a good doctor.

“Why doesn’t He free you from the world? He will do so when you are cured. He’ll free you when

1. Mahamaya.

2. Karmanyevādhikāraṇe gītā 2-47 [Your right is to work only.]

you have rid yourself of the desire to enjoy ‘woman and gold’. Having been registered as a patient in the hospital, you can’t run away. As long as your disease is not fully cured, your doctor won’t discharge you.”

These days Thakur, like Yashoda, overflows with motherly love. That’s why he has kept Rakhal with him. Thakur has a mother’s love for Rakhal. Just as a child sits close to the lap of its mother to suck milk from her breast, Rakhal leans onto Thakur’s lap.

**Sri Ramakrishna watches the flood-tide of the Ganges
with the devotees**

Thakur is in the same mood when someone comes to give news that the flood-tide of the river is about to rise. Thakur, Rakhal, M. and all the others run toward the Panchavati to see it. They stand at the edge of the Panchavati to watch. It is about half past ten.

Seeing a boat in distress Thakur says, “Look! God knows what’s going to happen to that boat.”

Now he sits on the path to the Panchavati with M., Rakhal and the others.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “What causes the flood-tide?”

M. draws a diagram on the ground and tries to explain the position of the earth, moon, sun, gravitation, flood-tide, ebb-tide, the full-moon day, the darkest day, an eclipse, and so on.

**Sri Ramakrishna in school during his childhood – a
yogi is beyond all finite relationships of number,
quantity, cause and effect**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Stop it! I can’t understand. It makes me feel giddy. My head is aching! How can they know things so far away?”

“You see, in childhood I could draw good pictures, but Subhankar’s arithmetic confused me. I couldn’t learn arithmetic.”

Thakur now returns to his room. Looking at Yashoda’s picture on the wall, he says, “This picture isn’t done well. She looks like a flower-girl.”

**First meeting with Adhar Sen – talk about animal
sacrifice**

After the midday meal, Thakur rests awhile. Adhar Sen and other devotees gradually assemble. It is Adhar Sen’s first visit to Thakur. His home is in Benetola in Calcutta. He is a Deputy Magistrate, 29 or 30 years old.

Circumstances and non-violence

Adhar (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Sir, I have a question to ask. Is it all right to sacrifice an animal to the Deity? This involves killing.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The scriptures say that sacrifices can be made on special occasions. There’s no harm doing it according to injunctions. For example, the sacrifice of a goat on the 8th day of the lunar month. But it can’t be done in all situations. I’m in the state now when I can’t stand the sight. I can’t eat the meat offered to the Divine Mother. So I touch it and make a tilak mark with it on my forehead so She won’t be angry with me later.

“And sometimes I’m in a state when I see God in all beings – even in ants. In that state when I see someone die, I have the consolation that only the body is destroyed, that there is no death of the soul.¹”

Advice to Adhar – don’t reason too much

“It isn’t good to reason too much. It’s enough to have love and devotion for the lotus feet of the Mother. Too much reasoning leads to utter confusion. If you take water from the surface of the pond here, you will get very clean water. But if you dip your hand deep into it and stir it, the water becomes muddy. So pray to God for love and devotion. Dhruva’s devotion was motivated – he practiced austerities to gain a kingdom. But Prahlada’s devotion was motiveless, *ahetuki bhakti*.”

A Devotee: “How can you attain God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Through this very love for Him. But you have to force your demands on Him. ‘Grant me Your darshan, or I will cut my throat!’ This is called the *tamas* of bhakti.”

The Devotee: “Can God be seen?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, certainly God can be seen. It’s possible to see both God with form and God without form. You can see God with form as Spirit Personified. But He can also be seen as manifest Himself. Seeing an incarnation of God is

1. Bhagavad Gita 2:20.

the same as seeing God Himself. God incarnates in human form in every age.¹”

1. Bhagavad Gita 4:8.

Section V

Sri Ramakrishna with Brahma Devotees at Brahma Samaj in Sinthi

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has arrived at the garden house of Beni Pal in Sinthi, where the semi-annual celebration of the Brahma Samaj is taking place. It is Sunday, 22 April 1883, in the afternoon of the full-moon day of Chaitra, 10th of Vaishakh. Many Brahma devotees have come. They sit around Thakur in the southern courtyard. After twilight Becharam, a teacher of the Samaj, will conduct worship.

The Brahma devotees now and then ask Thakur questions.

A Brahma Devotee: “Sir, what is the way?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The way is devotion – love for God, and prayer.”

The Devotee: “Love or prayer?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Love first, then prayer.”

O mind, call upon the Divine Mother with a real cry. How can Mother Shyama then keep herself from coming?

Sri Ramakrishna sings the song and then continues: “One should chant His name and sing His glories continuously, and pray to Him. An old pot has to be cleaned every day. Cleaning it just once won’t do. And one should practice discrimination and non-attachment, being conscious of the fact that the world is transitory.”

**The Brahma devotee and renunciation of worldly life –
selfless work in the world**

The Brahma Devotee: “Is it good to renounce worldly life?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Renunciation of worldly life is not for everyone. It is not for those whose desire for worldly enjoyment has not yet ended. Can you get drunk on only thirty millilitres of wine?”

The Brahma Devotee: “So they should lead a worldly life?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, they should try to work without expectation of any reward. They should break open the jack-fruit after rubbing their hands with oil. A maid in a rich man’s house attends to all her work, but her mind dwells in her village. This is called working without attachment.¹ It is called renunciation in mind. You should renounce mentally, while a sannyasin should renounce both outwardly and mentally.”

**Brahma devotee and end of worldly enjoyment –
nature of a spiritual woman – when does dispassion
occur?**

The Brahma Devotee: “What is the end of the desire for worldly enjoyment?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Worldly enjoyment means enjoyment of ‘lust and greed’. It is a great problem for a delirious patient to live in a room where tamarind pickles and water are stored. Until a person has enjoyed money, name and fame, bodily comforts and so on – until the desire for worldly

1. Bhagavad Gita 9:27.

enjoyments has ended – he doesn't feel a longing for God."

The Brahma Devotee: "Who is bad, we or women?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are women with spiritual qualities just as there are women who are ignorant of the value of spirituality. A spiritually-minded woman takes you to God and one who is not spiritually-minded makes you forget Him and drown in worldliness.

"This world and worldly life are due to His Mahamaya. In it are both the power of knowledge and power of ignorance. When you take refuge in the power of knowledge, you keep the company of the holy, imbibe spiritual knowledge, love for God, dispassion and so on. In the power of ignorance are all things pertaining to the five elements and the five senses – sight, taste, smell, touch, hearing. They all give worldly enjoyment and make you forget God."

The Brahma Devotee: "If it makes you ignorant, why has God created it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's His divine play. If there were no darkness, you would not realize the importance of light. If there were no sorrow, you wouldn't appreciate happiness. The knowledge of good depends on the knowledge of bad.

"Besides, the fruit of a mango develops and ripens because of its skin. It's only when the fruit is ripe that the skin can be thrown away. It's only when the skin of maya is present that a person can gradually attain the knowledge of Brahman.

Knowledge and ignorance are like the skin of the mango. They are both necessary.”

The Brahma Devotee: “Is it all right to worship a form, or a deity made of clay?”¹

Sri Ramakrishna: “You don’t believe in God with form. That’s all right. The image of God is not meant for you, only the feeling. Just the feeling of attraction, like Radha’s attraction for Krishna. Accept the love. Those who believe in God with form worship Kali, worship Mother Durga. How much they call on Her, crying, ‘Mother, Mother!’ How much they love! Accept that feeling. You don’t have to accept the image.”

The Brahma Devotee: “How do you develop non-attachment? Why doesn’t everyone have it?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You don’t develop non-attachment until the desire for worldly enjoyment is silenced. A child is made to forget everything else by giving him something to eat or a toy to play with. But when his eating and playing are over, he cries, ‘I want mummy!’ If he isn’t taken to his mother, he throws away the doll and screams.”

Sat-chit-ananda Itself is the Guru – after God-realization, rituals such as evening worship end

The Brahma devotees don’t believe in the tradition of gurus. Now they talk about it.

Brahma Devotee: “Sir, is it impossible to attain knowledge of God without a Guru?”

1. Refers to Sri Ramakrishna’s instruction to Keshab – ‘The Goddess of consciousness in the clay image.’

Sri Ramakrishna: “Sat-chit-ananda Himself is the guru. If a man as a guru awakens your spiritual consciousness, it is Sat-chit-ananda Himself who has taken up that form. A guru is a companion who leads you by the hand. After God-realization, the distinction between guru and disciple ceases. ‘It is a very difficult situation when the guru and the disciple can’t differentiate each other.’ That’s why Janaka said to Sukadeva, ‘Please give me the teacher’s fee first if you want the knowledge of Brahman.’ He said this because after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, the guru and the disciple wouldn’t be able to distinguish between each other. As long as there is no vision of God, the relationship of guru and disciple exists.”

The evening gradually sets in. Some of the Brahma devotees say to Thakur, “It must be your time for evening worship.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “No, that’s not so. All this is done somewhat in the beginning. Later, there’s no need for rituals or worship items like *kosha* and *kushi*.¹”

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and the Brahma teacher, Becharam – Vedanta and Brahman

In the evening Becharam, the Adi Brahma Samaj teacher, conducts the service from the pulpit. It is interspersed with Brahma music and reading from the Upanishads. After the service, the teacher

1. Fish-shaped spoons, one larger than the other, used in ritualistic worship.

sits with Sri Ramakrishna and has a long conversation with him.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Well, what is your opinion? Are both God with and without form true?”

**God-with-form, God-without-form, image of
Consciousness and the devotee**

Teacher: “Sir, God without form is like an electric current that you can’t see, but can experience.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, both are true – both God-with-form and formless God. Do you know what it’s like to speak only of God without form? It’s like a person playing only one note on a sanai that has seven holes. Another person plays many different melodies on the instrument. In the same way, people who believe in God-with-form enjoy Him in so many ways – the serene attitude, the attitude of His servant, friendship, with maternal feelings, and of a lover¹ – so many moods.

“Do you know what the heart of the matter is? To fall somehow into the pool of nectar. Whether it is achieved by singing hymns or by being pushed into it by someone, the result is the same. Both ways bring the same immortality.²

1. Shanta, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya and madhura.

2. brahmaivedamamṛtaṁ purastādbrahma paścādbrahma
dakṣiṇataścottareṇa |

adhaścordhvaṁ ca prasṛtaṁ brahmaivedaṁ viśvamideaṁ variṣṭham ||
muṇḍakopaniṣat 2-2-1

[All that is in front is but the immortal Brahman. The immortal Brahman is behind, and also on the right and the left. It reveals everything above and below. This world is nothing but the supreme Brahman.]

“A good illustration for Brahmo devotees is of water and ice. Sat-chit-ananda is like an infinite ocean. At various places in cold places, the water takes the form of ice. In the same way, Sat-chit-ananda Brahman,¹ due to the cooling influence of devotees’ love and devotion for Him, takes forms² for them. The rishis saw His supersensuous Spirit form³ [transcendental] and talked to Him. Devotees see His Spirit form through the body of ecstatic love.⁴

“But then, Brahman is beyond speech and mind. Blocks of ice (God with form) melt under the heat of the sun of knowledge. After attaining the knowledge of Brahman, after attaining nirvikalpa samadhi, He is again the same Infinite, beyond speech and mind, formless Brahman without shape.

“The real nature of Brahman can’t be described in words. One becomes silent. Who can describe the infinite in words? However high a bird may fly, there is still more space above it. What do you say?”

Teacher: “Yes sir. The Vedanta does say that.”

1. Brahman without attributes.

2. Brahman with attributes.

3. Atindriya.

4. prayujyamāne mayi tām śuddhām bhāgavatīm tanum |

ārabdhakarmanirvāṇo nyapatatpāñcabhautikaḥ ||

śrīmadbhāgavata 1-6-29

[Narada said, “I have attained the divine body, pure and omnipresent.” When that Bhagavati-tanu, the divine body of Sudha-Sattva fit for the service of the Lord, was generated in me, my body of the gross material elements fell dead on the exhaustion of that quantum of my karma responsible for the previous embodiment.]

**Brahman without attributes is beyond speech and
mind – beyond the three gunas**

Sri Ramakrishna: “A salt doll went to measure the ocean. It didn’t return to give a report. There’s a view that Sukadeva and others experienced the sight and touch of Brahman – but they did not dive into it.

“I said to Vidyasagar that everything has been polluted by speech – but not Brahman.¹ In other words, nobody has been able to say what Brahman is. The moment you say something, it becomes polluted. Vidyasagar was a learned man. He was pleased to hear this.

“I’ve heard that there are snow-covered mountains near Kedarnath. If you climb very high there you can’t return. Those who climbed them to find out what was there at such great height, or what you’d experience there, never returned to tell about it.

“A man is overwhelmed with Bliss when he attains God’s vision. He can’t utter a word. Who will give the report? Who will explain?

“The king lives behind seven gates. A powerful person sits at every gate. At each gate the disciple asks if it is the king. The guru replies, ‘No. Not this, not this.’ What the disciple sees at the seventh gate strikes him dumb.² He is overwhelmed with joy.¹

1. acintyam avyapadeśyam ... advaitam
māṇḍūkyaopaniṣat 7

2. yato vāco nivartante . aprāpya manasā saha. taittirīyaopaniṣad 2-4-1
[One is not subjected to fear at any time if one knows the Bliss that is Brahman.]

He doesn't have to ask whether it is the king he's seeing. As soon as he looks at him, all his doubts vanish."

Teacher: "True, sir. The Vedanta does say this."

Sri Ramakrishna: "When He creates, preserves and dissolves, he is called Brahman with attributes or the Primal Power.² When he is beyond the three gunas, he's called Brahman without attributes, beyond speech and mind – the Supreme Brahman.

"Falling under the spell of maya, a man forgets his real nature – inheritor of his father's limitless wealth. Maya consists of the three gunas.³ All three are dacoits. They rob a person of everything. They make him forget his real nature. They are sattva, rajas and tamas. Of them, only sattva can show the way to God, but not even this guna can take you to God.

"A rich man was walking along a path in the forest when three dacoits came and surrounded him. They robbed him of everything he had. After they'd snatched everything from him, one of the dacoits said, 'What's the use of sparing his life? Kill him.' Saying this, he stepped forward to cut the man to pieces. The second dacoit said, 'It's not necessary to kill him. Let's tie him up and leave him here. Then he won't be able to tell the police.' Saying this, they tied him up and left him there. A

1. bhidyate hṛdayagranthīschidyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ,
kṣīyante cāsyā karmāṇi tasmin dr̥ṣṭe parāvare | muṇḍakopaniṣad 2-2-8
[The knot of the heart gets untied, all doubts become solved, and all one's actions become dissipated.]

2. Adyashakti.

3. Qualities or cosmic energies.

little later the third dacoit returned and said to him, ‘Oh, how great your suffering must be! Let me untie you.’ After freeing him, he took the man with him and showed him the way. When they reached the main road, he said, ‘Go on this road and you’ll reach home easily.’ The man said, ‘What do you mean, sir? Please come with me. You’ve done so much for me. I would be very pleased if you’d come to my home.’ The dacoit said, ‘No, I can’t go there. The police would catch me.’ Saying this, while pointing the way, the dacoit left.

“The first dacoit is *tamas* – the one who said, ‘What good will it do to spare his life? Kill him.’ *Tamas* leads to destruction. The second dacoit was *rajas*. *Rajas* binds man to the world – entangles him in different kinds of activity. *Rajas* makes a person forget God. Only *sattva* can show the way. Compassion, charity, love for God, etc. all come from *sattva*. *Sattva* is like the last landing of a staircase – beyond it there is only the roof. The supreme Brahman is one’s own natural home. Unless a person goes beyond the three *gunas*, he does not attain the knowledge of Brahman.”

Teacher: “What a clear explanation!”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “Do you know the nature of a devotee? ‘Let me speak and you listen, and when you speak, I will listen.’ You are a religious teacher. You teach so many people. You are a ship, but we are small fishing boats.” (*They all laugh.*)

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna's enjoyment of Hari's kirtan – Sri Ramakrishna in the Haribhakti Pradayani Sabha (house of worship) in Ram Chandra's house

Sri Ramakrishna has arrived at the Kansari Para Haribhakti Pradayani Sabha in Calcutta. It is Sunday, 13 May 1883, 31st day of Vaishakh, 1290 (B.Y.), the 7th day of the bright fortnight of Sankranti. The society is celebrating its annual festival. Manohar Sai is conducting the kirtan.

The topic of the song is 'pique.' Radha's companions are saying to her, "Why are you piqued? It seems that you don't care about Krishna's happiness." Radha says, "It's not because he's gone to Chandravali's grove. Why should he go there? She doesn't know how to serve him."

The next Sunday, 20 May 1883, there is a kirtan again at Ram Chandra's house, 'The Song of Mathura.' Thakur has arrived. The 14th day of the bright fortnight of Vaishakh, the 7th of Jaishtha. 'The Song of Mathura' is now being sung. Radha is saying many things regarding her separation from Krishna. She has wanted to see Shyam¹ since she was a child. "Friend, my nails have worn down by counting the days on my fingers. Look, the garland he gave has dried up, but I have not thrown it away. Where has the moon of Krishna appeared now? It seems that it has run away in fear of pique. Oh, when shall I see that cloud of Krishna again? Will I ever see it again? O friend, I have never been able to see you to my heart's content. For I have only two eyes, and over them my eyelids blink and tears stream. The peacock feather on his head is like an unmoving flash of lightning. Peacocks, seeing the cloud of his figure, would raise their wings and dance."

1. Dark-hued Krishna.

“Friend, I cannot survive – please place this body on the branch of the Tamal tree and write Krishna’s name on it.”

Sri Ramakrishna says, “God and His name are one and the same. That’s why Radha is saying this. He who is Rama is also His name.”

Immersed in ecstasy, Thakur listens to this Mathur kirtan. A goswami musician is singing the songs. The same songs will be sung at Dakshineswar on Sunday, and then again sung at Adhar’s house the following Sunday.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Sri Ramakrishna is standing in his room at the Dakshineswar temple and talking to the devotees. Sunday today, 27 May 1883, 14th of Jaishtha, the 5th day of the dark fortnight, time about nine o’clock. The devotees have assembled gradually.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “It’s not good to have hostility – it’s not good that the Shaktas, the Vaishnavas and the Vedantists quarrel with each other. Padmalochan was the court pundit in Burdwan. A discussion was going on in a meeting about who was greater, Shiva or Brahma. Padmalochan gave a beautiful reply: ‘I don’t know. I haven’t talked to either Shiva or Brahma.’ (*They all laugh.*)

“If you have earnest longing, you can attain Him by any path. But you must be steadfast. There’s

another name for single-minded devotion,¹ chaste devotion.² Think of a tree with a single trunk. It grows straight up. Other devotion is like a tree with five branches. The gopis had such single-minded devotion that they didn't want to see any person but the shepherd³ Krishna of Vrindavan wearing his peacock feather crown and yellow loin-cloth. When they saw Krishna in Mathura in royal dress with a turban on his head, they drew down their veils and said, 'Who is he? Should we become unchaste by talking to him?'

"The way a wife serves her husband is also single-minded devotion. She serves food to her husband's younger and elder brothers and gives them water to wash their feet, but she has quite a different relationship with her husband. In the same way, you can have single-minded devotion to your own religion, but you shouldn't show malice to other religions because of it. Instead, you should conduct yourself with them in a sweet manner."

Thakur goes to the Kali Temple after a dip in the Ganges. He is accompanied by M. Sitting on the worshipper's seat, he offers flowers at the lotus feet of the Divine Mother. From time to time he puts them on his head and meditates.

**Worship of the Mother of the Universe and of Self –
mantra for destroying danger – dancing**

Thakur rises from his seat after quite some time. He is absorbed with emotion and dances and

1. Nishtha bhakti.
2. Avyabhicharini bhakti.
3. Gopal.

chants the name of the Mother. He says, “O Mother! Destroyer of all the trials in life, Remover of adversity.”

There is bound to be sorrow and adversity for an embodied person. It seems that he might be reciting this great mantra for destroying danger and calling on Her with a yearning heart to teach humanity.

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna and Nakur Babaji of Jhamapukur

Now Thakur comes to sit on the verandah to the west of his room. He is still in ecstasy. Rakhal, M., Nakur Vaishnava and some others are near him. Thakur has known Nakur Vaishnava for twenty-eight or twenty-nine years. When Sri Ramakrishna first came to Calcutta and lived at Jhamapukur, he used to perform worship at different houses. At that time he would sit at Nakur Vaishnava’s shop and enjoy his company. Now Nakur Vaishnava comes almost every year to see Thakur during Raghav Pandit’s celebrations in Panihati. Nakur is a devout Vaishnava and sometimes celebrates festivals. He lives in M.’s neighbourhood. He showed M. the old house belonging to Govinda Chatterji where Thakur lived when he was in Jhamapukur.

Sri Ramakrishna enjoys the singing of the name of the Mother of the Universe

Filled to overflowing with emotion, Thakur sings:

Kali ever-joyous, the beloved of Shiva!¹ Mother, You dance and clap Your hands of your own accord.

1. Mahakala.

O Eternal Primal Power, the image of the zero-shaped moon, where did You get Your garland of skeletons when there was no universe?

You are the great mechanic while we are instruments in Your hand, moving at Your will.

We do what You make us do Mother, we speak the way You make us speak.

O attributeless Mother, fondly berating You, Kamalakanta says – O Mother, the destroyer of all, You have swallowed both piety and impiety with the sword in Your hand.

Again he sings:

Mother! you are Tara,

Mother! You are Tara,¹ though You have assumed the three gunas, and You are the Limitless.

I know You are merciful to the lowly, the one who removes all distress.

You are sandhya, You are Gayatri, You are the support of the Universe, O Mother!

You are the savior of yearning souls; You have stolen the heart of Shiva.

You are in water; You are in earth; You are the root of the Beginning.

In all bodies You dwell, in all beings, in that with form and without.

Again he sings:

There is mal in golmal, leave out gol and hang onto mal.

[Pun on the word golmal which means confusion, but is composed of two words gol [disorder] and mal [wealth]].

And again:

1. The savior, literally “she who takes one across [the ocean of worldly existence]”.

O mind, we have no business here! Let us go to that region of the stars

And:

O Mother Shankari! The boat of my body is sinking in the sea of the world. The tempest of maya and infatuation is gradually rising.

And then:

Come, Mother. Let mother and son talk a little about suffering,

Some elephants carry a canopy. And some have tasty curd on dried roasted rice.

Sri Ramakrishna says to the devotees, “It’s not good to only talk of sorrow to householders. You should be cheerful. Those who are used to going without food can fast for two days. But others, whose meals are only somewhat delayed, fall ill. It isn’t good to talk to them only about sad things and about sorrow.

“Vaishnavcharan used to say, “What’s this, just saying ‘Sin, sin. Enjoy yourself!’”

Thakur has not rested for even a short time after his meal before Manohar Sai Goswami arrives.

Sri Ramakrishna is filled with ecstasy in the attitude of Sri Radha – Is it Thakur or Gauranga?

The goswami is singing a kirtan about the first intimations of love.¹ Listening to it for only a short time, Thakur becomes absorbed in the ecstatic mood of Radha.

1. Purvaraga.

The beginning song is about Gaur Chandrika. “With your hand on your palm – worried – Gaur, why are you downcast today?” Perhaps he is absorbed in Radha.

The goswami sings another song:

She slowly moves in and out of the room, again and again.

Why is her mind distracted? She is breathing rapidly.

She looks steadily at the Kadamba forest.

(Radha, what has happened to you?)

Hearing this line, Sri Ramakrishna goes into a deep mood.¹ He tears the shirt off his body and throws it away.

When the singer sings, “Her cool limbs become motionless at a soft touch,” Thakur trembles in mahabhava.

(*Looking at Kedar*) Thakur says in the singing tone of the kirtan, “O the master of my soul, the beloved of my heart, bring Krishna here; a friend of one’s heart should do this. Either bring him here or take me there. I will remain your maid-servant forever.”

The singer, the goswami, is overwhelmed to see Thakur’s divine state. Folding his hands, he says, “Please take away my worldly tendencies.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “The sadhu has found a place to stay.”² You are such a sweet person and express many sweet ideas.”

1. Mahabhava.

2. Ref: A holy man who visits the city after first finding lodging.

The goswami: “Sir, I am like an ox carrying a load of sugar. But I haven’t been able to taste it.”

The kirtan continues. The singer describes Radha’s condition. ‘The cuckoo is warbling sweetly.’ Hearing it, perhaps Radha is reminded of the sounds of Vraja, which is why she chants the name of Jaimini. She says, “Gopi friend, this life of mine will not survive separation from Krishna. Please place this body on a branch of the tamal tree.”

The goswami ends the kirtan after singing of the meeting of Radha and Krishna.

Section VI

Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram's and Adhar's houses in Calcutta

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is on his way from the Dakshineswar Temple to Balaram's house in Calcutta. From Balaram's house, he will go to Adhar's and then to Ram's. Manohar Sai will conduct a kirtan at Adhar's house, and there will be a reading and exposition of the scriptures¹ interspersed with music at Ram's house. Today is Saturday, 2 June 1883, the 20th day of Jaishtha, the 12th day of the dark fortnight.

In the carriage on his way Thakur says to Rakhal, M. and the others, "Look, all sins flee when you develop love for Him, like the water in an open pond dries up in the heat of the sun."

Sannyasin and householder's sense attachments

"A person doesn't attain [the goal] as long as there is still love for sense objects, for 'lust and gold'. A person doesn't attain if he has attachment to sense enjoyments even if he embraces monastic life. That's like swallowing your own spittle after spitting it out."

Still in the carriage, Thakur adds in a little while, "Brahmos don't believe in God with form. (*Smiling*) Narendra says, 'It's idol worship.' He also says, 'He [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] still goes to the Kali Temple.'"

1. Kathakta.

Sri Ramakrishna's vision of Nara Lila (divine sport as man) and enjoying it

Thakur has come to Balaram's house.

Suddenly he goes into an ecstasy. It seems he is seeing that God has become the world and all its creatures, that He is moving around as a human being, because he says to the Mother of the Universe, "Mother, what are you showing me now? Wait! What are you are showing me through Rakhal and others? All forms have vanished. And Mother, man is nothing but a pillow-case. Man's consciousness is Yours only."

"Mother, the Brahmos aren't tasting sweetness. Their eyes are dry and so are their faces. Nothing at all is achieved without love and devotion for God.

"Mother, I asked you, 'Give me a companion just like myself. It appears that You have given me Rakhal.'"

Thakur enjoys a Hari kirtan at Adhar's house

Thakur has arrived at Adhar's house. Preparations are being made for the kirtan of the musician, Manohar Sai.

A number of devotees and neighbours have come to Adhar's parlour to see Thakur. They all want him to say a few words.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "God's will is both in worldliness and freedom. It is He who has kept you unconscious in worldly life. And again, at His will, when He calls you, you will be liberated. The child has gone out to play – its mother will call at meal-time.

“He will give you the company of sadhus when he wants to grant you liberation. And He will also give you the yearning to attain Him.”

A neighbour: “Sir, what kind of yearning?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The yearning that you feel when you lose a job – the way you go from office to office every day to enquire, ‘Sir, is there a vacancy?’ Yearning brings restlessness: how can I attain God?”

“When a dandy twirls his mustache up on the sides, sits cross-legged, and chews betel-leaf nonchalantly, he can’t attain God.”

Neighbour: “Can you develop such longing by keeping the company of holy people?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, you can. But a hypocrite can’t attain such yearning. A kamandalu¹ is with the sadhu all the time that he is visiting the four centres of pilgrimage, but it remains as bitter as it was before.”

The kirtan has started now. The goswami sings a song of inner grief.

Radha: “Friend, I am dying! Bring back my Krishna.”

Gopi: “O Radha, the dark cloud² would have brought rain, but the winds of your pique have blown the cloud away. You aren’t happy to see Krishna happy. What causes that pride?”

Radha: “Friend, this pride is not mine. My pride went away with him who makes me proud.”

Lalita [speaking a few words on behalf of Radha]: “All of you made me fall in love. Some showed him to me on the

1. A sannyasin’s water pot made of bitter gourd.

2. A reference to Krishna.

riverbank or in the open field; Vishakha showed him in a picture.”

The goswami says in the song: The companions of Radha begin to look for Krishna near the Radhakunda pool. Then he mentions meeting Sri Krishna in the company of Sridam, Sudama, and Madhumangal; Sri Krishna’s conversation with Vrinda, Sri Krishna’s conversation with Jatila in the dress of a yogi, Radha giving alms, an astrologer yogi reading Radha’s palm and speaking of a coming danger.

The kirtan ends. Sri Ramakrishna talks with the devotees about the preparation for worshipping Katyayani.¹

The humanity of avatars

Sri Ramakrishna: “The gopis worshipped Katyayani. Everybody is under that Mahamaya, the Primal Power – even the avatars’ work is performed taking refuge in maya. That’s why they worship the Primal Power. Just look how Rama wept for Sita. ‘Bound by the five elements [maya], Brahman weeps.’

“After killing the demon Hiranyaksha, Vishnu incarnated himself as a sow.² Having forgotten his real nature, he lived happily as a sow, nursing the young ones. The gods consulted each other and sent Shiva down. Shiva asked the sow, ‘Why have you forgotten your real Self?’ The sow answered, ‘I am quite happy as I am.’ Shiva cut open the body of the sow with his trident. Then he [Vishnu] went back to his own abode.”

1. A name of Durga.

2. Braha.

Now Thakur goes from Adhar's house to Ram's and there he listens the story of Uddhava.¹ Kedar and other devotees were present. (See Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Vol. II, Section V).

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Manirampur and Belgharia devotees

Sri Ramakrishna tells his own story

Sri Ramakrishna is in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple talking to devotees, sometimes standing, sometimes sitting. Today is Sunday, 10 June 1883, the 5th day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha, the time about ten o'clock. Many devotees are present including Rakhal, M., Latu, Kishori, Ramlal and Hazra.

Thakur is talking about his early days.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "When I was a child, everybody in my native village was fond of me, men and women. They would listen to me sing. And I could also imitate other people's mannerisms. They'd watch and listen to me doing this. The women in their families would set aside snacks for me to eat. Nobody distrusted me. They all looked upon me as a child of their own family.

"But I enjoyed life like a pigeon. I'd visit happy households when I saw them. And I'd run away from a house of pain and sorrow.

"When I found a happy boy or two among my companions, I'd shower great affection on them. With some, I was very friendly. But now they're

1. Uddhava Samvad.

deep in worldliness. Some of them visit here and say, ‘My goodness, he’s just the same as we saw him in school!’

“Subhankari’s arithmetic problems that we studied in school made me giddy. But I could draw pictures and mould clay gods beautifully.”

Fondness for charitable houses and for Ramayana and Mahabharata

“Wherever I saw houses where holy men were fed for free, I’d stand there and watch them for a long time.

“I’d sit and listen to the readings from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata wherever I found them narrated. But if the readers were insincere, I’d mimic them before the other people.

“I understood the ways of women rather well. I’d mimic the way they spoke. A child-widow replying to her father, ‘I – am – leaving.’ The women calling from the verandah: ‘O, fisherman!’ I could recognize a woman of easy virtue – a widow parting her hair straight in the middle, her body lovingly massaged with oil, little modesty, and her way of sitting is quite different.

“Let’s not talk of these worldly things.”

Thakur asks Ramlal to sing a song. Ramlal sings:

Who is the lady dark as a cloud, dancing on the battlefield
– like a fresh lily in the sea of blood.

Ramlal now sings Mandodari’s grief at the death of Ravana:

O my beloved husband! What have you done? You the beloved, the life-breath of this helpless woman – till she leaves this body, it will find no peace.

He, the Lord of the Golden Kingdom is now lying dead on the ground. How can your wife not be desperate to see this sight?

The God of Death was your slave – you had the power never before seen on earth or in heaven.

She who was most respected among the women of Indra and other gods, that very woman has become a beggar on this earth.

Taking him, the wanderer in the forest, the man with matted hair, as a human being you have lost all.

You did not see anything great in that jewel which Brahma and Shiva, who has taken abode in the cremation ground, yearn for.

Even though you had heard that the stony Ahalya had become a human being by the very touch of Rama.

**Sri Ramakrishna overwhelmed with Rama's name –
ecstatic love of gopis**

As Thakur hears the last song, tears flow from his eyes and he says, “When I was going to the Jhautala to answer the call of nature, I heard the boatmen singing this song. As long I sat there I cried and cried. They held me, and then brought me to my room.”

I have heard that Rama is the Saviour Brahman.

Rama with matted hair is not a human being.

Father, did you steal Sita to destroy your own family?

Akrur is taking Sri Krishna to Mathura in a chariot. Seeing him, the gopis hold its wheels tightly in their grip – some of them even lie down in

front of it. They reprimand Akrur, not knowing that Sri Krishna is going of his own accord.

Don't hold the wheels of the chariot. Does the chariot move on those wheels? Don't hold them, please do not.

Lord Hari Himself moves the wheels – He on whose wheel the whole world moves.

These are not horses. They are magic. The game of love is over today in Gokul.

Why do you find fault unnecessarily with the charioteer? This driver is fully helpless.

Can any chariot move without the will of the master of the chariot?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “What affection, what intense love the milkmaids had! Radha drew a picture of Sri Krishna with her own hands, but she didn't draw his feet lest he'd leave for Mathura.

“I used to sing all these songs often in my childhood. I could sing a whole act of a musical drama. Some people said I was an actor in the Kaliyadaman¹ play.”

A devotee with a new chadar has arrived. Rakhal, who has the nature of a child, brings a pair of scissors to cut its loose fringes. Thakur says, “Why are you doing that? Please stop. It looks nice as it is. Brother, how much did it cost?” Foreign-made chadars are cheap. The devotee says, “A rupee and six annas for a pair.” Thakur says, “Oh, no! A rupee and six annas for a pair!”

1. Subjugation of the serpent by the Lord.

After awhile Thakur says to the devotees, “Go and have a dip in the Ganges. Please give him some oil.”

When the devotee returns after his dip, Thakur takes a mango from the shelf and gives it to him. He says, “I’m giving him this mango. He has three university degrees. Well, how is your brother now?”

Devotee: “The medicine has helped him. He should be well if he makes some effort.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Can you find a job for him? That would be nice. You would become his patron.”

Devotee: “When he gets well, he will have all the opportunities.”

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with the devotees from Manirampur

Thakur has been sitting for a while on the smaller cot after eating. He has had no time to rest and the devotees have begun to arrive. The first to come is a group from Manirampur. One of them who used to work for P.W.D.¹ is now drawing a pension. This group has been brought by a devotee. Another group of devotees from Belgharia also arrive. Mani Mallick and a few others arrive singly.

The devotees from Manirampur say, “We have disturbed you from your rest.”

Sri Ramakrishna says, “No, no. These are rajasic words. People say, ‘He is going to sleep now.’”

1. Public Works Department.

Listening to Chanak Manirampur, Thakur is reminded of his childhood friend, Sri Ram. He says, “Sri Ram has a shop in your area. He was my schoolmate in the countryside [Kamarpukur]. He came here the other day.”

The devotees from Manirampur say, “Do kindly tell us how to attain God.”

Instructions to devotees of Manirampur: practice spiritual disciplines and develop yearning for God

Sri Ramakrishna: “You must practice some spiritual disciplines.

“There is butter in milk, but just saying it won’t help you. You have to turn the milk into curd and then churn the curd to get butter. And you need to go into solitude from time to time.¹ Having lived in solitude for some days and attaining love for God, you can live anywhere you like. When you are well shod, you can walk easily across even a thorny path in the forest.

“The main thing is faith. You benefit according to your attitude of mind, but the main thing is faith. Once you have faith, there is no fear.”

Devotee from Manirampur: “Do you need a guru?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Many need a guru.² But you must have faith in the words of the guru. You

1. yogī yuñjīta satatamātmānaṁ rahasi sthitaḥ |
gītā 6-10

[A yogi should always try to concentrate his mind, living alone in solitude.]

2. ācāryavānpuruṣo veda

succeed only when you take the guru to be God. That's why Vaishnavas say, "Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava [are one]."

"You must always repeat the name of God. There is great importance of name in the Kaliyuga. Our life depends on food [which takes a great deal of time and energy to procure]. That's why the practice of yoga is not possible by repeating His name and clapping your hands, the bird of sin flies away.

"The company of the holy is always necessary. The nearer you go to the Ganges, the cooler the breeze you will feel. The nearer you are to the fire, the greater the heat you'll feel.

"Nothing happens by moving slowly to the beat of the drum. Those who desire enjoyment say, 'It'll come – we'll attain God some day or other.'

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'When his son grows insistent, a father will give him his share of inheritance three years early.'

"A mother is cooking food. Her infant is lying nearby. The mother has given him an artificial nipple to suck. When he throws it away and yells and cries, the mother puts down the boiling pot from the stove, takes the infant in her lap and nurses it. I said all this to Keshab.

"They say that in the Kaliyuga you can have the vision of God by weeping for a day and a night.

“Demand of God, ‘You have created me! You will have to reveal yourself to me!’

“Whether you live in the household or elsewhere, God sees only your mind. A mind attached to worldly things is like a damp matchstick. Strike it any number of times and it won’t catch fire. Akalabya learned archery by placing a clay image of Drona, his guru, before him.

“Move forward! A woodcutter, going forward, saw a sandalwood forest, then a mine of silver, farther a gold mine and then even diamonds and other gems.

“An ajnani [man without wisdom] is like a person living in a room made of mud walls. There’s not much light inside and he can’t see anything outside. But a person who attains Knowledge and then lives a family life is like a person living in a glass house. There is light inside and there is light outside. He can see things both inside the room and out.”

Brahman and Mother of the Universe are one and the same

“There is nothing but one. The Supreme Brahman who preserves the ‘I’ of man is, in the form of Primal Power, the same as He who is creating, preserving and dissolving.

“That which is Brahman is also the Primal Energy. A king said to a yogi, ‘You have to give me Knowledge in one word.’ The yogi said, ‘Yes, you will have it in one word.’ After some time a magician suddenly appeared to the king. The king noticed that the magician was waving two of his

fingers round and round, saying, ‘King, see this, just see this.’ The king looked at him speechless with wonder when, after some time, he notices that the two fingers have become one. The magician says, as he revolves his finger, ‘King, see this. See this!’ That is to say, Brahman and the Primal Power appear separate from each other at first, but on attaining the knowledge of Brahman, they are no longer two. They are not separate from each other. One and the same. One without a second – non-duality.¹”

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees from Belgharia

Govinda Mukherji, the head of the Belgharia devotees, has arrived. Thakur had gone into samadhi when he had heard the song ‘Awake, awake!’ from the musician the day he visited his home. Govinda has brought the same musician now. Thakur is happy to see him and says, “Please sing a few songs.”

The musician sings:

1. O Mother, Shyama! Nobody is at fault. I am falling into the well I myself have dug.
2. Yama, don’t touch me, since I have lost my caste.
If you ask me O, Yama how I lost caste, listen.
I have been turned into a sannyasi by the All-destroying one.

1. Advaita.

(The melody – mooltana)

3. O Mother, wake up, do wake up.

How long has Kulkundalini been asleep in the
Muladhara?

Mother, reach the thousand-petalled lotus in the head
where Shiva resides

So that all your work may be done.

O You, the image of consciousness, pierce the six mystic
centres and take away my grief.

Sri Ramakrishna: “This song is about piercing
the six spiritual centres. God is within and also
without. Residing within, He produces the different
states of mind. When the six centres are pierced,
the individual soul becomes one with the Supreme
Soul, leaving behind the realm of maya. This is
called vision of God.

“God-vision is not possible unless maya moves
aside. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are walking
together. Rama is in front, Sita is in the middle,
and behind her is Lakshmana. Because Sita is in
the middle, Lakshmana can’t see Rama. Similarly,
with maya in between, the embodied soul can’t see
God. (*To Mani Mallick*) But by the grace of God,
maya moves aside and leaves the door open. Just as
a doorkeeper says, ‘If the master orders, I’ll let you
through the door.’¹

“The view of the Vedanta and the view of the
Purana. The Vedanta says, ‘This world is a web of
deception.’ That is to say, the world is unreal. It’s
like a dream. But the Puranas or the Bhakti Sastra
says that God Himself resides in the universe in the

1. māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṁ taranti te . gītā 7-14|| [...but
they who take refuge in me alone, they cross over this illusion.]

form of twenty-four cosmic principles. Worship Him inside and outside.

“As long as He has kept the consciousness of ‘I’ in us, all this is real – we can’t say it’s a dream. When a pot is placed on the fire, lentils, rice, potatoes and vegetables¹ jump up and down. Like they’re saying, ‘Here I am jumping around.’ The body is like the pot, the mind and intellect are like water; sense objects are like lentils, rice, potatoes and vegetables. The I-ness is their sense of ego – it’s this ‘I’ that makes them jump. And Sat-chit-ananda is the fire.

“That’s why devotional texts call this world ‘the mart of joy.’ A song of Ramprasad says, ‘This universe is a web of deception.’ But another person responded, ‘This world is a mart of joy!’ A devotee of Kali is liberated in this very life; he is ever full of joy. That devotee sees that He who is God has Himself become maya. It is He who has become the world and all its beings. He sees God, maya, living beings and the world as one. Some devotees see everything permeated with Rama – that everything is the form of Rama. Some devotees see the world permeated with Radha-Krishna, Krishna Himself residing as all the twenty-four cosmic principles. Put on green-tinted glasses and you will see everything green.

“But according to the devotional school of thought, there are different manifestations of God’s power. Rama Himself resides everywhere – but at some places there is a greater manifestation than

1. Patal.

other places. He manifests Himself in an incarnation of God in one way and in an embodied-soul in another way. But an incarnation of God has body-consciousness. Assuming a body, maya exercises its jurisdiction – Rama wept for Sita. An incarnation can put a bandage on his eyes at will, like boys playing blindman’s bluff. But as soon as the mother calls, the game is over. It’s different with ordinary souls. The cloth with which they cover their eyes is tied to their waist with eight knots, with eight bonds.¹ Shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, pride of ancestry, pride of good conduct, grief and secretiveness are the eight bonds. No one can free you from them but a guru.

Chapter V

Advice to the devotee of Belgharia – petition with a heart full of longing – signs of a genuine devotee

Devotee from Belgharia: “Please grant us your grace.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “He resides in all. But you have to send an application to the Gas Company. They will connect you.

“You have to petition with a yearning heart. When three attractions of intense love combine, you can see God – a child’s attraction for its mother, a husband’s attraction for a chaste wife, and the attraction of possessions for a worldly person.

1. The Tantric scriptures list eight bonds or fetters: shame (lajja), hatred or contempt (ghrana), fear (bhaya), pride of caste, rank or race (jati), hesitation or suspicion (shanka), secretiveness (jugupsa), pride of family, ancestry, or lineage (kula), and pride of good conduct, character or piety (shila).

“These are signs of a genuine devotee: he listens to the instructions of his guru with a concentrated mind. A python listens to the song of the snake-charmer without moving. But not a cobra. There is another special sign: a real devotee has great power of assimilation. You can’t impress images on bare glass – but if you paint it with a black solution, a picture can be impressed on it. Take for example, a photograph. The black solution is devotion or love for God.

“There is another sign. A genuine devotee has complete control over his senses. He has conquered lust. The gopis of Vrindavan had no lust.

“You people are householders. Continue to live a family life. It will even help you in your spiritual practices – like fighting from within a fort. When people practice spiritual disciplines on a dead body,¹ the corpse produces the sound of hun-hun and frightens him. So they should keep rice or roasted gram with them to put in the corpse’s mouth every now and then. When the corpse is quiet, it’s possible to practice japa uninterruptedly. In the same way you have to keep the members of your family satisfied. Then alone will you be able to practice spiritual disciplines comfortably.

“Those who still have some desire for enjoyment should call on Him while living in the household. Nitai laid down this injunction: ‘Cat-fish [magur]

1. A Tantric practice.

soup, the embrace of a young woman¹ and repeating Hari, Hari at the same time.’

“It’s different with a person of intense renunciation. A bee sits on nothing but flowers. A chatak bird has water all around but will not sip a drop of it – it keeps its mouth open only for rain water that falls when the star Svati ascends. A true renunciate likes no enjoyment but the bliss of God. A bee sits only on flowers. A real sannyasi, one who has real renunciation, is like a bee. A householder devotee can be likened to a common fly – it sits on sandesh as well as on a festering wound.

“You people have taken so much trouble to come here. You are roaming around in search of God. Most people are satisfied to just see a garden – only very few try to find out who the owner of the garden is. They see the beauty of the world only. They don’t look for its creator.”

Hatha yoga, raja yoga and the devotee from Belgharia – the six spiritual centres and samadhi

(*Pointing to the musician*) “He has sung about the six spiritual centres. The words pertain to yoga. There is hatha yoga and raja yoga. A hatha yogi practices physical exercises. His ideal is to attain occult powers and a long life. His aim is the eight occult powers. The goal of raja yoga is to develop love for God – ecstatic love for Him – knowledge and non-attachment. Raja yoga is better.

1. Cat-fish soup means tears of devotion from singing God’s name; the embrace of a young woman means rolling on the ground in ecstasy.

“The seven planes of the Vedanta and the six centres of the Yoga Sastra are very similar. The first three planes of Yoga are Muladhara, Svadhithana and Manipura. In these three planes the mind dwells at the anus, the generative organ and the navel. When the mind rises to the fourth plane, that is to say when it reaches the Anahata or heart lotus, the embodied soul has the vision of light, like the flame of a lamp. He exclaims, ‘What is this! What is this!’

“When the mind rises to the fifth or throat plane, the person only likes to hear about God. It is the centre of the Vishuddha chakra. The sixth plane between the eyebrows and the Ajna chakra are the same. When the mind reaches there, the person attains the vision of God. But it is like the light within a lantern. You can’t touch it because there is a glass between.

“King Janaka used to teach the knowledge of Brahman from the fifth plane. Sometimes he lived on the fifth plane, at other times on the sixth.

“After piercing the sixth centre, the mind reaches the seventh plane, the Sahasrara, and is dissolved. The individual soul and the Supreme soul become one. One attains samadhi. One loses the awareness of the body. There is no outer consciousness left. All the different kinds of knowledge leave – reasoning stops.

“Trailanga Swami said, ‘You have the perception of many when you reason – you identify with different kinds of knowledge. After attaining samadhi, at last, one dies within twenty-one days.’

“But you can’t attain spiritual consciousness until the Kulkundalini is awakened.”

Signs of God-vision

“There are signs of a person who has realized God. Such a person becomes child-like, or like one mad, inanimate, or like an insentient being. He understands rightly that he is an instrument and God is the operator; that it is God who is the doer and he is a non-doer. Just as the Sikhs said, ‘It is by His will that even a leaf flutters.’ Everything happens by Rama’s will – one attains such awareness. A weaver said, ‘It is by Rama’s will that the cloth is one rupee six annas [per yard]; it is by Rama’s will that there was a theft; it is Rama’s will that the police took me away [as a suspect], and it is certainly by Rama’s will that I have now been released.’”

It is almost evening. Thakur has not rested for even a moment. He has talked continuously about God to the devotees. Now the devotees from Manirampur and Belgharia and the other devotees prostrate to salute him. They go to the temple to visit the deity and then each one returns home.

The goswami ends his kirtan after singing about the meeting of Radha and Krishna.

Section VII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Tantrik devotee and worldly life – fear of non-attachment

Sri Ramakrishna rests for awhile after a meal in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple. Adhar and M. arrive and salute him. A Tantrik devotee has also come. Rakhai, Hazra, Ramlal and some others are staying with Thakur these days. It is Sunday, 17 June 1883, 4th of Ashada, the 20th day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “Why can’t a person succeed while living a life in the world? But it is very difficult. Janaka and some others lived a worldly life after attaining knowledge. Even so, there is a risk. Even a worldly man who works without attachment has fear. When Janaka saw the Bhairavi, he bent his head down – he hesitated to look at a woman. The Bhairavi said, ‘Janaka, I see that you haven’t yet attained knowledge – you still see a difference between a man and a woman.’

“Howsoever clever you may be, if you live in a room full of soot, you’re sure to dirty your body a little bit with it.

“I’ve seen a worldly devotee performing worship in silk clothes, and he’s in a good mood. The mood lasts till he takes refreshments. Then he returns to his previous self – the same rajas and tamas.

“The sattva guna produces a devotional attitude – but there also is still the sattva of bhakti, the rajas of bhakti and the tamas of bhakti. The sattva of bhakti is pure sattva. With this attitude the mind only goes to God. It remains on the body only to the extent that is required for preserving the body.”

**A paramahansa is beyond the three gunas and beyond the fruit of karma – also beyond sin and virtue –
Keshab Sen and his group**

“A paramahansa is beyond the three gunas.¹ The three gunas, though within him, are almost non-existent. He’s like a child, not subject to them. That’s why a paramahansa lets young children come around – to adopt their attitude.

“A paramahansa cannot save for the future. This is not for householders – they have to save for their families.”

The Tantrik Devotee: “Is a paramahansa conscious of sin and virtue?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Keshab Sen asked me the same question. I said to him, ‘If I tell you more, your organization will break up.’ Keshab said, ‘Then please say no more, sir.’

“What is sin and what is virtue? In the state of a paramahansa, a person sees that it is God Himself who grants good behavior – and also bad. There are sweet as well as bitter fruits. Some trees bear sweet

1. And he who serves me with an unswerving devotion, he, going beyond the gunas, is fit for becoming Brahman. Bhagavad Gita 14:26.

fruits, others bitter or sour. He has created the tree of sweet mangoes as well as sour hog-plum.¹”

The Tantrik Devotee: “That’s true, sir. You see rose fields on the hills – as far as the eye can see.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “A paramahansa sees that it is all the splendour of His maya: real and unreal, good and bad, sin and virtue. But this is a very advanced stage. In this stage a person can’t maintain an organization.”

**Tantrik devotee and fruit of karma – sin and virtue –
sin and responsibility**

Tantrik Devotee: “But doesn’t a person have to reap the fruit of his action?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That’s true. The result of good acts is good. And the result of bad actions bring bad results. Don’t you feel the bite of chillies when you eat them? All this is God’s lila, His play.”

Tantrik Devotee: “What is the way for us? Every action bears fruit, doesn’t it?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Let it be. It’s different for devotees of God.”

Saying this, he sings:

O mind, you do not know how to farm

The field of your life lies fallow; were you to cultivate it,
you would reap a golden harvest.

Fence it around with Kali’s name, and your crop will not
be harmed.

That fence of the Mother with long flowing hair is strong
indeed: not even Death himself dares come near.

1. Amra.

Not today or in a hundred years will your crops be snatched away.

Work now, O mind, to reap your harvest to the full. Sow the seed, your guru's gift,¹ and shower it with the water of love.

If you cannot do so by yourself, take Ramprasad along.

He sings another song:

The path of Yama (God of Death) is barred.

The doubt of my mind has also gone.

O brother, at the nine gates of my house, four Shivas stand guard. The house stands on one pillar and is tied with three ropes.²

Sreenath sits on the thousand-petalled lotus in the head, giving fearlessness.

“Whether a brahmin or a prostitute dies in Kashi, he or she will become Shiva.

“When the eyes are filled with tears at the mention of Hari, or Kali, or Rama, ritualistic devotions³ are no longer needed. All work falls away. The fruit of action does not touch him.”

Thakur sings another song.

Love is born of contemplation.

One's gain depends on one's faith. Faith is the basis.

If the mind remains submerged in the nectar of the sea of the feet of Mother Kali,

There is no longer any need of puja, homa, yajna and so on.

Thakur sings another song –

1. Mantra.

2. The pillar is Brahman, the ropes are the three gunas.

3. Sandhya (thrice-performed worship and meditation) and protective mystic words.

Of what use are rituals for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.

Why go to Gaya, Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I can breathe my last chanting Kali's name?¹

“When the mind gets absorbed in God, bad or sinful tendencies do not survive.”

The Tantrik Devotee: “But you have said that the ‘I of knowledge’ remains.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The ‘I of knowledge’, the ‘I of the devotee’, the ‘I of a servant’ are the good ‘I’s,’ which remain. The rascal ‘I’ flees.” (*Laughter.*)

The Tantrik Devotee: “Sir, many of our doubts have been resolved.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Upon attaining the vision of Atman, all doubts flee.”

**Tantrik devotee and tamas of bhakti – hollow doubts –
eight occult powers**

“Develop the tamas of bhakti. Say, ‘What! I have repeated the name of Rama? I have repeated the name of Kali? What bondage have I? What fruit of action is there for me?’ ”

Thakur sings another song.

Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips, I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse to rescue me.

Should I have killed a brahmin or a cow, or destroyed a child in the womb, or indulged in drink, or slain a woman,

For all those heinous deeds I care not in the least; still may I aspire to Brahman.

1. For complete song, refer Volume IV, Section XVIII.

Sri Ramakrishna adds: “Faith! Faith! Faith! The Guru has said that it is Rama who resides in every form, ‘The same Rama lies in every being.’ A dog is going away with bread in its mouth. The devotee says, ‘O Rama! Stop, let me butter your bread.’ One must have such faith in the words of the Guru.

“Hollow people have no faith. They are always in doubt. As long as you have not realized the Self doubt doesn’t leave you.¹

“Pure love for God is devotion without any desires. You attain Him quickly through this love.

“Occult powers such as *anima*² are all desires. Krishna said to Arjuna, ‘My dear, if you have any occult power like *anima* you cannot attain God. You may only become more powerful.’”

The Tantrik Devotee: “Sir, why don’t the Tantrik rituals bear fruit these days?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Because they’re not done perfectly or not done with love and devotion for God. That’s why they don’t bear fruit.”

While ending his talk Thakur now says, “Bhakti indeed is the essence. The genuine devotee has no fear, no feelings of anxiety. The Mother knows all. The cat holds the mouse in one way but its own kitten in quite another.”

1. bhidyate hrdayagranthiśchidyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ,
kṣīyante cāsya karmāṇi tasmin dr̥ṣṭe parāvare | muṇḍakopaniṣad 2-2-8
[The knot of the heart gets untied, all doubts become solved, and all
one’s actions become dissipated.]

2. The power to become as small as an atom.

Chapter II

**Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, M. and other devotees
at Balaram's house**

Today Sri Ramakrishna visits Balaram in Calcutta. M. is sitting close to him. Rakhal is also here. Thakur has entered into an ecstatic mood. It is Monday, 25 June 1883, the 5th day of the dark fortnight of Jaishtha, 12th day of Ashada, time about 5 o'clock.

Sri Ramakrishna (*in an abstracted mood*): "Look here, if you seek with a yearning heart, you can have a vision of your true Self. But the more the desire for sense enjoyment remains, the more that vision is obscured."

M.: "As you say, sir, you have to take a leap."

Sri Ramakrishna (*joyfully*): "That's it!"

Everybody remains silent. Thakur continues to speak.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Look, everybody can realize the Self."

M.: "But, sir, God is the doer. He does differently with different people. In the case of some, he awakens their consciousness. But in the case of others, He keeps them in ignorance."

**Realization of one's own real Self – the way to realize
God, or the Self – earnest prayer – union of the
Absolute and phenomenal world**

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no. You must pray to Him with a yearning heart. When you are sincere, He is bound to listen to your prayer."

A Devotee: “True, sir – because there is ‘I,’ you have to pray.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “You go to the Absolute by holding on to the phenomenal, step by step – like going up to the roof by stairs. After realizing the Absolute, you must come back down to the phenomenal and live there loving God in the company of devotees. This is the surest way.

“God has numerous forms, many games: He plays as the Lord, as deities, as man, and as the world. He takes the form of a human being in every age as an incarnation of God, to teach mankind love and devotion. Just think of Chaitanya Deva. You can taste and appreciate God’s love only through an incarnation of God. Infinite is His divine sport, but we need love and devotion. We need only the milk. And that comes through the udders of a cow. The incarnation of God is the udder.”

Is Thakur saying that he has come down as an incarnation himself? That just by seeing him, you see God? Is Thakur hinting about himself by referring to Chaitanya Deva?

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna in different moods at Dakshineswar and in the house of a devotee

Sri Ramakrishna is at the Dakshineswar Temple sitting on the steps of the Shiva temples in the month of June 1883. It is very hot. The evening will set in soon. M. has come with ice, etc. After saluting Thakur, he sits down on a step of the Shiva temple just below Thakur’s feet.

John Stuart Mill and Sri Ramakrishna: limitations of man – a conditioned being

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “The husband of Mani Mallick’s granddaughter came here. He has read in some book¹ that God doesn’t appear to be all-knowing or wise. If He were, why is there so much misery? And an embodied being dies – why not let him die all at once? Why cause him to die slowly and with such great trouble? The author of the book has gone so far as to say that he could have created a better world.”

M. listens to Thakur with his mouth agape, without saying anything. Thakur continues.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Can God be understood? Sometimes even I think of Him as good and sometimes as bad. He’s kept us in the domain of delusion.² Sometimes He keeps us in the state of awareness and sometimes in unconsciousness. For a short time this ignorance disappears, but then it envelops us again. If you throw a piece of stone in a pond covered with algae, you see water for a minute – but very soon the water is covered by the algae again.

“As long as you have body-consciousness, you are subject to pleasure and pain, birth and death, disease and sorrow. They all belong to the body – not to the Atman. Maybe God takes you to a better place when the body dies. It’s like the birth of a child after labour pains. Realizing the Self,

1. John Stuart Mill’s Autobiography. Mill; 1806-1873

2. His Mahamaya.

happiness and sorrow, birth and death, appear like a dream.

“What can we understand? Can you put ten seers of milk in a pot that has the capacity for one seer? A salt doll that goes to fathom the sea never returns to tell its depth. It’s dissolved and becomes one with the sea.

All doubts are solved, all actions are dissipated

It is evening. Arati is being performed for the deities. Sri Ramakrishna, seated on the small cot in his room, is meditating on the Mother of the Universe. Rakhal, Latu, Ramlal, Kishori Gupta and some other devotees are there. M. is going to stay here for the night.

Thakur now talks to a devotee alone on the small verandah north of his room. He says, “It’s good to meditate before dawn and then late at night; and also every day at twilight.” He is talking about how to meditate on God with form and on the Impersonal Reality.

A little later Thakur sits on the semi-circular verandah to the west. It is about 9 p.m. M. is sitting near him. Rakhal and the others go back and forth between the verandah and the room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Look, all doubts will be removed from those who come here. What do you think?”

M.: “Yes, sir.”

At a distance a man is singing while he rows his boat on the bosom of the Ganges. The sweet sound of the song passing through the infinite sky and touching the bosom of the Ganges sounds to Thakur

like the anahata sound.¹ He immediately goes into ecstasy – his whole body horripilated. Holding M.'s hands he says, “Look, my hair is standing on end. Pass your hand over my body.”

M. is speechless to feel the body horripilated with love. ‘The body horripilated’: The Upanishads say that Brahman fills the entire universe and ether. Has the same Brahman touched Sri Ramakrishna in the form of sound? Is he Sound² Brahman?³

After awhile, Thakur resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna: “All those who come here have good tendencies from past lives.⁴ What do you say?”

M.: “Yes, sir.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Adhar must have good tendencies.”

M.: “That goes without saying.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “A person who is guileless realizes God quickly. There are two paths – good, toward God, and bad, toward the world. He should take the good path toward Reality.”

M.: “Yes, sir. If there is the least fibre on a thread, it can’t enter the eye of a needle.”

1. The sound of creation; Om, the unstruck sound.

2. Shabda.

3. etasminnu khalvakṣare gārgyākāśa otaśca protaśceti |

bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat 3-8-11

[By this Immutable, O Gargi, is the ether pervaded.]

śabdaḥ khe pauruṣaṁ nṛṣu

gītā 7-8

[[I am] sound in Akasha, and manhood in men.]

4. Samskaras.

Why complete renunciation?

Sri Ramakrishna: “If you find a hair in your food, you have to spit out everything you have in your mouth.”

M.: “But as you said: those who have realized God aren’t harmed by the world – even a whole banana plant is consumed by the blazing fire of knowledge.”

**Sri Ramakrishna and Kavikankan –songs of the Chandi
at Adhar’s house**

Thakur has come to Adhar’s house in Benetola in Calcutta another day. Saturday, 14 July 1883, the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. Adhar is going to have Rajnarayan chant the Chandi for Thakur. Rakhal, M. and some other devotees are with Thakur. The recitation will be in the worship hall. Rajnarayan begins:

I have surrendered myself at the fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama any more?

I have tied tuft of hair on the top of my head to the almighty mantra of Kali’s name.

Having sold my body in the mart of the world, I have bought the name of Durga.

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali’s name in my heart,

This time when Yama comes, I will open my heart to him.
This is my resolve,

The six wicked beings in the body I have driven out.

I have cried, ‘Victory to Durga, to great Durga!’ and have thus ended my journey.

Hearing only a part of it, Thakur is entranced and stands up. He sings along with the group of musicians.

Thakur adds his own line to the song, “O Mother, save me, O Mother!” As he does, he becomes absorbed in samadhi – unconscious of the outside world. Motionless, he stands there. The musicians continue:

Who is this Woman who lights the battlefield?

Her body is like a dark storm cloud. And Her teeth flash like lightening.

Her hair is disheveled and She runs about fearlessly among the gods and the demons.

She destroys the demons with terrible laughter on Her face. Thus She flashes like lightening in battle.

The drops of diligence falling on Her body of red lotuses look beautiful!

Beholding Her Sea of Beauty, the moon has shed its lustre.

Is it possible that Shiva, who enralls the Universe, is lying at Her feet as though dead?

Kamalakanta wonders who this Woman with the gait of an elephant can be.¹

Thakur again goes into samadhi.

When the music ends, he goes from the worship hall to Adhar’s parlour on the second level and sits down with the devotees. The conversation is on different aspects of spirituality. Some devotees’ emotion flows unseen as in the case of the Phalgu river – there is no sign of any internal emotion on the surface. The conversation continues in this way.

1. Volume II, Section XX.

Chapter IV

Talk about God-realization at Balaram's house – the aim of life

Yet on another day, Saturday, 18 August 1883, the 2nd day of Bhadra, Thakur comes to Balaram's house in the afternoon. He explains the doctrine of divine incarnation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “An incarnation of God takes on a body to teach mankind love for God. It's like climbing up and down the stairs after reaching the roof. Other people tread the path of devotion to reach the roof until they have attained knowledge, until they're free of desires. You can reach the roof only when you're free from all desire. A shopkeeper doesn't go to bed till he's set his accounts right – he sleeps only after his balances tally in the ledger.

(*To M.*) “If you take a plunge, you're bound to succeed – you're bound to be successful if you make the jump.

“Well, what do you think of the service performed by Keshab Sen, Shivanath and the other Brahmos?”

M.: “Sir, it's just as you say: they only describe the garden – they don't talk much about seeing the master of the garden. They start by describing the garden, and also end there.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That's right! The main thing is to look for the owner of the garden, and to talk to him. The only aim of life is to realize God.”¹

1. ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo

Thakur has now gone from Balaram's house to Adhar's. He chants God's name and dances in Adhar's parlour after dusk. Vaishnavcharan, the professional singer, is singing. Adhar, M., Rakhal and others are present.

Joy of singing at Adhar's house – Thakur's advice to him

After the singing, Thakur sits absorbed with emotion. He says to Rakhal, "The spiritual feeling here is not like rainfall in the month of Shravana when it rains heavily and then just as quickly stops. Here, Shiva springs up from the bowels of the earth, though he has not been installed by human hands. The other day you left Dakshineswar in a huff. I prayed to the Divine Mother not to mind your bad mood."

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God? Is he Shiva?

And then in an ecstatic mood he says to Adhar, "I say, brother. Meditate on the name you were just chanting."

Saying this, he touches Adhar's tongue with his finger and writes something on it.

Has Adhar been initiated?

bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat 2-4-5

[The Self, my dear [Maitreyi] should be realized – should be heard of, reflected on and meditated on.]

Chapter V

Primal Power and the doctrine of incarnation

Yet on another day Thakur is sitting on the steps of the southeastern verandah of his room at the Dakshineswar Temple. With him are Rakhal, M. and Hazra. In a jocular mood Thakur mentions several things about his childhood.

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi at Dakshineswar – he converses with the Mother of the Universe

Thakur is in samadhi. It is evening. He is sitting alone on the smaller cot in his room and is talking to the Mother of the Universe. He says, “Mother, why do You create such confusion? Should I go there, Mother? If You take me, I’ll go.”

There was talk about Thakur’s visit to a devotee’s house. Is he speaking like that to get the permission of the Mother of the Universe?

Sri Ramakrishna again talks to the Mother of the Universe. It seems that he is praying to Her for a devotee of his inner circle. He says, “Mother, please make him stainless. Why have you given him only one part¹ of divine power?”

He is silent for awhile. Then he says, “O yes, I see. It will be enough for Your work.”

Is this what Thakur is saying: Out of sixteen kalas, one kala of Your power will be enough for Your work, for teaching humanity?

1. Kala.

Now in an ecstatic mood, Thakur talks to M. and the others about the Primal Power and the meaning of the incarnation of God.

“That which is Brahman is also Power,¹ which I call Mother. When It is inactive I call It Brahman and when It creates, preserves and dissolves, I call It Power. It’s like still water and water with ripples in it. An incarnation of God is the play of Power. He comes to teach love and devotion to God. An incarnation is like the udder of a cow. You can only get milk from the udders.

“God manifests Himself as a human being – like fish collect in a hole.”

Some devotees wonder if Sri Ramakrishna is a God-man like Sri Krishna, Chaitanya Deva and Christ.

1. Shakti.

Section VIII

Adhar's House – Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, Ishan and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Childlike faith – the untouchables and Shankaracharya – heart of a sadhu

Sri Ramakrishna has kindly visited Adhar's house in Calcutta. He is sitting in the parlour. It is afternoon. Rakhal, Adhar, M., Ishan¹ and several people from the neighbourhood are present.

Thakur is fond of Ishan Mukherji. He was a Superintendent in the Accountant General's Office. After retiring he took to meditation and charitable work. One day Thakur went to his house on the Macchuabazar Street and had his meal there, with devotees. Ishan had invited a number of guests. (See Part I). Thakur stayed almost the whole day. Narendra was expected, but couldn't come.

Since retiring, Ishan has visited Thakur at Dakshineswar often and gone to a solitary spot on the bank of the Ganges in Bhatpara to meditate. Now he

1. All of Ishan's sons were very well-educated. The eldest, Gopal, was a District Magistrate. The middle, Satish Chandra, was a District Judge. Satish was a classmate of Narendra. He could play the pakhavaj beautifully. He was a government servant in Gazipur. It was at his house that Narendra stayed during his pravajya state [period of sannyasa wandering] and met Pavhari Baba. One of the brothers, Girish, had worked as Assistant Registrar at Calcutta University for a long time. Ishan gave so much in charity that at the end of his life he became a debtor and suffered great difficulties. His wife died many years before his own death.

is going to perform Gayatri purashcharana in Bhatpara.

Today is Saturday, 22 September 1883, the 6th day of Aswin.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): “Please tell that story of yours – about the boy who sent a letter.”

Ishan (*smiling*): “A boy heard that God had created us. So he wrote a letter to God as a prayer and mailed it in a post box. The address he gave was Heaven.” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “Did you notice the story? You can only succeed in spiritual life with childlike faith.¹ (*To Ishan*) And that story about the renunciation of work.”

Ishan: “After realizing God, all ritualistic devotion like sandhya drops off. One day everybody was performing devotions on the bank of the Ganges, everybody but one person. When asked, he said, ‘I’m observing impurity.’² I can’t perform rituals. I’ve had both the defilements of death and birth – the death of Mother Ignorance and the birth of Self-knowledge.³

Sri Ramakrishna: “And now that story – about caste discrimination falling off by attaining Self-realization.”

Ishan: “Acharya Shankara was going up the steps in Kashi after a bath in the Ganges. Seeing an untouchable with some dogs in front of him, he

1. The kingdom of heaven is revealed unto babes, but is hidden from the wise and the prudent. Bible.

2. Ashoucha.

3. Atmarama.

said, ‘Hey, you touched me!’ The pariah said, ‘Master, neither have you touched me nor have I touched you. The Atman within all is not touched by anything.’ Is there any difference between the sun’s reflection in wine and in the water of the Ganges?”¹

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “And next the story about the harmony of religions – that God can be realized by any path.”²

Ishan (*laughing*): “Both Hari and Hara come from the same root. The only difference is inflection.³ He who is Hari is also Hara. It’s only a question of faith.”⁴

Sri Ramakrishna: “And also that story about the heart of a sadhu being the biggest of all.”

Ishan (*smiling*): “The earth is the biggest thing we see. But the sea is even bigger – and the sky bigger than the sea! But Lord Vishnu has authority over all – heaven, the mortal world and the nether world – all three worlds in a single foot. That foot of Vishnu is in the sadhu’s heart. So the sadhu’s heart is the biggest of all.”

The devotees thoroughly enjoy listening to these words.

1. Bhagavad Gita 6:29.

2. Bhagavad Gita 4:11.

3. The word *pratyaya* has two meanings: faith and inflection. This is a pun meaning that if you have faith in God it doesn’t matter who you worship.

4. Hari is a name of God according to followers of Vishnu, Hara of Shiva.

Chapter II

The worship of the Primal Power is the worship of Brahman – Brahman and the Primal Power are the same

Identity of God the Absolute and God the creator, preserver and destroyer

Ishan is going to perform Gayatri purashcharana in Bhatpara. Gayatri is the mantra of Brahman. Until a person is completely rid of worldly attractions, he does not attain the knowledge of Brahman. But a worldly mind cannot be gotten rid of since life depends on food in the age of Kali. It is always concerned with the senses¹ of sight, taste, smell, touch and sound. That is why Sri Ramakrishna says, “It is not possible to live by the Vedic tenets in the Kaliyuga.” That which is Brahman is also Shakti, the power. When worshipping power, one is worshipping Brahman. When there is creation, preservation and destruction, it is called Shakti – they are not different, they are the same.”

The quest of the Absolute and Ishan – the Vedantist position, ‘I am He,’ So ‘ham

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): “Why do you roam around with neti-neti [not this, not this] on your lips? Nothing can be said about Brahman – only that it exists, “*asti mātram*,”² only Rama.

1. Bhagavad Gita 12:5.

2. *naiva vācā na manasā prāptuṃ śakyo na cakṣuṣā ,
astīti bruvato'nyatra katham tadupalabhyate .
astītyevopalabdavyastattvabhāvena cobhayoḥ ,
astītyevopalabdhasya tattvabhāvaḥ prasīdati .
kathopaniṣad 2-3-12, 2-3-13*

[It cannot be attained through speech, nor through mind, nor through eye. How can It be known to anyone apart from him who speaks of It as existing? The Self is (first) to be realized as existing,

“Whatever we see or think is the manifestation of the same Primal Power, the Primal Consciousness¹ – creation, preservation and dissolution, the world and living beings. Also meditation, he who meditates, love for God, ecstatic love for God – all these are manifestations of that Primal Power.

“But Brahman and Shakti are inseparable. Hanuman sang a hymn of praise for Rama when he returned from Lanka. He sang, ‘O Rama, You are the Supreme Brahman² and Sita is Your Shakti. You are one and the same.’ Like a snake and its zigzag movement. The moment you think of the movement of a snake, the snake comes to your mind. And when you think of a snake, you think of its movement. As soon as you think of milk, you think of its colour, its whiteness. And as soon as you think of milky whiteness, you think of milk. As soon as you think of wetness, you think of water. And, as soon as you think of water, you have to think of its wetness.

“This very Primal Power, or Mahamaya, covers Brahman. As soon as the veil is removed you realize, ‘I am You and You are I.’

“As long as there is the covering of Mahamaya, cherishing the Vedantist attitude of So ’ham, ‘I am indeed that Supreme Brahman,’ is not correct. Waves belong to water, water does not belong to

and then as It really is. Of these two, the real nature of the Self that has been known as merely existing, becomes favourably disposed for the self-revelation.]

1. Chitshakti.

2. Parabrahman.

waves. As long as there is the veil, it is good to call God, ‘Ma, Ma – You are my Mother, I am Your child.’ ‘You are my Lord, I am Your servant.’ The attitude of master and servant is also good. All other attitudes, such as serenity, friendship etc. – follow from this attitude. If a master has affection for his servant, he may say to him, ‘Come, sit beside me. You and I are not different.’ But if the servant sits beside the master of his own accord, won’t the master be cross?”

The Primal Power, the play of the incarnation of God – and Ishan – what is maya? The harmony of the Vedas, the Puranas and the Tantras

“As for the play of an incarnation of God, it is all the manifestation of the power of Consciousness. He who is Brahman is also Rama, Krishna and Shiva.”

Ishan: “Hari and Hara come from the same root. They are only distinguished in inflection.” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, except for the One, nothing exists. The Vedas say, ‘Om Sat-chit-ananda Brahman.’ The Puranas says, ‘Om Sat-chit-ananda Krishna.’ And the Tantra says, ‘Om Sat-chit-ananda Shiva.’

“This very Consciousness in the form of Mahamaya keeps everyone in ignorance. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* says, ‘All the rishis who saw Rama just said only this, ‘O Rama, don’t enchant us with Your world-bewitching maya!’”

1. ajñānenāvṛtam jñānam tena muhyanti jantavaḥ
gītā 5-15

Ishan: “What is maya?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Everything that you see, hear or think is all maya. If you have to say so in a word, ‘lust and greed’ constitute the veil of maya.

“There’s nothing wrong in chewing betel-nut, eating fish, having a smoke or massaging the body with oil. What is the use of only giving these up? Giving up ‘lust and greed’ is the one thing necessary. Giving them up is true renunciation. Householders should now and then retire into solitude and practice spiritual disciplines. After developing love for God through them, they can renounce mentally. Sannyasis should renounce both within and without.”

Keshab Chandra Sen and renunciation – Navavidhan and doctrine of the Formless – dogmatism

“I said to Keshab Sen, ‘How can a person suffering from delirium be cured if he lives in a room where there’s a pitcher of water and tamarind pickles? You have to go into solitude now and then.’”

A Devotee: “Sir, how about Navavidhan – it seems to me like a mix¹ of five kinds of lentils.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Some people say it’s modern. But I ask myself, ‘Is the God of the Brahmos a

[Knowledge is enveloped in ignorance, hence do beings get deluded.]
 daivī hyeṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā |
 māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṁ taranti te ||
 gītā 7-14

[Verily, this divine illusion of Mine, constituted of the gunas, is difficult to cross over. Those who devote themselves to Me alone, cross over this illusion.]

1. Khichuri.

different God?’ They call their cult Navavidhan, the new dispensation. That may be so. Just as there are six systems of philosophy. Maybe this is like them.

“But, you know where the believers of the formless God are mistaken? When they say that God is formless and all other views are wrong.

“I know that God is both with form and without form – and much more beyond that. God can be everything.¹”

God in the untouchables

(*To Ishan*) “The same Consciousness, the same power of Ignorance,² has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.³ One day when I was meditating, my mind entered Rasik’s house. He is a scavenger. I said to my mind, ‘Stay, stay here, you rascal!’ The Divine Mother showed me that all the members of his household were the same containers and have the same kulkundalini inside and the same six centers.

“Is the Primal Power male or female? In the countryside [Kamarpukur], I saw Kali being worshipped in the house of the Lahas. She was wearing a sacred thread around Her neck. Somebody asked, ‘Why a sacred thread around the

1. nānto'sti mama divyānām vibhūtīnām parantapa |
gītā 10-40.

[There is no end of My divine attributes, O scorcher of foes.]

2. Mahamaya.

3. mahābhūtānyahaṅkāro buddhiravyaktameva ca,
indriyāṇi daśaikāṇi ca pañca cendriyagocarāḥ.
gītā 13-6

[The great elements, egoism, intellect, as also the Unmanifested, the ten senses and the one (mind), and the five objects of the senses.]

Mother's neck?' The master of the house, said, 'Brother, you have understood the Mother. But I don't know whether She is male or female.'¹

"It's said that the Mahamaya once swallowed Shiva. When her six centers were awakened, Shiva emerged out of Her thigh. Then He [Shiva] created the Tantra philosophy.

"You have to take refuge in that Chitshakti, that Mahamaya."

Ishan: "Please shower your grace on me."

Advice to Ishan – dive deep – need of a guru – brahmin pundit – Ishan and scriptures – mere book-learning

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pray with a guileless mind, 'O Lord, reveal Yourself to me!' Weep! Say, 'O Lord, please take my mind off 'lust and greed!'"

"And dive. Can you reach the jewels by swimming on the surface of the water? You have to dive deep.

"Get the information from your guru about where to search. A person was looking for a special stone image of Shiva.² Somebody came along and

1. tadvā etadakṣaram gārgyadr̥ṣṭam dr̥ṣṭr, aśrutam śrotṛ, amataṁ manṭṛ, avijñātam vijñāṭṛ, nānyadato'sti dr̥ṣṭr, nānyadato'sti śrotṛ, nānyadato'sti manṭṛ, nānyadato'sti vijñāṭṛ, etasminnu khalvakṣare gārgyākāśa otaśca protaśceti.

bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 3-8-11

[O Gargi, this Immutable, is never seen but is the Witness. It is never heard, but is the Hearer. It is never thought, but is the Thinker. It is never known, but is the Knower. There is no other witness but This, no other hearer but This, no other thinker but This, no other knower but This. By this Immutable, O Gargi, is the ether pervaded.]

2. Vanalinga, a particularly-shaped stone found in nature.

said, ‘Go near that stream and you will find a tree. Close to the tree is a whirlpool. You will have to dive at that spot. Then you will find the stone image.’ You have to get instruction from the guru where to search.”

Ishan: “Yes, sir.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Sat-chit-ananda Himself comes as the Guru.¹ If someone receives initiation from a human guru and regards the guru as a mere man, he will not succeed. He will have to regard the guru as God Himself. Only then will he have faith in the mantra. And faith does bring everything. Eklavya (a low caste boy) made a clay image of Drona and then learned archery standing in the forest before the image. He worshipped the clay Drona as Dronacharya himself. Thus, through that faith, he perfected himself in archery.

“And don’t bother too much with brahmin pundits. They’re always after money.

“I’ve seen brahmins who’d come to perform ceremonies – reading the Chandi or some other scripture – turning over many of the pages without reading. (*All laugh.*)

“A nail knife² is enough to kill yourself, but to kill others you need such weapons as a sword and a shield. That’s the purpose of the scriptures.

1. pitāsi lokasya carācarasya tvamasya pūjyaśca gururgariyān
gītā 11-43

[You are the Father of the world, moving and unmoving; the object of its worship; greater than the great.]

2. Naharni.

“You don’t need many scriptures.¹ If you don’t have discrimination, mere scholarship won’t help. Even the study of the six philosophies is of no avail. Go in solitude and weep for Him, call upon Him. He will certainly do everything for you.”

Practicing spiritual disciplines in seclusion – concern for cleanliness and Ishan

Ishan is building a hut with eight thatched roofs on the bank of the Ganges in Bhatpara to perform purushcharana. Thakur has heard about it.

Sri Ramakrishna (*impatiently, to Ishan*): “Oh yes, is the hut ready? The fact is that the less people know about such activities, the better. People of sattvic nature meditate in their minds or in a forest or some solitary place. Sometimes they even meditate inside a mosquito net.”

Sometimes Ishan takes Hazra to Bhatpara with him. Hazra is always concerned about outward purity. Sri Ramakrishna has asked him not to behave like that.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): “Well, don’t involve yourself with undue concern about outward purity. A sadhu felt very thirsty. A man with a water-skin passed his way. He offered water to the sadhu. The sadhu asked, ‘Is your container clean?’² The man

1. uttamā tattvacintaiva madhyamaṁ śāstracintanam |
adhamā mantracintā ca tīrthabhrāntyaḍhamādhamaḥ ||
maitreyī upaniṣat 2-21

[To meditate upon the Reality is the best, to meditate upon the scriptures is placed in the middle, to meditate upon the mantra is inferior and to wander about in the places of pilgrimage inferior than the inferior.]

2. navadvāramalasrāvaṁ sadā kāle svabhāvajam |
durgandhaṁ durmalopetaṁ spr̥ṣṭvā snānaṁ vidhīyate ||

said, ‘Sir, it is very clean, but in yours is a lot of urine and excreta. So I say, drink water from my skin. It won’t cause any harm.’ Your skin, i.e. your body, your stomach, contains filth.

“And believe in God’s name. Then you won’t need to go on pilgrimages.”

Saying this and overwhelmed with emotion, Thakur begins to sing.

Renunciation of rituals in the stage of perfection

Why go to Gaya, Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I can breathe my last chanting Kali’s name?

Of what use are rituals for one who utters Kali’s name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.

Charity, vows, and almsgiving no longer appeal to Madan’s mind. His worship alone is surrender at the Mother’s blessed feet.

Lord Shiva Himself, the God of Gods, with all His powers, sings Her praises. Who, then, can conceive of the power of Her holy name?

Ishan remains silent.

Advice to Ishan; childlike faith – first practicing spiritual disciplines like Janaka, then God-realization in the world

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): “If you still have any doubts lurking inside, please ask me.”

Ishan: “Sir, you talked about faith.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It’s only through true faith that you can realize Him. It happens sooner if you

have full faith. If a cow is choosy about her fodder, she yields less milk. If she grazes on all kinds of grasses and leaves, she yields more milk.

“Rajakrishna Bannerji’s son told a story: A person received a command from God to see his ideal deity in a ram. He believed it. God exists in all.

“A guru said to his disciple, ‘It is Rama who resides in every being.’ The devotee put his full faith in this. When he saw a dog running away with a chapatti in its mouth, the devotee ran after it with butter in a container, shouting, ‘Rama, wait a minute! Let me butter your chapatti.’

“Oh, what faith Krishnakishore had. He would say that by reciting, ‘Om Krishna, Om Rama,’ you earn the result of millions of sandhyas.

“Also Krishnakishore would say to me in my ear secretly, ‘Please don’t tell anybody that I don’t like sandhya and other rituals anymore.’

“I also feel the same way. The Divine Mother reveals to me that She has become everything. Once when I was coming back from the Jhautala towards the Panchavati after easing myself, I saw a dog following me. I stopped at the Panchavati and said to myself, ‘Maybe the Mother is going to say something through it.’

“So, as you said just now, a person attains everything by faith.”¹

1. sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja,
ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayaīṣyāmi mā śucaḥ.
gītā 18-66

**Difficult problems of the householder and the Lord's
grace**

Ishan: “But I am a householder.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “So what? By His grace, even the impossible becomes possible.¹ Ramprasad sang, ‘This world is a veil of deception.’ Somebody replied to him by way of another song:

This world is indeed a thing of joy; let me eat and drink and be merry.

King Janaka, the great royal sage, was he inferior in any respect to a 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.

“But first you have to practice spiritual disciplines secretly, in seclusion. Then you can live in the world and become a King Janaka. But if you don't, how can you be like him?

“Just see, Kartika, Ganesha, Lakshmi, Saraswati, are all there, but Shiva is sometimes lost in samadhi. And sometimes he dances, chanting ‘Rama, Rama.’”

[Relinquishing all dharmas take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate you from all sins; grieve not.]

1. With man it is impossible, but nothing is impossible with the Lord – Christ.

Section IX

At Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple with the devotees. Rakhal, M., Ram and some other devotees are present. Hazra is outside on the verandah. Today is Sunday, 23 September 1883, the 7th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Bhadra.

Nityagopal, Tarak and a few other devotees are staying at Ram's house. He treats them with great affection and regard.

Sometimes Rakhal stays with Adhar Sen. Nityagopal is always absorbed in a spiritual mood. Tarak's mind is also indrawn – he does not talk to people very much these days.

Sri Ramakrishna's worry about Narendra

Thakur is now talking about Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to a certain devotee*):
“Narendra doesn't like even you. (*To M.*) Why? Why didn't he come to Adhar's house?”

“There are so many qualities all in the one person, Narendra. Singing, playing instruments, studying. The other day when he was in Captain's carriage, Captain asked him so many times to sit next to him. But Narendra sat on the other side and didn't even look at Captain.”

Pundit Gauri, a Shakta, and Sri Ramakrishna

“What is the use of mere learning? Practice of spiritual disciplines are what is necessary. Gauri Pundit of Indesh was a spiritual seeker – and a scholar. Sometimes he would become absorbed in the ecstasy of the Divine Mother, now and then chanting [a Vedic hymn to the Mother], ‘*Ha re, re, re. Niralamba lambodar janani kam yami sharan.*’ The other pundits would sit there like earthworms. I also would become overcome with emotion. Seeing me eat, he would ask whether I’d practiced spiritual disciplines with a bhairavi.

“Gauri was enraged to hear that a follower of the Kartabhaja sect described the formless aspect of God,¹ i.e. the shape² of water.³

“At first he was a bigoted Shakta. He would pick up a tulasi leaf with two sticks⁴ – he wouldn’t touch it. (*Everybody laugh.*) Then he went home. When he returned, he didn’t behave like this.

“I planted a tulasi plant in front of the Kali Temple. It died. It is said that tulasi plants don’t grow where goats are sacrificed.

“Gauri used to give very nice interpretations. He would say, ‘O this!’ explaining, ‘O disciple! This is your ideal deity.’ He would say that the ten heads of Ravana are the ten senses.⁵ Kumbhakarana was a man of tamas, Ravana of rajas, and Bibhishana of

1. Nirakara: Sanskrit word for the Formless God.

2. Akara.

3. Neer.

4. A bigoted worshipper disdains anything to do with any other sect. Tulsi leaves are sacred to Vishnu.

5. The 10 indriyas: 5 sense organs and 5 organs of action.

sattva. That's why Bibhishana was blessed by Rama.”

Ram, Tarak and Nityagopal

Thakur is resting for awhile after his midday meal. Ram, Tarak [later Swami Shivananda] and some other devotees arrive from Calcutta. Having saluted Thakur, they sit on the floor. M. is also sitting on the floor. Ram says, “We're learning to play the mridanga.¹”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ram*): “Has Nityagopal learned to play?”

Ram: “No, he plays it just a little bit.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What about Tarak?”

Ram: “He plays a good deal.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Then he wouldn't sit so downcast, with his eyes on the ground. “If you give your mind to something else, it doesn't dwell on God that much.”

Ram: “I've been learning the drum only to play kirtan.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Are you learning to sing.”

M. (*smiling*): “No sir, not exactly. I just hum like a drone.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Have you learned the song, ‘I have no use for knowledge or reason. Only make me mad in Your love?’ My attitude is exactly this.”

1. An earthen drum.

Hazra shows malice toward some.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ram and other devotees*):
 “In Kamarpukur I used to visit one house almost every day. The boys were my age. They came here the other day and stayed for two or three days. Their mother used to dislike everybody, like Hazra. One day her foot was dislocated and gangrene set in. The room smelled so bad nobody could enter it. So I said to Hazra, ‘Don’t find fault with other people.’”

It is now about four o’clock. Thakur goes to the Jhautala slowly for a wash. A cotton carpet has been spread on the verandah southeast of Thakur’s room. He will sit there when he returns from the Jhautala. Ram and others are present. Adhar Sen belongs to the caste of goldsmiths. Ram Babu comments that Rakhai had eaten at his house. Adhar is a great devotee. This is the topic of conversation.

A devotee jokes about the disposition of some of the goldsmiths. He said they like to eat bread with dry roasted vegetables. It doesn’t matter if they have anything else to eat. They eat high quality rice, and they must have fruit as snacks. They like hog plum. If they receive hilsa fish¹ or sandesh as a present from someone, they send the same to the father-in-law of their daughter or son. Who would send the same present to his own daughter or son’s father-in-law? In this way one hilsa fish would be eaten in fifteen to twenty houses. The women do all the work, but the cooking is done by a brahmin from Orissa. He spends an hour or two in every home. Sometimes one Oriya brahmin cooks at four

1. A delicacy of West Bengal.

or five places. Thakur laughs but offers no opinion of his own.

Thakur in samadhi – he talks to the Mother of the Universe

It is evening. While standing in the northwestern corner of the courtyard, Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi. After a long time his external awareness returns. What an amazing state Thakur is in. These days he almost always remains absorbed in samadhi. The slightest suggestion can make him unconscious of the outside world. When devotees come, he talks for awhile; otherwise he remains absorbed within. He cannot attend to worship, japa or any ritual.

Sri Ramakrishna in the state in which one cannot perform work of any kind

Coming out of samadhi, Thakur remains standing and talks with the Mother of the Universe. He says, “Mother, worship has left me and also japa.¹ Look Mother, don’t make me so inert. Let my attitude be that of a servant of God. Mother, I should be able to talk, and chant Your name, and sing. And please, Mother, give some strength to this body so I can walk a little on my own. And be able to go to all the places where they talk about You and where Your devotees are.”

This morning Sri Ramakrishna came to the Kali temple and offered flowers at the feet of the Mother of the Universe. Now he is talking to her.

1. yastvātmaratireva syādātmaṛptaśca mānavaḥ |
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭastasya kāryaṁ na vidyate ||
gītā 3-17

[But the man who is devoted to the Self, and is satisfied with the Self, and content in the Self alone, has no obligatory duty.]

Sri Ramakrishna says, “Mother, this morning I offered a few flowers at Your feet. I thought I had done well and that my mind was going to external worship. But Mother, why did this happen? Why are You making me inert again?”

It is the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra. The moon has not yet appeared. It is a dark night. Sri Ramakrishna remains in ecstasy. He returns to his room and sits on the small cot in his room, still abstracted. And he talks again to the Mother of the Universe.

**Advice to Ishan – Vedic injunctions don’t suit the
Kaliyuga – carry out spiritual practice taking God as
Mother**

He seems to be talking to the Divine Mother about the devotees. He is talking about Ishan Mukherji. Ishan had said, “I’ll go to Bhatpara and practice the Gayatri *purashcharana*.¹” Sri Ramakrishna had said to him that Vedic injunctions did not suit the Kaliyuga because people have to work hard for food, are short lived and their body and sense consciousness can’t be completely given up. He asked Ishan to carry out spiritual disciplines according to the Tantras instead, in the filial attitude. And he also said, “The Mother is none other than Brahman and Brahman is also the Primal Power.”

Absorbed in ecstasy Thakur now says, “What, the Gayatri purashcharana! Leaping from this thatched roof to another ... Who has told him this?”

1. The repetition of japa, increasing and decreasing the number according to the moon.

Is he doing it himself? ... Well, let him do a little purashcharana.”

(*To M.*) “Well! Is this all real, or fancies of my mind?”

M. is amazed watching Thakur talking to the Mother of the Universe in this way. He is speechless. God is very near to us. He is both outside and inside us. If that is not so, how can Sri Ramakrishna talk with Him in whispers?¹

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhai and other devotees at Dakshineswar

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the platform in front of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. He is seeing the Mother of the Universe in the image of Kali. M. and other devotees are sitting near him. It is 26 September today, 1883, the 10th day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra. It is afternoon.

A short time ago, Thakur had said, “No calculation can be made about God. His glory is boundless. What can man say in words? An ant went to a sugar hill and ate a grain. Its stomach was filled. Then it thought to itself, The next time I come, I’ll bring the whole hill into my hole.

“Is it possible to understand Him? That’s why my attitude is like a kitten’s. The mother cat can keep it

1. tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padaṁ sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ divīva
cakṣurātataṁ |

ṛgveda saṁhitā 1-23-20

[Just as the eye perceives the universe in the vast expanse of the sky, the illumined souls too have the clear perception of that supreme state of Vishnu, the all-pervading Reality.]

anywhere and it doesn't care. A little child doesn't know all the riches of its mother."

Sri Ramakrishna sings while he sits on the platform of the Kali temple, "O Mother, O Mother, You, the embodiment of Omkar. Mother, how much these people talk. I understand nothing, Mother. I know nothing. I take refuge in You, in You I take refuge! I pray only that I may have pure love at Your lotus feet. Please do not bewitch me with Your world-enchanting maya, Mother. I take refuge in You, in You I take refuge."

The arati is over in the temples. Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the small cot in his room. Mahendra squats on the floor.

Earlier Mahendra¹ was a regular visitor to Keshab Sen's Brahma Samaj. Since meeting Thakur, he doesn't go there any more. Sri Ramakrishna is always talking with the Mother of the Universe. Mahendra becomes speechless to see it. He is charmed by hearing about the harmony of religions and Thakur's yearning for God.

Mahendra has been visiting Thakur for almost two years. Not only does he have his darshan, he is also blessed by his grace. Thakur is always telling him and the other devotees that God is both formless and also with form, that He takes up a form for the sake of the devotee. To those who believe in God without form, he says, "Please stick to your belief. But you must remember that everything is possible for Him. He can be both with form and formless, and so much besides."

1. M., who used many names for himself, to humbly hide himself.

Sri Ramakrishna and Mahendra – God with form and formless – sense of duty – for the devotee, the world of spiritual ignorance is the pain of death

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahendra*): “You have held faith in one, the formless God?”

Mahendra: “Yes, sir. But as you say, everything is possible. Forms of God are also possible.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Beautiful. And remember that He is residing in the world of both animate and inanimate in the form of consciousness.”

Mahendra: “I think of Him as the Consciousness of the conscious.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Stick to this attitude for the time being. There’s no need to strain and change your attitude. Gradually you will know that He Himself is consciousness and that consciousness is His consciousness only. He is the very nature of consciousness.

“Well, are you attracted by money and power?”

Mahendra: “No. But, for the sake of contentment [freedom from worry]. I want to meditate on God without anxiety.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That’s only natural.”

Mahendra: “Greed? No, I don’t have that.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, that’s all right. But who will look after your children? If you feel that you are not the doer, who will provide for your children and others?”

Mahendra: “I’ve heard that as long as there is the sense of duty, you can’t attain knowledge. Duty is the burning sun!”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Live in this state of mind now. It will be different later when the sense of duty leaves you by itself.”

Everybody is quiet for awhile.

Mahendra: “If you have partial knowledge in worldly life, it’s like death in full consciousness – like cholera.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Rama! Rama!”

If a person has awareness at the time of death from cholera, he suffers great pain. Perhaps this is what Mahendra is referring to: the world of ignorance is like a forest fire. Maybe that’s why Thakur exclaimed, “Rama, Rama.”

Mahendra: “Other people are like delirious patients. They go into a state of unconsciousness and don’t feel the pain of death.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Look, what good is money anyway? Jaygopal Sen has so much money, but he’s not happy because his sons aren’t obedient.”

Mahendra: “Is poverty the only suffering in this world? We have six enemies. Add to it disease and grief.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “And then name and fame – the desire to earn a name.

“Well! What do you think about the state I’m in?”

Mahendra: "The state in which one finds oneself on waking up. You are ever united with God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you see me in dream?"

Mahendra: "Yes, sir. Many times."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How? Do you see me giving instruction?"

Mahendra doesn't reply.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you see me giving instruction, know that it is Sat-chit-ananda."

Then Mahendra tells him everything that he had seen in dream. Sri Ramakrishna listens attentively.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahendra*): "This is very good. Don't reason any more. You are a Shakta."

Section X

Sri Ramakrishna at the Durga Puja Festival at Adhar's House

Chapter I

Today is Navami Puja day, Wednesday, 10 October 1883, the 25th day of Aswin. Adhar is celebrating the Durga Puja festival at his house and has invited Thakur to it. Sri Ramakrishna is standing in the worship Hall, watching the arati of Sri Durga.

Sri Ramakrishna has come with devotees, including Balaram's father and Sarada Babu, a retired school inspector and a friend of Adhar. Adhar has invited his neighbours and relatives for the occasion. Quite a number of them have come.

Sri Ramakrishna stands, in ecstasy, after watching the evening arati. Absorbed, he sings to the Divine Mother.

Adhar is a householder devotee. Many householder devotees present have been scalded by the three fires of the world.¹

Perhaps that is why Sri Ramakrishna sings a hymn of praise to the Mother of the Universe for the welfare of all.

O Mother, O Redeemer, take me across quickly this time.

I am dying in fear of the God of Death.²

O, Mother of the Universe, preserver and enchantress of the world, and its begetter.

1. Three kinds of affliction: spiritual, material and supernatural.

2. Yama.

You took birth from Yashoda's womb, emerging as the Lord's divine sport.

In Vrindavan as Radha You sported and enjoyed Yourself with Krishna, the beloved of Vraja.

Full of sweetness, You took delight and participated in the dance of divine sport.

You are Shiva's consort; You are the Mother, the heartthrob of Govinda. You dwell in the heart and bestow 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 fathom Your greatness?

**Sri Ramakrishna talks with the Mother of the Universe
in an ecstatic mood**

Sri Ramakrishna goes to Adhar's parlour on the second floor and sits down. Many invited guests are there. Balaram's father, Sarada Babu and others sit near him.

Still absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur says to the guests, "Gentlemen, I have eaten. Go now and enjoy the feast."

The Divine Mother has accepted Adhar's offering. Is it because of this that Sri Ramakrishna is saying to the Mother of the Universe, in an ecstatic mood, "I have eaten. Now, you people should eat the sacramental food." Still absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur says to Her, "Should I eat, Mother, or will You eat? O Mother, the image of divine bliss!"

Is Sri Ramakrishna seeing the Mother of the Universe and himself as one? Has the Divine Mother incarnated in this world as a son to instruct mankind? Is this why Thakur says, "I have eaten?"

In a state of ecstasy, he sees the six spiritual centres in his body and the Mother seated in them.

Absorbed, he 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 vina.¹

In the machine of a human body, You manifest Yourself. With Your great mantra, You pierce the three gunas which reside in the three spiritual nerves² – the Sushumna, Ida and Pingla.

You provide energy to the three musical scales.

You abide in the six-petalled lotus of Svadhisthana as Bhairava musical mode.³

You illuminate as Mallhar⁴ raga in the Manipura and as the Vasanta⁵ 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 essence is? But sing like the cuckoo and Your essence is the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas.

He sings again:

-
1. A stringed musical instrument.
 2. Nadis.
 3. Raga.
 4. Indian musical mode of rainy season.
 5. An Indian musical mode.

What more can I reason? I am already dead, reasoning and reasoning.

How did She take a black complexion, She whose name dispels the fear of death, and She who has Mahakala lying at Her feet.

There are so many forms of black, but this blackness is really amazing – it illumines the lotus of my heart when contemplated there.

She who is called Kali is blacker than black.

One who has seen this form of Hers but once likes no other form.

Prasad says in delight, “Where is such a woman that by merely hearing her name – without seeing Her – the mind is at once absorbed.”

Taking refuge in the Fearless One, all fear is dispelled. Perhaps it is for this reason that Thakur is dispensing fearlessness to the devotees by singing this song.

I have surrendered myself at the Fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama any more?

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali’s name in my heart.

Having sold my body in the marketplace of the world, I have bought the name of Durga.

I have cast from me my six unflagging foes.¹

This time when Yama comes, I’ll open my heart to him. This is my resolve.

The name of Tara, the Essence of Essences, I have tied to the top tuft of my hair.

Say Ramprasad: I have cried “Durga!” and am ready for the journey.

1. The six passions: Lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and envy.

Sarada Babu is mourning the death of his son. That's why his friend Adhar has brought him to Thakur. Sarada Babu is a devotee of Gauranga. At his sight, Sri Ramakrishna is inspired with the feeling of Gauranga. Thakur sings:

Why has my body turn fair? (for complete song see Section 19, Chapter 4 of Vol. IV of this title).

Now he sings, inspired with the feeling of Gauranga. He said that Sarada Babu was very fond of the song:

Surely Gauranga would be in ecstasy.

How else would he who is the treasure house of ecstasy be?

He laughs, weeps and dances, charged with divine feeling.

Seeing a forest, he thinks of Vrindavan. Seeing the sea, he thinks it the Jamuna.

He who has Krishna within and Gaur without surely will know ecstasy.

Gaur sobs and weeps. He holds his own feet and says:

Where are you, Radha, full of the ecstasy of love?

And he sings:

O Mother! The neighbours raise a scandal, they cast aspersions on me because of Gaur.

How shall I explain and to whom, O the friend of my heart? I am dying of shame.

One day Gaur was performing the kirtan round the city with his troupe.

Shouting, Hari Bol, Hari Bol, he went through Nadia's bazaar.

Accompanying them, I saw his two red-hued holy feet.

One day, there was noise and bustle of the kirtan in the house of Srivas.

The moon-faced Gaur rolled in ecstasy in Srivas' courtyard.

I stood aside, hiding myself in a corner.

I fell in a swoon and the wife of Srivas brought me to consciousness.

One day, the moon-faced Gaur was standing on the bank of the Ganges,

The moon and the sun both shone on Gaur's body.

Seeing the beautiful image of Gaur, both Shaktas and Shaivites were entranced.

Suddenly my water-pot fell and the husband's sister, that gossip, saw it.

M. muses: Balaram's father is a Vaishnava. Is it for this reason that Ramakrishna is singing the mad love song of the gopis and Sri Krishna?

O Friend, I have not found my Shyam within my reach.

Can I live happily at home? Had Shyam been the hair of my head, I would have made a braid with Bakul flowers entwined.

Had Shyam been a bracelet, he would always be around my arm.

O friend, I would have walked along shaking my arm for show.

I would have gone on the main road, wearing that bracelet of Shyam.

When Shyam plays his flute, I come to the Jamuna to fetch water.

And I look all around like a shy she-deer.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna on the harmony of religions – conversation with Balaram's father

Balaram's father has estates in Bhadrak and other places in Orissa and has built guest houses and temples for the service of the deities in Vrindavan, Puri, Bhadrak and other places for the service of the deities. During the last part of his life, he devotes himself to Shyamasundar Kunj [Krishna] in Vrindavan.

Balaram's father is an old Vaishnava. Many Vaishnava devotees have no sympathy for the views of Shaktas, Shaivites and Vedantists. Some of them even have malicious attitudes toward them. But Sri Ramakrishna does not like such a narrow-minded opinion. He says that you can realize God by all paths, all beliefs, if you have longing in your heart. Many Vaishnava devotees outwardly tell beads and recite the scriptures, but they have no yearning for God-realization. Perhaps that's why Thakur is advising Balaram's father.

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna wears the habit of Vaishnava hermits and is initiated with Rama mantra

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I thought, why should I walk on a single track? I also took up the habits of a Vaishnava recluse in Vrindavan. I followed this attitude for three days. Then I was initiated with the Rama mantra at Dakshineswar – I had Vaishnava mark on my forehead and wore a diamond around my neck. After a few days I put them all away.

**Advice to Balaram’s father – God with attributes and
the attributeless – God with form and formless**

“A man had a tub. People took their clothes to him to be dyed. The tub was full of a solution of dye, but the clothes would take whatever colour the people wanted by being dipped in the same liquid. Someone was speechless to see this and said to the dyer, ‘Please give me the dye you are using.’”

Is Thakur saying that people from all religions will go to him to be awakened spiritually?

Sri Ramakrishna adds, “A chameleon lived on a tree. One person saw that it was green, another black, and another saw it yellow. Different people saw it in different colours. They talked about it, one saying that the animal was green. Another said, ‘No, it is red.’ ‘No, no,’ another said, ‘It is yellow.’ And they began to quarrel. Then all these fellows went to a person who was sitting under the tree. He said, ‘I live under this tree day and night. I know that it is a chameleon. It changes its colour often. And sometimes it has no colour at all.’”

Is Sri Ramakrishna saying that God is with qualities, and that He assumes various forms? And again, that He is without qualities – He has no colour, He is beyond mind and speech? And that the sweetness of God can be tasted on all paths – bhakti yoga as well as jnana yoga?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram’s father*): “Don’t read any more books. You can read devotional scriptures, like the life of Chaitanya.¹”

1. *Chaitanya Charitamrita*.

**The significance of the play of Radha-Krishna –
sweetness and the taster of sweetness – the one thing
needful**

“There is nothing more to it than this: to love Him and to taste His sweetness. He is sweetness, the devotee is the taster – it is the devotee who drinks the sweetness. He is a lotus and the devotee is the bee. The devotee drinks the honey of the lotus.

“Just as a devotee can’t live without the Lord, the Lord can’t live without a devotee. In that case, the devotee is the sweetness and the Lord its taster. The devotee is the lotus and the Lord a bee. To enjoy His sweetness God becomes two, which is the reason for the divine play of Radha-Krishna.”

**Advice to Balaram’s father: How long do holy duties
like visiting places of pilgrimage, wearing a string of
beads and religious habit last?**

“In the beginning a person should go on pilgrimage, wear a string of beads and practice rituals. But after attaining the goal, after realizing God, outer display gradually decreases. Then there is only living with God’s name – remembering and meditating on it.¹

“Sixteen rupees are a lot of paise. But when sixteen rupees are put together it doesn’t look like much of a heap. When they are turned into one gold piece, how small they become. And when you buy a diamond for it, people hardly notice it.”²

1. Bhagavad Gita 3:17.

2. Bible, Matthew 13:45-46: A merchant sold all he had, closed his business, and bought a pearl of great price.

Vaishnavas criticize people who don't wear outer signs like rosaries around their necks. Is this why Thakur is saying that after God-realization, a devotee doesn't have any need for religious rosaries and clothes? When you attain the real thing, the outer observances decrease?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father*): “The Kartabhajas talk about beginners, practioners, perfected ones and the perfected among the perfect. A beginner puts a vermilion mark on his forehead, wears a rosary around his neck and practices outer rituals. Practioners don't observe as much outer conduct – for example, the bauls. The perfected is one who has firm faith that God exists. The perfected among the perfect are like Chaitanya Deva. They have realized God and are always communicating with Him. The perfected of the perfect are called Sai. There is no one beyond Sai.”

Advice to Balaram's father – sattvic spiritual disciplines – harmony of all religions and giving up fanaticism

“There are different kinds of spiritual seekers. Sattvic spiritual disciplines are practiced secretly – the aspirant practices in seclusion. He looks like an average person, but he meditates inside a mosquito net.

“A rajasic aspirant indulges in outward show. He wears a rosary around his neck, puts on ochre clothes, a silk dhoti, and his rosary is interspersed with gold beads. This is like sitting outside with a signboard.”

Vaishnava devotees do not have much faith in Vedanta or Shaktism. Thakur is instructing

Balaram's father to shake off such narrow-mindedness.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father and others*): "Whatever the religion, whatever the belief, everyone calls upon the same God. So you mustn't look down upon or criticize any religion or belief. The Vedas call God Sat-chit-ananda Brahman. The Bhagavata and other Puranas call Him Sat-chit-ananda Krishna. The Tantras call Him Sat-chit-ananda Shiva – the same one Sat-chit-ananda.

"Vaishnavas have different sects. That which is called Brahman in the Vedas is called Alekh-Niranjan by one of their sects. Alekh means that which is not noticeable, cannot be seen through the senses. They say that Radha and Krishna are two parts of the same Alekh.

"In Vedanta there is no incarnation of God. Vedantists say, 'Rama and Krishna are two waves of Sat-chit-ananda.'

"There are no two, only One. Whatever one may call God, if it is from the bottom of his heart, it will surely reach Him – it is yearning which brings it about."

Sri Ramakrishna is absorbed in ecstasy while he says all this to the devotees. Now he regains outer awareness and says, "Are you Balaram's father?"

Advice to Balaram's father – yearn for God

They are all quiet for awhile. Balaram's old father counts the beads of his Harinam rosary silently.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and others*): "Well, these people chant His name so much, go on pilgrimage

so often. Then why are they like this? For them a year has eighteen months.

“I said to Harish, ‘What’s the use of going to Kashi if you have no yearning? If you have yearning, Kashi is right here.’

“Why don’t they succeed even after visiting so many holy places and repeating the name so much? They have no yearning. If you call Him with longing, He reveals Himself.

“Before a yatra [theatrical performance] begins, there is so much noise everywhere. You can’t see Sri Krishna then. Later, when Rishi Narada comes to Vrindavan with a longing heart, playing on his vina and saying, ‘My life-breath! My Govinda, my soul!’ Krishna doesn’t delay anymore. He appears with the cowherd boys and says, ‘Stop, O white cow. Stop.’”

Section XI

The Lakshmi Full Moon Festival of the Bright Fortnight of Aswin at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

**Thakur with Rakhal, Balaram's father, Beni Pal, M.,
Mani Mallick, Ishan, Kishori Gupta and others**

Today is Tuesday, 16 October 1883, 30th day of Aswin. Balaram's father and some other devotees are here. Balaram's father is a great Vaishnava. He continuously chants the name of Hari with his rosary.

Strict Vaishnavas do not like people of other sects very much. Balaram's father, on the other hand, sometimes visits Sri Ramakrishna – his attitude is different from other Vaishnavas.

Sri Ramakrishna: "People who have open minds accept all deities: Krishna, Kali, Shiva, Rama and so on."

Balaram's Father: "Yes, one husband in different dress."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But there is also something called single-minded devotion.¹ When the milkmaids went to Mathura and saw Krishna wearing a turban, they drew down their veils and said, 'Who is this man? Where is our yellow-robed Krishna with a crest of peacock feathers?'"

1. Nishtha bhakti.

“Hanuman also had single-minded devotion. When he came to Dwaraka in the Davapar yuga, Krishna said to Rukmini, ‘Hanuman won’t be happy unless he sees Rama’s form.’ So he assumed the form of Rama.”

**Amazing state of Sri Ramakrishna – union of the
temporal and the Absolute**

“What do I know, brother? I’m in this state when I descend from the Absolute to the phenomenal, and then I return to the Absolute.

“Experiencing the Absolute is called Knowledge of Brahman. It is very difficult. Unless you’re completely rid of worldly attachment, you can’t succeed. When Bhagavati took birth in the house of Himalaya, She appeared before Her father in many forms.’¹ Himalaya said, ‘Mother, I want to see Brahman.’ Bhagavati said to him, ‘Father, if that is what you desire, you’ll have to associate with sadhus.’ You’ll have to keep the company of the holy and live in solitude from time to time, leaving behind your worldly activities.

“The One has produced many – the phenomenal comes from the Absolute. In a particular state of consciousness, ‘many’ vanishes. Then even ‘one’ also disappears, for if there is one, there is also two. It is beyond all comparison. You can’t describe It with any analogy. It’s not darkness and light. It’s not the light that we see. That light is not material light.²

1. Devi Bhagavata, 7th Skanda, chapters 31, and 35 to 36.

2. tacchubhram jyotiṣām jyotistadyadātmaavidō viduḥ
muṇḍakopaniṣad 2-2-9

[It is pure, and is the light of lights, It is that which the knowers of the Self realize.]

“And when God changes the state of mind, when He brings the mind down to the phenomenal world, I see that He Himself has become the Lord, maya, the individual soul and the world.¹”

God is the doer – You and yours

“And sometimes He reveals to me that He has created all creatures and the world. Just think of a garden and its proprietor. He is the Doer, and the whole of this world and all its creatures belong to Him – this is spiritual knowledge. And to say, ‘I am the doer, I am the guru, I am the father’ is ignorance. The whole house and the family is mine, and also wealth and people – this is ignorance.”

Balaram’s Father: “Yes, sir.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “As long as you don’t realize that God is the Doer, you will have to return to the world again and again – you will be born again. When you realize that He is the Doer, you won’t be born into this life again.

“As long as you do not say, ‘Tuhun, Tuhun [only You],’ He will not liberate you. You will die and be born again and again and you will not attain liberation. So what’s the use in saying, ‘My and mine?’ The servant of a proprietor says, ‘That’s our garden. This is my cot.’ But when the proprietor dismisses him, he can’t even carry away his mango-wood box.

1. tvam jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ
śvetāśvataropaniṣad 4-3
[Taking birth, You have Your faces everywhere.]

“Me and mine’ has veiled the Reality and doesn’t allow you to perceive it.”

The knowledge of non-duality and vision of pure consciousness

“Without the knowledge of non-duality, you can’t perceive pure consciousness.¹ Only after realizing pure consciousness itself is there eternal bliss.² The state of paramahansa is one of eternal bliss.

“There are no incarnations of God according to the Vedanta school of thought. According to it, Chaitanya Deva was only a bubble of non-dual consciousness.

“What is the perception of pure consciousness? Like sudden light in a dark room when a match is struck.”

Incarnation is a jewel of a man

“In the path of bhakti, or love, one believes in incarnations of God. When a woman of the sect³ saw the state I was in, she said, ‘Father, you have realized the truth within. Don’t dance so much. Grapes should be preserved carefully, in cotton.’ When a woman conceives, her mother-in-law gradually decreases her work. A sign of God-realization is that the person’s duties slowly drop off. There is a jewel of a man inside this person.

“When I ate, the Kartabhaja woman said, ‘Father, are you eating or feeding someone else?’

1. Chaitanya.
2. Nityananda.
3. Kartabhaja.

“This feeling of ‘I’ hides the Reality. Narendra said, ‘The more this “I” disappears, the more His “I” will appear.’ Kedar says, ‘The more clay there is in a pot, the less water is in it.’

“Krishna said to Arjuna, ‘Brother, if you have even one occult power, you will not find Me.’ You may gain some power, such as witchcraft¹ or healing, and they may do some good to people. What do you say? So I prayed to the Divine Mother to grant me pure love – I didn’t ask for occult powers.”

Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi when he is saying this to Balaram’s father, Benipal, M., Mani Mallick and others. He sits there like a picture, outwardly unconscious.

When his samadhi is over, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing:

I have not found Him, friend, for whom I have gone mad.

Now he asks Ramlal to sing. Ramlal begins with a song about Gauranga’s renunciation.

What an exquisite bright form of Sri Gauranga – his eyes streaming with the tears of love – did I see in Keshab Bharati’s hut!

Gauranga dances mad, like an elephant. He sings and then rolls in the dust, tears streaming from his eyes.

He calls on Hari, weeping, piercing the mortal world and heavens with his thundering voice.

Then he prays repeatedly for liberation as a slave of God, with a straw between his teeth and palms joined together.

He wears the robe of a yogi, his locks of hair shaved.

1. Gutika siddhi.

One's heart cries to see him so charged with ecstatic love for God.¹

Having renounced all, he has come to distribute it to all, overwhelmed as he is by the sorrows of mankind.

Premdas wishes to wander from door to door like a slave at the feet of Sri Chaitanya.

After singing about Chaitanya Deva's madness in ecstatic love, and with a hint from Thakur, Ramlal sings of the intoxicated state of the milkmaids:

Don't hold it, don't. Does a chariot move because of its wheels?

Hari is the master of this wheel – His will alone make the world move.

And then he sings:

What value is the colour of a cloud holding fresh water?

In comparison to it, the beauty of the moon of Shyam (Krishna) with flute in hand and a smile on his lips illumines the three worlds.

Chapter II

The untouchable caste becomes pure by Hari's name

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you develop love for Hari, you don't distinguish between castes." (*To Mani Mallick*): "Please tell that story about Tulsidas."

Mani Mallick: "A chatak bird is dying of thirst. It has the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Saraju and many other rivers and lakes, but it won't drink from any of these. It only waits with its mouth open

1. Prema.

for the rain drops of the svati constellation of stars.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That’s to say, only devotion for His lotus feet is the real thing, everything else is illusion.”

Problem of untouchables – the untouchable is purified by the name of Hari

Mani Mallick: “There’s something else, too, that Tulsidas said. By touching the philosopher’s stone, the eight metals turn into gold. In the same way all castes, even a pariah, becomes pure by repeating Hari’s name. As well, without the name of Hari, all four castes – brahmin, kshatriya, vaishnava and shudra – become impure like a tanner of hides.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “A hide which is not supposed to be touched can be taken into the temple when it is tanned.

“A man is purified by God’s name. That’s why you should practice chanting God’s name. I said to Jadu Mallick’s mother, ‘At the time of death, the worries of the world invade the mind – worries about the family, sons, children, writing out a will – come to mind. The thought of God will not come.’ The remedy is to practice chanting and singing His name. If you do this, only His name will come to the lips at the time of death. When a bird is caught by a cat, it only squawks – ‘Rama, Rama’ doesn’t come to it.

“You have to prepare for the time of death. Repeat His name and meditate on Him in solitude for the rest of your life. If an elephant is taken to

the stable after a bath, it won't get dirty again by mud and dust.”

Balaram's father, Mani Mallick and Beni Pal are all aged. Is this why Thakur is instructing them like this, especially for their good?

Addressing the devotees, Sri Ramakrishna speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Why do I ask you to meditate on Him and repeat His name in solitude? Living day and night in the world brings restlessness. Just see how brother kills brother and becomes a murderer for only one yard of land. The Sikhs say, ‘All the confusion and lack of peace in the world are because of land, wife and money.’”

Ramachandra, the world and Yoga Vaishishtha – the mart of joy

“You're a family man, but what is the danger in that? When Rama said he'd renounce the world, Dasharatha [Rama's father] was very worried and he asked Vaishishtha's advice. Vaishishtha said to Rama, ‘Rama, why do you want to renounce the world? Let's talk about it. Is the world without God? So what will you renounce and what will you take? Except for Him, nothing exists. He appears [or reveals Himself] in the form of ‘the Lord, maya, individual souls and the universe.’”

Balaram's Father: “Very difficult!”

Sri Ramakrishna: “During the time of spiritual practice, the world is a snare. But when you've attained knowledge, when you've had His vision, the world becomes ‘a mart of joy.’”

**Seeing God in an incarnation – Chaitanya Deva, an
incarnation of God**

“The Vaishnava scriptures say, ‘You meet Krishna by faith. Reasoning takes you far away from Him. Faith, faith alone!’

“What faith Krishnakishore had! In Vrindavan a low-caste man drew water from a well for him. He said to the man, ‘Just say Shiva.’ As soon as he had repeated the name of Shiva, Krishnakishore drank the water. He used to say, ‘You have chanted the name of God. Why should you buy repentance by paying money? What’s this?’

“Seeing people offer tulsi leaves to cure diseases, Krishnakishore was amazed.

“When someone mentioned his going to see a sadhu, Haladhari said, ‘Why should I go see a case built of the five elements?’ Very angry, Krishnakishore reported, ‘Haladhari said this! He doesn’t know that the body of the sadhu is made of Consciousness.’

“At the bathing ghat of the Kali Temple he said to us, ‘Please bless me that I may pass my days repeating Rama’s name.’

“Whenever I went to Krishnakishore’s house, he would dance when he saw me.

“Rama said to Lakshmana, ‘Brother, wherever you find burning love for God, know that I am there.’

“For example, Chaitanya Deva. He laughed, wept, danced and sang with ecstatic love for God.

Chaitanya Deva was a divine incarnation, God in human form.”

Sri Ramakrishna sings:

Sri Gauranga, a treasure of ecstasy. In ecstasy he laughs, weeps, dances, sings and cries.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple – dance and ecstasy

Balaram’s father, Mani Mallick, Beni Pal and others take their leave. The devotees of the Harisabha at Kansaripara had arrived after twilight. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing with them like an intoxicated elephant.

After dancing, he is absorbed in ecstasy. He says, “I myself will walk a little by myself.”

Kishori wants to massage Sri Ramakrishna’s feet while he’s in ecstasy, but Sri Ramakrishna does not allow anybody to touch him then.

Ishan arrives after dusk. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting, absorbed in ecstasy. After awhile he talks to Ishan. Ishan wants to practice Gayatri purashcharana.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): “Do what you have in mind. Are there doubts in your mind any more?”

**Vedic path¹ is not for the age of Kali – the path of
Tantra² is**

Ishan: “I’ve decided to do an atonement ceremony.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Can’t it be achieved by the path of Tantra? He who is Brahman is also Shakti, the Primal Power, and Kali. ‘Having realized the reality of Kali-Brahman, I’ve renounced both religion and irreligion.’”³

Ishan: “In a hymn to Chandi, it is said that Brahman Itself is the Primal Power. Brahman and His Primal Power are inseparable.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It doesn’t help to just say this. It’ll be true when you’ve realized it. After spiritual practice and when the heart is purified, you will clearly know that He alone is the doer. He is the mind, the vital-breath, the intellect. We are only tools.

‘You mire the elephant in mud

And make the lame cross the mountain.’

“When your heart is purified, you will realize that He makes you perform rituals like purashcharana. ‘It is He who does His work, people say that they do it.’

“When you’ve attained God-realization, all doubts vanish. The devotee sits contentedly, like a

1. Nigam.

2. Agama: A religious philosophy according to which Shakti is usually the main deity worshipped and the universe is regarded as the divine play of Shakti and Shiva; it deals primarily with spiritual practices and ritual forms of worship.

3. Lines from a Bengali song.

boatman with the tiller in hand who has unfurled his sail when a favourable wind blows and is now enjoying a smoke.”

When Ishan has left, Sri Ramakrishna talks with M. alone. He asks him, “What do you think of Narendra, Rakhal, Adhar and Hazra? Are they guileless? And what do you think of me?”

M. says, “You are simple and yet profound. It’s very difficult to understand you.”

Sri Ramakrishna laughs.

Section XII

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is immersed in samadhi most of the time. He only engages himself outwardly for the instruction of devotees like Rakhai – to awaken their spiritual consciousness.

Everyone is sitting in the verandah to the west of Thakur's room. Today is Tuesday, 4th of Pausha, the 4th of Agrahayana, 18 December 1883. Sri Ramakrishna is praising Devendranath Tagore for his renunciation and devotion to God. Looking at Rakhai and the other young devotees, Thakur says, "He is a good person, but those who never enter into worldly life and develop dispassion by meditating on God day and night from their very childhoods, like Sukadeva, are truly blessed.

"Worldly people nurse some desire or another in spite of themselves – even though they are clearly very devoted. Mathur Babu was entangled in a law-suit. He said to me, 'Father, make this offering of flowers to Mother Kali for me.'¹ I did it wholeheartedly.'

"And Rati's mother – she was so devoted. She used to come occasionally to serve me. She was a Vaishnava devotee. After a few days, as soon as she

1. Mathur wanted to offer the flowers to the Divine Mother in order to win his law-suit.

noticed that I ate food consecrated to Mother Kali, she stopped coming. So orthodox she was! It's not possible to recognize such a single-track mind at first.”

Sri Ramakrishna is seated near the eastern door of the room. It is winter. He is wrapped in a moleskin shawl. Suddenly he sees the sun and then loses all outer-consciousness.

Is this the realization of the truth of the Gayatri mantra: We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe; may He enlighten our minds?¹

After a long time, he comes out of samadhi. Rakhal, Hazra, M. and others are sitting near him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): “The feeling in samadhi is ecstatic love. One time in Shyambazar a kirtan was being performed in Natabar Goswami's house. I had a vision of Sri Krishna and the milkmaids and went into samadhi. I felt that my subtle body² was following at the heels of Sri Krishna.

“During a kirtan at the Harisabha at Jodasanki, I lost all consciousness of the outer world. I almost quit my body that day.”

Sri Ramakrishna goes out for a bath. When he returns, he continues talking about the ecstatic love of the gopis. (*To Mani and others*) “You should accept the attraction of the gopis for Krishna and sing songs like these:

1. tatsaviturvareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahī
ṛgveda 3-62-10
2. Linga sharira.

Friend, how far is that forest where my Shyamasundar lives? I cannot walk any farther.

And:

O companion, I shall not go into a house where it is hard for me to chant the name of Krishna.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at the Sri Siddheshwari Temple in Thanthania

Sri Ramakrishna had vowed to offer sugar and green coconut to Sri Siddheshwari for Rakhal. He had asked Mani, “Will you pay for the sugar and coconut?”

In the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by Rakhal, Mani and some others, goes in a carriage to the Siddheshwari Temple. They pass through the Shimulia bazaar, where green coconut and sugar are bought.

When they reach the temple, he says to the devotees, “Break open a green coconut, put sugar on it, and offer it to the Divine Mother.”

When they had first arrived at the temple, priests and their friends were playing cards in front of Mother Kali. Seeing this, Thakur had said to the devotees, “Look! Playing cards in a place like this! They should be thinking of God here.”

Then they go to the house of Jadu Mallick. Several gentlemen are sitting with him.

Jadu says, “Come, please come.” After polite enquiries, Sri Ramakrishna says, (*smiling*): “Why do you keep ridiculous courtiers with you?”

Jadu (*smiling*): “So that you may save them!”
(*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: “Flatterers have in mind that the rich man will give them money. But it’s very difficult to extract money from a gentleman. A jackal met a bull and wouldn’t leave its side. When the bull was out grazing, the jackal was with him. The jackal thought the testicles of the bull would fall some time or other and he could eat them. Even when the bull slept, the jackal slept next to him. When it rose to graze, the jackal was by its side. A few days passed this way but the testicles did not drop. Disappointed now, the jackal left the bull. (*All laugh.*) Flatterers meet the same fate.”

Jadu and his mother treat Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees with refreshments.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with Mani – can one not have both knowledge and love of God?

Wednesday, 19 December 1883. Past nine o’clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna is talking with Mani in the Panchavati (see detailed account in Volume IV, Section VII).

Mani (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Can’t you have both knowledge and love for God?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “A person with a very high spiritual ideal can have them both. God-men like Chaitanya Deva had both. But it’s different with ordinary human beings.

“There are five kinds of light: the light of a lamp, the light from another kind of fire, the light

from the moon, the light of the sun and the light of the sun and moon together. Love for God is the moon, knowledge is the sun.

“Sometimes you can see the moon in the sky even before the sun has set. In an Incarnation of God and those like him, the moon of devotion and the sun of knowledge appear together.

“Can knowledge and love for God come in a single receptacle just by wishing for it? Only a special kind of person can possess both. Some bamboo has big holes and some very small. Is it possible for everybody to comprehend God within him? Is it possible for a one-seer pot to contain two seers of milk?”

Mani: “But what is not possible by His grace? If He bestows His grace, even a camel can pass through the eye of a needle.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Does He shower His grace just like that? When a beggar begs for a pice, it is given to him. But if he suddenly asks for railway fare, he is refused.”

Mani stands there without saying a word. Sri Ramakrishna is also silent. Then suddenly he says, “Yes, no doubt. In the case of some they both come, just by His grace – both knowledge and love for God.”

Leaving Thakur respectfully, Mani goes toward the bel tree.¹ It is afternoon when he returns. As he had been delayed, Sri Ramakrishna had started

¹ The tree under which Sri Ramakrishna practiced the most austere sadhana; sometimes referred to as the “beltala.”

toward the bel tree himself. He notices Mani returning with a carpet, asana, and a pot of water. Thakur meets him near the Panchavati. Mani prostrates before him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): “I came to look for you. It was very late and I thought you might have run away by jumping over the wall. Seeing your eyes, I thought maybe you had run away like Narayan Shastri. Then I thought, No, he wouldn’t run away. He thinks a great deal before he acts.”

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with Mani and other devotees

Again that night Sri Ramakrishna talks with Mani. Rakhal, Latu, Harish and others are present.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): “Well, some people give a metaphysical interpretation of Krishna in Vrindavan. What is your opinion?”

Mani: “There are different opinions. There’s no harm in it. You told the story of Bhishma Deva. Before quitting his body, when he was lying on a bed of arrows he said, ‘Why am I weeping? Not because of the pain. When I think that God Himself was the charioteer of Arjuna and yet so many troubles befell the Pandavas, I realize that I have not understood God’s ways at all. That’s why I weep.’

“And then you told us about Hanuman’s saying, ‘I don’t know the day of the week or the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.’

“And you said that there is nothing else besides the two: Brahman and Shakti. You also said that when a person attains the knowledge of Brahman, both of them are felt to be one, only one without a second.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, certainly. You have to attain your goal, whether you go through a forest of thorns or along a good road.

“Of course, there are many opinions. The Naked One (Totapuri) said, ‘Sadhus can’t be fed together because of the difference of their views. Once a feast was arranged and sadhus from different sects went. Each sect insisted that their group be served first and the others later. No solution could be found. In the end, they all left. Prostitutes were served the food.’”

Mani: “Totapuri was a great man.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Hazra said, ‘He was just ordinary.’ No brother, there’s no use in talking about it. Everybody says only his watch gives the correct time.

“Look what dispassion Narayan Shastri developed. Such a great scholar. He left his wife and disappeared. When a person has renounced lust and greed totally, he attains union with God. Some have the characteristics of a yogi.

“I’ll have to tell you about the six spiritual centres. After piercing them, yogis attain God’s vision by His grace. Have you heard about the six spiritual centres?”

Mani: “According to the Vedanta school of thought, there are seven planes.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Not Vedanta. According to the Vedas. Do you know what the six centres are like? There are ‘lotuses inside the subtle body’. Yogis can see them – like the leaves and fruits of a wax tree.”

Mani: “Yes, sir. Yogis can see them. One book says that there is a kind of glass that magnifies a very small object, causing it to appear larger. In the same way these subtle lotuses can be seen.”

Sri Ramakrishna has asked Mani to stay in the hut in the Panchavati. He spends the night there. At dawn he sings the following song alone in the hut:

O Gauranga, I am without austerity and prayer. Please purify this lowly person with Thy philosopher’s stone.

My only thought is that I shall attain Thy feet.

O Gaur, I have not reached Thy feet – my days have passed in vainless hope and expectation.

Suddenly, he looks toward the window and sees Sri Ramakrishna standing there. Hearing, “Purify this lowly person with Thy philosopher’s stone,” his eyes are filled with tears.

And then Mani sings another song:

I shall put on the ochre robe and wear earrings of Mother of Pearl.

Having donned the robe of a yogini, I shall go to that region where hard-hearted Hari is.

Sri Ramakrishna walks on with Rakhal by his side.

The next day, Friday, 21 December, Sri Ramakrishna talks to Mani alone at the bel tree. He is talking about different secret spiritual practices and about renunciation of 'lust and greed'. He also talks about how the mind itself becomes the guru – he talks about things like this.

After his meal he comes to the Panchavati, wearing a beautiful yellow robe. Two or three Vaishnava sadhus arrive. One of them is a Baul. Thakur says to the Vaishnavas, "Please tell me the meaning of the string in your loin-cloth."

In the afternoon a monk of the order of Nanak¹ arrives. Harish and Rakhali are also present. The sadhu believes in the formless Absolute. Thakur asks him to meditate on God with form also.

Sri Ramakrishna says to the sadhu, "Dive, dive. You can't find jewels by swimming on the surface. God is without form but also with form. A person develops love quickly by meditating on God with form. Then you can meditate on the Formless again. It's like throwing away a letter after reading it – then he attends to the instructions of the letter."

Chapter V

At Dakshineswar with the devotees – Balaram's father and others

Today is Saturday, 22 December 1883. It is about nine in the morning. Balaram's father has arrived. Rakhali, Harish, M. and Latu are staying here. Devendra Ghosh of Shyampukur arrives. Sri Ramakrishna is

1. Nanakpanthi.

sitting with the devotees on the southeastern verandah.

A devotee asks him: “How do you develop love for God?”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram’s father and the other devotees*): “Go forward! The king sits beyond the seven gates. Only when you’ve passed through all the gates, can you see him.

“During the installation of Annapurna at Chanak (1874-75), I said to Dwaraka Babu, ‘There are big fish in the deep water of a large pond. Drop bait for them. They will make a big splash when they smell it.’ Ecstatic love – love and devotion – is the bait.”

Sri Ramakrishna and the meaning of incarnation

“God plays as a human being. He incarnates in a man – for example, Sri Krishna, Ramachandra and Chaitanya Deva.

“I said to Keshab Sen, ‘There is the greatest manifestation of God in man. There are small holes in the ridges on the edge of a [rice] field. They’re called *ghutis*. Small fish and crab gather there. If you want to find them, you have to look in these holes. If you’re looking for God, look for Him in an incarnation of God.

“The Mother of the Universe manifests Herself in the person three and a half cubits tall. There is a song that goes:

What a machine Mother Kali has made!

In this machine, three and a half cubits high, what pranks
She plays!

She Herself residing within pulls the string to make it move.

The machine thinks it moves by itself, knowing not who its operator is.

But the machine who knows it is She will be a machine no more.

And Mother Shyama Herself will be tied with the string of love.

“But you have to practice spiritual disciplines if you want to realize God and to recognize an incarnation. There are big fish in a large pond. You have to throw bait for them. Milk contains butter, but you have to churn it. Mustard contains oil – but it has to be pressed to extract the oil. Henna makes a palm red – but you have to grind it first.”

Sri Ramakrishna and the worship of the Formless

A Devotee (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Well! Is God formless or with form?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Wait. First go to Calcutta, then you’ll know where Fort Maidan is and where the Asiatic society is and where the Bengal Bank is.

“If you want to go to the brahmin quarter in Khardaha, you have to first reach Khardaha.

“Why shouldn’t it be possible to practice discipline of the formless? But it is very difficult. You can’t practice it without renouncing ‘lust and greed’ – both outwardly and inwardly. You won’t succeed if there is even a trace of worldly calculation.

“Worship of God with form is easier. But it’s not that easy.

“You shouldn’t talk to devotees about the spiritual disciplines of God without form, of the path of knowledge. It’s only with a great deal of difficulty that a person develops a little love for God. Calling everything a dream can harm devotional feelings.

“Kavirdas believed in the formless God. He didn’t believe in Shiva, Kali or Krishna. He used to say, ‘Kali eats rice and bananas and Krishna danced like a monkey when the milkmaids clapped.’ (*Everybody laughs.*)

“A worshipper of the formless perhaps first sees the ten-armed one and then the four-armed one. Then he sees the two-armed Gopala. Finally he sees the indivisible light and is merged in it.

“Dattatreya and Jadabharata didn’t return after the vision of Brahman – so it is said.

“According to one belief, Sukadeva tasted only a drop of that ocean of Brahman. He saw and heard the play of the waves on the ocean – but he didn’t dive into it.

“A brahmachari said to me, ‘If you go beyond Kedar, your body will not survive.’ Similarly, the body doesn’t survive after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. The body dies in twenty-one days.

“There is a boundless plain on the other side of the wall. Four friends tried to see what was on the other side. Each one of them climbed the wall and, after seeing the field, fell into it laughing, exclaiming, ‘Ah! Aha!’ The first three didn’t come back to give a report. Only one of them did. His body survived even after attaining the knowledge of

Brahman – in order to teach people. For example, Divine Incarnations.

“Parvati was born as the daughter of King Himalaya.¹ She began to show her different forms to her father. Himalaya said, ‘Daughter, I have seen all these forms. But you also have the form of Brahman. Please show that to me.’ Parvati said, ‘Father, if you want the knowledge of Brahman, you will have to renounce the world and keep the company of sadhus.’

“But Himalaya would not give up beseeching her. So Parvati showed him her Brahman form. No sooner did he see it than he fainted.”

Sri Ramakrishna and bhakti yoga

“All that I have said is a matter of deliberation. ‘Only Brahman is real and the world an illusion’ is the idea – that everything is a dream! It’s a very hard path. In this path God’s play is like a dream and so unreal. The ‘I’ also vanishes. In this path an incarnation of God is not accepted. Very difficult. Devotees shouldn’t listen to much of such ideas.

“The reason God incarnates is to teach and cultivate love of God. He tells us to accept Him as a refuge. When a person has love for God and devotion to Him, everything happens by His grace – knowledge and vijnana, everything.

“He plays. He is under control of the devotee.”

Mother Shyama has tied Herself with the string of love.

1. The king of the mountains.

“Sometimes God is the magnet and the devotee is the needle. At other times the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. A devotee attracts Him. The devotee has the gracious loving Lord under his control.

“According to one belief, Yashoda and the other milkmaids were believers of the Formless in earlier incarnations. They were not satisfied with that. So they enjoyed sporting with Sri Krishna at Vrindavan. One day Sri Krishna said, ‘I’ll show you the Eternal Abode.¹ Let’s go to Jamuna for a bath. As soon as they dove into the water, they saw Goloka, and then the Indivisible Light.’ Yashoda said, ‘O Krishna, I don’t want to see all this anymore. I only want to see Your human form. I want to take You in my arms and feed You.’

“That’s why God is more manifest in His incarnation. As long as an incarnation of God lives in a human form, he should be worshipped and served.

O Brother, he will hide himself in the morning, in that secret chamber within.

“Not everyone can recognize an incarnation of God. Assuming a body, disease, sorrow, hunger and thirst, all invade him. He appears like any one of us. Rama wept in sorrow at his separation from Sita.

Bound by the five elements, even Brahman laments.

“It is said in the Puranas, ‘After killing Hiranyaksha, God² lived happily with its young

1. Nityadham.

2. Vishnu as the Boar Incarnation.

ones, suckling them. (*Everybody laughs.*) He didn't think at all of returning to His own heavenly abode. At last Shiva came and killed the body with a trident and God, laughing out loud, returned to His abode.”

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna with Bhavanath, Mani, Latu and others

It is afternoon. Bhavanath has arrived. Rakhal, M., Harish and others are in the room. It is Saturday, 22 December 1883.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath*): “It's enough if you develop love for an incarnation of God. Oh, what love the milkmaids had!”

Saying this, Thakur assumes the attitude of the milkmaids and sings:

Shyam, You are the soul of my soul.

And:

My companion, I will not go home.

Again:

The other day I was standing at the door. Friends, you were going to the wood.

I wish I were a cowboy carrying your load on my head.

“When Sri Krishna disappeared in the midst of the dancing, the milkmaids became mad [with grief]. Seeing a tree, they said to it, ‘Maybe you are a hermit. You've surely seen Sri Krishna. If not, how could you have become so immobile, absorbed in samadhi?’ Seeing the ground covered with grass,

they said to the ground, ‘O, surely you have seen him. If not, why does your hair stand on end? Surely, you have tasted the joy of his touch.’ And seeing a madhavi creeper, they said, ‘O madhavi, give us Madhava.’ The milkmaids are mad with divine love.

“When Akrur arrived, Sri Krishna and Balaram got into his chariot to go to Mathura. The milkmaids caught hold of its wheels. They would not let it move.”

After saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sings again:

Don’t hold the wheels of the chariot. Please do not.

Does this chariot move because of the wheels?

It is Hari who is the charioteer – He who moves the world moves the chariot.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Does this chariot move because of its wheels? – I like that very much. ‘He who moves the world moves the chariot’ – the charioteer moves the chariot by His command.”

Section XIII

Sri Ramakrishna with the Devotees in Ram Chandra's Garden House

Chapter I

Today Sri Ramakrishna is going to visit Ram Chandra's new garden. It is Wednesday, 26 December 1883.

Ram adores Thakur and considers him an incarnation of God. Every now and then he goes to Dakshineswar to see Thakur and worship him. He has bought a new garden close to Surendra's garden house. Sri Ramakrishna is going to see it.

Manilal Mallick, M. and one or two other devotees are seated in the carriage with Thakur. Manilal Mallick is a Brahmo devotee. The Brahmos don't believe in divine incarnation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manilal*): "If you want to meditate on God, you should first try to meditate on the attributeless. He is without attributes, beyond mind and speech. But it's very difficult to become expert in such meditation.

"He incarnates Himself as a man. It is very easy then to practice meditation – Narayana in man. The body is only a veil, like a lantern with a light burning inside. Or like seeing valuable things in a glass case."

Alighting from the carriage, Sri Ramakrishna first goes with Ram and the devotees to see the tulsi grove in the garden.

Standing there, Thakur says, “O, it’s a beautiful place. You can meditate on God very nicely here.”

Now he goes to a room south of the pond and sits down. Ram Chandra has grapes, oranges and some sweetmeats on a plate for him. Thakur enjoys them with the devotees.

In a little while he walks around the whole garden.

Next he starts toward Surendra’s garden, which is nearby. He walks a little, and before he climbs into the carriage to continue on, Sri Ramakrishna notices a sadhu sitting alone on a cot under a tree in the next garden. As soon as he saw him, he went to the sadhu and talks happily with him in Hindi.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the sadhu*): “To which order of sadhus do you belong? Are you from the Giri or Puri Order?”

Sadhu: “People call me a paramahamsa.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Very good, great indeed. It’s nice to have the attitude ‘I am Shiva.’¹ But then, it’s also true – creation, preservation and dissolution go on day and night by His power. The Primal Power and the Absolute are inseparable. Without Brahman there is no Power, as there cannot be a wave without water, or music without an instrument.

“As long as He keeps us in the phenomenal world, we have a feeling of duality. But when you speak of power, you speak of Brahman – like being aware of day when you are aware of night.

1. Shivoham.

“In another state, He shows us that the Absolute is beyond knowledge and ignorance. This cannot be expressed in words. What is, is.”

It is after this nice conversation that Sri Ramakrishna goes back to the carriage. The sadhu accompanies him, arm in arm, like a long-time friend. When Thakur gets into the carriage, the sadhu returns to his place.

Next Sri Ramakrishna comes to Surendra’s garden. Sitting with the devotees, the first thing he talks about is the sadhu.

Sri Ramakrishna: “He is a very good person. (*To Ram*) When you come to Dakshineswar the next time, bring him. He’s a superior sadhu. There’s a song that says that unless you’re simple yourself, you can’t recognize another simple man.

“He believes in God without form – that’s all right. God is both formless and with form – and much more! The Absolute belongs to the same One that the phenomenal belongs. That which is beyond mind and speech takes different forms, incarnates and enters into various activities. From the same Om have come ‘Om Shiva’, ‘Om Kali’ and ‘Om Krishna’. The master of a house sent a small boy of the family to invite people for a feast. What respect they showed him because he was the son or grandson of an important person.”

After having refreshments at Surendra’s, Sri Ramakrishna proceeds toward Dakshineswar with the devotees.

Chapter II

Thakur in Dakshineswar among devotees, Tantrik and others

Today is Wednesday, 2 January 1884, 19th day of Pausha, the 4th day of the bright fortnight, 1290 (B.Y.).

Sri Ramakrishna is in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar in the company of devotees. Staying with him at the time are Rakhal, Latu, Harish, Ramlal and M.

It is 3 o'clock. Returning from the bel tree, Mani walks toward Sri Ramakrishna's room to see him. He is sitting on the western verandah with a Tantrik devotee.

Mani comes and salutes him by prostrating on the ground. Thakur asks him to sit near him. Perhaps he wishes to teach him while he talks to the Tantrik devotee. Mahima Chakravarti has sent the Tantrik devotee to Thakur. The devotee wears ochre.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Tantrik*): "It's part of Tantrik discipline to drink wine from a human skull. Isn't the wine called karana?"

Tantrik: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Eleven cups – isn't that right?"

The Tantrik: "Three tolas for spiritual discipline with a corpse."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But I can't even touch wine."

Tantrik: “You have spontaneous bliss.¹ Attaining such bliss, a person needs nothing else.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “And please note that I don’t even like japa and austerities. But I have constant remembrance and recollection of Him. Well, what are the six spiritual centres?”

Tantrik: “Sir, they are like places of pilgrimage. Shiva and Shakti reside in each spiritual centre, though they are invisible – you can’t take them out by cutting into the body. The stalk of the lotus is the Shivalinga. The Primal Power is in the pistil of the vulva-shaped lotus.”

Mani listens to the conversation silently. Glancing at him, Sri Ramakrishna asks the Tantrik devotee, “Well, can a person attain perfection without being initiated with a seed mantra?”²

Tantrik: “It’s possible by faith – faith in the words of the guru.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*turning to Mani and calling his attention*): “Faith!”

After the Tantrik devotee has left, Jaygopal Sen, a Brahmo, comes in. Sri Ramakrishna talks with him. Rakhal, Mani and other devotees are seated near them. It is afternoon.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Jaygopal*): “A person shouldn’t entertain malice toward any person or belief. Believers in the formless as well as believers in God with form are going toward Him – whether it’s a jnani, a yogi, or a devotee, they’re all looking

1. Sahajananda.

2. Bija.

for Him. On the path of knowledge, He's called Brahman. Yogis call Him Atman, Paramatman. Devotees call Him Bhagavan, Lord. And then also 'eternal-god', 'eternal-servant'."

Jaygopal: "How can we know that all paths are true?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A person can attain God by following any one path properly. Then he can learn about all the other paths. It's like climbing up to a roof, whether you do it by a wooden ladder or brick steps or even by a rope.

"When God's grace descends, a devotee can know everything. You will know everything once you realize Him. You have to meet the landlord by whatever means possible – you have to talk to him. Then he himself will tell you how many gardens, ponds and company securities he has."

The way to realize God

Jaygopal: "How do you receive God's grace?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to chant His name and glories constantly. You have to renounce worldly thoughts as much as possible. You may have brought water to your field to irrigate it with great difficulty, but it is lost if there are holes in the ridge of the field – all the labour of digging a channel to the field is wasted.

"When your mind is purified and you are rid of attachment to the world, you will feel yearning for God and your prayer will reach God. If a telegraph wire is damaged by something or there is a break in it, you can't send a message.

“I used to weep all alone, full of yearning. I’d cry, ‘Where are You Narayan?’ While I cried, I would lose consciousness – and get merged in the Mahavayu.¹

“How can union with God be attained? If there is no damage to the telegraph wire – no break – you achieve union. You must rid yourself of worldly attachment completely.

“You must not entertain any desire. If you have a craving, your love for God is selfish.² Devotion without desire³ is love for its own sake⁴ – whether or not you love me, I still love you. This is called love for its own sake.

“The basic thing is to love God. When you’ve developed intense love, you will see God. When these three things are combined into one – the attraction of a chaste wife for her husband, the love of a mother for her child, and the attachment of a worldly person for things of the world – you will have the vision of God.”

Jaygopal is a businessman. Is that why Sri Ramakrishna thinks these instructions might be useful to him?

1. Cosmic Consciousness or the life force; a word also used to denote the spiritual current in the spinal column when the Kundalini is awakened.

2. Sakama.

3. Nishkama bhakti.

4. Ahetuki bhakti.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna tells Mani not to reason any more

Today is Friday, 4 January 1884. It is four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting at the Panchavati smiling. With him are Mani, Haripada and some others. He is talking with Haripada about Hiranda Chatterji and about the spiritual practices of the Ghoshpara sect.

Sri Ramakrishna returns to his room. Mani, Haripada, Rakhal and other devotees are there. Mani has been spending a good deal of time under the bel tree.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): “Don’t reason any more. It harms you in the end. You must assume one particular attitude when you call on God – the attitude of a friend, of a maidservant, or a child or a hero.

“I have the attitude of a child. When the goddess of maya notices this attitude, she moves out of the way in shame.

“The heroic attitude is very difficult. The Shaktas and the Vaishnava bauls practice this attitude. It is very difficult to remain correct with this attitude. Besides, there are the attitudes of serenity, of a servant or friend, as well as the filial attitude.¹

(*To Mani*) “Which attitude do you like best?”

Mani: “I like all of them.”

1. Shanta, dasya, sakhya and vatsalya.

Sri Ramakrishna: “It’s only in the state of perfection that a person likes all these attitudes. In that state, there is no trace of lust. The story of Chandidas and the washerwoman Rajakini is in the Vaishnava scriptures. Their love had no trace of lust.

“In that state a man has the disposition of a female – he no longer has the feeling of being a man. Rupa Goswami refused to see Mirabai because she was a woman. Mira sent the message: ‘Sri Krishna is the only male, everyone else in Vrindavan are his maidservants. Was it right for the Goswami to nurse the ego of a male?’”

At dusk Mani sits again at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. A message has been received that Keshab Sen’s disease has taken a turn for the worse. In connection with this, the subject of the Brahmo Samaj comes up.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): “Well, are there only lectures there? Do they also practice meditation? Maybe they call it worship.

“Earlier in his life Keshab studied the Christian religion and faith deeply. At that time and before that, he was associated with Devendra Thakur (Tagore).”

Mani: “If Keshab Babu had come here from the beginning, he wouldn’t have been so busy with social reform. He wouldn’t have given so much thought to removing the caste system and widow remarriage, inter-caste marriage, female education and such social concerns.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Keshab now believes in Kali – the embodiment of knowledge and consciousness – the Primal Power. He chants Her name and glories crying, ‘Mother, Mother.’”

“Well, do you think the Brahmo Samaj will continue to exist as a sort of social reform movement?”

Mani: “This isn’t the tradition in this country. The correct thing will take root here.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, the Sanatana Dharma¹ – that which the rishis taught – will last. But the Brahmo Samaj and other such sects will also continue in some form. Everything comes and goes by God’s will.”

A number of devotees came from Calcutta in the afternoon. They sang many songs for Thakur. One of the songs says:

Mother, You have made us forget by giving us a red pap.²
When we throw away the pap and cry for You, You will certainly come running to us.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): “They only sang about red paps.”

Mani: “Sir, you talked about them with Keshab Sen.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes. But I also talked about the Sky of Consciousness and many other things. We enjoyed ourselves singing and dancing.”

1. The Eternal Religion.
2. Pacifier.

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Manilal and other devotees

Chapter I

Today is Sunday, 9 March 1884, 27th day of Falgun. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple with several devotees – Manilal Mallick, Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi, Balam, M., Bhavanath, Rakhal, Latu, Adhar, Mahimacharan, Harish, Kishori Gupta, Shivachandra and others. Girish, Kali and Subodh have not yet arrived. Sashi and Sarat have visited Thakur only once or twice, Purna and the Younger Naren have not yet met him.

Sri Ramakrishna's arm is in a splint. He broke it when he fell down near a railing in a state of ecstasy. It was only a short time ago and his arm is giving him constant pain. But even in this condition, he is often merged in samadhi or speaks to the devotees of deep eternal truths.

One day while he was crying with pain, he suddenly went into samadhi. When he returned to the normal state of consciousness, he said to Mahimacharan and some other devotees, "Babu, if you haven't realized Sat-chit-ananda, you have achieved nothing. It can't happen without deep longing." I used to weep and call out, "O friend of the humble, I am without spiritual effort – but you have to grant me Your vision!"

Mahimacharan, Adhar, M. and others are now sitting with Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan and the others*): "There is a kind of love for God that is

completely unselfish.¹ You can perfect it in your life – if you can practice it!”

(*To Adhar*): “Can you stroke this arm a little?”

Manilal Mallick and Bhavanath talk about the exhibition which took place near the Asiatic Museum in 1883-84. They say, “So many kings had sent precious things to it – golden bed and so on – worth seeing.”

Sri Ramakrishna, wealth and splendour

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the devotees*): “Yes, a person can gain a lot by going to exhibits. Seeing such valuable articles and other belongings of the rajas and maharajas, you develop repulsion for them. This in itself is a great gain.

“When I used to go to Calcutta, Hriday would show me the residence of the Governor General. He’d say, ‘Uncle, just look at the palace of the Viceroy with its big pillars.’ The Mother showed me that it was just clay bricks placed one on top of another.

“The Lord and His splendour. Splendour only lasts two days or so. Only God is true. Think of a magician and his magic. Seeing the tricks, everybody is amazed – but it is all illusion. The magician alone is true. Or take a rich man and his garden. Seeing the garden, you should try to meet its owner.”

Mani Mallick (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “And what an amount of electric light they’ve put in it! Seeing

1. Ahetuki bhakti.

it, you feel how great whoever invented electric light is.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manilal*): “One idea is that He Himself has become everything that you see. And the person who says it is also He – God, maya, the individual soul, and the universe.”

Now they talk about the museum.

Sri Ramakrishna and the company of the holy – the picture of a yogi

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “Once I went to the museum. I saw that everything there had turned into brick or stone – animals had become transformed into fossils. I saw what can happen as the result of company. Like that, by keeping the company of holy people, a person becomes like them.”

Mani Mallick (*smiling*): “By going there (to the exhibition) only once, you have material to teach us for ten to fifteen years.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “What, for example?”

Balaram: “No. If you go around here and there and everywhere, your arm won’t heal.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I’d like to have two pictures – one of a yogi sitting near a sacred fire. And the other of a yogi pulling deeply on a chillum of hemp, with the coals of his pipe blazing up.

“Such images are very inspiring. Like an imitation custard apple. Seeing it, you’re reminded of a real one.

“But there are obstacles to union with God – ‘lust and greed’. When the mind is purified, it attains union with God. The seat of the mind is in the forehead¹ – but attention remains tied to the organs of generation and evacuation – in other words, to ‘lust and greed’. Through spiritual practices, the mind turns upward.

“What spiritual practice turns the mind up? You come to understand this by keeping the constant company of holy people.

“The rishis lived either alone or in the company of sadhus. That’s why they could renounce ‘lust and greed’ and unite their minds to God effortlessly. They rid themselves of fear and fault-finding.

“You must pray to God to give you the ability to renounce – to enable you to give up immediately what appears to be an illusion.

“The rishis had this ability. They conquered their senses because of it. When a tortoise pulls in its limbs, it doesn’t let them out even if you cut it into four pieces.

“A worldly man is a hypocrite. He’s not guileless. He’ll say, ‘I love God,’ but he doesn’t give God even the least attraction he has for worldly things, the love he has for ‘lust and gold’. All the while saying he loves God.

(To Mani Mallick): “Give up hypocrisy.”

Manilal: “About men or about God?”

1. The ajna chakra, between the eyebrows.

Sri Ramakrishna: “In every way. Regarding everything, man as well as God. You must not be hypocritical.

“How guileless Bhavanath is! After his marriage he came to me and said, ‘Why do I have so much affection for my wife?’ Oh, he is so guileless!

“Why wouldn’t a man feel love for his wife? She is the world-bewitching maya of the Mother of the Universe. A man begins to think of his wife as if no one in the whole world is equal to her – she is one’s own in life and death, in this life and hereafter.

“How much a man suffers because of his wife! Even then, he thinks she has no parallel. What a terrible thing! A salary of twenty rupees a month and he already has three children. He doesn’t have the means to feed them properly. The roof of his house leaks, but there is no money to repair it. He can’t afford a new book for his son. He can’t celebrate his son’s sacred thread ceremony, but has to beg eight annas from here and another eight from there.

“Only a wife with spiritual qualities is a real partner in life. She helps her husband to advance toward God. They live like brother and sister after having one or two children. Both are devotees of God – His servant and His maid. Their family is a spiritual family. They know that God alone is one’s own – one’s own for eternity. Don’t ever forget Him, in happiness or in sorrow – like the Pandavas.”

Worldly devotee and devotee who has renounced

“For worldly people, the love of God is only momentary, like water dropped on a burning pan. It dries up right away, *pssht!*”

“The mind of worldly people is attached to sense pleasures. So it doesn’t have that love, that restlessness for God.

“The *ekadashi* fast on the eleventh day of the lunar month is of three kinds. One, without water, – even water is not drunk. This is the fast of an all-renouncing mendicant. He has completely renounced all enjoyment. Second, a person can take milk and sweets made of milk. It’s like a devotee who keeps a few things of enjoyment in his house. Third, the devotee eats luchi and vegetables to his fill. He may even keep two chapattis soaked in milk to eat later on.

“People practice spiritual disciplines, but their minds remain tied to ‘lust and greed’. That’s why they don’t get results from their practices.

“Hazra used to practice a lot of japa and austerities here. But he had a wife and children in the country, and a piece of land. While he practiced japa, in his mind he was engaged in the business of a broker. Such people can’t stick to their word. One minute they may say they won’t eat fish, but then the next minute they eat it.

“What won’t a person do for the sake of money! He can even make a brahmin and a sadhu carry a load for him.

“Sandesh may become rotten, but I couldn’t give it to such people. I can use water from the toilet can of other people, but I can’t touch the can of worldly people.

“Seeing a rich man, Hazra would welcome him. He’d call out to him and talk to him. And he’d say to him, ‘You see Rakhai and the others. They don’t practice austerities or japa. They just wander around talking.

“There may be a person living in a cave in the hills with his body covered with ashes, and he may observe fasts and practice different kinds of austerities, but if his mind is on worldly things inwardly, on ‘lust and greed,’ I say ‘fie on him!’ On the other hand, if a person eats, drinks and wanders around here and there but his mind is not on ‘lust and greed,’ I call him blessed.”

(Pointing to Mani Mallick) “He doesn’t have a picture of a holy man in his house. Pictures of sadhus awaken divine feelings.”

Manilal: “Yes, I do. Nandini¹ has a picture in her room of a European woman praying. And there’s another picture. A man is holding to the Rock of Faith. There’s a bottomless sea below him. By losing hold of faith, he’d fall into the water and drown. And there’s another picture. Some girls are keeping vigil with their lamps filled with oil, waiting for the bridegroom.² Anyone who falls

1. The widowed daughter of Mani Mallick and a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.

2. St. Matthew 25:1 – “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lantern, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.”

asleep will not be able to see the bridegroom when he arrives. Here, the bridegroom stands for God.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “That’s very good.”

Manilal: “There are other pictures too – one of the Tree of Faith and the other of Sin and Virtue.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath*): “These are all beautiful pictures. You must go see them.”

After awhile Sri Ramakrishna says, “I think about these things sometimes, and then I don’t like all that. In the beginning you can talk about sin and how to be free from it. But, if by God’s grace, you begin to feel love for Him, you develop devotion, you forget all about sin and virtue. Then you go beyond injunctions and scriptures. You no longer feel you have to bother about penance and repentance.

“It’s like reaching your destination by a winding river, taking a long time and with great difficulty. But if the water rises in flood, you reach your destination by a straight path, without difficulty and in a short time. Then there is pole-deep water even on dry land.

“In the early stages you have to go around and about and face a lot of difficulties. But when you develop intense love for God, the path becomes straight. It’s like choosing any direction to cross a field after the paddy has been harvested. Before, you had to go around and along the ridge of the field, but now you can go any way you like. Even if there is stubble, you can put on shoes to walk across. If you have discrimination, non-attachment

and faith in the words of the guru, you won't have any trouble."

**Sri Ramakrishna and Dhyana Yoga, Vishnu Yoga –
meditation on the Formless and God with form**

Manilal (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Well, what is the rule for meditation? Where should one meditate?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The heart is the most well-known place. You can meditate either there or in the Sahasrara.¹ These are rules for meditation according to the scriptures. But you can meditate wherever you want. Every place is filled with Brahman. Where is Brahman not present?

"When Narayana, in Vali's presence, covered the heavens, the earth and the nether-world in three steps, did any place remain uncovered? Whether it is the bank of the Ganges or a dirty place, they are equally holy. Besides, it's said that everything you see is His Universal Image.²

"Meditation on the Formless and on God with-form. To meditate on the Formless is very difficult. In that meditation whatever you may see or hear will melt away; then you will contemplate your true Self. Contemplating his own Self, Shiva dances. He dances, exclaiming, 'Who am I, who am I?' This is called Shiva Yoga. While meditating, your gaze should be fixed on the forehead. You must give up the world and meditate on your real Self after confirming, 'Not this, not this.'

1. The thousand-petalled lotus at the top of the head.

2. Virat.

“And then there is Vishnu Yoga. You fix your sight on the tip of your nose – half within, the other half on the world. Meditation on God with form is like this.

“Shiva sometimes dances when meditating on God with form. Then he exclaims, ‘Rama, Rama!’”

Chapter II

The state after realization of God

Manilal Mallick is an old member of the Brahmo Samaj. Bhavanath, Rakhal and M. sometimes go there. Sri Ramakrishna is explaining ‘Omkar,’ and the stage after the knowledge of Brahman and the vision of Brahman.

The anahata sound¹ and the supreme state

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “Sound Brahman.² Rishis and sages used to practice austerities to hear this sound. When you attain perfection, you hear it rising automatically from the navel.

“Some ask, ‘What is the use of just hearing this sound?’ You can hear the sound of waves from a distance. If you follow the sound, you will reach the ocean – when there is the sound of waves, the ocean must be near. By following the anahata sound, you reach Brahman, which is what it indicates. That is called the supreme state.³ But as long as you are

1. Om.

2. Shabda.

3. yatra nādo viliyate [where the nada ends.]

tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padaṁ sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ
rgaveda samhitā 1-23-20

conscious of your I-ness, you cannot have this kind of perception. It is possible only when there is neither 'I,' nor you, nor many."

Union of individual soul and supreme soul

"Just imagine the sun and ten pitchers of water. You see the reflection of the sun in every pitcher. At first you see one sun and ten reflected suns. If nine pitchers break, there remains only one sun and a reflected one. Each of the pitchers is like an individual soul. Following the reflection, we can reach the true sun – from the individual soul to the supreme soul. The individual soul can have the vision of the supreme soul if he practices spiritual disciplines. But if you break the last pitcher, what remains cannot be described.

"At first the embodied soul is ignorant – it is not aware of God, but is aware of many things. When knowledge arises, it feels that God is in all things. It's like taking out a thorn that's stuck in your foot by finding another thorn to take it out. It's taking out the thorn of ignorance with the thorn of knowledge. And when you attain vijnana, you throw away both thorns – the one of ignorance as well as the one of knowledge. In that state you don't merely have a vision of God, but you converse with God day and night.

"A person who has only heard about milk is ignorant. One who has seen it has acquired some

[Just as the eye perceives the universe in the vast expanse of the sky, the illumined souls too have the clear perception of that supreme state of Vishnu, the all-pervading Reality.]

knowledge. But the one who has become strong after drinking milk has attained vijnana.”

Perhaps Thakur is now explaining his own state of mind to the devotees. By describing the state of a vijnani, he may be describing his own state.

Sri Ramakrishna’s state of mind, told by himself – the state after attaining God’s vision

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “There is a difference between a sadhu who is a jnani and a sadhu who is a vijnani. The way a jnani sadhu sits is very different. He twirls his moustache. When somebody comes to see him, he says, ‘What’s brought you here, sir? Have you any questions?’

“Those who see God constantly and talk to Him are vijnanis. They have a different nature. One moment they are inert, another moment they act like a ghoul, and sometimes childlike, other times like a madman.

“Such a person loses all outward consciousness when he goes into samadhi. He becomes inert. He sees everything filled with Brahman, so he behaves like a ghoul. He’s not conscious of purity and impurity. He can eat a plum at the same time he defecates – like a child. When he soils himself at night, he doesn’t feel polluted, knowing that the body is made from semen.

“He’s not aware of urination and defecation. For him everything is filled with Brahman. Rice and dal become filthy like faeces to him when they turn bad.

“Then again he acts like a madman. Noticing his conduct, people think he’s insane.

“And sometimes he acts like a child, free from all bonds – shame, hatred, hesitation, and so on.

“This is the state that comes with God-realization. It’s like a ship sailing near a magnetic hill. All the screws and nails of the ship are loosened. With God-realization, lust, anger, etc. vanish.

“I noticed that the screws lost their heads when lightning hit Mother Kali’s temple.

“A person who has seen God is no longer able to continue creation by begetting children. When you sow rice you get plants, but boiled rice won’t yield plants.

“Those who have realized God retain their ‘I’ only in name. It can’t do any harm. It exists only in name, like the mark left by a fallen coconut branch. The branch has fallen – only its mark remains.

**The ‘I’ when God is realized – Sri Ramakrishna and
Keshab Sen**

(To the devotees) “I said to Keshab Sen, ‘Give up your “I” – renounce the consciousness that you are the doer, that you teach men.’ Keshab Sen said, ‘Sir, then I will lose my organization!’ I said, ‘Renounce the rascal ‘I.’

“You don’t have to give up the feeling that you are God’s servant, that you are God’s devotee. But as long as the rascal ‘I’ remains, you can’t do this.

“When there is a man in charge of the storeroom, the master doesn’t take responsibility for the food in it.”

Sri Ramakrishna – God’s play as a human being and the essence of an incarnation

(*To the devotees*) “Look, because I’ve hurt my arm, my temperament is changing. Now I see that God is more manifest in man. It’s as if He’s saying, ‘I reside in human beings. Enjoy yourself in their company.’”

“He is more manifest in pure devotees – that’s why I long so much for Narendra, Rakhal and others like them.

“You find small holes at the edge of lakes. Fish and crab collect in those holes – just as God is more manifest in man.

“They say that a man is even greater than the Shalagram, Nara-Narayana.¹ If God manifests Himself in an image, why can’t He manifest Himself in man?”

“He appears as a man to play as a human being – for example Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, Chaitanya Deva. When you meditate on an incarnation, you meditate on God.”

Bhagavan Das, a Brahma devotee, arrives.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhagavan Das*): “The rishis followed the Eternal Religion.² It has existed since eternity and will continue forever. Whether with form or without form, it is the Eternal Religion.

1. An emblem of Vishnu.

2. Sanatana Dharma.

There is the path of knowledge and the path of devotion. Other modern religions will last for a few days and then disappear.”

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar – Phalaharini Puja and the Vidyasundar Musical Theatrical Performance

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Rakhal,¹ Adhar, Hari² and other devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room. It is eleven o'clock. Rakhal, M. and some other devotees are present. The Phalaharini Kali Puja was celebrated last night. A musical theatrical performance of Vidyasundar played in the natmandir late at night. Sri Ramakrishna had watched a little of it when he went to visit the Mother in the temple in the morning. After the actors took their baths, they came to see Sri Ramakrishna.

It is Saturday, 24 May 1884, 12th of Jaishtha, a new moon day.³

The fair-skinned young man who had played the role of Vidya had acted his part really well. Sri Ramakrishna happily talks to him about spiritual things. The devotees listen intently to the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the actor who played Vidya*): “Your acting was beautiful. Anybody who is

1. Later Swami Brahmananda.
2. Later Swami Turiyananda.
3. Amavasya.

good at singing or playing musical instruments or dancing, or good at any art, can realize God quickly if he makes the effort.

Advice to the people associated with the play and the soldiers of Chanak – the yoga of practice – remember death

“You should practice concentrating the mind on God as hard as you practice singing, playing musical instruments and dance. You have to practice worship, japa and meditation regularly.¹

“Are you married? Do you have children?”

Vidya: “Sir, I lost a daughter. I have another child.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You had her and already lost her. You’re so young! As the saying goes, ‘The husband died in the evening. How long shall I cry into the night?’ (*All laugh.*)

“You have experienced worldly happiness. It’s like a hog-plum, only pit and skin. If you eat it, you’ll get an upset stomach.

“It’s fine that you work with a troupe. But there is trouble in that too. You are very young now, so you have a round face. After a time, it will wrinkle. People connected with the theatre are all like that: with hollows in their cheeks and big bellies and a band of strings on their arms.²

1. abhyāsayogena tato māmicchāptuṁ dhanañjaya
gītā 12-9

[...then by abhyasa-yoga, you seek to reach Me, O Dhananjaya.]

2. Amulets or armlets.

“Why did I watch the Vidyasundar play? I noticed that the beat, the rhythm and the music were beautiful. Then the Divine Mother showed me that Narayana had assumed the forms of the actors.”

Vidya: “Sir, what is the difference between lust¹ and desire²?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Lust is like the root of a tree and desires are like its branches and leaves.

“These six enemies – lust, anger, greed and the rest – will not go away entirely. That’s why you have to turn them towards God. If you have to nurse a desire, if you have to be greedy, then desire love for God and be greedy for Him. If you have to be ego-centered, if you have to be proud, be intoxicated with the idea and proud of the fact that you are a servant of God, a child of God.

“Unless you give your whole mind to Him, you can’t reach Him.”

Union with God comes when desire for worldly enjoyment is over – brotherly love and the world

“The mind’s energies are wasted on ‘lust and greed’. Look, you have a son and a daughter. You’re an actor in the theatre. A person can’t achieve union with God in the middle of all these activities.

“When you have desire for worldly enjoyment, desire for union with God is diluted. There is suffering as long as there is desire for worldly enjoyment. The Srimad Bhagavata says, ‘The

1. Kama.

2. Kamana.

Avadhuta chose a kite¹ to be one of his twenty-four gurus. The kite had a fish in its beak, so thousands of crows surrounded it. Whichever way the kite went with the fish in its beak, the crows followed, cawing all the time. When the fish suddenly dropped from the kite's mouth, all the crows flew toward the fish, leaving the kite alone.²

“The fish stands for objects of enjoyment and the crows are worries and anxieties. Wherever there is desire for worldly enjoyment, there are worries and anxieties. You can attain peace only when you give up worldly enjoyment.

“And look, money itself becomes a reason for trouble. Brothers are good to each other, but when property is divided, problems arise between them. Dogs lick each other and have good feelings toward each other – but when a householder throws a little rice, they begin to fight.

“Do come here now and then. (*Then pointing to M. and the others*) They visit on Sundays or on other holidays.”

Vidya: “Our Sunday lasts for three months with the month of Shravana, Bhadra and Paush – the rainy season and when the paddy is harvested. We are lucky to be able to visit you. Just before I came to Dakshineswar I heard about two people – you and Jnanarava.”

1. Osprey.

2. sāmiṣaṃ kuraraṃ jaghnurbalino'nye nirāmiṣāḥ,
tadāmiṣaṃ parityajya sa sukhaṃ samavindata |
śrīmadbhāgavata 11-9-2

Sri Ramakrishna: “Be a friend to your brothers, live in harmony. Everything is nice to hear and see if there is harmony. Have you seen it in a play? If four or five people sing a different tune, the performance is destroyed.”

Vidya: “A bunch of birds get caught in a net. If they fly together to take the net in one direction, they are saved. But if they all fly in different directions, that doesn’t happen.

“But in a play you also see a person dancing and at the same time balancing a brass pitcher on his head.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Live in the world, but balance the pitcher properly – in other words, keep your mind on God.

“I said to the soldiers at Chanak, ‘Do your duties in the world, but bear in mind that the pestle of death can fall on you.’

“In Kamarpukur the women of carpenter families use a husking machine to flatten rice. One woman presses one end of the wooden beam with her foot and the other woman spreads the paddy into a mortar with her hand. She is careful that the pestle doesn’t fall on her hand. At the same time, she nurses her baby. And with all this, she talks to a buyer: ‘You owe us so much. Please come and pay us.’

“Keep your mind on God and at the same time attend to your many duties of the world. But you have to practice, and you have to be careful. Only then can you take care of both things.”

Way to realize the Self, or God: holy company, not science

Vidya: “Sir, what is the proof that the soul [the Atman] is separate from the body?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Proof? God can be seen. If you practice austerities, you can see Him, through His grace. The rishis had the direct perception of the Atman. You can’t understand the essence of God from science. In science there is only this: Mix this with that and such and such a thing will happen. Mixing that with this, it does happen, and in this way, you get information about all things connected with sense objects.

“That’s why you can’t understand spiritual things with the help of this kind of intellect. You need to keep the company of holy people. Associating with a physician, you learn how to feel the pulse.”

Vidya: “I understand it now.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You have to practice spiritual disciplines. Only then can you attain your objective. It doesn’t help to memorize verses of the scriptures. By repeating ‘Hemp, hemp,’ you don’t get intoxicated. You have to swallow the hemp.

“It’s not possible to explain to people the experience of God. You can’t explain to a five-year-old child the joy that a husband and a wife share.”

Vidya (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Sir, how do you realize the Atman?”

Sri Ramakrishna's motherly attitude toward Rakhhal

Just then Rakhhal is about to sit down to eat but because there are so many people in the room, he hesitates. These days Thakur is treating Rakhhal just like a mother treats her child, just like Mother Yashoda and Gopala.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhhal*): “Oh, do eat. These people will stand aside. (*To a devotee*) Keep some ice for Rakhhal. (*To Rakhhal*) Do you want to go to Vanhooghly? Don't go in this hot sun.”

Rakhhal sits down to eat. Thakur again talks to the young man who acted the part of Vidya in the musical.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vidya*): “Why didn't you all take prasad from the temple? You could have eaten here.”

Vidya: “Sir, not everybody feels the same way. So they cook food in a separate kitchen. Not everybody wants to eat at the guesthouse.”

Rakhhal sits down to eat. Thakur talks with the devotees on the verandah.

Chapter II

The actor in the play and spiritual practice in the household – way to realize God

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the actor Vidya*): “The means to God-realization is deep longing. Make the effort with your body, with your mind, with your speech. When there is too much bile in the body, a person suffers from jaundice. Everything looks yellow. Yellow is the only colour you see – in everything.

“Among you actors, a person who only plays the role of a woman develops a feminine nature. In the same way, if you meditate on God day and night, you acquire the nature of God.

“Dip your mind in any colour and it will take on that colour. The mind is like a freshly laundered cloth.”

Vidya: “So you have to send it to be washed once.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes. At first you have to purify the heart.¹ Then if you keep it occupied with thoughts of God, it will take that colour. But if you live a householder’s life and only keep it on acting, the mind will be coloured by that.”

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with Hari (Swami Turiyananda), Narayan, and other devotees

Before Sri Ramakrishna could rest more than a few minutes, Hari, Narayan, and Narendra Bannerji, the son of Rajkrishan Bannerji and a Sanskrit teacher at Presidency College, arrive from Calcutta. Because of problems at home, Narendra Bannerji lives in a separate house in Shyampukur with his wife and son. He is a very simple man, twenty-nine or thirty years old. When he meditates, he hears the sound of bells and other temple instruments. He had traveled in Bhutan, the northwest, and several other places. He comes to visit Thakur now and then. (He spent his last days in Allahabad and passed away at the age of fifty-eight.)

1. Chitta.

Hari (Swami Turiyananda) lives with his brothers at their Baghbazar house. Having studied for the matriculation examination at the General Assembly School, he now spends his time in contemplation of God, studying the scriptures and in practicing yoga. He comes to Dakshineswar to see Sri Ramakrishna now and then. When Thakur goes to Balaram's house in Baghbazar, he often sends for him.

**On Buddhism – Brahman is the nature of knowledge –
Totapuri's instruction to Thakur**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "I've heard a lot about Buddha Deva. He's one of the ten incarnations of God. Brahman is immovable, changeless, inactive and the nature of knowledge. When the intellect merges into the awareness of knowledge, a person attains Brahmajnana – then he becomes *buddha*, enlightened.

"The Naked One used to say, 'The mind merges into the intellect and the intellect into the nature of knowledge.'

"As long as I-ness persists, a person doesn't attain the knowledge of Brahman. Only after gaining the knowledge of Brahman and having the vision of God can you get I-ness under control. Otherwise, you can't control it. It's difficult to catch your shadow, but when the sun is overhead, your shadow is no farther away than half a cubit."

**Instruction to Bannerji – God's vision – company of the
holy is the way**

A Devotee: "What is the vision of God like?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Haven't you seen a theatrical performance? People are talking with each other –

but as soon as the curtain is raised, everybody's mind turns completely to the play on the stage – it doesn't wander away. This is called being absorbed in samadhi.

“When the curtain drops again, the attention turns to external things. When the curtain of maya drops, the mind of a man again turns outward.”

(*To Narendra Bannerji*): “You've traveled to many places. Tell us something about the sadhus.”

Bannerji had seen two yogis in Bhutan who used to drink a pound of bitter neem juice every day. This is the kind of thing he talked about. Also, he had gone to the ashram of a holy man on the bank of the Narmada. Seeing a Bengali gentleman dressed in trousers, the sadhu had said, “He's carrying a dagger next to his belly.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Listen. You should keep pictures of holy men in your room. They will inspire you.”

Bannerji: “I have a picture of you in my room, and one of a sadhu on a hill. He's holding a pipe with burning hemp in it.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, a person is inspired by seeing pictures of sadhus. A custard apple carved out of soft wood brings to mind a real custard apple. It's the same as being aroused by the sight of a young woman.

“That's why I say to you, you need the company of sadhus constantly.

(*To Bannerji*) “You're already seeing the fire of the world. A fire blazes whenever you indulge in

enjoyment. As long as the kite kept the fish in its beak, one flock of crows after another tormented it.

“A person finds peace in the company of sadhus. A crocodile stays under water a long time. It comes up to the surface from time to time to breathe deeply. Then it is at peace.”

Actor and God, the wish-fulfilling tree – the danger of prayer with a motive

Actor: “Sir, you’ve talked about enjoyment. What you say is right. If you pray to God for enjoyment, you will get into trouble. How many wishes and desires are in the mind! But not all of them bring happiness. God is the wish-fulfilling tree. Whatever you pray for, you will get. But thinking that God is the wish-fulfilling tree, you might wish to test whether or not a tiger will come at your asking. As soon as the idea of a tiger comes to mind, it comes and devours you.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You must understand that the tiger does come.

“What more can I say? Turn your mind to God. Do not forget God. If you call upon Him sincerely, He will reveal Himself.

“There is another thing. At the end of your performance, you must chant the name of Lord Hari. In this way, those who listen will return home thinking of God.”

The actors offer their salutations and leave.

Sri Ramakrishna and advice to devotees on the household ashram

The wives of two devotees enter and salute Thakur. They have fasted in preparation for seeing him. They are the wives of two brothers, sisters-in-law. They are wearing veils. They are twenty-two or twenty-three years old and each has a son.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the wives*): “Look, worship Shiva. There is a book on how to worship him called *Nityakarma*. Study it. Then you will be able to engage your minds for a long time preparing for the worship: picking flowers, making sandalpaste, cleaning the utensils of worship, arranging offerings. By doing all this, your mind will be directed. You will get rid of meanness, attachment, anger and so on. When you two sisters-in-law talk, talk only about God.”

Sri Ramakrishna and the value of image worship

“You have to unite your mind with God in whatever way you can. See that you don’t forget Him even once – it should be like an unbroken flow of oil – no break in it. Even if you worship a brick or a stone as God, with a spirit of love and devotion, you can see Him by His grace.

“As I said before, you should worship Shiva the way I told you. When you become established in that, you don’t have to continue formal worship. Then the mind will always be united with Him. Then you always remember Him and think of Him.”

Elder sister-in-law (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Will you give us some instruction?”

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): “I don’t initiate with a mantra. When you initiate a person, you have to take on yourself the sins of the disciple. The Mother of the Universe has kept me in the state of a child. I told you about Shiva Puja. Just perform that. And come here now and then. We will see what His will is later on. Try to come again on the day of Snanyatra.¹

“I asked you to chant the name of Hari. Are you doing that?”

Sister-in-law (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Yes, sir.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Why did you fast before coming here? You should have eaten something before you came. Women are the image of my Mother,² so I can’t bear to see them suffer. Each of you is a different image of the Mother of the Universe. Come here after you have eaten and you will be happy.”

Saying this, Thakur asks Ramlal to give the ladies seats and offer them refreshments. They are served the prasād of the Phalaharini Puja – luchi, different kinds of fruit, sweets and a glass of sweetened water.

Thakur says, “You have had something to eat. Now my mind is at peace. I can’t bear to see women fast.”

1. The Bathing Festival.

2. striyaḥ samastāḥ sakalā jagatsu

caṇḍī 11-6

[O Devi,] all the women in the world are your aspects.]

Chapter IV

Secret conversation with devotees – Keshab Sen

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on a step of the Shiva temples. It is 5 p.m. Adhar, Dr. Nitai, M. and a couple of other devotees are sitting near him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “You see, my nature is changing.”

As if he is going to talk about something secret, he comes down a step and sits beside the devotees. Then he talks to them.

The human being is the highest creation of God – the secret of divine incarnation

“You are devotees. I’m not afraid to tell you. These days I don’t see the spirit-form of God. Now I only see Him in the concrete form of a human being. It’s my nature to see, touch and embrace Him. But now He says to me, ‘You have assumed a body. Enjoy me in human forms, in a concrete form.’

“God certainly resides in all beings, but there is greater manifestation of Him in man.

“Is man something insignificant, brother? Man can think of God, he can meditate on the Infinite. Other living beings can’t do this.

“He is present in other beings – in plants and trees, in all elements – but there is greater manifestation of God in a human being.

“The essence of fire is in all beings, in all things – but there is greater manifestation in wood.

“Rama said to Lakshmana, ‘Look brother, an elephant is such a big animal – but it can’t think of God.’

“Then again, there is a greater manifestation of Him in an incarnation of God. Rama said to Lakshmana, ‘Brother, when you see deep ecstasy¹ in a man – laughing, weeping, dancing and singing – know for certain that I am there.’”

Thakur is now quiet. After a few minutes, he speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna’s influence on Keshab Sen

Sri Ramakrishna: “Keshab Sen used to come here quite frequently. Since he first came he’s changed a lot. Now he’s quite a remarkable man. He’s brought his group here several times. But he also wanted to see me alone. Before, Keshab never had the opportunity of holy company.

“I met him in his Colootola house. Hriday was with me. We were taken to the room where Keshab was sitting. He was at a table writing something. After a long time, he put down his pen and came down from his chair to sit with us. He didn’t salute us or give any other kind of greeting.

“He used to visit me here now and then. One day in a spiritual mood I said to him, ‘You shouldn’t sit with one leg on the other before a holy man. It increases rajas in a person. Whenever he came, I saluted him and his friends. They gradually learned to salute, bending their foreheads toward the ground.’”

1. Urjita bhakti.

**Repeating the name of Hari and the Divine Mother's
name in the Brahmo Samaj – vision of God in the heart
of a devotee**

“And I said to Keshab, ‘Chant the name of Hari. You should sing His glories in the Kaliyuga.’ They began to do it with the accompaniment of drums and cymbals.

“How did my faith in the name of Hari grow? Sadhus visit this temple from time to time. One of them from Multan came. He was waiting for pilgrims going to Gangasagar. (*Pointing to M.*) About the same age as he is. It was he who said, ‘There is a way: the path of devotion taught by the rishi Narada.’”

**Advice to Keshab – ‘lust and greed’ is the basket
smelling of fish – company of the holy, fragrance of
flowers – practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude
now and then**

“Keshab came here one day and stayed till ten at night. Pratap and some others said, ‘Let’s stay the night.’ They were sitting under the banyan tree (in the Panchavati). Keshab said, ‘No. I have some work to do. We have to leave.’

“At that, I laughed and said, ‘So you won’t be able to sleep without the smell of your fish basket? A fishwife was a guest in a gardener’s house. She had come back from selling fish with her basket in hand. She was given the flower room to sleep in. But she couldn’t get to sleep until late at night because of the fragrance of the flowers. Seeing her plight, the mistress of the house asked her, ‘Why are you so restless?’ The fishwife answered, ‘I don’t know, sister. Maybe I can’t sleep because of the

fragrance of the flowers. Could you bring me my fish basket? Maybe, I can sleep then.’ When the basket was brought to her, she sprinkled some water on it and put it close to her nose. Then she fell sound asleep, snoring loudly.

“Hearing the story, Keshab’s group burst out laughing.

“At dusk Keshab conducted worship at the river ghat. After the worship, I said to Keshab, ‘Look here, in one way, God has become the Bhagavata, so you should worship the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras. He has also become a devotee. The heart of a devotee is His living room. You can easily find the owner of the house in his living room.’ So by worshipping a devotee, you worship God.

“Keshab and his followers listened with great concentration. A full moon flooded the area with its light. They were all sitting just above the stairs leading to the Ganges. I said, ‘Let’s all chant *Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.*’

“Everyone chanted together, ‘*Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.*’ Then I said, ‘Brahman is Primal Power and Primal Power is Brahman.’ Those people again repeated in one voice, ‘Brahman is Primal Power, Primal Power is Brahman.’ I said to them, ‘Whom you call Brahman, I call Mother. Mother is a very sweet name.’

“Then I said to them, ‘Say this too: Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava.’ At this, Keshab said, ‘Not that far, sir. Then people will think of us as orthodox Vaishnavas.’

“Sometimes I’d say to Keshab, ‘Whom you call Brahman, I call Shakti, the Primal Power.’ What is beyond mind and speech, attributeless and inactive, the Vedas call Brahman. When I see creation, preservation and destruction, I call it Shakti, the Primal Power.

“I said to Keshab, ‘It’s very difficult to succeed leading a worldly life. How can a person recover delirium if he’s put in a room where there is pickle, tamarind and a water pitcher? So from time to time it’s necessary to go into solitude to practice spiritual disciplines. When the trunk of a tree grows thick, you can tie even an elephant to it. But when it’s just a sapling, a goat or a cow can eat it up. That’s why Keshab said in a lecture, ‘Get established strongly in spiritual life – and then live in the world.’”

Advice to Adhar, M., Nitai and others – go forward

(To the devotees): “You see, Keshab was a very learned man. He lectured in English and many people respected him. Queen Victoria herself talked to him. But when he came here, he would be bare-bodied. When you go to meet a holy man, you should take something for him – so he used to bring me some fruit in his hand. He had no pride at all.

(To Adhar) “Look, you are so learned and you are a Deputy Magistrate. But you are under the power of a snub-nosed¹ woman. Go forward. Beyond the sandalwood are better things: silver mines, gold mines, and then diamonds and precious gems. A

1. Hen-pecked.

woodcutter was chopping wood when a brahmachari said to him, ‘Go forward.’”

Coming down the steps of the Shiva Temples, Sri Ramakrishna goes toward his room through the courtyard. Adhar, M. and some other devotees are with him. Just then, Ram Chatterji, the priest of the Vishnu Temple, comes and gives news that the attendant [maidservant] of Holy Mother has contracted cholera.

Ram Chatterji (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “I told you about this at ten o’clock but you didn’t listen.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What could I do?”

Ram Chatterji: “What could you do? Rakhal, Ramlal, all of them, were there. But they did nothing.”

M.: “Kishori (Gupta) has gone to Alambazar to get medicine.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What, has he gone alone? Where is he getting it?”

M.: “Nobody went with him. He’ll get it in Alambazar.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Please tell whoever’s nursing the patient what they have to do in case she gets worse and what she should eat when she gets better.”

M.: “Yes, sir.”

The devotee’s sisters-in-law come again and offer their salutations. They ask for permission to leave. Sri Ramakrishna says to them again, “Please perform worship the way I told you. And come here

after eating something. Otherwise, I feel bad. Try to come again on the Snanyatra day.”

Chapter V

Instruction to Bannerji – wife is the reason for worldly life – take refuge in God

Sri Ramakrishna is now sitting on the western semi-circular verandah. Bannerji, Hari, M. and some others are sitting with him. Thakur knows that Bannerji has some family problems.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Look, all problems that exist are just ‘for a loin-cloth.’ You are married and have children, so you have to have a job. A sadhu is worried about his loin-cloth and a householder about his wife. On top of that, you don’t get along well with everyone at home so you have to live separately. (*Smiling*) Chaitanya Deva said to Nitai, ‘Listen, brother Nityananda. A man caught in the world is never free.’”

M. (*to himself*): “Maybe Thakur is talking about the world of delusion. Maybe a worldly man lives in a world of ignorance.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*pointing to M. and smiling*): “He is also living in a separate house. ‘Who are you, sir?’ ‘I am an expatriate.’ ‘And who are you, Sir?’ ‘I am separated from my beloved.’ (*All laugh.*) You will get along well.

“But there’s no danger if you take refuge in God. He will save you Himself.”

Hari and others: “Well, why does it take so many people so long to find Him?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You know what the reason is? A person doesn’t feel yearning for God until all work and desire for enjoyment are over. A physician says, ‘Let a few days pass. Then the ordinary medicine will do him good.’

“Narada said to Rama, ‘Rama, how can Ravana be killed if you stay in Ayodhya? You have come down to earth for that purpose.’ Rama said, ‘Narada, let the right time come. Let Ravana’s past actions begin to bear fruit. Then the ground will be prepared for killing him.’”¹

**The problem of evil and Hari (Swami Turiyananda),
Thakur’s the state of vijnani**

Hari: “Well, why is there so much suffering in the world?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “This world is like play. In this game there is sorrow and happiness, virtue and vice, knowledge and ignorance, good and bad – everything. If there were no sorrow, no sin, the play couldn’t go on.

“In the game of blind man’s buff you have to touch the granddame. If you touch her in the beginning of the game, she is not pleased. God [the granddame] wills that the play continue for some time. After that:

Among a hundred thousand kites only one or two break free.

And then, O Mother, how you laugh and clap your hands!

“In other words, after practicing a lot of austerities, one or two attain the vision of God and

1. *Adhyatma Ramayana*, Ayodhyakanda.

are liberated by His grace. The Divine Mother then claps in joy: “There! It’s cut free!”

Hari: “This game is death to us.”

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): “Just tell me who *you* are; it is God Himself who dwells in everything – maya, living beings, the world and the twenty four cosmic principles.¹

“I bite becoming a snake and cure becoming a doctor.’ He has become both knowledge and ignorance and dwells in the world. He dwells as ignorance in the maya of delusion, and He cures in the form of the maya of knowledge, in the guru.

“There are ignorance, knowledge² and supreme knowledge.³ A man of knowledge sees that He alone exists, that He is the doer, creating, preserving and dissolving. The man of supreme knowledge sees that He exists and dwells in the world as all.

“When you attain ecstatic love⁴ for God, you see that there is nothing besides Him.

“Compared to ecstasy, devotion is very weak. And then ecstasy matures into ecstatic love for God.

(*To Bannerji*) “Do you still hear the sound of a bell when you meditate?”

1. tvaṁ strī tvaṁ pumānāsi tvaṁ kumāra uta vā kumārī |
tvaṁ jīrṇo daṇḍena vañcasi tvaṁ jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ ||
śvetāśvatara upaniṣat 4-3

[You are the woman, You are the man, You are the boy, (and) You are the girl too. You are the old man tottering with a stick. Taking birth, You have Your faces everywhere.]

2. Jnana.

3. Vijnana.

4. Mahabhava and prema.

Bannerji: "I do hear the same sound, every day. And I have visions of His form as well. Once the mind has experienced this, does it ever stop?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes, when once firewood catches fire, it doesn't cool down. (*To the devotees*) He knows a lot about faith."

Bando [Bannerji]: "My faith is very deep."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why not talk about it?"

Bannerji: "Once a guru gave a mantra of the ram to someone. He told the man that the ram was his ideal. The fellow attained perfection by repeating that mantra of the ram.

"And a grass cutter crossed the Ganges by repeating the name of Rama."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Bring the women of your family to meet the women of Balaram's."

Bannerji: "Which Balaram?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't you know Balaram? He lives in Bosepara."

Sri Ramakrishna is filled with joy to meet a guileless man. Bannerji is very simple. Sri Ramakrishna is also very fond of Niranjan because he is so guileless.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Why did I ask you to see Niranjan? I told you to find out if it's true that he's a man of guileless heart."

Section XVI

Birthday Celebration for Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar – Joyful Kirtan with Narendra and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the long northeastern verandah at the Dakshineswar Temple, listening to the songs relating to Gopigoshtha and Subol Milan. Narottam is singing. Today is Sunday, 22 February 1885, 12th day of Phalgun 1291 (B.Y.), the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month. The devotees are celebrating Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. According to the lunar calendar, it fell on the 2nd of the bright fortnight of Phalgun, last Monday. Narendra, Rakhai, Bhavanath, Surendra, Girindra, Binode, Hazra, Ramlal, Ram, Nityagopal, Mani Mallick, Girish, Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi and many other devotees have assembled. The kirtan has been going on since early morning. It is now about eight o'clock. M. enters and salutes Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur motions to him to sit near him.

Listening to the singing, Sri Ramakrishna has become filled with emotion. Sri Krishna is late in bringing the cows to pasture. One of the cowherd boys says, "Mother Yashoda is keeping him from coming." Balai says sharply, "I'll blow a horn and bring Kanai here." Balai's love for him is deep.

The musicians continue. Sri Krishna is playing his flute. As the milkmaids and cowherds listen, different moods arise in their minds.

Thakur sits with the devotees and listens to the singing. Suddenly his glance falls on Narendra, who is sitting close to him. Thakur stands up and goes into samadhi. He touches Narendra's knee with one foot. Returning to normal consciousness, Thakur sits down again. Narendra leaves the room. The kirtan goes on.

Sri Ramakrishna whispers to Baburam, "There's pudding¹ in the room. Please go and give some to Narendra."

Is Thakur seeing the very presence of God in Narendra?

At the end of the kirtan Sri Ramakrishna returns to his room. He feeds Narendra affectionately with sweets.

Girish believes that God has come down to earth in the form of Sri Ramakrishna.

Girish (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "All your actions are like Sri Krishna's – the way he used to pose before Yashoda."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, because Sri Krishna was an incarnation of God. Playing as a human being, He acts like this. Even while he lifted the Govardhan hill (on his hand), he pretended to Nanda² that he found it difficult to pick up a footstool.³"

Girish: "I'm sure I understand you now."

1. Kshir.
2. His father.
3. Pidda.

**Sri Ramakrishna puts on new clothes for his birthday
– service rendered to him by devotees – in samadhi**

Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. It is about eleven o'clock. Ram and other devotees want to dress Thakur in a new cloth. Thakur says, "No, no." Pointing to a person educated in English, he says, "What will he say about it?" When the devotees insist, Thakur says, "If you insist, I'll do it."

The devotees are making arrangements for Thakur's meal in the room.

Thakur asks Narendra to sing. Narendra sings:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain cave.

In the lap of infinite darkness, on the waves of the great silence,¹ eternal peace and joy float without end.

Putting on the form of the Formless One, in darkness draped, O Mother, who are You, seated alone in boundless bliss?

At the lotus of Your fear-dispelling feet flashes the lightning of love, while loud and earth-shaking laughter issues from Your dazzling face.

What wondrous beauty, what an enchanting face I see!

The Lord of my soul has entered my humble hut, and the spring of love wells forth.

O Lord, beloved of my heart, what treasure shall I offer You?

Accept my soul, accept my life; whatever I have, accept all that from me.

As Narendra sings, "O Mother, who are You, seated alone in boundless bliss?" Thakur

1. Nirvana.

immediately loses all outer consciousness and goes into deep samadhi. After a long time, when he returns to normal, the devotees make him sit for his meal. He is still absorbed in ecstasy and eats rice but with both hands. He says to Bhavanath, “Please feed me.” He is still in an ecstatic mood and is unable to feed himself. Bhavanath feeds him.

Thakur eats a little. Then Ram says, “Nityagopal will eat from your leaf plate.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “From the plate? Why?”

Ram: “Can’t he eat from your leaf plate if you say he can?”

Seeing Nityagopal in an ecstatic mood, Thakur feeds him one or two morsels

By this time the devotees of Konnagar have arrived by boat. They enter the room singing kirtan. After singing, they go out for refreshments. A singer, Narottam, is in the room. Thakur says to him, “Their music is like they’re pushing a boat in the river. The music should be such that everybody wants to dance. You should sing like this:

O Brother, because of the intensity of Gaur’s ecstatic love, the village of Nadia is swaying.

(To Narottam) “And this should be added to it.”

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.

1. Gauranga and Nityananda.

They who embrace even the pariah, these two brothers have come.

And you should sing this too.

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers are so full of compassion.

You even raise the *chandala* up in your arms and utter *Haribol*¹ to him with so much compassion, O Lord of the indigent.

Chapter II

Conversation with devotees during the birthday celebration

The devotees now eat the sacrificial food. They are happy to have the flattened fried rice,² sweets and some other kinds of food. Thakur says to M., “Didn’t you invite the Mukherjis? Please ask Surendra to feed the musicians.”

Bepin Sarkar has come. A devotee says, “This is Bepin Sarkar.” Thakur sits up and says humbly, “Give him a seat and offer him a betel leaf.” He says to him, “I can’t talk to you. There’s such a big crowd.”

Seeing Girindra, Thakur says to Baburam, “Give him a seat.” Seeing that Nityagopal is squatting, Thakur says, “And him too.”

Mahendra, the kaviraj³ from Sinthi, has arrived. Smiling, Thakur points to Rakhai and says, “Show him your pulse.”

1. To chant the name of Lord Hari.

2. *Chinre*.

3. Ayurvedic physician.

He says to Ramlal, “Make friends with Girish Ghosh. Then you’ll be able to go to the theatre [free of charge].” (*Laughter.*)

Narendra has been talking a long time to Hazra on the verandah. Since the death of Narendra’s father, there are great troubles with his family. Narendra comes in the room and sits down.

Thakur gives Narendra various instructions

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): “Were you sitting with Hazra? You are ‘a foreigner’ and he is a ‘woman separated from her lover.’ Hazra also needs one and a half thousand rupees. (*Laughter.*)

“Hazra says, ‘Narendra has developed sixteen annas¹ of sattva guna, but he still has a little red raja guna in him. I am seventeen annas of pure sattva.’ (*All laugh.*)

“When I say, ‘You are dry because you only reason,’ he says, ‘I’m dry because I drink the nectar of the sun.’

“When I talk to him about pure love for God, when I say that a pure devotee doesn’t want money and wealth and splendour, he says, ‘When the flood of His grace rises, not only will streams be flooded, but even canals and pools will be filled with water. A person gains pure devotion and also the six splendours. And money too.’”

Narendra and many other devotees are sitting on the floor in Thakur’s room. Girish enters and takes a seat.

1. One-hundred percent.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): “I regard Narendra as the very essence of Atman. And I obey him.”

Girish: “Who do you not obey?”

Narendra belongs to the Supreme Abode

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “He has a manly nature and I have a feminine nature. Narendra has a high spiritual ideal – the abode of Indivisible Brahman.”

Girish goes out for a smoke.

Narendra (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “I had a talk with Girish Ghosh about you. He’s a great man.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What did you say about me?”

Narendra: “That you don’t know how to read and write and we are all learned – this is the drift of the conversation.” (*Laughter.*)

Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra – scholarship and scriptures

Mani Mallick (*to Thakur*): “You are learned without being literate.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra and others*): “To tell you the truth, I haven’t studied Vedanta or other scriptures, but I’m not a bit sorry about it. I know the essence of Vedanta: Brahman is real and the world is an illusion. And what is the essence of the Gita? That when you go on repeating the word *Gita* ten times, you get *tyagi, tyagi*.¹

1. Renunciation.

“A person should know the essence of the scriptures from the lips of a guru, but then practice spiritual disciplines. Somebody wrote a letter. Before it was read, it got lost. Everybody began to look for it. When they found the letter, they read that five seers of sandesh and a dhoti had to be bought. They threw the letter away and began to collect five seers of sandesh and a dhoti. In the same way, when you know the essence of the scriptures, what further need do you have to read the book? Now you have to practice spiritual disciplines.¹”

Girish enters the room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): “Hello! What were you saying about me? I just eat, drink and live.”

Girish: “What else should we say about you? Are you a sadhu?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I’m no sadhu. Truly, I don’t feel like I am.”

Girish: “Even in joke, I can’t compete with you.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I went to Jaygopal Sen’s garden house wearing a red-bordered dhoti. Keshab Sen was there. Seeing my red-bordered dhoti, he said, ‘That’s a lot of colour today – so much red border!’ I said, ‘I have to distract Keshab’s mind, so I have come like a spring festival.’

1. tameva dhīro vijñāya prajñāṁ kurvīta brāhmaṇaḥ,
nānudhyādbahūñchabdān vāco viglāpanaṁ hi tat.
bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 4-4-21

[The intelligent aspirant after Brahman, knowing about this alone, should attain intuitive knowledge. He should not think of too many words, for it is particularly fatiguing to the organ of speech.]

Narendra is going to sing now. Sri Ramakrishna asks M. to take down the tanpura. Narendra tunes it for a long time. Thakur and the others become impatient.

Binode says, "Today it will be tuned and another day we'll hear the song." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna laughs and says, "I feel like breaking it. Only *tang*, *tang* is being produced? It may be followed by *tana nana*, *nera tum*."

Bhavanath: "There's always impatience before a musical performance."

Narendra (*while tuning*): "When you don't understand."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "There! He's explained away all our complaints!"

**Narendra's song and Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy –
inwardness and outwardness – still water and wave**

Narendra sings. Thakur listens, sitting on the smaller cot, and Nityagopal and other devotees listen, sitting on the floor.

Song No.1

O the all-knowing Mother, You are always awake within me. Night and day You hold me in your arms.

Song No. 2

Sing O brother, the name of the Self of Joy. She, the one Reality,¹ brings peace to my mind.

1. Ektantri.

Song No. 3

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain cave.

Thakur, filled with ecstasy, comes down from the cot and sits near Narendra. He speaks while still in ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna: “Should I sing? Fie on it! (*To Nityagopal*) What do you think? You have to hear it before you’re inspired. What happens after makes no difference.

“He has lit a fire. That’s good. Then afterward it is quiet. I’m silent and you should also remain silent.

“The important thing is to be immersed in the nectar of joy.

“Should I sing? Well, I may. When water is still, it is water and when it is in waves, it is still water.”

Advice to Narendra – go beyond knowledge and ignorance

Narendra is sitting near. His family at home is in trouble and he is always worried about them. He used to visit the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and still reasons about knowledge. He is interested in reading Vedanta and other holy books. He is about twenty-three years old. Thakur looks at him steadfastly.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Narendra*): “You are *kha* (like space). If only you did not have this tax (worry at home). (*All laugh.*)

“Krishnakishore used to say, ‘I am *kha*.’ One day I went to his house and found him worried. He

wouldn't talk much. I asked him, 'Brother, what has happened? Why are you sitting so silently like this?' He said, 'The tax man came and warned me that if I didn't pay taxes, he would auction off all the pots and pans in my house. So I'm worried.' I laughed and said, 'How is that? You are *'kha'*, like the sky. What does it matter if the rascal comes and carries away your pots and pans?'

"So I say to you, 'You are only *'kha'*. Why do you worry so much? Do you know that Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'If you have even one of the eight occult powers, you can be a little powerful, but you will not be able to attain Me.' You can have power, strength, money and things like that through occult powers, but not God.

"And there's something else – go beyond knowledge and ignorance. Many people say that a certain person is a great man of knowledge, but in reality it is not so. Vasishtha was such a great jnani, but he lost his balance at the loss of his sons. Lakshmana said, 'Rama, this is strange! He is totally overwhelmed with sorrow.' Rama answered, 'Brother, the person who has knowledge also has ignorance. A person who is conscious of light also knows darkness. One who knows what is good also knows what is bad. The one who knows what happiness is also knows what sorrow is. Brother, go beyond both. Go beyond happiness and sorrow, knowledge and ignorance.' That's why I say to you, 'Go beyond knowledge and ignorance.'"

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees – advice to Surendra – family life and charity – mind yoga and action yoga

Sri Ramakrishna again sits on the smaller cot, the devotees near him on the floor. Surendra also sits near him. Thakur looks at him affectionately and, in the course of their conversation, advises him on many things.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Surendra*): “Come here now and then. The Naked One (Totapuri) used to say that a pot should be washed every day or it will get stained. It’s necessary to keep the company of holy men often. A sannyasin has to renounce ‘lust and greed’, but that’s not the path for you. You should occasionally go into solitude and call on God with a longing heart. You should renounce mentally.

“Unless you are a heroic devotee, you can’t take care of both sides. King Janaka lived a worldly life after he had attained perfection through spiritual disciplines. He wielded two swords: one of knowledge and the other of action.”

After saying this, Thakur sings:

This world is indeed a thing of joy; let me eat and drink and be merry.

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.*)

“For you people, Chaitanya Deva’s advice is best: compassion for the living, service, and chanting God’s name and glories.

“Why do I say this? You work in a merchant’s office. You have to attend to many things. That’s why I say it to you.

“You tell lies at the office. So why do I eat the food you bring me? Because, you give in charity and also practice meditation. You give away more than you earn. ‘A melon seed is larger than the fruit.’

“I can’t eat food brought by a miser. Their money is squandered in a number of ways: first, in law-suits; second, in robbery or theft; third, in medical expenses; and then by the extravagance of bad children. This is how their money goes.

“It’s very good that you give in charity and perform meditation. Whoever has money should give in charity. A miser’s wealth is hidden away, but the wealth of a generous man is saved and spent in good causes. There in the countryside [Kamarpukur], farmers bring water to their fields by digging canals. Sometimes the flow of water is so forceful that it breaks the ridges and floods the fields. The crops are then destroyed. That’s why the farmers make holes at places along the ridge. They are called ‘muzzles.’ The water runs out a little through them so the ridge doesn’t wash away by the force of the water. Then a layer of silt covers the field. This layer makes the field very fertile and yields a very good crop. A charitable person reaps the four fruits of karma – virtue, wealth, fulfillment of legitimate desires and liberation.”

All the devotees listen attentively to this instruction of Thakur on the virtue of charity

Surendra: “I can’t meditate well. Now and then I repeat, ‘Ma, Ma.’ At bedtime I repeat, ‘Ma, Ma’ and fall asleep.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “That’s enough. It is remembrance.”

“Mano¹ yoga and Karma yoga. Performing worship, going on pilgrimage, service to living beings and so on under the guru’s instruction is called karma yoga. The work Janaka used to perform is also called karma yoga. Mano yoga is what yogis do: remembering God and meditating on Him.

“When I go to the Kali Temple, I say to myself, ‘Mother, you are the mind also.’ Pure mind, pure intellect and pure Atman are one and the same thing.”

It is almost dusk. Most of the devotees are returning home after saluting Thakur. He goes to the western verandah with Bhavanath and M.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath*): “Why do you come here so infrequently?”

Bhavanath (*smiling*): “I visit you once a fortnight. The other day I saw you on the road. That’s why I didn’t come then.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What are you saying? What use is it to just see each other? There should be touching and talking too.”

1. Mental yoga.

Chapter IV

Thakur with Girish and other devotees on the night of his birthday – in the joy of ecstasy

It is evening. The sounds of arati in the temples can be heard. Today is the 8th day of the bright fortnight of Phalgun. The Holi festival¹ will be held six or seven days later, on the next full moon.

The spires of the temple, the courtyard, the garden, the tree tops are beautifully lit by moonlight. The Ganges is flowing north by the temple, its surface bright with moonlight, as if with joy. Sri Ramakrishna, seated on the smaller cot, is meditating quietly on the Divine Mother.

One or two devotees are still here after the birthday celebration. Narendra had left earlier.

Arati is over. Absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur begins to pace the long southeastern verandah. M. stands watching him. Suddenly, Thakur says to him, “O, how beautifully Narendra sings!”

Meditation on Mahakali according to Tantra – the deep meaning of meditation

M.: “Sir, are you talking about the song beginning ‘in dense darkness?’”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes. There’s deep meaning in that song. It is still drawing my mind.”

M.: “Yes, sir.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “To meditate in the dark is prescribed in the Tantra. Where is sunlight then?”

1. Dol festival, a color-sprinkling ceremony.

Girish Ghosh comes in and stands near. Sri Ramakrishna sings the song:

Is my Mother black?

She is the image of death.

Naked, She is illumining my heart.

Thakur, as though intoxicated, stands there with a hand on Girish's body.

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 repeats 'Kali' in all the three sandhyas¹ 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?

Then he sings:

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?

1. At dawn, noon and twilight.

2. Bhava.

I am awake in the sacrifice of yoga.

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 sulphur.¹

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 unrighteousness.³

It seems that Thakur's joy of ecstasy increases as he looks at Girish. He sings more songs as he stands there:

I have surrendered myself at the Fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama anymore?

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.

And then:

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree,⁴ the name of Mother Kali, in my heart.

I am waiting to open my heart to Yama⁵ to show him the name of Kali residing there.

I have thrown out the six bad beings⁶ that were dwelling in my body.

1. Borax and sulphur render paint permanent.

2. Dharma.

3. Adharma.

4. Kalpataru.

5. King of Death.

6. Six passions, namely lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride and envy.

Says Ramprasad, I am prepared to start my journey of life, taking the name of Durga.

Intoxicated with feeling, Thakur continues to sing:

I have bought Sri Durga's name having sold my body in the market place of the world.

(*To Girish and other devotees*): “*Bhavate bhrala tanu haral ge jnana*. [Feelings of ecstasy fill my body and steal my consciousness.]

“That *jnana* means consciousness of the outside world. You need consciousness of Truth,¹ consciousness of Brahman.² The body becomes filled with divine ecstasy and you lose all body consciousness.”

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God? The state of a paramahansa

“Love for God is the essence. There is love with a motive and there is also motiveless devotion, pure love and devotion, love that seeks no return. Keshab Sen and his group didn't know about motiveless love. In this love the devotee has no desire for return, he only has devotion for the lotus feet of the Lord.

“Then there is ecstatic love,³ as if love for God is overflowing. ‘The devotee laughs, weeps and dances in ecstasy’ – it's like Chaitanya Deva's. Rama said

1. Tattva-jnana.
2. Brahmajnana.
3. Urjita bhakti.

to Lakshmana, ‘Brother, wherever you find overflowing love, know that I am present.’¹

Is Thakur alluding to his own state? Is he an incarnation of God like Chaitanya Deva, come down to earth to teach mankind love for God?

Girish: “Everything is possible by your grace. Just think what I was before, and what I am now!”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Well brother, you had good tendencies from past births. That’s why it happened. Nothing happens before its time. When the time comes for a disease to be cured, the physician says, ‘Grind this leaf with black pepper and take the powder.’ The patient recovers. Who knows whether it was the medicine with black pepper which cured the patient, or it was spontaneous?”

“Lakshmana said to Lava and Kusha,² ‘You are children. You don’t know Ramachandra. By the touch of his feet, the Ahalya who had been turned into a stone became a woman again.’ Lava and Kusha said, ‘Yes sir, we know all this. We’ve heard all about it.’ A stone turned into a human being because of the words of a sage. The sage Gautama had said that in the age of Treta Ramachandra would pass by this ashrama. ‘By the touch of his feet you will again turn into a human being.’ Who can tell now whether it happened because of

1. śraddhāuratyūrjītabhaktīlakṣaṇo yastasya dṛṣyo’hamaharṇīṣaṁ hṛdi
adhyātma rāmāyaṇa - uttara kāṇḍa 5-58

[He who has deep faith and has great urjita bhakti, I am always visible to him in his heart.]

2. Rama’s sons.

Rama's holiness or because of the words of the sage?

“Every single thing happens by the will of God. If you are becoming spiritually awakened here, please know me to be only the instrument. ‘Uncle moon is the uncle of all.’ Everything happens by the will of God.”

Girish (*smiling*): “Yes, certainly by the will of God. That's what I'm saying.” (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): “If a person is sincere, he realizes God soon. There are some who do not attain knowledge: One, a person who has a crooked mind – insincere. Two, one who is obsessed with external purity. And three, one who doubts.

Thakur praises Nityagopal's ecstatic condition.

There are still three or four devotees standing near Thakur on the long southeastern verandah, listening closely. He describes the state of a paramahansa: “A paramahansa always has the awareness that God is real and everything else is transitory. Only a swan can separate milk from water. If milk is mixed with water, the acid on its tongue can separate the milk from the water. A paramahansa also has a similar acid, that of ecstatic love for God. Having such love, he can discriminate between the eternal and the transitory. He can experience God and see Him.”

Section XVII

Conversation at Girish's House on Harmony of Knowledge and Devotion

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is at Girish Ghosh's Bosepara house talking about spiritual things with the devotees. It is three o'clock. M. arrives and salutes him by prostrating on the ground. Today is Wednesday, 25 February 1885, 15th of Phalgun, the 11th day of the bright fortnight. Last Sunday Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was celebrated at Dakshineswar. Today, after visiting Girish's house, Thakur is going to see a play by Vrishaketu at the Star Theatre.

Thakur arrived only a short time ago. M. had arrived late, having been delayed by finishing some work. Reaching Girish's, M. sees that Thakur is talking enthusiastically about the harmony of the knowledge of the Absolute and the essence of love for God.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish and other devotees*):
"To be awake, to dream and to be in deep sleep – these are the three states of an individual's consciousness.

"People who reason and discriminate don't acknowledge these three states. They say that Brahman is beyond the gross, subtle and causal states – beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. Everything is maya, they say, like the reflection in a mirror. The reflection has no

substance. Only Brahman has substance, everything else is illusory.¹

“The knowers of Brahman say also that you see duality because of body-consciousness – you feel that even the reflection is real. When this identification is gone,² you experience So ‘ham – I am That Brahman.”

A Devotee: “So is that what we should do? Follow the path of reasoning?”

Girish and two paths – reason and love for God – Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Sri Ramakrishna: “There is the path of reasoning. Jnana Yoga. It is the path of the Vedantists. The other path is devotion. Bhakti Yoga. If a devotee weeps longingly for the knowledge of Brahman, he can attain it too.

“You can attain the knowledge of Brahman by following either path. Some people retain love for God even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, to teach others. For example, incarnations of God.

“But it’s not easy to get rid of body-consciousness, I-consciousness. It goes away only by His grace when you attain samadhi – nirvikalpa samadhi³ and jada samadhi.⁴

“The ‘I’ of an incarnation of God returns after attaining samadhi – the ‘I’ of wisdom, the ‘I’ of a

1. Mandukya Upanishad.

2. That is, the identification of oneself with the body/mind.

3. The highest state of samadhi, total oneness with Brahman.

4. Union with God in which one is inert and appears lifeless.

devotee. It is by this 'I' of wisdom that he can teach. Shankaracharya retained this 'I' of wisdom.

“Chaitanya Deva used to taste love of God with this 'I' and lived with love of God and devotees, talking about spiritual things and chanting God's name.

“I-ness' doesn't die easily. So a devotee doesn't reject the states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep as unreal – he accepts all the states. He also accepts the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. A devotee sees that it is these qualities that have become the twenty-four cosmic principles, that they are the world and its creatures. He also sees that God reveals Himself visually in the tangible form of Spirit.

“A devotee accepts the maya of knowledge and makes it his shelter. He takes refuge in the company of the holy, in pilgrimage, in knowledge, and in non-attachment – all of them. He says, 'If "I" doesn't leave easily, let the rascal remain a servant or a devotee.'

“A devotee also attains knowledge of the Oneness of God. He sees that there is nothing but God. He doesn't call the world a dream, but he says that it is God who has become everything. In a garden of wax, it is all wax – only in different forms.

“But you attain this experience only when your love for God has matured. When too much bile accumulates, you get jaundice and everything looks

yellow. Srimati,¹ by constantly thinking about Shyam,² saw everything filled with Shyam; and even felt herself to be Shyam. If lead remains immersed in a basin of mercury, it becomes mercury. Thinking a long time about a beetle, a cockroach becomes motionless. It doesn't move and finally it turns into a beetle. A devotee also becomes ego-less constantly thinking about God. And then sees that 'He is I' and 'I am, indeed, He.' When the cockroach becomes a beetle, everything is accomplished. Then comes liberation."

Girish and different moods of worship – 'I have the mood of a child with its mother'

"As long as this 'I' remains, a person should call on Him with one of these attitudes: serenity, servant, child³ and so on.

"I had the attitude of a maid-servant for a whole year – the servant of the Divine Mother. I dressed and adorned myself as a woman in many ways. And I wore a nose ring. If you assume the attitude of a woman, you can conquer lust.

"You should worship the Primal Power.⁴ You have to please Her. It is She who lives in the world in the form of all women. That's why I look on all women as mother.

"The attitude of looking on women as mother is very pure. The Tantra mentions worship in the company of a woman, *vamachara*. But that's not

1. Radha.

2. Krishna.

3. Shanta, dasya, vatsalya.

4. Adyashakti.

good. There's danger of slipping if you keep an object of enjoyment near you.

“Looking at a woman as mother is like the *ekadashi* fast without taking a drop of water. There's not a single trace of desire in it. But then there's also the *ekadashi* fast with a meal of fruit and roots. And then there's also *ekadashi* when you eat luchis and vegetable curry. I keep the *ekadashi* without taking a drop of water. I performed the Shorashi Puja¹ with the attitude of a woman as mother. I saw her breasts and female private parts as parts of Mother.

“The attitude of God as Mother is the last word in spiritual practice. ‘You are the Mother and I am Your son’ – this is the last word.”

Difficult rules for a monk – rules for householders and Girish

“A sannyasin keeps the *ekadashi* fast without taking a drop of water. It is a dangerous situation if he clings to enjoyment. ‘Lust and greed’ are sense enjoyments – they're like swallowing your own spittle. Money, name and fame, sense pleasures – all these are sense enjoyments. It's not good for a sannyasin to even sit and talk to a woman devotee. It harms not only him, but others – they don't learn from it. It doesn't help them. A sannyasin lives to teach others.

“Sitting or talking with women for a long time is also described as a kind of sexual intercourse.

1. Worship of a sixteen-year old girl.

There are eight kinds of intercourse:¹ Listening to a woman and enjoying her conversation is one kind. Talking about women is another kind. To whisper to a woman in private is also a kind of intercourse. Another kind is to keep a memento of a woman and enjoy it. Touch is another kind. That's why you shouldn't touch the feet of your guru's wife if she's young. These are all rules of conduct for a sannyasin.

“It's different for householders. After begetting one or two children, a husband and wife should live as brother and sister. The other seven forms of intercourse are not so harmful for them.

“A householder has debts: debts to gods, to the father, to the rishis, to raise one or two children, and then debts to his wife – if she is chaste.

“Worldly people don't understand who a good wife is, and who is a bad one; who is the power of knowledge, *vidyashakti* and who exhibits the power of ignorance, *avidyashakti*. A good wife who is the power of knowledge has very little lust, anger and so on. Her sleep is short, she pushes her husband's head away. She has affection, compassion, devotion to God, modesty, and so on. She serves everybody like a mother. And she helps her husband to develop love for God. She doesn't spend much, so

1. smaraṇam kīrtanam kelih prekṣaṇam guhyabhāṣaṇam,
saṅkalpo'dhyavasāyaśca kriyāniṣpattireva ca.
etanmaithunamaṣṭāṅgam.

[Hearing about women, speaking about them, playing with women, watching them, speaking to them secretly, thinking of sexual intercourse, determination towards it and the actual accomplishment; these are the eight kinds of sexual intercourse.]

her husband doesn't have to work harder and deprive himself of thinking about God.

“And then, there are mannish women who have certain signs. Their bad traits are – squint eyes, pigeon breasts, cat eyes, and calf cheeks.”

Essence of samadhi and Girish – ways to God-realization – Girish poses a question

Girish: “What is the way for us?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Bhakti, love for God, is the essence. But then there is the sattva of bhakti, rajas of bhakti and tamas of bhakti.

“Sattvic bhakti means an attitude of humility and modesty, while tamasic bhakti shows itself in the attitude of a highway robber: ‘I have recited His name, how can I sin? You are my real Mother, You will have to reveal Yourself to me.’”

Girish (*smiling*): “You yourself are teaching us tamasic bhakti.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “But there are signs when one has attained His vision. The devotee goes into samadhi – there are five kinds or five different feelings. One is like the movement of an ant – the spiritual current¹ feels like it is crawling up like an ant. The second is like the movement of a fish. The third feels like the zig-zagging of a snake, the fourth like the flight of a bird – flying from one branch to another. The fifth is like the movement of a monkey, as if the great current jumps up to the head. Samadhi follows.

1. *Mahavayu*.

“And there are two other kinds of samadhi. Unwavering samadhi¹ when the person is completely unconsciousness of the outside world. It can last a long time, perhaps many days. In the other samadhi,² the scattered mind suddenly withdraws and unites with God.”

Sudden samadhi and M.

(*To M.*) “Do you understand this?”

M.: “Yes, sir.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “People have realized God many different ways. Some attain Him by long and hard spiritual practices – they become perfect through them.³ Some are perfect from birth – for example, Narada, Sukadeva and others. They are known as ever-perfect.⁴ And then there are those who realize Him suddenly,⁵ – not expecting it, like Nanda Basu’s inheriting great wealth.”

Chapter II

Girish’s peaceful attitude – devotion and liberation of the shudra in the Kaliyuga

Sri Ramakrishna: “And then there are ones who attain perfection in dreams⁶ and those who attain it by God’s grace.⁷”

-
1. Sthita.
 2. Unmana.
 3. Sadhana-siddha.
 4. Nitya-siddha.
 5. Hatha-siddha.
 6. Swapna siddha.
 7. Kripa siddha.

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing, absorbed with feeling:

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 toward one and casts Her glance, that 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 those feet.

Thakur remains in ecstasy for some time. Girish and other devotees are seated in front of him. A few days ago Girish had said quite a few rude things at the Star Theatre, but he is in a quiet mood now.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): “This mood of yours is very good – the peaceful mood. That’s why I said to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, make him peaceful so he doesn’t say rude things to me.’”

Girish (*to M.*): “It seems like somebody is pressing my tongue and not letting me speak.”

Sri Ramakrishna is still in ecstasy and he gradually becomes forgetful of people and things outside. Then coming down somewhat to the normal state, he brings his mind down. He looks again at the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (*looking at M.*): “All these people come (to Dakshineswar). Let them. The Divine Mother knows everything.

(*To a young man of the neighbourhood*) “Hello! What do you think? What’s man’s duty?”

Everyone remains silent. Is Thakur saying that the aim of human life is God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narayan*): “Don’t you want to pass your examinations? O, Shiva is freed from all bonds. A man is Shiva, but the individual soul is bound by them.”¹

Thakur is now in an ecstatic mood. Finding a glass of water near him, he drinks from it. He says to himself, “Why, I have drunk water in this mood.”

Sri Ramakrishna and Atul – yearning for God

It is not yet dusk. Thakur is talking with Atul, Girish’s brother. Atul is sitting in front of him with the other devotees. A brahmin neighbour is also sitting there. Atul is an advocate of the High Court.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Atul*): “I have this to tell you – do both. Live in the world and also try to develop love for God.”

Brahmin neighbour: “Can a person attain perfection without being a brahmin?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Why not? Devotion of shudras in the Kaliyuga has been mentioned. For example, Shavari, Ruhidas, Guhak Pariah – all these.”

1. *Pash-mukta* Shiva, *pash-baddha* jiva. Thakur is making a pun on the word *pash* (pass).

Narayan (*smiling*): “Brahmins and shudras, all one!”

Brahmin neighbor: “Is it possible to find God in one lifetime?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What is not possible when God’s grace dawns? If you bring a light into a room that’s been dark for a thousand years, does the darkness disappear little by little? No, the room is lit up all at once.

(*To Atul*) “Intense renunciation is necessary. It has to be like a naked sword removed from its sheath. When such dispassion arises in the mind, near and dear relatives appear like deadly snakes, and the home like a deep well. And you have to call on God earnestly, with a yearning heart. He is bound to listen to an earnest call.”

Everybody is silent, reflecting on what Thakur has said.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Atul*): “But maybe you don’t have such yearning, such a pull.”

Atul: “The mind doesn’t concentrate.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “The yoga of practice.¹ You have to call on Him daily. It doesn’t happen in one day. Yearning comes when you call on Him daily.

“How can yearning come when a person is involved in worldly things day and night? In the beginning Jadu Mallick used to listen to spiritual talk, and he also used to talk about God. These days he doesn’t talk so much. Day and night he is

1. Abhyasa Yoga.

surrounded by flatterers and only talks about worldly things.”

Prayer at dusk – Tejchandra

It is now dusk. A lamp is lighted in the room. Sri Ramakrishna chants the name of God. He sings and prays.

He chants, “Haribol, Haribol, Haribol” and then, “Rama, Rama, Rama,” then, ‘Nitya Lilamayi,’¹ ‘O Mother, tell us the way, Mother. You are our only refuge, our only refuge, our only refuge are You.’

Noticing that Girish is restless, Thakur stops talking for awhile. He says to Tejchandra, “Come and sit closer to me.”

Tejchandra comes and sits near him. After awhile, he whispers to M., “I have to leave.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “What is he saying?”

M.: “He has to go home.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Why do I attract these boys so much? Because they are pure receptacles – worldliness hasn’t touched them yet. If there is worldliness in a person, he can’t grasp spiritual instruction. You can keep milk safely in a new pot, but if you put it in a pot already used for making curds, it turns sour. A cup that garlic paste has been made in doesn’t lose its smell even if you wash it a thousand times.”

1. The Mother image of eternal sport.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna, Star Theatre – Thakur watches the play of *Vrishaketu* with Narendra and others

Sri Ramakrishna is going to watch the performance of *Vrishaketu*. The Star Theatre is the same theatre on Beadon Street where the Manomohan Theatre later came into existence. Arriving there, they sit in a box facing south. M. and other devotees sit near Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Has Narendra come?”

M.: “Yes, sir.”

The play begins. Karana and his wife, Padmavati, sacrifice their son, Vrishaketu [to please God, their guest, who came in the guise of a Brahmin to test Karana’s charity]. Each one holds one end of a saw. Padmavati cries while she cooks the meat. The old brahmin guest says happily to Karana, “Come now, let’s sit down together and share the meat.” Karana says, “I can’t do that. I can’t eat the flesh of my son.”

A devotee breathes heavily in consolation. Thakur also expresses his sorrow.

The play over, the Master goes to the recreation room. Girish, Narendra and other devotees are already there. When he enters the room, Sri Ramakrishna stands near Narendra and says, “I have come.”

Overwhelmed hearing the sound of the sanai

Thakur sits down. The music is still heard.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “I feel happy listening to this music. There (in Dakshineswar), I used to be filled with ecstasy when they played the sanai. Noticing my state of mind, a sadhu said, ‘This is a sign of the knowledge of Brahman.’”

Girish and ‘me-mine’

When the music stops, Sri Ramakrishna speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): “Is it your theatre or does it belong to other people too?”

Girish: “Ours, sir.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “It’s good to say ‘ours’. It’s not good to say ‘mine’. Some people [talk of *me* and *mine*] say, ‘I have come here on my own.’ Only egotistical people of poor understanding say such a thing.”

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and others

Narendra: “The world is theatre.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, yes. Quite right. But at some place it’s the play of vidya,¹ other places the play of avidya.²”

Narendra: “Everything is the play of vidya.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, yes. But that only comes with the knowledge of Brahman. In the case of a

1. Knowledge.

2. Ignorance.

devotee following the path of devotion, there's both: vidyamaya and avidyamaya.

“Sing a little.”

Narendra sings:

The waves of ecstatic love for God rise on the sea of the bliss of consciousness.

The sweet play of intense bliss¹ has overwhelmed me.

All has become one in the great union.²

All divide and distinctions of time and space have disappeared.

Now, raising your arms in the inebriation of bliss, with the mind sing Hari's name.

When Narendra sings, “All has become one in the great union,” Sri Ramakrishna says, “This is what a person realizes when he has attained the knowledge of Brahman – as you were saying, indeed everything is vidya.”

When Narendra sings, “Now raising your arms in the inebriation of bliss, with the mind sing Hari's name,” Sri Ramakrishna says, “Repeat that again.”

When the song ends, Sri Ramakrishna resumes his conversation with the devotees.

Girish: “Devendra Babu didn't come. He said peevishly, ‘We don't have fillings of condensed milk, we're only filled with lentil paste.’³ What can we contribute if we go there?”

1. Mahabhava.

2. Mahayoga.

3. Meaning: without milk, the sweetness of divine love, we will only be filled with worthless lentil soup.

Sri Ramakrishna (*surprised*): “What? He never spoke like that before!”

Thakur has refreshments. He offers some to Narendra.

Jatin Deva (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “You’re always saying, ‘Eat, Narendra; do eat, Narendra.’ Have the rest of us washed in with the wave?”

Thakur is very fond of Jatin, who comes to Dakshineswar to visit him from time to time. Sometimes he stays for the night. He is a son of an aristocratic family of Sobhabazar – he belongs to the house of Radhakanta Deva.¹

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra, smiling*): “He’s (Jatin) talking about you.”

Then Thakur laughs and touches Jatin affectionately by holding his chin. He says “Go there and eat” [in other words, go to Dakshineswar].

Thakur is now going to watch the play *Vivaha Vibhrant*.² He goes to the box and takes his seat. He laughs when he hears the conversation of the maidservant in the play.

Girish’s belief in incarnations of God – Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation?

After watching the action on the stage for awhile, Thakur becomes absent-minded. He whispers to M.

1. Radhakanta was the family’s household deity.

2. A marriage farce.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Well, is it true, what Girish Ghosh says (that he is an incarnation of God) true?”

M. “He’s right. If it weren’t true, why would it appeal to us?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Look, I’m going through a change. My old mood has changed. I can’t touch anything metal anymore.”

M. listens, speechless.

Sri Ramakrishna: “This is a new state. It has a deep meaning.”

Thakur cannot touch metal. Incarnations of God do not enjoy any of the splendours of maya. Is this why Thakur is saying this?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Do you see any change in me?”

M.: “How, sir?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “In what I do.”

M.: “Your activities are increasing as more people have come to know about you.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You see! What I said before is becoming true now.”

Thakur is silent for awhile. Then suddenly he says, “Well, why can’t Paltu meditate well?”

Girish's cup of garlic – the Lord's message of hope for so-called sinners

Now Thakur is ready to go back to Dakshineswar.

Talking about Girish, Thakur had said to a devotee, "Does the cup in which garlic paste is made lose its smell completely if you wash it a thousand times?" Girish's pride had been wounded.

When Thakur is ready to go, Girish speaks to him.

Girish (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Will the smell of garlic ever go?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, it will go."

Girish: "So you are saying that it will?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "All smell or odor leaves when you put it in fire for a long time. If you put a cup smelling of garlic through fire, it won't retain its smell. It becomes a fresh, new cup.

"The person who says he won't succeed doesn't succeed. A person who feels he is liberated becomes liberated. But the person who thinks himself bound remains bound. The one who says emphatically that he is liberated does in fact become liberated. The one who says day and night, 'I am bound, I am bound' truly is bound."

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna Observing Silence and Vision of Maya

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has been observing silence from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon. Today is Tuesday, 11 August 1885, 27th day of Shravana. The new moon day¹ was yesterday.

Sri Ramakrishna's disease has manifested. Has he come to know that he will soon be quitting this world to sit again in the lap of the Divine Mother? Is it because of this that he is observing silence? The Holy Mother weeps to see that he doesn't speak. Rakhal and Latu also weep. The brahmini woman of Baghbazar has arrived and is also crying.

The devotees ask him every now and then, "Will you remain silent always?"

Sri Ramakrishna by a sign says, "No."

Narayan comes at three o'clock. Thakur says to him, "Mother will bless you."

Narayan happily gives the news, "Thakur is speaking now." It is as if a heavy stone has been removed from the chest of Rakhal and the other devotees. They all come and sit near Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal and the other devotees*): "The Divine Mother has shown me that everything is maya. Only She is real and everything else is the manifestation of Her maya."

1. Amavasya.

“And She showed me something else: how much every devotee has progressed.”

Narayan and other devotees: “Well, how far has each of us advanced?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I saw everything about them: Nityagopal, Rakhai, Narayan, Purna, Mahima Chakravarti and others.”

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Girish, Pundit Shashadhar and other devotees

The devotees in Calcutta have come to know of Thakur’s illness. They understand that his epiglottis is diseased.

Today is Sunday, 16 August 1885; the first of Bhadrapada. A number of devotees have come to visit him – Girish, Ram, Nityagopal, Mahima Chakravarti, Kishori (Gupta), Pundit Shashadhar, Tarka Chudamani.

Thakur is full of joy as usual and talks to the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna: “I can’t talk about my disease with the Divine Mother. I feel ashamed to mention it.”

Girish: “My Narayana will heal you.”

Ram: “You’ll be all right.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “Yes, please bless me like that.” (*All laugh.*)

Girish has started coming just recently. Thakur says to him, “You have to live in the middle of a lot

of problems. You have so many things to do. Come here three times more.” Now he talks to Shashadhar.

**Advice to Pundit Shashadhar – Brahman and the
Primal Power are the same**

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shashadhar*): “Say something about the Primal Power.”

Shashadhar: “What do I know?”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “A person was very respectful of another. The latter asked him to bring some fire to light a smoke for him. He said, ‘Am I fit to bring fire for you?’ And he didn’t bring it!” (*All laugh.*)

Shashadhar: “Sir, the Divine Mother Herself is the cause and the material of the universe. It is She who creates it and its creatures. Then She Herself dwells as the universe and as its creatures. Just like a spider that makes a web (instrumental cause), drawing the web out of itself (material cause).”

Sri Ramakrishna: “And this is also true. He who is Purusha is also Prakriti; He who is the Absolute is also the Primal Power. When He is not active, when He is not creating, preserving or dissolving, I call Him Brahman or Purusha. And when He is active doing all these things, I call Him Shakti, Prakriti. But He who is Brahman is also the Primal Power. He who is Purusha has become Prakriti. Water is water whether it is still or moving. A snake remains a snake whether it moves in its zigzag way or lies coiled up quietly.

**Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi talking about the
knowledge of Brahman – desire for sense enjoyment
and duty**

“What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words. Speech stops. At the end of the song, ‘Nitai is my mad elephant!’ nothing remains to be said. First the singer repeats, ‘Elephant, elephant.’ Then, after saying ‘Elephant,’ he now can only say, ‘Ele.’ In the end, he can’t even utter this. He loses all outer consciousness.

Saying this, Thakur goes into samadhi. He is standing.

Coming out of samadhi, he says, “What is beyond ‘kshara’¹ and ‘akshara’² cannot be described in words.”

Everyone is silent. Thakur continues: “As long as the desire for sense enjoyment is not fulfilled and duties remain unfinished, a person cannot attain samadhi.³

(*To Shashadhar*) “God is making you work now, giving lectures and so on. You have to do all that now. “When this work is finished, there will be no more duties. A housewife who has finished the chores of the household and goes for a bath does not return however much you call her.”

1. Perishable.

2. Indestructible.

3. bhogaiśvaryaprasaktānām tayāpahṛtacetasām,
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhiyate |
gītā 2-44

[O Partha, no set determination is formed in the minds of those that are deeply attached to pleasure and power, and whose discrimination is stole.]

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna ill – Doctor Rakhal – dancing with the devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room at Dakshineswar with the devotees. Today is Sunday, 20 September 1885, 5th of Aswin, the 11th day of the bright fortnight. Navagopal, Haralal (a teacher in the Hindu School), Rakhal, Latu, the kirtan singer Goswami and several others are present.

M. has brought Doctor Rakhal from Bowbazar to examine Thakur's sore throat. The doctor is stout and has thick fingers.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the doctor*): "Wrestlers have fingers like yours. When Mahendra Sarkar examined my throat, he pressed my tongue so hard I felt great pain. He did it like he was pressing a cow's tongue."

Doctor Rakhal: "Let me examine you. You won't feel any pain."

Why is Sri Ramakrishna suffering?

After the Doctor examined him and made a prescription, Sri Ramakrishna begins to talk.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Well, people say that if he's so holy, why is he suffering from disease?"

Tarak: "Bhagavan Das Babaji was confined to bed for a long time because of illness."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Doctor Madhu carries food to the house of his mistress. He's sixty years old, but he's not suffering from any disease."

Goswami: “Your disease, sir, is because of others. You take upon yourself the transgressions of those who visit you. That’s why you’re suffering.”

A Devotee: “If you say to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, cure me of this disease,’ you will be cured quickly.”

**Attitude of master and servant is diminishing – even
looking for ‘I-ness,’ it can’t be traced**

Sri Ramakrishna: “I can’t ask the Divine Mother to cure me. And the attitude of master and servant is diminishing. Sometimes I say, ‘Mother, please repair the scabbard of the sword a little.’ But I can make such a prayer less and less now. These days even when I’m looking for ‘I,’ it can’t be found. I see that She Herself is dwelling inside this scabbard.”

The Goswami has come for kirtan. A devotee asks whether there will be music. Sri Ramakrishna is not well and might become ecstatic if there is kirtan – this is what everyone is afraid of.

Sri Ramakrishna says, “Let’s have a little kirtan. They’re afraid I might go into ecstasy – it hurts that spot in my throat.”

Listening to the music, Thakur is unable to control his feelings. He stands up and begins to dance with the devotees.

Doctor Rakhai sees everything. His hired carriage is waiting for him. He and M. stand up to return to Calcutta. Both of them salute Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately, to M.*): “Have you had your meal?”

Instructions to M. on self-realization – ‘the body is only a sheath’

It is Thursday, 24 September, the full moon day. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot in his room. He is in agony with the disease in his throat. M. and the other devotees are sitting on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): “Every now and then I think this body is only a pillowcase. There’s nothing but the Indivisible (Sat-chit-ananda).

“When I go into ecstasy, the disease stays away from me. Now that mood is coming on me and I feel like laughing.”

Dwija’s sister and younger maternal grandmother have come to see Thakur since hearing of his illness. After saluting him, they sit on one side of the room. Seeing the maternal grandmother, Thakur asks, “Who is she? Is she the one who raised Dwija? Why has Dwija brought an *ektara*?”¹

M.: “Sir, it has two strings.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Dwija’s father doesn’t agree with his views. Besides, what will people say? It’s better for him to pray secretly.”

There is an extra picture of Gaur and Nitai on the wall of Sri Ramakrishna’s room. The picture is of Gaur and Nitai singing kirtan in Navadvip with their companions.

Ramlal (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Let me give this picture (to M.).”

1. A single-stringed musical instrument.

Sri Ramakrishna: “That would be good.”

Sri Ramakrishna and Harish’s service

Thakur has been taking the medicine prescribed by Doctor Pratap for some time. He woke up deep at night feeling very restless. Harish, who was in the room, was nursing him. Rakhal was also there. Ramlal is sleeping on the verandah outside. Later, Thakur said, “When I was feeling so restless, I felt like embracing Harish. After being massaged with medicinal oil, I felt better and began to dance.”

Appendix I

Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra (Swami Vivekananda)

Vivekananda in America and in Europe

Chapter I

It is the day following the Rathayatra, 1885, Sankranti of the month of Ashada. This morning Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with the devotees in Balaram's house talking about Narendra's (Swami Vivekananda's) great qualities.

Great qualities of Narendra – 'a prince among men'

"Narendra belongs to a very high plane – the realm of the Absolute. He has a manly nature. Many devotees come here, but none can equal him.

"Now and then I sit down and consider the devotees. They are like lotuses: some with ten petals, others with sixteen petals and some others with a hundred petals. But among lotuses Narendra is a thousand-petalled lotus.

"The others may be a brass pot or a jug – but Narendra is a barrel.

"Compared to ponds and tanks, Narendra is a big lake like the Haldarpukur.

“Among fish, he is a big red-eyed carp. Others are different kinds of small fish – minnows and other small fish.¹

“He is a very large container – he can hold many things. He is a bamboo with a big space inside.

“Narendra is not under the control of anything. He is above attachment and sense enjoyments. He is a male pigeon. If you hold a male pigeon’s beak, it will pull it back – a female pigeon doesn’t resist.”

**First realize God – when you receive the
commandment you may preach**

Three years ago, in 1882, Narendra came to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with a couple of Brahma friends. He stayed there for the night. At dawn, Thakur said, “Go and meditate in the Panchavati.” A short time later, Thakur went there and saw that Narendra was meditating with his friends at the foot of the Panchavati. When the meditation was over, Thakur said to him, “Look, the aim of life is to realize God. You should meditate and think on Him privately in a solitary spot and with a yearning heart. And you should pray and weep, saying, ‘Lord, reveal Thyself to me!’”

About the welfare work of the Brahma Samaj and other religious sects – like the education of women, establishing schools and lecturing – he said, “First realize God, both the formless God and God with form. He who is beyond speech and mind assumes a form for the sake of devotees – appears

1. Pona, kathi vatta.

and talks to them. After attaining His vision and getting His commandment, then one should take to humanitarian work. It is said in a song: No deity has been installed in the temple, yet Podo blows a conchshell as if arati is being performed. So somebody scolds him, saying:

O Podo, Madhava has not been installed in your temple.

You have unnecessarily created confusion by blowing the conch.

Eleven bats live here day and night.

“If you wish to install Madhava in the temple of your heart, if you wish to realize God, what is the use of only blowing the conch shell? Purify your heart first. When the heart is purified, the Lord will come and sit upon the pure seat. When there are bat droppings, Madhava cannot be brought here. The eleven bats are the eleven sense organs.

“First dive deep. Dive and pick up the jewels. Other work will come later. First install Madhava. Then if you feel like it, you can deliver lectures.

“Nobody likes to dive. No one practices spiritual disciplines – devotion is missing, discrimination and non-attachment are absent. After learning a few words, people start lecturing.

“It’s difficult to teach people. If someone receives His command after realizing God, only then can he instruct.”

Pundit Shashadhar met Sri Ramakrishna in Calcutta on the Rathayatra day in 1884. Narendra was there. Sri Ramakrishna said to the pundit, “You lecture for the benefit of people. That is good. But my dear, without receiving a command from

God, instructions are useless. People will listen to your lectures for two days and then forget about them. There were people who used to ease themselves on the bank of Haldarpukur. Others berated them with foul language, but they continued. At last, when the government put up a notice, it stopped. In the same way teaching is useless if you haven't received a command from God."

That's why, taking the instruction of his guru, Narendra renounced the world and carried out austerities secretly in solitude. Later, after strengthening himself, he took up the difficult task of teaching humanity.

When Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill at Cossipore in 1886, he wrote on a piece of paper: "Naren will instruct mankind."

Swami Vivekananda sent a letter to the residents of Madras from America. In it he said he was a servant of Sri Ramakrishna and was becoming his messenger; he was propagating Thakur's message to the whole world:

"It was your generous appreciation of him whose message to India and to the whole world, I, the most unworthy of His servants, had the privilege to bear, it was your innate spiritual instinct which saw in him and his message the first murmurs of that tidal wave of spirituality which is destined at no distant future to break upon India in all its irresistible power"... (Reply to the Madras Address)

In his third lecture in Madras, he said, "Whatever of significance I have said is all the

Paramahansa's. And if I have told you anything with no substance, it is all mine."

"Let me conclude by saying that if in my life I have told one word of truth, it was his and his alone; and if I have told you many things which were not true, correct and beneficial to the human race, it was all mine and on me is the responsibility." (Third lecture, Madras.)

When he was welcomed in Radhakanta's house in Calcutta, he said that the power of Sri Ramakrishna was manifest around the world. O Indians, meditate on Him and you will achieve greatness in every type of activity. He said:

"If this nation wants to rise, it will have to rally enthusiastically round his name. It does not matter who preaches Ramakrishna Paramahansa; whether I or you or anybody else. But him I place before you and it is for you to judge, and for the good of our race, for the good of our nation, to judge now what you shall do with His great ideal of life.

Within ten years of his passing away His Power had encircled the globe. Judge him not through me. I am only a weak instrument. His character was so great that I or any of his disciples, if we spent hundreds of lives, could do no justice to a millionth part of what he really was!"

While talking about his gurudeva, Swami Vivekananda would be completely beside himself. Blessed be his love and devotion to his guru!

Chapter II

The work of spreading Sri Ramakrishna's teachings by Narendra

Today we will comment a little on how Swami Vivekananda made efforts to spread the universal eternal Hindu religion¹ as taught by Sri Paramahansa Deva.

Realization of God

Sri Ramakrishna's first teaching was that you have to realize God. Religion does not mean memorizing the doctrines of a religion or quoting verses. God-realization comes to the devotee who calls on Him with a yearning heart – whether in this life or another. I remember what he said one day at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar.

The Paramahansa was talking to Mahima Chakravarti of Cossipore (on Sunday, 26 October 1884).

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan and other devotees*): “How long will you study scriptures? What is the use of only reasoning? First you have to try to realize Him. What will you know by reading books? As long as you are at a distance from the marketplace, you only hear the hustle and bustle. When you reach it, you find it very different. Then you see and hear clearly: ‘Take these potatoes, pay me for them.’

“You don't get the right feeling from books. There is a great difference. When you realize God,

1. Sanatana Dharma.

scriptures and science all seem like straw and dry grass.

“What you need is to know the rich man. Why are you anxious to know how many houses, gardens, and company shares he has? Somehow or other get introduced to the owner – whether or not you have to scale the fence to do so. Then if he wishes he will tell you himself about his houses, gardens and company shares. Once you’re introduced to the proprietor, his servants and his guards will all salute you.” (*All laugh.*)

Devotee: “But then how can you manage to get acquainted with the proprietor?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You have to work for it – practice spiritual disciplines. It won’t do to just sit and say that God exists. You have to reach Him somehow. Call on Him in solitude and pray, ‘Reveal Yourself to me!’ Weep with a longing heart. You roam around madly for ‘lust and greed’ – be a little mad for Him too. Let people say that so-and-so is mad for God. In whatever way you can, call on Him in solitude for a few days – renounce all else. What is the use of just sitting there and saying, ‘He exists?’ There are big fish in the Haldarpukur. Can you get one by just sitting on its bank? Prepare some bait and offer it to the fish. Gradually, one will come out of the deep water, making ripples on the surface. Then you will feel joy. You might be able to have a little glimpse of it jumping out of the water. When you see it, you feel even more joy.”¹

1. Jesus Christ would tell his devotees: ‘Blessed are the pure in spirit, for they shall see God.’

Swamiji said exactly the same thing at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, i.e. the aim of religion is God-realization, to see God:

“The Hindu does not want to live upon words and theories. He must see God and that alone can destroy all doubts. So the best proof a Hindu sage gives about the soul, about God, is I have seen the soul; I have seen God ... the whole struggle in their system is a constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God; and their reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even ‘as the Father in Heaven is perfect’, constitutes the religion of the Hindus.” Lectures on Hinduism (Parliament of Religions, Chicago)

Swamiji lectured at many places in America and he said the same thing everywhere. In a place known as Hartford, he said:

“The next idea that I want to bring to you is that religion does not consist in doctrines or dogmas... The end of all religions is the realization of God in the soul. Ideals and methods may differ but that is the central point. That is the realization of God, something behind this world of sense – this world of eternal eating and drinking and talking non-sense – this world of eternal shadows and selfishness. There is that beyond all books, beyond all creeds, beyond the varieties of this world and that is the realization of God within you. A man may believe in all the churches in the world, he may carry on his head all the sacred books ever written, he may baptize himself in all the rivers of the earth; still if he has no perception of God I would class him with the rankest atheist.”

Swamiji said in his book *Raja Yoga* that people nowadays do not believe that God can be realized. They say, ‘Yes, rishis and great spiritual

personalities like Christ may have realized the Self. But that doesn't happen these days.' Swamiji says that one certainly can realize the Self. Practice concentration of mind; you will certainly find Him within your heart:

“The teachers all saw God; they all saw their own souls and what they saw they preached. Only there is this difference that by most of these religions, especially in modern times, a peculiar claim is made, namely, that these experiences are impossible at the present day; they were only possible with a few men, who were the first founders of the religion and subsequently bore their names. At the present time these experiences have become obsolete and therefore we have now to take religion on belief, this I entirely deny. Uniformity is the rigorous law of nature; what once happened can happen always.” (Raja-yoga: Introduction)

On 9 January, 1896 Swamiji lectured in New York on the Ideal of Universal Religion. That is to say, the religion where you can find the followers of the path of knowledge or devotion or action unite. While ending his lecture he said: The aim of all religions is God-realization. He also said: knowledge, action, devotion – these are all different paths, different ways – but the goal is the same, the realization of God. He said:

“Then again all these various yogas (work or worship, psychic control or philosophy) have to be carried out into practice; theories will not do. We have to meditate upon it, realise it until it becomes our whole life. Religion is realization, not talk nor doctrine nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging. It is not an intellectual assent. By intellectual assent we can come to a hundred sorts of foolish things and change

them next day, but this being and becoming is what Religion is.”

In a letter he wrote to the residents of Madras he said: The specialty of the Hindu religion is realizing God. The chief ideal of the Vedas is realization of God. This is what distinguishes the Hindu religion from others:

“The one idea which distinguishes the Hindu religion from every other in the world, the one idea to express that which the sages almost exhaust the vocabulary of the Sanskrit language, is that man must realize God... Thus to realize God, Brahman, as the Dvaitins (dualists) say, or to become Brahman as the Advaitins say – is the aim and end of the whole teachings of the Vedas.”

Swamiji lectured in London on 29 October 1896. His subject was God-realization. In this lecture he read from the Kathopanishad and mentioned the story of Nachiketa. Nachiketa wanted to see God. He wanted to acquire the knowledge of Brahman. Yama, the King of Death,¹ said, “Brother, if you want to know God, you will have to rid yourself of attachment and the desire for enjoyment. You cannot attain union with God if there is desire for enjoyment. By loving something insubstantial [avastu], you cannot attain the substantial [vastu].” Swamiji said, “According to me, everybody is an atheist. With the help of a rigmarole of words, I harp on religion. If you see God only once, you will gain real faith.

“We are all atheist and yet we try to fight the man who tries to confess it. We are all in the dark;

1. Dharmaraj.

religion is to us mere intellectual talk. We consider a man religious who can talk well. But this not religion... Religion comes when that actual realization in our own souls begins. That will be the dawn of religion. Then will real faith begin.”

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra. Harmony of religions

Narendra and other educated young men were surprised to see Sri Ramakrishna’s love and reverence for all religions. The paramahansa would frankly say that there is truth in all religions. And he would add: All religions are true – you can reach God through every religion. One day, the Kojagar Lakshmi Puja day¹ (27 October 1882), Keshab Sen went by steamer to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar and took Thakur back to Calcutta. They talked about many things on the way – the same conversation as the one on 13 August, a few months ago. I am quoting from my diary their talk about the harmony of religions.

Kedarnath Chatterji organized a great festival at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. After the celebration, about three or four o’clock, many talked on the southern verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “As many religions, so many paths. Every religion is true. It’s like going to Kalighat by different paths. Religion is not God. One can reach God following different creeds.

“Rivers come from different directions – but they all end in the ocean. They all become one there.

1. Full moon day of the bright fortnight of Aswin, the nightlong puja of Lakshmi.

“You can climb to the roof by different means. You can go up by brick steps, a wooden ladder, a spiral staircase, even a rope. But you have to hold onto only one. You can’t put your foot on two or three different kinds of steps and reach the roof. But when you have reached it, you can come down by using any means, and again go up.

“So at first a person must follow only one religion. When God is realized, he can come and go by any religious path. When he is among Hindus, everybody thinks he is a Hindu. When he is with Muslims, all think he is a Muslim. And when he is with Christians, they all think he is a Christian.

“The followers of all religions call upon the same one Person. Some call Him Ishvara, some Rama, some Hari and others Allah or Brahman. These are different names, but the Reality is the same.

“A pond has four landing steps. Hindus take water from one of them and call it *jal*; from another, Muslims take water and call it *pani*; Christians at yet another spot call it water; and then there are some people who call it *aqua*. (*All laugh.*) It’s the same thing – water. But the names are different. What is the use in quarreling? Everybody is calling upon the one, the same, God, and everybody will go to Him.”

A Devotee (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “Is there anything false in another religion?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Which religion is without error? Everybody says his watch gives the correct time. But no watch is absolutely correct. All

watches have to be set right from time to time by comparing them with the sun.

“What religion has no error? But even if there is an error and you call on Him sincerely with a yearning heart, God will certainly listen to you.

“Just imagine a father with many sons, small and big. Not all of them can say, ‘Father.’¹ One says, ‘Baba’, another says, ‘Ba.’ Yet another one says just, ‘Pa.’ Will the father be angry with the ones who can’t pronounce *baba*? (*All laugh.*) No, the father will still love them all equally.²

“People think that their religion is true, that they have understood what God is, but these people have not understood. They think they are calling on Him correctly, but they’re not. They think that God grants them His grace but not others. Such people don’t understand that God is the father and mother of all. If they are sincere, He will be compassionate to all.”

What the religion of love is, he explained many times. But how many people have been able to comprehend it? How much could even Keshab Sen understand? Swami Vivekananda, having been initiated into this fiery formula of love, was able to propagate it in the world. Sri Ramakrishna again and again advised not taking recourse to dogmatism. To say that my religion is true and yours is false is dogmatism. And it is the basis of all trouble. Swamiji spoke of this at the Parliament of

1. Baba.

2. The same is mentioned in an English book: Max Muller’s Hibbert Lectures. Max Muller also explained it with the same metaphor, that it is not right to hate those who worship gods and goddesses.

Religions in Chicago: how much killing, shedding of blood, and violence have taken place in the name of Christianity, Islam and other religions:

“Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often, and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair.”
Lecture on Hinduism, (Chicago, Parliament of Religions).

In another lecture Swamiji said, “All religions are true,” and tried to explain it through scientific reasoning.

“If anyone here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of these religions and destruction of the others, to him I say, Brother, yours is an impossible hope. Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.

“The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become earth or the air or the water? No, it becomes a plant, it assimilates the air, the earth and the water, converts them into plant substance and grows a plant.

“Similar in the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve its own individuality and grow according to its own law of growth.”

In America Swamiji lectured on the Hindu religion at the Brooklyn Ethical Society. Dr. Lewis Janes chaired this meeting. Here too, Swamiji’s first words were on the harmony of religions. He

said that it is not possible that the religion of a particular person is true and those of all others are false. To say that only my religion is true is a kind of disease. We all have five fingers. If one person has six, we will have to say that he is different.”

“Truth has always been universal. If I alone were to have six fingers on my hand while all of you have only five, you would not think that my hand was the true intent of nature, but rather that it was abnormal and diseased. Just so with religion. If one creed alone were to be true and all others untrue, you would have again to say that, that religion is diseased. If one religion is true, all others must be true. Thus the Hindu religion is your property as well as mine.” (Lecture at Brooklyn Ethical Society)

When Swamiji spoke to thousands at his first lecture at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, six thousand were fascinated and stood up to give him a standing ovation.¹ He said:

“I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to tell you that I belong to a religion into whose sacred language, the Sanskrit, the word ‘exclusion’ is untranslatable.”

1. “When Vivekananda addressed the audience as sisters and brothers of America, there arose a peal of applause that lasted for several minutes.” (Dr. Barrow’s Report) “But eloquent as were many of the brief speeches, no one expressed so well the spirit of the Parliament of Religions and its limitations as the Hindu monk... He is an orator by divine right.” (New York Critique, 1893).

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra, Karma Yoga and Patriotism

Sri Ramakrishna used to always say, “‘Me and mine,’ this is just ignorance. ‘You and yours,’ is knowledge.” One day, a great festival was being celebrated in the courtyard of Suresh Mitra, on Sunday, 15 June 1884. Sri Ramakrishna and many devotees, including many Brahma devotees, were there. Thakur said to Pratap Chandra Majumdar and other devotees, “Look, ‘me and mine’ – this alone is ignorance. Everybody says that the Kali Temple was built by Rani Rasmani – nobody says that God built it. So-and-so founded the Brahma Samaj – that’s what people say. Nobody says that it came about by the will of God. ‘I have done it’ – this is ignorance. ‘O God, nothing at all is mine, this Kali Temple is not mine, the Samaj is not mine, all these belong to you; wife, son and family, none of these are mine, they are all yours.’ These are the words of spiritual wisdom.”

“Saying, ‘Mine! Mine,’ and getting attached to all those things are maya. Loving everybody is compassion. I love only the members of the Brahma Samaj is maya. To love all people of the country, the followers of all religions, comes from compassion, love of God. Maya binds a man and makes him forget God, but compassion moves him to realize God. Sukadeva and Narada had compassion.”

Thakur said, "To love only your compatriots is maya. To love people of all countries and all religions comes from compassion, love of God." Then why did Swami Vivekananda concern himself so much with his own country?

Swamiji said one day at the Chicago Parliament of Religions that he went there to beg for money for his poor countrymen, but he found it very difficult. It is very difficult to collect money from Christians for people who are not Christian.

"The crying evil in the East is not religion, they have religion enough, but it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats;...

"I came here to seek aid for my impoverished people and fully realized how difficult it was to get help for heathens from Christians in the Christian land." Speech before the Parliament of Religions (Chicago Tribune).

One of the chief disciples of Swamiji, Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble) said that when Swamiji was living in Chicago, he would shower a lot of love on any Indian he met, whatever religion he belonged to – Hindu, Parsee or Muslim. He would take his countrymen to the prosperous home where he was staying as a guest. The hosts took care of them generously. They knew very well that if they didn't, Swamiji would surely leave their homes and go somewhere else.

"At Chicago any Indian man attending the great world Bazaar, rich or poor, high or low, Hindu, Mohammeden, Parsee, what not, might at any moment be brought by him to his hosts for hospitality

and entertainment and they well knew that any failure of kindness on their part to the least of these would immediately have lost them his presence.”

Swamiji constantly pondered how to rid his countrymen from the pangs of poverty, how to educate them correctly, how to help them grow spiritually. But he was as anxious for the African Negroes as he was for his own countrymen. Sister Nivedita said that when Swamiji was traveling in the southern United States, some refused to receive him, thinking that he was a coloured man, a negro. But when they found out that he was a Hindu monk, the well-known Swami Vivekananda, they took him home with great regard and served him. They said to him, “When we asked if you were an African, why did you leave without saying anything?”

Swamiji said, “But why? Isn’t the African Negro my brother?”— in other words, “Are my countrymen different from men anywhere in the world?” You should love a negro the same way you love a countryman. But because one always lives with his own countrymen, service to them comes first. This is called service without attachment.

It is also called karma yoga. Everybody works, but work without expectation of any reward is very difficult. Without renouncing everything, without meditating on God in solitude for a long time, it’s not possible to help one’s country. Don’t say, ‘My country,’ for that is maya. Whoever lives there are Yours (God’s), so want to serve them. It is Your command, that’s the reason to serve one’s country. ‘It is Your work,’ I am your servant – that’s why I

observe this vow. Whether I succeed or not. You [God] care about it – it is not for my own name or fame, it is to bring to light Your glory.”

What is real patriotism? It was to teach its ideal to humanity that Swamiji took this earnest vow. Those who have a home and family, those who have never longed for God, who, hearing the word *renunciation* only smile, those whose minds are always on ‘lust and greed’ and for name and fame in this world, those who are struck dumb to hear that the ideal of human life is to realize God – how can such people accept this high and lofty ideal of benefiting their country? Though Swamiji used to weep for his, he always remembered with it that in this transitory world only God is real and everything else is unreal. When he returned from the foreign land, Swamiji went to Almora to see the Himalayas. The residents of Almora worshipped him as the very presence of God. When he saw the very high peaks of Nagadhiraj Deva Atma Himgiri, he became absorbed with emotion. He said, “Today I am seeing that holy land of renunciation in the holy Uttarakhand, where rishis meditated on God day and night after renouncing the hubbub of the world. It was from their lips that the Vedic verses poured. Oh, when will such a day come to me? I do have the desire to continue some work, but coming to this holy land again after so long, I am losing those desires. Now I wish to sit down alone and spend my last days in meditation on the lotus feet of Hari, merged in deep samadhi.

“It is the hope of my life to end my days somewhere within this Father of Mountains, where Rishis lived – where philosophy was born.” (Speech at Almora.)

On seeing the Himalayas, one’s desire for work is lost. Only one idea comes to mind, the renunciation of work.¹

“As peak after peak of this Father of Mountains began to appear before my sight, all those propensities to work, that ferment that had been going on in my brain for years seemed to quiet down and mind reverted to that one eternal theme which the Himalayas always teach us, that one theme which is reverberating in the very atmosphere of the place, the one theme, the murmur, of which I hear even now in the rushing whirlpools of its rivers – renunciation.”²

Upon achieving this renunciation, this detachment, a person becomes fearless – all other things involve fear.

sarvaṁ vastu bhayānvitaṁ bhuvi nṛṇāṁ
vairāgyamevābhayaṁ

vairāgyaśatakam 31

“Everything in this life is fraught with fear.

It is renunciation that makes one fearless.”

When you come here, you lose the feeling of sectarianism – quarrels and arguments concerning religion disappear. Only one supreme truth becomes established in the mind – that the only thing needed in life is the worship of God – all else is illusion.

1. Karma sannyasa.

2. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda: Volume 3; Lectures from Colombo to Almora; Address of Welcome at Almora and Reply.

Only God is the reality, all else unreal. Or, a bee doesn't buzz anymore when it sits on a lotus flower.

“Strong souls will be attracted to this Father of Mountains in time to come, when all this fight between sects and all those differences in dogmas will not be remembered any more, and quarrels between your religion and my religion will have vanished altogether, when mankind will understand that there is but one Eternal Religion and that is the perception of the Divine within and the rest is mere froth; such ardent souls will come here, knowing that the world is but Vanity, knowing that everything is useless except the worship of the Lord and the Lord alone.” (Speech at Almora.)

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “Tie the knowledge of Advaita (non-dualism) to the end of your cloth and go anywhere you like.” Swami Vivekananda engaged himself in work with the knot of Advaita tied to the end of his cloth. For the sannyasin, what are home, wealth, strangers and one's own family, homeland or foreign lands? Yajnavalkya said to Maitreyi, “Without realizing God, what use is wealth and education? Maitreyi, first know Him and then anything else.” Swamiji propagated this very idea to the world. He said, “O, people of the world, first renounce sense pleasures and worship God in solitude. After this, you can do whatever you like. It will not cause any harm. Serve your country or, if you like, raise a family. There is no harm in any of these when you understand that He resides in all, that there is nothing else but He, that the world and your country are not without Him. After you have realized God, you will see that it is He alone who

dwells in the world.” Rishi Vaishishtha Deva said to Ramachandra, “Rama, what you say, that you want to renounce the world – just reason it out with me. If God is outside the world, then renounce it.”¹ Ramachandra had realized the Atman (Self), so he kept silent. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “First know how to use a dagger before you take it in your hand.” Swami Vivekananda explained who a real karma yogi is. What good can he do for his country? Swamiji knew that there were other great things to do besides helping the poor with money. The main thing is to help them know God. After that comes learning, then the gift of life, then clothing and feeding the poor. How long can you end the miseries of the world? Sri Ramakrishna asked Krishnadas Pal,² “Well, what is the aim of life?” Krishnadas said, “In my opinion it is to do good to the world, to remove misery from the world.” Thakur was irritated and responded, “You have the intelligence of the son of a widow!³ Why, how much can you save the world from its trials and tribulations? Is the world so small? Do you know that there are crabs in the Ganges in the rainy season? In the same way, there are innumerable universes. He who is the Master of this universe takes care of all of them. The goal of life is to know Him first. Then you may take up anything you like.” Swamiji also said somewhere:

1. Yogavashishtha.

2. Krishnadas Pal was a famous and wealthy man of Calcutta, a well-known philanthropist. He visited Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple.

3. Randi putti buddhi: low intelligence, having grown up flattering others and by other such means.

“Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can remove our miseries forever, and other knowledge satisfies wants only for a time... He who gives spiritual knowledge is the greatest benefactor of mankind... Next to spiritual help (Brahmajnana) comes intellectual help (Vidyadana), the gift of secular knowledge. This is far higher than the giving of food and clothes; the next gift is the gift of life, and the fourth, the gift of food. Karmayoga (New York), My plan of Campaign (Madras).

God-realization is the aim of life and it is the main interest in this country. First this, and then anything else. Politics shouldn't be talked about in the beginning. First meditate on God with a concentrated mind and see Him in your heart. Having realized Him, you'll be able to do good to your motherland because then your mind will be detached. You can't serve your country by thinking, "my country." It is the God in all that you can serve. Then you will not see any difference between your country and foreign countries. Then you will be able to truly see how you can do good to others. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Those who play the game of chess can't understand the right moves as well as unattached onlookers. They can suggest much better moves." This is because an unattached person needs nothing for himself. An unattached person who is free from attachment and malice, who is a spiritual personality, who is liberated in this very life, who has practiced spiritual disciplines for a long time and attained Him doesn't like anything else."

And having gained which, he thinks that there is no greater gain than that, wherein established he is not

shaken even by the heaviest affliction. (Bhagavata Gita 6:22)

For this reason, the politics and the social code of Hindus are all religious regulations. Manu, Yajnavalkya, Prashar and other great saints are the authors of these religious texts. They had no need of anything. Even so, having received the command of God they composed these scriptures for householders. Remaining unattached they suggested the right move in the chess game. For this reason, there is no possibility of any error in what they said due to place, time or character.

Swami Vivekananda was also a karma yogi. Remaining unattached, he took the vow of service to others. That is why he was so valuable a worker. Remaining detached, he did good for this country, the way the sages of yore worked incessantly for the good of humanity. May we be able to follow his footsteps on this path of religion without selfish desire.¹ But how difficult a thing it is. First we have to attain the lotus feet of Lord Hari. We have to practice renunciation and austere spiritual effort like Vivekananda. Only then may we be eligible.

Blessed are you, the all-renouncing personality. You have truly followed in the footsteps of your guru. You have truly practiced the great mantra of your gurudeva: first attain God, and then anything else. You understood that if you don't believe in God, this world is only a dreamlike magic show. That is why you renounced everything and devoted yourself to spiritual practice. When you saw that He is the life of all, when you saw that there is

1. Nishkama.

nothing but Him, then you put your mind on the world, O Mahayogin! You entered again the region of work for the service of Hari imminent in all. Thus all Hindus, Muslims, Christians, foreigners, wealthy, poor, all men and women became a part of your limitless love – you gave them all the embrace of ecstatic love. Overwhelmed with deep dispassion, leaving behind the mother who gave you birth, with tears flowing from your eyes, you put on the ochre robe and left. Later, to acknowledge her maternal love and to fulfill her desire, you came back to see that mother. You worked like Narada and Janaka to educate humanity.

Chapter V

Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra, Keshab Sen and worship of God with form

Is God with form or without form?

One day Keshab Chandra Sen, accompanied by his disciples, came to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur talked with him about God without form for some time. The paramahansa said to him, “I don’t think of Kali as an image of clay or stone. She is Spirit. That which is Brahman is also Kali. When not acting, it is Brahman; when creating, preserving or destroying, it is Kali. Kali – that is, She who romances time.¹ Time, that is, Brahman.” The following conversation took place that day:

1. Kala.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab*): “Do you know what it’s like? Think of Sat-chit-ananda [Existence-Consciousness-Bliss] as an ocean – without any shore or limit. Due to the coolness of devotion, water freezes into ice at different places – into different forms. In other words, at times God reveals Himself as a form for the sake of his devotee. And when the sun of the knowledge of the Absolute rises, the ice melts – that is, one goes into samadhi and realizes that God is the only reality and the world is an illusion. All forms disappear. Then it’s not possible to say in words what He is. You can’t catch Him with your mind, reason or ego.

“A person who knows one thing properly can also know another. He who knows God without form can also know God with form. A person who hasn’t gone to the neighborhood can’t know where Shyampukur and Telipara are. Not everybody is able to worship God without form. So there’s a great need for worship of God with form.”

Explaining further, the paramahansa says: “A mother has five sons. She has cooked fish in different ways to suit the digestion of her children. For one, she has made fish pulao. And for the son who has bad digestion, she has made fish soup – whatever suits the different boys.

“In this country people worship God with form. Christian missionaries from America and Europe brand Indians as uncivilized. They say that Indians are idol worshipers, that they are in miserable condition.”

Swami Vivekananda explained for the first time in America the significance of God with form. He said, "Indians do not worship idols."

"At the very outset I may tell you there is no polytheism in India. In every temple if one stands by and listens, he will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God to these images." (Lectures on Hinduism, Chicago)

Swamiji explained with the help of psychology that nothing except God with form comes to mind when one begins to think of God. He said:

"Why does a Christian go to Church? Why is the Cross holy? Why is the face turned toward the sky in prayers? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church? Why are there so many images in the minds of Protestants when they pray? My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a material image than we can live without breathing. Omnipresence to almost the whole world means nothing. Has God a superficial area? If not, then when we repeat the word we think of the extended earth; that is all." (Lectures on Hinduism, Chicago)

Swamiji also said, "The worship of God with form and the formless God depends on the worshiper. The worship of God with form is not sinful¹ or illusory. It is a truth of the lower order.

"If a man can realize his divine nature easily with the help of an image, is it right to call it a sin? Nor even when he has passed that stage, should he call it an error. To the Hindu, man is not traveling from error to truth, but from lower to higher truth."

1. Kusanskara.

Swamiji said that there could not be one rule for everybody. The Lord is one, but He appears in various forms before His different kinds of devotees. The Hindu understands this.

“Unity is variety in the plan of nature and the Hindu has recognized it. Other religions lay down certain fixed dogmas and try to force society to adopt them; they place before society one kind of coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. If it does not fit John and Henry, he must go without a coat to cover his body. The Hindus have discovered that the Absolute can be realized, thought of, or stated only through the Relative.”

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna, Brahma Samaj, Narendra and the Doctrine of Sin

Swamiji’s spiritual preceptor, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, used to say, “By repeating the name of God and meditating on Him sincerely, sin vanishes. It’s like a mountain of cotton that burns away instantly with the touch of fire. Or, imagine a group of birds perched on a tree. If you clap your hands, they fly away.”

One day Thakur was talking with Keshab Babu.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab*): “It is the mind that binds, and then again it is the mind that liberates. I am liberated. Whether I live a worldly life or in a forest, how can I be bound? I am a child of God, the son of the King of kings. Who can bind me? If a snake bites, its venom dries up immediately if you say emphatically, ‘No venom, no

venom.’ Similarly, by saying repeatedly and firmly, ‘I am not bound, no, I am not bound. I am free.’ You in fact become that, you become free.

“Somebody gave me a book of the Christians, the Bible. I asked him to read out loud. It was full of nothing but sin and sin only. The person who says again and again, ‘I am bound, I am bound,’ in the end is indeed bound. The one who says day and night, ‘I am a sinner, I am a sinner,’ does become a sinner.

“A person should have such faith in the name of God as to say, ‘since I have taken His name, can sin possibly reside in me?’ What bondage is there then? What sin? Krishnakishore was an orthodox Hindu brahmin who observed all the rules of conduct. He went to Vrindavan. One day there he felt thirsty. Approaching a well, he saw a person standing at it. He said to him, ‘Brother, can you give me some water to drink? Which caste do you belong to?’ The man said, ‘Maharaj, I belong to the low caste of cobblers.’ Krishnakishore said, ‘Just repeat the name of Shiva and draw me some water.’

“When you repeat the name of the Lord, it purifies both the body and the mind. Why just talk about sin and hell? Say once, ‘I shall never again do the evil I have committed today’ and have faith in His name.”

Swamiji also spoke to Christians about this *sinism*. What sin? You are the children of Immortal Bliss! Your priests talk day and night of the fire of hell. Don’t listen to them.

“Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings, Ye divinities on earth – sinners! It is a sin to call a man so. Come up, O lions! and shake off the delusion that you are sheep! You are souls immortal, spirits free and blest and eternal, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant; not you the servant of matter.” (Lecture on Hinduism – Chicago)

Swamiji was asked to speak in Hartford in America. The American Consul here, Mr. Paterson, was present there and chaired the meeting. Swamiji again talked about the Christian doctrine of sin. If it is dark in the house, what good will it do to just to say, “Dark, dark!” You have to bring light.

“Shall we advise men to kneel down and cry – O miserable sinner that I am! No, rather let us remind them of their divine nature ... If the room is dark, do you go about striking your breast and crying, ‘It is dark?’ No, the only way to get in light is to strike a light and then the darkness goes. The only way to realise the Light above you is to strike the spiritual light within you and darkness of impurity and sin will flee away. Think of your higher Self, not of your lower.”

Swamiji had heard a fable¹ from the Paramahansa Deva. He told the same story. A tigress attacked a herd of goats. She was pregnant and ready to deliver. When she jumped, a cub was born, but she died. The cub began to grow up with the goats, eating grass with them and bleating *baa, baa* like them. In due course, it grew up. One day a tiger attacked the flock of goats. It was surprised to see a tiger eating grass and crying *baa baa*, and also running away like a goat when it saw the tiger.

1. It is from the Akhyayika Sankhyadarshan – Section on Akhyayika.

It caught hold of the grown cub and brought it to a water pond. “You are also a tiger. Why do you eat grass and bleat? Look how I am eating meat. You eat it too. Look in the water and see that your face looks just like mine.” The young tiger saw it and also had a taste of meat.

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna, Vijay, Keshab, Narendra and the renunciation of ‘lust and greed’ – renunciation

One day Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Vijaykrishna Goswami at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): “A person can’t teach people without renouncing ‘lust and greed.’ Keshab Sen couldn’t do it. Just see what happened at last. If, living in ‘lust and greed,’ you say that the world is transitory, that only God is eternal, many will not accept your words. You have treacle with you but you’re saying to others, ‘Don’t eat treacle’. That’s why, after giving it a lot of thought, Chaitanya Deva renounced the world. If he hadn’t, no one could have been saved.”

Vijay: “True sir, Chaitanya Deva said, ‘It was to get rid of a cough that medicine from peepal seeds was prepared.¹ But it brought more trouble instead. The cough increased.’ Many people of Navadvip began to make fun: ‘Pundit Nimai is having a great time, brother. He has a beautiful wife. He has a great reputation, and no want of money. He is in great shape.’”

¹ In other words, propagation of name of Hari at Navadvip.

Sri Ramakrishna: “If Keshab had renounced, he would have been able to do great work. If there is a scar on a goat’s body, God doesn’t accept it, it can’t be offered to the deity. Unless a person has renounced, he doesn’t have the authority to teach. How many people are going to listen to a person who is a householder?”

Swami Vivekananda renounced ‘lust and greed.’ That’s why he had the capacity to teach people about God. Vivekananda is foremost amongst scholars of Vedanta, English and Philosophy. He is an extraordinary lecturer. Is this his only greatness? Sri Ramakrishna will answer this question. Addressing the devotees at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple in 1882, the paramahansa said about Swami Vivekananda:

“You see this boy?¹ He’s different here, a restless boy. But when he sits near his father, he’s quiet like a bugbear.

And when he plays in the courtyard, he’s quite another person. These boys belong to the class of the ever-perfect. They are never bound in the world. At quite an early age, their spiritual consciousness is roused and they turn towards God. They come to the world to teach people. Nothing in

1. Swami Vivekananda was then studying in the Assembly General College. He was nineteen or twenty years old. At the time his home was near the College in Shimulia. His father’s name was Viswanath Dutta; he was an attorney in the High Court. The boy’s childhood name was Narendra. He passed his B.A. from the College. Mr. Hastie was the principal. He had brothers and sisters. Swamiji was born on Monday, Pausha Sankranti, 1269 (B.Y.), 1863 A.D., time 6:30–33 am, 6 minutes before the sunrise. He died at the age of 39 years 5 months and 24 days.

the world attracts them – they are never attracted by ‘lust and greed’.

In the Vedas there is mention of the homa bird that lives high in the sky. It lays its eggs in the sky. When an egg starts falling, it hatches as it falls. And as the young one falls, its eyes open and its feathers begin to grow. As soon as it opens its eyes, it becomes aware that it is falling and will soon be dashed to pieces when it hits the ground. It turns and flies straight up to its mother high above.

Vivekananda is this homa bird. He has one aim in life: to go to his mother in full flight before his body has touched the ground – that is, to take to the path of God before coming in contact with the world. Sri Ramakrishna said to Vidyasagar, “Learning! What will mere scholarship do for you? A vulture soars high up in the sky, but its gaze is fixed on the charnel pits below where the carcasses of dead animals are thrown. A scholar can recite many verses fluently – but where does his mind dwell? If his mind dwells on the lotus feet of the Lord, I respect him. But if it dwells on ‘lust and greed,’ I consider him dry straw.”

Swami Vivekananda is not only a scholar, he is a sadhu, a highly elevated soul. It is not for his learning alone that the English and Americans waited on him like servants. They followed him as being a man of a different class. People are interested in honour, wealth, sense pleasures, learning and so forth – but he had just one aim: God-realization. In the song of the sannyasin, he himself says, “A sannyasin must renounce lust and greed.”

Truth never comes where lust
 and fame and greed
 of gain reside. No man who
 thinks of woman
 As his wife can ever perfect be.
 Nor he who owns however little,
 nor he –
 Whom anger chains
 Can ever pass
 Through Maya's gates,
 So give these up, sannyasin bold, Say –
 "Om Tat Sat Om!"

– Song of the Sannyasin.

In America, there was no want of temptation for him. His fame was worldwide, and extremely beautiful and well-educated women of high class families would come to talk to him and serve him. He had such an attractive power that many of those (ladies) wanted to marry him. An heiress came to him one day and said, "Swami, I have surrendered my all and myself to you." Swamiji said in reply, "Gentle lady, I am a sannyasin. I cannot marry. All women are like my mother to me." Blessed hero! You are the genuine disciple of the gurudeva! The mud of the earth has truly not touched your body. The stain of 'lust and greed' has not touched you at all. You did not flee from the kingdom of temptation, but living in it, staying in the land of riches, you advanced on the path to God. You did not want to spend your days like a common man.

You left this mortal world as a living example of divinity.

Chapter VIII

Sri Ramakrishna, Karma Yoga, Narendra and service of God in the poor (selfless work)

The paramahansa used to say, “Everybody has to do his duty. Knowledge, devotion and work without attachment – these are the three paths to attainment of God.” The Gita says: Both a sadhu and a householder first have to work without expectation of any reward according to the instructions of the guru in order to purify their minds. To think ‘I am the doer’ is ignorance; that wealth, people, work and activities – these are mine – is also ignorance. The Gita says: Knowing yourself not to be the doer, surrender the reward of your work to God and then perform whatever work you do. The Gita further says: Some people, even after attaining spiritual perfection, receive the divine command to work, like Janaka and others. This is the karma yoga that the Gita teaches. Sri Ramakrishna said the same thing.

So karma yoga is a very difficult path. Without practicing spiritual disciplines in seclusion for a sufficiently long period of time, one cannot work without attachment. During the time of spiritual disciplines, the guru’s direction is essential. It is a period of immaturity, so one can easily fall prey to unforeseen attachment. He may think that he is serving selflessly and practicing charity without attachment solely in the name of God, but in reality he may be doing so to gain the admiration of the

world. He does not understand this. It is very difficult for an individual with hearth and home and family to learn to work for others without any motive, to understand *nishkama* karma, non-attachment.

But if an all-renouncing – a renunciate of ‘lust and greed’ – and perfected person works selflessly, people can easily understand and imitate him.

Swami Vivekananda renounced ‘lust and greed’. He practiced spiritual disciplines in seclusion according to the instructions of his guru for a long time, and he perfected himself. Thus he was truly eligible to practice karma yoga. But he was a sannyasin. If he had wanted to, he could have lived with devotion and knowledge alone, like a rishi, or like his master, Paramahansa Deva. But his life was not merely to serve as an example of renunciation. It was also to show people how to live unattached in the middle of the things that worldly people own. Like Narada, Sukadeva and Janaka, Swamiji has also shown this to the multitudes. Like a sannyasin, he considered wealth and name and fame the droppings of a crow – in other words, he did not indulge in them himself – yet he showed how to use them in the service of others by teaching as well as by practice. The money he collected from his friends in America and other foreign lands, he spent only for the good of humanity. He established monasteries at different places, such as Belur Math near Calcutta, Mayavati near Almora, at Kashi and at Madras. He served famine-stricken people in Dinajpur, Vaidyanath, Kishangarh, Dakshineswar and other places. He established orphanages during

times of famine for boys and girls without parents. He established an orphanage at Kishangarh in Rajputana. An orphanage still exists near Murshidabad (Bhavda) in the village of Sargachhi. He established a *seva-ashrama*¹ for the sick sadhus of Kankhal, near Hardwar. During the plague he sent relief for patients suffering from the epidemic that entailed a good deal of expenditure. He would sit alone, crying for the poor and the destitute, and he would say to his friends, "Alas, how they are suffering! They don't even have time to think of God."

All work except what the guru teaches is a cause for bondage. He was a sannyasin. What need did he have to work?

Who sows must reap, they say,
 and, cause must bring
 The sure effect. Good good;
 bad bad; and none
 Escape the law. But whoso
 wears a form
 Must wear the chain. Too true,
 but far beyond
 Both name and form is Atman,
 ever free.
 Know thou art that, Sannyasin bold!
 Say "Om Tat Sat Om."

– The Song of the Sannyasin.

1. Home of service.

God made him do all this work to teach mankind. Now both sannyasins and householders will learn how to develop love and to work without attachment, such as practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude for a period of time, according to the instructions of the guru. Then they will be able to do charitable work like Swamiji did. Swamiji's guru, Sri Ramakrishna, used to say, "If you oil your hands before opening a jackfruit, its milky juice will not stick to them." In other words, by practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude and attaining love for God, worldly work can be accomplished in a detached way. By contemplating Swami Vivekananda's life, one can glimpse what spiritual discipline in solitude is and what work for the instruction of humanity is.

All the works of Swami Vivekananda were for the instruction of humanity.

[By performing prescribed activities King Janaka and others certainly realized complete perfection; likewise you should perform [work] as well for the sake of benefiting the welfare of the world.] (Gita 3:20)

It has been mentioned in the Gita that karma yoga is extremely difficult. Janaka and others attained spiritual perfection through work. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Janaka had practiced a lot of difficult austerities in seclusion, in the forest, before that." That is why sadhus take to the path of knowledge and love of God and practice spiritual disciplines far from the noise and bustle of the world. Only a very competent person like Swami Vivekananda, a hero, is able to practice this karma

yoga. How many saintly persons of this class are on earth, those who experience God and yet work in the world unattached? How many religious teachers do you see going around actively engaged in the service of individual souls, intoxicated with the love of God, with no stain of 'lust and greed'?

Swamiji quoted the Gita in explaining the karma yoga of the Vedanta on 10 November 1896 in London:

“Curiously enough the scene is laid on the battlefield where Krishna teaches the philosophy to Arjuna; and the doctrine which stands out luminously in every page of the Gita is intense activity, but in the midst of that, eternal calmness. And this idea is called the secret of work, to attain which is the goal of the Vedanta.” (Practical Vedanta – London)

In the lecture Swamiji talked about the feeling of a sannyasin while performing karma yoga (calmness in the midst of activity). Swamiji tried to work without love or hate. He could do this only because of the quality of his spiritual practice and his experience of God. Such calmness is not possible without being spiritually perfect or an incarnation like Sri Krishna.

Chapter IX

Sri Ramakrishna's and Swami Vivekananda's instructions regarding spiritual disciplines with women (*vamachara*)

One day Swami Vivekananda went to the Dakshineswar Temple to see Sri Ramakrishna. Bhavanath and Baburam were there. It was 29 September 1884. Narendra raised the subject of the

Ghoshpara and Panchanami. He asked, “How do they practice spiritual disciplines with a woman as a partner?”

Thakur said to Narendra, “It’s not for you to hear such things. The Kartabhaja, the Ghoshpara, the Panchanami and the Bhairava-Bhairavi cannot practice spiritual disciplines correctly – they experience a downfall. All these paths are dirty – they’re not good. It is only good to take a pure path. They took me to a Bhairava circle in Kashi. There were Bhairava–Bhairavi couples. I was asked to drink wine. I said, ‘Mother, I cannot touch wine.’ They began drinking. I thought they would now practice japa and meditation. But they didn’t. Instead, after drinking wine, they began to dance.”

He further said to Narendra, “Do you know that I have the ‘mother-child feeling,’ the filial attitude? The attitude of a child to a mother is very pure – there’s no danger in it. To look upon God as wife, ‘the hero-attitude,’ is very difficult – it can’t be practiced correctly – a man experiences a downfall. You are my own, so I say to you, ‘My last realization is this: He is full,¹ and I am just a part of Him; He is the Lord, and I am His servant. And sometimes I think, I am He and He is I; love² is the essence.’”

Another day, 9 September 1883, Thakur said to the devotees at Dakshineswar, “I have the attitude of a child. Achalananda sometimes came and stayed here. He would drink a lot of wine. Since I didn’t approve of spiritual practice with women, he said,

1. Purna.

2. Bhakti.

‘Why don’t you approve of the hero-attitude? It’s prescribed in the Tantra. Can you deny Shiva’s direction? He (Shiva) talked about the attitude of the hero as well as the attitude of a child.’

“I said, ‘I don’t know why, but I don’t like it. I have the attitude of a child.’

“There (in Thakur’s village) I noticed Bhagi Tailin [an oil-woman] in the Kartabhaja group. They have the same discipline, with a woman as a partner – and a woman cannot practice religious discipline without a man. They call the man the Krishna of Love. He asks three times, ‘Have you found Krishna?’ And the woman also answers three times, ‘I have found Krishna.’”

On another day, 23 March 1884, Sri Ramakrishna said to Rakhal, Ram and some other devotees, “Vaishnavcharan belonged to the Kartabhaja sect. When I went to that part of the country, to Shyambazar, I said to him, ‘I don’t like this. I have the attitude of a child with its mother.’ I noticed that they talk big and perform adultery. These people don’t like to worship the image of God – they prefer a living person. Many of them follow Radhatantra – the principles of the earth, fire, water, air and ether – excreta, urine, semen, sperm etc. are the principles of all these. It is a very bad practice – it’s like entering a house through the latrine.”

In accordance with Thakur’s teaching, Swami Vivekananda also found fault with the practice of spiritual disciplines with women. He said, “Almost everywhere in India, particularly in Bengal, many

people practice it secretly and quote the Vamachara Tantra as their justification. It is best to give this up and teach the boys the Upanishads, the Gita and so on.”

On his return from abroad, Swami Vivekananda delivered a very important lecture on Vedanta which carried a deep inner significance. He gave this lecture in the temple of Radhakanta Deva in Sobhabazar. In it he ran down the practice of spiritual practice with women as partners, saying:

“Give up this filthy Vamachara that is killing your country. You have not seen the other parts of India. When I see how much the Vamachara has entered our society, I find it a most disgraceful place with all its boast of culture. These Vamachara sects are honeycombing our society in Bengal. Those who come out in the daytime and preach most loudly about *achara*,¹ it is they who carry on the most horrible debauchery at night, and are backed by the most dreadful books. They are ordered by the books to do these things. You who are of Bengal know it. The Bengali shastras are the Vamachara Tantras. They are published by the cartload, and you poison the minds of your children with them instead of teaching them your shrutis.² Fathers of Calcutta, do you not feel ashamed that such horrible stuff as these Vamachara Tantras, with translations too, should be put into the hands of your boys and girls, and their minds poisoned, and that they should be brought up with the idea that these are the shastras of the Hindus? If you are ashamed, take them away from your children and let them read the true shastras,³ the Vedas, the Gita, the Upanishads.” (Reply to Calcutta address at Shovabazar.)

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1. Good behavior.
 2. The Vedas.
 3. Sacred scripture.

One day when Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill at the Cossipore Garden house (in 1886), he sent for Narendra and said to him “Son, see that nobody drinks wine here. It’s not good to drink wine in the name of religion. I have seen that it has done nothing good where people have done so.”

Chapter X

Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and the doctrine of incarnation of God

One day Sri Ramakrishna was sitting with Baburam and other devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple – 7 March 1885, the time about 3:00 or 4:00 p.m.

The devotees were gently stroking Thakur’s feet. He smiled a little to a devotee and said, “There’s a lot of meaning in this service (stroking of the feet).”

Then putting his hand on his heart, he said, “If there’s anything inside here, you will be rid of ignorance and illusion in no time (by stroking the feet).”

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna became very serious, as though he were going to divulge a secret: “There is no outsider here. I’m telling you a secret. The other day I saw Sat-chit-ananda come out from inside me and take a form. It said, ‘I do incarnate from age to age.’ I saw the fullest manifestation, but with the glorious quality of sattva.”

The devotees listened to these words without saying anything. Some of them were remembering the great words of Sri Krishna in the Gita:

[Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bharata, and rise in unrighteousness, I manifest Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.] (Bhagavad Gita 4:7-8)

On another day, 1 September 1885, the birthday of Sri Krishna, Janmashtami day, Narendra and other devotees had come to Dakshineswar. Girish Ghosh and a couple of his friends had arrived by carriage. He was crying. Sri Ramakrishna patted him affectionately.

Lifting his head and folding his hands, Girish had said, “You yourself are the Supreme Brahman. If that is not so, everything is illusion. I regret that I have not been able to serve you. Grant me, O Lord, that I may serve you for a year.”

When he sang hymns of praise again and again to Sri Ramakrishna as the Lord, Thakur said, “Shame! You must not say such things; a devotee cannot be treated like a Krishna. You may think as you please – a guru is the Lord Himself – but it is wrong to speak of such things.”

Girish again praised Thakur, “Lord, give me purity so my mind will not have the least sinful thought.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You are already pure. You have such faith and devotion to God.”

One day, on the day of throwing color (dol yatra), the 1st of March 1885, Narendra and other devotees had arrived. It is on this day that Thakur instructed Narendra on renunciation and said, “Son, you will not succeed without renouncing ‘lust

and greed.' Only God is eternal; everything else is transitory." As he talked, he was filled with emotion, his look full of compassion and affection. Consumed with feeling, he sang:

Afraid am I to speak a word to you; equally afraid am I not to speak.

The fear that arises in my mind is that I may lose you, yes, be robbed of you, my wealth, my treasure!

I teach you the *mantra* (holy name) that is to bring you to Your Beloved.

Now ready yourself to receive it, which enables us to steer the ship safely to land.

It was as if Sri Ramakrishna was afraid Narendra might go to someone else – be no longer his – that he might enter worldly life later on. He said, "I know the sacred mantra I have given you is the only mantra for you. I have given you the mantra for the highest ideal of life – renouncing all and taking refuge in God." Narendra looked at Sri Ramakrishna with eyes full of tears.

That same day Thakur said to Narendra, "Did anything that Girish say agree with your own ideas?"

Narendra: "I didn't say anything. It's he who says he has the faith that you are an incarnation of God. I didn't say anything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Such firm faith! Did you notice?"

After a few days Thakur and Narendra talked about the incarnation of God. Thakur says, "Well, some people say I'm an incarnation of God. What do you think?"

Narendra said, “I won’t say anything about what others think. I will only speak when I understand myself, when I begin to believe it myself.”

One day when Thakur was restless in the Cossipore garden house because of the pain from the cancer, when he could not even swallow rice gruel, Narendra, sitting near him, thought to himself, “If, in such a pain as this, he says that he is an incarnation of God, I will believe it.” The same moment Thakur said, “He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, has manifested Himself in the form of Ramakrishna for the sake of His devotees.” Hearing it, Narendra was speechless.

After Thakur passed away,¹ Narendra embraced sannyasa and devoted himself to austere spiritual practices. Then all Thakur’s great statements about incarnation became enshrined in his heart more firmly. He began to explain this truth more clearly in his native land and abroad.

When Swamiji was in America he wrote in English the book *Bhakti Yoga*, basing it on the *Narada Sutras* and other such books. He says in it, too, that incarnations of God awaken the spiritual consciousness of people by their mere touch. By their touch even the wicked become great saints. “Even a person of the vilest conduct who worships me and depends on me entirely should be considered holy, for he is truly resolved.”² God

1. Left his own *dham*.

2. *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, 9:30 – Even if the vilest sinner worships Me with exclusive devotion, he should be regarded a saint; for, he

Himself comes to us as an incarnation. If we want to realize God, we will see Him in an incarnation. We cannot help but worship him.

“Higher and nobler than all ordinary ones, are another set of teachers, the Avataras of Ishvara, in the world. They can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish. The lowest and the most degraded characters become in one second saints at their command. They are the teachers of all teachers, the highest manifestation of God through man. We cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshipping them; and indeed they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship. (Bhakti Yoga)

He also says: As long as we are in the human body and worship God, we cannot help but worship an incarnation. Talk as long as you want, but you cannot think of God except as a human being. What you say about the nature of God with your little intelligence is nonsense. Whatever you say, it will have little value – it will be mere froth.

“As long as we are men, we must worship Him in man and as man. Talk as you may, try as you may, you cannot think of God except as a man. You may deliver great intellectual discourses on God and on all things under the sun, become great rationalists and prove to your satisfaction that all these accounts of the Avatars of God as man are nonsense; but let us come for a moment to practical common sense. What is there behind this kind of remarkable intellect? Zero, nothing, simply so much froth. When next you hear a man delivering a great intellectual lecture against this worship of the Avatar of God, get hold of him and ask him what his idea of God is, what he understands

has rightly resolved. (He is positive in his belief that there is nothing like devoted worship of God).

by ‘Omnipotence,’ ‘Omnipresence’ and all similar terms beyond the spelling of the words. He really means nothing by them; he cannot formulate as their meaning any idea unaffected by his own human nature; he is no better off in this matter than the man in the street who has not read a single book.” (Bhakti Yoga)

Swamiji went to America again in 1899. In 1900 he gave a lecture in Los Angeles in the state of California on Christ the Messenger. Swamiji said, you will have to see God in the incarnation (in the Son). We may have God within us but there is greater manifestation of Him in His incarnation. There are vibrations of light everywhere, but all darkness is dispelled when big lamps are lit.

“It has been said by the same Messenger (Christ), ‘None, hath seen God, but they have seen the son’ and that is true. And where to see God but in the Son? It is true that you and I and the poorest of us, the meanest even, embody that God – even reflect that God. The vibration of light is everywhere, Omnipresent; but we have to strike the light of the lamp before we can see the light. The Omnipresent God of the universe cannot be seen until He is reflected by these giant lamps of the earth; the Prophets, the Man-Gods, the Incarnation, the embodiments of God.” (Christ, the Messenger)

Swamiji also said, “You may imagine the real nature of God as much as you can, but you will find that your imagined God is far below that of an incarnation of God. What harm is there in worshipping these God-men? No, there is no harm in worshipping them. Not only that, if you wish to worship God you will have to worship an incarnation. You are human beings, so there is no way but to worship God in a human being.”

“Take one of these great Messengers of light, compare his character with the highest ideal of God that you have ever formed, and you will find that your God falls short of the ideal, and that the character of the prophet exceeds your conception. You cannot form a higher ideal of God than what the actually embodied have practically realized and set before us as an example. Is it wrong, therefore, to worship these as a God? Is it a sin to fall at the feet of these man-Gods and worship them as the only divine beings in the world? If they are really, actually, higher than all our conceptions of God, what harm is there in worshipping them? Not only is there no harm; but it is the only possible and positive way of worship.” (Christ, the Messenger)

Signs of an incarnation – Jesus Christ

What do incarnations of God come to proclaim? Sri Ramakrishna said to Narendra, “Son, it will not do to not give up ‘lust and greed.’ Only God is real – nothing else lasts.” Swamiji also said to the Americans:

“We see in the life of Christ the first watchword, ‘Not this life, but something higher!’ No faith in this world and all its belongings! It is evanescent; it goes!”

Jesus had renounced ‘lust and greed’. He knew that the soul is neither male nor female. An incarnation of God does not look for money, name and fame, pleasure, sense satisfactions – none of these. For him, “me” and “mine” have no meaning. The feelings “I am the doer, this house is mine, this is my family etc.” are all illusions born of ignorance.

“We still have fondness for ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ We want property, money, wealth. Woe unto us; let us confess; and not put to shame that great Teacher of humanity! He (Jesus) had no family ties. But do you think that

that man had any physical ideas in him? Do you think that this mass of Light, this God and Not-man, came down to earth to be the brother of animals? And yet they make him preach all sorts, even of low sexual things. He had none! He was a soul! Nothing but a soul, just working, as it were, in a body for the good of humanity; and that was all his relation to the body. Oh, nor that! In the soul there is neither man, nor woman. No, no. The disembodied soul has no relationship to animal, no relationship to the body. The ideal may be high; away beyond us. Never mind; it is the Ideal. Let us confess it so – that we cannot approach it yet.” (Christ, the Messenger)

And he also said to the Americans, “What else does an incarnation say? You see me, but you cannot see God? But He and I are one. He is known by the pure mind within the heart.”

“Thou hast seen me and not seen the Father? I and my Father are one! The kingdom of Heaven is within you! If I am pure enough I will also find in the heart of my heart, I and my Father are one. That was what Jesus of Nazareth said.” (Christ, the Messenger)

In this lecture at another place, Swamiji said, “An incarnation assumes a body in every age to establish religion. He comes down like Christ at different times and places. Just by wanting to, he can pardon our sins – he can liberate us (vicarious atonement). May we worship them always.”

“Let us, therefore, find God not only in Jesus of Nazareth, but in all the great ones that have preceded him, in all that came after him, and all that are yet to come. Our worship is unbounded and free. They are all manifestations of the same infinite God. They are all pure and unselfish; they struggled and gave up their lives for us, poor human beings. They all and each of them bore vicarious atonement for every one of

us and also for all that are to come hereafter.” (Christ, the Messenger)

Jnana Yoga and Swami Vivekananda

Swamiji would advise people to talk about Vedanta, but he would also point out difficulties associated with discussion. When Thakur talked to Pundit Shashadhar in Thanthania in 1884, Narendra and many other devotees were there.

Thakur had said, “The path of knowledge is very difficult to practice in this age. Life depends on food, and this requires hard work – but life is short. And it is impossible to get rid of body-consciousness. On the other hand, until you can get rid of body-consciousness completely, you can’t attain the knowledge of the Absolute. A man of knowledge says, ‘I myself am that Brahman. I am not the body – I am beyond hunger, thirst, disease, sorrow, birth, death, happiness, pain, and so on.’ So if you have disease, sorrow, happiness, pain, how can you be a knower of the Absolute? It’s just as if your hand is cut by thorns and is bleeding profusely and is very painful, but you say, ‘Why my hand has not been cut, there is nothing wrong with me.’

“So the path of devotion is for this age. It is easier to reach God by it than by other paths. You can reach God by jnana yoga or karma yoga or other paths, but they are all difficult paths.”

Thakur also said, “Whatever work remains complete has to be done selflessly. When the mind is purified by selfless work without expecting any reward, a person develops love and devotion for God. God is realized by such devotion.”

Swamiji said, “As long as there is body-consciousness, the realization that ‘I am He’ [*So ham*] cannot be had. In other words, when one is rid of all desires, when one has completely renounced everything, one attains union with God [samadhi]. Only by attaining samadhi, does one attain the knowledge of the Absolute. Bhakti yoga is natural and sweet.”

“Jnana yoga is grand, it is high philosophy; and almost every human being thinks curiously enough that he can surely do everything required of him by philosophy. But it is really very difficult to live truly the life of philosophy. We are often apt to run into great dangers in trying to guide our life by philosophy. This world may be said to be divided between persons of demonic nature who think the caretaking of the body to be the be-all and end-all of existence, and persons of godly nature, who realize that the body is simply a means to an end, and instrument intended for the culture of the soul. The devil can and indeed does quote the scriptures for his own purpose, and thus the way of knowledge often appears to offer justification to what the bad man does as much as it offers inducements to what the good man does. This is the great danger in jnana yoga. But bhakti yoga is natural, sweet and gentle; the bhakta does not take such high flights as the jnana yogi, and therefore he is not apt to have such big falls.” (Bhakti Yoga)

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation? Swamiji's faith

Swamiji delivered a lecture on the sages of India. In it he said several things about incarnations of God. He talked about Sri Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, the Buddha, Ramanuja, Shankaracharya, Chaitanya Deva, and

about their lives. When righteousness¹ declines and lack of religion² rises, sages appear from age to age to save the good and destroy wickedness. The Lord says so in the Gita. Swamiji elucidated it:

“Whenever virtue subsides and irreligion prevails I create myself for the protection of the good and for the destruction of all immorality I come from time to time.” (The Sages of India)

And then he said, “Sri Krishna harmonised religions in the Gita.”

“In the Gita we already hear the distant sound of the conflicts of seers, and the Lord comes in the middle to harmonise them all. He, the great preacher of Harmony, the greatest Teacher of Harmony, Lord Krishna himself.

“Sri Krishna also said in the Gita, ‘Women, Vaishya, shudra, all will attain supreme liberation, not to speak of brahmins and kshatriyas.’”

The Buddha is the deity of the destitute – sarvabhūtaṣṭhamātmānaṁ [gītā 6-29]. He showed from his work that God resides in all elements. The disciples of the Buddha did not believe in the Atman or the individual soul. So Shankaracharya again propagated the religion of the Vedas. He began to explain the tenets of Advaita and the qualified non-dualism³ of Ramanuja. After him, Chaitanya Deva incarnated to teach love and devotion. Shankara and Ramanuja distinguished between the castes, but Chaitanya Deva didn't. What castes can there be for devotees?

1. Dharma.

2. Adharma.

3. Vishishtadvaita.

Next Swamiji spoke of Sri Ramakrishna: In him Shankaracharya's power of knowledge and the intense love of Chaitanya manifested together in the same person. Then Sri Krishna's harmony of religions was spoken of again, followed by the cry of one who wept like Buddha Deva for the poor, the aggrieved and the sinful. It is as if none of these incarnations was a full manifestation. Sri Ramakrishna was the fulfillment of all the sages.

“The one (Sankara) had a great head, the other (Chaitanya) a large heart, and the time was ripe for one to be born, the embodiment of both head and heart; the time was ripe for one to be born who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Sankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; ‘One who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the out-caste, for the down-trodden, for everyone in this world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand brilliant intellect, would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonise all conflicting sects, not only in India but outside of India, and bring a marvelous harmony, the universal Religion of head and heart, into existence.

“Such a man was born, and I had the good fortune to sit at his feet for years. The time was ripe, it was necessary that such a man should be born, and he came; and the most wonderful part of it was that his life's work was just near a city which was full of western thought, a city which had run mad after these occidental ideas, a city which had become more Europeanised than any other city in India. There he lived without any book-learning whatsoever; this great intellect never learnt even to write his own name, but the most brilliant graduates of our

University found in him an intellectual giant. He was a strange man, this Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. It is a long, long story, and I have no time to tell anything about him tonight. Let me now only mention the great Sri Ramakrishna, the fulfillment of the Indian sages, the sages for the time, one whose teaching is just now at the present time most beneficial. And mark the Divine power working behind the man. The son of a poor priest, born in a out-of-the-way village, unknown and unthought of, today is worshipped literally by thousands in Europe and America. And tomorrow will be worshipped by thousands more. Who knows the plans of the Lord! Now my brothers, if you do not see the hand, the fingers of Providence, it is because you are blind, born blind indeed." (The Sages of India)

Swamiji continued, "The divine words of the Vedas which the sages had heard on the bank of the Saraswati, those words which once reverberated in the ears of the great yogis and austere hermits practicing austerities on the peaks of the great Himalayas; or the words which, taking the shape of the fast flowing river containing all within itself, encompassing the names of Sri Krishna, Sri Buddha Deva, and Sri Chaitanya, entered this mortal world. Those very words are heard again today. Their great message will reach all places in a short period of time – India to begin with, and then everywhere to the length and breadth of the world. These words are gaining power every day from a new power. These divine words have been heard before many times in earlier ages, but what we hear today is the summation of them all."

"Once more the wheel is turning up, once more vibrations have been set in motion from India, which are destined at no distant day to reach the farthest

limits of the earth. One voice has spoken, whose echoes are rolling on and gathering strength every day, a voice even mightier than those which have preceded it, for it is the summation of them all. Once more the voice, that spoke to the sages on the banks of the Saraswati, the voice whose echoes reverberated from peak to peak of the 'Father of Mountains' and descended upon the plains through Krishna, Buddha and Chaitanya, in all-carrying floods has spoken again. Once more the doors have opened. Enter ye into the realms of light, the gates have been opened wide once more." (Reply to Khetri address)

Swamiji said further, "If I have spoken the truth even once, know that it is all Sri Ramakrishna's, and if I have said anything imperfect, those which are not"

"Only let me say now that if I have told you one word of Truth, it was his and his alone; and if I have told you any things which were not true, were not correct, which were not beneficial to the human race, they were all mine, and on me is the responsibility."

This is how Swami Vivekananda announced the advent of the incarnation Sri Ramakrishna in different places in India. Wherever a Math has been established, Sri Ramakrishna is worshipped daily. In all these places at the time of arati, the hymn composed by Swamiji is sung accompanied by musical instruments. In this hymn Swamiji addresses Sri Ramakrishna as attributeless, with attributes, perfect¹ and Lord of the universe. And he called him the pilot to steer one across the ocean of the world. "You have come as a human being to liberate us from the bonds of the world, to help us to attain union with God. It is by your grace that I

1. Niranjana.

have attained samadhi. You have made me renounce 'lust and greed'. O refuge of devotees, give me devotion to your lotus feet. Your lotus feet are my supreme treasure. If I have them, the ocean of the world appears like a pit made by cow's feet."

Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna composed by Swamiji

Mitra chautal

Breaker of this world's chain,
 We adore you, whom all men love;
 spotless, taking man's form,
 O purifier, you are
 Above the gunas three.
 Knowledge divine, not flesh;
 You whom the cosmos wears,
 A diamond, at its heart.

Let us look deep in your eyes –
 They are bright with the wisdom of God,
 That can wake us from Maya's spell.
 Let us hold fast to your feet
 Treading the waves of the world
 To safety. O drunk with love,
 God-drunken lover, in you
 all paths of all yogas meet.

Lord of the worlds, you are ours,
 Who were born a child of our time,

Easy of access to me.
 O merciful, if we take
 Any hold upon God in our prayer,
 It is by your grace alone,
 Since all your austerities
 Were practiced for our sake.

How great was your sacrifice;
 Freely choosing your birth
 In this prison, our Iron Age,
 Perfect, whom lust could not taint
 Nor passion nor gold draw near;
 O master of all who renounce,
 Fill our hearts full of love for you.

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

Speech cannot hold you, nor mind,
 Yet without you we think not, nor speak.
 Love, who is partial to none,
 We are equal before your sight.

Taker away of our pain,
 We salute you, though we are blind;
 Come to the heart's black cave
 And illumine, O light of the Light!

**He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, is now
 Ramakrishna**

Swamiji heard these great words from Sri Ramakrishna in the Cossipore garden house. Remembering them on his return to Calcutta from abroad, Swamiji composed a hymn at Belur Math. In it he said, "He who was the friend of the humble, the poor, the destitute, the beloved of Janki (Sita), the incarnation of knowledge and devotion, Sri Ramachandra – and He who blew the sweet, solemn notes of the Gita at Kurukshetra as Sri Krishna – has now manifested as the renowned person Sri Ramakrishna.

Om namo bhagavate Ramakrishnaye

He who was Sri Rama, whose stream of love flowed with compelling might to even the Chandala (the outcast); O, he who was ever engaged in doing good to the world though by nature he was above it, whose renown is unequalled in the three worlds, Sita's beloved, whose body of knowledge supreme was covered by sweet devotion in the form of Sita;

He who quelled the terrible uproar at the battle (Kurukshetra), who removed terrible night of ignorance born of nature (of Arjuna), and who roared out like a lion the sweet and peaceful Gita; that renowned soul is born now as Sri Ramakrishna.

And another hymn is sung at evening worship at Belur Math, Kashi, Madras, Dhaka and at all other Maths.

In this hymn Swamiji says, “O friend of the lowly, you possess [the three] attributes and yet you are beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. Since I do not worship your lotus feet day and night, I therefore take refuge in you. I repeat your name with my lips, I talk of spiritual wisdom – but I do not realize anything. Therefore I take refuge in you. One conquers death by meditating on your lotus feet – so I take refuge in you. O, friend of the humble! You are the one thing worth aspiring to in this world. I take refuge in you – tvameva śaraṇam mama dīnabandho.”

You are to be adored, you are truth unchanging, you are Lord of the gunas. In my weakness I have failed, O taker-away of delusion to worship your blessed lotus feet earnestly and unceasingly.

Therefore I claim sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.

This evil dream called life can be dispelled by love, adoration, and understanding;

These three can bring us quickly to our goal: the truth of Brahman.

But, alas, though I speak these words with my lips, they find no answer in my heart.

Therefore I claim sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.

O Ramakrishna, you are the path that leads to truth.

If a man offers you his heart, he soon overcomes the world and finds fullness in eternal life;

For your feet still the waves of death and bring immortality into the world of mortals.

Therefore I take sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.

Lord, your name, the name Ramakrishna, is goodness and purity itself; graciously it awakens us from our delusion.

He who chants your name will become a saint, though he be a sinner.

You are the refuge of us all. I have no other refuge but you.

Therefore I take sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.

After the arati was over, Swamiji taught how to offer salutations to Sri Ramakrishna. In this he says that Thakur is the greatest of all incarnations:

Om, salutations to you, Ramakrishna, the foundation of virtue and the embodiment of all religion, the most universal of incarnations.¹

1. om sthāpakāya ca dharmasya sarvadharmasvarūpiṇe,
avatāravariṣṭhāya rāmakṛṣṇāya te namaḥ.

Appendix II

Sri Ramakrishna and Bankim

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna and devotees sing joyfully at Adharlal Sen's house – conversation with Bankim Chandra Chatterji

Today is Saturday, 6 December 1884, 22nd of Agrahayana, the fourth day of the dark fortnight and Thakur has come to Adhar's house. He has arrived on the day of the pushya constellation of stars.

Adhar is a great devotee. A deputy magistrate, he is twenty-nine or thirty years old. Thakur is very fond of him and Adhar is very devoted to him. Almost every day, after working the whole day at his office, he goes home to wash his face and hands and then goes to see Sri Ramakrishna. His home is in Benetola in Sobhabazar. From there he goes by carriage to visit Thakur at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. He spends two and a half rupees every time to hire a carriage, for the sole joy of seeing Thakur – it is often not possible for him to hear Thakur speak. Reaching Dakshineswar, he would lie prostrate to salute Thakur, and after exchanging polite enquiries, would go to the Kali Temple. Then he would rest on a mat spread on the floor. Thakur himself would ask him to rest. Because of the hard work he had done all day, Adhar would be so tired that he would soon fall asleep. At nine or ten in the evening they would

wake him up. He would get up and salute Thakur and then again board the carriage to return home.

Adhar would often take Thakur to his home in Sobhabazar. These occasions would be a kind of celebration. Adhar thoroughly enjoyed himself in Thakur's company and in the company of the devotees and he fed them with various refreshments to their great pleasure.

One day when Thakur went there Adhar said, "You haven't been here for a long time. The house seems gloomy, even as if it had a smell. But see how nice it looks now, and how fragrant it has become. I prayed to God for a long time today – my eyes even began to water." Thakur said, "My dear, is that true?" He looked at Adhar affectionately and began to smile.

They are going to celebrate today as well. Thakur and the devotees are filled with joy because wherever Thakur is present, there will be no other talk than of God. There are many devotees and also some newcomers. Adhar has invited several deputy magistrates who will meet Thakur and give their opinion as to whether or not Thakur is a genuine saint.

Sri Ramakrishna smiles when he talks with the devotees. Adhar comes in with a number of his friends and sits near Thakur.

Adhar (*to Thakur, pointing to Bankim*): "Sir, he is a very learned man. He has written many books. He has come to see you. His name is Bankim Babu."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “Bankim! For whose feelings have you become bankim [bent]?”

Bankim (*smiling*): “Well, sir, it’s because of the kicks. (*All laugh.*) I am bent because of the kicks of our foreign bosses.”

Bankim and Radha-Krishna – the two-in-one explained

Sri Ramakrishna: “No, my dear. You are bent like Sri Krishna, out of love for Srimati (Radha). Some people explain Krishna’s pose as ‘thrice bent in love for Radha’. Do you know why he is black and is only fourteen spans of a hand – so short? As long as God is far away, He appears dark, just like ocean water looks blue from a distance. But it is not dark when you go near it and take some in your palm – then it is transparent. The sun, seen from a distance, looks very small, but it is not small if you go near it. When you know God’s real and true nature, He is no longer dark. But this is experienced only in samadhi. As long as ‘I and you’ endures, names and form also exist. It is all God’s play. As long as ‘I and you’ persist, God is manifest in different forms.

“Sri Krishna is Purusha [pure Consciousness] and Radha is Primal Energy, Shakti, its dynamic aspect. They represent different aspects of the same Reality. What is the significance of the dual image? That Purusha and Prakriti are one and the same – they are not separate. Purusha cannot live without Prakriti, and Prakriti cannot exist without Purusha. Talk of one and you have to recognize the other. It’s like fire and its power to burn – you can’t think of fire without its power to burn. And you

can't think of burning power without fire. So in this dual image the gaze of Sri Krishna is on Radha, and that of Radha on Krishna. Srimati's complexion is white, like lightening, and she wears blue clothes. She also wears a blue jewel.¹ She has anklets on her feet and Sri Krishna also wears them. In other words, the union of Purusha and Prakriti conform both internally and externally."

When this conversation is over, Bankim and Adhar's other friends began to whisper to each other in English.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to Bankim*): "My dear, what are you talking about in English?" (*All laugh.*)

Adhar: "Just your explanation of Krishna's form."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to all*): "I'm laughing at a story that's come to my mind. Listen. A gentleman went for a haircut. The barber inadvertently nicked him. The gentleman shouted, 'Damn!' The barber didn't know the meaning of damn. He put down the razor and the rest of his equipment and rolled up his sleeves (it was winter). He said, 'You have called me damn. Tell me what it means.' The gentleman said, 'Please go on with your shave. It doesn't mean much. But do it a little more carefully.' But the barber was not the man to leave it alone. He said, 'If damn means good, I am damn, my father is damn and my fourteen generations of ancestors are damn. (*All laugh.*) And if it means bad, then you are damn, your father is

1. Nilkanta mani.

damn and your fourteen generations of ancestors are damn.' (*All laugh.*) Not only damn once but damn, damn, damn and damn!"

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and the work of preaching

When their laughter has abated, Bankim begins the conversation again.

Bankim: "Sir, why don't you preach?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Preaching! It comes from pride. Man is an imperfect creature. Only the one who has created the moon and the sun and is lighting up the world can preach. Is it an ordinary thing? Until He manifests Himself and commands you, preaching is not possible. Why? Unless there is God's command, people go on talking nonsense. Some listen to you for a couple of days but forget – it's only a short-lived fancy and nothing else. As long as you talk people will say, 'Oh, how nicely he speaks.' But when you stop, there's nothing left.

"As long as fire is under the milk pot, the milk will boil and make a gurgling sound. Pull out the firewood and the milk is as it was before. Only it's deflated.

"A person should add to his power by spiritual effort. Without it, preaching is not possible. 'You have no place to sleep and you call out: O Shankara, come here and lie down and sleep with me!' (*Laughter.*)

"People used to defecate daily on the bank of Haldarpukur in the countryside and others would

hurl insults at them the next morning. It did not end in spite of their insults. At last the people petitioned the Company (Government), which put up a notice, ‘Defecation and urination are prohibited here. If you do, you will be prosecuted.’ It all stopped, immediately – no more trouble. It was the Company’s order – everybody had to obey.

“Similarly, preaching is only possible and people able to be taught only if God reveals himself to you and gives you the command to preach. Without it, who will come listen to you?”

Everybody listens intently and with concentration to Thakur’s words.

Bankim and the other world

Life after Death – argument from analogy

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): “Well, you are a very learned man and you have written so many books. What do you say: what is the duty of man? What will go with us when we die? Is there a hereafter?”

Bankim: “Hereafter! What is that?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Yes, after attaining knowledge, you don’t have to go to another world – there is no rebirth. But until you attain knowledge, until you realize God, you will have to return to this world – there is no release. The hereafter will exist for you that long. But when you attain knowledge, when you realize God, you are liberated and don’t have to be reborn in this world. Boiled paddy will not sprout and grow into a plant. If somebody is boiled in the fire of knowledge, he can no longer

take part in the game of creation – he cannot lead a worldly life – he is not attracted by ‘lust and greed.’ What can boiled paddy yield in a field?”

Bankim (*laughing*): “Sir, even weeds are useless.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “But a man of knowledge is not a useless plant in this sense: a person who has realized God has gained the fruit of immortality, not a gourd. He isn’t born again – whether on earth, on the region of the sun, or on the region of the moon. He doesn’t have to go anywhere.

“All analogies have only one point of reference. You are a learned man. Haven’t you studied logic? When you say a person is ‘terrible like a lion’, it doesn’t mean he has a terrifying tail or a bone in its mouth. (*All laugh.*)

“I said the same thing to Keshab Sen. Keshab asked whether or not there was a hereafter. I didn’t talk either of this life or another. I said, ‘A potter puts his clay pots in the sun to dry. A few of them are baked, the others are unbaked. Sometimes cows or other animals walk on them. If the baked pots are broken, the potter throws them away. But if the unbaked ones break, he picks them up and mixes them with water again and fashions new pots on his wheel. They’re not thrown away.’ So I said to Keshab Sen, ‘As long as the pots are unbaked, the potter won’t throw them away. As long as a person doesn’t attain knowledge, realize God, the potter will put him on his wheel again. He won’t let him go.’ In other words, he will have to be reborn on this earth again – no deliverance for him. A person is

liberated only when he realizes God. Only then will the potter let him go – because he is no longer of any use for Maya’s creation. A jnani goes beyond maya. What purpose can he serve again in the world of maya?

“But He keeps some in the world of maya to instruct others. A jnani lives in the world taking refuge in vidya maya. God Himself keeps him there to work for Him – for example, Sukadeva or Shankaracharya.

(*To Bankim*) “Well, what do you say? What is man’s duty?”

Bankim (*laughing*): “Since you ask, it is eating, sleeping and procreating.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): “What! You are a scoundrel! What you do day and night is coming out of your mouth. A man belches what he eats: if he eats radish, he belches radish, or he belches coconut if he eats coconut. You live day and night in the midst of ‘lust and greed,’ so that’s what you’re belching out. If you only think of worldly things, you develop the nature of a revenue record-keeper – you become dishonest. By thinking of God, a person becomes trustworthy. Nobody who has attained God will say such a thing.”

Bankim – mere learning and ‘lust and greed’

(*To Bankim*) “What is the use of being learned if you don’t think about God, if you have no discrimination and dispassion? How can learning help if the mind is on ‘lust and greed’?”

“Kites and the vultures soar high, but their sight is fixed on charnel pits. A pundit reads many books and can quote many scriptures or has written books. But he is only attached to his wife and thinks money and fame is the secret of life. What kind of pundit is he? What is a pundit without God on his mind?

“Some people think that people who talk about God are crazy, that it is a disease of the brain. How clever we are, they say, how we enjoy ourselves with money, fame and sense enjoyments! A crow also thinks it’s very clever but when it wakes up in the morning, it eats the excreta of others and then dies. See, how active a crow is. Very clever! (*All laugh.*)

“But those who meditate on God and pray day and night to be rid of attachment to worldly things and their love for ‘lust and gold,’ those who feel that sense pleasures are bitter, who like nothing but the nectar of the lotus feet of Hari, have the nature of swans. Put milk and water before a swan and it will drink the milk and leave the water. And have you seen the gait of a swan? It walks straight, in one direction. The movement of a pure-minded devotee is directed only towards God. He wants nothing else, he likes nothing else. (*To Bankim, sweetly*) “Please don’t mind my words.”

Bankim: “I’m not here only to hear pleasant words.”

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and service to others

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): “Maya is nothing but thinking that ‘lust and gold’ is the essence. It keeps you from thinking of or seeing God. After having one or two children, you should live with your wife like a brother and only talk to her about God. In this way the minds of both will go towards Him, and the wife will be a help in his spiritual life. You can’t enjoy the bliss of God without first getting rid of animal tendencies. You should pray to God to rid you of these inclinations and you must pray with yearning. He is the controller of our hearts and will surely listen if the prayer is earnest.

“As for gold! Sitting on the bank of the Ganges at the foot of the Panchavati,¹ I threw money away into the water saying, Money is clay, clay is money.”

Bankim: “Money is clay! Sir, if you have some money, you can give it to the poor! If money is clay, you can’t practice compassion or charity.”

Bankim, doing welfare of the world and ‘giving up work’

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): “Compassion! Charity! What ability do you have to do good to others? A man tries to be so clever and runs here and there [doing so many things], but when he

1. A grove of 5 sacred trees that Sri Ramakrishna planted at Rasmani’s Kali Temple garden. It was at the foot of one that he practiced many spiritual disciplines. The panchavati is a very secluded spot that brings divine inspiration to the mind effortlessly.

sleeps he doesn't even know if somebody is urinating in his mouth! Where is his pride, ego and arrogance then?

“A sannyasin must renounce ‘lust and gold’. He cannot accept them. A person doesn't swallow his own spittle. If a sannyasin gives anybody anything, he doesn't keep it in his mind that he did it. Compassion comes from God. What compassion can a man practice? All charity is by the will of Rama. A genuine sannyasin renounces both internally and externally. Not only does he refuse to eat *gur* [raw sugar], he won't even keep it near him. If he himself should have it and ask others not to take it, nobody would listen to him.

“A householder needs money for his wife and children. He should save it to feed them. Only birds and sannyasins don't hoard. But when a bird has fledglings, it brings food for them in its beak – it also has to save. That's why householders need money – they have to support their families.

“If a householder is pure, he works without attachment. He offers the fruit of his actions – profit, loss, happiness and pain – to God. And he prays day and night for love of God. He has no other desire. This is called work without desire for results,¹ work without attachment. A sannyasin also has to work without expectation of any result. But a sannyasin doesn't engage in worldly activities like a householder.

“If a man of the world gives in charity without expectation of any reward, he does it for his own

1. Nishkama karma.

good, not for the good of others. Lord Hari dwells in all, so it is a way of serving Him. By serving Hari, one serves oneself – it is not by doing good for others. It is service to Lord Hari in all creatures – not merely in human beings, but also service to Him in birds and beasts. If a person doesn't expect name and fame or heaven after death or any return from those he serves, it is genuine work without desire or attachment. Working like this, without expectation of any reward, brings good to himself. This is known as karma yoga, renunciation of work. It is also a path for God-realization. But it is very difficult – it is not for the age of Kali.

“So I say that the man who works unattached in this way shows compassion, gives away in charity, and does good only to himself. It is God who does good to others, brings benefit to others – God who has created the moon and the sun, the father and the mother, fruits and flowers, paddy and creatures. The love that you see in parents is His love – He has endowed them with it for the preservation of living beings. The kindness that you see in a kind heart is His, which He has given to protect the helpless. Whether you show kindness or not, He will get His work done through some medium. His work is never stopped.

“What, then, is man's duty? What else but to take refuge in Him and to pray earnestly to Him that He be attained, be realized.”

Only God is real and all else is illusion

“Sambhu said, ‘I want to build many dispensaries and hospitals. They will be a great

help to the poor.’ I said, ‘Yes, it wouldn’t be bad if you could do it without attachment. But it’s very difficult to remain unattached without sincere love and devotion for God. Besides, if you involve yourself in a lot of different jobs, attachment creeps in from somewhere, you don’t know from where. You think you’re working unmindful of reward, but you may have a desire for recognition hidden from you – the desire for fame. Also, a person forgets God in the middle of too many engagements.’ I also said, ‘Sambhu, I ask you this: If God were to manifest Himself to you, would you want Him to give you dispensaries and hospitals?’ A person doesn’t desire anything else after attaining Him – after tasting candy syrup, who likes molasses?

“Those who enjoy building hospitals and dispensaries are good people, but they belong to a different class. A person who is a true devotee wants nothing but God. If he happens to fall into too much work, he prays earnestly, ‘O God, be gracious enough to reduce my work. If there weren’t so much work, my mind would be thinking of you every day. It is being wasted now – now it’s only involved in thinking of worldly things.’ A person who has pure love belongs to a different class. Only God is real, everything else is an illusion. Without realizing this, pure love can’t be attained. The world is transitory – a matter of two days. Only He who runs it is real, eternal. Pure love and devotion cannot be attained until this is realized.

“Janaka and others performed work by the command of God.¹”

1. Pratyadishtha.

Chapter IV

First science or God?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): “Some people think it isn’t possible to realize God without reading books or studying scriptures. They think you should first know the world and the living beings and study science. (*All laugh.*) They say that without understanding God’s creation, God can’t be known. What do you say? God first, or science?”

Bankim: “Yes, a person has to have an adequate knowledge of the world first. How can God be known without some knowledge of the world? You should educate yourself first and then acquire knowledge of Him.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “You people say this. But one must know God first, and then His creation. After attaining God, you will know everything you need to know.

“If you can somehow manage a meeting with Jadu Mallick, then, if you want, you can know how many houses, how many shares, how many gardens he has. Jadu Mallick himself will tell you. But if you haven’t been introduced to him and talked to him, and his doorkeeper doesn’t let you in, how can you know about his houses, his company shares and gardens? Knowing him, you know everything.¹ But then you don’t care to know ordinary things. The Vedas say this. Until you see a person you can talk about his virtues, but when he’s face to face with

1. tasmin vijñāte sarvamidaṃ vijñātaṃ bhavati

you, this talk stops. You become engrossed talking to him and don't need to talk about anything else.

“First God-realization, then His creation and anything else. Valmiki was given Rama's mantra to repeat, but he was asked to repeat ‘mara’, ‘mara.’ ‘Ma’ means God and ‘ra’ the world. First God then the world – by knowing the one, you know all. If you put fifty zeros after the figure “1”, it becomes a very big number. But if you put the figure “1” after the zeros, it has no value. It is by having the digit “1” that you have many – first one, then many; first God,¹ then the world and His creation.

“First you need to know God. Why do you talk so much about the world, creation, science and so on? You need to eat mangoes. What need is there for you to know how many hundreds of mango trees there are in the garden, how many thousands of branches, how many millions of leaves? You have come to eat mangoes – eat them and leave. A man has come to this world to attain God. It's not good to forget this and give the mind to so many other things. You have come to eat mangoes. Eat and forget everything else.”

Bankim: “But where can I get mangoes?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Pray to Him with yearning. If you are sincere, He will surely listen. He may give you holy company – someone may tell you what to do to enable you to find God.”

1. Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and all other things shall be added unto you – Jesus.

Bankim: “Who? Guru? He takes the better mangoes himself and gives us the inferior ones.”
(*Laughter.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: “Why, my dear? It’s what a person can digest – not everybody can digest fried rice and *kalia* [a meat preparation]. Fish is brought in the house. The mother doesn’t serve fried rice and *kalia* to all her sons. She gives fish soup to one with a weak digestion. Does this mean the mother has less love for him?”

Way to attain God – yearning and faith like a child’s

“You have to have faith in the words of the guru. The guru himself is Sat-chit-ananda, Sat-chit-ananda alone is the guru. By having faith in his words, by believing like a child, a person attains God. What faith a child has! His mother says, ‘This is your elder brother,’ immediately the child believes him to be his elder brother – full faith, absolutely one hundred twenty-five percent faith. The boy may be the son of a brahmin and the ‘elder brother’ a carpenter’s or a potter’s son. If the mother says, ‘There is a hobgoblin in that room,’ the boy absolutely believes that there is a hobgoblin in the room. The faith of a child. You have to have this kind of faith in the words of the guru. God can’t be realized by cleverness or by a calculating or reasoning mind. You have to have faith and a simple mind – hypocrisy cannot help you. He is very near a guileless person and very far from an insincere one.

“You have to have such yearning for God as a child has when it doesn’t find his mother. He

doesn't forget her even if you offer him sandesh or other sweets. There is no way to pacify him and he insists, 'No, I want to go to my mother!' Ah! What a state, a child mad for its mother and crying, 'Mother, Mother!' There's no way to make it forget its mother. The person who finds all joys of the world tasteless, who doesn't care for money, name, fame, physical comforts and sense enjoyments – it is only to the person who wants none of these, who sincerely calls for his mother with pangs of separation, that the mother leaves behind all her work and comes running.

“Such longing! Whatever path – whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Shakta, Brahmo – whichever path you take, the basic condition is yearning of this kind. He is the inner controller of the heart. There is no harm falling into a wrong path if you have yearning. He Himself will put you back on the right path.

“Besides, there are short-comings in all paths. Everybody thinks his own watch gives the right time, but nobody's watch is perfect. But that does not stop anyone's work. If there is yearning, holy company comes to help you correct your watch.”

Appendix III

(B) With Keshab at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter One

Saturday, 1st January 1881, 18th day of Pausha, 1287 (B.Y.). The winter festival¹ of the Brahma Samaj will soon be celebrated. Keshab Sen has come to the Dakshineswar Temple with Pratap, Trailokya, Jaygopal Sen and other Brahma devotees to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Ram, Manomohan and some others are present.

Many of the Brahma devotees have reached the Kali Temple before Keshab. They are sitting near Sri Ramakrishna and await Keshab's arrival eagerly, looking to the south for his arrival by steamer. They are restless and talking noisily.

Finally Keshab arrives. He has a bouquet of flowers and two bel fruits in his hand. He touches Sri Ramakrishna's feet and places the articles near, prostrating in salutation. Thakur returns the salutation by his own prostration.

Sri Ramakrishna laughs joyfully. He talks to Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (*with a smile, to Keshab*):
"Keshab, you like me, but your disciples don't. I said to them, 'Let's make some noise, be restless so Govinda will come.'"

1. Maghotsva.

(*To Keshab's disciples*) “Hey brothers, your Govinda has arrived! We’ve been making noise for a long time, but why would that make you joyful?”

“It isn’t easy to experience Govinda. Didn’t you see in the play about Krishna that he and the cowherd boys and gopis only came after Narada prayed in Vrindavan with a yearning heart: ‘O Govinda, my life-breath, my life!’ Without yearning, you cannot see the Lord.

(*To Keshab*) “Keshab, do say something. All these people are eager to listen to you.”

Keshab (*smiling, humbly*): “Talking here is like selling a needle to a blacksmith.”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “But the fact of the matter is that the nature of a devotee is like the nature of a hemp-smoker: ‘You take a puff on the pipe so I can also have one.’” (*All laugh.*)

It is four o’clock. Music can be heard coming from the nahabat of the temple garden.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and the others*): “Listen to how nice the music is. One person is playing a monotone and another is raising many waves of other modes. I’m like that. Why should I blow only one note when there are seven available to me? Why should I only say, ‘So ‘ham, So ‘ham?’ I like to call on Him in all attitudes – of *shanta* (serenity), of *dasya* (servant toward his master), of *vatsalya* (mother toward her child), of *sakhya* (friend) and of *madhura* (beloved). I’ll call on Him in all these attitudes, I’ll be happy and enjoy myself in all these moods.”

Keshab listens to these words, speechless. He says, “I have never heard such an explanation of knowledge and devotion – amazing, so beautiful!”

Keshab (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): “How long will you hide away in solitude like this? Crowds of people are going to fill this place.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “What do you mean? I just eat and drink, enjoy myself and repeat His name. I don’t know about gathering people. I don’t know the names of various villages – what I know is that I am a brahmin from Virbhumi.’ Hanuman said, ‘I don’t know the day of the week, the date, or the conjunction of stars. I only contemplate Rama.’”

Keshab: “Well, I’ll gather the people. But they will all have to come here.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “I am the dust of the dust of the feet of everyone. If they are kind enough to come here, let them come.”

Keshab: “Whatever you say, your coming will not be in vain.”

Chapter Two

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Arrangements for a kirtan are being made. Many devotees are participating. The kirtan party is coming south from the Panchavati. Hriday is playing a horn¹ and Gopidas is playing a drum.² Two devotees are playing cymbals.

1. Shinga.

2. Mridanga.

Sri Ramakrishna sings:

O man, if you want happiness in life, repeat the name of Hari.

You will have a life of joy, go to Vaikuntha and taste the fruit of liberation. That is the merit of repeating Hari's name.

Today I give you the name that Shiva sings with his five mouths.

Sri Ramakrishna dances with the strength of a lion.¹ Soon he goes into samadhi. When he comes out of samadhi, he sits in his room and talks with Keshab and some others.

About the harmony of religions

“God can be realized by all paths. Just like some of you have come here by carriage, some by boat, some by steamer, and some on foot – whatever way is convenient for you or according to your inclination. But the aim is only one, though some reach it earlier than others.”

Way to realize God: give up ego

(To Keshab and others) “The more you rid yourself of your adjunct, or title, the closer to God you will be. Water doesn't stay on a high mound. It gathers in a hollow below it. It's the same with the shower of God's grace. It doesn't stay where there's ego. Humility is the only right attitude.

“You have to be very cautious in life. Even the clothes a person wears generates ego. I've seen a person with an inflated belly caused by an enlarged

1. Vikrama.

spleen. He was wearing a black-bordered dhoti and singing snatches of Vidhu Babu's love songs.

"People spout English when they wear western style boots.

"Ordinary people putting on the ochre cloth become proud. Only a small mistake on the part of somebody else irritates them."

End of sense enjoyment, yearning, and God-realization

"You can't see God without yearning. And such longing doesn't come until the desire for sense enjoyments has ended. Those who are surrounded by 'lust and greed,' who are not finished with their desires for enjoyment, do not feel yearning for God.

"There, in the countryside [Kamarpukur], Hriday's son used to stay with me the whole day. He was four or five years old. He'd keep himself busy doing this or that and forget everybody else. But as soon as it was evening, he'd say, 'I want to go to my mother.' Howsoever much I tried to get his attention, saying such things as 'I will give you a pigeon,' he couldn't forget his mother. He'd cry to go to her. Play – anything else – couldn't soothe him. Seeing him in that state, I'd cry too.

"This is a childlike cry for God. This is yearning. In this state, not play, not food, nothing else interested him. It is only when the desire for enjoyment ends that such yearning, such crying, comes."

Everyone sits silently, amazed to hear these words.

It is evening. A lamp man has lit the lamp in the room. Keshab and Brahma devotees will leave after eating. Food is being prepared.

Keshab (*smiling*): “Puffed rice today too?”

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): “Hridu knows.”

Leaf plates have been laid for the guests. They are first served puffed rice, then luchs, and then ragout. They are all full of joy, with smiles on their faces. It is nearly ten o'clock before it is over.

Thakur talks with Brahma devotees at the foot of the Panchavati.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Keshab and others*): “After realizing God you can live well in the world. First touch the Granddame, and then play the game.

“A devotee becomes unattached after he has realized God, like a mudfish. Even while living in muddy water, the body of a mudfish is not stained with mud.”

It is about 11 o'clock. Everyone is impatient to leave. Pratap says, “Why not spend the night here?”

Sri Ramakrishna asks Keshab to stay.

Keshab (*smiling*): “I have work to do. I have to leave.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Well my dear, can't you sleep without the smell of the fish basket? A fishwife was the guest of a gardener one night. She was given a room full of flowers to sleep in, but she couldn't sleep. (*All laugh.*) She lay there restlessly. The gardener's wife noticed her state and asked her, ‘Why can't you sleep?’ The fishwife replied, ‘I don't

know, sister, but the fragrance of the flowers won't let me sleep. Can you bring my fish basket?' The fishwife sprinkled some water on the basket and fell fast asleep smelling it." (*All laugh.*)

Leaving, Keshab took a few flowers that he had offered at Thakur's feet and salutes him by prostrating. He and the devotees then cry, "Victory to the scriptural prescription!"¹

Keshab gets into the carriage of the Brahma devotee, Jaygopal Sen, and they leave for Calcutta.

1. Vidhan.

Appendix IV

Sri Ramakrishna's Visit to Surendra's Home

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna with Ram, Manomohan, Trailokya, Mahendra Goswami and others

Today Sri Ramakrishna and some devotees have come to Surendra's home. It is a day in the month of Ashada, 1881 A.D. It will be dusk soon.

Earlier this afternoon Sri Ramakrishna rested at Manomohan's residence.

Devotees have gathered in Surendra's second floor parlour. Mahendra Goswami, Bholanath Pal and other neighbours are also present. Keshab Sen was expected, but was unable to come. Trailokya Sannyal and some other devotees of the Brahma Samaj have come.

A cotton carpet with a sheet on it has been spread on the floor of the parlour. A beautiful carpet and bolster have been laid over them. Surendra leads Thakur to the carpet and asks him to sit there.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "But why?" Instead, he sits with Mahendra Goswami. For several months, whenever there has been a festival at Jadu Mallick's garden, Sri Ramakrishna has attended it.

Mahendra Goswami (*to the devotees*): "For months I used to be with him [Sri Ramakrishna]"

almost all the time. I've never seen such a great man. His spiritual moods are not ordinary."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the goswami*): "What are you saying? I'm the lowest of the low, poorest of the poor. I am servant to his servants. Only Krishna is great.

"He who is the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda is alone Sri Krishna. From a distance the water of the ocean looks blue, but when you are close to it you see that it has no colour. He is with attributes and He is also without attributes. The being who is the Eternal is the phenomenal as well.

"Why is Sri Krishna bent in three places [*tribhanga*]? Because of his intense love for Radha. That which is the Absolute is also Kali, the Primal Power which creates, preserves and dissolves. He who is Krishna is also Kali. The source is one. All the rest is a game, divine play."

Way to realize God

"You can see God. You can see Him through a pure mind, a pure intellect. Attraction for 'lust and greed' defiles the mind.

"It is the mind that is all important. It's like a newly-laundered cloth that takes the colour it's dipped in. It's the mind alone that makes a person either a man of knowledge or ignorant. 'So and so has gone bad' means that a bad dye has coloured the person's mind."

Trailokya Sannyal and other Brahma devotees arrive. They sit down.

Surendra comes in with a garland to put around Thakur's neck. Thakur takes the garland in his hand, but throws it away.

Eyes brimming with tears, Surendra goes to the western verandah and sits down. Ram, Manomohan and a few others are with him. Surendra says, "I am very hurt. What does a brahmin from the Rad region¹ know about the value of these things? It costs a lot. I spoke in anger, 'Put the other garlands on the necks of the other devotees!' I understand now that it was my fault. The lord is not bought with money. Nor can he be won by pride. I am proud. Why should He accept my worship? I have no desire to live anymore."

As he says this, streams of tears flow down his face and onto his chest.

Meanwhile, Trailokya is singing in the room. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing, intoxicated. He picks up the garland which he had thrown aside and puts it around his neck. Holding it in one hand, he sings and dances, swinging it with the other hand:

You are the philosopher stone of my heart.

And he adds:

Do I want any other jewel?

I have put on the garland of the moon.

Surendra is overwhelmed with joy that Thakur is dancing with the garland around his neck. He says to himself, "The Lord takes the pride of the

1. A few districts in West Bengal where Sri Ramakrishna was born.

proud. But He is the treasure of the poor, of the humble.”

Sri Ramakrishna sings:

Behold the two brothers¹ have come, they who shed tears
when chanting Hari’s name;

They who offer 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.

Several devotees dance with Sri Ramakrishna.
Finally they all sit down and talk with one another.

Sri Ramakrishna says to Surendra, “Won’t you
give me something to eat?”

Saying this, he gets up and goes to the inner
apartments. The women come and salute him by
prostrating on the ground with great devotion.
After his meal, Thakur rests awhile and then
leaves for Dakshineswar.

1. Gauranga and Nityananda.

Appendix V

Sri Ramakrishna at Manomohan's Home

Chapter One

**With Keshab Sen, Surendra, Rajendra Mitra, Trailokya
and others**

At Manomohan's house, 23 Shimulia Street, near
Surendra's residence, Saturday, 3 December 1881
today; 19th day of Agrahayana, 1288 (Bengali Year).

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at about four o'clock in
the afternoon. Manomohan's is a small one-storeyed
house [one upper floor], with a small courtyard.
Thakur sits in the parlour overlooking the street,
on the ground floor.

Sri Ramakrishna talks with Ishan Mukherji
from Bhawanipur.

Ishan: "Why did you renounce family life? The
scriptures speak highly of the householder stage of
life."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I don't know what is good or
bad. I do what He makes me do. I say what He
makes me say."

Ishan: "If everyone were to renounce the
householder's life, it would be working against
God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why should everyone
renounce? Is it His will that everybody should be
like dogs and jackals with their mouths in 'lust and

greed'? Does He will nothing else? How do you know what He wills and what He doesn't?

"You're saying it is His will that a person leads a family life. Why don't you see it is also His will when a husband or wife and son die? When you starve, when there is poverty, why don't you see that as God's will too?

"Maya doesn't allow us to know what His will is. Because of His maya, the ephemeral appears to us as permanent and the permanent appears transitory. The world is transitory. It is here now and then gone. But His maya doesn't let us see that. It is His maya that makes me think I'm the doer and all these – wives, sons, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, hearth and home – are all mine.

"Maya is both knowledge and ignorance. The world of ignorance makes you forget, and the knowledge aspect of maya, of spiritual knowledge, takes you towards God, towards love for God and holy company.

"But for the person who is beyond maya, by God's grace, they are both the same, knowledge and ignorance.

"There is a lot of enjoyment in the householder life. But what is the enjoyment of 'lust and greed'? Once you swallow sandesh, you don't remember if it was sweet or sour.

"Anyway, why should everybody renounce 'lust and greed'? It isn't even possible to renounce before the time is ripe. When the desire for enjoyment is over, the time for renunciation comes. Can you do it by force?

“There is a kind of renunciation called monkey renunciation. It is the renunciation of people of little understanding. A widowed mother supported herself and her son by spinning. The boy lost the small job that he had. As a consequence he felt he should renounce the world. He put on ochre and went to Kashi. But in a few days he wrote to say that he had found a job paying ten rupees a month. He tried to buy a gold ring, a dhoti and a shirt with it. How could he get rid of that desire for enjoyment?”

Chapter Two

Sri Ramakrishna at Manomohan's

Keshab has arrived with Brahma devotees. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the courtyard. Keshab salutes him with great devotion. He takes his seat to the left of Thakur, and Ram sits on his right.

After a reading from the Bhagavata, Thakur speaks. Householder devotees are sitting all around the courtyard.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): “Worldly duty is very difficult to perform. After spinning around quickly, a person feels faint and falls. But if he holds to a pillar while he spins, there is no danger. Do your duty, but do not forget God.

“So you ask, what is the way out if it's so difficult? The way out is the yoga of practice. I've seen carpenters' wives in the village [Kamarpukur] pounding flattened rice with one hand, being careful that the pestle doesn't mangle their fingers. And at the same time they nurse their babies at the

breast and talk to customers, demanding payment before they leave.

“An unfaithful woman attends to all her household work, but her mind is constantly on her lover.

“But some spiritual practice is necessary for this. From time to time you need to go into solitude and call on Him. You should first develop love for God and then do your duty. If you cut a jackfruit with your bare hands, its milky juice will stick to them. But if you rub your hands with oil first, and then cut the jackfruit, its juice won’t stick to them.”

Now there is music in the courtyard. And then Trailokya sings: “Victory, victory to the All-Blissful Mother, the form of Brahman!”

Thakur dances in joy. Keshab and other devotees dance with him. It is cold, but Thakur’s body is covered with perspiration.

Having enjoyed the kirtan, everybody sits down and Sri Ramakrishna asks for something to eat. A plate of sweets is brought to him from the inner apartments. Keshab holds it while Thakur eats from it. He holds a drinking glass as well in this manner. Then he wipes Thakur’s mouth with a cloth and begins to fan him.

Sri Ramakrishna again takes up the question of whether or not it is possible to lead a spiritual life in the household.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and others*): “Householders who are able to pray to Him are heroes. They have a very heavy load of twenty seers

on their heads and yet they try to realize God. Such devotees are heroic.

“Even if you say that it’s very difficult, in spite of that, what is not possible with God’s grace? Even the impossible becomes possible. If you bring a light into a room that’s been dark for a thousand years, does it light up little by little? It lights up immediately.”

Listening to these words of hope, Keshab and other householder devotees are filled with joy.

Keshab (*smiling, to Rajendra Mitra*): “It would be nice to have a celebration like this at your home.”

Rajendra: “All right, that would be nice! Ram, you please take charge of it.” (Rajendra is Ram and Manomohan’s uncle.)¹

Thakur is now taken to the inner apartments. He is to be served a meal there. Shyamasundari, Manomohan’s mother, has prepared the meal. Sri Ramakrishna sits down and looks at the different sweets and other plates of food. He smiles and says when he eats, “You have done so much for me.” He is also given a glass of ice water.

Keshab and the other devotees sit in the courtyard to eat. Coming down to them, Thakur starts feeding them. And he dances and sings of *luchis* and balls of sweets² to entertain them.

1. The husband of Ram and Manomohan’s mother’s sister.

2. *Luchi-munda*.

It is time for Sri Ramakrishna to go back to Dakshineswar. Keshab and the other devotees take the dust of his feet and see him board the carriage.

Appendix VI

Sri Ramakrishna at Rajendra's House

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna with Ram, Manomohan, Keshab and other devotees. 1881 A.D.

Rajendra Mitra's home is on Bechu Chatterji Street in Thanthania. Keshab had suggested to Rajendra, when they were at the festival at Manomohan's house, that it would be nice if a similar festival were celebrated at his house one day. Rajendra happily arranged one.

Today is Saturday, 10 December 1881, 26th of Agrahayana, 1288 (B.Y.). The celebration is today. It is a very happy occasion. Many devotees are coming, including Keshab and other Brahma devotees.

Just before the festival, Umanath had informed Rajendra about the death of Bhai Aghornath, a Brahma devotee. Aghornath had passed away at 2 a.m. in Lucknow on 8 December, 24th Agrahayan. The news had been received by wire the same night and Umanath had brought the message the next day. Keshab and the other Brahma devotees were in mourning. Rajendra worried whether or not they would be able to come on Saturday.

Ram had said to Rajendra, "Why do you worry whether or not Keshab Babu comes? Thakur is coming. He is always in samadhi, he sees God face to face – the joy of which makes the whole world taste joy."

When Ram, Rajendra and Manomohan visited Keshab, he said, "But I never said I wouldn't go. The paramahansa is going. How can I stay away? I'll

certainly go. Because I'm in mourning, I can eat separately."

Keshab then talked with Rajendra and other devotees. There is a picture of Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi in the room.

Rajendra (*to Keshab*): "Many people say that the paramahansa is an incarnation of Chaitanya."

Keshab (*pointing to the picture of samadhi*): "Such samadhi can be seen nowhere. Jesus Christ, Mohammed and Chaitanya used to experience it."

Sri Ramakrishna arrives at Manomohan's house at 3 o'clock. He rests for awhile and has some refreshments. Surendra says, "Come, sir, yesterday you said you wanted to see a camera." He takes Thakur by carriage to the Bengal Photographer Studio. The photographer shows how a photo is taken. A glass plate is covered with silver nitrate on one side to take the image.

Thakur is photographed. He immediately goes into samadhi.

Afterward, he goes to Rajendra Mitra's house. Rajendra is a retired deputy magistrate.

Mahendra Goswami is reading from the *Bhagavata* in the courtyard of the house. A number of devotees are present, but Keshab has not yet arrived. Sri Ramakrishna talks to the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Why should it not be possible in family life? But it is very difficult. Today I came by the Baghbazar bridge. It is held up with so many chains! If one of these chains breaks, the bridge won't be affected because

it's tied with so many other chains. Householders have as many bondages. Without God's grace there's no way to get rid of them.

“After realizing God, there's no danger. There are both knowledge and ignorance in His maya. You become unattached when you realize God. Then you have correct understanding, the state of a paramahansa. There is water in milk. A swan takes the milk from the mixture and discards the water. A swan can do this, but not a sparrow.¹”

A Devotee: “Then what is the way for a family man?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Faith in the words of the guru. Follow his instructions. Hold onto them like you're whirling around a pillar then do your duties – that is, do the work of the world.

“Don't think of the guru as a human being. Sat-chit-nanda Himself comes as the guru. By the grace of the guru a person sees the form of his spiritual ideal. And then the guru merges into the ideal.

“What is not possible through simple and unquestioning faith? During the rice-eating ceremony² of a guru's son, his disciples contributed to the best of their abilities. There was a poor widow who was also a disciple. She had a cow. She brought a small jug of milk. The guru had expected her to take the responsibility for all the milk and curds of the ceremony. He became angry and threw away the milk she had brought, saying, ‘Just go

1. A shalik: A black sparrow with a small yellow beak.

2. Annaprasana.

drown yourself!’ Taking it as a command, the woman went to the river to drown herself. Narayana appeared to her and said, ‘There’s curd in this container. The more you pour, the more there will be. And your guru will be pleased.’ When the guru was given the container, he was amazed. When he heard the whole story, he went to the shore of the river and said to the widow, ‘If you do not show me Narayana, I will commit suicide in this very river.’ Narayana appeared, but the guru could not see Him. The woman then prayed, ‘Lord, if you do not reveal yourself to my guru, he will quit his body and I will also die.’ Then Narayana showed himself once to the guru.

“You see, because of her devotion to her guru, not only did she attain the vision of God, but her guru also had His vision.

“So I say:

Even if my guru visits a tavern he remains my ever-joyful guru.

“Everybody wants to become a guru, but only a rare few want to be disciples. So notice that rainwater doesn’t collect on a hill. It collects in hollows on lower ground.

“You should practice spiritual disciplines with full faith in the name the guru gives at initiation.

“It is said that a pearl oyster opens itself for a drop of rain water that comes from the Svati constellation of stars. As soon as the drop falls into the oyster, it dives deep into the water and stays there till a pearl is formed.”

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at Rajendra's house

Seeing so many Brahma devotees, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Is this a Brahma Samaj gathering or mere show? There is regular worship in the Brahma Samaj, which is very good, but you have to dive deep. Mere worship and lectures are not enough. You have to pray to God to take away desire for enjoyments and attachment, and to grant you pure love and devotion at His lotus feet.

"An elephant has both inner and outer tusks. The outer tusks are for show, but the inner ones are teeth for eating. Secret desire for the enjoyment of 'lust and greed' harms a person's devotion.

"What is the use of giving lectures? A vulture flies high, but its sight remains fixed on charnel-pits. A rocket first shoots high into the sky, but the next moment it falls to the ground.

"A person only remembers God at the time of death when the desire for enjoyment has been done away with. Otherwise, only things of the world come to the mind – wife, son, home, wealth, prestige, rank and so on. A parrot can learn to say 'Radha Krishna,' but when it's seized by a cat, it only squawks 'caw-caw'.

"That's why practice is essential – to repeat His name and qualities, to sing His glory, to meditate on Him, to contemplate Him, to pray – in order to get rid of the desire for enjoyment and attachment and fix the mind on His lotus feet.

“Be like a maid-servant who attends to all her work but at the same time keeps her mind in her own village. In other words, attend to all your duties while keeping your mind fixed on God. A worldly life sticks to you. A genuine devotee lives like a mudfish – in the mud, but the mud does not stick to his body.

“Brahman and His Primal Power are the same. By calling on Him as Mother, you soon gain love and devotion for God.”

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing:

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.¹

And then he sings:

O Mother Shyama! Yashoda would make You dance when she called You her precious blue jewel!

Where have You hidden that form, O terrible Shyama?

Now Thakur stands up and dances as he sings. The devotees also stand up.

Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi now and then. Everyone watches him intently, standing still like images in a picture. Doctor Dukari puts his fingers in Thakur’s eyes to test the samadhi. The devotees are irritated to see it.

After this amazing dancing and singing, they all seat themselves again. Just then Keshab and many Brahma devotees arrive. They salute Thakur and sit as well.

1. For complete song, refer Volume III, Section IX.

Rajendra (*to Keshab*): “We had wonderful music and dancing.” He then asks Trailokya to sing again.

Keshab (*to Rajendra*): “Since the paramahansa has already taken his seat, the kirtan will never pick up tempo.”

Trailokya and other Brahma devotees begin to sing:

But for once, repeat the name of Hari, say the name of Hari, repeat the name of Hari.

Cross the ocean of the world, by repeating, ‘Hari, Hari, Hari.’

Hari is present in the water, Hari is on earth, Hari is present in the moon, Hari is present in the sun.

Hari is present in the air and in fire. This vast expanse of earth is filled with Hari.

Arrangements are being made on the first floor for a feast for Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees. He is still sitting in the courtyard talking with Keshab. He tells Keshab that he had been to a photographer in Radha Bazaar.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Keshab*): “Today I saw a beautiful machine for taking photographs. For one thing I saw that a bare glass does not receive the image, but that first they rub something black on the back side of the glass. Then the photograph appears. Just like this, a person may hear spiritual talks that leave no impression on the mind, it is forgotten the next moment. But if the person has the black ink of love for God within him already, and attraction for Him is rubbed on the mind, then he internalizes the words. Otherwise they are heard and forgotten.”

Thakur goes to the first floor. He is given a seat on a beautiful small carpet.

Shyamasundari, Manomohan's mother, serves the food. Manomohan says, "My affectionate mother has saluted Thakur by lying prostrate on the floor. She has also served him food." Rama and others were there then.

Keshab and other devotees sit for their meal on the verandah opposite the room in which Thakur is being fed.

Shailajacharan Mukherji, the present attendant of the Shyamasundar image in the shrine on Bechu Chatterji Street, is present today.

Appendix VII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Grand Festival of the Brahmo Samaj at Shimulia

Chapter One

In the company of Ram, Keshab, Narendra and other devotees

Today Thakur is attending, with devotees, the annual festival of the Brahmo Samaj at Shimulia. It is being held at the house of Jnana Chaudhary. It is Sunday, 1st January 1882, 18th Day of Pausha, 1288 (B.Y.), time about five o'clock.

Keshab Sen, Ram, Manomohan, Balaram, the Brahmo devotee Raj Mohan, Jnana Chaudhary, Kedar, the Brahmo devotee Kantibabu, Kalidas Sarkar, Kalidas Mukherji, Narendra, Rakhai and many devotees are present.

Only a few days ago, Narendra visited Thakur at Dakshineswar with Ram and some others. He is also at the festival today. He visits the Shimulia Brahmo Samaj from time to time and worships and sings there.

The worship will be performed according to the rules of the Brahmo Samaj.

First are readings from scriptures. Narendra, who can sing, sings at their request.

It is evening. Gauri Pandit of Indesh arrives in the dress of a brahmachari.

Gauri: “Where is the gentleman, the paramahansa?”

In a little while, Keshab arrives with devotees. He salutes Sri Ramakrishna by lying prostrate on the ground. They are all seated in the courtyard enjoying themselves.

Seeing the householder devotees all around, Thakur says with a laugh: “Why shouldn’t it be possible in family life? But, you know, there’s a problem. The mind is not with you. You can only give it to God if it’s with you. And you’ve enslaved it, enslaved it with ‘lust and greed’. So there’s a constant need of holy company.

“It is only when the mind is in your possession that it’s possible to practice spiritual disciplines. Constant company of the guru, service to him, and the company of holy people is essential. Either you think about Him day and night in seclusion, or have the company of the holy. When the mind is left alone it gradually dries up. It’s like if you keep water separately in a jug – it will become dry. But if you keep the jug in the water of the Ganges, it won’t dry out.

“The iron in a blacksmith’s shop reddens in fire. But if you take it out of the fire, it becomes black as before. That’s why it should be put in the furnace from time to time.

“To say that I am the doer, that because of this, the world is running, the house is mine and this is my family, is ignorance. But to feel that I am His servant, His devotee, or His child is very good.

“This I-ness doesn’t disappear for good. You can rid yourself of it by reasoning for awhile, but it soon returns, as if from nowhere, like the bleating and jerking of a slaughtered goat.

“The ‘I’ which God retains in you after His vision is called the ‘ripe I’ – like a sword turning gold after touching the philosopher’s stone. It can’t be used for killing anymore.”

Sri Ramakrishna, sitting in the worship hall, says this to Keshab and the other devotees. They all listen with rapt attention. It is 8 p.m. The bell rings three times for worship to begin.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and the others*): “What? You haven’t started worship yet?”

Keshab: “What else would our worship be? What has been happening is our worship.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “No, brother. You must perform according to your rules.”

Keshab: “Why? Worship is going on very nicely!”

At Sri Ramakrishna’s repeated insistence, Keshab rises and begins the worship. During it, Thakur suddenly stands up and goes into samadhi. The Brahma devotees sing:

O mind, chant the name of Hari once.

By repeating His name, one crosses the sea of the world.

Hari is in water, Hari is on land, Hari is in fire, Hari is in the wind,

Hari in the moon, Hari in the sun, the whole universe is filled with Hari.

Sri Ramakrishna is still standing and in ecstasy. Keshab, holding him by the hand very carefully, brings him down from the hall to the courtyard.

The song continues. Thakur begins to dance to the beat of the song. Devotees all around him also dance.

On the first floor of Jnana Babu's house, arrangements are afoot for a feast for Sri Ramakrishna, Keshab and the others.

After it they all return to the ground floor and take their seats. While talking, Thakur again begins to sing. Keshab joins him:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight to the blue lotus flower of Mother Shyama's feet.¹

The honey of all worldly things – the flowers of lust and cravings – have lost all charm.

Then they sing:

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.²

Both Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab appear intoxicated. They dance and sing with the others till midnight.

Having rested for awhile, Thakur says to Keshab, "Why did you send me gifts on the occasion of your son's marriage. Please take them back. What do I need them for?"

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section II, Chapter VII.

2. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Section IX.

Keshab smiles a little. Then Thakur says, “Why do you publish my name in newspapers? Nobody can be made great by being written about in books and newspapers. If God makes someone great, even a person who lives in a dense forest becomes known. A flower opens out in a dense forest and a honeybee finds it, not flies. What can a man do? Don’t look up to a man. Men are just worms. The mouth that speaks well of a man one moment will soon run him down the next. I don’t want to be respected. I’d rather be the lowest of the low, the most insignificant of the insignificant.”

One day in the month of Ashada in 1881 A.D., Thakur Sri Ramakrishna visited Surendra’s mansion. Keshab was also expected, but he couldn’t make it. He was busy arranging the marriages of his eldest son and his second daughter.

On Friday, 15 July 1881, the 1st day of Shravana,¹ Keshab, with a number of Brahma devotees from Calcutta, had enjoyed a cruise to Somra in the steam yacht belonging to his son-in-law, the king of Cooch Bihar. During the cruise he broke his journey at Dakshineswar and took the paramahansa and Hriday on board. In the yacht were Keshab, Trailokya and other Brahma devotees and Kumar Gajendra, Narayan, Nagendra and so on.

While talking about God without form, Sri Ramakrishna entered samadhi. Trailokya Sanyal was singing to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. Coming out of samadhi, Thakur sang:

What a machine Mother Shyama has built!

1. Nagendra had narrated this to M. two or three months later. Many months later M. met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time, on 26 February 1882 A.D.

What a machine Mother Kali has made!

In this machine, three and a half cubits high, what pranks
She plays!¹

On the return journey Thakur disembarked at Dakshineswar. Keshab had been invited to Kalicharan Bannerji's house and got off at the Ahiritola Ghat to go by foot to his house on Masjidvari Street.

1. For the complete song, refer Volume IV, Section XVI.

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