As the wind removes the cloud, so the name of the Lord destroys the cloud of worldiness that overcasts the mind.

—Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi
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‘Doing is very good, but that comes from thinking... Fill the brain, therefore, with high thoughts, highest ideals, place them day and night before you, and out of that will come great work.’

—Swami Vivekananda
Cover Story

Calcutta Students’ Home, Belgharia, West Bengal

Founded in 1916 by Swami Nirvedananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda (a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the first President of the Ramakrishna Order), Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students’ Home is located in Belgharia, a suburb north of Kolkata. Spread over several acres, the Students’ Home imparts Gurukula type of education, suited to modern times, to the students residing in its hostel, under care and guidance of monks of the Ramakrishna Order. The hostel provides boarding and lodging to around 100 students, studying in classes 11 and 12 (with a few studying in the university) from rural and economically disadvantaged sections. With a large pond in the centre, and hostel blocks around it (with the featured temple on one side), the institution has a textbook library, prayer hall, paddy cultivation, dairy farm and other facilities. Shilpapitha, a government-sponsored polytechnic which offers three-year diploma courses in civil, mechanical, electrical, electronics and telecommunication engineering to over 700 students is located in the same premises. A centre of Belur Math, the Students’ Home also maintains the ancestral house of Swami Vijnanananda (a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) where daily worship, religious classes, a weekly charitable homoeopathic dispensary and other activities are held. Bringing food and other things to the needy during the floods and other natural calamities is another important activity of the institution which is celebrating its Centenary now. □

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To be continued . . .
Gita Verse for Reflection

Tr. by Swami Tapasyananda

अनपेक्ष: शुचिर्दृश्य उदासीनो गतव्य: ||
सर्वार्द्धपरिवर्तायो मदुक्तः स मे प्रियः ||

—Bhagavad Gita, 12-16

Desireless, pure, resourceful, unattached, unworried and without any sense of self-centred agency—a devotee thus endowed is dear to Me.

The miseries of the world cannot be cured by physical help only. Until man’s nature changes, these physical needs will always arise, and miseries will always be felt, and no amount of physical help will cure them completely. The only solution of this problem is to make mankind pure. Ignorance is the mother of all the evil and all the misery we see. Let men have light, let them be pure and spiritually strong and educated, then alone will misery cease in the world, not before.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 1.53
Finding Our Space—Outer and Inner

The Reality of Space

While we all live, grow and finally rest in space, we have to, and such are the ways of life, struggle to find the right space all through! This is a profound truth the implication of which takes a long time to dawn on us.

Without an exception, everyone has a place to live in, a place to work and relax, to learn and grow. The term ‘space’ simply means something around us in which we are located and placed. (Space and time are, in physics, a continuum but let us consider here space in a perspective of one’s inner and outer lives.) ‘Space’ has it’s physical and mental dimensions. We encounter the idea of space in various ways:

When we wish to park our car, for instance, we look for the right space. We also consider if it is right and safe to park it there. While driving, we estimate the right space in order to drive between vehicles. It could be riding between two vehicles or under a bridge or while taking a turn. We search for space in a crowded bus to sit or to stand. We have the physical space in which are located our house, office, market, street, garden, and all else. We buy or acquire things keeping in mind the right size of space to store them or use them. We thus find that space-idea is present in all our thoughts and actions.

The physical dimension of space is the subject of investigation by physics and other sciences. The common sense idea of space, however, is ‘emptiness’ but we forget that everything happens in space, and emptiness is merely the gap that exists in between. While everything happens in space, nothing happens to space. Take for instance, a house. A house or office is built on a plot of land which is a space, a kind of emptiness, but does the construction of building of the house or office in anyway affect space? After some years, in some cases, centuries, the house is pulled down or slowly disintegrates, but does this affect the space in which it was originally built? Space continues to be there, and houses are built and destroyed in it, and yet nothing happens to space. Things come and go, space remains.

Space is everywhere but we in order to live our lives meaningfully must find the right space. What is ‘right space’? It is not what we like or suits us but also what is within certain norms and conditions. For instance, while travelling on a beautiful national highway in mountainous terrain, we might get fascinated by the scenic beauty and would like to have a house right in the middle of the highway! That is not what is expected of a traveller. And moreover, if wishes were horses, beggars would ride! Thank God, they are not and we cannot ride them! If they were, there would be no highways, no place left, no order left anywhere.

Another meaning, and a recent one, of space is the storage capacity of digital gadgets. While buying a computer, for instance, we ascertain or ask for the space that we require or would like to have. The space in digital terms means more data, greater speed and other related technical advantages.
And finally, there is a final resting space, or place, where we return after completing our earthly journey. Physically, it depends on which religious tradition we adhere to, and accordingly, the physical remains are given the space they are supposed to be given. From birth to death, from womb to tomb, we all need and look for space.

The Finer Space

Space acquires a newer dimension when we think of it in a more psychological and finer sense. We speak of finding space in a family, in an organisation, in a group, in a society. Of finding space in a society, it is said of Parsis community’s arrival in India:

The Parsis came to western India from Iran more than a thousand years ago to escape religious persecution at the hand of the Arabs. According to the oral tradition, the local ruler Jadi Rana, somewhat concerned at this sudden appearance of a strange people, presented the Parsis a bowl of milk filled to the brim, denoting symbolically, that he had no place for them. A wise Parsi priest added some sugar to the milk suggesting the adaptive and accommodating attitude of the Parsis. The Parsis would be like sugar in milk; they would enhance the population without overwhelming it.¹

Thus Paris found a space in India—an honourable one and have played a role of contributor in almost all fields of national life. The same principle works at many levels—that of finding space in a group, institution or tradition. If the space in not rightly found out in a given situation, there are maladjustments and quarrels. This holds true of family life as well as national life, personal life and social life.

Finding space at the mental or psychological level is a vital issue in life and it returns to us in a variety of ways. A young baby may find its place or fill in a void in household but a growing teenager may be struggling to find his space in the conflicting ideas and situations in which he may be placed. Not finding the right space results in conflict, confusion and anxiety. In order to have inner peace and happiness, one has to find space whether as a teenager or a grown up or as an old person. In households where the old, aged people do not find the space they deserve, there are deep cultural erosions and moral decay. For, if all deserve space, why should the elderly, who have contributed to life in their greener years, be denied their rightful space!

Finding honourable space in one’s professional and social lives is another dimension of the finer space being discussed. When one starts one’s profession in any field, one may have a long way to go to find an honourable space for oneself. Finding that space would require hard work, commitments, overcoming obstacles, and so on—and finally reaching the honourable space one is seeking for. And yet, spiritually speaking, space is the place where all ups and downs, finding and losing happens, and so on. Everything is born, lives and dissolves in space—including all our failures and achievements!

The Spiritual Dimension of Space

As we reflect on the idea of space, we must remind ourselves that space is one of the pillars of the ‘temporary’ reality called the world. Space is held to be a part of a passing truth called creation. Only the Self, the divinity within, is beyond space and other limiting factors. The real being is the foundation of all, and is subject to no change. Says Swami Vivekananda,

This whole universe as it exists is that Being. It is unchanged, and all the changes we see...
in it are only apparent. These changes are caused by Desha, Kala, and Nimitta (space, time, and causation), or, according to a higher psychological generalisation, by Nama and Rupa (name and form). It is by name and form that one thing is differentiated from another. The name and form alone cause the difference. In reality they are one and the same.2

According to the Vedas, when the ‘creation’—srishti, or projection—began, the first evolute that emerged was space, akasha. ‘From Akasha came air principle, from air came fire, from fire came water and from water came the principle of earth.’3 In other words, it is in space that all objects (physical and subtle) exist and finally merge and again merges back to the Ultimate Reality called Brahman. Atman or the Self is beyond time, space and causation. Swami Vivekananda says,

If it [the soul] is not in space, either of two things is possible. Either the [soul permeates] space or space is in [it]. You are in space and must have a form. Space limits us, binds us, and makes a form of us. If you are not in space, space is in you.4

So, in a Vedantic perspective, space, along with time and other factors (called conditions) in which we live, grow and die, is itself a kind of limitation. Called Maya, this sum total of all limitations reduces us to living-dying beings. What we call as growth, or spiritual growth, is nothing but to transcend these limitations. Swamiji says,

There is a screen here, and some beautiful scenery outside. There is a small hole in the screen through which we can only catch a glimpse of it. Suppose this hole begins to increase; as it grows larger and larger, more and more of the scenery comes into view, and when the screen has vanished, we come face to face with the whole of the scenery. This scene outside is the soul, and the screen between us and the scenery is Maya—time, space, and causation. There is a little hole somewhere, through which I can catch only a glimpse of the soul. When the hole is bigger, I see more and more, and when the screen has vanished, I know that I am the soul. So changes in the universe are not in the Absolute; they are in nature. Nature evolves more and more, until the Absolute manifests Itself. In everyone It exists; in some It is manifested more than in others. The whole universe is really one... All our struggles, exercises, pains, pleasures, tears, and smiles, all that we do and think tend towards that goal, the tearing up of the screen, making the hole bigger, thinning the layers that remain between the manifestation and the reality behind. Our work, therefore, is not to make the soul free, but to get rid of the bondages.5

‘To get rid of bondage,’ one has to begin from where one is—and slowly turn one’s time, space, and other causes into means to purify the mind and reach the inner divinity. In classical metaphors used in explaining Vedanta, it is illustrated by way of saying, ‘break the space enclosed by a pot and merge it with the larger space.’ Inner and outer are mere terms, and not ultimate reality.

Finding Inner Space

So, now let us turn to the practical side of finding our inner space. Often we talk of private versus public space. Private space is the space one has at one’s command—one’s place of study, rest, sleep, eat, even walk, exercise and keep one’s personal belongings. The public space is where all others are invited and welcomed. There are of course shared spaces, too. But at times there is conflict in small places with regard to private and public spaces and it leads to many tense moments. At times, arriving at some compromise in such situations, or finding some other alternative is the only way to peace and harmony.
Finding our inner space is crucial to a life of wisdom, peace and genuine joy. Here are a few pointers as to how it could be found:

**Slowing Down:** However impracticable it may sound in today’s world of deadlines and catching one’s bus or train, the speed with which we live our lives need to be slowed down. Slowing down does not mean promoting inactivity and inefficiency but, paradoxically, slowing down helps one achieve greater and truer happiness. This simply means making space in our crowded lives, space to think over what is right and wrong, and learning to examine our lives in the perspective of the ultimate goal of life. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi used to say that one should sit down every morning and evening and examine how one is leading one’s life. She called this practice as setting right our compass of life. One needs to cut down many unwanted things such as social visits, urgent works, surfing the Net, checking one’s missed calls or mails and so on. One must find time for introspection and self-study which are vital to check if one is going in the right direction. It may look difficult, even impossible, at first but a careful and honest review of one’s life and activity would reveal that there are certain things we can do without.

**Practice of Meditation:** Meditation is an important way of finding one’s inner space. Swami Vivekananda describes what one does, to begin with, in meditation:

Imagine a lotus upon the top of the head, several inches up, with virtue as its centre, and knowledge as its stalk. The eight petals of the lotus are the eight powers of the Yogi. Inside, the stamens and pistils are renunciation. If the Yogi refuses the external powers he will come to salvation. So the eight petals of the lotus are the eight powers, but the internal stamens and pistils are extreme renunciation, the renunciation of all these powers. Inside of that lotus think of the Golden One, the Almighty, the Intangible, He whose name is Om, the Inexpressible, surrounded with effulgent light. Meditate on that. Another meditation is given. Think of a space in your heart, and in the midst of that space think that a flame is burning. Think of that flame as your own soul and inside the flame is another effulgent light, and that is the Soul of your soul, God. Meditate upon that in the heart.

Meditation, as suggested by Swamiji in the above passage, is a spiritual exercise wherein one employs visualization and concentration to achieve inner poise. One caveat in this context, however, may be sounded: it requires a certain degree of preparation and one way of doing it is to cultivate the habit of Japa, repeating a Sacred Name, and prayer which go a long way in making one ready for meditation.

**Finding Our Space Between the Thoughts:** One of the important keys to self-transformation is finding a space for oneself to make right choices. If we reflect carefully, we will discover that between every thought that we think there is micro space which can be gainfully used to decide how to act and respond in a given situation. In our present state, this space is as if non-existent and hence we are caught in the compulsive action of stimulus-response. Finding inner space between our thoughts is the key to regulating and controlling our thoughts and live lives of peace, fulfillment and meaning.

Finding space, in conclusion, with its outer and inner dimensions is a vital part of our lives and due attention should be paid to all its aspects.

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**References:**
2. CW, 1.363  3. cf. Purusha Sukta  4. CW 1.495  5. CW, 1.421  6. CW, 1.192
The spiritual state is attained by the deepening of one’s own personal life by the quieting of all individual and personal desires, whether Egoistic or Altruistic. Even the very recognition of society and individuals and the manifold variety, however fine our emotions may be, falls short of the spiritual unity or fellowship of the Jnani or Bhakta. Hence Karma and Yoga were ever subordinated in this land to Bhakti and Jnana: Karma flowers into the Bhakti state and Yoga into that of Jnana.

Just as individuals may fall short of the ideal states of the Jnani and Bhakta, so individuals following Karma and Yoga may also fall short of the ideal. The other-regarding passion of the Karmi and the outward, objective vision of the Raja Yogi have all the dangers appertaining to the fluctuating environment, social and material, on which their whole motive force is bestowed. Hypocrisy and fanaticism are as likely to breakout among them as in the case of the other two types. The fanatic element in these two types may lead to anarchism and organised rebellion as it is likely to lead in the case of the other two types, to suicide or self-torture. The hypocrite among these two types, instead of being merely ‘a social parasite,’ will be a veritable ‘blood-sucking vampire’ as is evidenced by too many examples of those who in modern times talk of public spirit, patriotism, humanity, brotherhood and all the shibboleths to which Western education has made us familiar.

The imperfect types among Jnanis and Bhaktas harm themselves but do not harm society or other individuals while the imperfect types among Karmis and Yogis ever threaten to engulf society and endanger individual happiness. The hell which a Jnani or a Bhakta may create is individual, local and restricted: while the social hell which the fanatic among the latter types create spell disaster terrible and widespread. Besides the most Sattvika among the Karmis and Yogis have the chance of succumbing to the overpowering influence of the social and material environment. Who among the souls in Samsara will be strong and pure enough to escape contamination? Sri Krishna says in the Gita thus: ‘The objects of the senses turn away from an abstemious soul: but the tendency towards experience then perishes only after the Supreme is seen.’ So the unrealised soul of a Karmi or a Yogi is ever prone to be a captive of the caprices of the mind. It is therefore absolutely necessary to recognise limitations of the life lived in and for the social and material environments and it is also necessary to emphasise that those engaged in it can never aspire to possess that exalted state of Sattvika temper which is absolutely free from the least dross of Rajas. . .
Reminiscences of Sargachi

SWAMI SUHITANANDA

Sargachi is located in Murshidabad district of West Bengal and is well-known to the devotees of Ramakrishna Order for being associated with Swami Akhandananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The following writing is about another monk who lived in Sargachi, Swami Premeshananda (1894-1967), a disciple of Holy Mother and well known for encouraging many young men and women, as also many married people to live a life of spirituality and service. The following reminiscences in Bengali, Sargachhir Smriti, is by Swami Suhitananda, the General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math. He was a personal attendant of Swami Premeshananda for several years and while serving him noted his conversations and teachings in his diary. The same is being serially published in the Udbodhan (our Bengali monthly published from Kolkata) from its Jyaishtha, B.S. 1419 issue. These reminiscences have been translated by Sri Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee, a long-standing devotee from Kolkata. English words and expressions which appear in the original have been put within single inverted commas ‘ ’. The numbers ||1||, ||2||, etc., denote the serial numbers of the Udbodhan instalments.

||1||

Prologue

In 1958, I had the good fortune to become associated with Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachi. This Ashrama was the outcome of the life-long tapasya of Swami Akhandananda Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa Deva. The practice of ‘Service of Jiva as Shiva’ in Ramakrishna Mission started in this Ashrama.

In 1958 the Head of that Ashrama was Swami Sukhadananda Maharaj, a disciple of the Holy Mother. At that time another disciple of Mother, a senior monk named Swami Premeshananda Maharaj used to stay in that Ashrama. Songs [in Bengali] composed by him, such as Arupa sayare, Banga-hridaya gomukhi hoite, Ayuta kanthe bandana-giti, were especially appreciated by Holy Mother, Raja Maharaj, Mahapurush Maharaj and Master Mahasaya. Besides, books, articles and letters written by him are dear to many devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. In 1937 after the passing away of Swami Akhandananda, the authorities of Belur Math appointed him the Head of Sargachi Ashrama and sent him there. After serving the Ashrama there for a length of time, he passed some time at the Himalayas doing tapasya. But as he fell ill there, Swami Sukhadananda, the then Head of Sargachi Ashrama, brought him there with great love and care. Because of his extraordinary personality, scholarship, sweet behaviour, mode of speaking and motherly compassion, he soon turned out to be an attractive personality. As a result, many young men and women, old people and learned men from Kolkata, Madras and other places used to come to him at different times. They used to ask Maharaj questions on Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and other topics and in answer Maharaj also used to give important discourses which had as their basis his tapasya
and knowledge of the scriptures. To have a walk with Maharaj in the afternoon was, in Swami Shraddhananda’s words, ‘a university education’. Sometimes he would, on his own, throw light on some spiritual or social topic.

When I went to Sargachi, he was very old and in very poor health. Physicians used to come from Berhampur almost every day or at intervals of 2 or 3 days to examine and treat him. Berhampur is situated at a distance of 8 km from Sargachi Ashrama. As for transport there were only rickshaws and one or two buses plying during the whole day. Almost every day 8 or 10 admirers used to come to him from Berhampur and with great enthusiasm he used to join them in discussing various topics related to religion, salvation, social order, etc. Although mostly he used to be the principal speaker, the topic of discussion used to change depending on particular situations and persons. As I had joined Sargachi Ashrama as a Brahmacharin, I had, therefore, an opportunity to discuss spiritual matters with revered Maharaj or to listen to what he discussed with others in between my duties.

It seemed to me that what revered Maharaj talked about would be of use in my personal life. Besides, as I did not trust my memory much, I used to note down for myself certain things which, it seemed, might be useful to me personally. However, to note down these things was no easy matter. In this connection an incident may be mentioned.

After I came to the Ashrama, I became wonderstruck to hear a few words of revered Maharaj. I thought nobody in the school or college had talked like this. So I made a wooden cot that stood outside his room my table, and sitting on the floor, used to take some notes. One day Maharaj was talking with others in the room. Suddenly he came out and asked me, ‘What are you doing?’ I answered with a bit of pride, ‘I am taking notes of your talk.’ He said, ‘Let me see.’ As soon as I handed over the notes to him, he tore them into smithereens and dancing and turning his hands started reciting a sarcastic Bengali couplet which said, ‘The Master urinates as he gyrates round and round; the devotees say this also is a kind of disport of the Master.’ He then said, ‘Have you planned to write a Gospel out of the vomiting of Premeshananda? You have thought that this would give you name and fame! Listen carefully. Our ideal is Thakur, Holy Mother and Swamiji. At the most, the ‘Direct Disciples’ of Thakur. If we deviate from it, the ideal would become belittled.’

After this incident it was difficult to take down any notes. As I had to serve revered Maharaj for almost round the clock, I had very little time and opportunity to write anything.
Yet I could not resist the temptation, even at the cost of disobeying Maharaj, to make some notes of his words, unknown to others, in the dim light of a turned-down hurricane lantern at night.

As Maharaj had given clear directive in this regard, I had kept these notes as top secret and had read these only once or twice myself. Now, as I opened and looked at these notes after half a century, it seemed that many of these sayings might be of special value to some truth-seeking spiritual aspirants. I can see which among these are of use to me, but cannot decide which would be useful to others. Hence I present to the readers verbatim whatever an immature youth wrote down fifty years ago. The choice of accepting or rejecting parts of it, lies with the reader.

Had I written these today, and then admixed with my experience and knowledge, surely these would have taken a new shape—perhaps these would have become much more refined. But then, these would not have borne the dignity associated with the memory of Premeshananda Maharaj. Apprehensive of this, in spite of an interlude of fifty years, I have not used my pen to make any significant changes.

There is another reason for publishing these notes. In 1966 revered Maharaj was staying in Varanasi—he passed away in the following year. In the days preceding his demise, he could neither see nor walk. His hands had also become paralyzed—everything had to be done by the attendant (myself). At that time, one day when I was reading the words of revered Maharaj, I felt emboldened to ask him, ‘Maharaj, in spite of your forbidding me, I have taken down some of your words. Will you kindly listen to these and say whether I have written these correctly?’ Perhaps to please me, he said, ‘All right, read.’ When I read parts of the notes, he said, ‘Well done.’ That gives me courage in this venture.

I have mentioned earlier in what adverse circumstances I had attempted to preserve the words of Maharaj. I had neither time nor opportunity, and besides that, not even the ability to arrange and write these in an orderly form. Therefore, at places reading these may seem monotonous—somewhat like reading a ‘Dictionary’. Although all words in a ‘Dictionary’ may not be useful to a person always, one has to preserve them. For, who can tell what would be of use on what day and when?

**From 10.8.1958 to 22.8.1958**

(It had not been possible to record the exact dates towards the beginning.)

One day Maharaj told the attendant: You intend to give your mind to God, but cannot. This is because of the impressions of previous births—lust, anger and delusion. But do you know one thing? If you pray to God, these get lessened a little. Besides, since I cannot become a free soul overnight, I have but to go ahead with whatever power I do possess. The other fellow has more power—he can walk faster. Let him do so. But I have to keep my goal steady. I want to go to Varanasi; that I must. I am trying with whatever little power I have.

Does not the Divine Mother see that?

Let us say, a porter has come to the Ashrama to carry certain pieces of luggage on his head. With him has come his little son. The boy is trying his utmost to help his father a little by carrying a piece. He cannot, but still he does not let go the piece. His father then smilingly takes the thing from his hand and puts it in his own basket.

Query: Does that mean there is need for God’s grace?

Maharaj: Do you know who speaks about grace repeatedly? Those, whose mind has not
properly settled God-ward. Their attitude is—if God through His grace accepts me let Him; I myself won’t be able to accomplish so tough a task (he said this in a peculiar intonation). He who has developed an attraction for God has the attitude—I must cry out for God; He is my own I cannot do without crying out for Him. In my boyhood I saw at our place that a boy next door, while coming back from school, used to shout as he approached the house, ‘Mother, give me something to eat.’ One, who is not hungry, will not eat even if he is given food. Just like Hutko Gopal in Thakur’s time—he would come once in a while and then would disappear. After Thakur left his mortal body, others tried to detain him. But he made an excuse of going to attend nature’s call and ran away. When one is not hungry, one does not like payas [sweet pudding] even. When one is tired after finishing the game and feels hungry, one says, ‘Mother, give me the payas’.

29.9.1958

Maharaj started saying: You are English-read gentlemen; I am very scared of you. He who is simple-hearted and ignorant, obeys in good faith whatever the teacher tells him. But you try to judge with your intellect and spoil everything. As regards you, you have your ‘nerve strong’, but you are deficient in spirit; try if you can make up the deficiency through discrimination. As you discriminate you have to open one by one each of the five koshas or sheaths. This does not require showing off of any japa or other spiritual practice visible to others.

I am an observer, a witness. Vital force, mind, intellect, body, organs are acting in cooperation with each other. I am just looking on. As the indivisible consciousness (akhanda chit) goes on reflecting like this, sometime within 50 years, truth will be realized in a flash.

If I could give you ‘substantial food’, I would have made you experience a small-scale samadhi within 12 years. Be careful so that your vital energy is not wasted even a little bit. Do not disturb yourself by offending someone unnecessarily. Just sit for meditation one day after exchange of angry words with somebody, you would know the after-effect of anger and see how the state of your mind has changed.

You cannot get ghee or meat; so be careful that the little vital energy you accumulate is not wasted a bit. You can see what ‘strain’ one has to undergo to do meditation. You would feel tearing pain in the head.

As soon as the attendant raised the issue of various disorders taking place in the Ashrama, Maharaj said:

What’s the use of taking note of which person in this world stoops how low. You look at yourself. There is no dearth in this world of monks who are hypocrites. One cannot keep track of the various kinds of magic and trickeries to which bogus monks resort to deceive people. But those who are deceived are also like that—they like to be deceived and never use their power of judgment.

Monks should never mix too much with householders. They [householders] cannot understand a monk’s mentality. Seeing me write letters, that gentleman says that in this way one can maintain good relations with people and they would send remittances. And the other gentleman says that I keep in mind the mentality of a person while talking with him so that he remains under my control. How can I make them understand that monks look upon others with the spirit of equality? Hence too much mixing harms both parties.

It is very difficult to make common people understand anything. That is why our Puranas magnify everything. One has
to renounce a lot for the sake of God—how should they make this understood? They said that a person performed austerity by remaining in the head-downwards position for sixty thousand years. ‘Credulous’ people would gulp that with open mouth and overawed eyes and say, ‘Good God.’ They would never consider the absurdity of the literal meaning of the statement and judge what that truly means.

In this world nobody is bad. One is ‘bad’ means one does not ‘suit’ the place one is in. Given a ‘suitable’ place, one would ‘shine’ there. For this reason, carry on intelligently remaining in harmony with all. If all are of the same disposition then they make rapid ‘progresses’. For instance, suppose all wake up together, they do the work of the storeroom attached to the shrine together, and while helping others, identify with them in their happiness and sorrow. Otherwise, your living would be only like staying in a ‘bachelor’s mess’, feigning as monks, and muttering only ‘mechanical’ japa.

I heard that a fellow has kept a picture of mine in his room. I get annoyed by that. But the fellow is a rajoguni; so I keep mum.

(To be continued...)
The Beginning of a Divine Play

Little Sarada was only five years old when she was married to Sri Ramakrishna, who was then twenty-three years old—and that was socially acceptable, way back in 1859. We find in their lives a new ideal of conjugal life. The sage husband plays the part of a spiritual teacher and the wife that of a disciple. She not only absorbs his teachings but also comprehends his aspirations which find an echo in her pure mind and make her a fit partner in his divine mission.

After the marriage Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar and plunged in the pursuit of his divine quest and Sarada Devi to her parental home at Jayrambati. Except for three short visits to Kamarpukur, when Sri Ramakrishna visited his village home, she remained separated from him till she appeared at Dakshineswar in the year 1872, in the concluding act of the drama of his Sadhana.

She was eighteen years old. It was then that the most fascinating Divine Lila, the grandest love story the world has ever witnessed, was staged at Dakshineswar Kali temple. It was a strange mysterious web of relationship—a communion of the mind with the mind, union of the spirit with the spirit, and romance of the soul with the soul. Without any physical intimacy, there flowed back and forth a stream of deep adoration, veneration, understanding and immemorial unity between the two souls.

Once Holy Mother asked Yogin-Ma to convey her prayer to Thakur that she might have a little of spiritual ecstasy. Yogin-Ma, in her innocence, could not imagine that no mediator was necessary for giving concrete shape on the physical plane to the strong, though unseen, spiritual line of communication that subsisted between these

□ A devotee from Ambala, Sudesh regularly contributes inspiring articles to The Vedanta Kesari.
two souls. . . When she returned, the Mother was engaged in her daily worship. She noticed the Mother laughing—laughing and then again weeping by turns—while tears flowed down profusely. After passing a while in this way she became quite silent, merged in samadhi.¹

**Holy Mother’s Sadhana**

We do not see Holy Mother practising sadhana like Thakur [as Sri Ramakrishna is addressed by devotees] nor do we see as often the manifestation of divine moods in her. Inebriated with divine joy Thakur sings, dances, laughs, weeps and frequently loses himself in samadhi. But then, is the manifestation of ecstatic states the only criterion to measure spiritual heights? Can one limit the mode of expression of the Limitless, the Absolute Reality? Can it not manifest Itself in myriads of ways, through infinite moods and modes? That is why the divine Lila of Thakur and Ma is so fascinating because there is no repetition, no ‘monotony’.

She did not practice austerities like Thakur because she had to continue the play beyond that stage. The mode of expression of her divine stature was to be through universal Motherhood before the blazing splendour of which all considerations of merit and demerit, high and low, caste and creed became irrelevant. It left none outside its all-comprehensive grasp—the high-bred and elegant Western women and the illiterate village women; the spiritual giants Swami Vivekananda and Swami Saradananda and the ‘mulberry robber’ Amjad and the drunken Padma Binode; her spiritually evolved companions Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma and her crazy relatives worrying the life out of her; the persecuting Britishers and the suffering natives.

Moreover, through the performance of the *Shodasi Puja*, Thakur laid the fruits of his sadhana at the feet of the Deity whom he identified with Holy Mother. Swami Gambhirananda wrote:

There was need for raising her in the estimation of the world by offering his own sincerest worship, so that she might naturally take up the threads of his unfinished task after him; and it was necessary, too, to make that deity conscious of her real stature. . .In a state of divine afflatus the Mother accepted the worship as also the result of all the spiritual disciplines of the Master. In fact, she inherited the richest spiritual wealth without any corresponding conscious endeavour on her part.²

**How Sri Ramakrishna Looked at Holy Mother**

Sri Ramakrishna spoke of the Mother’s identity with Saraswati, the goddess of learning, who had come to impart knowledge. She had the power to transform jivas by breaking their delusive dreams that veil off the face of Reality; take the eager seekers to the eternal shore of peace and bliss where world-bewitching maya no longer deludes.

Knowing that she was Saraswati and liked to put on ornaments, Thakur had the gold bracelets made for her. At Kamarpukur the ladies would surround Thakur and listen to his illuminating words. During such conversations, the Mother often fell asleep. The ladies would try to wake her up. But Thakur, afraid that her mind might soar into the Infinite, if she heard those words, would prevent them. Otherwise the very purpose of her descent and the divine part she had to play in his mission would be frustrated.

Though always absorbed in high spiritual moods, Mother’s God-intoxicated consort was never unmindful of her prestige. He
always looked upon her in great reverence—sometimes protecting her from the company of persons with impure motives, sometimes like a child depending on its mother. How embarrassed he was when unwittingly, mistaking her for his niece Lakshmi he happened to address her [in Bengali] ‘tui’ instead of ‘tumi’! He passed a sleepless night brooding over his rudeness to her and begged for her forgiveness again and again. As for his courtesy to Mother, she herself said: ‘I was fortunate to be wedded to a husband who never addressed me as thou “tui”. The Master never hit me even with a flower.’

How terribly anxious he was when he learnt one day that Mother had a headache! He went on asking Ramlal again and again, ‘O Ramlal, why does that headache trouble her?’ Hriday had attended on Thakur during the period of his spiritual austerities. But in the end he was puffed up with pride and egotism. Transgressing all limits of courtesy he often began to slight Thakur and did not spare even Mother. When Thakur noticed his insolent and rude behaviour towards Mother he warned him, ‘Well, you often slight me. But don’t you do that with her. You may be saved if the being that resides in this body (i.e. in him) “raises its hood”, but if the being that is in her is angry, even Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara won’t be able to save you.’

Holy Mother Reveals Thakur’s Glory

More than anyone else it was Holy Mother, who understood Thakur and revealed his glory. She impressed indelibly on the devotees’ hearts that Thakur was their all—the God-head, the Guru and the Ishta. He was all the gods and their sacred word symbols. In and through him one could worship all gods and goddesses. On receiving a despondent letter from a Sannyasin disciple, she said, ‘Is the Master’s name such an empty word as to go in vain? . . . Those who have come here with their minds fixed on the Master, will have the vision of their chosen Deity as a dead certainty. If they don’t get this at any other time, they can’t but have it at the time of death.’

On another occasion another devotee said: ‘The Master will take us in his arms after death; is there anything great in that? If he would only do so while we are in this body!’

Mother replied, ‘He is holding you in his arms even in this body. He is above your head. Truly he is holding you.’ Ah, what an assurance! A woman devotee wrote that she had been cursed by her family guru on learning that she has been initiated by the Mother. Mother had it written in reply that not even a brahmin’s curse could touch one who took refuge in the Master.

To the Mother the sine qua non of spiritual life was: ‘What else is spiritual life besides praying to the Master, repeating his name and contemplating on him?’ Mother did not look upon Thakur as a mere husband but God and worshipped him with every breath as an Incarnation of Divinity.

All her thoughts and deeds centred round Thakur. As an ultimate remedy to all problems and miseries, disease and grief, she clung to Thakur and asked others also do so. In all her reminiscences by various devotees we see that Mother is constantly talking of Thakur; now recalling various incidents from their lives, now revealing his glories or teachings. Isn’t it constant contemplation on him? Isn’t it re-living all those fondly cherished moments for her and re-enactment of their soul-bewitching divine play before our mental vision? Isn’t it giving living expression to the hymn Swami Abhedananda composed on her—’Ramakrishna gata prana, tannama shravana...’
Priyā, / Tadbhav ranjita kara’? Writes one of her sons,

Even while feeding Radhu, she would say: ‘Come on, eat this dish of herbs; the Master used to have it. He loved it—herbs, figs, and green bananas.’⁹

What a man to be born upon earth! So many people received the truth from him. How full of joy he was! Every hour of the day was filled with laughter, words, stories and songs. I have never known him to lose his peace of mind. He would say such wonderful things to me.¹⁰

One day Hazra said to the Master: ‘Why do you constantly long for Narendra and other youngsters? They are quite happy by themselves, eating, drinking and playing. You had better fix your mind on God.’ At these words, the Master took his mind away from the young disciples. . . and merged it in the thought of God. Instantaneously, he entered into Samadhi; his beard and hair stood on end like Kadama flower. Just imagine what kind of man the Master was. His body became hard like wooden statue.¹¹

Like Shiva and Shakti, One and Inseparable

Girish Ghosh tried to drink alcohol to relieve the grief caused by his first wife’s death. Stricken with grief over the loss of his second wife and son, one day he told Niranjan that it was a pity that he could not see Sri Ramakrishna, who was his only refuge. Niranjan interrupted saying:

Why! Mother is there. Is there any difference between the Master and Mother? Can you imagine Narayana without Lakshmi, Shiva without Parvati, Rama without Sita or Krishna without Radha . . . You believe that Sri Ramakrishna is an avatar, God incarnate in human form. Do you mean to say that he took an ordinary woman ‘jīva’ as his spiritual partner . . . You must remember the words of our Master, ‘Brahma and Shakti are one and the same though in manifestation they appear to us as two.’ Mother is Shakti, the Shakti of Purna-Brahma Sri Ramakrishna.¹²

The Mother herself revealed that she was Thakur’s Shakti and identified with him by installing Thakur’s picture on the altar of the Koalpara Ashrama and by its side her own, and worshipping them duly. The Koalpara Ashrama was then a hot-bed of Swadeshi agitation. Lest the devotees stray away from the path of spirituality in the talks of looms, spinning wheels, and politics, she enjoined upon them to carry on worship, offering of cooked food, and vesper service regularly.

Jane Brown, a Vedanta student from California wrote: ‘Inseparability from her blissful Lord is the story of the Holy Mother’s life. From the
days at Dakshineswar to her pilgrimage to Vrindavan after the Master’s mahasamadhi, it grows deeper and steadier until it is flawless expression of divine inseparability. It gives lustre to her highest teaching and to her vegetable peeling, and it is a model for living in the world with uninterrupted consciousness of God.’ 13 ‘And the Master? What is there after all in him? He is our own eternally!’ 14 said Mother. That is why she prepared simple betel rolls for Thakur as he was already hers. For devotees she made the ones with cardamom and other spices whom she wanted to make her own through love and care. Yet, though his wife and consort, Mother did not lay exclusive claim on Thakur. Just as moon was everybody’s ‘uncle’, so was God everybody’s own.

In those early days at Dakshineswar, Mother had to be content with fleeting glimpses of Thakur from afar when he passed at midnight on his way to the jhau grove. Or, when she watched through a hole in the screen of bamboo strips, Thakur singing and dancing with the devotees in his room. It was only later on when she started carrying his meals to his room, she could be by his side once in the course of the day. Yet in her magnanimity, she gladly handed over Thakur’s plate of food to a woman when requested. When the woman left, he told her that he found it very difficult to take that food as the woman who carried it was not pure in life. He also asked her to give word that she would never hand over his food to anybody in future. At this Mother said with folded hands: ‘Thakur, that I cannot. . . you are not my Thakur alone—you belong to all.’ 15

In later life, she exhorted the disciples to think of Thakur as their own. Swami Arupananda asked: ‘Can we get Him as our own. . . Is He my Own?’ ‘Yes, he is one’s own, ever related to one. . . each getting him according to his own imagination.’ 16

(To be continued . . )

References

3. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, 81.
5. Swami Tapasyananda, Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math 1969), 59
7. Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother, 374.
8. Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother, 331.
10. In the Company of the Holy Mother, 254.
11. Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother, 352-353.
15. Sri Sarada Devi The Great Wonder, 414.

Life is and must be accompanied by evil. A little evil is the source of life. The little wickedness that is in the world is very good. For, when the balance is regained, the world will end, because sameness and destruction are one. When this world goes, good and evil go with it. When we transcend this world, we get rid of both good and evil, and have bliss.

—Swami Vivekananda
Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play

SUMITA ROY

Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play by Swami Chetanananda, Vedanta Society of St. Louis, Missouri, USA, 2015; pp. 876; Illustrations 125; Price: $35 (Hardcover), available in India at Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, email: email@advaitaashrama.org, Indian price: Rs 1000/

A complementary volume to his earlier book Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play, this biography of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother (as she is popularly known) has the advantage of being originally written by Swami Chetanananda with material from numerous sources and not translated from a single source like the other one. The creativity, meticulous research, originality and in-depth analysis that characterize this volume are therefore unique.

Using a wide canvas—beginning with a Preface and an Introduction, followed by 35 sumptuous chapters and an Epilogue, with 125 breathtaking illustrations, 5 detailed appendices, an exhaustive chart of chronology of Sarada Devi’s life, Glossary, References and an Index—the ample, intimate details and ‘Unknown Facts’ (name of a chapter) that the author has included suggest deep study and research of extant data available in published as well as unpublished forms and other sources as well as long years of contemplation on the Mother. Noteworthy are the happenings catalogued with mathematical precision; to name just one: Mother’s travel between Calcutta and Jayrambati/Kamarpukur (p. 69).

Swami Chetanananda’s inwardness with the tradition of Ramakrishna-Sarada gives this biography an insider’s perspective which is reinforced by his meditative, intuitive explication and revelatory mode of narration. Often he juxtaposes the mind, milieu and moment—bridging the gap between the 19th century of Sarada Devi’s lifetime and the narration in the 21st century, saying: ‘Holy Mother’s life [was] a meeting point of the ancient and the modern’ (p. 210).

Swami Chetanananda’s inimitable style makes the narrative come alive with an immediacy that has to be read to be appreciated—concise, aphoristic, and deeply moving; the English is impeccable and mellifluous—the language reads like the Holy Mother’s loving caress—soft, gentle and soothing.

Commendable for its sensitive handling of a complex subject—which includes culture-specificity of rituals, religion, spirituality, miracles, faith, etc.—this new biography of
Holy Mother is balanced and rational; it is also candid in its expression of certain limitations. For instance in the chapter entitled ‘The Divinity of Holy Mother’ he says: ‘There are some episodes of the Mother’s life that we cannot explain but we shall present them to the readers and let them come to their own conclusions’ (p.614). Objectivity about incidents that are open to legend-making propensities, foregrounding the human aspect for a general reader and detailing the divine for the devotees are incipient strengths of the volume.

A gifted depiction of the character traits of Sarada Devi is given on page 643 where the biographer writes: ‘The Mother upheld her household with these [twelve] qualities, . . . [mutual love and respect, patience and forbearance, detachment and devotion to work, adjustment and forgiveness, selflessness and sympathy, joyfulness and spirituality] . . . so wherever she lived, peace and joy prevailed.’

Right at the beginning of the volume Holy Mother is described as being free from desire and ego (p.19); as the narrative progresses another significant aspect is unveiled—her handling/resolution of conflict (especially important in terms of people, skills and gender and perspectives). Swami Chetanananda describes how by shunning exclusivist and fragmentary modes, Holy Mother displayed a pragmatic, inclusive consciousness through her attitudes, words and actions.

The biographer dexterously establishes Sarada Devi as not only an Indian but a universal ideal of womanhood by bringing out significant and widely applicable life skills and values. In one of the numerous reminiscences he has used, he quotes the Mother as saying: ‘to make my life a model, I have done much more than necessary’ (p.627). Sri Ramakrishna made Sarada Devi an ideal model in whose life and teachings women of the East and the West will find answers to the vital questions of their lives. Her life truly is an oasis of peace and joy in this joyless world.

Merging incidents with core competences signifying universal values, Swami Chetanananda repeatedly illustrates how the apparently trivial is sacralized by Sarada Devi. In a world where people are aggressively demanding their rights but running away from their responsibilities, Swami Chetanananda has very subtly yet convincingly delineated a long list of values in the life of Sarada Devi which ensure human excellence.

Chapter 14 entitled ‘Holy Mother and Western Women’ is a spectacular chapter which seems to be the core of the book.

In addition to presenting many fascinating facts, the author often includes insightful comments to explicate a point: ‘The more often gold is rubbed with a touchstone, the more it glitters. A fire burns more brightly when the wood is stirred. . . Similarly, a human soul awakens when a person is challenged. The lives of the divine women who accompanied the avatars in every age were full of suffering and tragedy . . . This is why, in the Indian tradition, we pay respect to the Shakti or the female counterpart of God first.’ (p.51)

Much importance is given to chronology as Swami Chetanananda believes that a biography is more readable if this mode is adopted. Also, adhering to the hoary Indian tradition of sthalapurana, the biographer describes Sarada Devi’s birthplace in the first chapter titled ‘Jayrambati’. Of course, some of the later chapters have a cyclic mode of narration rather than only linear because concepts rather than life events are included there.
Rare photographs in excellent print and paper quality show how the best of technology is at work here. Can one say that it is Divine Play which orchestrated the decades spent by the author in the West—crucial to ensuring excellence in production quality among other things? Add to this designing excellence an eye for detail as exemplified by the headers: on each page, the page number and chapter title is interspersed with a small hibiscus—a flower that is essential in the worship of Mother Goddess in India.

The year 2015 began with media glare on Indian women through Leslee Udwin’s documentary ‘India’s Daughter’. Released in March, it created a furor globally and swamped the social media with raging debates. The same year 2015 ends with another perspective on Indian women through the publication of Swami Chetanananda’s biography of Sarada Devi—another Daughter of India. Will it get the same interest, involvement and engagement of the movers and shakers, thinkers and bloggers and result in some positive and transformative revolution?

If at this moment in history any volume deserves to be circulated widely and read closely, it is certainly Swami Chetanananda’s Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play.

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**Sri Ramakrishna’s final word for the ideal of Indian womanhood**

To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna’s final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new? In her, one sees realised that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of women may attain. And yet, to myself the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood.

I have never known her hesitate, in giving utterance to large and generous judgement, however new or complex might be the question put before her. Her life is one long stillness of prayer. Her whole experience is of theocratic civilisation. Yet she rises to the height of every situation. Is she tortured by the perversity of any about her? The only sign is a strange quiet and intensity that comes upon her. Does one carry to her some perplexity or mortification born of social developments beyond her ken? With unerring intuition she goes straight to the heart of the matter, and sets the questioner in the true attitude to the difficulty. Or is there need for severity? No foolish sentimentality causes her to waver.

The novice whom she may condemn, for so many years to beg his bread, will leave the place within the hour. He who has transgressed her code of delicacy and honour, will never enter her presence again. ‘Can’t you see,’ said Sri Ramakrishna, to one who had erred in some such way, ‘can’t you see that the woman in her is wounded? And that is dangerous!’

—Sister Nivedita, The Master As we Saw Him, p.122-123
Cultivating Santosha or Contentment

SWAMI BRAHMESHA NANDA

Contentment Glorified

Contentment is a very important characteristic of a sane mind. In the Bhagavad Gita, contentment is mentioned as one of the qualities of a man of steady wisdom, \textit{sthitaprajna}. In the second chapter of the Gita, Sri Krishna, in reply to Arjuna’s inquiry, says:

O son of Pritha, when all desires of the heart have been abandoned and one remains content with oneself, then one is spoken as a person of steady wisdom.\textsuperscript{1}

In the twelfth chapter, one of the characteristics of an ideal devotee is that he is ‘ever content and contemplative’ (\textit{santushtah-satatam yogi}).

No wonder, contentment is included as one of the five \textit{niyamas}—qualities to be cultivated—by Sage Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras.\textsuperscript{2} Sage Vyasa, in his commentary on Yoga Sutras, defines it as ‘having no desire to acquire anything more than what one already has.’ This means to remain satisfied with what little one has—not to have any desire for more, or to change the situation, or to feel envy.

The issue of contentment is closely related to desires. Generally, we only feel moments of happiness in our worldly life when a particular desire is satisfied. This temporarily quietens the mind but does not remove anxiety and craving permanently. This was the experience of King Yayati, who remarked, ‘By enjoyments, desires are not satisfied. Desires, indeed, increase like fire when butter is poured into it (instead of water).’

While this is the case with desires and an attempt to fulfil them at the conscious level, there is also a state of hidden discontent in the subconscious mind. Indeed, more often than not, there are innumerable desires, some very strong, stored at the subconscious level which produce a general feeling of discontent even when there are no apparent strong desires. But it is also a fact that there is a state of perfect contentment in which, according to Patanjali, there is the superlative happiness: ‘\textit{Satoshat-anuttama-sukhalabhah}.’\textsuperscript{3}

In the \textit{Ananda-valli} of the Taittiriya Upanishad, it is mentioned that ‘the one versed in Vedas and un-smitten by desires attains and experiences all the degrees of happiness from that of a monarch of the world to that of the Hiranyagarbha (2.8.1.). Therein various categories of beings have been mentioned and even the hundredfold happiness of each is mentioned as that of a desire-less sage. This remarkable assertion of the scripture proves that desirelessness and contentment are not merely negative states of mind. There is a definite positive bliss when the barriers of desires break down. Then the mind becomes perfectly calm. There is then a subtle constant bursting forth of joy from within, totally independent of external objects or situation which is termed as ‘\textit{Ananda}’—bliss!

\textsuperscript{1}A former editor of the \textit{Vedanta Kesari}, the author is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, now living at the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi.
The Practice of Contentment

How does one practice contentment? First of all, it must be repeatedly impressed upon one’s mind that desires cannot be fulfilled and they go on increasing in trying to do so. Secondly, that maximum happiness lies in being free from desires as is said: ‘The worldly sex enjoyment and the great happiness of heavenly enjoyments are not even one sixteenth part of the joy of giving up all desires.’

This is also emphasized by the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi when she said: ‘There is no treasure like contentment and no virtue like forbearance.’ She has also advised us to pray for desirelessness. According to her, this is the best prayer or wish one can have. Sri Ramakrishna’s wise counsel is that we should get over the minor desires by a little fulfilment and discrimination. But major desires must be renounced by discrimination alone without attempting to satisfy them.

One can also cultivate the value of contentment by holding in the mind the feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction one gets by satisfaction of a desire. If we may have met some deeply contented sage, we may imagine his mental state and contemplate upon it. Patanjali also recommends such contemplation of the mental state of sages who are free from attachments and desires.

All bliss is within, nothing is outside. This is what Patanjali wishes to emphasize by stating that superlative bliss is the result of contentment.

References

1. Bhagavad Gita, II.56.
2. Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, II. 34.
3. Ibid, II 42.
5. Veetaraga-vishayam-va-chittam. Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, I. 37

The minds of these ancient Aryan thinkers had begun a new theme. They found out that in the external world no search would give an answer to their question. They might seek in the external world for ages, but there would be no answer to their questions. So they fell back upon this other method; and according to this, they were taught that these desires of the senses, desires for ceremonials and externalities have caused a veil to come between themselves and the truth, and that this cannot be removed by any ceremonial. They had to fall back on their own minds, and analyse the mind to find the truth in themselves. The outside world failed and they turned back upon the inside world, and then it became the real philosophy of the Vedanta; from here the Vedanta philosophy begins. It is the foundation-stone of Vedanta philosophy. As we go on, we find that all its inquiries are inside. From the very outset they seemed to declare--look not for the truth in any religion; it is here in the human soul, the miracle of all miracles--in the human soul, the emporium of all knowledge, the mine of all existence--seek here. What is not here cannot be there. And they found out step by step that which is external is but a dull reflection at best of that which is inside.

—Swami Vivekananda
Unpublished Letters of Swami Saradananda

Jan 20. 09.
India.

Dearest Granny—
Your kind letter of Dec 2.08 was most welcome. I thank you very much for the same. I do not know what gave you the idea, that we do not agree to the division of the sale proceeds of the books as proposed by you. I tell you again we have no objection to the same and the Math will continue to observe the same as long as the female work goes on.

I am afraid dear Granny your letter speaks between the lines that you are tired again & your nerves require rest. Do not think it impertinent of your boy takes liberty to say this on account of his anxiety for your health. If so, do not try to strain them, but take rest.

I am well & so are every one here at the Math. All wish you a happy New Year and many a return of the same, including your boy—and to all friends there.

I thank you for the timely arrival of the cheque.

With loving regards from your

Affectionate boy
Saradananda

India. July 29, 09.

Dear Grannie –
Your two kind letters are waiting acknowledgement for a long time. I am very very sorry, but the fact is I am getting older every day and find myself unable to cope with the growing demands of the work. So I keep quiet and attend to those only which are most urgent at the time—and think of those who are the light of my life every day with my prayers.

Your first, dated April 1st found me at the Holy Mother’s village settling family disputes and attending to the partition of family property among Her brothers. So I had very little leisure to attend to my correspondence.

When that business was settled I made arrangements to bring the Holy Mother to the little house that has been built & of which I believe I have already spoken to you. We returned on May 23rd and in a week’s time the Holy Mother got small pox. Now that She is quite well again and none other in the family has caught the disease, I feel free to write to you.

Sister N. [Nivedita] has arrived and I am glad to learn from her that the stay in Norway and the voyage back has done you a deal of good.
The bank has advised me of the arrival of £ 50 and I thank you for the same. I am continuing Sister Christina’s allowance of Rs 25 from last June again.

Sister Devamata (Miss Glenn) has come from Madras to meet the Holy Mother and is stopping with the Sisters N. & C. She seems to be very quiet sort of person and has got a real awakening of spirit. She will go back to Madras soon I hear.

There was a rumour here before Sister N. arrived, that you will be coming to India soon—but it seems that we cannot congratulate ourselves for such a good fortune.

The Math members are well. You will be glad to learn that the R.K.Mission has been incorporated of late. Mr. Mohini has helped us in doing the same and has been very kind and good towards me & all is us—all along.

By the bye, you remember perhaps that little garden house which forms the northern boundary of the Math—that has come to the market and the proprietors have sent word that they will let it go for Rs 13000, or less even if we buy the place. You remember how when we wanted to place for you before they demanded over Rs 20000. We would surely have bought the place & used the same as place for Math grounds, if we had the money in hand.

My brother was working in a copper mine in Jonapah[?] in January last. But two months after he got the work, a strike of the miners took place followed by a depression of the copper market. The proprietors thus compelled to reduce their establishment, dispensed with his services. Since that he has gone to Nuncis[?] and is working there in one of the mines—I hear from his friend Miss Rebecca Fox of 2744 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. In his letters he seems to be cheerful and undaunted as ever & I am glad he is going through all these experiences. His friend says, he is determined to learn everything of mining & at any cost. So you see Grannie I have to thank you again for what he is now—for he could never have found the opportunity if you had not kindly sent him on to Japan.

I am glad to have the kind wishes of Mrs. Vaughan. I wish I could be with her at Norway while you were there. It would have seemed so much like the days at Sharon. My kindest regards to her please and to all friends at Cambridge who care to have them. Kindly tender the same to Agnes & Santi please when you write next.

With my love and best prayers in which the Holy Mother and Jogin Maa are joining with their whole hearts, I remain

Ever yours affectionately

Saradananda.

P.S.

I will send you the R.K.Mission Rules by the next mail.

Yours
S.

References
1. A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna
2. Mrs. Sara Bull, an American disciple of Swami Vivekananda

Courtesy: Ramakrishna Museum, Belur Math
Vivekananda in Madras—
Some Anecdotes

D. B. RAGHUNATH RAO

My father, the late D. R. Balaji Rao, was a close friend of Swami Vivekananda. He used to tell us that Swamiji was an arresting personality with handsome features, always smiling and had a robust constitution. His voice had a pleasant ringing tone. Being older than my father by a little more than two years, he used to call my father ‘Balaji’ affectionately. Whenever he entered our house (42 Singarachari Street, Triplicane, Madras) in pure Marathi, he would ask my eldest sister, Amritha Bai, then about six years old, whether father was at home. She would always run up and announce with excitement the arrival of Swamiji saying, ‘Father, Swamiji has come, come and receive him.’ My sister was being given lessons in Sanskrit at home then and she would reel off shlokas with a clear accent at his request and he thus became very fond of her and blessed her not in the usual way but by saying, ‘Let God give you great jnana.’

Swamiji, it appears, was fond of visiting Madras and the many holy shrines scattered all over the Presidency. Whenever he visited our house, he would ask my mother to give him dhal soup with plenty of jeerakam (cummin seeds) in it and fried vadam and appalams.

Discussions and Discourses

In the upstairs hall (which has been hallowed by his frequent visits) many philosophic discussions took place, and also discourses on the Gita to a select gathering of admirers and intellectuals. Swamiji would revolt at the impotence of Indian nationhood, express how we have been emasculated politically, economically and otherwise and say that it was still not too late to rise and drive away

D. B. Raghunath Rao was the youngest son of D. R. Balaji Rao. This article from Samvit (No. 9 March 1984, pp. 25-29), the English quarterly published from Sarada Mission, was reprinted from The Hindu of 18 January 1963.
the foreigner and shed the foreign yoke, even though the country was rife with a narrow-minded and communal and jealous outlook. However, it appears he would also say in a stentorian voice, that all was not lost and that India would have its resurgence and ultimately become independent. He laid great stress on manliness in any form.

Regular discourses on the *Gita* used to be held in the Ice House under the able organization of another of his close friends, Alasinga Perumal, whom Swamiji would affectionately call ‘Alasinga’. At Swamiji’s request, father accompanied him on his South Indian tour to some of the holy shrines. Swamiji would say that this part of India was a blessed land. He had great faith in the strength of Indian Nationhood and said his task was to unify the forces, gone at a tangent, and galvanize the nation to work, strive and succeed. My father, who was fond of tying his turban in various modes, presented one such length of cloth to Swamiji. It is this that adorns his head in the popular photographs published; and the sash around his waist which we also see in the photos was presented to him by the Maharaja of Khetri. One of those responsible for urging him to go to Chicago to attend the Parliament of Religions was my father, because of a philosophical bent of mind and also because he was a journalist, contributing to the *London Journal of Psychology and Mind*.

Swamiji narrated an incident to father stressing how he had a mission in life and that all his actions were guided by a superior divine force. During his peregrinations in the Punjab, Rajasthan and Kashmir, he said, due to incessant wandering from shrine to shrine and sometimes without any regular food, he one day lay down exhausted, stricken with fever and fell fast asleep under the shade of a big tree where the jungle was wild. When he woke up, he was terribly weak and hungry. A
nobleman of the place at this time had a dream that a very pious and good person lay helpless due to fever and hunger and he should repair there immediately with food and fruits. When Swamiji opened his eyes after some time, he beheld a great nobleman with an array of servants holding trays of tasty food which was most welcome to him to keep his body alive.

Victor in Wrestling Bout

Swamiji had a beautiful voice and could sing well some of the kirtans. Once he was walking on the Marina with father and other friends and was challenged as a bachelor to wrestle with a pahilwan. Swamiji accepted the challenge and defeated him on the sands of the Triplicane Beach. Sometimes he would do Hatha Yoga and show by cutting his finger with a knife that he would not bleed. Swamiji said to father that there was ample sympathy for India in America and elsewhere for gaining independence and all that was needed was a unifying force.

In a lighter vein, Swamiji informed father that the urge to enjoy a hukka was so great that when he neared Port Said he borrowed one from an Arab and enjoyed smoking it. On his return from America, Swamiji said to father that he dreamt of seeing lots of palm leaf manuscripts and treasures of wise sayings and other precious literature lying buried somewhere in an island near Cyprus.

During his itinerant days of parivrajaka, Swamiji changed his name several times in order to avoid recognition and one such name was Sacchitananda by which he was intimately known to father, Alasinga Perumal and some others. It was at the request of the Maharaja of Khetri that he changed his name to Swami Vivekananda, but still he wrote to his friends from abroad as Sacchitananda.

Spiritual Power

Swamiji had glimpses of divinity. When he used to wait for father in the house, he would close his eyes and say Om with a hum vibrant with energy. Mother used to say that the whole house would, so to say, shake with his spiritual power. He wanted to give upadesham [Instruction] to father and called him thrice (since he was just finishing his bath) but when father did not turn up, told him later that he still had to eke out his Karma in this birth and in the next birth he would surely attain salvation. Swamiji would say that God would try a man in many ways, not in heaping material prosperity but subjecting him to many difficulties and miseries and calamities. He who by the strength of his mind was able to withstand the storm like a man would surely be blessed by the Lord. He foretold to father before he left for Bengal that God would
try him in many ways and all these came to pass. My father lost two sons aged eight and six in quick succession and when Swamiji heard about this he wrote a beautiful letter of condolence which is reproduced below.

This treasure of advice from a great Vedantin like Swamiji is fit to be taken as wonderful consolation under any condition of adversity which afflicts human beings. As prophesied by Swamiji, father lost all in 1907, in the Arbuthnot Bank crash but he was undaunted and carried on. Swamiji would say that a man could attain salvation even by being a householder and doing his duties correctly.

On his second trip to America in 1899, the boat touched Madras but was in quarantine. Father with others went in a small boat but were not allowed to board the steamer. Only Alasinga accompanied him to Colombo. He blessed them all from the deck.

Letter to Mr. Balaji Rao

Dear Balaji,

‘Naked we came out of our mother’s womb, naked we return: blessed be the name of the Lord’. Thus said the old Jewish saint when suffering the greatest calamities that can befall man and he erred not.

Herein lies the whole secret of existence. Waves may roll on the surface and tempests rage but deep down there is the strata of infinite calmness, of infinite peace and of infinite bliss. ‘Blessed are they that sorrow for they shall be comforted’ and why? Because it is during these moments of visitation when the heart is wrung by hands which

never stop for the father’s cries or the mother’s wails, when under the load of sorrow, dejection and despair the world seems to be cut off from under our feet—that the internal eyes open and when the whole horizon seems to be nothing but an impenetrable sheet of misery and utter despair, light flashes all of a sudden, the dreams vanish and intuitionally we come face to face with the grandest mystery in nature—Existence. Yes—then it is when the load would be sufficient to sink a lot of frail vessels—the man of genius, of strength, the hero sees that infinite, absolute,
ever blissful existence *per se*—that infinite being who is called and worshipped under different names under different climes. Then it is that for a time the shackles that bind it down to this hole of misery break as it were for a time and the unfettered soul rises and rises until it reaches the throne of the Lord where ‘the wicked cease to torment and the weary are at rest’. Cease not brother to send up petitions day and night, cease not to say day and night ‘Thy will be done.’

‘Ours not to question why, Ours but to do and die’.

‘Blessed be thy name, thy holy name, O Lord, and thy will be done. Lord, we know that we are to submit. Lord, we know that it is the mother’s hand that is striking, but the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. There is, father of love, an agony at the heart which is fighting against that calm resignation which thou teachest. Give us strength O thou who saw thy whole family destroyed before your eyes with your hands crossed on your breast. Come Lord come thou great teacher who has taught us that the soldier has only to obey and speak not. Come Lord come Arjuna’s charioteer and teach me as thou once teachest him that resignation in thyself is the highest aim and end of this life. So that with these great ones of old I may also firmly and resignedly cry *Om Sri Krishnarpanamastu*. May the Lord send you peace is the prayer day and night of

Sacchitananda

*Photo courtesy:* Swami Dakshajananda, Chennai Math, and Sri Madhav Rao, the great grandson of Balaji Rao and the son of DB Raghunath Rao. Balaji Rao’s house [Singarachari street, Old No. 9, New No. 17] in Triplicane (now Thiruvallikeni) is located in front of Uttaradi Mutt near Parthasarathy temple. It is likely to change hands soon and may be pulled down to make way for a new construction.
Re-consecration of the Old Temple at Chennai Math

The Background

Considered the oldest temple of Sri Ramakrishna in existence in south India today is the old temple at Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai. Its foundation was laid in 1916 by Swami Brahmananda, the first President of the Ramakrishna Order and a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and was consecrated by him in 1917. At that time he stayed in a room to the southeast on the ground floor of the temple. Besides him, two other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and later Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Shivananda (second President), and Swami Vijnanananda (fourth President) stayed in this building during their visits.

Dedicated ‘In the Memory of Swami Ramakrishnananda’, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the founder-President of Chennai Math, the Old Temple was actually built six years after Swami Ramakrishnananda’s demise (in 1911). The heritage site where the first building of the Chennai Math was built (but had to be pulled down due to structural defects), located right in front of the Old Temple, now has a Mantapa with Swami Ramakrishnananda’s metal image.

The Old Temple

The ‘temple’, the building that housed the Mylapore Math’s shrine on the first floor with a prayer-hall on the ground floor, was, and is, also used as living quarters for monastic novices and monks. Many eminent monks of the Ramakrishna Order have lived and performed spiritual practices here. These include Swami Yatiswarananda, Swami Akhilananda, Swami Ashokananda and Swami Prabhavananda, all well known for their pioneering Vedanta work in Europe and America, as also Swami Ghanananda, who worked for the spread of Vedanta in Mauritius and London. Swami Swahananda, Swami Budhananda and a number of respected monks lived as inmates here. Besides regular worship for over 80 years (till 2000), the shrine and the prayer hall has been a witness to a number of spiritual and cultural events.

Owing to wear and tear, the Old Temple has been repaired and painted many times in the past. This time, the roof of the prayer-hall, resting on wooden rafts, badly leaking and in a dilapidated state, has been replaced with RCC roof, along with other renovations. Prior to restoration work, the structural features of the building were thoroughly studied and analysed and the restoration work in accordance with these was started in first
week of June 2015. By God’s grace and by the conjoint effort of innumerable persons and generosity of the donors, the restoration work was completed recently.

The Celebrations

The renovated temple was re-consecrated on Wednesday, 25 November 2015, the sacred birthday of Swami Vijnanananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. It was also the day of Karthikai Deepam, a sacred day in Tamilnadu, observed, like Deepvali, by lighting lamps and bursting crackers at night.

The day began at 5 am, with Mangalarati, Vedic chanting and Bhajans at the new temple. This was followed by a Sankirtana-pradakshina by monks and devotees around the new temple three times, after which the procession of Sankirtan came to the Old Temple, did pradakshina around it once, and the Temple was re-consecrated with a special Arati to Sri Ramakrishna, Mother and Swamiji, amidst Vedic Chants and singing of Bhajans. Monks and devotees later offered flowers in the shrine and it continued till noon. After the opening, the new website of Chennai Math as also a short film on concentration, Mind Your Mind, were commissioned. On this occasion, a booklet, From a Small Shrine To A Universal Temple, by [late] Swami Ananyananda, was also released. The book contains the historical and archival material related to the 100 years of the Old Temple, along with many rare pictures.

In the new temple, Puja, Homam, Bhajans and Naam-sankirtans were performed from 8 am to 12.30 pm, followed by distribution of noon-prasad.

From 2 to 3 pm there was reading from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and from 3 to 4 pm, Bhajans were sung by Sri Ramakrishna-Sarada Samiti, Trichy, Tamilnadu. From 4 to 6, many senior monks and devotees recalled their associations with the Old Temple and spoke about the elevating influence of the place on their lives.

After the evening Arati at the new temple, Smt. Nithaysri Mahadevan, the renowned vocalist of Carnatic genre of Indian music, gave an hour long concert to an audience of hundreds at Vivekananda Centenary Auditorium.

The one day event was attended by over 100 monks and hundreds of devotees. A good number of monks and Brahmacharis, who were inmates of Chennai Math in the past and are in various centres of the Ramakrishna Order in India, were invited to take part in the event.

On this occasion a special sale of books published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, and other publication centres, was organised which was well received.
All living beings originate from food, draw sustenance from it, and finally merge into it and hence ‘Annam Brahma’ [Food is God], says Taittariya Upanishad (3.2.1). This ultimate importance has been given to food in shrutis. If this is the case, most of us would think, do we really need to worry about Karma while having food? The answer is yes and no. We need to understand the concept of karma with regards to food in order to gauge this.

Various Views

There are many opinions and recommendations in Hindu scriptures on what we should eat and what we should not. Given that animals look and act more like humans, there has been a great deal of effort expended on whether to eat or not to eat animal flesh, not only in ancient Indian literature, but also in Roman history. Additionally, in Sikhism, there are discussions on how plants also suffer, while being consumed as food. Even today, we hear a lot of discussions and debates around eating or not-eating of meat, from moral, health and religious standpoint. There are many organizations like PETA, who are trying to convince people to go for plant-based food for health and moral reasons. At the same time, there are many others who are trying to convince people to opt for meat based diet, because, as per them, it gives the body required nutrition.

Given that human body is designed to eat and digest meat as well as plant, there is no doubt that humans are omnivorous. In addition to being omnivorous, humans are also intelligent beings, who question and think over every aspect of life. The same thinking has been happening over many centuries on the food as well. While there have been many theories on what we should eat and what we should not, this article tries to look at food from Karma point of view.

The Hindu View about Food

Unlike what most people think, food in Hinduism is not really regulated barring eating meat of cows. It has been left to individuals to decide what kind of food they want to eat. There are verses in Rig-Veda which asks us not to kill a cow for any reason and that is mainly because she gives milk, which is beneficial to all humans. Simultaneously, there are many verses in Rig-Vega where meat eating of oxen is discussed, along with other animals like horses. There are no rules in the Shrutis or Upanishads, recommending people on their choice of food. Food in Hinduism is indirectly regulated by various core principles, like theory of karma.
Hinduism believes that human body is the only form where a soul can make spiritual progress, and it needs to be the goal of humans to use this body to go further on spiritual path and set ourselves free from the cycle of birth and death and attain Moksha. Unlike animals that act on their instincts, humans can decide what is good or bad for them, also what would help make progress towards spiritual path, and what will not. The same applies to food too. It is left to us to decide what we want to eat. With this freedom of decision comes the responsibility of owning it up too. This is where the philosophy of Karma would help to make most intelligent choices.

Let’s first consider the philosophy of karma.

What is Karma

According to the philosophy of karma, what a person does comes back to him, more like newton’s third law. What we get in life is earned by us; part of it is from this life and remaining from earlier lives. As learned people say, we take birth to spend the karma accumulated in earlier lives and while spending accumulated karma we end up creating new ones.

And to spend this newly created Karma, we need to take additional births. This way the cycle of birth and death continues. The only way out here is living life without generating any new karma, and that way we can slowly clear the accumulated karma from previous lives and come out of this cycle of life and birth. And one of the easiest ways to live life without generating any new karma is following the philosophy of ‘Do good, because doing good is good, without expecting anything in return’.

Karma’s Link to Food

As per karma, every action done with an eye on material comfort has an equal reaction, and this applies to harming an animal or a plant as well. Unlike other religions, where animal/plant souls are considered as lower grade, in Hinduism animal/plant souls are considered having similar status as human being. Hinduism believes that a soul, depending upon the composition of the accumulated karma needs to go through up to 8.4 million species/births, including various plants/animals, before it can take rebirth as a human being. Unlike other births, human birth is considered superior only for the reason that humans can try to act against their animal traits, while animals do not have the intellectual capability to go beyond their animal instincts.

With this background, we can see that harming animal/plant with the intention of eating them creates a karma, which needs to be expended either in this or in next human/animal/plant life.

While most of the plant-based food (fruits, flowers, seeds, leaves, etc.), can be derived with no or minimum impact to the plant, there is no easy way to take animal flesh without really killing them. And as per theory of karma, when you eat animal flesh you are creating a karma, which means you have to bear the resultant effects in this or in future lives.

There are also some plant-based foods for which one needs to kill the plant in order to acquire the food like potatoes, onion, sugar cane, etc., which also would create similar treatment. So let’s discuss the karma created by the eating plant-based food and animal-based food separately.

Karma Created By Eating Animal-based Food
This topic has been discussed a lot in various Hindu scriptures. The best details come from Anushasan Parva of Mahabharata. As per Bhishma, the karma created by killing an animal for the purpose of eating, falls equally on five people or entities, involved in the whole chain. The person who actually raises and kills the animal for food, the person who dismembers and sells the meat, the person who transports the meat, the person who cooks the meat, and the person who finally eats it. The pain the animal has gone through while getting killed has to be repaid by them in this or in future births.

In today’s world most of the animals getting killed for food are raised for food, and when they are killed, they know for many days in advance that they are going to get killed, and they live in a state of terror. They are mostly kept without food and in many traditions they are killed slowly leading a longer time to die with more pain and miseries for animal. Unlike in the wild, these animals cannot use their survival instincts to save themselves, in fact they do not have an opportunity to save themselves. In short, they endure a very long psychological and physical pain before and while getting killed.

Additionally, most of the animals are raised in very inhumane conditions, fed with lot of artificial food so that they grow faster and many times they grow so fat that they cannot even walk, additionally, they are killed in very tender age, even before they could fulfill any of the animal instincts because somebody is craving for their flesh.

Every entity involved in the chain has to repay that back, by going through in some measure pain and suffering. While Hinduism has a concept of Heaven and Hell, that is reserved for some souls who do either extreme good or extreme bad karma, which they cannot repay in this material world. Most of the time a person needs to take a birth in the world and live out that karma, by taking various animal and plant forms, so as to go through the same pain in some way or the other.

**How About the People Who Chose To Be Vegetarians**

Things are less complicated for vegetarians, mainly because most of the plant-based food is derived from fruits, for example vegetables like tomato, potato, beans are all fruit, and same is the case with apple, banana, etc. Unlike meat, fruits can be taken from plants without harming the plants. In fact, fruits are generally thrown out by the plants itself, even if we don’t pick them. So eating fruits does not really create any bad or good karma.

Having said that, there are some plant-based food for which one would either trouble or kill the plants. For example, for all the leafy vegetables, even though you don’t need to kill the plant, you need to trouble it. For root-based food like carrots, onions, you need to uproot the plant, thus killing it. Most of the time, when we do this, plants would have lived almost all of their life, but still it results in killing the plants.

In terms of generating karma, vegetarians are at far more advantage than their meat eating counterparts, as they generate far less karma when they eat plant-based foods. But having said that, it is not zero—they too are not completely out of it.

**So, What Should We Eat?**

We think the answer lies more in ‘how’ than in ‘what’. As suggested by Sri Krishna in the Bhagvad Gita, the secret of not generating any karma while eating food lies in how we eat food. There are two approaches we can take.
One, for those people who don’t believe in Personal God, if they could achieve a state where they are eating food, only because of the need of body, and not for taste, nutrition or any other material comfort, then in that case they don’t generate any karma by eating food, even though they choose to eat plant-based or animal-based food. Meal needs to be taken as a sacrifice where in the fire of hunger, the food is sacrificed. This is easier said than done, but achieving moksha is also not an easy thing!

There is an easier path for those people who believe in Personal God. As suggested by Bhagavad Gita, if these people wholeheartedly, first offer all the prepared food to God and then only eat it as an offering to be partaken, they do not generate any karma.

In summary, a person may even eat meat without creating any karma, if he or she follows any of the above paths. What is important is not just what one eats but what one does after eating. The impact of Karma on food is just a small portion of the total karma one has. One accrues Karma by the type of life one leads, one’s good and bad actions. The point is after ‘eating’, we should be doing noble actions and think good thoughts which have more influence on our Karma-deposits than only the food that we partake.

An Example from Mahabharata

One of the easiest ways to understand this concept is through Mahabharata story of ‘Vyadh Gita’—a narration by sage Markandeya to Pandavas while they were going to Vanaprastha Ashrama. The story is about a learned Brahmin being asked to meet a butcher (Vyadh), as the butcher is very knowledgeable in dharma. In the conclusion of this section, having got the knowledge, Brahmin asks the butcher, ‘Why are you still doing the low level, filthy work’. In reply to it, he says, ‘This is the work I got from my forefather and the only thing I know how to do best, and I am doing it without any attachment to the work itself, along with other responsibilities in life, like looking after my parents.’ So the work he performs does not come as an obstacle as this is the natural work that came to him.

In this example, Vyadha was actually a part of the chain, which accrued karma for killing an animal for food, but was still saved from generating any karma. This was mainly because of his unattached approach and his natural progression doing his work.

Conclusion

Everybody creates more or less karma in the process of eating food. Vegetarians have a clear advantage over the meat eaters, but are not completely saved from it either. So in order to completely avoid any karma getting generated due to eating any food, a person needs to practice either eating food for the purpose of sustaining the body, without attaching to the real nature of the food or by eating the food as an offering to God.

Both these paths save us from creating new karma and slowly leads one to the path of liberation or moksha, as it is called.
But, in case you are not able to do any of the two, at least turn to plant-based food, thus reducing the amount of total karma which one needs to pay back.

Let us remember that it is a step, not the destination. While following any of the above prescribed paths, we need to understand that, all these paths are only a step guiding one towards achieving moksha, and not a final destination by itself. We need to understand and treat it that way. We need to use it as a stepping stone, keeping eyes firm on the ultimate destination. The key is to just practice it, leaving behind any karmabhiman (pride of doing it), that way we will stay away from karma and move towards the ultimate goal.

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End Notes

4. Complete Works, 1.70.
5. Rig Veda on cow killing, 10.87.16 to 19
6. Mahabharata Anushasan Parva, 115.9-12, 16, 24-25, 33, 40.
7. Vyadh Geeta, 207.20-21 and others
8. Taittriya Upanishad, 3:2:1

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Healthy Food

To eat meat is surely barbarous and vegetable food is certainly purer—who can deny that? For him surely is a strict vegetarian diet whose one end is to lead solely a spiritual life. But he who has to steer the boat of his life with strenuous labour through the constant life-and-death struggles and the competition of this world must of necessity take meat. So long as there will be in human society such a thing as the triumph of the strong over the weak, animal food is required, or some other suitable substitute for it has to be discovered; otherwise, the weak will naturally be crushed under the feet of the strong. It will not do to quote solitary instances of the good effect of vegetable food on some particular person or persons: compare one nation with another and then draw conclusions. Meat and plenty of fruit and milk is best suited to the attainment of longevity. More especially, they who take much fruit regularly, do not so soon lose their youth, as the acid of fruit dissolves the foul crust formed on the bones which is mainly the cause of bringing on old age.

All these contentions have no end; they are going on unceasingly. Now the judicious view admitted by all in regard to this vexed question is, to take such food as is substantial and nutritious and at the same time, easily digested. The food should be such as contains the greatest nutriment in the smallest compass, and be at the same time quickly assimilable; otherwise, it has necessarily to be taken in large quantity, and consequently the whole day is required only to digest it. If all the energy is spent only in digesting food, what will there be left to do other works?

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 4:85
Dealing with Pride

SWAMI SUDARSHANANANDA

Conceit or pride is the most invincible enemy of man. It is the greatest relief when we get rid of conceit. It is as if a heavy burden is rolled off of our heads! And we become free from all doubts, fears, anxieties and troubles. When conceit is gone, what remains is divinity.

Sri Ramakrishna’s Advice

Sri Ramakrishna would warn his devotees about the danger of conceit. He would say how conceit is a grave impediment to spiritual progress. In his own inimitable style he would draw inferences from incidents of daily life. He would explain [Gospel, cf.901] conceit this way:

Those who have read a few books cannot get rid of conceit. They will boast of their knowledge and will be in no mood to listen to others. Once I had a talk with Kalikrishna (a man of learning) about God. At once he said that he knew all about that. I told him that does a man who has visited Delhi brag about it? Does a gentleman go about telling everyone that he is a gentleman? There was a sweeper woman near the temple garden at Dakshineswar. How proud she was! This was because she had a few ornaments. One day a few men were crossing her path and she shouted at them, ‘Hey! Get out of the way, you people!’ If a sweeper woman could talk that way, what can one say about the vanity of others?

Sri Ramakrishna would thus elaborate the dangers posed by conceit. It harbours a feeling of pride, knowledge, etc., in a person in a measure far more than what he actually possesses. It gives a false or wrong sense of comfort and well-being. These are great impediments to spiritual progress. Hence, a spiritual aspirant should be extremely careful to steer clear of the feeling of conceit. Moreover, the more a person progresses in spiritual life, the more humble he becomes. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in his famous Shikshastakam, while extolling the importance of humility, speaks about being humbler than a blade of grass and having a quality of forbearance harder than a tree. Further, he talks of showing honour even to those who are supposedly lowly and about singing the name of God always.

Here are two incidents from the Puranas to illustrate this further:

1. Three Celestials Learn Their Lessons

Once conceit arose in minds of three people associated with Sri Krishna—Satyabhama, Sri Krishna’s wife, Garuda, his celestial vehicle and Sudarshana, his celestial weapon. Caught in the clutches of conceit, they would often boast of their relation with Sri Krishna. They thought that there was nothing in the world they could not do. Sri Krishna, the indweller, knew about it all and thought of setting them right.

So, one day he asked Garuda to bring a lotus from the pond of Kubera. No sooner was he was told this than Garuda rushed to the pond and tried to pluck a flower. At that time Hanuman was resting near the pond. Seeing
Garuda plucking a flower he very politely asked Garuda whether he had obtained permission from Kubera to do so. Filled with pride, Garuda replied that it was not necessary to obtain permission from any one for he had all rights to do so. Hearing the conceited words of Garuda, Hanuman became furious, took Garuda and put him in his arm-pit. Garuda tried his level best to get escape from the fold of Hanuman and remained unsuccessful.

Sri Krishna learnt of it, he asked his Sudarshana to go and set free Garuda from the clutches of Hanuman. Sudarshana, who was equally conceited, tied his best to defeat. He whirled round and tired his best to free Gaurada from Hanuman but so powerful was Hanuman that he caught Sudarshana too under his other arm-pit!

Now Sri Krishna asked Satyabhama to go and set free Garuda and Sudarshana. Satyabhama replied that it was impossible for her to free them as they themselves were unable to break out, though strong they were. Sri Krishna suggested her to take the form of Sita Devi and order Hanuman to free them. Satyabhama tried her best but could not assume the form of Sita Devi.

Then Sri Krishna remembered Radha Devi. She came and listened to everything. She immediately went to Hanuman and very humbly and politely requested him to release both Garuda and Sudarshana as they were required by Sri Krishna. Hearing the name of Sri Krishna and the humble request of Radha Devi, Hanuman immediately released them!

All the three celestials learnt their lessons.

2. What is Being a Great Devotee

Once conceit entered the heart of Narada and he thought there was no greater devotee than himself. Reading his heart, the Lord said, ‘Narada, go to such and such a place, a great devotee of mine is living there. Get familiarized with him for he is truly devoted to me.’ Narada went there and found a farmer who rose early in the morning, pronounced the name of Hari, one of the names of Krishna, only once, and taking his plough, went out and tilled the ground all day long. At night, he went to bed after pronouncing the name of Hari once more.

Narada said to himself, ‘How can this rustic be a lover of God? I see him busily engaged in worldly duties and he has no signs of a pious man about him.’

Then Narada went back to Sri Krishna and told him what he thought of his new acquaintance. Thereupon the Lord said, ‘Narada, take this cup of oil and go round this city and come back with it. But take care that you do not spill even a single drop of it.’ Narada did as he was told, and on his return the Lord asked him, ‘Well, Narada, how many times did you remember me in the course of your walk round the city?’ ‘Not once, my Lord,’ said Narada, ‘and how could I, when I had to watch this cup brimming over with oil?’ The Lord then said, ‘This one cup of oil did so divert your attention that even you did forget Me altogether. But look at that rustic, who, though carrying the heavy burden of a family, still remembers me twice every day.’

Indeed, conceit, pride, vanity or egotism have no place in the path of spirituality. They cannot touch those who are true devotees of the Lord. Rightly has it been said, ‘Before the fall, comes pride.’

A seeker must therefore be always cautious about it and seek to cultivate humility and dependence on God. □
Swamiji’s Statue at Malaysia Unveiled

A 12-ft tall bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda at Ramakrishna Mission in Petaling Jaya in Malaysia was unveiled on Sunday, 22 November 2015 by Shri Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India. Over two thousand people attended this historic event which was very well covered by the media, both in Malaysia and India. ‘Vivekananda is not just a name. He personifies the thousands-year-old Indian culture and civilisation.’ Modi said in Hindi after paying floral tributes to Swamiji’s statue. ‘From Vedas to Vivekananda, India’s culture is rich,’ he added.

Relief Work by Chennai Math

In view of the incessant rains that lashed Tamilnadu in November 2015, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai, carried out primary relief for the affected people. The Math conducted the relief work in the Cuddalore district which was worst affected region. The places where the Math distributed free relief material were Vandipalayam, Bhimanagar, Kuyavanpalayam, Cuddalore old town, Meliruppu of Katanpuliyur taluk, Narikuravar colony (Periyakuruchi) in Neyveli taluk, Kurunjipadi and
Kannuthoppu, Rasapalayam (Samattuvapuram) of that taluk.

As part of the flood relief, 1500 families were provided 10 kgs. rice, half a kilogram Dal, two sarees, two lungis, a towel, a bed-sheet, and a mat. And 400 families were further given vessels. The Math spent 10 Lacs rupees for this relief service.

At Chennai, the Mylapore Math distributed cooked food to around 5000 people of Foreshore Estate near Mylapore. Free medical care was provided by the Math to 1250 flood affected people in two places.

**Workshop for Teachers at Kadapa Centre**

Ramakrishna Mission, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh, conducted a Workshop for Teachers for two days—10 to 11 October 2015. Sri K.V. Ramana I.A.S., Collector of the Y.S. R. District, Kadapa, was the Chief Guest and inaugurated the workshop.

Around 126 teachers and lecturers from various districts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana took part in the event. Some of the professors from Yogi Vemana University too participated.

**Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj**

Nagpur Math held a special programme for 41 children of an orphanage in Nagpur on 12 October, the sacred birthday of Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj. After bringing the children to the Math, they were taken around the campus and shown a video film on Swamiji. They were also given food, clothes, stationery, etc.

Ranchi Morabadi centre conducted a special lecture on 30 September which was attended by 125 people.

**Other News**

Four students of Vivekananda Veda Vidyalaya, Belur Math, were awarded gold medals for securing all-India first ranks in Purva Madhyama (equivalent to Class 10) and Uttara Madhyama (equivalent to Class 12) examinations conducted by Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi, in 2013 and 2014. Smt Smriti Zubin Irani, Minister of Human Resource Development, Government of India, handed over the medals to them in the convocation of the Sansthan at New Delhi on 30 September.

The newly built guesthouse, Swami Vijnanananda Bhavan, at Ghatshila Math was inaugurated on 6 October, the sacred birthday of Swami Abhedanandaji Maharaj.

Silchar Sevashrama conducted youth conferences for school and college students on 9 and 10 October respectively which were attended by a total of 742 students and 62 teachers.

Visakhapatnam centre celebrated the silver jubilee of its temple consecration ceremony from 15 to 18 October which was attended by about 400 devotees.

Dr V Manikantan, a professor of the Vivekananda College of Chennai Vidyapith, secured Session’s Best Presentation award for his paper in the First Annual International Conference on Education organized by the International Institute of Knowledge Management at Beijing, China, on 9 and 10 April. A medal and a certificate were handed over to the professor.
The volume under review deals with different facets of Advaita. It begins with Adi Shankara’s multi-faceted personality which comes in for special praise in the well-written editorial.

The handy issue contains ten illuminating articles written by scholars. The articles may, broadly, be grouped under three heads namely (a) those that expound and explain the kernel of Advaita viz., the doctrine that the realisation of the identity between Brahman and Atman is the key to moksha, (b) those that explore and study the sacred hymns of Shankara which ignite and foster the spark of devotion and (c) an article that deals with the vital role of disinterested action (nishkama karma) in the imperative task of purification of the mind. The magnitude of Adi Shankara’s signal contributions in these triple areas of jnana, bhakti and karma, in the form of his profound commentaries on Prasthanas Traya, his Prakarana Granthas and his mindboggling hymnal literature can, to some extent, be realised by a perusal of these articles.

The first article titled ‘Vijnana-Nauka (Boat of Knowledge)’ deals with Adi Shankara’s treatise of that name and takes up for detailed study the commentary ‘Vijnana-naukavyakhyya’ of Mukunda Parivrajaka.

The second article titled ‘Upanishads—An Overview’ seeks to study the ideas elaborated in Kena, Taittiriya, Brihadaranyaka and Katha Upanishads. The related ideas contained in Panchadasi of Vidyaranya Swami are also explained to clarify the Upanishadic ideas.

The third article titled ‘Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada’ provides a bird’s eye-view of the Acharya’s achievements as an eloquent exponent of Advaita, as a far-sighted organiser of the four Pithas in the four quarters of the nation and as a prolific composer of sacred hymns. The fourth article ‘Pratibodhaviditam as Sakshi Chaitanya’ is a scholarly inquiry into the import of the phrase contained in Kena Upanishad.

The fifth article ‘Vision and Mission of Adi Shankara’ is a brief essay that turns the spotlight on his matchless commentaries on scriptures, on his voluminous hymnal output and his genius in establishing the worship of the six deities namely Aditya, Ambika, Vishnu, Ganesha, Maheshvara and Subrahmanya—and he is rightly referred to as ‘Shanmata Sthapaka’. This article offers us a glimpse of Shankara’s faces as a philosopher and a devotee.

The sixth article titled ‘Status of karma (action) in the Shankara Vedanta’ gives us an insight into Shankara’s conclusive view that karma, being an offspring of nescience, can only serve, once it is sublimated into karma yoga, as a feeder to bhakti and jnana. The seventh article captioned ‘Brahma Sutras or Vedanta—The Essence’ institutes a brief comparative study of the interpretations of the three Acharyas (Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva) on such recondite concepts as Brahman, jagat, jiva and salvation.

The eighth article titled ‘Sri Bhagavaccarana Stotram’ is an analytical study of the devotional hymn bearing the same name authored by Sri Brahmananda. While the ninth article titled ‘Bhujanga Stotras’ is a brief survey of various Bhujanga Stotras of Shankara, the tenth article ‘Adi Shankaracharya’s Atmabodha’ is an investigation of the various topics contained in the classic of 68 verses.

A couple of reviews about the book are also given at the end. The votaries of Advaita Vedanta
would find the journal both informative and inspiring.

N. HARIHARAN, MADURAI

**Hinduism Scriptures and Practices**

*By Prabha Duneja*

*Published by New Age Books, A -44, Naraina Industrial Area Phase-I, New Delhi-110 028. nab@newagebooksindia.com 2014, paperback, pp.448+lvi, Rs.400.*

Hinduism, as a staunch faith of millions, is a conglomeration of theory and practice. Hinduism is flourishing even by passing the test of time, threats by alien and rival religions, atheists, etc., for its well-knitted three fundamental elements viz., Shruti (scripture), Yukti (testifying through reason) and Anubhava (experience). Both reason and revelation lead to reverberating experience and enjoyment of the Divine Supreme.

The book under review is a review of the grandeur of the Hindu Scriptures as well as the richness and variety of Hindu practices in an encyclopaedic model. The author has undertaken a 'sublime journey graciously into the breadth and depth of Hindu faith, through the scriptural testimonies and practical resources. Scriptures the author makes a detailed description about are The Vedas, The Upanishads, Manusmriti, The Ramayana, The Mahabharata and The Bhagavad Gita. The message of the Vedas centres on individual prosperity and global welfare through ritualistic mysticism. The Upanishads provide with a unique source of spiritual guidance and enlightenment giving wider scope to the perennial philosophy viz., the Vedanta. The ordinance of Manu is ‘codification of the guiding rules for the proper management of the society’. The varna-dharma, ashrama-dharma, samskaras are elaborately explained here. The two grand epics viz., Ramayana and Mahabharata portray an ideal civilisation depicting the idea of humanisation of the Divine in fulfilling the mission on earth through well-knitted and thematic stories and simultaneously preaching the importance of the union and communion of the human and the divine through various means. The author of this book has narrated the stories of the epics and also has culled out the implied philosophical dissertations and directions for spiritual practices.

Chapter-wise deliberations of the Bhagavad Gita have been made to highlight the glory of this globally renowned text that deals with the ‘principles of spiritual religion which are not contingent on ill-founded facts’ unscientific dogmas, or arbitrary fancies. Besides the teachings of karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and jnana yoga, this magnificent text resolves several moral crises, political upheavals, domestic confrontations, social deformities and religious feuds which are well pointed out by the author. The transcendental and immanent aspects of one God—Parabrahman, appearing in manifold forms as Gods and Goddesses are described in the next two chapters. As the concept of God, the author brings forth the significant features of Hindu theology. The purpose of worshipping major Gods and Goddesses including the nine planets are characteristically described with authentication and annotation. For, they are guiding stars and moving spirits in every moment of human existence on this earthly planet, according to Hindu tradition.

The next two chapters elaborately elucidate the practice of yoga and meditation on the chakra mainly to lead a healthy, happy, spiritual, peaceful and prosperous life in order to build a harmony with our own inner being, with fellowmen and nature. As connected with the yogic practice, the chanting of the mantras help the soul to be imbued with powerful vibrations since ‘it is a thought-movement vehicle in sound and words’. According to the author, mantra is the gateway to freedom from the empirical thraldom. Nineteen festivals of major and minor kinds including the Buddha Jayanti are well explained with specific features of time, modes of worship, offerings, etc., which are celebrated throughout the year in the length and breadth of this sub-continent and abroad as well. These festivals serve as the purgation of body and mind so that the soul moves towards its own realisation and ultimately God-realisation culminating in divine ecstasy.

The last chapter gives a distinctive account of the status of women in Hindu society right from the Vedic era up to the modern period along with...
their roles in philosophical discussions, academic pursuits, domestic activities, administrative skills, enjoying equal freedom and rights, etc. The author deserves much appreciation for her stupendous task of presenting the entire gamut of Hindu religion, philosophy, culture, history, scriptures, symbols, rituals, etc., in one book in a commendable manner not merely for the sake of professing the doctrinal expositions of Hinduism, but also to espouse the pathway to perfection leading to spiritual advancement, enlightenment and emancipation. Any reader of this book with or without background knowledge of Hinduism will certainly be benefited with rich scholarship, richer understanding and richest enrichment of joy.

R. GOPALAKRISHNAN, CHENNAI

EXPLORING MYSTICISM A METHODOLOGICAL ESSAY
by Frits Staal.
Published by Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 41, UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. mlbd@mlbd.com 2013, Hardback, pp.230+xiv, Rs.495

Professor Frits Staal, an internationally known authority on Oriental Mysticism and Vedic rituals says in the book under review that it is possible to rationally investigate the mental state of the mystics by means of artificial methods. It is generally believed that mysticism (‘conceal’ in Greek) is ‘the pursuit of achieving communion or conscious awareness of the Ultimate Reality, the Divine, Spiritual Truth or God through direct personal experience rather than rational thought’.

The Professor strangely believes that drug facilitates meditation. He goes to the extent of saying that investigators of the mystic’s state of mind and body must subject themselves to drug experiment. According to him, there is a similarity in the experiences of all mystics all over the world and so their experiences must be independent of moral and religious superstructures. He does not deny that some mystics are born like Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Ramana Maharshi. There should not be any restriction, whatsoever, to a researcher to conduct an experiment on his own inner consciousness in private, he feels.

He opens his discussion by providing a slew of diverse approaches to the study of Mysticism applied mostly by western scholars. His bibliography runs to ten pages. Not being entirely satisfied with their results and the limitations of the approaches, the author comes out with his own hypothesis though it is inconclusive.

In the last part of the book, Professor Staal posits his theory of drug-induced mystical experience. Drug may weaken the will of the subject but may not abolish it, he avers. Though this drug experiment may serve as a booster first, the mystic can do away with it as he progresses in his experience. The Professor links his drug theory to Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra (IV-i), the use of soma libation in the vedic rituals and the myth of Siva’s swallowing the poison during the churning of the milky ocean. He interprets the word ‘visam’ (poison) as ‘hallucinogen’. His theory about the origin of the Vedas is interesting. ‘When the tribes of the Indo-European speech who composed the Vedas having entered the sub-continent from the north-west, moved further away from the mountains where the original soma grew...’(p. 10).

There are quite a few surprising things he mentions about Yoga also.

By way of conclusion, Professor Staal says: ‘... the altered states of mystical consciousness constitute a return to a state of human mind that existed before the emergence or origination of language. The theory explains... that mysticism belongs to a Golden Age, that it goes beyond language, and that reciting or meditating on mantras leads to mystical states’.

KPANCHAPAGESAN, BANGALORE

THE UPANISHADS DECRYPTING THEIR GOAL, PURPOSE AND CONTENT
by Sushila Krishnamurthi
Published by True Living Foundation, India, 409 Deecon Valley, Tapovan, Rishikesh Uttarakhand - 249 192. sushil.krish@gmail.com; 2012, paperback, pp.402, Rs.650.
This book is the culmination of the journey of a seeker, biochemist by training and profession, who gave up a promising and successful career to search for Truth. Hence it is a subjective commentary on the Upanishads rather than an exposition.

The foreword, which is somewhat long, explains the genesis of many of the themes in the chapters that are to follow and explains the writer’s stance. Her first guidance for answers to her questions came for writings of Swami Vivekananda, which, she says found a ‘an echo in my heart’ (p. 15).

Book I which follows this somewhat long foreword begins with an examination of the Vedic vision, which accepts worldly goals as part of human existence. The central theme of the Vedas is described by Krishnamurthi as being ‘pragmatic and truth–revealing’ (p 97 ibid). The second part contains her interpretation of the Upanishads (Vedanta) and several subheadings clarify concepts such as non-duality, wholeness, consciousness, freedom and bondage, etc. This part is in the nature of an overview,

This is followed by Book II, where the study of the Upanishads begins. The concept of ‘para-vidya’ is outlined through the famed exchanges with of the sage Yagnavalkya and Maitreyi, between Arjuna and Krishna and the Sage Angirasa and Shaunaka. Self-enquiry is established as the best form of the search for true Knowledge with knowledge of the Self as the only one worth seeking. From here emerges definition of spirituality as the ‘fundamental urge or need for wholeness’ (p. 177, ibid). In this part of the book the writer expands on the theme of ‘self-love’ being the highest form of love as propounded by the sage Yagnavalkya to Maitreyi and the journey thereby to immortality. Canto four explains the story creation and here the writer has used the Bhagavad Gita and the writings of Adi Shankara to validate her own views.

The last part of the book is the advaitic interpretation of freedom and happiness, culminating with the Happiness Recipe, wherein our interpretations of the concept of happiness are basically flawed. We use the word loosely, pleasure, satisfaction, self-seeking as against true happiness, which is true harmony and serenity born of the knowledge as outlines in the previous chapters. The ending note is on meditation or mind-watching, ranging from awareness meditation and culminating in the egolessness of Samadhi.

Krishnamurthi’s book is a really honest examination of life and the accepted parameters of evaluating it—such as success, achievement and wealth. The start of her own journey was dissatisfaction with her own apparently successful career and professional achievements, her conviction that there is more to life than all that, complacent as one may become and her all-out attempts for the search.

The book is very well produced—the only comment that can be made is that the footnotes often exceed the contents of the page, thereby creating distraction from the main contents. The book is the fearless examination of a seeker and that’s where its value lies.

PREMA RAGHUNATH, CHENNAI

HAPPINESS AND PEACE IN EVERYDAY LIFE
2013, Paperback, pp.83, Rs.25.

NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS
2013, paperback, pp.32, Rs.15.

Both by Swami Nikhilishwarananda.
Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai - 600 004. mail@chennaimath.org

Both these are lectures delivered by Swami Nikhilishwarananda, a senior monk and head of the Ramakrishna Mission Centre at Vadodara, Gujarat, given at the Ahmedabad Management Association in 2004.

In the first book, Happiness and Peace in Everyday Life, Swami Nikhilishwarananda points out how the world has become a small village and tension prevails at all levels of society—from the elderly people to students on to those in jobs. Even within the family tension prevails. The driving force in all human activity is the desire to acquire more money. This is the human
predicament all over the world. Affluent societies seem to be suffering from ‘affluenza’, which the Oxford Dictionary has defined as ‘a tendency of acquiring more and more goods for comfort, creating more tension and lack of peace of mind.’

The author points out that it is Vedanta that can relieve people of tension and give them peace of mind. We should look within and discover God, realize the presence of ‘Sat-chit-ananda’ meaning infinite existence, infinite consciousness, and infinite bliss. We are encouraged to live a life of detachment, pursue a spiritual discipline like one of the four yogas—Jnana, Karma, Bakthi, or Raja, work and pray for the welfare of others. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have shown the effulgent path of spiritual life. Swami Nikhileswarananda mentions how Mahendranath Gupta (M) was in a state of depression but Sri Ramakrishna transformed him into a devotee and ‘M’ wrote the monumental literary work The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. The author offers some hints as to how one may handle difficulties in life like a family quarrel, death of the near and dear, and other calamities. In all such situations the best thing is to maintain one’s calmness and balance of mind.

The second book, Nurturing Relationships, focuses on how to take care of relationships and make them last long. There are a variety of relationships—husband and wife, parents and children, teacher and student, labourer and employer, supervisor and manager, and they need a variety of approaches. He observes that people in most societies belong to three groups. The first group wants three P’s—Profit, Pleasure and Popularity, and finds Intelligence Quotient helpful in achieving these ends. The second group wants three H’s—Happiness in life, Harmony in family, corporate and society life, and Health, both physical and mental, to achieve the other two H’s. This group wants Emotional Quotient (EQ) in addition to Intelligence Quotient (IQ).

The third group aims at everlasting relationship with infinite happiness, joy and peace, and they need in addition to IQ and EQ the power of Spiritual Quotient. One needs the quality of sacrifice and unselfish service for developing relationships. As one provides good soil, fresh air, sunlight, manure, and water for a plant to grow, so one has to be good in oneself, have discipline, give freedom to the other, maintain proper communication and above all love and trust the other person. Also it would be wonderful to transform this love in a dynamic way into love for God. That would be real growth in human relationships.

--Swami Turiyananda, Letters, p.53
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