

Editorial

Reaffirming Our Goals

American Vedantist is now completing its thirteenth year of publication. During this time we have endeavored to communicate Vedantic ideals in an American context, to contribute toward planting Vedantic seeds in American cultural soil. Our contention has been that if these ideals are expressed in language that resonates with the local culture, they have a better chance of being received and understood. AV has also sought to bring together Vedanta devotees in the West in a common shared effort by serving as a forum where ideas, experiences and creative efforts could be exchanged, and so help to create community among Vedantists in the West.

This sharing and working together, in our view, is not only beneficial in creating solidarity among devotees and reaching out to a wider public, but is an expression of Vedantic ideals as lived and taught by Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda. The tendency of traditional Vedanta, as taught by important medieval commentators, was to stress individual liberation without social concern. By contrast, Sri Ramakrishna scolded Swami Vivekananda for being concerned only with his own inner realization and commissioned him to work for the welfare of all people. The Master also insisted that Holy Mother, shy and retiring as she was, should become a source of peace and blessing to innumerable seekers. The Master's vision was realized in the lives of both Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda. The monastic order founded by Ramakrishna and his disciples took as its motto, "For the realization of the Self and for the good of the world." This motto has also become the guiding principle for many non-monastic devotees around the world.

From the inception of *American Vedantist*, John Schlenck has served as its Coordinating Editor. Now, for reasons of health, he is retiring from this position, which will be held by Gary Kemper beginning with the Spring 2008 issue. Gary is a long-time devotee of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. He brings to this position devotion, editorial experience, and strong commitment to carry on the ideals and purpose for which the magazine was started.

As we move toward our fourteenth year of publication, we ask for the continued support of all our readers and contributors. Let us all continue to work together in service of Vedantic ideals, forging a sense of community as we daily dedicate our lives to the realization of the Self in all beings.

—The Editors

Meditation on Great Souls

John Schlenck

Reverence for great spiritual figures has been an important part of religious life from very early times. Swami Vivekananda says in *Bhakti-Yoga*:

Wherever [God's] name is spoken, that very place is holy. How much more so is the man who speaks His name, and with what veneration ought we approach that man out of whom comes to us spiritual truth! Such great teachers of spiritual truth are indeed very few in number in this world, but the world is never altogether without them. They are always the fairest flowers of human life—"the ocean of mercy without any motive." (Complete Works, III.51)

In a sense, these great souls are heroes, and to some extent we are all hero worshipers. We spontaneously admire and sometimes stand in awe of those who excel in any field. If we are spiritually inclined, saints and prophets will be our heroes.

Simple Reverence and Seeking Help

This spiritual "hero-worship" takes different forms. It may consist of a simple reverence for and acknowledgement of the prophets through whom spiritual truth has been revealed. In some traditions this reverence becomes more formalized and becomes a means of actually contacting and asking help from these great figures. In Mahayana Buddhism, Bodhisattvas—those who, at the threshold of Nirvana defer their own liberation until all beings are liberated—are regarded as direct helpers in the path to liberation. Any devotee can access their compassion and derive help from them. In some forms of Islam, the graves of saints (*pirs*) become focal points for reverence and worship. In Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianity, devotees may offer homage at the icons of saints and seek their help.

One of the means to perfection in yoga, according to Patanjali, is meditating on the heart of a saint. (*Yoga Aphorisms*, 1:37) Vivekananda gives his own translation and commentary as follows:

Or (by meditation on) the heart that has given up all attachment to sense-objects.

Take some holy person, some great person whom you revere, some saint whom you know to be perfectly non-attached, and think of his heart. That heart has become non-attached. . . Meditate on that heart; it will calm the mind. (CW, I.227)

Hinduism and Christianity worship and meditate on the greatest spiritual figures as Incarnations of God, though Christianity reserves this status for Jesus

alone. When these figures are regarded in this light, they are actually worshiped as embodiments of the divine.

Vivekananda continues in *Bhakti-Yoga*:

Higher and nobler than all ordinary ones are another set of teachers, the Avatars of Ishvara, in the world. They can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish. The lowest and most degraded characters become in one second saints at their command. They are the Teachers of all teachers, the highest manifestations of God through man. We cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshiping them; and indeed they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship. (III.51)

Even if we don't accept the idea of Divine Incarnation, we have to admit that many spiritual seekers have had their lives transformed by this kind of spiritual practice. It is a method of worship and meditation that has stood the test of time.

Working Within Human Nature

For most people, abstract ideas of God are not very helpful. They do not inspire many of us to undertake and persevere in the spiritual journey. Vivekananda continues:

By our present constitution we are limited and bound to see God as man. If, for instance, the buffaloes want to worship God, they will, in keeping with their own nature, see Him as a huge buffalo; if a fish wants to worship God, it will have to form an idea of Him as a big fish; and man has to think of Him as man. And these various conceptions are not due to morbidly active imagination. Man, the buffalo, and the fish all may be supposed to represent so many different vessels, so to say. All these vessels go to the sea of God to get filled with water, each according to its own shape and capacity; in the man the water takes the shape of man, in the buffalo, the shape of a buffalo, and in the fish, the shape of a fish. In each of these vessels there is the same water of the sea of God. When men see Him, they see Him as man, and the animals, if they have any conception of God at all, must see Him as animal, each according to its own ideal. So we cannot help seeing God as man, and therefore, we are bound to worship Him as man. (52-53)

Even in traditions where worship of any human being is prohibited, God is still conceived in human terms. In Abrahamic traditions, God sits upon his throne. He is the faithful shepherd who takes care of his flock. He is "the merciful, the compassionate." God is without form but with attributes that are quite human. To paraphrase Vivekananda, until we transcend our human nature and realize the divine as it really is, we are bound to think anthropomorphically.

That being the case, what is the harm of approaching the divine through a great soul? The important thing is intent. Is our goal the realization of God? Or do we use God or a saint as a means to obtain something lesser? Do we lean upon

God or a spiritual teacher as an emotional crutch and get stuck there? As Vivekananda says, it is acceptable to use a substitute or symbol of God, as long as we try to see God through that substitute. (CW 3: 57-58) But if we worship the substitute in and of itself and “not as a ‘help to the vision’ (Drishtisaukaryam) of God. . . it is at best only of the nature of ritualistic Karmas and cannot produce either Bhakti [devotion] or Mukti [liberation].” (59)

This distinction is important when it comes to reverence for one’s own teacher. Do we truly honor our teachers by trying to put into practice what they taught? Do we honor and revere what the teacher honored and revered? Is our devotion to the teacher an end in itself or a stepping-stone to liberation?

Some years ago, a much loved and respected swami who had worked in this country for nearly 50 years passed away. His disciples wanted to make a shrine out of his bedroom. The swami who was then in charge of the center said, “And suppose the disciples of the next swami want to make his bedroom a shrine? And the one after that? Soon all will forget Sri Ramakrishna and simply worship their own gurus.” All of these gurus would be very unhappy if they thought they were being worshiped instead of Sri Ramakrishna. There should be reverence for greatness wherever and in whomever it is found. But actual worship should be reserved for only the very highest spiritual figures.

Three Kinds of Meditation

One method of meditating on an Incarnation of God is by meditating on and sharing the words spoken by the avatara. This is taught in the Gopika Geetam of the Srimad Bhagavatam:

tava kathaamritam, taptajeevanam kavibhireeditam kalmashaapaham
shravanamangalam shreemadaatatam bhuvi grunanti te bhooridaa
janaa (X: 31. 9)

O Lord, your words, like sweet nectar, refresh the afflicted. Your words, which poets have sung in verses, vanquish the sins of the worldly. Blessed are they who hear of you, and blessed indeed are they who speak of you. How great is their reward!

M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta) quotes this verse at the beginning of each volume of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (translated into English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*).

Meditation on great souls may be said to be of three kinds: meditation on the words spoken by them, meditation on their forms, and meditation on incidents in their lives. In practice, these three types of meditation tend to overlap. The words spoken by great souls are not uttered in a vacuum. They grow out of their life experiences and realizations. Indeed, meditating on the words in the context of the life can give more inspiration and generate deeper feeling.

Jesus' saying, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone," is a great teaching in and of itself, when taken figuratively. But seen in the context of its occasion, where a group of men were ready to stone to death a woman convicted of adultery, the teaching highlights Jesus' compassion and generates love and devotion for him.

Or take Buddha's teaching that old age, disease and death are inevitable and painful, but that there is a way beyond them. Then place the teaching in the context of Kisa Gotami bringing her dead child to Buddha and asking him to bring it back to life. Buddha asks Kisa to bring a grain of mustard seed from a house where death has never entered. The story gives life to a teaching that may otherwise seem too general. One can envision the empathy and patience of Buddha, who knew that Kisa would have to find out for herself the inevitability of death in order to transcend it.

The teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita cover the whole of spirituality and are enough to build one's life on. And yet the setting on the battlefield, Arjuna's real-life situation, and the relationship between Krishna and Arjuna, give the teachings an immediacy that helps us to relate them to our own lives.

Much of the beauty of the *Kathamrita* lies in the setting which M. vividly describes, and even more for the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna's personality that emerges, over and above the teachings which are magnificent in their own right.

And if we meditate on the form (*murta*) of the avatara, incidents of the life are bound to come to mind. There is a very fine two-part article by Swami Atmajnanananda, "Meditation on Holy Mother," which appeared in *American Vedantist*, volume 10, nos. 3 and 4. In this, Swami Abhedananda's "Meditation on Sri Sarada Devi" is taken as a starting point for meditating on the form of Holy Mother, in this case as seen in the photograph that is used for worship. Each part of her form is mentioned, but these descriptions are then used to meditate on different aspects of her life and character. So when we use this photograph for worship, we automatically think of incidents in her life.

Towards the Living Presence

Until the avatara becomes living in our meditation, we have the recorded words, the life story and the iconic form—statue, painting or photograph—to contemplate. These are the materials we start with. In the cases of Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, they are a very rich treasure trove indeed, which we are very lucky to have. Still, to the devotee who longs to come into the divine presence, they seem inadequate, and indeed their very inadequateness spurs one on to yearn more intensely for the living experience. Nevertheless, they are very precious, and one feels that it is by God's grace that we have this much to hold on to, to make easier our meditation on the divine, for those of us who find it difficult to develop love for a more abstract conception of God. □

Glimpses of Swami Shraddhananda

*[Students and friends of Swami Shraddhananda, led by Lalita Parvati Maly, celebrated the 100th anniversary of his birth in the fall of last year by establishing a website in his honor. Many of those who had known him recorded and posted their reminiscences. These shared remembrances paint a varied and winsome portrait of a revered teacher who dedicated the last 40-odd years of his life to rendering spiritual service to the people of the United States, first as Assistant Minister of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, and then as Minister of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento. We are grateful to the contributors to the website for their permission to reproduce the following reminiscences. For those interested to join the website, the address is: http://us.rd.yahoo.com/evt=42879/*http://groups.yahoo.com/group/swami_shraddhananda/.]*

Swami Sarvadevananda

[The following incident took place at a Ramakrishna Mission Center in India.]

We took our seats on the floor. The Swami [Shraddhananda] took his seat on a couch. Just then the lights went off due to the failure of the supply current. Monks started running to find a matchbox and a candle, but in that pitch darkness they were running over the bodies of others in their efforts. Understanding the situation, the visiting Swami said, “It will be difficult for you to find the matchbox and the candle in this dark. There are some in the drawer of the table. Let me find them out in the light of the Atman.” It was a surprising statement for us. We were amazed to hear such a profound statement and thought, how one can relate and apply the truths of the scriptures in such a situation for solving our mundane problems of life?

Then he stood up and, touching the walls, moved slowly, reached the table, pulled the drawer out and found the matchbox and the candle there. Someone helped him to light the candle and then the Swami took his seat. He started reciting the ‘Single verse’ (Eka-shloki) composed by Acharya Shankara:

Teacher: My dear boy, according to you what is the light (*jyoti*) that illumines the objects (of the universe) during the day and at night?

Student: The light of the sun during daytime and the oil lamp etc. (moon, stars, etc.) during night.

Teacher: Then tell me what is the light needed to see the sun and the lamp, etc.?

Student: The eyes.

Teacher: When the eyes are closed, what light remains?

Student: *Buddhi*, the intellect.

Teacher: What light is capable of seeing the *buddhi*, the intellect?

Student: I, (that is) the *atman*, only am capable of seeing the *buddhi*.

Therefore, Sir, you are that Brahman, the supreme light, essence of the Self. O my lord, I am also of the nature of that supreme light."

Narrating this verse and its meaning, he then continued to say that the light of the Self is actually illuminating everything outside and inside. "Did you see how I got the candle and the matchbox? The light of the sun was not there. Neither was the light of the lamp. But the light of the *buddhi* showed me, through its assistant *chitta* or memory (which was contained in the mind), where I can get the matchbox and the candle. The organ of touch was the light which came from the mind, which was illumined by *buddhi*, that was in turn lighted by the light of the Self-luminous eternal lamp—the Atman. So we are that Light behind all the lights of our experience."

Cleo Satyamayee Andersen

We were in the [Sacramento] temple, and Swami was speaking from the lectern. When I heard him say, "You are not this body, you are not this mind, you have never been born, you will never die," I knew I was hearing absolute truth for the first time in my life. After the lecture he shook my hand and asked me to wait for him in the library. When he came to the library he talked to me briefly and we made an appointment for . . . the following Saturday. When I came for the appointment I could not talk; endless tears began to flow. So an appointment was made for the following Saturday. Again, no words would come, only tears. Finally, I was able to say, "My mother died a month ago and I am still grieving for her." Swami said, "No, those tears are not for your mother, those tears are for God." I knew I was again hearing truth. From then on I was blessed to be able to have Swami as the polestar of my life. I had found my teacher.

Pravrajika Brahmaprana

Walking with Swami Shraddhananda through the Vedanta Society retreat area gardens was always a joy. Every day at a certain bend in the path, he would look up at a large majestic tree and call out to it: "O Mother, shake your locks!" We would wait. And then, sure enough, a breeze would arise and the leaves would shimmer. This is how he daily made us feel that Consciousness was living, tangible, and all around us.

Amrita Salm

[On one occasion,] after conducting an evening class [at the Vedanta Temple] in Hollywood, rather than conclude it with a chant, as was customary, [Swami Shraddhananda] began to dance down the aisle of the temple. I think at that moment something clicked inside me, and I began to think what Thakur's disciples must have felt seeing him dance and be immersed in Samadhi. It was as if Thakur decided to visit us in the form of Swami Shraddhananda. That memory is still deeply impressed in my mind. I often recall that moment with awe and wonder and think to myself, was I really so fortunate as to have known a man of God, someone immersed in His joy? Someone who, by Thakur's grace, acted as an inspiration to my life.

Chuck Tamraz

The commute from California to New York was very difficult. The [airline] company had the crew scheduled for maximum use and minimum rest. I was really getting worn down commuting. I could never get enough time off to get back in balance. [My wife] Joan told me to go and talk to the Swami and maybe he could give me some help. This was after one of our crewmembers had fallen asleep driving home and had a very bad accident. I had fallen asleep at the wheel many times, but had avoided collisions. Joan saw me fall asleep at the dinner table and again emphasized seeing the Swami. I made an appointment with Swamiji. My expectation was that I would receive a profound mantra to let me sleep when I needed to sleep and be awake when I needed to be awake.

I met Swami and explained the situation to him. I waited for his advice. Swami looked at me and told me to wait. He left and returned with a book. Swami said, "Mr. Tamraz, this is a book of mine. It is now yours. Take this book and before you need to sleep, read it." I took the book, expecting some profound message of the Upanishads. However, the book was *The Humorous Mr. Lincoln*. My expression of surprise was seen by Swami. He again said, "Read this book before you go to sleep." I looked at Swami and, through insight, knew it would help. I rarely hug people. I hugged Swami and thanked him with all my heart. This book was taken on my flights, read before I was to sleep, and no matter how difficult a day was going to be, I slept. The humor made me chuckle, put me at ease, and I slept!

Jack Carmen

While we were finishing college in Fresno, and later as Shelley and I were raising children and managing the family farm in northern California, Swami

wrote dozens of personal letters. The letters contain teachings that we can reflect on today and forever. For example, one time he wrote:

“I fully understand your mental conflicts in the university atmosphere. My advice to you is to overlook them. The ideas and jargons are not a part of your life.” [He then referred to Jesus’ saying, “Render unto Caesar...” and wrote], “Apply this teaching to your case. Render unto the university its demands, but let them not touch your personal life. The university career is necessary for your living. Pass through this ordeal of a few years with patience and calmness... Don’t be depressed, dear Jack and Shelley. Depression is a great obstruction to spiritual life. Laugh away the self-contradictions and absurdities of the pundits. It is great fun to see the fooleries of the world.”

Barbara Bhadra Powell

It was Swami who taught me to notice and appreciate nature. I’d never been much aware of it before, being usually too shut up in my own mind and imagination. Soon after I began attending the Sunday services at the temple, Swami allowed me to accompany him on his afternoon walks in the garden. On one of the earliest ones, he kept stopping and pointing out various flowers and plants to me, asking if I knew their names. I told him I didn’t. “That,” he’d patiently explain, “is a —,” and he’d tell me its name. I came to understand that these beautiful things were important. God was in nature, and that was important. Another time, when it was only the two of us on the walk, the figs in the garden were at their ideal ripeness, and Swami took me on a fig hunt. He picked the best ones and we collected them in a pouch I made with the front of my shirt. After returning to the kitchen, he divided them and let me take home half of them. I swear they tasted transcendental. There was something heavenly in those figs.

Another time we were walking and though it was daylight the moon was already visible in the sky. He pointed it out to me and said, “Wherever you are in the world, when you look at the moon, and wherever I am in the world, when I look at the moon, we’re looking at the same moon. When you look up at the sky or breathe the air, it’s the same sky I see and the same air I breathe. It’s all one. No one is separate. Nothing is separate. You’re never alone!”

Mahamaya Schweitzer

In 1971, [my husband and I] decided to drive to Los Angeles, as we knew Swami Prabhavananda was not well and we both wanted to meet him and have his darshan. We asked Swami [Shraddhananda] if it was possible, and he arranged it. When we went to the temple to say goodbye before leaving, Maharaj

gave us a letter for Swami Prabhavananda. We reached Santa Barbara and were ushered into the Swami's presence, though told this visit would not be long as his doctor was there and didn't want him to talk too long. It was wonderful to meet him, as I had first read [his] translation of the Gita. . . when I was in high school. We talked for a while, and then he read the letter. He read it slowly, then put it down and loudly said, "No, I will not." We both said, "no you won't what?" We had no idea what Swami Shraddhanandaji had written in the letter. Swami Prabhavananda said, "Maharaj asks me to give you both initiation if you want it, but I won't. Go back to Sacramento," he said. "That may be a small pond, but Shraddhanandaji is a VERY BIG fish!!".

Pravrajika Vrajaprana

After seeing Swami Shraddhananda for years, I hadn't a clue that he was a great mystic, a spiritual luminary, a treasure. I thought he was sweet and "cute," and that is as far as it went. The Lord bless forever that determined swami in India [who], though aware of my fecklessness regarding Swami Shraddhananda, pulled me aside and said to me with surprising intensity, "Japa siddha! Japa siddha! He is perfected in japa!" Even if this swami considered me a fool, which surely he must have, I owe him an unpayable debt for pointedly informing me that there was in our midst, right in California where I lived, a man of great spiritual attainment, a man easy of access, a man willing to share his knowledge and insights, and a man of indelible sweetness. . .

Charlie Krishnadas Mitchell

On Valentine's Day in about 1992 [my wife] Sita got the idea to take a Valentine's balloon to Swami. We bought a gaudy, silver and purple heart-shaped balloon with purple and red streamers. Earlier in the day Swami had given an inspired lecture on love and the meaning of Valentine's Day. We came back that afternoon and were alone with him. (We were always amazed at how easy it was to be alone with him, this stunning holy man usually all by himself.)

So we gave him our Valentine balloon. He was beside himself with delight. He took the balloon out to the big, grassy lawn by the temple and began to chant and sing. He wanted to offer the balloon to the world, to spread love everywhere. He chanted over it. He blessed it. Then at last he let it go, and as it sailed away into the sky trailing its pretty streamers, Shraddhananda began to dance. This picture will remain in our minds for the rest of our days. Dancing and singing, radiating love and a child-like joy, there is Shraddhananda, like nothing anybody in this world ever gets to see, clapping his hands as the bright balloon drifts higher and higher, becomes a speck in the sky and then is gone. □

The Lord Is With Us

Look, he is standing
in full samadhi
we are each silent
the Lord is with us

All gaze in wonder
His face is shining
yes truly shining
the Lord is with us

His right hand is raised
offering blessings
our hearts are bursting
the Lord is with us

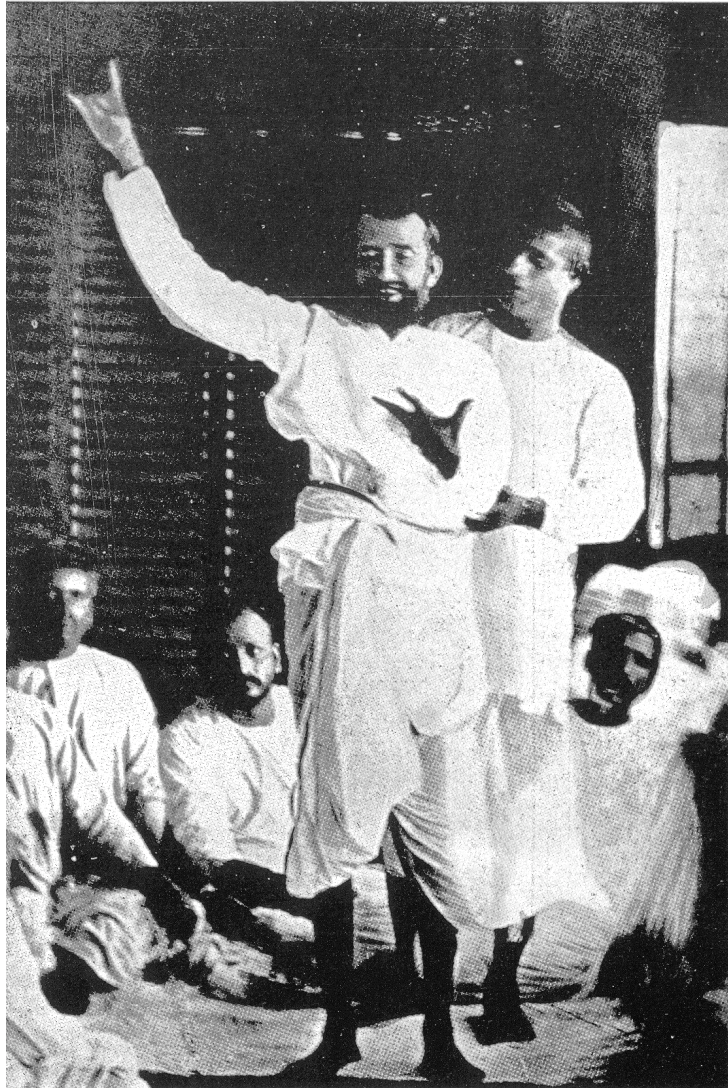
All feel His love, we
bathe in His radiance
thus He transforms us
the Lord is with us

That day passed away
as do all others
yet in my heart now
He is still standing

The Lord is with us
The Lord is with us
The Lord is with us
The Lord is with us

The Lord is with us
The Lord is with us
The Lord is with us
The Lord is with us

Shankara
(Gary Kemper)



Spiritual Stability Depends On Its Ability To Alter With Time

Bhagirath Majmudar

The choice of general topic for this issue of *American Vedantist* is both praiseworthy and noteworthy. It is praiseworthy because it creates an opportunity for us to reflect upon our internal belief system from which we can sort out, select and meditate on our selected “Great Soul.” We can share thereafter, our intimate spiritual observations to enrich our commonwealth of collective wisdom and identify unabashedly the truths that we have discovered.

It is noteworthy because we have embarked upon a time of transition where we cannot expect anymore that the past will passively project into the future. In fact, we currently experience an overload of unselected and unsought information torrentially showered upon us, threatening to uproot our basic belief system, ridiculing the religions and trivializing the great souls. To many people, nothing and nobody appears sacred anymore. Disbelief and disrespect are constantly at work to dislodge us from our foundation of faith. In such turbulent times, our challenge is not only to continue holding the torch, but also to pass it from hand to hand, generation to generation, and to make sure it remains aflame. How to face this threefold challenge?

A Challenge of Changing Times:

The Darwinian principle of survival of the fittest is now suffixed with an important corollary that the fittest were not the strongest or the most intelligent beings but they were most capable of changing and adapting. “When everything is about to be destroyed, a wise man lets a half of it go,” says a story from Panchatantra. The situation therefore, resolves to a question: Which half of what we have shall we keep, and which half shall we let go? How shall we preserve and permeate the essence of the message conveyed by some of the great souls of the past so that it survives in the soil of today and tomorrow? At the same time, should our reverence for the past Great Souls be so rigid and restrictive as to block the further creation of New Great Souls in a new milieu and millennium? Should we bend or should we break in keeping our traditions?

Let Us Not Be A Floo Floo Bird:

A floo floo bird flies backward to see what it has traversed rather than what is ahead of it. The philosophy of Vedanta however, is both *trikalajnani* (aware of the past, present, and future) and also *kalatita* (beyond time). It recognizes the change in times and responds to it with sensitivity and precision. It cannot

prevent the metabolic production of toxins of societal origin but knows how to generate antitoxins that are therapeutic for the malady, through *avatars* (divine incarnations). As I reflect upon some of the avatars described in Hindu religion, each one seems to connote a different philosophy of life. Rama, Krishna, and Buddha gave different messages that fulfilled the need of the time in which they were born, and yet had a common spiritual link. Should we become like them or adopt from them? Should we opt for the rigidity of Rama or the plasticity and shrewdness of Krishna? If we select ill-fitting traits from the past, they will be untenable for the present time and may cast a darkening shadow on the future. We have to learn from the past without retaining its rigidity. In thus transforming creatively, we express a deep reverence for our past spiritual traditions.

God and Incarnate Are Two Different Words:

Perhaps this is the very reason why we call them God Incarnate. They represent a mixture of Godliness and flesh, humanity and divinity. Humanity may be unstable, but divinity is solid and steadfast. Humanity can change, but divinity is beyond the need for change. Humanity is embodied and subject to deterioration. Divinity is disembodied and free from the flaws of flesh. Humanity can carry information and knowledge; divinity blends them with wisdom. In the Bhagavad Gita, therefore, Sri Krishna accepts the event of “*Dharmasya glanih*” (untoward decline of religion), and reassures that he will be born time and again to set it right. That is why Rama and Krishna had to be born in flesh to weed out the wicked humans. Their enemies were different, their wars were different, and accordingly their weapons were different too. We have to hold them both with deep reverence while withholding from them blind worship.

Reverence Versus Worship:

For the sake of comprehension, if we accept that God and Incarnate are analogous but not synonymous words, then the words *worship* and *reverence* will follow a similar path. Reverence is a cultivated feeling born out of contemplation, repetitive reflections resulting in a deep devotion. Worship may have the same end stage but may sometimes bypass the previous steps. We have to be mindful that the newly emerging society seems to have a progressively weakening tendency to worship. A compensatory sense of reverence therefore, needs to be recreated and reinforced to keep the flame alive.

I would agree that the differentiation between reverence and worship is often arbitrary. At the same time, the fusion of the two created a sense of confusion in me while growing up as a child in India. On the one hand, blind worship was discouraged. On the other-hand, a child was prohibited to question parents, teachers, saints, holy scriptures, religious traditions etc. Paradoxically, I was asked to admire Nachiketa, a child who challenged his father for a right reason,

while instructing me to follow the orders of my elders unthinkingly. The culmination of all these confusions and contradictions, after years of meditative introspection led me to understand the analogy of the legendary white swan (*hamsa*) who can separate milk from water, truth from half truth. I learnt that the worship should not be blind but it may help sometimes to close our eyes to generate an inner vision. Thus I understand the statement by Yudhishtira in his reply to the Yaksha in the Mahabharata that no logic is free of flaws, that religious scriptures can give diverse messages, that no one Rishi is always and infallibly right. Ultimately, therefore, one should follow the path indicated by great men, but with discrimination. This Shloka can be interpreted differently by different people, and the richness of the Sanskrit language will permit it. To me, however, it indicates that we should carefully select our great soul(s) and follow their path discreetly rather than totally. It is very interesting that Vyasa, the author of the Mahabharata, described Yudhishtira as a *dharmaraja*, a great soul full of all human talents and virtues. He nevertheless had one inherent weakness: addiction to gambling! Thus no human being is ever free of flaws.

Once we grasp this principle that to err is human but to transcend it is divine, the mud-throwing on the great souls of the past which has become the mindless fashion of today will not bother us any more. An automatic immunity to such blasphemy will shield our deeper spiritual self. We will revere them even more because of what they achieved in spite of their human limitations. We are encouraged even more to free ourselves from our human fetters and pursue our goal more decidedly. We are more likely to proceed thereafter from darkness to light, from untruth to truth, from death to immortality. The great souls will now appear not only greater in their magnitude but also divine in their spiritual leadership. We will develop a sense of deep reverence for them for the prophylactic care with which they nurture our spirituality.

The Future:

We are headed towards the crossroads of culture and civilization. Rapidly developing technology and its aftereffects will induce a new twist and turn in our so-far linear passage. This will be the period wherein a spiritual outlook will be most needed and, strangely, most rejected. The fractured limbs of religious faith can potentially be plastered together only by a higher plane of spirituality. I believe beyond doubt that Vedantic philosophy can achieve this. Vedanta can be our beacon, a lighthouse to guide us to our right path.

The changing times nevertheless will necessitate a change in our approach. In coming years, people may refuse to believe in God but they will believe in “goodness.” They would have a developing sense of reverence for an integrative ecology. They may not believe in one God Incarnate but they will believe in the congregation of human beings propounding spirituality, perhaps without using that term. “Sanghe Shaktih Kalau Yuge” (Union of human beings will be the

strength in Kali Yuga), is a well-known Sanskrit aphorism. Such congregations will include monks, musicians, scientists, philosophers, and many others, intent upon helping all biological beings, and they will restore our eco-spiritual balance in a broader sense. Their collective wisdom will draw them to Vedantic principles, but they may call them “New and Improved!” This should not bother our current generation of Vedantists because we have long believed that, “Truth is one; sages call it variously.” Even our new twisted path will lead us from unreal to real, from darkness to light and from death to immortality. The neo-science when completely integrated with spirituality will be a new Avatara illustrating God Incarnate. □

Krishnamurti’s “Pathless Land” A Personal Reflection on This Teacher’s Role

Richard Simonelli

Jiddu Krishnamurti shocked a segment of the spiritual-seeking world of the late 1920s when he dissolved Theosophy’s Order of the Star on August 2, 1929 and walked away from his prescribed role as the messianic leader who was to guide the Theosophical Movement of those times. In words that carried meaning far beyond Theosophy he said,

“I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. ...Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path. If you first understand that, then you will see how impossible it is to organize a belief. A belief is purely an individual matter, and you cannot and must not organize it. If you do, it becomes dead, crystallized; it becomes a creed, a sect, a religion, to be imposed on others. This is what everyone throughout the world is attempting to do. Truth is narrowed down and made a plaything for those who are weak, for those who are only momentarily discontented. Truth cannot be brought down, rather the individual must make the effort to ascend to it. You cannot bring the mountaintop to the valley. If you would attain to the mountain-top you must pass through the valley, climb the steep, unafraid of the dangerous precipices.”

Krishnamurti did what the Buddha did when the Buddha left the formal religious structure of his day to find the Truth that can only be found deeply within oneself. Krishnamurti said that a prescribed pattern of study, behaviors, practices, and interior orientation—that is, a path—is not an adequate formula to

realize Truth. No formula *as formula* can ever be adequate. In other words, realizing Truth is never a “turn the crank” proposition. That’s what I believe the notion of “path” means in the statement *Truth is a pathless land*.

Guidelines for a Spiritual Seeker

Those who are inspired by Krishnamurti’s teachings, or even those just curious to know what this spiritual revolutionary said, will very quickly learn that there are major themes and guidelines for a spiritual seeker all through Krishnamurti’s work. To me, they are his own interior discoveries, expressed through his own personality, temperament and background as a man of India, himself raised in a Brahmanic tradition until the age of 16. A spiritual aspirant may utilize them as powerful guidelines, keeping in mind that they are expressed through Krishnamurti’s unique lens. But his statements and guidelines are not properly speaking, *a path*, nor did he ever intend them to be. A path is a trail, which, if followed, will lead to some particular place, pretty much guaranteed. There is no guarantee that a spiritual seeker will realize the spirit and intent of the Vedas or Upanishads, or what the Buddha, Krishnamurti or others have realized, by following a path in the sense of a formulaic pattern leading to Truth. Such a formulaic journey may help a person to clarify his or her difficulties and even cleanse harmful karma up to a point. But the actual phenomenon of realizing Truth is more like an act of grace, never a mechanical pathway.

In my own journey I followed prescribed spiritual paths and practices, which did indeed help clarify me up to a point. But after a certain point, religious formality for me became an obstacle to realizing the formless, luminous and free goal that the paths point to. I knew of Krishnamurti’s powerful caution against following a particular path even as I spent 16 years in formal Japanese Zen and Tibetan Buddhism. Those formal paths did help me find myself because I was so very lost, as a human being, as well as a spiritual seeker. I needed them and am grateful that they were available to me. But as soon as the *being* began to break through to Truth in its own unique way, the formality of religion and its practices became an obstacle, just as Krishnamurti had taught. It was then that I realized for myself that Truth is indeed a pathless land.

In Search of Life’s Meaning

Jiddu Krishnamurti’s teachings have had a profound effect on my life. I first became aware of Krishnamurti in the 1960s because his books were everywhere. To someone who prowled the bookstores in search of my own life’s meaning, it was impossible not to pick up one of Krishnamurti’s books, read a bit, and then... And then what? Well, in my case, in that time period...to put them right back on the shelf! I didn’t really connect with Krishnamurti until at least five

years later when a dear friend introduced the teachings to me in a very personal manner in the early 1970s.

William D. Quinn was a man twenty years older than myself. Bill had become a personal friend to Krishnamurti in the 1940s, during World War II, when Krishnamurti was confined to Ojai, California and unable to travel because of the war. As a young man, Bill visited Krishnamurti when the latter was in Ojai, both during and after the war. He lived with Krishnamurti during some of the 1940's. The deep basis of Krishnamurti's *being* must have awakened the same in Bill. So by the early 1970s when Bill and I were both living in Mt. Shasta, California, Krishnamurti's teachings, and more than that, his *presence*, were a guiding light in my friend's own life. It is through my friendship with Bill Quinn that I came not only to the Krishnamurti teachings, but also much later to the inexpressible deep source that birthed those teachings.

Bill's gone now, but I have many fond memories of listening to Krishnamurti's talks with Bill on an old Hitachi cassette tape recorder from 1972 through 1977 in Mt. Shasta. We would listen, Bill would explain what he thought was being said, and I would just sit in wonder. As a science professional in those days, an electronic engineer, the quality of Krishnamurti's heart-mind was entirely different than anything I had ever heard from the mindset of my profession or from my colleagues. Here was a man pointing to the basis of life, and especially, to the ground of my own life in a manner qualitatively different than I had been taught in evidence-based science. I also participated in the Zen Buddhist sitting practice of meditation during those years and found harmony between formal meditation and the teachings. Sitting meditation allowed me the direct experience of my mind, while Krishnamurti's teachings put discoveries into context, pointing out what I did easily miss.

Now, at age 64, I feel enormous gratitude for Krishnamurti's guidance in my own life's journey. When I stop and reflect on what the nature of that gift might be, I come to two main points. First, the teachings helped me learn how to work with my own mind. Krishnamurti's books and talks present an understanding of the mind that one may utilize in an entirely personal manner to live in self-awareness and clarity. Teachings on the nature of listening, what it means to pay attention, the folly of looking outside oneself for spiritual authority, the foolishness of comparison, awareness of the subject-object split that we all experience, the courage to look into one's own fear, and the awareness to realize the fundamental love, free of emotion, that underlies everything are just a few of his lessons that come to mind.

Recognizing Fear

I often use a simple insight from Krishnamurti to help recognize when my own fear comes up and so not cover it over with clever escapes. The insight?

Quite simply, *there is fear*. His teachings on noticing the *content of consciousness* have also enriched my life. The book *Meeting Life* comes to mind as a wonderful compilation that goes deeply into the intricacies of mind process, and even beyond to the very *nature* of mind, so mystically conveyed by his experience of both love and of the natural world on its pages.

For me, there is a second thrust in Krishnamurti's teachings that now cuts even deeper than his discussion of the mind, especially as I get older. This is his sharing of the deeper, mystic source of reality that comes up so strongly in some of his journals. *Krishnamurti's Notebook* has been an enormous help to me in later life. It is in the *Notebook* that K most completely shares his experience of what he called the *other* or an *otherness*, which was his reality right up until his passing in 1986. In a sense, direct experience of what K called *the other* is a greater dimension than the explication of mind process that makes up so much of the teachings. If what I'm calling the "first thrust" of his gift to me is pointing out the important features of the mind, and how to work with them, then this "second thrust" might be called realizing the nature of the mind.

Krishnamurti's lasting gift to me was the statement made to his friend Asit Chandmal after his final public talk in January of 1986 in Madras, India, just 6 weeks before his death. "Be absolutely alert and make no effort," he said. Bill Quinn had sent me a Xeroxed copy of Asit Chandmal's article, *The Last Walk* from *Bombay—The City Magazine*, dated March 7-21, 1986, pp. 34-38, when it had come out following Krishnamurti's passing. I still have it. I was floored when I read those words. Yes, we must work very hard in full awareness with our minds. Yes, we must live the challenge of change, perhaps now as never before. But who or what is the "we" or the "I" who is doing this necessary very hard work? The journey of awakening requires hard work, but this discovery is effortless. "Be absolutely alert and make no effort," he said. This is a teaching on the *nature of mind* that I use almost every day to bring myself back to the primacy of egoless *presence* in moment-to-moment experience.

A Mirror for Finding Oneself

Bill Quinn died in 1998, but even to this day I often slip and think, "I ought to give Bill a call to discuss this and that aspect of Krishnamurti's teachings." We used to do that often. Now I have many of Krishnamurti's books peppered with sticky notes and underlining. But it is that *otherness*, which is something one must discover in one's own terms, that is my deepest connection to Krishnamurti. He says in *Meeting Life*, "Be alone, sometimes, and if you are lucky it might come to you, on a falling leaf, or from that distant solitary tree in an empty field." He helped me find the essential love that authors everything. He warned people against interpreting him and I hope I do not do so. His teachings offer a kind of path—but they are pathless in the traditional sense. He is a mirror in which I find myself.

Sri Ramakrishna spoke of the fundamentally single goal of different forms of spirituality. He came to understand this through his own realization experience followed by years of insight about the different faiths. Realization occurs in an instantaneous auspicious moment. Afterwards, the personal journey continues, but it is one of clarification, stabilization and depth rather than the further pursuit of a goal. It becomes a journey without a goal in the usual sense. The goal orientation of “path” comes to an end, freeing one from the sense of further seeking, striving and becoming. Absorption into what is sometimes called “the formless,” but is really inexpressible, then deepens without effort in the sense of ego-driven objectives. This is, in fact, abidance at the essence of all spiritual forms. It depends on one’s recognition of, and self-empowerment in that auspicious moment. This kind of core experience is spoken of in Vedanta, Buddhism and in Krishnamurti’s teachings; it is, I believe, one way to examine and explore the commonality of these three different approaches. This is what I have come to know for myself.

Putting Aside Belief in Favor of Experience

Now is a time for healing the wounds of religions and spiritual systems of all sorts. Krishnamurti’s teachings have the potential to assist in this healing time because they take a fresh look at beliefs and attitudes that have been above examination for too long. They encourage one to put aside beliefs in favor of direct experience. Direct experience of Truth is only the beginning of a fully contemplative life. The deepest meeting ground for us is then in the interiority of contemplation. How may this take place? We may have to be willing to face our fear. Perhaps, to have the courage to listen to something in interpersonal communication with which we might disagree or just misunderstand. Perhaps, to have the honesty and humility to own up to our own fear in such communication. *There is fear...* Creative communication often begins this way.

Krishnamurti shared a secular spirituality, free of religious, cultural or scientific attachments. Like other great teachers, he never intended his teachings to be codified as a religion or ideology. He pointed at the essence of Truth and insisted each of us come to *know* for ourselves. He pointed away from formulas, paths and attachment to belief systems. He pointed towards ineffable discovery in surrender.

Simple, loving presence is the pathless land where we meet in the deepest sense. It is pathless because we have been meeting here right from the start. In this land, trees and birds, rivers and skies all carry love. A quiet mind allows us to hear our brothers and sisters, as well as the land. This land is always right here and right now, no matter what. Nothing blocks the way. We humans are always welcome. □

Sri Ramakrishna, The Artist of Consummate Vision

Sreemati Mukherjee

Songs evoke the sense of the *Ramakrishna Kathamrita*¹ almost as powerfully as the documentary realism of M's inimitable style. Indeed, song was one way through which Ramakrishna taught and expressed himself. It is commonplace to view Sri Ramakrishna as the visionary par excellence, the God-intoxicated man, whose reality was not the corporeal reality that circumscribes most of us, but another reality/consciousness that enabled him to derive ecstatic joy from all that he beheld. Sri Ramakrishna may be thought of as an example of the child visionary, richly celebrated in Romantic poetry, and also in Bibhuti Bhushan's immortal *Pather Panchali*.² Years back, I remember being impressed by that incident in Thakur's childhood when, crossing a field, he fell senseless to the ground on viewing the beauty of a flock of cranes as they made their way across the sky.³ I was reminded of Atulprasad Sen's song "Pagla monta re tui bandh/ Keno re tui jetha setha korish praner phand/ Sheetol baye uthle nishi/tui keno re hosh udashi,"⁴ of which I offer a rough translation:

"O mad one, rein in your mind.
Why do you create snares for yourself everywhere?
When night comes on a cold wind,
Why, oh why do you become melancholy?"

These lines, reflecting the poetic personality's tendency to continuously cross the threshold of the self and find it mirrored in the manifold beauties and sorrows of the world, offer for me a key to understanding Sri Ramakrishna's infinite capacity for empathy. Keats, with reference to Shakespeare, called this capacity "Negative Capability."⁵ This is how he describes the plastic⁶ power that he felt

¹ All references to the *Ramakrishna Kathamrita* are from the Udbodhan publication, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, recorded by M. (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1st edition in two volumes, 1986-1987). I have used my own translations of the original Bengali everywhere.

² Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, *Pather Panchali*, trans. T.W. Clark & Tarapada Mukherji as *Song of the Road*. (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1968).

³ Romain Rolland. *The Life of Ramakrishna*. Trans. E.F. Malcolm-Smith. (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1992), 22-23.

⁴ Atulprasad Sen, *Geetigunja*. (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1931).

⁵ John Keats, *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (San Diego & New York: HBJ Publishers, 1971), 474.

⁶ William Wordsworth uses the word "plastic" to describe the fluid operations of the imagination in Book II of his long autobiographical poem *The Prelude*. In this poem,

allowed Shakespeare to create both an Iago (archetypal villain) and an Imogen (archetypal virtuous character).⁷ Keats tells his brothers George and Thomas in a letter:

...at once it struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean negative capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us not further than this, that with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.”⁸

Keats’s remark reminds me of the countless occasions in the *Kathamrita* when Thakur cautions against trying to understand everything. He says, “Why is it important to know how many mangoes are in the garden, when all you actually want to do is eat the mangoes.” (127) He also exhorts a devotee at one point with the comment that it is futile for dolls made of salt (meaning us) to try to measure the ocean! When Keats tells Richard Woodhouse that contrary to the “egotistical sublime”⁹ or emphasis on self which characterized Wordsworth’s poetry, he rather belonged to that group of poets (like Shakespeare)¹⁰ who delighted in both “foul or fair,”¹¹ I am struck by Thakur’s protean sensibility that made him open to the existence of puzzling contraries in this universe. Thakur probably never reacted with “gusto” to “the dark side of things,”¹² but he too shied away from any uniform, unilateral, monochromatic view of existence. Thakur tells M (September 26, 1883):

Wordsworth further describes this power: “An auxiliary light/ Came from my mind, which on the setting sun/ Bestowed new splendor; the melodious birds,/ The fluttering breezes, fountains that ran on,/ Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed.” See Penguin Classics edition of Wordsworth’s *Selected Poems*, pg. 334. In the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge used the word ‘esemplastic’ to describe the poetic imagination, a term which he probably derived from Schelling’s essay, “On The Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature,” where Schelling argues that Nature and Art are intimately linked. In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge asserts that the imagination is a divine faculty capable of “the reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities.” (chapter XIV)

⁷ John Keats, Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27th October, 1818. *English Critical Texts*, D.J. Enright and Ernest de Chickera (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1962), 258.

⁸ *Critical Theory*, 474.

⁹ John Keats, Letter to Richard Woodhouse. D.J. Enright and Chickera, ed., *English Critical Texts* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1962), 258.

¹⁰ Parenthetical explanation is mine.

¹¹ *English Critical Texts*, 258.

¹² *Ibid.*, 258.

Hazra discriminates and ratiocinates too much! He's forever calculating, how much of God's energy is manifested in the world and how much is left! My head aches/whirls to hear him talk that way. ***I know that I don't know anything.*** Sometimes I think that He/She is Good and sometimes Evil. What do I know of Him/Her? (281) (Translation mine.)

A memorable instance of Thakur's capacity for empathy with creatures less powerful than human beings is his deep concern for the cats who had taken refuge with him at Dakshineswar, and his exhorting Nistarini Devi to look after them well.¹³

According to the Romantics, a sense of wonder is *the* paramount quality in a poet.¹⁴ A parallel may be found in the *rasa adbhuta* of the Classical Indian aesthetic system.¹⁵ An instance of Thakur's indefatigable sense of wonder is when he talks about ants as manifestations of Divinity! Once, while traveling from Burdwan, Thakur ventured into a field to see what kind of creatures lived there. As Thakur narrates this incident to M on the 23rd of December, 1883, it is interesting to trace the events leading up to Thakur's ecstatic revelations.

Instances in the *Kathamrita*, where Thakur responds to external stimuli in the shape of a song, or a person or a reference to God, with a song or a dance or a story are innumerable. M. records these in his inimitable manner, leaving just enough details for the perceptive reader to work in his/her own interpretations. In this case, M says that on hearing the sound of instruments playing in the *roshan choki*¹⁶ of the *nahabat*, Thakur was immediately transported to a world of happiness. (349) He tells M. that Brahman has become the World. He further adds that, at some point when someone had said that God was not present in a particular place, he immediately saw that God indeed had become all the creatures in that place. He adds that they were just like innumerable bubbles on

¹³ Nistarini Ghosh, *Ramakrishna As We Saw Him*, ed. Swami Chetanananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama and St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1990), 362-363.

¹⁴ William Wordsworth, "Preface To The Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads." *Critical Theory*, 437.

¹⁵ For a recent explication of the *rasa* theory in ancient Sanskrit poetics see Edwin Gerow, who identifies in *Pather Panchali* the existence of the *rasa adbhuta* in Apu. "The Persistence of Classical Esthetic Categories in Contemporary Indian Literature: Three Bengali Novels." *The Literatures of India: An Introduction*. Ed. Edward C. Dimock, Jr. et al. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 237.

¹⁶ *Roshan choki* was a temporary structure attached to houses of ceremony, where usually the *shenai* player was seated, and from where the sound of his instrument would fill the air with a sense of the celebration of the moment. At the Dakshineswar temple, Rani Rasmoni had probably arranged for musical instruments to be played at different times of the day.

the surface of water. He then talks about the Burdwan incident, where he says that going into the field to see what creatures lived there, he saw a million ants walking, and that seemed to him an indication of the presence of God!

Thakur goes on to talk about flowers and petals as manifestations of God's splendid energy and beauty, and while he talks about these things he passes into samadhi. This incident dramatically demonstrates not only Thakur's capacity for unselfish enjoyment and the kind of empathy and imagination that leads to inspired perception in poets, but also his capacity to pass beyond the sense-directed and perceivable to a state that is irretrievable in language. In that state of immersion in something that is clearly beyond the reach of the senses, Thakur says, " Oh! I have become. Oh! I have come." Doesn't Thakur's declaration of arrival indicate his ability to be all things and feel like all things, to encompass all things within himself?

An example analogous to Thakur's ecstatic union with his subject, may be taken from Wordsworth's long autobiographical poem "The Prelude" when he says:

....I, at this time,
Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.
Thus while the days flew by and years passed on,
From Nature overflowing on my soul,
I had received so much, that every thought
Was steeped in feeling; I was only then
Contented when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still;
O'er all that, lost beyond, the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart. . .¹⁷

In the above lines, one gets a sense of the capacious spirit that is needed to derive enjoyment out of the rhythms of Nature, something Rabindranath's *Balai*,¹⁸ whose nerve ends regulated themselves according to the rhythms of Nature, was also capable of doing. Although Balai is not a poet, he has a poetic sensibility. I think that in spirit and imagination these figures are analogous to Sri Ramakrishna. One must not forget that the poet or the artist has always been hailed as a prophet or a *vates*,¹⁹ because he/she sees with the "visionary"²⁰ eye.

¹⁷ William Wordsworth, *Prelude, Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994), 335.

¹⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali* (The Collected Works). Vol. 24 (Calcutta: Viswabharati, Bengali year 1354), 220-237.

¹⁹ For the idea that poetry is divine, one goes back to Plato's assertion in the *Ion* that the poet/rhapsode speaks with a "divine madness." Other essays that allude to the same idea are Sir Philip Sydney's "An Apology For Poetry", and Shelley's "Defense of Poetry." In

Although one runs the risk of reducing Thakur by comparing him to poets and artists, who in private life often display petty ego and selfishness, one still feels that the selflessness that takes place when an artist seeks union/identification with his/her subject, makes such people close to Thakur in spirit. When I read the lines describing the character/nature of the poet in Wordsworth's critical manifesto *Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads*, I feel that they come close to describing Thakur's habitual disposition of deriving joy from all he saw. In Wordsworth's inimitable words, the poet is a man who is

.....endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.²¹

Holy Mother commented at one point that Thakur was always blissful, and she had never seen him in a state of melancholy.²² Thakur's state of continual bliss reminds students of English Literature of yet another Romantic symbol linked to the concept of ineffable joy. Yes, Shelley's skylark, of which there is mention in the *Kathamrita* itself. How uncanny that Thakur's words should recapitulate the central idea of the poem. Shelley, who believed in an ecstatic response to life, apostrophizes the bird (actually, an analogue of the poet), describing its upward movement to the sky:

Hail to thee, blithe spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from heaven or near it
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest,
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,

the latter, Shelley claims that "poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge," and also that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." See "A Defense Of Poetry" in *English Critical Texts*, 250 & 255.

²⁰ *Selected Poems*, 336.

²¹ *Critical Theory Since Plato*, 437.

²² From *Sri Sri Mayer Katha* (The Gospel of Holy Mother) (Calcutta: Udbodhan, Eighth edition, 1962), 132.

And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.²³

Shelley's lines ring uncannily through Thakur's description of the free soul winging through eternity in joyous abandon: In the 63rd chapter (October 30, 1885), Thakur declares to M:

Do you know what the jnani's meditation is like? It's like there's the eternal (endless) sky, and a bird is winging through it, its wings spread in utter joy. The soul is the bird in the sky of *chit* (pure consciousness). Not confined to a cage, gloriously free and joyous. (991)

M expanded the implications of Thakur's statement by footnoting a reference to Shelley's poem. It makes the modern reader agree with Jung, that we truly get our images from an archetypal reservoir of images, thereby creating a remarkable consonance of words and images in literatures that are otherwise disparate in time, place and historical context.²⁴

Throughout the *Kathamrita*, the dialectic of the *Sakara* (God With Form) and the *Nirakara* (God Without Form) through questions that various devotees pose to Thakur, and his own transition from ecstatic response to the various forms of God to the enigmatic state of *samadhi*, bring us close to questions of both artistic/ecstatic response and mystic response. In the former the response, no matter how refined, is still sense-directed (therefore artistic), whereas in mystic response the initial direction given by the senses melts and transmutes itself into something that is so overpowering as to be practically irretrievable in language. As one may divine from what Thakur himself says about *samadhi*, it is a state beyond imagination, and therefore beyond form as well. However, Thakur, the lover of the many forms of God, did not wish to stay in a state of *samadhi* perpetually. He ratifies love, emotion and *bhava* (ecstasy). To Prankrishna he says, "He is not only without form, he is also with form. One can view his forms. One can glimpse his innumerable and wonderful forms through *bhava* and *bhakti* (ecstatic love and devotion). Ma appears to me in many forms." (131). He goes on to add, "Yesterday I saw Mother in saffron clothes which hadn't been stitched." (131). "I also saw Gauranga (Chaitanya) wearing a dhoti with a black border." (131)

As a dialectic of the form and the formlessness of God runs through the *Kathamrita*, so does a dialectic of *shakta* (Kali worship) and *vaishnava* (Vishnu or Krishna worship) phases or aspects of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna is known as an *avatar* of shakti or the Goddess Kali; however, his intrinsic love for

²³ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "To A Skylark," *The Golden Treasury*, Collected by Francis Turner Palgrave (Harmondsworth: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), 270.

²⁴ C.G. Jung, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry," *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series XX. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*. Vol. 15. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 80.

and identification with Sri Chaitanya and the Radha mode account for a large part of the charm of the *Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. Thakur felt very close to Radha, Krishna's consort, often expressing a close sense of affinity with her. Indeed, while Thakur was in Vrindavan, the old sadhu Gangamata, identified in Thakur the Radha state of mahabhava and had given him the name "Dulali," (darling friend).²⁵

To emphasize the Radha state of *mahabhava* in Thakur, I will now allude to the incidents that took place between Kedar Chatterjee and Thakur on January 1, 1883. Kedar Chatterjee—in whom M sees qualities of the gopis, so complete was his immersion in God, and whose eyes would overflow at any mention of God—had come to see Thakur. On seeing him, Thakur was immediately transported to the *Vrindavan leela* of Sri Krishna. Sri Ramakrishna was a man of splendid empathy, as indicated by M's comment on March 11 1883, "Thakur's mind is like a perfectly dry matchstick, which catches fire immediately. Not like worldly people, whose minds are like wet matchsticks that fail to catch fire, even after repeated attempts." (146)

On January 1, 1883, Thakur, on seeing Kedar, stands up intoxicated with feeling and starts singing a song of Radha, "O friend, where is that forest where my Krishna is, I can't walk anymore." (136) Thakur is so immersed in the feeling to the extent that he enters into *Samadhi*, remaining perfectly still (like a picture, as M has described so many times), with tears of joy running down from his eyes. To make the scene even more memorable, and to imprint it on the reader's mind with its profound dramatic quality, Kedar is described sitting at Thakur's feet, chanting a hymn (136).

Going to the events of April 8, 1883, we once again witness the dramatic manifestation of the Radha mode in Thakur. Ramlal is singing songs in which Radha says, addressing Krishna, "Lord, You Are My Everything!" (169) Thakur is immediately moved and says, "Oh! What words!" (170). Various songs of the *madhura bhava* (attitude of a lover toward God) continue, and soon Thakur is transported to a different world. He becomes immersed in *Samadhi*, still as in a photograph, with only tears of joy (*aananda dhara*), visible in the corners of his eyes. For a long time Thakur remains in that state, and after coming to himself, he seems to be talking to someone and says, "You are Me, and I am You." Please eat, You, I, eat. Oh! You're really playing up!" (translation mine.) He further goes on to say, "Oh, what confusion everywhere! I see only You. Krishna, O friend of the lowly, my beloved, Govinda." (170) Who is thus speaking? Thakur seems entirely immersed in the *bhava* (mood) of Sri Radhika. M, recording this incident, declares that the devotees stared wonderstruck at this man of gigantic empathy and imagination, Thakur of the "Mahabhava." (170).

²⁵ Swami Saradananda. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Leelaprasanga* (Bengali) Part II. Calcutta: Udbodhan, 11th edition, 1963 .68.

In response to Haladhari's comment that God is beyond the senses and beyond emotion (*bhava*), Thakur had asked the Divine Mother whether *bhava* was wrong, whereupon she had appeared to him in the form of Rati's mother, and said, "Stay with *bhava*." (131). Perhaps this is the reason that Thakur felt so close to Sri Chaitanya, whose state of *mahabhava* he describes eloquently and unforgettably, when he says that Sri Chaitanya jumped into the ocean at Puri, embracing the blue waters of the sea, mistaking them for the blue skin of Sri Krishna. (April 5, 1884 and June 15, 1884)

When Thakur enjoins love of the *ishta* (chosen ideal) and service of the *avatar*, it is Radha's form of ecstatic love and worship that he is validating. On December 22, 1883, Thakur speaks to Bhavanath and Rakhal about Radha's and the Gopis' power to love with complete self-abandon. Addressing Bhavanath, Thakur says, "Oh, if only that kind of love would come for the *avatar*. How the Gopis knew how to love!" (347). If they saw the *tamal* tree, they would get excited because the *tamal* is linked to Krishna. (450)

In art, as for instance in Keats' *Ode to A Nightingale*, there is a difficult negotiation between artist and medium, the artist and the object inspiring the artist's imagination, where part of the richness and complexity of the text arises from the artist's attempt to understand his object.²⁶ In Sri Ramakrishna, the state of ecstatic union is ever-present. Although Thakur's sublimity would be hard to encompass, nonetheless, when I think of his magical fluidity of sensibility, I am reminded once again of Keats' extraordinary claim, "If a sparrow come before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel."²⁷ In Ramakrishna, joyful transports to another scale and degree of Being are so numerous as to make us wonder what are the perimeters of his earthly existence. Did he belong to this world, or to some other? Like Shelley's skylark, or the homa bird (153) that Thakur constantly alluded to, he perhaps did not belong to our world at all, and we may spend our entire lives trying to figure out what he was.

Acknowledgements:

I first wish to thank Swami Satyaswarupananda, Editor, *Prabuddha Bharata*, for pointing out the exact references to Sri Chaitanya's *mahabhava* in the *Kathamrita*. I also wish to thank my former teacher Professor Janet Walker of Rutgers University for having introduced me to the *rasa* theory. □

²⁶ John Keats, "Ode To A Nightingale," *Golden Treasury* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), 275.

²⁷ John Keats, Letter to Benjamin Bailey, *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (San Diego & New York: HBJ Publishers, 1971), 473.

In Memoriam

Swami Adiswarananda (1925—2007)

With the passing away of Swami Adiswarananda, the Vedanta movement in America has lost a great leader and expounder of Vedantic ideals. The swami had headed the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York since 1973.

Born in West Bengal, India, Swami Adiswarananda received his undergraduate and Master's degrees from the University of Calcutta. As a student, he was drawn to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, especially to Swamiji's call to serve God in man. He joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1954 and took final vows in 1963. He served the Order in various capacities in India, teaching religious subjects at the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, a college adjacent to the Order's headquarters in Belur, West Bengal, near Calcutta, and serving as Joint Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* (*Awakened India*), the Order's premier English-language journal.

In 1968 Swami Adiswarananda was sent to New York to serve as assistant to Swami Nikhilananda, who founded the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York in 1933. After the demise of Swami Nikhilananda in 1973, Swami Adiswarananda was appointed head of the Center, where he served until his passing away last October 31.

The swami was highly respected for his learning and for his skill as an orator. He was widely read and knew what was going on in the various fields. He served on several interfaith advisory boards. His life was dedicated to the welfare of his students, to whom he taught the need to develop good character, an understanding of the nature of the mind and the senses, the practice of restraint and philosophical discrimination, the performance of unselfish work, and the methods of fixing one's mind on God.

While Swami Adiswarananda was loved and revered by his followers, he was never an object of idolatry. He remained a humble truth-seeker, uncompromising in his ideals yet full of humor, generosity, and human warmth.

The books he authored include *Meditation and Its Practices*, *The Vedanta Way to Peace and Happiness*, *The Spiritual Quest and the Way of Yoga*, and *Vivekananda, World Teacher*.

A funeral service was held at the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center on Friday, November 2, and a memorial service was held at the Brick Presbyterian Church on December 9, both attended by capacity crowds.

Peter Shneidre (1951—2007)

Much loved and respected by monks and devotees as well as by friends and family, Peter Shneidre was associated with the Vedanta Society of Southern California from the early 1970s. After serving the Society and the Vedanta movement in America in many capacities, he died suddenly on September 20, 2007. A well-attended memorial service was held in the Center's Hollywood Temple on October 6.

Peter was perhaps best known for his multi-faceted creative work. He was a gifted poet and translator of poetry. He authored articles on Vedanta and edited the writings of others. In addition to composing the music and lyrics of numerous songs, he wrote and directed musical plays which were performed at the Hollywood Center and at other locations, including folk operas on Buddha, Jesus and Chaitanya. He was also Assistant Director of the Center's choir.

His many other services to the Society included managing the lending library, working in the garden, and acting as host to newcomers. He participated fully in other activities of the Center such as attending retreats and vigils, and was sometimes found meditating alone in the temple.

Peter was a loving husband, father and friend. His wife and two children often sang at the Center and participated in performing his musical plays. At the memorial service his son and daughter sang several of his songs and spoke movingly about his love and guidance. Friends also spoke, about his encouragement, his humor, and his kindness. One young friend remembered the encouragement he had received when Peter interviewed him for a job. A devotee remembered how, when she was temporarily homeless, Peter brought her food. On another occasion, the same devotee was hugging a valued old tree to prevent its being destroyed. Peter contacted the news media and brought attention to her cause.

Peter's quiet humor is remembered by many. He had the Sanskrit name Hiranyagarbha (Golden Womb of the Universe) which he often used tongue-in-cheek. Introducing himself, he would say, "Hi. I'm Peter—Hiranyagarbha for short."

At the time of his passing, Peter was working on two unfinished projects: a movie on the life of Sister Nivedita; and the libretto of an opera, "Farrow's Lullaby," in collaboration with John Schlenck.

—AV Staff

Book Reviews

The Divine Feminine in Biblical Wisdom Literature

by Rabbi Rami Shapiro

Skylight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont

184 pp. paperback \$16.99 2005

In his lucid, terse, and poetic prose, Rami Shapiro introduces us to that elusive yet surprisingly pervasive presence in the Hebrew Bible—the Divine feminine. This dimension of Ultimate Reality, masked by millennia of patriarchy, shines forth as Wisdom: *Chochma* in Hebrew and *Sophia* in Greek. Both words are feminine nouns, and they are part of a universal apprehension of the ungendered God’s feminine persona, manifest variously across the ages and traditions as the Goddess, the Divine Mother, Kwan Yin, the Virgin Mary, the *Shekhinah* and Mother Wisdom, among others.

It is the latter that Shapiro elucidates in this volume of commentary on selections from seven Jewish Wisdom texts, largely Hebrew (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes), but also Greek (Wisdom of Solomon and Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach). The former five appear in the Hebrew Bible; the latter two are found in the Apocrypha (and are part of the Catholic Canon). The book is arranged (like all of SkyLight Path’s Illuminations series) with the text itself on the right and author’s notes on the left. This arrangement allows the reader to appreciate and ponder the original words of these sacred writings (and Shapiro’s striking translations are reason enough to buy the book), while enlarging their scope through commentary that is often revealing, sometimes startling, sometimes unsettling, always thought provoking.

Who Is She?

The book is divided into four sections. Three are headed by questions about the nature of Mother Wisdom: “Who Is She? Where Is She Found? What Does She Teach?” (“Why?” is the wrong question, for Wisdom speaks to living in harmony with what *is* without explanations). The fourth is entitled “The Way of the Wise.” Each section contains a sprinkling of passages drawn from the Jewish Wisdom Literature mentioned above alongside Shapiro’s provocative insights.

Who is She? We learn that “Wisdom is the first of God’s creations” (comparable to *Logos* in John’s Gospel, and thus connected to Jesus: Mother and Son are One). What’s more, Lady Wisdom is timeless, and all things manifest through Her. She is God’s master architect, the pattern and blueprint of creation, the Way of all things. We see Her connection to the Tao as well—the grain or current of the universe—and to ourselves, for “You are Her; it is only arrogance that blinds you to the fact.” We are advised to rejoice in Her playfulness, to trust

in Her ever-present witness (and with-ness), and to receive Her gift of right action and just deeds. When we imitate Her (or better yet, become intimate with Her), we, too, become God's partner in the holy work of *tikkun olam*, healing and repairing the world with justice, compassion, and humility. With Wisdom, we have the tools to accomplish this mighty task.

Where is She found? Wisdom is found in the streets, on the rooftops, "at every intersection, gate, and doorway." Key to apprehending Her, however, is quieting the noise and selfish desires of our narrow mind (the din of ego with its incessant mantra of "I, me, mine"), and opening to the wonder of spacious mind which is attuned to the simple happiness of here and now. Spacious mind appreciates Wisdom's role in the changing seasons and the moment by moment unfolding of life's mysteries: "Wisdom is not a way but the Way: the Way a rosebush roses and an apple tree apples. She is the Way a baby gurgles and takes his first steps. She is the Way the *I* emerges from the darkness of sleep and the Way it melts into the darkness of death." This present moment awareness gives us the discernment "to see what is and to act in harmony with it."

"You Are Not Who You Think You Are"

What does She teach? Wisdom teaches us to abandon cynicism and doubt (those "hideouts from reality"), to be present rather than distracted, to find meaning in the ordinary: "life is the point...living is its own reward." We learn not to cling to the past: "only narrow mind treasures memory over the moment and reduces the future to an imitation of the past." Alive to the present, free from the obsession with *why* and open to the wonder of *what*, "Wisdom reveals the truth of the moment." But Shapiro cautions that it is up to us to engage that truth. When we see both the plain and the hidden, the knowable and the ineffable as "fleeting expressions of an infinitely expressive God," we move beyond duality to life's unity: "The ultimate deceit is to fool yourself into believing you are separate from others." Thus comes the hard won awareness of Job: "You are not who you think you are." Our spacious self is our truest Self, and that, astonishingly, is Divinity itself: "The sage realizes that humans are the way dust and ash knows itself divine."

The final section, "The Way of the Wise," elaborates on the path to this insight. This path requires discipline, desire, and devotion. Will power and focus provide fuel but "surrender is obligatory." It is a journey of wonder, "passionate and heartfelt, giving rise to compassion and love." It is a journey that makes room for confusion and fear, for the crooked and the straight, for both shame and grace: "Everyone makes mistakes, follows dead ends and takes detours that promise much and yield nothing." We move beyond shame and error when we keep our eye fixed on the goal, when we practice patience and detachment from our ego agenda. We are advised to seek out the sages, to listen to their lessons, to make ourselves "a constant guest in their midst." We are

advised to guard our thoughts, “for mind is the source of your reality.” Finally, the Woman of Valor (from Proverbs) is presented as the quintessential householder sage: generous, vibrant, industrious; a thrifty and savvy working woman of the world whose business is kindness and cheerfulness; whose husband and children adore her; who serves her servants respectfully; who is “in tune with God and brings godliness into all her affairs.”

This book is best read in small doses, perhaps a passage or two a day, so as to savor properly its meaning and absorb its message. Mother Wisdom makes a fine traveling companion, and Rami Shapiro serves Her well.

—Laura Bernstein

The Veiling Brilliance: Journey to the Goddess

By Devadatta Kali

Nicolas-Hays, Lake Worth, Florida

ix + 245 pp. paperback \$18.95 2006

Devadatta Kali (David Nelson) previously has published a wonderful bilingual edition with commentary of the *Devimahatmya (In Praise of the Goddess: the Devimahatmya and Its Meaning)*, Nicolas Hays, 2003). But, even with commentary, classic Sanskrit religious works are not always easy of access, and so the author with his new book has targeted the broader audience of those intrigued with the wisdom of India, but not quite up for direct translations from the Sanskrit. Thus *The Veiling Brilliance*, inspired no doubt by the *Devimahatmya*, but written in a simple and engaging narrative style, offers what for many will be an easier way into the beautiful world of the worship of the Goddess as well as an entertaining and insightful introduction to the spiritual value of such worship seen from a Vedantic perspective..

The worship of the Goddess and the philosophy of Vedanta might seem a pairing of opposites to many readers, since faith in oneself and the struggle to realize the Self hardly requires the worship of any kind of personal god. Such was the case with Ramakrishna’s Advaita teacher Tota Puri. Seeing Ramakrishna clapping his hands and repeating with devotion the name of the Divine Mother, he gently kidded him and asked him if he were making chapattis! Yet Tota Puri was to find out soon afterwards, in a spiritual vision that further transformed and deepened his spiritual life, that it was not even possible to stoically drown his dysentery wracked body in the Ganges if the Divine Mother did not wish it. Vedanta was not the final word, so to speak. Yet it was thoroughly compatible with the acceptance of the power of the Divine Mother. One truth did not rule out the other.

Ramakrishna himself seems to have privileged in his own personal spiritual practice the kind of Vedanta-friendly worship of the Divine Mother that *The Veiling Brilliance* promotes. His direct disciple Swami Turiyananda remembered

vividly how once Ramakrishna had asked a great Vedantic scholar to speak at length before him:

The scholar with great deference expounded on Vedanta for more than an hour. Sri Ramakrishna was very pleased. The people around were surprised at this, but after eulogizing the scholar, the Master said: “As far as I am concerned, I do not like all those details. There is nothing but my Mother and I. To you knowledge, knower, and known—the one who meditates, meditation, and the object of meditation—this sort of triple division is very good. But for me, ‘Mother and I’—that is all and nothing else.” These words, “Mother and I,” were said in such a way that it made a very deep impression on all present. At that moment all ideas of Vedanta paled into insignificance. The Master’s “Mother and I” seemed easier, simpler and more pleasing to the mind than the three divisions of Vedanta. I realized then that “Mother and I” was the ideal attitude to be adopted.” (Swami Turiyananda, in: *Ramakrishna As We Saw Him*, edited and translated by Swami Chetanananda [Vedanta Society of Saint Louis, 1990], pp. 191-2).

Allegories of Spiritual Grace

The Veiling Brilliance is partly philosophical dialogue, partly storytelling with a large admixture of mythic tales. The frame tale concerns a king, Suratha, who had lost his kingdom, and a merchant, Samadhi, who lost his business and family. Both wind up at the ashram of the wise guru Medhas, who takes them on as students and shows them gradually how to spiritualize their lives after the traumatic experience of having been forced to relinquish everything with which they had identified their happiness. For example, early on the teacher says to the king: “You see, Suratha, by holding on to the thoughts of your lost kingdom, you are holding on to more than its remembered pleasures. You are holding on to your pain as well.” (58) Mythological tales concerning the Goddess, at first disconcertingly bizarre or gruesome, are explained as allegories of spiritual grace, as when She beheads a demon: “This metaphor of beheading means that through the grace of divine knowledge, the Devi puts an end to all the false ideas that have kept us so long in bondage.” (167)

This mixture of story telling, mythological tales and philosophical dialogue is quite appealing, and proves to be an effective way to communicate an ancient Hindu spiritual path to a contemporary audience in terms that seem timeless. The reader can learn a lot painlessly about this spiritual path, and will find that what in these teachings initially felt foreign and strange will soon appear familiar and modern. This spiritual idyll is not, however, without a small shortcoming: characterization is sketchy, and, in the case of the teacher Medhas and the king Suratha, sometimes problematic. Medhas seems to me to be frequently too narcissistically impressed with his own brilliance, and the king has guilty feelings

and cowering reactions that seem inappropriate for one who had been a powerful and arrogant monarch. The merchant Samadhi, by contrast, struck me as more alive and vivid as a man whose life had been ruined by a wife who seems to exhibit the traits of someone suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder. But it would be unfair to expect this type of narrative based on classic Indian sources to attain the depths of characterization of a modern novel; the depths are in the teachings, not the characters.

The book has a glossary at the end that will fully satisfy the reader's need for short and clear definitions of the Sanskrit terms used throughout the narrative.

—Steven F. Walker

Report

Sarada Ma Publishing—Vedanta Literature in Spanish

Translations of Vedanta literature into Spanish go as far back as 1912, when a translation of Swami Abhedananda's *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, based on M.'s original English version of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, with some additions by Abhedananda, was published in Argentina by the first Vedanta Society in Buenos Aires. Spanish translations of a number of basic Vedanta books by Swami Vijayananda, founder of the second and present Vedanta Society in Argentina, the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Bella Vista, a city near Buenos Aires, were published from the 1930s to the 1950s. These books continue to be reprinted and so are still available. Several other books have been published by the Ashrama over the last few decades.

Recently a new Spanish language venture has been undertaken by the Vedanta Society of Southern California under the name "Sarada Ma Publishing." This new venture was sparked by the need to reach out to the large Spanish-speaking community in southern California as well as to the many Spanish-speaking countries. There is a large demand for Vedanta literature in those countries that has been partly met by pirated versions of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. To date, the only Center of the Order in a Spanish-speaking country is the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Argentina. From the beginning, Sarada Ma Publishing has worked closely with the Center in Argentina to make Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature more available in Spanish.

SMP builds on work by Eddie Acebo, a long-time devotee of the Southern California Center with Mexican roots. Eddie has translated a number of Vedanta books into Spanish, but until the establishment of Sarada Ma Publishing, there was no foreseeable way to get the translations published. Last year, the first of his efforts saw the light of day: *Vedanta, Una Sencilla Introducción* (Vedanta: A Simple Introduction), by Pravrajika Vrajaprana.

Other publications last year included a DVD on Karma and Reincarnation, in Spanish and English, and a CD on Holy Mother, *Sarada Ma Darshan*, in Spanish and English.

Activities have expanded this year with the publication of three books in Spanish: *Como Conocer a Dios: Los Aforismos de Yoga de Patanjali* based on the English translation of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*; *Ramakrishna y sus Discípulos (Ramakrishna and His Disciples)*, by Christopher Isherwood; and a new edition of Abhedananda's *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, (*El Evangelio de Ramakrishna*). In addition, a Dutch translation of Vivekananda's *Karma Yoga* has also been released.

Permission has recently been granted for the publication of Eddie's translation of *Holy Mother* by Swami Nikhilananda. In process of publishing are a translation of Swami Paramananda's *Book of Daily Thoughts and Prayers* and a book on the Arati (Vesper) Hymns.

In additional outreach work, some monastics and devotees of the Southern California Center fluent in Spanish have visited and given talks and retreats in Spain, Mexico and Puerto Rico as well as for Spanish-speakers in Los Angeles and Miami. Swami Swahananda, leader of the Southern California Center, has given spiritual instruction to a number of Spanish speakers inside and outside the U.S.

Those who are interested may view SMP's website: www.saradama-publishing.org. SMP may be contacted by e-mail at libros@vedanta.org, or by telephone at 323-743-8452. □

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