BEYOND DUALITY

Sketches of Enlightened Spiritual Teachers of Modern Times

Researched and compiled by:

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COVER: A depiction of the Mahayantra, the Sricakra, a figure of special power symbolic of the Divine Mother who is the Source of all Consciousness and of all phenomena.
AUTHORS’ NOTE

Many recent religious commentators draw attention to the shocking events that are taking place in the world today. Religions back factions in war, pedophilic priests abound and women are abused in the name of religion. The environment is in dire straits, corporations plunder peoples’ savings, and even with the wonders of modern technical farming, around one billion people go to sleep hungry every night. Moreover, although a thin veneer of sensitivity has appeared, the results of altercations are no less unpleasant than the brutality of the dark ages. It seems that science, technology and democracy, that were to deliver a world free of hardship, disease and unpleasant things like bugs, is letting us down. So what hope is there for what can be thought of as ‘liberation’ for mankind? It does not seem that civics or religion can provide the solution to mankind’s problems. The religions, for the most part, seem to be much too far removed from their ‘Source’, and in civics (and the religions) there is too much thinking, planning, scheming, judging and self-interest for anything they contrive to be effective in providing whatever-it-is that mankind needs to be happy and live in harmony.

From whatever angle it is viewed, the problem seems to lie with mankind’s level of consciousness and in the egoic thought system that he has developed. And in every case it seems that, in the presence of the seers, the founders of religions (and also many who didn’t found religions), a different state of consciousness was engendered; albeit, in most cases, for only very limited periods of time. It was with this in mind that we undertook to look at the lives, actions and teachings of individuals of modern times, who seemed to us to have what the seers of ancient times had. The result is the present book, and we would like to point out that it is not filled with the comments and interpretations of he authors. Rather, it is comprised almost entirely of the sayings of the individuals themselves, and the observations, comments and conclusions of people, still living in many cases, who knew them; or others, were there has been a clear and contiguous lineage. In most cases the places where they lived and taught have been visited, and in the case of the still-living ones, they have, where possible, been visited or even spoken to.

The reactions to the book, and we have seen many now, have varied. Most people, at least, have found it interesting. A very few have found it offensive; it did not conform to the mental images they had of one or several of individuals sketched. But with yet others, particularly those whom we feel may have been searching, an extraordinary resonance seem to have come from the words in a manner that can best be described as the generation of a feeling of love. The words of the masters seemed to have had, for them the power to neutralize, for a moment, the overbearing nature of the egoic mind and to reveal something quite pristine. It could be said that everyone, at some point in their lives, comes face to face with the demon of the egoic mind, and that there are enlightened individuals who have realized this Truth so that their words can help dispel the demon. These are some of the things that they have said:

“The dying, the cripple, the unloved - they are Jesus in disguise. Speak kindly to them. Let there be kindness in your voice... Don’t only give your care; give your heart as well... The poor give us much more than we give them. Only in heaven will we know just how much we owe them for helping us to love God better - because of them.” From: Mother Teresa, Chapter 18.

“In our lives we have two possibilities: indulging in the world or going beyond the world... Worldly wisdom, however appealing it seems is only so in a worldly sense. The Buddha taught the practice of letting go. Don’t carry anything around... Peace comes from doing this with your whole body and mind... Not clinging any more, or if there’s still clinging, it becomes less and less. From: Ajahn Chah, Ch. 14.

“Mind is thought existing as subjects and objects. In life the first wave of consciousness is ‘I’, then ‘I am’, then ‘I am this, I am that’, and ‘This belongs to me.’ Here the mind begins. Now keep quiet, and do not allow any desire to arise from the Source. Just for an instant of time don’t give rise to any desire. You will find that you have no-mind and you will see that you are somewhere indescribable, in tremendous happiness. And then you will see who you really are.” From: Papaji, Ch. 12.
“My voice is your voice; no powers, kings, devils or gods can withstand it - inevitable is the order of Truth. My head is your head; cut it off and a thousand will grow... I shall shower oceans of love and bathe the world in joy. All societies are mine! Come; for I shall pour out floods of love. Every force is mine, small and great.” From: Rama Tirtha, Ch. 2.

“Each and every drop of Mother’s blood, each and every particle of energy is for her children... The purpose of this body and of Mother’s whole life is to serve her children.” From: Amma, Ch. 19.

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“In the strange stillness of that part of the world (the Rishi Valley in India), with the silence undisturbed by the hoot of owls, he woke up to find something totally different and new. This was in no way to be confused with, the gods of ‘religion’: Desire cannot possibly reach it, words cannot fathom it, nor can the string of thought wind itself around it. The whole universe is in it, measureless to man... There is only a sense of incredible vastness and immense beauty... It is a world without image, symbol or word, without waves of memory. Love was in the death of every minute and each death was the returning of love. It was not attachment; it had no roots; it flowered without pause and it was a flame which burnt away the borders, the carefully built fences, of ego consciousness.” From: J. Krishnamurti, Ch. 5.

She had an experience of a blue flame: It slipped itself into her heart and she looked at it with wonder, “It was still, small, a light-blue flame trembling softly, and it had the infinite sweetness of pure love, like an offering of flowers made with gentle hands, the heart full of stillness and wonder and peace.” From: Chasm of Fire, See Ch. 11.

“In the midst of chaos I know that all is well! No thoughts about it - just a gentle, loving gratitude that is always present. When you were a small child, you heard your God speak to you, and you listened. Then the mind grew strong and dominated your life. (Then), after a lifetime of futile seeking... God comes back into the forefront of your awareness.” From: Satyam Nadeen, Ch. 24.

“The nameless, formless Reality, the transcendent awareness in which you will become permanently awake, is precisely the same Reality that you have perceived blossoming around you... The perfectly peaceful Absolute is not different from the playful relative universe.” From: Ramakrishna, Ch. 1.

“I opened my eyes and the soft luminosity filtering through the curtains was love itself. Everything was fresh and pristine - as if it had just come into existence.” From: Eckhart Tolle, Ch. 23.

“All my rage, all my thoughts that had been troubling me, my whole world, was gone. At the same time laughter welled up from within the depths and just poured out. Everything was unrecognizable. It was as if something else had woken up. It opened its eyes. It was looking through Katie’s eyes. And it was so delighted! It was intoxicated with joy. There was nothing separate, nothing unacceptable to it; everything was its very own self.” From: Byron Katie, Chapter 22.

“To talk of God only is worthwhile, all else is verily pain and in vain.” Sri Anandamayi Ma, 1924 Ch. 7.

May their words help you to find the Truth

? 

FORWARD

“Beyond Duality” is a unique book containing biographical sketches of saints – living and dead – and spiritual teachers of the twentieth century. They hail not only from India, the home of spirituality, but also from other countries. The book contains a fairly detailed life sketch and important teachings of renowned spiritual Masters like Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Rama Tirtha, Ramana Maharshi, Paramahansa Yogananda, Anandamayi Ma, Swami Chinmayananda, famous for his Geetha Jnana Yagnas, the venerable Dalai Lama, Swami Shivananda, Nityananda, Mother Teresa, Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba and internationally acclaimed Sadguru Mata Amritananda Mayi Devi (AMMA). The readers are introduced to nineteen spiritual Masters and five spiritual Teachers. Fifteen of them come from India.

These Masters come from different backgrounds. It has been said that no saint is similar to the other. This is but natural, for they have come to this world to serve the cause of dharma, from place to place and time to time, as the situation warrants. They have different missions to perform. Yet the basic thrust of their different messages remains the same. Satyam (Truth), Dharmam (Righteousness), Premam (Love) and Seva (Service to others). These eternal principles are universal in nature. These messages are well known; they are preached widely from every pulpit. There are any number of books written enumerating the virtues of these teachings. They are aplenty. Unfortunately for us those who
are living these principles are very rare to come by. This book, or rather compilation, takes us to meet these great personages. We are indeed lucky that some of those great Masters like Bhagawan Satya Sai Baba and Sadguru Mata Amritanandamayi Devi are still alive to guide Millions of Devotees. They can be approached and we can convince ourselves that the great truths spoken by the realised Masters are still valid and relevant for the future of humanity. Their guidance is sought after by the high and mighty, even to solve their day to day problems.

This book also provides sufficient material for those who are interested in academic pursuits also. I believe that this commendable work will provide enough material to satisfy their thirst for spiritual knowledge and give practical guidelines for those sincere seekers who want to tread the path laid down by the great Masters.

I would like to complement the authors Norman Williams, K. K. Nair and Barry Osborn, who have painstakingly researched and collated the material. I have great pleasure to write the forward for an ennobling work, which should make many sincere seekers find their way to the presence of the spiritual Masters.

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Introduction

PERCEPTIONS OF THE WORLD

All your material plans and even great achievements have gone by the wayside. You start to think what is life all about? Who am I? You have no idea what’s going on because no one has ever been able to explain these things to you. So you come to believe that life is just a chance: you were born, you have gone through prevailing conditions and experiences, and you get old and die. But this is not how it is; and there are those who know the Truth, capital ‘T’ Truth. This book introduces the reader to some of them - some of the great saints, mystics and enlightened spiritual masters of modern times. They tell us that the material world is a dream being experienced by the egoic mind in an illusion of time. The essence of the dream is separateness from God or for those who don’t believe in God then from a Supreme Consciousness; and reality is the realization of union with this ‘Entity’ - then there is unalloyed joy and happiness. Although there has never been any question about this from the point of view of the saints and mystics of the world, whatever their religious background, there are fundamental differences in understanding between the philosophical views of West and East; and they need to be aired before the following sketches can be clearly appreciated. Consider these questions:

Is the world of matter, this universe of which we are a part, reality? - “Yes” says the West; because the world of matter is the only reality the senses and the intellect can perceive. “No” says Eastern mysticism, because the world of matter, perceived by the senses and cognized by the intellect, is finite and changeable; reality is changeless, infinite and immortal when experienced by the inner man - the Spirit or Atman, or what Buddhism calls Buddha nature. And after all, few would deny that man has a spiritual dimension other than the ‘personality’ that we know so well; or that the ‘logical’ intellectual mind frequently comes across imponderables that question perceived ‘reality’. One could say that it is an arrogance to assume that only those things that can be ‘understood’ by the mind are reality. Quantum physics is full of things that can’t actually be ‘understood’.

Is man separate from God? - “Yes” says the West because God, if such is even given cognisance at all, created the world including man. God is the creator and we are the created. There is duality - God and his creation. “No” says the East, because God manifested as the universe. God is therefore in the world of matter and the world of matter is in God. Godliness is in everything - and there is only One.

Even though the Bible, the bastion of duality in the West, proclaims that God created man in his own image, and Jesus exhorts man to “know thyself ... The Kingdom of Heaven is within ... The Father is in me and I am in the Father” - these and other sayings do not suggest the same concept of onecity that occurs in the East. Millennia earlier than the period of the Bible, an anonymous Eastern sage made this observation: “Tat Tvam Asi”: God is the substratum of all existence and “I Am That”. Changeable matter cannot be real. It can only exist in time, and time is an illusion. This encapsulates the concept of Advaita Vedanta and it is the philosophy and the experience of the individuals considered in this book.

It may be said that if the only reality is the material world, then the leaders and the thinkers of the West who proclaim this view, should know all about it and should be able to explain it to the people so that they can live in harmony, but this they have never been able to do. The prevalent worldview of society is simply that there are ‘me’ and ‘you’, ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ - and mostly ‘mine’; and consequently there is judgment, desire, anger, anxiety, fear and depression - all the emotions of the world.. In modern times, in the ‘developed’ world, there is an economic engine that drives society and has, like the rest of nature, survival of the fittest as its principal ethic. And it uses greed, exploitation and consumption to
generate growth and wealth. But although wealth, one could surmise, should diminish fear and increase happiness, it instead gives rise to more fear, confusion and less happiness.

In duality there are also ego-created ‘gods’ who stand separate from man: “Please may we prevail against the axes of evil” has become our clarion call to these ‘gods’. Sadly these gods today predominate in the developed Western world in which most of us believe. And it is the world of the egoic mind, separated from the Creator. Further, it is a world that exists in time, represented by a past of history projected into an imagined future. The past is filled, for the most part, with wars, conquests and conflict - of exploiting, killing, devouring and suffering - and the future is filled with fears and expectations. It has not changed in these attributes from its primal beginnings to the present technological age.

On the other hand in societies that subscribe to Eastern philosophies, notwithstanding the fact that they too may follow the ethos of ‘me’ and ‘mine’ and may be hell-bent on becoming westernised, we notice that deep within their consciousness there is also an ingrained concept of oneness.

Another reality: Notwithstanding the dominant worldview, there really are saints and mystics who have transcended the egoic mind and awakened to see a timeless world of measureless joy and immense beauty, where “love flowers with the death of every minute.” What they have to say, as will be seen, is not about religion but about the fundamental nature of God and of all creation. There is no duality in it and there is the end of loneliness and separation. Such individuals are beacons to whom we can look for evidence that there is another way than the brutal but sanitized Disney Land world that we know so well. And they can be guides to those ready to find this other reality. This concept was beautifully expressed by just such an enlightened individual, Swami Vivekananda (see Chapter 1), who was probably the first Indian saint, and one of the very few genuine ones, to visit the West. In addressing the founding conference of the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago, he said:

“This soul is potentially divine. The goal of life is to realize this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or worship, or psychic control or philosophy - by one or all of these, and become free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas, rituals or books, temples or forms are but secondary details... Religion is not taught as a science of experience. This should not be. There is however a small group of individuals who teach religion from experience. They are called mystics, and these mystics who occur in every religion, speak the same tongue and teach the same truth. This is the real science of religion. As mathematics in every part of the world does not differ so the mystics do not differ. They are all similarly constituted. Their experience is the same, and this becomes law... and the book from which to learn religion is your own heart.”

So the root of the problems of the world is separation from ‘God’ and belief in the crazy world dreamed up by the egoic mind. In the ‘developed’ modern world the belief is so strong that truth is seldom perceived. Instead the modern world is permeated by mindstuff - which has given rise to a serious and dangerous dilemma.

Mindstuff and the dilemma of the modern world

It could be said that, above the very small needs necessary for a comfortable survival, the more you have the more unhappy you will be. This is why, in general, people are happier in poor countries than in the satiated developed ones.

In the modern world the ego personality is firmly in charge and runs all our governments, cultures, economic systems, academic and religious institutions, wars and conflicts. It is given credence by thinkers, writers, commentators, politicians, economists, and religious pundits, and is believed to be good for society. The ego personality is very much concerned with and focused on the physical body. On one hand it adulates the perfect body and on another it worries continuously about health and appearance. In its separateness from other egoic minds and bodies it becomes a master of judgment, attachment and aversion, and though it forms alliances, which are always temporary and fragile, it (or the alliance) covertly, and sometimes overtly, delights in the other’s discomforts while abhorring criticism directed at itself.

The ego’s world is driven by the pursuit of personal gratification in the forms of praise, recognition, career fulfillment and so on, over the personal gratification of others; and all these gratifications are eulogized as healthy competition and the pursuit of ‘excellence’.

The ego’s world is very popular with mankind. At its lowest level it can be represented by food, drink, sex, shelter, attire, recognition and entertainment. At the middle level it is all these things plus, nice houses and cars, insurance and holidays abroad. At the upper level it is all these plus power and control - and though every intergradation can be seen, all the representations are empowered by what Malcolm Muggeridge called “the cold corridors of cash” (see Chapter 18). A recent and popular TV program, in referring to its heroes, said that what they were after was: “Money, sex and putting down their enemies - like everyone else.”

But as the egoic mind attempts to generate comfort and pleasure, it is always against a background of uncertainty that ranges from barely subliminal anxiety to hysteria and paranoia. Daily life, with its vicissitudes and unknowns, becomes mostly a grinding task focused on the perceived needs of survival: paying the mortgage, keeping up with the Jones’, and all the other ruthless demands of living. If this seems in doubt read the biographies and autobiographies of the rich and famous, and reflect on Emerson’s conclusion that “the majority of men lead lives of quiet desperation”.

The egoic mind is also the substance of boredom. It needs repeated stimulation, pleasure and entertainment, for virtually its only relief takes place through these temporary gratifications. Further, there are compelling sensual and procreative urges that seek fulfillment almost independently of what we imagine to be our will. Sigmund Freud had plenty to say on these when he initiated the psychoanalytical movement in the early twentieth century. And through all of this there always lurks the fear of death. To serve this latter the ego has projected an externalized infinite deity in the name of
It seems that almost all of our lives in the modern technological consumer-society world, is an attempt to escape from a consuming sense of isolation that the ego has created. And when there is no sense of true spirituality, the end of life is becoming more and more a slow epicurean crawl towards senile dementia. Medical science and technology, once thought to hold the solution to this problem, are letting us down.

**Glimmerings of truth**

The subtlety of the ego is so well developed that even great thinkers and philosophers are fooled by it. The French writer sometimes thought of as the father of modern philosophy, Rene Descartes, was completely misled when he said: “I think therefore I exist.” The mind is continuously regaled with an almost endless parade of thoughts which are the products of memory. They can never be new and are always the jaded past parading as the present. A great observer said that everyday life presents only recurring changes with a magnitude that is always much the same. We seem, he said, compelled to a life of acting out an almost diabolical destiny - orchestrated by the egoic mind. Nevertheless, some have perceived this mind for what it is and recognized it as the culprit.

The writer Paul Zweig, at a time of transition in his life, began to feel as if he had been chosen for attention by a personal ego demon, whose bizarre humour, he said, had turned his face into a nightmare. In his book *Three Journeys* - see Bibliography - he wrote:

“Some recipe of wishes dating from the earliest mixture of my being had created an awful dish”. He had, he wrote, intended to be completely happy but something had gone wrong and he began to suspect, to his horror, that the demon was himself: “It shadowed me from within... loving when I loved, speaking when I spoke. Every spoonful of my existence went, somehow, into its mouth - and because of it everything went wrong. Food did not feed me, but it; success did not please me, but it; and the creature reined in the sultriness of my inner existence while I shivered and became thin.”

The writer and Nobel Prize winner, Gao Xingjian, makes a similar observation in his book *Soul Mountain*. He writes,

“I don’t know if you have ever observed this strange thing, the self (the egoic self)... I once looked at a photo of me on the monthly bus ticket I had... At first I thought I had a charming smile; but (then) there was also an anxiety which betrayed acute loneliness and fleeting snatches of terror - certainly not a winner - and there was a bitterness which stifled the common smile of unthinking happiness and doomed that sort of happiness. This was very scary... and I didn’t want to go no looking at the photo... The problem is the mind; this is the monster which torments me no end... Arrogance, pride, complacency or anxiety, jealousy and hatred all stem from this. The egoic self is in fact the source of mankind’s misery. So, does this unhappy conclusion mean that the self should therefore be killed? Is it just vanity? The Buddha said: All the myriad phenomena are vanity, and the absence of phenomena is also vanity.”

Aldous Huxley concluded that every man and woman, “Even the most healthy and well endowed individuals who have made what the jargon of psychology calls ‘an excellent adjustment to life’ - may suddenly, or gradually with age, arrive at a feeling of damnation that is nothing more nor less than being confronted by one’s own sweating ego self: our common consciousness, generally dulled, but sometimes acute and naked, of behaving like the average sensual human beings that we are.” And this, the mystics also tell us, stems from our belief that we are the doers, the movers and the shakers of the world; and for the religious, ‘God’s little helpers’ in a world of judging, rewarding and punishing.

But for some, Huxley asserts, the demands of living may yet be superficial to a deep longing for harmony with nature and oneness with life - a need that is seldom perceived and even more seldom realized and satisfied. The pursuit of this wish is what leads us to search for a guide; who, for success, must be someone quite extraordinary, a saint or mystic, who knows how to deal with the mind and the ego and can show the way to the universal truth: “This is liberation, this is enlightenment, this is the beatific vision, in which all things are perceived as they are ‘in themselves’ and not in relation to the craving and abhorring ego.”

**West and East**

Western psychology and Western biological and medical science recognize only the egoic mind - and to some degree, little understood, the subconscious. These are considered to be the ‘software’ and ‘databases’ of the mind, with the brain being the ‘hardware’. Modern psychology, counseling, sociology and so on are largely concerned with the control and treatment of bruised and deranged egoic minds, which is a daunting task - as can be surmised from the low level of success in the treatment of psychological illnesses. The ego is recognized in the West as the unquestioned master of all worldly activities, and psychology describes it as a ‘self regulating principle’ - something that must be given cognizance and respect. But Sigmund Freud, firmly steeped in fathoming the machinations of the egoic mind, could conceive the possibility of something greater than this when he wrote, “If the ego were merely a part of the ‘Id’ that is modified by the influence of the perceptual system, the representative of the mind in the real external world, we should have a simple state of things to deal with.” But after wrestling to comprehend the elemental forces active within our psyche, he concluded in his Lecture No. 35 - *A Philosophy of Life* - that, “Psycho-analysis is not, in my opinion, in a position to create a Weltanschauung of its own.” As for scientific thought, he believed: “It is still in its infancy, there are many of the great problems with which it has as yet been unable to cope.” This is why, to understand anything beyond the egoic mind, we have to turn to Eastern philosophy.

**The basic elements of Hinduism:** Christopher Isherwood in his book *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, made a
gallant effort in summing up the basic elements and terminology of Eastern philosophy. It is paraphrased as follows:

Brahman is the ultimate Reality, the Godhead. Brahma, in its role as the Source, is considered to be female (Devi or the Divine Mother) and that which gives birth, even to the gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva - which are therefore subordinate to Brahman and are perishable.

When Brahma occurs in manifested, created, objects of the world - such as a human being, it is called the Atman, the Purusha or the Self. Generally, in the sensual world, the Atman becomes deluded as the Jiva, the egoic self, living in duality. The word ‘soul’, not used in the East, could be either the Atman (the pure soul) or the Jiva, the deluded ‘personal’ and perishable soul.

Brahman and Atman do not act, they just are.

Shakti, maya or prakriti act and do things - they are the ‘power’ of Brahman.

Brahman in association with its power is called Ishwara - God with the attributes of action - similar to the concept of God the Father in association with the Holy Spirit. Christ, in man, is the Atman or the Self. Ishwara, thus, can be considered to be the same as the Christian Trinity.

Man (the Jiva soul) can become one with the Atman by the simple recognition of his essential nature. By becoming realized or enlightened he ‘knows’ he is in union with God. The same is true in Sufism and, though not usually officially condoned, in Christian mysticism. (In Western Christian dogmatics, dreamt up when Rome accepted Christianity, to say one is God is considered to be blasphemy).

The three functions of Ishwara are: creation (undertaken by Brahma in association with his power Sarasvati), sustaining (undertaken by Vishnu with his power Lakshmi), and dissolving (undertaken by Shiva with his power Parvati). Other forms of power are Durga and Kali, which are aspects of Devi and therefore may be regarded as the power of powers. Thus, Ishwara creates the universe, sustains it for a while, and then dissolves it - and it is all set in phases of time of which there are specific amounts. These phases are called Yugas and the last before dissolution is Kali Yuga, when things are in decline - as many believe of the world in the present age.

Vishnu is believed to have incarnated in Human form a number of times, with Rama and Krishna in Hindu theology being the best-known examples. Jesus and the Buddha are also considered by some to be incarnations of Vishnu, along with many others. In Hinduism such incarnations are given the name Avatar.

**The mind in Eastern philosophy:** Here the mind is perceived to be more complex than that of the simple Western model (a thinking function based on the brain that serves an ego consciousness). In Eastern philosophy the mind is made up of several more psychic elements which may be those relegated to the mysterious ‘subconscious’ of the West. The lowest of these are the ego and the mind (manas) and its companion the intellect (buddhi). They are concerned very much with the gross physical body, the senses and relationships to the material world.

Then there is a subtle body in which reside thoughts and emotions and ancestral likes and dislikes, the vasanas, and cultural tendencies and habits called samsaras. The subtle body persists after physical death and may also be the vehicle of out-of-body experiences during physical life. Much has been written about these things in the transcendental media. The subtle body also has a physiological system comprising ‘nerve’ channels running roughly in the vicinity of the spine from the coccyx to the crown of the head. The channels are associated with a system are chakras (wheels) placed from the lower abdomen to the heart and throat, and higher yogic plexi between the eyes to the crown of the head. The lowest of these is the Muladhara, located between anus and genitalia. At the base of the spine is the Swadhisthana, then in the region of the navel is the Manipura. At the heart is the Anahata chakra and at the throat the Vusuddha, while in the head are the Ajna chakra behind the eyes and the Sahasra at the crown. These attributes of the subtle body are known to yogis.

The kundalini is the dormant psychic energy of the subtle body located beneath the Muladhara that can be awakened through yoga to rise up through the chakras - see *Devatma Shakti*. The turning of the chakras brings psychic and physical experiences and the perception of deities and other worlds - of which there are several more than the simplistic heaven and hell of Western theology. Acupuncture and some forms of massage are focused on the chakras and the conducting pathways of the subtle body, and the stimulation of the kundalini and the chakras is important in some types of yoga.

The psyche also has a supracausal body which is devoid of all thought and where the state of deep sleep resides. It is said to be blissful because within the supracausal body a blissful escape from the egoic mind is experienced. Deep sleep is the closest that worldly-bound individuals get to enlightenment. When we wake up from a bout of deep sleep we forget the experience almost immediately but if we are alert, which mostly we are not, we may be able for a moment to discern a trace of this bliss. Much more often the ego switches in and brings up concerns of the body and the worldly realm.

All these psychic elements are associated with sheaths (kosas) that keep them separate and encapsulated. The outermost is the food sheath of the gross physical body which enfolds the sense organs and the organs of action. Beneath this is the vital-air sheath, the prana sheath (pranakosa) which is not only the physical breath but can be said to be that which controls and moderates the whole physiology of the organism. The prana therefore has control over the functioning of the body and an understanding of it is important in yoga for maintaining bodily health and control. Finally there is the innermost sheath known as the bliss sheath, the anandakosa - the sheath of the supracausal body.

Through yoga and the yogic powers of certain practitioners and adepts, these psychic elements can be penetrated and explored to some degree. This has been affirmed by the sages of the East and by psychics generally, but the practice of yoga for the attainment of psychic experiences, though popular, is not recommended by enlightened spiritual teachers - because such experiences amount to the opening of a kind of Pandora’s Box and can easily bring about physical and
mental dysfunction. But, it is said, if they occur naturally, or through the agency of a truly enlightened being, they are okay.

In the manifest state of human beings, individuals are subject to the gunas (tendencies of behaviour) of which there are three primary ones: tamas (inertia and sloth), rajas (passion and energy) and satvas (spirituality).

The Self, the Atman: Over and above the psychic elements, and not generally perceivable by ordinary thought, there exists the higher entity mentioned before - the Atman or the Self. (The ‘soul’ of Christianity may be the Jiva that is associated with the mind and body and also with the subtle body, although the word Soul, in a higher sense, has also been used for the Self). All the sheaths cover and conceal the Atman, which has been described as Consciousness itself. The Atman is the God-essence in all created objects.

All these things have been described and explained by enlightened spiritual teachers. They also explain the concept of karma, the existence of other worlds, rebirth and so on. Such matters are not elaborated further here but one point needs to be mentioned because of a conviction, often smugly adhered to in the West and considered to be very bad, that Hindus and Eastern philosophy in general, supports the worship of ‘idols’. Is this a valid and justifiable point of view? The answer may be both yes and no. If the universe is seen as the manifestation of the Absolute, then the worship of anything real (that is, anything not a product of the egoic mind), is the worship of God - such worship will be pristine and holy. In this case idols are nothing more than symbols, as are the statues of saints and virgins, and the crosses, stars, shrines, icons and calligraphy of the ‘Western’ religions. But in Eastern philosophy, which makes it more realistic than Western theocracy, the symbols are also perceived as something that must go - when enlightenment is attained. So the answer to the above question is also no. The ultimate aim of worship is to become free of worship and attain the Self - which is to love God. So, one may ask, why did God create us? The answer is simply to love Him - and nothing more than this is necessary.

Celestial experiences, miracles

Such happenings are mentioned here because of their importance in supporting belief systems. Actually science has now proved the existence of ‘things’ that defy Aristotelian logic, that could be called ‘miraculous’ but this is hardly given credence in the fields of biological and medical science. Worldview of modern times still perceives a mechanistic universe. In contrast to these well entrenched views and even the views of ordinary science, there is incontrovertible evidence of the veracity of miracle-like things, and evidence that they are actually normal. Good writers have expounded these matters in books like The Dancing Wu Li Masters, The Tao of Physics, A New Science of Life and The Self-Aware Universe - see Bibliography, as do the many publications of quantum physics - which also rejects the common understanding of time. See Science and Religion Chapter - Appendix II.

But aside from quantum physics there is also well documented anecdotal as well as confirmed evidence of many esoteric phenomena. For example, there are individuals who remember other lives or other worlds. In a phenomenon known as the Charles Bonnet Syndrome, some apparently normal and definitely not deranged people have clear visions of what can only be described as other places and other times: A woman sees cows grazing in a winter field and comments on the cruelty of this to others who see the field as empty; another is followed around by two children in Victorian dress; yet another sees bright flowers growing everywhere she walks (see Hindustani Times of 23 October 2000). Such visions are said to be experienced by literally millions of people.

In ordinary medical science, anyone who sees visions or talks with angels is automatically relegated to the nut house; but Colin Wilson, in a comparison between some of the inmates of lunatic asylums and the writings of the mystical philosopher Swedenborg, (who was beyond criticism and the threat of being burned for heresy because of his protection by the Swedish king, and also because he was a solid citizen and civil servant), draws attention to the remarkable and uncanny similarities between the exclamations of certain of the “lunatics” and those of the great mystical philosopher himself. Add to this the occurrence of visions of the past that have been materially authenticated - see The Book of Time and many other well researched books by Colin Wilson and other authors, and we should be able to see clear evidence of the collapse of linear time and the existence of miracles. But miracles are not necessarily about the parting of the Red Sea and curing cancer, yet they may create a great stir and an outpouring of religious fervour when they occur. It is in the occurrence of such miracles that saints and enlightened individuals come into their own - but usually unintentionally. Miraculous events and spiritually enlightening experiences often occur around such people, sometimes with great regularity and in a way that clears up doubts for many. In common understanding miracles range from healing - the blind see, the lame walk and the dead are raised - to the generation of feelings and changes in spiritual comprehension. If we look at the best known miracles of recent times they have usually been around visions and experiences of the heart. Some children see a vision of the Virgin and are so overwhelmed and entranced by it that others around them can sense their ecstasy, their changes in appearance, behaviour and so on; and then a kind of divine energy comes into play. Pretty soon there are crowds of people enthralled by the vision that they themselves do not even see. The force of this energy then becomes unstoppable and the results are well known. After this, and in the years and decades that follow, miracles of the healing type may occur at the very place where the event first took place. And such miracles of healing, or the happening of other intensely-wished-for events against all odds, seem clearly now to be examples of the individuals own power of creation, and common evidence for the laws of quantum physics.

A good example of a highly personal miracle of the heart type and a demonstration of the energy that flows from a saintly being at such times, concerns the great yogi Baba Muktananda - whose ability to impart mystical experiences made
him popular in the West through the 1970’s. The account is given by Paul Zweig in his book *Three Journeys* - see Bibliography. He (Zweig) is taken, somewhat unwillingly, to meet Baba Muktananda in New York by a friend and is listening as people are introduced and are asking questions or making comments. Zweig wrote, “The sorts of questions rubbed me the wrong way; they seemed full of personal melodrama: ‘Sometimes I feel within me…’ ‘I know in my heart…’ ‘My cosmic feelings’…” - and so on. But then a young woman began speaking to Muktananda. She explained that she had lived for several years in India and in a tremulous voice she said that she had a question to ask. Paul Zweig continued: “I found myself paying attention suddenly, not so much to what she was saying as to the note of vulnerability in her voice. When she meditated, she said, the experience of silvery light was intense, but then nightmarish forms came between her and the light, and she was frightened. When she lifted her hand, as if to describe the nightmares, it began to shake. Then Suddenly I was shaking too. I felt as if I was rooted to the floor, yet trembling with intense feeling. I had to make an effort not to cry, but it wasn’t simply grief, for my body had become buoyant and warm... Even after the hand was tucked away in her lap, and Muktananda’s voice had begun to speak, I went on staring while the forms and colours of the room glided before my eyes like paper cut-outs. The words ‘afloat in tears’ repeated themselves over and over in my mind... I was aware that my mouth was hanging open, yet I couldn’t seem to close it... My jaws felt like hinged gates into a cave of tears... And all the while I held my tears in by an effort of subtle attention. The tears seeped into my face anyway, a few at a time.”

But notwithstanding all the well recorded experiences of miracles and visions of other worlds that seem to entrance us so much, they are just miracles and worlds. They are all dualistic and bound in time, for in them there are always figures interacting with other figures in a succession of events that form a panorama of time. They, the miracles themselves rather than the feelings they generate, do not have anything to do with liberation, for liberation is something yet again.

**Enlightened teachers**

Experiencing reality is not a mental process but involves transcending the egoic mind. A renowned spiritual teacher of modern times, Nisargadatta Maharaj (Chapter 15) said that the liberated see beyond the world, and what occupies the whole field of consciousness of someone bound in the personal world, will be only a speck to an enlightened being, “a momentary appearance in consciousness”. But can this be explained? Only by negation and analogy. Every positive explanation is from memory and is therefore inapplicable, yet the enlightened state, Nisargadatta explained, is supremely actual and therefore possible and realizable.

Historically and since time immemorial there have been gifted individuals who studied, practiced and realized union with the Ultimate - and some have been given credence enough for religions to form around them. But in the West it is often supposed that such beings - saints and so on - if they existed at all, lived only in the ancient past. Most of us are just not comfortable with the idea of modern-day saints and are only prepared to accept ‘sainthood’ beings, who practice austerities and do good works, such as Mother Teresa (Chapter 18) - and only as long as they remain strictly mortal. Sages who have supernatural powers and who, perhaps, lived for hundreds of years are, on the whole, repulsive to Western outlook and have been shunned by great thinkers like Carl Jung and even one of the individuals considered here, Krishnamurti (Chapter 5).

Although it may be something of a digression a short account is given here of a modern sage who has lived to a great age. It was recounted by the indomitable guru researcher, Surjan Singh Ubani (see *The Gurus of India*), who was an Indian Army surgeon and wartime hero of the Burma campaign of World War II. He studied gurus and wonder workers for most of his life and one of these was Sri Bawa Hari Das Ji Maharaj. In 1955 Sri Bawa was a forest sage in the Himalayas reputed to be over 150 years old at that time. Surjan Singh, following a long series of unusual events, found himself climbing through the Himalayan jungle in a quest to meet this ancient sage. He writes:

“"The path was rough, uphill and full of tall grass amongst the pine trees, where, I was told, cobras were quite common. The orderly told me, however, that the cobras were harmless and were only there to protect this great yogi. There were panthers also, I presumed, for the same purpose. I had my own doubts about the capability of these wild animals to sift good men from bad; mistaken identity could spell a painful death..."

Sweating and puffing we arrived at the gate of the yogi’s beautiful cottage... Whilst the orderly shouted to the guru to come out and open the gate, I was forming a mental picture of a very old man, bent down by age and hardly able to walk. Instead I saw a lean, erect and sprightly figure come quickly up to the gate, ... The yogi appeared rather curt when he asked me the purpose of my visit but after explanation his stern face became kind and charming...

Hesitatingly I broached the subject of this yogi’s guru - who was reputed to be even older. He replied: ‘My guru is over 400 years old and sits in that part of the Himalayas’, - pointing a finger to snow covered peaks. He then explained how he had wandered for some twenty years along the coast of the Arabian Gulf and over the Tibetan plateau undergoing austerities and hoping to find his Inner Being, all without any result. After he had become considerably emaciated and had lost all hope of finding his goal, he walked back into India, and settled down in a decrepit old temple. He started singing God’s name and some villagers would bring him milk or rice and join him in his devotional singing. One day a crazy fellow came from nowhere. He had a shoe on one foot and the other was bare. As he entered the temple with one shoe on the whole congregation shouted at him pointing out the sacrilege he was committing by entering the temple with a shoe on. He just laughed and said, ‘which temple are you talking about? The whole world is God’s temple. Anyway, I have come to take your miserable priest’, and taking the yogi by the arm and marching him away, he said, ‘I have been sent by my guruji,
who says you are now fit to take up initiation with him. Accompany me and I will take you there in a moment.’”

Surjan Singh continued contact with Sri Bawa for many years and could see no significant changes in his appearance. He wrote in his book, “What I have read in Autobiography of a Yogi by Yogananda about the legendary Babaji (see Chapter 6), made sense only after I had met Sri Bawa Hari Das.”

**Keys to finding an enlightened spiritual teacher:** Generally enlightened spiritual teachers are not to be confused with most of the often pleasant men and women who give lessons in yoga and meditation or preside over ashrams and spiritual centres all over the world. Enlightened individuals have always been quite rare but we should also not assume that those founders of the religions are the only true ones. In religious history there have also been those whose influence was confined to tiny regions and lasted only for a decade or two. But they also had the effect of stimulating spiritual fervour. For example, Aldous Huxley, in his book The Devils of Loudun, gives examples from seventeenth century France that were only locally recognized. He writes of the town of Loudun at the time of the narrative:

“It had no saints, no man or woman whose mere presence is self-validating proof of a deeper insight into the eternal reality, a closer union with the divine Ground of all being. Not until sixty years later did such a person appear within the city walls. When, after the most harrowing of physical and spiritual adventures, Louise de Tronchay came to work at the hospital of Loudun, she at once became the centre of an intense and eager spiritual life. People of all ages and of every class came flocking to ask her about God.”

And in another part of France of the same period, a Carmelite nun who had been a disciple of Saint Teresa, wrenched the heart of Jean-Joseph Surin, one of the individuals biographised in The Devils of Loudun. Huxley again writes:

“He listened spell bound to a voice that talked, in labouring guttural French, of the love of God and the bliss of union, of humility and self-naughting, of the purification of the heart and the emptying of the busy and distracting mind.. Praying one day, he became aware of a supernatural light, a light that seemed to reveal the essential nature of God... The memory of that illumination and the unearthly bliss by which the experience had been accompanied never left him.”

One of the characteristics of all enlightened individuals is that they exude a feeling of God’s love - not to be confused with connubial love. Paul Zweig, in his book Three Journeys, talks about this form of love - which in the East is called Bhakti. He writes:

“Most of us would probably agree that love is our ideal emotion, and we would say it a little wistfully, because there have been only a few short times in our lives when we have known, personally, the dislocating power of love. The rest of the time we find it necessary to preserve certain limits: to have affection, to like, to feel tenderness, to ‘love’ with civility and constraint, expecting the same civility and restraint in the ‘love’ that others feel for us. The other, more extreme kind of love, we idealize by using only elevated language when we talk about it. We direct it towards beautiful objects, or Jesus whom we visualize with the aid of highly stylised images... Our reverence doesn’t require that we change the way we live because the beloved ideal is hopelessly remote from our imperfect existences... Yet this ideal is marked by an almost forgotten trace of an undefined longing which can be overpowering, almost religious in its insinuating attraction. Even a pop tune has the power, sometimes, to make us feel like exiles wandering about in an empty world... We listen to the song and for a minute the ideal isn’t rose-colored any more. It sinks its teeth into us like something hungry that would break apart our lives if we let it. And all the great legends of love and death mutter and turn over in our psyches... To experience the great dislocating power of Bhakti, we must come before the true saints and gurus with humility and have our pressing minds put into neutral.”

So whatever criteria are used in discerning the enlightened from those still bound in egoic delusion, the presence of a feeling of the dislocating power of love must be the most reliable, for:

“Though they may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, they are as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”

It is definitely not about what religion is followed. Religion is nothing more than the medium of spiritual practice for people from different cultures. Mother Teresa said:

There is only one god and everyone should be seen as equal before God
We should help a Hindu to be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Catholic a better Catholic

No enlightened teacher will ever tell you to change your religion;
Rather he or she will tell you to:

**FIND OUT WHO YOU REALLY ARE**

♥
PART - I

GREAT MYSTICAL SAINTS, AVATARS AND SATGURUS - & ENLIGHTENED SPIRITUAL TEACHERS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

♥♥ ♥♥

A NOTE BY A. E. D'AGNINO
Seeker, Writer, Artist - Venezuela

As a spiritual seeker who has been coming to India since 1964, and has had the good fortune to meet eight of the great Masters who's life and teachings form the substance of this wonderfully compassionate book: Sri Mata Anandamayi Ma, J. Krishnamurti, Vimala Thakar, Swami Muktananda, Neem Karoli Baba, Papaji, Sri Satya Sai Baba, and Sri Mata Amritanandamayi; I want to give testimony of the authenticity in which their biographies and teachings have been presented, and to recommend it highly to students of the philosophy and practice of Non Duality.

Chapter 1

RAMAKRISHNA AND DISCIPLES

With the blue mountain for her ink,
With a branch of the heaven tree for her pen,
With the earth for her writing leaf,
Let the goddess Sarada describe your greatness,
She could not - though she wrote for ever.

"Oh great lord God," Ramakrishna cried:
"How can I tell them of your glory?"

Background

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was one of India’s greatest mystical saints of recent times. Although himself almost illiterate, his influence was so powerful that it left behind several generations of disciples who established and continue to operate the highly regarded and internationally recognized Ramakrishna Order of Monks and the Ramakrishna Mission and Institute, which have centres in many parts of the world. Both have their headquarters in Calcutta close to the temple where Ramakrishna served as a priest. The Ramakrishna Order of Monks is a residence and a training facility for monks and visitors belonging to the worldwide Vedanta Societies. The Ramakrishna Mission, unlike the Order - which has a purely spiritual function - is largely devoted to philanthropic and cultural activities in India and elsewhere.

Ramakrishna was born of a poor Brahmin family in a small village in West Bengal in 1836. His father was a village pundit (religious teacher) and the young Ramakrishna showed spiritual leanings from an early age. His first significant mystical experience came to him when he was seven. It occurred just before a heavy tropical storm when the sky was filled with bruised and brooding blue-black clouds. Suddenly he saw a flight of pure white cranes, stark against the looming background. He was stunned by the beauty of the sight and fell into a mystical trance in which he lay unconscious for several hours. From that time onwards, and even to the end of his life, he remained precariously poised between normal and trance-like states. At the age of nine, while appearing as Shiva in a school play, he was carried away by the exalted role and fell into an ecstatic, God-enraptured state for three days. The school play was cancelled.

Later Ramakrishna trained as a Brahmin priest and at the age of twenty, because it was proving difficult to get a more experienced incumbent, he was appointed to the position of chief priest in a newly constructed Kali temple at

1 From the Mahimna Stotra.
Dakshineswar, on the banks of the Ganges River in Calcutta. His worship now became centred on the image of Kali in the temple. It took the form of intense desire to receive visions of the Divine Mother, and also of Krishna. In these God-intoxicated states he would dance naked at night in a nearby burial site and beat his head on the ground, weeping in his longing for union with the Mother of the Universe. Later that transformation occurred and during these bhavas (identifications with deities) he would decorate his own body with flowers and sandalwood paste as his attention to the Kali idol in the temple waned. But the bhavas were pursued with such intense devotion that they alarmed the temple authorities who relieved him, temporarily, of his duties.

Also concerned about his excessive zeal and believing that marriage would help him to settle down, his parents agreed to a marriage contract that the son had proposed. (He was after all an official Brahmin priest). But then they discovered the ‘bride’ was just three years old - so that many years passed before she moved into the temple. The marriage was never consummated but later the wife came to be called Sarada Devi, a subject of intense devotion herself. For many years Ramakrishna worshipped her as an incarnation of the Divine Mother, as did the disciples that followed - see later.

Following the ‘marriage’ he was allowed to return to the Dakshineswar temple where he continued, though in a somewhat abated form, to experience God-intoxicated raptures. Any reference to God could send him into the trance-like state of samadhi, and because of this he was regarded with some measure of contempt by many of the temple servants.

Another of his bhavas was to the God Rama and to attract him he took the part of Rama’s favourite general of the Ramayana, the monkey-god Hanuman. Then he went through a period of longing for Krishna and would dress as a woman to attract the deity. His appearance was so woman-like that it was said to convince the closest observers. At This period of his life he was often regarded as strange indeed and this, along with accusations of debauchery, became a means of denigration by some and a license for holier-than-thou forms of criticism to arise. It seems that sometimes, when he saw drunkards, he would go into the street and dance with them - because the sight of their reeling made him think of the way holy men sometimes reel about in apparent drunken ecstasy. He had a friend who was a well known dramatist of those times, G. C. Ghosh, with whom he sometimes danced when Ghosh was drunk and called at the temple after escapades of debauchery. Unquestionably however, as witnessed by his closest disciples, some of whom became enlightened masters themselves, Ramakrishna was neither a drunkard nor sexually active and remained celibate and temperate throughout his entire life. In the confines of temple life it would have been impossible to conceal clandestine activities. For example, as recorded by Christopher Isherwood, one of the young disciples (Jagendra Nath Choudhary, who became Swami Yogananda and was one of six disciples whom Ramakrishna referred to as ‘ishwarakotis’ – free from Karma, who would allow themselves to be reincarnated to serve mankind), thinking that the master was paying a secret visit to his wife, spied on him. Later Ramakrishna appeared from the opposite direction but commented that the spying was correct action: “You should check your Guru by watching day and night,” He said. His nature was such that he simply could see no fault; but that he did not know what was going on was not the case. On one occasion Ghosh called late at night in a high state of inebriation. He had left a bottle of wine in the carriage, but Ramakrishna, somehow knowing this, had sent one of the servants to fetch it and insisted that his visitor drink it all up – after which he was fairly sick and no doubt experienced the folly of over indulgence.

During this early period, long before he began to draw a following of well-educated disciples, he learned tantric forms of yoga, and eventually under the tutelage of a Naga sadhu, Tota Puri, he was taught to meditate on the ‘Formless Absolute’ - which involved mentally decapitating his favourite deity, Kali. Tota Puri also, with full knowledge of his marriage, initiated him into sanyas (monkhood). And then, from being a wandering mendicant who had never spent more than a few days in any one place, Tota Puri stayed at the temple as Ramakrishna’s devotee - the master became the disciple. After this Ramakrishna spent six months in the state known to yogis as nirvikalpa samadhi - in total union with God and completely oblivious to the world. He had to be fed and tended by others. Eventually he came down to earth. He had by that time lost all traces of individual identity and was totally free of ego. He spent the rest of his life completely immersed in the knowledge that the world and its phenomena were simply, as he put it, “Waves emanating from the Cosmic Mind.” He said:

“When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive, neither creating nor destroying, I call him Brahman or Purusha, the impersonal God. When I think of him as active, creating or destroying, I call him Shakti or Prakriti, the personal God. But the distinction does not mean a difference; both are the same Being - as milk and whiteness are the same, as the serpent and its undulations are the same. It is impossible to conceive one without the other.”

At this time he was around 25 years old and still regarded as a fool by some of the temple servants. But then another wandering aesthetic, a female monk known as the Bhairavi, came to the temple. She was a woman of extremely strong character and striking beauty, who immediately recognized Ramakrishna as divine. She claimed that he had to be an Avatar (a direct incarnation of God) because there are nineteen kinds of spiritual mood, and these can only be combined in an Avatar. Ramakrishna had demonstrated all these moods. She called for a conference famous pundits - well known for their strong opinions - and, after some debate, these had to agree that he did, indeed, have all the attributes of an Avatar. Ramakrishna took it all calmly and said, “So they think that! Well, anyway, I’m glad it’s not a disease.” From that time on he was taken more seriously, and later again, over the last few years of his life, he began training the mostly well-educated young men from good families, who, entranced by his mere presence, gathered around him. They would carry the Ramakrishna teachings to the world.
Ramakrishna’s verbal teachings, for the most part, took the form of sayings and stories in response to events and circumstances as they occurred in the dharma of life, and they resulted in numerous parables. He taught by direct statement based on the most supreme spiritual authority, and by the demonstration of samadhi and his state of God-intoxication, his joy and his song and dance. Collections of his sayings have been printed and are available from the Ramakrishna Mission.

Probably the most important record is *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which is based on a diary kept by a disciple, Mahendra Das Gupta, who became the Master Mahasaya - see further on. Another, *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, is an account of a French writer of that time, Romain Rolland - who tried to relate Ramakrishna’s sayings to those of Jesus.

Ramakrishna did not set out to form a new religion but was one of the first masters of modern times to be responsible for what could be called a ‘renaissance’ and reform of the ancient philosophy of Vedanta. Although he was in no way scholarly, his innate wisdom attracted some of the most highly regarded scholars of India. These are some examples of his many recorded teachings:

His comment made to a sadhu who came to him for instruction, encapsulates his views and demonstrates his exalted state of awareness. He said:

“The nameless, formless Reality, the transcendent awareness in which you are now permanently awake, is precisely the same Reality that you have perceived blossoming around you... The perfectly peaceful Absolute is not different from the playful relative universe.”

With regard to the playful relative universe, he said that the world always has to have trouble makers: ‘Otherwise the plot doesn’t thicken - then there’s no fun.’ This is one of the most striking examples that can be found of the difference in the way the world is seen by the enlightened, compared to the judging worldly-bound.

Nevertheless, he also considered matters of the world to be obstacles to liberation. One of the greatest obstacles to progress towards attainment of the higher vision was, he said: “The aggregate of the lustful and voluptuous sensations associated with the sexual act.” But notwithstanding this view of sex he was neither a sexist nor a bigot. Ramakrishna revered all women, of whatever type, as incarnations of the Divine Mother. As explained, his own wife, Sarada Devi, was also worshipped as the Divine Mother. And after the death of Ramakrishna she became a leading figure for devotion within the Ramakrishna Mission and Order. He did discourage his young and unmarried disciples from womanizing. He would say, “I don’t know what people see in women, they are just meat and bone and fat.” He maintained that if a young person, of whatever sex or sexual proclivity, maintains absolute continence for 12 years, the mind will certainly become open to the knowledge of God.

But Ramakrishna had no illusions about human nature and refrained from indulging in judgment. One parable is wonderfully illustrative of this point of view:

“Oh two friends were walking past a place where the word of God was being preached. One said, ‘I must go and hear this sermon and join the pious congregation in the worship of God.’ But from across the road came the sounds of revelry and the second friend said, ’I think I prefer to join the merry-makers and flirt with the dancing girls over there.’ The two friends parted company, one to enter the temple, the other to sport with the revelers. In a short while the one who had chosen the house of pleasure tired of his amusement and was struck by the folly of what was taking place around him. He said to himself, ‘What am I doing, why have I come here when I could have joined my companion in hearkening to the word of God?’ Across the road his companion, bored with the monotonous droning of the preacher, said to himself, ‘I wish I had joined my companion in his fun instead of listening to this rigmarole.’ Which of these two, the sage might well ask, was the better man? Or were they not both the same person? Two beings that dwell in each one of us.”

Ramakrishna recognized four classes of men: The ever free (like Vivekananda) who are in the world for the good of others, to serve and teach the truth. Then there are the liberated, like the mahatmas, who are not entangled in the world: “seeking women and gold.” - and are always meditating on the lotus feet of God. Thirdly there are the seekers who want to be liberated - some will succeed and some will not. Finally, there are the majority of men, who are in bondage and stuck in the world. They never think of God and are full of lust, greed and gossip. What should a seeker do? Ramakrishna said that from time to time he should seek the company of holy men, seek solitude and meditate on God; use discrimination and pray for devotion and faith; faith is everything - there is nothing greater.

On being asked how long a devotee should perform the rituals of worship, he said, “When you shed tears, and your hair stands on end when you utter the name of God, then you will know you no longer need to perform rituals - and the rituals will drop away from you themselves. Then it is enough to just say the name of God, or just the word Om. Ritualistic worship becomes merged in the sacred Gayatri mantra; and then Gayatri becomes merged in Om.”

To those who were married, like Mahendra Das Gupta, he would say attend to your duties. Wife, father, mother, children - live with them and serve them, but know in your heart of hearts that they are not your own: “If you are in family life without having cultivated love for God, you will get more and more entangled and will be unable to withstand dangers, grief and sorrows; if you have not acquired dispassion, knowledge and devotion. In the world, the only thoughts are of lust and greed.”

Ramakrishna was fond of practical jokes and was skilled at imitating others in a humorous manner. He would sometimes parody the arrogant British by strutting around and uttering fruity English-sounding words and syllables. But he was always gentle and filled with love and humour and without aggression. He believed in being assertive only when necessary, without doing harm to anyone. This view was illustrated in a story, thus:

*There was a dangerous cobra that lived in a field so that herdsmen would never go there. One day a holy man passed*
through the field but as the snake approached he put a spell on it so that it was unable to attack. Then he said to the snake, "I will give you a mantra and from now on you will not attack any creature." And the holy man passed on his way. But soon the herdsmen learned that the snake was now harmless and they threw stones at it and beat it badly. The snake crawled into a hole and nearly died. Some time later the holy man passed by again and on seeing the poor condition of the snake, asked, "What's wrong with you, you look terrible?" The snake explained and the holy man said, "You were very foolish, I told you not to bite people, I didn't say not to hiss."

**His indifference to the forms of worship:** To illustrate the egalitarian nature of his beliefs he would say:

"Greeting to the Jnani; Greeting at the feet of the Bhakta - to the devout who believe in the formless, and to the devout who believe in the God of form. Greeting to the men of old who knew Brahman! And greeting to the moderns who knows the truth.

He would maintain that there is sometimes a need for images, even if made of clay: "God himself has arranged many ways of worship to suit the varied temperaments of his worshipers in their different stages of growth."

But Ramakrishna was convinced that, on the spiritual path, personal experience was much more important than spiritual instruction or practices based on extreme forms of tapasya (spiritual burning and austerities) - because the state of liberation is several times removed from the phenomenal world which surrounds us and cannot be comprehended, except by experience. To illustrate this he told a tale of a blind man who wanted to know what milk looked like. One person said, 'White like a crane.' ‘What is a crane?’ He asked, and another said, ‘Like a sickle.’ And then he was told that a sickle was like a bent arm. Finally the blind man came to a conclusion: ‘Ah,’ he said, ‘Milk is white like a bent arm.’

He had little time for extreme forms of asceticism and said, "If twenty years of asceticism merely enables you to walk on water, better pay a boatman and save your effort." Further, he paid little heed to theoretical matters and the dogmas of different creeds. To him religion was a living experience and he was convinced that the actual participation in the practices of other faiths (than Hinduism) - and particularly Christianity, was also a part of experience and a means of understanding God. His main form of teaching to the many disciples and devotees that gathered around him was, like that of all great beings, by the infusion of his grace - simply by being in his presence they acquired grace and some of them went on to become enlightened masters in their own rights. It was these two phenomena that most influenced his disciples; the experience of his presence, and the philosophy of the universality of religion. And it was these characteristics that led to the eventual recognition of Ramakrishna throughout the world as one of the great saints of modern times. The spread of Sanatana Dharma, the universality of religion, was further advanced, and continues to be advanced, through the teachings of swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission.

**Last days**

For more than a year before he passed away it was known that Ramakrishna was suffering from throat cancer, yet, through what must have been terrible pain even to the last day and the last hour he continued with the teaching of the young disciples. During this last year he continued to laugh, to joke and sometimes, in a croaky voice, to sing. Christopher Isherwood writes that one of the attendants formed the opinion that he was not suffering at all: "The eyes of the saint regarded the wasting of the body with a kind of calm, secret amusement, as only the horrible disease was only a masquerade. Lex Hixton, in his book *Great Swan*, writes of the experience of an attending doctor. Ramakrishna, his face literally shining with heavenly joy, would say: "Please open your entire being… Why feel self-conscious about calling the divine name with total abandon?" (The doctor was recalcitrant about this, feeling that it would detract from his professional standing).

Hixton writes that it was during this period that he expressed most strongly his conviction that the Divine Mother was the Source of all Consciousness. He said:

"I experienced the Divine Mother as a young pregnant woman who gave birth to the manifest world, cradled it and nursed it for a while and then began to swallow it. As it entered the dark mouth in the form of a radiant child, it was immediately revealed to be devoid of any substantial and independent existence. The Cosmic Mother then cried in a charming voice: 'Come delusion, come illusion! The Divine Magician alone is Real!' ... All phenomena, including Divine Forms, are sheer transparency. There's nothing to hold on to, here of anywhere."

Even to his last day and his last hour he continued with the teaching of the young disciples. Two days before his death he said, "He who was Rama and he who was Krishna, is now Ramakrishna - in the body lying here... Not in the Vedantic sense and not in the sense of the Absolute, but in the sense of reincarnation of a Bodhisattva." Just before his death his skin took on an extraordinary lustre. He placed his hand upon his heart and said, "All phenomena emanate from here".

The disciples were to spread the message of the universality of God through the world. So to the last hour he spoke to them on this matter, and to others he said again and again, "Take care of these boys." On the last day, after listening to devotional songs, the master began to shudder and the hairs on his body stood on end. Tears of joy flowed from his eyes. They seemed to be seeing some beatific vision for there was an enraptured smile on his lips. Then in a ringing voice he cried three times the name of his beloved Kali, and lay back in silence, surrounded by the disciples. A doctor felt for the pulse and said that it had stopped. But then, after some time, a tremulous vibration seemed to run through the body and at this the hairs on the heads of the assembled disciples stood on end. Simultaneously, as if prompted by a higher power, they cried "Jai Ramakrishna" - it was the mahasamadhi of a truly great being.

Ramakrishna had trained a band of young intellectuals, agnostics, and rebels against the established order of the
day, to comprehend the truth of God. Most had belonged to the Brahmo Samraj Sect that opposed the worship of idols. At the same time some, like Vivekananda, were against the concept of Advaita, that everything could lay claim to the name of God. In the end, by the time they began their various missions, they were all alloyed into the belief of not limiting God in any way at all.

**Some major disciples**

Of the young monks Vivekananda and Brahmananda were the most pivotal in establishing the Order, and Ramakrishna had spent much of his time during his last year training them. He had great love for Vivekananda saying that he was a reincarnation of Narayana (Vishnu). At one point Vivekananda was tormented by the existence of ‘evil’ in the world; and then one night, in the presence of the master: a screen was lifted - and he saw the perfect harmony between God’s justice and mercy and its relationship to all of creation. From that time on he became totally indifferent to praise or blame in the world. At first Vivekananda was opposed to both idol worship and the notion of everyone being God as in Advaita: “What’s this nonsense about I am God, you are God, and anything that is born and dies is God?” Ramakrishna answered, “You may not be able to accept these truths at present, but is that reason to condemn the great sages who taught them? Why do you try to limit God’s nature? Keep calling to him. He is truth itself. Whatever he reveals to you, believe that to be true.” The attitude of accepting God in every form was the key to the success of Vivekananda’s presentation of Vedanta philosophy to the first meeting of the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. At this meeting he described the teachings of Ramakrishna on the unity of all religions; that all religions have the same goal and that the teachings of Jesus, the Buddha, Mohammed and others are merely different aspects of one divine Reality.

After his death Ramakrishna’s teachings were spread widely by his leading disciples who became the first monks of the Ramakrishna Order. There were seventeen young disciples and a number of older lay disciples: Balram Bose and Keshab Sen, and Mahendra Das Gupta and G. K. Ghosh who have already been mentioned, and of course, Sarada Devi. Following the death of the master the young disciples found an old house near the Ganges said to be haunted. It was all that they could afford. Here they enshrined Ramakrishna’s bed with his picture upon it and his ashes nearby on a stool. (Some of the ashes had already been deposited at a village house elsewhere but the boys had secreted some to have with them.) They slept on mats on the floor and sometimes went hungry, and they called themselves the ‘dhanas’ - the ghost companions of Shiva. They would gather together and discuss the teachings of Ramakrishna, Jesus, and other sages and they would sing kirtans long into the night. It was here that they assumed their monastic names, and often Mahendra Das Gupta - the Master Mahasaya to be - would visit and join in their activities.

**Swami Vivekananda:** As part of his mission Vivekananda traveled the length and breadth of India, preaching and visiting holy sites. It was at this time that the Maharaja of Ketri offered sponsorship for his visit to America. On return to Calcutta he became the first head of the Ramakrishna Order and during the following years he traveled widely in the United States and Europe expounding Ramakrishna’s vision. He was a sublime lecturer and usually spoke to packed houses. He was also a tireless opponent of the concept of dualism in religion. Almost everyone responded to the deep bell-like voice of this most unusual of human beings - someone who expressed exactly what he meant - the truth of man’s essential divinity. He would say: “He, for whom you have been weeping and praying in churches and temples, is your own Self.” But as leader of the Order, he never forgot that he was a disciple of Ramakrishna and an equal with his fellow monks. This is an example of his teaching:

“If living by rule alone ensures excellence, if it be virtue to strictly follow the rules, say then who is a greater devotee, a holier saint, than a railway train? .. The dualist thinks you cannot be moral unless you have a God with an iron rod in His hand, ready to punish you. Suppose a horse had to give us a lecture on morality, one of those cab horses who moves only with the whip. He begins to speak about human beings and says they are very immoral. Why? Because I know they are not whipped regularly. ..

I hate this world, this dream, this horrible nightmare, we have created with its churches, its fair faces and false hearts, its howling righteousness on the surface and utter hollowness beneath, and, above all, its sanctified shop keeping .. Let the barks of puppies not frighten you - no, not even the thunderbolts of heaven - but stand up and work.”

Vivekananda’s zeal for God and abhorrence of worldly matters is shown by a letter to some of his devotees written in 1894. It said: “Stick to God! Who cares what comes to the body or to anything else! Through the pangs of death say - my God, my Love! Thou art here, I see Thee. Thou art with me, I feel Thee. I am Thine, take me. I am not of the worlds but Thine. Leave me not. Do not go for glass beads, leaving the mine of diamonds. This life is a great chance. Why seekest thou the pleasures of the world! He is the fountain of all bliss. Seek for the highest, and you shall reach the highest.”

His touring and pioneering days ended in 1900 by which time he had become sick and exhausted; but he was much calmer and happier after returning to the math, than during the hectic days. He wrote: “I feel the rest of the soul more than the body - the battles lost and won. I have packed my things and await the Great Deliverer.” It has been suggested that his death was a predetermined act. Not of desperate suicide but in the way that holy beings are said to be able to decide the time of their deaths. He went to his room on the 4th of July 1902 and after meditating he called a young monk to fan him as he lay on his bed. Some time later his hand trembled and he breathed once very deeply and then lay still with his eyes fixed in apparent ecstasy. After some time it was realized that he had passed from the worldly realm.

In his short lifetime Vivekananda became an institution in India and, although never involved in political activities, he had thrust upon him political and ambassadorial status for India - even though the Order steadfastly refused to
comment on political matters, especially in those early days of the independence struggle. Today his statue stands at the Gateway to India, in Mumbai. He died barely sixteen years after the death of the master, at the age of thirty-nine.

**Swami Brahmananda:** Known as Maharaj, Swami Brahmananda became the second head of the Order and held this position for many years until just before his death in 1923. His character was very different from that of Vivekananda, being quiet and reserved, and he remained in India looking after the young monks and the new disciples. His influence on them was outstanding and helped to carry on the Ramakrishna tradition into its third generation. As a young disciple the gentle yielding boy became the gentle deeply wise Brahmananda, under whose leadership the mission came to maturity. He steadfastly maintained that the first concern of monks must be spirituality, and its success must be judged by the inner state of its members. Isherwood wrote that Maharaj’s care for others extended far beyond ordinary compassion and was deeply spiritual. He seemed to be in mental communication with everyone in the order and was aware of their unspoken problems, even at long distances when young monks had to go overseas - see the example of Swami Prabhavananda below.

It was said that even when members of the Order were being admonished by Brahmananda, they would experience an undercurrent of joy. And he was so utterly fearless that others lost their fear in his presence. He had deeply searching eyes and at times would look strikingly like Ramakrishna. He was not an accomplished speaker but rather inspired by silence - instilling a feeling of peace, and an inclination to meditate, in others. He said: "Religion is a most practical thing. It doesn’t matter if one believes or not. It’s like science. If one performs spiritual disciplines, the result is bound to come, even practicing mechanically - if one persists one will get everything in time. And remember, if you take one step towards God, God will take a hundred steps towards you. And why did God create us? So that we may love him."

Brahmananda was immensely fond of music, whether devotional or not, and he said that sound itself, like silence, is God - everything is God.

**Sarada Devi:** For most of her life she was simply in the background - a shy ordinary woman. But after the death of the master, when she was on pilgrimage, she started to become more and more the “Holy Mother” to the young monks. To call her ‘Mother’ was not simply an expression of respect, for the young monks began to feel her maternal qualities. Slowly, as she grew older, she came to inhabit a world of her children and was unable to see fault in them. At first she was unwilling to assume a spiritual role as a teacher but she began to be such after a number of visions of Ramakrishna. She began also to help the new and unfolding Order to establish. It came to be that any wish that she expressed was observed instantly. She was considered to be one with the Mother of the Universe and one with Ramakrishna, and she became the de facto head of the Order.

In 1920 she began to isolate herself as she experienced recurring fevers and it became clear that her end was near. And when a young monk asked what will become of us? She replied, “Why are you afraid? You have seen the Master.”

**Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood:** We probably can discern as much or more about a third generation master, Swami Prabhavananda, as we can about the earlier figures, from the sensitive accounts of the British writer Christopher Isherwood. Isherwood became a devotee and disciple of one of these monks, Swami Prabhavananda, and wrote of him in his book My Guru and His Disciple - see Bibliography. Prabhavananda was a disciple of Brahmananda and never met Ramakrishna personally. He intimated that there was a long-standing relationship with Brahmananda and that he may have been a mentor of Brahmananda in an earlier incarnation. When, as a young prospective monk, he first met Brahmananda, the latter said to him, “Son, haven’t I seen you before?” And much later, towards the end of his life, Prabhavananda related an incident which may support this belief. He explained it thus: “I was sitting cross-legged in front of Maharaj (Brahmananda) with his feet resting on my knees. This was the position in which I often used to massage his feet. Then something happened to me which I cannot explain, though I feel certain that it was at Maharaj’s doing. I found myself in a condition in which I was talking and talking, forgetting my usual constraint. It seems to me I spoke freely and even eloquently for a long time, but I do not remember what I said. Maharaj listened and said nothing. Then suddenly I returned to normal consciousness and became aware of Maharaj leaning towards me and asking with an amused smile, ‘What did you say?’ I then realized I was addressing him as ‘tumi’ (the familiar form of ‘you’, used with equals or juniors and friends). I hastened to correct myself, repeating the sentence - I have forgotten what it was - but using ‘apani’ (the respectful form of ‘you’ by which we addressed him). After this it occurred to me that this may have been Brahmananda’s way of revealing our association from an earlier life in which I was the mentor and Brahmananda the student.”

In 1923 Swami Brahmananda died and shortly after this Prabhavananda, who was barely thirty, was transferred to the California Mission as an assistant swami. Some time after this he became head of the Southern California Branch until his death in 1976, aged 83. For much of this time, from 1939 onwards, Isherwood was one of his devotees and, to a degree, his disciple - the one of the book title. He has given a detailed account of this relationship which was both as the friend and the mentor of Isherwood. Together they produced an important biography of Ramakrishna and the first generation of monks called Ramakrishna and His Disciples - see Bibliography. From My Guru and His Disciple one can discern that some of the successors of the great Ramakrishna were still on the path themselves for most of their lives, but while none of them ventured to presume themselves ‘gurus’, it was obvious that, in the end, many of them had become enlightened beings.

Isherwood records many of the comments and feelings that Prabhavananda conveyed to him. At one time, when aged 62, he said to Isherwood after a ceremony, “I get so bored with philosophy nowadays - even with Shankara (the 8th century reviver of Advaita). Then he intimated that he had always been intensely aware of the presence of Brahmananda. He said, “If there hadn’t been others there, I’d have balled like a baby... I used to want visions and ecstasies but now I
don’t care. I only pray to love God.” Isherwood commented: “He’s like a young man in love.” And some time later Prabhavananda said, “I want to have this joy not only occasionally but always - then I can pass it on to all of you.”

Later in his life Prabhavananda’s began to feel the presence of the Lord almost continuously; he no longer had to make much effort - sometimes it was Ramakrishna, sometimes Sarada Devi, or Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda). He said, “When I met Maharaj I knew that one could know God... It’s all Maharaj... Everything he told me is coming true; I didn’t understand him at the time. Now I begin to know what he was talking about.” Isherwood recounts: “He kept repeating Maharaj matters most to him - even more than Ramakrishna, because he actually knew Maharaj. He was in a wonderfully exalted mood and said, speaking of Maharaj, “Chris (Isherwood), I saw him! His Joy, the oneness of it, was so beautiful.” He told Isherwood that he had come to realize more and more that Maharaj, Swamiji (Vivekananda), Holy Mother, and Ramakrishna, “are all the same.”

Something that speaks worlds for the exalted state that some of the successors of Ramakrishna must have achieved, was concerned with the relationship with Krishnamurti (Chapter 5). Both Isherwood and Aldous Huxley were, at one time, official disciples of Swami Prabhavananda, even though Huxley had stronger leanings towards Krishnamurti - who abhorred the idea of priests and gurus. Nevertheless, Krishnamurti and Prabhavananda met on a number of occasions and showed the greatest respect and humility towards each other. (Krishnamurti was actually under fire from the Ramakrishna Mission at that time - because Mrs. Anne Besant, Krishnamurti’s self-appointed patron, had dared to suggest that he, Krishnamurti, was an ‘Avatar’ - and therefore equal in Hindu mythological belief, to Ramakrishna.)

Prabhavananda’s death was characteristic of the deaths of many great beings, serene and focused. Isherwood wrote that in the afternoon he had had a heart attack and was very weak. (Previously he had told Isherwood that after an earlier heart attack he hadn’t been afraid - he had simply observed the palpitations of his heart.) On the occasion of his death he spoke of Maharaj (Brahmananda) and then was quiet. Later he asked, “What time?” and on being told said, “No, too soon - it must be midnight.” - Just before midnight his lips began to move and his eyes were turned up, and just after midnight those around him began chanting, “Om, Hari Om, Ramakrishna.” With the first Hari Om, he gently exhaled his last breath and died. (It is generally agreed that he wanted to wait for midnight because the following day was July the fourth - auspicious not because of the American celebration, but because Vivekananda had died on a fourth of July.)

**The Master Mahasaya:** Of all the disciples of Ramakrishna, the one who gained the greatest status as a saint of that period in India was the Master Mahasaya. His greatness almost equaled that of Ramakrishna himself. He had been a disciple of Ramakrishna’s for the last five years of the latter’s life. Unlike most of the others he did not take sanyas (monkhood) but was married and led a family life until old age. Paul Brunton met the Master Mahasaya in Calcutta in 1935. He was in his seventies at the time. On being asked to say something about Ramakrishna, he said this: “Ah, you raise the subject about which I best love to talk... It is nearly half a century since he left us, but his blessed memory can never leave me; always it remains fresh and fragrant in my heart. I was constantly in his society for the last five years of his life. The result was that I became a changed man; my whole attitude to life was reversed... He threw a spiritual spell upon all who visited him. Even materialistic persons who came to scoff became dumb in his presence... They had to bow before his tremendous spirituality which was so real that it could be felt. He taught us that pride, riches, wealth, worldly honors, worldly position are trivialities in comparison with that spirituality - fleeting illusions that deceive men.

Often he would pass into trances of so palpably divine a nature that we who gathered around him then would feel that he was a God, rather than a man. Strangely, too, he possessed the power of inducing a similar state in his disciples by means of a single touch; in this state they could understand the deep mysteries of God by means of direct perception.

I had been educated along Western lines. My head was filled with intellectual pride. I had served as a professor at different times. Ramakrishna was living in the temple of Dakshineswar... There I found him one unforgettable spring day and listened to his simple expression of spiritual ideas born of his own experience. I made a feeble attempt to argue with him but soon became tongue-tied in that sacred presence, whose effect on me was too deep for words.

Again and again I visited him, unable to stay away from this poor, humble but divine person, until Ramakrishna one day humorously remarked, ‘A peacock was given a dose of opium at four o’clock. The next day it appeared at exactly the same hour. It was under the spell of opium and came for another dose.’... That was true, symbolically speaking. I had never enjoyed such blissful experiences as when I was in the presence of Ramakrishna, so you can wonder why I came again and again. And so I became one of his group of intimate disciples, as distinguished from merely occasional visitors.

Ramakrishna has gone, but as you travel through India, you will see some of the social, philanthropic, medical and educational work being done throughout the country under the inspiration of those early disciples of his, most of whom, alas, have now passed away too.

*People should associate frequently with truly holy men who have real spiritual experience. Constant contact with them will assist them to bring out their latent spirituality. Higher men turn our minds and wills towards divine objects. Above all, they cause an intense longing for spiritual life. Therefore the society of such men is very important as the first step, and often it is also the last, as Ramakrishna himself used to say.*

Paul Brunton’s comments on Master Mahasaya himself are as follow: “Night after night I come, less to hear the utterances of Mahasaya than to bask in the spiritual sunshine of his presence. The atmosphere around him is tender and beautiful, gentle and loving; he has found some inner bliss and the radiation of it seems palpable. Often I forget his words, but I cannot forget his benignant personality. That which drew him again and again to Ramakrishna seems to draw me to Mahasaya also, and I begin to understand how potent must have been the influence of the teacher when the pupil exercises
such a fascination upon me. When our last night came... the good Master takes my hand... He says softly, ‘My task has almost come to an end. This body has nearly finished what God sent it here to do. Accept my blessing before I go’.

In fact, by a strange ‘coincidence’, Paul Brunton met a wandering sadhu some time later and far to the south in Tamil Nadu. The sadhu, quite unprompted, asked him what he felt about the Master Mahasaya. Paul Brunton was surprised but said that he loved him greatly and would go to see him soon. The sadhu then said, “You will never see the Master in this short life again for the hand of death is already approaching him”. And so it happened, a few months later the Master Mahasaya passed away.

Practicalities

The Belur Math is located on the banks of the Ganges, opposite the Dakshineswar Kali Temple where Ramakrishna served as a priest. The ashes of Ramakrishna’s most famous disciple, Swami Vivekananda, and those of Ramakrishna’s wife Sarada Devi are interred here, and there is a small museum of Swami Vivekananda’s memorabilia. The math has a comfortable guest house for serious devotees of Ramakrishna and for members of the various Vedanta Societies. Others may stay for a few days with prior permission. Payment is by appropriate donation. Contact details are as follow: Belur math, (Attention of General secretary), Ramakrishna Mission, PO Belur math 211202, District Howrah, West Bengal, India. Tel. (Internat.) +91 33 654 1146 /1180 /1144 /5391 (local) 033 654 1146 etc. Fax. (Internat.)+91 33 654 4346 (local) 033 654 4346.

Most visitors stay at the Ramakrishna Institute of Culture which is mainly concerned with cultural and sociological works. Contact details are as follow: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, (Attention of the Secretary), Gol Park, Calcutta 700 029. West Bengal, India. Tel. (Internat.) +913374 1303 /1304 /1305 (local) 033 741303 etc. Fax. (Internat.) +9133 741307 (local) 033 741307. The Website is: www.Sriramakrishna.org

Chapter 2

RAMA TIRTHA - A SAINT OF PRACTICAL VEDANTA

I can wear the silver threads of moonlight... I can dance in the waves of the sea.
I am the breeze that proudly walks and the wind inebriated.

Rama Tirtha was born in West Punjab (now Pakistan) in 1873 and died in 1906. He was related to Gosain Tulsi Das, the mystical saint reputed to be the author of the Ramayana. His mother is also said to have been the aunt of Papaji (Ch.12). In his short life he became one of India’s best-loved saints and, along with Vivekananda and Yogananda, was considered to be one of the very few fully-realized Indian spiritual teachers to travel to the West. During this period he entranced audiences with his interpretations of Western philosophy and Vedanta and his explanations of the universality of all religions from Sufism to Christianity, and Buddhism to Hinduism. He said of himself (in the third person), “Rama guarantees that anybody in this world who hears his speeches (or reads his books), would get his doubts removed and would be sure to come to the conviction of his own divinity.”

Background

From infancy Rama was regarded as a beautiful and charming child who radiated extraordinary grace and intelligence and won the hearts of all who encountered him. His early life was recorded by Shribad Rama Sharma in his book Swami Rama Tirtha - the Apostle of Practical Vedanta - see Bibliography. As a child he would sometimes fall into mystical trances. At school he was placed under the guardianship of Baghat Dhanna Rama, a saintly man who wielded a great influence on his life by expounding the Yoga Vasistha - the story of the enlightenment of the Hindu deity Rama under the tutelage of the sage Vasistha.

The young Rama Tirtha became a brilliant scholar and at the age of 22 with high distinctions and an MA degree, was appointed as a professor of mathematics at Lahore University. Here he gave an indication of his exalted state when he wrote to his guardian as follows: “The degree of concentration and pure divine feeling is wonderfully high these days and God consciousness is possessing with a marvelous sweep. As the subject is to fickle whims and constant change, I will never, never identify myself with this naughty will-o-the-wisp”. He had been married early in the Brahmin tradition but in 1897, at the age of twenty four, he left his family for ramblings in sacred spots and in the forests around Rishikesh, Northern India, and completely devoted his life to spirituality. In 1901, at the age of 28 and with the persuasion of Swami Vivekananda (Chapter 1), he took sanyas (monkhood).

It was said that he behaved as if ‘God intoxicated’ through most of his adult life and at times would weep tears of joy and ecstasy and lose himself, even during his public lectures. He was never pedantic and would not judge others’ opinions. He was extremely polite to all persons and also to animals and even inanimate things. Even to his pens and books
he would talk lovingly - to him they were all God. An observer of that period, Sadar Puran Singh, said, “No words could paint the charm of this person.” - see Introduction to *The Woods of God Realization* Vol. II. He toiled day and night practicing spiritual exercises and at times attained visions of Krishna and other celestial beings. To these he would also apply scientific observation and concluded, after looking Krishna squarely in the eyes, that he (Krishna) was a product of his own (Rama Tirtha’s) divinity, that marked a particular state of mind-concentration - his vision was nothing but a manifestation of his exalted state of mind.

He was above all fear, anxiety and annoyance - a state to which he rose through constant practice and perseverance, from (in his own words) the lowest depths of ignorance and superstition. And he said to all comers, “If I can do it so can you... My voice is your voice... No powers, kings, devils or gods can withstand it - inevitable is the order of Truth. My head is your head; cut it off and a thousand will grow.”

Whenever he could Rama went to the Himalayan hills where, it is said, after spending time alone in the forests near Rishikesh, he realized the Atman. Of himself he would say: “The whole universe serves me as this body. I shine in the lightning and roar in the thunder... I flutter in the leaves - I am in all.”

Rama was a great admirer of the Sufi tradition and would talk of the Sufi saint Shems of Tabrez as if talking of himself. He said: “Shems forgot he was born... he forgot his personality... he was all divinity. It is said that when he walked people heard, as if coming from the pores of his body as a song, ‘Haq Analhaq, Haq Analhaq’ - God, I am God. Ordinary people were enraged and murdered him for heresy but Shems seemed not even aware of it. Whom would they kill? He was impaled on a spike with his face still glowing with the glory of God. And from every hair came the same sweet song - ‘Haq Analhaq’.

In 1904 and 1905 Rama traveled to Japan, America, Europe, Egypt and throughout India. His talks were spellbinding and laden with the divine ecstasy of a realized being. They were, in effect, miracles. In Egypt he was welcomed by Mohammedans as he spoke in Persian in a mosque. His opening words were: “I shall shower oceans of love and bathe the world in joy. All societies are mine! Come; for I shall pour out floods of love. Every force is mine, small and great - Welcome!” And in America, as if in harmony with the worship of physical power characteristic of that nation, he went on a country run with marines and finished several hours before the next runners.

In his talks he would first warm the heart of the listener and then the intellect. His scholarship was astounding, covering Western philosophy, mathematics, chemistry, biology and evolution - so that he could talk of Vedanta (Sanatana Dharma), which embraces all these philosophies, to a Western audience. Of Vedanta he knew every detail and he could apply scientific observation and concluded, after looking Krishna squarely in the eyes, that he (Krishna) was a product of his own (Rama Tirtha’s) divinity, that marked a particular state of mind-concentration - his vision was nothing but a manifestation of his exalted state of mind.

**Teachings**

It seems that the teachings or Rama were made potent through the divine and unseen energy that emanated from him - the ‘silent teaching’ so to speak. For example, one man commented after hearing a talk on the *Bhagavad Gita*, as follows: “I had no faith in the *Bhagavad Gita*, nor did I find anything worthy of admiration in the life of Krishna. Yet the charm of his speech and the spell of his words was such that I felt induced to read about these things - the effect it produced on me was simply indescribable.”

Rama maintained that the scriptures should be studied like chemistry and physics, with our own experience as the ultimate authority. He proclaimed: “Develop self confidence and reliance. Be a free thinker - judge for yourself, and listen to the inner voice so that you understand the Truth and the Truth alone. Avoid dogmas and blind faith. All the prophets in the world can’t help unless you remove your own darkness!”

One of his main and often-repeated teachings was that renunciation was a necessary ingredient on the path to enlightenment in this life. In defense of this would say: “The love of God that is good for you must also be good for your wife or husband. The Truth is eternal and the world momentary... (and) sensuous engagements are nothing but a dead carcass - those who run after them are behaving no better than dogs. If you could love the Truth even half as much as you love your wife you would realize immediately.” But he would sometimes add that it does not mean giving up the family, but rather giving up attachments. He would say, “Happiness is within you. Don’t suffer from any desire. Overcome body consciousness. Give up your ego which is the root of selfishness and the worst defilement. Be above body and mind consciousness.”

Rama did not try to retain any of his talks but some of them were recorded and collected by his chief disciple...
Swami Narayana and these have been published in nine volumes under the title *In the Woods of God Realization* - see Practicalities. These are some examples of his teachings:

**The path to Truth:** Rama said that the path to the Truth is a contradiction in terms, for the Truth is not far distant somewhere else, but within. To attain it we simply have to *undo* what we have spent our lives doing in making our own prisons - that is, fabricating our ‘personalities’. There is some effort required for all attachments: loves and hates, and all desires, are shackles and chains - as are all debased yearnings, superstitions, and prejudices. He said, “It’s a great deal more than refraining from conjugal activities; house, dog, mother, child and so on - so make yourself free of all that keeps you bound to the world!”

**On spirituality and psychic powers:** In answer to a question on the desirability of contact with departed spirits, Rama expounded on the cosmic worlds. He explained that there are three basic worlds: the gross physical world, the psychic or astral world, and the world of the unknown. The heavens and hells of the religions all belong to the second - but they are all of them simply *worlds*; that is, they exist in the illusion of time and duality. To hanker after any of them, even where you may imagine a departed soul to be, is worldliness. It will not lead to true immortality. He said, “In India there are many yogis and psychics who know about the astral world but we should not bow to them on our knees for peace and happiness because we cannot get that from them. They are far from being holy. There was a man in India who was apparently dead for six months in a state called *kheahari mudra* known to yogis. It seems to be a wonder of wonders but this man was far from being happy and free.”

He explained that everyone wants to enlarge and extend their personal dominion, but personal power binds just as much as material wealth does. Such fakirs may be happy when they are in a state of samadhi, which is a good state, but on the material plane they are just as miserable as anybody else. Keeping the mind in a state of trance for hours is not necessarily brought about by divine wisdom - for when they wake, Rama said: “The snake of passion awakens also! So, is it right to develop psychic powers? For your own sakes remember it is just worldliness. Rama recommends no hunting after shadows and ghosts. It is your own self that appears as ghosts and spirits... In dreams the rivers and mountains are within you. You split yourself into the phenomena (the objects), and the little thinking agent (the ‘subject’ - your egocentric self). But in reality you are the subject and the object. You are the lovely rose and the nightingale. Everything is you: the ghosts, the gods and angels, the sinners and the saints - all are you. Know that, feel that, realize that - and you are free. This is attained through the path of renunciation... Place all your confidence in yourself and nothing will make you fall.”

**Aids to spiritual practice - pranayana:** Rama often taught about practices to aid realization. He said, “There are eight principal methods of yoga but one is mentioned by Rama for getting out of the dumps and to control thoughts, it is control of the breath (pranayana)... Through pranayana you gain strength and expel diseases; but most people fall sick when they hear this from Rama, because they prolong the steps excessively. So be natural, be judicious, try to increase gradually.” He also explained that there is nothing mystical in pranayana, nothing supernatural - it just helps to concentrate the mind:

> Sit upright with the right thumb on the right nostril and inhale long and deeply thinking that divinity is being inhaled. When filled close the left nostril and keep the breath in the lungs, abdomen and all cavities and think you are divinity permeating every atom of the universe. As the breath fills your body realize that you are the Truth that fills the universe. When you cannot hold the breath any longer exhale slowly through the right nostril feeling that impurities and ignorance are being exhaled - weakness, fear, anxiety, worry. Now take the hand away but hold the breath out for some time and let the mind feel that it is divinity - the Atman, and not limited by anything in the world. Now relax and breathe as if you have been exercising for some time until recovered. This resting is actually also part of the pranayana. Then begin the process again but this time inhaling first through the right nostril and exhaling through the left.

**Chanting sacred syllables:** Rama said that the sages threw themselves into ecstasies by chanting the sacred syllable Om. It does not belong to any language; it comes from within; it resembles a child’s cry and the sound occurs in every language, animals say it; it pervades life through prana and brings relief to the sick; mentally saying SO-HAM in breathing in and out, is chanting OM mindfully - thus reality runs through the breath. These are his instructions:

> *Soham is a prayer not of asking but of realization. Sit at ease with back straight and understand there is only one reality. Chant OM! - feel it, let the OM be your symbol. Chant with your whole soul. All powers I am - All joy, all Truth - OM! .. Light, fearlessness is me - no attachment or aversion - OM! .. I hear in all ears, see in all eyes. In all minds I think - OM! .. Sages aspire to know me - OM! .. The light of stars is me - OM! .. All your troubles will disappear as you lose your small self that makes the world more real than God. If the body feels sick, leave it aside. Feel healthy and you will be. The small ifs and I’s will be gotten rid of with your own divinity.*

**The secret of Rest:** Rama recognized that the demands of life bring tension but the secret of rest was not to give up work but to rely on renunciation. Give yourself to any work that presents itself but while working take short rests and think, “The body is nothing.” You have nothing to do with its actions or results. You are a witness only. Close your eyes and unburden thought. The more you unburden thought the stronger you will feel.

**Lecture to yourself:** In a talk delivered in America and recorded in Volume II of *In the Woods of God Realization*, Rama advocated lecturing to yourself: in the sense of, and based on, a study of the scriptures - marking the faults that have to be removed and crushing them one by one. Persuade yourself of the need to give up desires because desires inhibit concentration. If greed or grief exist, reflect why? Chant OM and subdue them. He said: “One by one take up the dragon’s heads and lecture on each to yourself. And while meditating chant OM.” Rama maintained that the basic cause of all evils is ignorance. It reveals itself in the desire to identify with the body and bodily pleasures, and the tendency
to be grieved, injured and afflicted: “So, do not starve and do not overfeed - be the master!”

On centering: Rama said, “Whatever you are doing keep your thoughts always at home. Be not ‘centre out’. Continuously contemplate the light of the world as yourself. Always be in touch with your divinity... Those who are really happy are those who keep themselves above worldly pleasures and pains.” Children, for example, are mostly above causation, enjoying everything and caring not for reason - and so they are cheerful and happy. We should struggle always to be above the plane of causation. He said, “I am simply the witness of phenomena, never entangled, ever above... All phenomena are simply harmonic vibrations of the upward and downward motions of the universe, the rising and bringing down of the step.”

Death, the physical body and the subtle body: The human being is like a horse and rider. The physical body is the horse but the rider is the subtle body. This leads to confusion in thinking about such matters as death and freedom. All must die to the physical body yet no one entertains death. Everyone carries on developing connections, promoting growth and engaging in activities as if death will never take hold of them. Rama explains, “The cause of this is that your real Self, is incapable of death... But the attributes of the real Self are, by mistake, attributed to the mortal body, and in the mortal body we find nothing that could give us belief in immortality.” So why can’t we believe in death practically since it is so certain a thing? According to Vedanta it is because the real Self - the Soul or Atman, is incapable of death - and this thought is universal, even in the animal kingdom.

Conflict and bloodshed: Similarly we believe in “freedom” but no one is really free in the world because of so many attachments, desires and temptations - sweet fruits, delicious food, attractive colours, prosperity - they all make us slaves. In a lecture entitled Sin: its relation to the Atman, which appears in Volume I of In The Woods of God Realization, Rama continues to develop the concept of attributes of the Atman being incorrectly applied to the body. The misidentifications also apply to sin, guilt and conflict, and the notion of ‘freedom’ - particularly as it prevailed at that time - the turn of the 20th century. The cause of bloodshed, he maintained, was related to the notion of freedom which very few understood. There is no freedom in the world because everything of the world is bound by time, space and causation. Every thought and deed is determined by the chain of causation which binds us, so how can we be free? “Yet,” he said, “We are so concerned about freedom - explain that! This idealized “freedom” comes from the Atman, which really is free - unlimited, unbound. But we want to have freedom for the body, mind and gross self (the egoic personality) which are bound and hence are not capable of freedom.”

In regard to “sin” he said that everyone in the world, from the point of view of the egoic self, is a sinner - responsible for defects, deficiencies and so on. Yet nobody, except in religious perversion, considers himself to be a sinner - even convicted criminals maintain their innocence. But in church they switch to another mode and confess their sins. Of these tendencies Rama asked, “Is this not an anomaly? According to Vedanta the belief that we are not sinners is testament to the true holy character of the Atman, the inner Self - which really is sinless and pure - the holy of holies. In the pursuit of wealth there is no limit and no happiness is ever achieved. Therefore the cause of peace must be something else. Yet everyone wants wealth... 'Gain the whole world but lose your soul’ - What does that mean? According to Vedanta the real Self is the cause of wanting to possess the world - but while in the body this cannot be achieved... No one sees this.”

He explained that while Jesus spoke about the giving up of riches and the need for renunciation, we still hunger after riches and comfort - even missionaries and dignitaries of the church do this. Rama said that the antidote to this dilemma is to understand that the cause of the ignorance, that makes us confuse body and spirit, is that we attribute to the body what is of the Self, and to the Self, the misery of the body. So, he said, “Remove this ignorance and you will see the rich man with no money and the monarch of the world with no land and property. It is said that Alexander the Great looked at the smiling face of a saint and asked him to come to Greece. The saint just laughed and said, ‘The world is in me - why should I go to Greece?’ Alexander got angry and was going to chop his head off but the saint just laughed and said, ‘I am the power that makes your hands move’ - and the sword just dropped to the ground.”

The cardinal sins: According to Vedanta there is a power that leads you to anger, greed, vanity, attachment, sensuality, and so on. It is the same energy as the Atman. We can’t remove the propensity for sin by preaching, but we can spiritualize this energy. However faulty and sinful the physical individual may be, the sinlessness of the real Self must also be there - must sometimes make itself felt, because it is there and cannot be destroyed. The cardinal sins of vanity and pride and the need for flattery, Rama maintained, are not deadly but are universal. He said, “From the lowest vermin to the highest god, flattery is welcome. Even dogs enjoy flattery. How is it? Even the gods of higher worlds are apprised by flattery. In Christian practice prayers are mostly comprised of asking for things by the use of flattery. Vedanta explains that the cause of feeling good from flattery is due to the real Self. It is not that the statements are true when applied to worldly individuals, but they seem true because there is something behind the senses, some potent force to which flattery can be rendered. The sinfulness of wanting flattery is the mistake of rendering it to the body and the egoic small ‘personality’ self.”

Avarice is also universal; animals, men, women, everybody has it. Such greed is never satisfied and the more we have the more is greed inflamed. All the preaching cannot strangle it. Rama asks, “Is it due to Satan? Not so. Vedanta explains it as the Atman asserting itself. Its energy cannot be crushed - but you can make the right use of it. Eradicate the error of your misunderstanding and realize the Self and then it is impossible for you to seek these outside things to accumulate around your body.”

Anger, according to the explanation of Vedanta, occurs because the Self is absolutely free and universal so that the ego is not satisfied to be limited in any way. Sensuality is wanting all the beauty of the Self but in the world it becomes
nothing but gratifying the senses of the physical body. Attachment and grief is the wanting that things around you should not change while, in reality, in the world everything is in a state of flux. Of all these things Rama said, “The mistake of attaching vanity or pride to the body is the cause of seeking aggrandizement of the body, of becoming frustrated and angry, and of wanting things to be permanent - and this wanting is based on ignorance. So if ignorance could be called ‘Satan’ we might say: ‘Here comes Satan which puts things into confusion’... You will never be able to do away with animal passions unless you do away with all that attracts you... You stand above all these passions and then you will be perfectly free, perfectly full of bliss - this truly is heaven!”

**Rama’s early death**

V. C. Lucknow, in a foreword of Volume III of *In the Woods of God Realization*, wrote the following words: “In the case of Rama Tirtha the sword was too keen for the scabbard. At the early age of 33 he laid himself to rest, as romantic in death as in life, in the icy bubbling waters of the Ganga in Tehri, on the beautiful festival day of Dipawali in 1906... A strange mystical anticipation of his own death was seen in his poetic expression of immortality, written a few weeks before his demise:

“Oh death! Take away this body if you please. I care not. I have enough of bodies to use. I can wear the silver threads of moonlight. I can roam as divine minstrel and put on the guise of hilly streams and mountain brooks. I can dance in the waves of the sea. I am the breeze that proudly walks and the wind inebriated. All these are my wandering shapes of change. I came down from yonder hills, raised the dead, awakened the sleeping, unveiled the fair faces of some and wiped the tears of weeping ones. The bulbul and the rose both I saw and comforted them. Him I touched, her I touched. Now I doff my hat and off I am. Here I go and there I go, and none can find me. I keep nothing with me. ”

It may be said that such as he comes to this world for a short time, throws out some hints and then departs. He draws out love and then disappears, leaving people to stand on their own feet.

**Practicalities**

Rama Tirtha became a monk of the Ramakrishna order. His heritage was the salvaged transcriptions of some of his talks, collected by the chief disciple of his lifetime, Swami Narayana. (The first three are English language talks). The talks have been published in nine volumes under the title *In the Woods of God Realization*, by the Rama Tirtha Pratisthan: 9, Vishnupuri, Church Road, Aliganj, Lucknow 26602, India. Tel. +91522332376. E.mail: webmaster@ramatirtha.org In USA the agent for publications is Blue Dove Foundation, 4204 Sorento Valley Blvd. Suite K, San Diego, CA 92121, USA. E.mail: mail@bluedove.org

**Chapter 3**

**BHAGAWAN NITYANANDA**

*He spoke in a strange language, addressing no one in particular, and everyone present felt he was speaking to him or her alone.*

Bhagawan Nityananda is one of the great mystical saints of the twentieth century and has become a household name in many parts of Mumbai (Bombay) and Maharashtra. Thousands of people still go to his grave, his Mahasamadhi Shrine, in Ganeshpuri near Mumbai, to his ashram in Kanhangad, Kerela and other places where had lived, to ask for blessings. His origins and nature are shrouded in mystery but his influence on those that came to him was, and still is, quite profound. He was an avadahoot, a recluse, who did not give verbal teachings. Yet his ‘silent teachings’ and social works for poor villagers were quite remarkable - see further on. These are the comments of a devotee who visited him for the first time in the early 1940’s - see Bhagawan Nityananda of Ganeshpuri.

“Rain poured down in sheets. In the enclosed veranda, the atmosphere was filled with the sulphurous odors from the nearby hot springs. A few rain-drenched visitors were staring, wide-eyed, through the bars of a window at the ebony figure seated alone on a hard wooden bench inside. He was as motionless as a black granite statue - gazing into space far beyond human vision. The visitors waited expectantly for some indication that this being was alive and not merely a statue. But he seemed totally unaware of their presence. Then, after a few minutes, the figure did move: He lowered his gaze and spoke. A high-pitched voice broke the silence of the dark, rainy afternoon. He spoke in a strange language, addressing no one in particular, and continued speaking until everyone present felt he was speaking to him or her alone.

My rain-soaked clothes were completely dry by now and I started sweating under them when he looked at me and asked, ‘Did you take a bath in the hot springs? Did you have the Darshan of Vajreshwari?’ Ave struck, I could only nod... Bhagawan Nityananda was a giant among the Siddha Masters of his time. There have been very few who have equalled his stature throughout history. Nevertheless, his life was completely shrouded in mystery until Swami Muktananda, his worthy disciple, opened the treasure house of his own spiritual experiences, and I was shown who Nityananda truly was.”
Early life

Bhagawan Nityananda is considered to be an Avatar - that is, he was already enlightened at birth and, like Ramakrishna, Anandamayi Ma and Amma, needed no guru or spiritual guide. In spite of his great popularity, details of his birth and his growing up are not clearly known, so that there are several versions. It is believed he may have been born around 1897 in Kerela, being found in strange circumstances as a baby on a forest path and guarded by a cobra. He lived with his adopted father, Ishwar Iyer - a well known lawyer, through his childhood to the age of around ten. He was apparently mischievous but instinctively knew the scriptures in great detail.

His adopted father took him on a pilgrimage when he was ten to the holy town of Kashi (also known as Varanasi and Benares), after which he insisted on going off on his own. As indicated in Gurudev Nityananda - see Bibliography, it is believed that during this period he spent around ten years in the Himalayas.

He first re-appeared in Kanhangad in south Karnataka at the age of about 20 in 1916 or 1917, and lived for some time in a nearby forest cave in deep meditation. This place is now called Guruvan (Guru’s Forest) and is considered to be a holy and mysterious place and is a destination of pilgrimage for devotees from Mangalore and elsewhere - who go there on the occasion of the anniversary of his death.

After some time he began to travel again, but mainly around Karnataka and Kerela. It is also believed that these travels took him to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) when a boat on which he had been working, left suddenly. This was during the First World War and officials in Ceylon, seeing an apparently ordinary healthy young fellow, tried to recruit him into the army. However, Bhagawan was having none of this and foiled them by slowing his heart beat so much during the medical examination that the doctors thought he had died.

During this wandering period he lived alone and never remained anywhere for long. Usually he traveled on foot - at faster than lightning speed on some occasions - because, like many great Siddhas, he would sometimes be seen in different places at the same time. He appeared to be always in a state of total bliss. It was said that he was almost always smiling and lived in childlike innocence, so people began to call him Nityananda - one who is always in bliss. He accepted food and water only when it was offered and sometimes it appeared that he did not eat for long periods of time. Consequently, it was believed that he didn’t really need anything - he was complete in himself.

After several years in South India he began again to travel further afield and visited holy sites throughout India - on a pilgrimage of blessing, and receiving the blessings, of places with great spiritual energy. Swami Muktananda, in his biography Nityananda of Ganeshpuri, records that he could describe each pilgrimage site in great detail. According to some sources of information he may again have lived in the Himalayas during this period. But later he returned to the South.

Around the year 1925, he started to build a road and develop a meditation cave complex near Kanhangad, which attracted the attention of the authorities. They wondered where this strange ‘fakir’ was getting the money for these enterprises. He was asked by visiting officials to explain and, according to records of the time, he took them to a crocodile infested lake where he dove in and came up with handfuls of new rupee coins. Awestruck, the officials returned to their headquarters; but later another visit was made, this time led by the arrogant English Collector Sahib of South Karnataka, a Mr. Gawne. They traveled along the road in question and eventually met the Bhagawan. Immediately, it seems, a marked change was wrought in Mr. Gawne - who dropped his official stance and appeared quite humbled. Bhagawan said that if he (Mr. Gawne) wanted the road he could have it. After this, apparently satisfied, the party retraced its steps, and as they reached the start of the road they were amazed to see a perfect Public-Works-Department road sign bearing the name Gawne Road.

Bhagawan’s building days resulted in an extensive cave complex and also a large ashram near the town of Kanhangad a few miles from the Guruvan cave; but in 1933, when the construction of the ashram was complete, he made another move. He had spent the first half of his life as a wandering avadhoot around India but he now made his way to Ganeshpuri where he spent the second half of his life.

The Ganeshpuri period

The Ganeshpuri area is considered to be a very holy place where, in ancient times, the Sage Vasistha (the Guru of Rama) is said to have performed a great Yajna (fire ceremony) and installed a statue of Lord Ganesh in a temple. Bhagawan Nityananda arrived in the early nineteen thirties when he would have been about 35 or 36 years of age. At first he lived near the Vajreshwari temple, built by Shree Chimnaji Appa, a Maratha ruler - to commemorate a victory over the Portuguese at the nearby coastal city of Vasai. He also spent time at the village of Akloli; at both places he built rest houses for visiting sadhus and sunk wells. In Vajreshwari he also established a clinic, a maternity home, a restaurant and a school.

Later he settled in Ganeshpuri town around 2.5 kilometers from Vajreshwari, near the hot springs of the Bimeshwar Mahadev Temple. The Ganeshpuri valley was at that time surrounded by forest. The Tejasa River flows beside the town, where the now-famous hot springs are located, and the valley is overlooked by Mount Mandagni - which is believed to be the ‘Mandakini Mountain’ mentioned in scriptures.

At the time of Bhagawan’s arrival the area was a forested wilderness full of snakes and wild animals, including leopards and tigers. There was only an overgrown Shiva temple with the hot springs beside it. This is now the site of Bhagawan’s samadhi shrine. At first he lived in a simple hut near the hot springs while the temple as well as the hot springs facilities were being renovated. This ancient Shiva temple has a Shiva lingam known as Bimeshwar Mahadev. To this day a continuous trickle of holy water falls from the dome of the temple onto the lingam. This water is considered to be...
extremely sacred - no less so than water of the Ganges that flows from Shiva’s locks. During the very early mornings Bhagawan used to bathe at the hot springs. Here devotees would watch him and receive his Darshan - and after that they would feel very happy.

From the earliest days many devotees used to come to have the Darshan of Bhagawan even though there was no place for them to stay. Later, in 1956, devotees built a larger accommodation called Kailas Nivas where Bhagawan lived, and since then the village has grown steadily to become a small town with simple hotels, rental apartments, shops, a clinic and electrification. There is a frequent bus service to the nearby cities of Thane, Vasai and Virar.

During the building of the road to Ganeshpuri, which was undertaken at the instigation of Bhagawan, the activity again came to the notice of Government and an official was sent to investigate. The official report noted that Ganeshpuri had become a place of pilgrimage and a road would have had to be built anyway, and since this was already done by this strange ‘fakir’ the Government had been spared the expense. Nevertheless, the District Forest officer and the Collector came to inspect. When they saw Bhagawan Nityananda they withdrew but expressed surprise that someone dressed in a loincloth could be engaged in works of such social benefit.

Nowadays there are blocks of flats in and around Ganeshpuri but there are still many farms, paddy fields and forested hills near the town. Hundreds of people visit Bhagawan’s Mahasamadhi shrine daily, and thousands visit on special occasions.

**Siddhis; miracles**

The miraculous happenings that took place around Nityananda were numerous. They are a subject of great interest in India and constitute much of the biography associated with him. Bhagawan’s miracles are considered to be of the highest type and not to be confused with those of the wonder-working yogis that abound in India. Higher miracles manifest of their own accord and are the reason that so many miracles occur around great beings, often without even their own awareness of them.

Reports of Bhagawan’s siddhis would fill volumes and only a few of the best known ones are mentioned here. Some events of his dealings with officialdom have already been described. Apart from these he is said to have caused several streams to flow which were not there before he came on the scene; one in his meditation cave at Guruvan, and another at the site of his ashram near Kanhangad. The former, the cave at Guruvan, is considered to be a place where the power of performing siddhis can be attained by yogis and there are eight huge stones there that are symbols of the eight psychic powers.

Bhagawan had a great liking for inducing siddhis in his dealings with officials. In one place he was thrown into goal for vagrancy, but when his gaolers saw him standing outside at the same time as he was in his cell, they quickly realized that he was something that should not to be meddled with, and he was released. He also had a great liking for trains and would get on them from time to time. On one occasion the guard put what he perceived to be a simple fellow in a dhoti off at a station because he didn’t have a ticket. But when the driver tried to start the train it wouldn’t move - not until locals told the guard that Bhagawan was a divine being, and he was allowed to board again. On other occasions, when a guard asked him for his ticket, he produced hundreds of perfect tickets from his dhoti.

Once he was observed to be walking on the surface of the Pavanja River in South Kanara in the State of Karnataka, and on another occasion the Netravati River mysteriously flooded inundating the town of Bantwal where the people had been ungracious to him. When they realized their mistake a delegation met him and asked him to intervene - he did and the floods rapidly subsided.

Later, in Ganeshpuri, the miracles continued. On one occasion when sitting before a group of devotees, to their great alarm a tiger came up behind him. He turned and gently touched the tiger’s paws and said, “Devi’s vehicle has come for her Darshan”. (The Goddess Durga traditionally rides on a tiger). After this the tiger quietly turned and disappeared into the surrounding jungle.

**Powers of Yoga**: On two recorded occasions Bhagawan went into trance-like states and appeared to his devotees and other witnesses to be quite dead. The devotees naturally became very alarmed. The first occasion was in 1922 or 1923 in Mangalore. Some devotees were sitting with the master in the evening when they noticed that he appeared to be in a trance, and even after a long time had elapsed he remained motionless. Suddenly there was a flash of light on the wall and the master became quite stiff and was not breathing. The devotees thought he had died and many devotees came to pay their respects. But suddenly, on the afternoon of the following day, he come back to life. When questioned he commented this time was that he had to go to Delhi to do some work. These are striking examples of his mastery of yoga, but the most remarkable feature of his life is not miracles, nor his powers of yoga, but Bhagawan himself and the influence he wielded on thousands of devotees.

**What he was like - his ashrams**

It is said that Bhagawan was always very tranquil, and in his presence those who were disturbed or had questions would become silent and would receive answers to their questions in mysterious ways - through a gesture or a cryptic word full of profound meaning. Even his casual remarks wrought profound effects on those near him, or if addressed to a particular individual or group of individuals, would bring about a feeling of deep calm and happiness. The atmosphere around him and in his ashram was always very disciplined - his tranquility and silence was transmitted to others who
became silent too. His appearance was always auspicious, radiant and attractive. In the heat or cold he wore only a dhoti and sometimes a short blanket as a cloak. Baba Muktananda describes his appearance thus:

"His skin was like a dark shining jewel with divine radiance. His forehead was high and arched, and his face completely captivating. Thick eyebrows curved over his large beautiful eyes. A river of love poured forth from his glance..."

Even to this day to view one of the old films made of him, fills the viewer with a feeling of awe. Bhagawan never used the first person when referring to himself. One of his biographers, M. U. Hatengdi records:

"On no single occasion either in His youth or later in Ganeshpuri, was He ever found using the first person singular (‘I’) in reference to himself. It would always be ‘this one’ and ‘from here’."

Bhagawan loved solitude and silence and was not given to the performance of rituals or to intellectual discourse. He had no gospel to preach. But once when a rich visitor insisted on him and his family being blessed by touch, he uncharacteristically explained that blessing is not given by placing one’s hand on somebody’s head - it is an internal transmission. In this way a master blesses countless people even when they are not present before him.

He lived very simply and often lay on a plain concrete bench covered with a single blanket. He was also a champion of the poor and set up many feeding, health and other social programs. Even to this day children and wandering holy men are fed daily at the temple of his samadhi shrine in Ganeshpuri.

He loved children and the sounds of their voices playing around him could be heard all day long. He also loved animals and was frequently seen feeding them. He had a special relationship to snakes and it is said that on his first arrival He had no particular interest in spiritual matters but was possessed of unusual purity of heart. As a young man he was struck by a terrible pain, beginning in the heart and soon encompassing his entire body. The pain lasted for around six months and then dispersed as quickly as it had arrived. Then, after a period of deep contemplation for several months on the nature of the pain that had afflicted him, he was able to arrive at the conclusion that the pain was bondage - and the cause of bondage is karma. He realized that karma is created by the thoughts of the mind concerned with the small self - the ego. On the last night of this contemplative period he concluded that money was the most important thing in the world of the small self, and that all fear and insecurity was rooted in attachment to it. At this instant he experienced an astounding vision of a beautiful woman whose body was red and who, to his horror, had blood pouring from her mouth. This he recognized as death incarnate and with the vision came the conviction that the root problem of money was possession, and possession was death. The vision of the woman then changed into a door and at this point he asked himself, “Who Am I?” The door then opened and he passed through it leaving his body - through the top of his head. Following this, his body lay on the floor apparently dead, but was guarded
by a Muslim farmer who had received a cosmic instruction to look after it. He would not allow members of the family to touch it (with a view to cremation). Then, after some time, a ball of light appeared and entered the body at which point he opened his eyes, rose up, and said, “The one who was here is gone - someone else has come. I am not the body, I have no mother, I have no father - I am that brightness!”

These events had a profound effect on him and after a period of adjustment (during which his family had him committed to a mental asylum - where he was declared to be quite sane), he left home and spent the next twenty years completely God-intoxicated, wandering about as a naked avadahoot. He would dance and sing and move about wherever the inclination took him, oblivious to the elements and to his surroundings. The Muslim farmer, Ishmael, became his constant companion and looked after his physical needs. Then in 1961, while in Rishikesh, he heard an internal voice that said:

“Come to me. You come to me. This one is here in Ganeshpuri.”

He recognized this immediately as a message from Bhagawan Nityananda and journeyed to Ganeshpuri to meet Him. It is said that they spent only five minutes together staring into each others eyes in complete silence; but after this Aja came down from his solitary state, returned to his home, and re-entered the life of the world - though only in the location of his village in the South Indian State of Karnataka.

He presumably had a small following but was virtually unknown outside his immediate circle until he was discovered as indicated above. When questioned by Andrew Cohen on his connection with Mahatma Ghandi, he said, “What I experienced was Universal Soul... We cannot see our own face... That is left to others.”

Andrew’s conclusion after meeting Aja and observing a session with both devotees and potential detractors, who questioned his spiritual authority, was that in the end, what profoundly moved him was this extraordinary man’s utter emptiness of a personal self. He seemed to be literally an example of someone whose mind and body had become truly empty and through which that ‘One without a second’ could shine - “untainted by even a trace of any individuality.”

One could wonder if Aja, in the ‘lineage’ tradition, is the true successor to Bhagawan Nityananda. From what little is known it seems that his teachings would best lie in his presence itself - his silent teachings, and that any attempt to verbalize them would only reduce their efficacy. Bhagawan Nityananda was also such a master who left no books and seldom spoke. Aja then, albeit with a forty year time gap, could be said to be continuing the teachings of that great saint. But where Bhagawan Nityananda may have throw a banana or a pebble at a devotee too full of mindstuff, Aja bears all with equanimity and fields questions with what seems to be a simple return to the ‘Absolute’. These are some examples cited by Andrew Cohen:

“... Words are coming, it is true. Through this vehicle, some unknown force is acting; some power is working, using this body as an instrument. It is not this body that is speaking...”

“There is no relationship between the state of bliss (and) ... my actions.”... Words come out, but between the words that come out and that ultimate reality there is no relationship.

“I don’t have the experience that I am a jivan mukta, I don’t have anything. When the ‘I’ is gone, the consciousness does not even raise the feeling of ‘I’. So for a jnani that question does not arise. When there is no question of thinking, then ordinary action as in day-to-day life does not take place. Our thoughts are transformed into contemplation, and then our day-to-day routine interactions become spiritual. In that the regular routine itself becomes spiritual life. That itself is yogic life. That itself is divine life.”

“You have to have the experience. Only then will you be able to understand.” (and) “Some people are the embodiment of love but the nature of their love is beyond the senses. You cannot see it with your eyes. You cannot describe it with your words.”

He has a concern, reflecting Buddhist philosophy, for the enlightenment of all beings. He said, “This message is for the whole of humanity. If I alone become free, it is not enough to make me happy. Everyone should become free. Every soul has to become free. I have had a glimpse of that possibility, and if all were free, that would be true bliss for me.”

And on advice to devotees: “We must understand how, by doing action, we can reach that state (where there is no difference between birth and death). What kind of action will help us to become liberated? Chanting the name of God, contemplation, surrender, truth, non-violence, detached action. One who, during his lifetime, can translate the knowledge of the Self into action that one deserves to realize the extreme blissful state. ... ‘Who am I?’ What is the secret of my life, my birth? ‘Understanding this, realizing this through his search, even when he is engaged in actions and duties, he attains his original nature, which is bliss. So it is through action that he becomes transformed’ ... “Any action which is done as a duty without expectation of a result ... any action, if you do it without expectation and selfishness, is transformed into duty. This leads you to a state where there are no emotions. One is doing but he is not doing. There is no feeling that ‘I am doing something’ - what happened to that ‘I’? It doesn’t happen all of a sudden. It has to pass through various stages. However, even the most elementary state of bliss is bliss itself.”

“One loses his existence through knowledge and action. Through these he becomes free. Then he himself is a jivan mukta. But when that ‘I’ has gone, what is there? Where is the question then?”

“Meditation is the starting point. In the beginning you should sit. You should have that internal preparation. One has to discipline oneself. But it is not enough only to sit. It is not merely that the body must sit; your mind must also sit...”

“The wandering mind itself is the world. The mind should not be wandering. Unless the mind is controlled, there is no meditation.”

“Who am I? - This inquiry is the foundation. When you go in search of that, it is possible to find the answer to every
question on this earth ... you will reach a state where there is nothing ... That state is Atman, ... Until then, ego is there. Then it is not ... ‘I’ means the state where nothing is there. It’s over. No sadhana is required for this - only search.”
“We all have to go beyond thought to that state where there are no obstacles at all ... every individual has the capacity to become That.

**Bhagawan Nityananda’s death**

By 1960 Bhagawan Nityananda’s health began to deteriorate, but nevertheless he continued to give Darshan to whoever came to see him. But in 1961, two months before his death he stopped eating except for a little fruit and water. He became quite thin. On the 25th of July he asked to be moved to another building ‘to rest’ for fifteen days. Fifteen days later, in the presence of a few close devotees, he died. His last words were “Sadhu became Swami, Swami became Deva, and now it is Sthira Samadhi.” His disciples decided to leave his body there for 48 hours so the devotees could have his Darshan. People were deeply distressed and many wondered who would help them now in their times of sorrow and distress. Everywhere people spoke of Bhagawan and what he had done for them. Day and night people kept coming and it is estimated that between three and four hundred thousand people came for this final Darshan. He was interred at the site of his first hut in Ganeshpuri and subsequently a large temple was built on the site, with a beautiful statue of Shree Gurudev. It is today a place of pilgrimage for thousands of devotees who still receive his Darshan and have their prayers answered.

**Major Disciples**

Bhagawan Nityananda had three principle disciples: Sri Jananand Swami who lived most of his later life in the Kanhangad cave complex built by Bhagawan - he died in 1982; Sri Shaligram Swami, who lived in Ganeshpuri for many years and died just before Bhagawan himself; and Swami Muktananda. Swami Muktananda became Bhagawan’s best known successor (particularly in the West) and gained fame as one of the most powerful yogis of the twentieth century. He continued to spread the message of Bhagawan Nityananda and other Siddhas for some twenty years before he died. His Main ashram, called Gurudev Siddha Peeth, is very close to Ganeshpuri, and he established other ashrams in India, the USA, Australia and Europe.

**Practicalities**

Bhagawan Nityananda’s Samadhi Shrine, temple and former residence is in the village of Ganeshpuri, north of Mumbai. It can be reached by train and bus, or is around two hours drive by car. The entire town is imbued with his presence. There are a number of small hotels that offer budget accommodation and rooms and apartments can be rented. Both the Bhagawan’s Ganeshpuri Temple and the nearby Gurudev Siddha Peeth Ashram, founded by Gurudev’s principle disciple, Baba Muktananda, who became a great spiritual teacher in his own right, perform arati to him daily. Two disciples of Muktananda who carry on his teachings are: Swami Chidvilasananda (Gurumayi), who heads the organization set up by Baba Muktananda, see www.siddhayoga.org; and Swami Nityananda, who has ashrams in Pine Bush, NY. and Haridwar, India - E.mail: mandir108@aol.com

Bhagawan’s ashram at Kanhangad in Kerela offers accommodation and the opportunity to meditate in the Guruvanam cave. See www.Bhagawan.org E.mail: info@Bhagawannityananda.org

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Chapter 4

**RAMANA MAHARSHI**

*Experience is the word. Knowledge implies subject and object.*

*But experience is non-terminous, eternal.*

It may be true to say that Ramana Maharshi became India’s most-loved saint of the 20th century - and the greatest proponent of the path to realization through Self inquiry. A modern teacher of Vedanta, Swami Dayananda - see *What is Enlightenment* Fall/Winter 1998 - pointed out that Ramana had discovered a means of converting all questions into the primal question of Self inquiry - ‘Who are You?’ He said, ‘If someone asked him, ‘Are you enlightened?’ he would say, ‘Who are you who wants to know? - Find out who you are.’... Another fellow asks, ‘What is God?’ and he answers, ‘Who are you that is asking this question?’ This is a way of answering questions that he adopted to turn the person towards his inner Self. He was telling people: ‘Understand who you are. That’s what is important’.

Ramana Maharshi tried to convince everyone that divine Consciousness, the only reality, was their natural state. His explanations on the attributes of the mind and the relationship to the Self, or God, were probably the most explicit of the time. From this he developed, to a fine state of proficiency, his method of teaching Self inquiry.

It is said that Ramana’s mission in life was among the most successful in awakening people to their own divinity and to this day the ashram in Tiruvannamalai, not far from Chennai (Madras), that he founded in 1922, is a powerful seat of learning and a centre to which myriads of seekers come to pursue their sadhana.
Much of the information in this chapter is sourced from many excellent publications on Ramana and in particular: *Sri Maharshi - A short sketch of his life, Who Am I? The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, and *Meditations, The Ramana Way* - see Bibliography. Appreciation is also expressed to the Trustees of the Ramanashram for the hospitality given during the research carried out for this account.

**Early Life**

Ramana Maharshi was born in December 1879 to a middle class family in the town of Tiruchuli in Tamil Nadu, South India. He was named Venkataraman and in contrast to the often-heard stories predicting the forthcoming of great beings, there were no wandering ascetics who came to tell of his imminent arrival; and his mother had no premonition that Divinity was about to descend on her. It seems, perhaps, that the gods knew that Ramana would have given short shrift to any such extravagance. However, he was born on an auspicious day, the anniversary of the day Lord Shiva appeared to his devotees Gautama and Patanjali.

Later, when he was in his teens, the family moved to the larger town of Madurai and young Venkataraman was sent to English medium schools; first Scot’s Middle School and then the American Mission High School. He thus received something of a Western education and influence in his formative years. Furthermore, the family as a whole, though Brahmmin, seemed to be somewhat Western and ‘Indian Civil Service’ orientated. As a boy he showed little interest in spiritual life and was much more interested in games than in academic pursuits. The only unusual characteristic of the young Ramana was a tendency to go into trance-like states from time to time, from which it was difficult to awaken him. When this happened at school, and because he was bigger than average and consequently better at sports, other boys sometimes used the opportunity to pelt him with mud balls and other missiles.

**Enlightenment**

The first evidence of this event occurred just before his 16th birthday. For some reason he had casually asked a relative where he had just come from. The reply was “Arunachala” - a mountain believed to be endowed with mystical powers and to be the original home of Shiva in the form of the primal lingam - see further on. Then, for no apparent reason, the reply had a startling effect on the boy, filling him with a feeling of awe and immense joy. Later another auspicious event occurred; he came across a biography of famous Tamil Saints (the Periapuranam), and this also stirred him deeply to the heart and again filled him with immense joy. These occurrences preceded what is believed to be his experience of enlightenment which occurred shortly afterwards when he had turned sixteen, in June 1896. This was both his first and ultimate experience of the state of enlightenment, from which he never changed or wavered throughout his entire life. The experience, which was the impetus for his realization of the Self, took the form of a terrifying fear and the actual experience of death. Much later he described it thus:

“The shock of death made me at once introspective. I said to myself mentally, ‘Now death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? - This body dies. ‘As I said so to myself the symptoms of death followed, yet I remained conscious of the inert body condition as well as the ‘I’ quite apart from it. On stretching the limbs they became rigid, breath had stopped and there was hardly any symptom of life in the body. ‘Well then, I said to myself, this body is dead. It will be carried to the burning ground and reduced to ashes. But with the death of the body, am I dead? - this body cannot be the ‘I’ for it now lies silent and inert, while I feel the full force of my personality, of the ‘I’ existing by itself - apart from the body. So ‘I’ am the Spirit, a thing transcending the body.’ All this was not a mere intellectual process. It flashed before me vividly as living truth, a matter of indubitable and direct experience, which has continued from that moment right up to this time.”

**His state of God intoxication:** The realization experience had a remarkable effect on his personality. From being a typical school boy with many likes and dislikes he became completely detached from friends and family while at the same time being filled with humility and lack of concern for everyday matters. While he had formerly resented injustice and retaliated against it, he now accepted everything with equanimity. As far as food was concerned he ate anything that was given to him without comment. Furthermore, his whole attitude towards temples and religious symbols such as idols changed completely. From irreverence and indifference he became spiritually absorbed and would go daily to the local temple (the Meenakshi temple) and spend long hours of adoration in front of the idols. And he would pray for the descent of Grace so that he could be like the Saints of the Periapuranam. He would become lost in the depths of the Divine within. Tears would flow but without feelings of pleasure or pain.

**To Tiruvannamalai and Arunachala**

Some six weeks after this event and amidst growing estrangement from members of his family he had the thought, “What business have I here?” And he made the decision that he would go to Tiruvannamalai and the holy mount Arunachala. He took three rupees from the family coffers, which he reasoned was enough to reach his destination a few hundred kilometers north of Madurai, and set off leaving this letter for his family:

“I leave, in search of my ‘Father’ and in obedience to his command, started from here. This is only embarking on a virtuous enterprise. Therefore, none should grieve over this affair. To trace this out no money need be spent.”

After what was an arduous journey in those days he reached Tiruvannamalai and made his way straight to the temple of Arunachala and mentally announced his arrival to the temple deity Arunaschaleswar. He abandoned all his possessions except for a strip of cloth to be used as a loin cloth, and sat in silence in the temple. This, however, soon
attracted the attentions of urchins who made him the object of their pranks, so he moved to an unattended and underground part of the temple known as Patala, where few were brave enough to enter. Here, in a place infected by vermin, he remained for many days, being eaten by insects and rats. But so oblivious was he to his body, and so absorbed in bliss of the Self, that he felt almost no discomfort. Eventually the sight of this young man and the intensity of his tapas (austerity) was so moving that local sadhus began to look after him. From this time he began to be known as a holy being as he moved from place to place in the temple compound meditating and in complete silence. And thus he acquired his first temporary, and later other, more permanent, attendants.

Although he remained in silence, pilgrims began to visit him regularly to experience his presence, and have his silent darshan. But as the visitors became more and more intrusive and became a constant source of disturbance, he moved out of town to a small temple (the Gurumurtham temple) where he spent the next eighteen months and where his identity was eventually established. It happened this way:

An attendant, with devotional zeal, began to perform religious ceremonies to him, offering flowers and food, uttering sacred syllables and mantras, burning camphor and so on. On the occasion of a subsequent visit he saw, written in charcoal on the wall, the words: “This (food) alone is the service (needed) for this (body).” This was the first indication that puja were not necessary and the first indication that the young swami (as he was by then considered) was ready to communicate. After this another devotee, a government servant, continually asked him, on each occasion of visiting, for a clue to his identity. Then he again wrote, this time on a slip of paper, his name and place of birth, “Venkataraman, Tiruchuzhi.”

The discovery soon became public knowledge and reached the ears of his family in Madurai who then proceeded to Tiruvannamalai to try to persuade him to return to Madurai where, since he was now a publicly recognized saint, they could attend him - but to no avail. He wrote on another slip of paper:

“The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their past deeds - their parabda karma. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. The best course therefore, for one is to be silent.”

This became one of the cornerstones of his teaching and a confirmation of his firm belief in the principles of Advaita Vedanta. After the family’s departure he moved to a cave on the side of Mount Arunachala, the Virupaksha cave, overlooking the Arunachala temple.

**His first teaching**

The young Swami had been living in complete silence and more or less without any form of communication for more than three years, so that the extent of his spiritual attainment and understanding was more a matter of speculation than certainty. However, around this time, and apparently out of compassion for the many sincere seekers that were drawn to him, he began to write down answers to questions. Two of his earliest devotees (Sri Ganbhiram Sesahayya and Sri Sivaprakasam Pillai) put a series of questions to him in 1902 (when Ramana was about 22 years of age) relating to Self-inquiry, Ramana’s principle teaching. These questions and their answers have been preserved with care and published under the title Self Inquiry and Who am I? - see Bibliography. The answers were spontaneous and direct and are indicated as follow (From Sri Maharshi - A short life sketch):

“By incessantly pursuing within yourself the inquiry ‘Who am I?’ you will know your true Self and thereby attain salvation.

“The real ‘I’ or the Self is not any of the five senses, nor the sense objects, nor the organs of action, nor the prana (breath and vital energy), nor the mind, nor even the deep sleep state, where there is no cognisance of any of these.

“That which remains after excluding each of the above, is the real ‘I’ and that is pure consciousness.

“The mind can find rest only when it has found the answer to the query, Who am I?

“The first and foremost of all thoughts is the ‘I-thought’. (It is only the awareness of ‘I’ that makes the difference between man and thinking computer. This a computer can never have.)

“The mind and the ego are one and the same.”

“In the body what asserts itself as ‘I’ is but the mind. Therefore, if you inquire whence the ‘I-thought’ arises, it will plainly be seen that the Heart is the source.

“Do not even murmur ‘I’ but inquire keenly within what it is that now shines within the Heart as ‘I’. Transcending the intermittent flow of thoughts there arises the continuous unbroken awareness, silent and spontaneous as ‘I’ - ‘I’ in the Heart. If one catches it and remains still. It will completely annihilate the sense of ‘I’ in the body and itself disappear as the fire of burning camphor. Sages and scriptures proclaim this to be Liberation.”

**Return to the world; what he was like**

As indicated before, Ramana is one of India’s best-loved saints. His compassion for those who came to him for guidance slowly drew him back to the world and as he became more communicative he started answering queries verbally. Nevertheless, his main teaching method was carried out in total silence - see further on. His nature was kindness and humility itself and he would allow no one to treat him in any special way. He acquired the name Ramana Maharshi in 1907 when he was 28 years old - when a well-known Sanskrit scholar and poet called Ganapathi Muni became his close devotee and proposed the name Ramana as a derivation of Venkataraman. The other devotees present at that time agreed and from then onwards he became Ramana Maharshi (Maharishi - Great Rishi).

From 1907 until 1922 he lived in various locations on the hill of Arunachala, attending to the spiritual needs of
the devotees who visited or went around with him. He generally stayed at a location known as Virupaksha cave, and in the hot season, the Mango Tree caves. Around 1916 he moved to more commodious accommodation built for him on the hill and known as Skandasramam. But it was not until the death of his mother in 1922 (see below) and when her samadhi shrine and temple was built, that he moved permanently to what became the first part of the present-day ashram, located at the foot of Arunachala. At first it comprised only a simple hut among other accommodations built by individual devotees. But shortly after this a hall was built that served both as his residence and as a meeting place for devotees and visitors.

After the move the number of permanent and visiting devotees increased appreciably but at all times he remained humble and accessible to residents and visitors alike. He participated in the running of the ashram including doing some of the chores. He wore only a loin cloth and set an example of simplicity for all. He sternly discouraged any attempt to garland him and never allowed the more ornate religious ceremonies of Hinduism to be performed at the ashram. He received no money though, of course, money was donated, as it is today, for the running of the ashram.

Ramana had an inordinate love for animals and as a consequence all manner of creatures came to live at the ashram and were cared for and fed - a practice which continues to this day. Because he spent so much time on his couch it appears that on one occasion lice began to infect the couch. The inmates wanted to spray them but he forbade them. However, since he went for a walk every day, they did the job during his absence, and when he returned he smilingly commented that someone had tricked him. On one occasion in 1924 thieves came and started smashing windows to gain access. Some of the inmates wanted to challenge them but Ramana would not allow it. His first concern was for an elderly dog and he saw that it was put in a safe place. Then he said, “Let the thieves play their role. We shall stick to ours.” When the thieves could not find any valuables or cash they became angry and beat some of the inmates including Ramana himself, but he would not allow retaliation. He said, “We are sadhus; we must not give up our dharma. If you strike them some may receive fatal injuries and the world will justly blame us. They are only misguided men, blinded by ignorance... Sometimes your teeth suddenly bite your tongue. Would you knock out your teeth as a consequence?”

**Elaboration of his teachings**

Ramana’s assertion was that nothing exists apart from an indivisible and universal consciousness that is either in its unmanifest form as a beginningless awareness or in its manifest form as the worlds of the universe. For him this meant that as an individual (personality) he had ceased to exist. His language equated God, the Self, and the Heart as essentially the same thing. The unmanifest state he called the Self. He was not overcome by the trappings and appurtenances of Hinduism and, possibly because of his early ‘Western’ exposure and English education, he was able to express himself in terms that were largely free of what may have been construed as Eastern ‘mythological’ association. The condition of awareness that is usually deemed to be unexplainable, the effect of enlightenment on the body and the normal human condition, he described as something like having “a large elephant in a small grass hut.”

Throughout his life Ramana continually expounded the teachings of Self inquiry (Atma vichara). For those who possessed a sufficiently high level of mind control it was the most direct path, and in any case, an essential final step to liberation. For most however, meditation - the concentration on one thought to the exclusion of all others and surrender to God, may at first be necessary. This was to centre the mind and to learn wisdom, but ultimately vichara is necessary. So, he maintained, why waste time if we have the ability and can go for it directly.

He said that the only permanent self evident reality is that ‘I exist’ or ‘I Am’ - which is yet another name for unity with the Self. Contemplation of ‘I Am’ by repeatedly asking the question ‘Who Am I?’ is used as a tool to divert the mind from externalisation, back to its source. The method centres on the ‘I - thought’ which must be isolated from other thoughts. The ‘I - thought’ is there because the Self, the Atman, has lost its bearings and externalises, investigating the world and becoming the ego. All other thoughts arise from the mind (which is the same as the ego and the intellect) and cannot exist without the attention of the ‘I - thought’. He pointed out that the mind becomes fattened by thoughts or groups and clusters of thoughts that appear continuously. But it is the individual’s attention to them that allows them to exist - latent tendencies come up only when the individual pays attention to them. So, if concentration on the ‘I thought’ is achieved and maintained, and one is alert to the rising of other mind thoughts and repeatedly asks of them the question ‘To whom is this thought directed?’ - one can repeatedly and continuously revert to the ‘I - thought’. This, Ramana maintained, can be done, and the ability to do it successfully increases with practice. “The moment the ego self tries to know itself its character changes to participate less in the ‘jada’ in which it is absorbed… It takes to its heels on Self inquiry.”

While all mind-thoughts depend on the ‘I - thought’ for sustenance and disappear if they do not obtain it, the ‘I - thought’ derives its power from its own conscious Source. Ramana explained that consciousness spreads through the various nadis (conducting channels of the subtle body) from the mind to the heart and then the body, while the process of vichara (Self inquiry) reverses this flow from the ‘I - thought’ to the thinker (the false self), and then from the thinker to the consciousness and back to the Heart.

Ramana was always patient with seekers asking him questions on Self inquiry but often they asked irrelevant questions. Commenting on these he said, “Coming here, some people ask: ‘Does the sage, liberated while alive, see the world? Is he affected by karma? Should the body of a liberated sage resolve itself into light? … and so on.’ - And he would say to them: ‘Leave liberation alone. Is there bondage? Know this: see yourself first and foremost.’

**On meditation**: As indicated above, Ramana maintained that meditation is necessary as a prerequisite to Self inquiry - for those whose minds are not well focused. It is actually the ego that mediates on the object of meditation; the subtle ego rather than the gross and overt ego of ordinary life. In the first instance meditation on forms or on a mantra is
recommended so that the mind becomes one with the object of meditation and becomes quite still. But then think: “Who is the meditator?” or “Who is the worshiper?” The answer is ‘I’, that is, the self - the deluded self; and in this way, by repeated effort, the true Self can be gained.

Eventually, however, it is necessary to dispense with all forms and mantras. Even the great saint Ramakrishna (Chapter 1), at one stage during his sadhana, became fixated on the form of Kali and could proceed no further. A Naga sadhu had to teach him how to meditate on the formless by mentally cutting off the head of the visualized Kali during his meditation.

Surrender: For those who could not follow the method of Self inquiry, Ramana recommended surrender - completely surrendering all responsibility for your life to God; free from the idea that there is a person who is capable of acting independently from God. He often spoke of the correct interpretation of surrender to devotees. It was not, as some supposed, that one did not eat unless someone came and put food into one’s mouth; this would be just too silly and could be extended to the need to swallow, should God do this as well - make me swallow? He would say, “In walking it is necessary to put one foot in front of the other, we do not expect God to do this. And for the business of obtaining food one could note the advice of Shankara (the 8th century reviver of Advaita) in the Sadhana Panchakam, who said: ‘For the treatment of the disease called hunger one should eat the food received as alms’.”

Hence, in the practice of surrender, one should take things as they come in accordance with one’s traditions, but be free of the feeling that one is doing things oneself; eliminate the concept of being the doer, just be the witness. It is the feeling of doing that is the bondage but it is necessary to consider by what means such feelings can be overcome. Do this instead of doubting if food or medicine should be swallowed: “May I groan if there is pain? May I exhale the breath after feeling of doing that is the bondage but it is necessary to consider by what means such feelings can be overcome. Do this be free of the feeling that one is doing things oneself; eliminate the concept of being the doer, just be the witness. It is the

Surrender:

The Supreme.

Methods of teaching

Although much of Ramana’s teaching took the form of dialogue between himself and his devotees in answering questions, he spent even more time on his couch before his meditating devotees, engaged in silent teaching. He maintained that this was the most effective means of teaching for it came directly from the master to the disciple. In his presence the devotees felt a strong sense of peace and in this state they were most receptive to the teachings. Of the difference between silent and spoken (or written) teaching, he said:

“First there is the abstract knowledge and out of it there arises the ego, which in turn gives rise to thought, and that thought to the spoken word. So the word is the great-great-grandson of the original source. If the word can produce effects, imagine how much more powerful must be the Source, obtained in silence.”

In support of silence as the best mode of teaching he recounted a story of someone who composed a bharani (a poetic exposition), in honour of a great master. Some learned pundits objected, saying that such expositions were meant only for warriors who defeated enemies, it was inappropriate for a mere guru. To resolve this question it was decided that all concerned should sit in the presence of the master and contemplate the proposal. Immediately they fell into deep meditation until the master aroused them. Then, unanimously, they agreed that the bharani was after all appropriate, because in such a short time the master had defeated the “thousand rutting elephants of their minds”.

Teaching by silence has a long history in India with its classical and most famous exponent being Sri Dakshinamurti, who was supposed to be a manifestation of Shiva himself. It is because of this that Ramana highly valued and recommended the satsang (company) and darshan, of enlightened beings whenever it could be obtained. He said that although man is always with the Self, he does not know it because of his ignorance. Therefore the company of saints is the best medicine for liberation. By contact with realized beings man gradually loses his ignorance until removal is complete - then God is realized.

Ramana on gurus

Ramana had strong views on gurus and said that they must be Self realized to be of any use to a seeker. A true satguru is simultaneously an incarnation of God and the Self of the Heart. He maintained that every seeker needs a satguru - as association with him brings a temporary cessation of mental activity and encourages the development of the samadhi (inner contemplative) habit in the seeker.

On the finding of a true satguru, he said that by intense meditation God will provide a suitable guru in accordance with the devotee’s state of development. The best guru for anyone is one with whom the seeker feels attuned and experiences peace. A sense of respect will be felt. A true satguru should abide steadily in the Self and look at everyone equally, and he should also have unshakable courage at all times. A guru who asks the seeker to do this and that, engaging him in activities, is not a true guru. He maintained that peace, the one thing that is desired by everyone, cannot be attained in any way, by anyone, and at any time and place, unless stillness of mind is reached through the grace of a satguru. “Therefore always seek that grace with a one-pointed mind.” He said:

“According to the stage of development of the seeker the master manifests as a personal guru, or as the inner Self. By
grace the seeker can feel that the Self is the master and that God is the personal guru, the Self and the Heart all in one. Because he is both inside and out, his power works in two ways - he gives instructions that enable the seeker to keep his attention on the inner Self and the inner Self pulls the mind back to its Source.”

On the question of whether one should have more than one guru Ramana usually pointed out that there really is only one, the Self. But the company of saints should always be sought. He intimated that there are no hard and fast rules; the ancient sage Dattatreya had had 24 gurus, including the non-human ones of fire and water. And on the question of the result of having followed a false guru he said, “Each one experiences according to his merits.”

On whether everyone needs a personal guru, he said that there may be some rare individuals who do not; but when someone pointed out that he (Ramana) didn’t have a guru he replied, “I might have had one - at one time or another. And did I not sing hymns to Arunachala? God appears in some form or other, human or non-human, according to the needs.” When told that Krishnamurti (Chapter 5), at that time, said that no guru is necessary, he replied, “How did he know it? One can say so only after realizing, not before.”

Devotees’ experiences

The poet Ganapathi Muni (see above) became a devotee of Ramana after an experience in 1907 - before Ramana became well known. He was in deep meditation at a shrine near Tiruvannamalai when he felt a call that intimated “God wants you.” He felt compelled to go to the Arunachala temple but there was no indication of anything unusual there. The next day he was wandering around aimlessly when Ramana’s presence in a cave on the hill flashed across his mind. He went to the cave and fell before Ramana and said, “I have read and studied the whole of Vedanta, yet I have not understood what tapas is.” Ramana gazed at him in silence for a short time and then said, “If one watches whence this notion of ‘I’ springs, the mind is absorbed in that. That is tapas.”

Ganapathi Muni was completely satisfied with this answer. Prior to this encounter he had had a following of disciples of his own, and these now, on his persuasion, became devotees of Ramana. This was one of the events that led Ramana to become more communicative, for he saw that they were in need of instruction. And, in fact, his answers to their questions became the source material for the Sri Ramana Gita. It describes, to the extent that this is possible, the state of realization of Ramana Maharshi himself.

Another extraordinary experience of Ganapathi Muni with Ramana involves astral travel. One day in the temple of the town where he was staying (Tiruvothiyur), Ganapathi experienced an intense desire to be with Ramana. At this point he saw Ramana enter the temple and bless him. Ramana explained this occurrence as taking place through astral travel for his body was still in Arunachala. He explained: “I was lying down, but I was not in a state of trance; yet awake as I was I felt my body rising higher and higher. I could see clearly the physical objects growing smaller and smaller until they completely disappeared and all around me was a limitless expanse of dazzling light. After some time I felt the body slowly descend and physical objects below began to appear... I concluded it must be by such means that the Siddhas travel over vast distances within a short time. It occurred to me I was in Tiruvothiyur... (and) some distance away was the temple where Ganapathi was.”

An example of the remarkable effect of being in the presence of an enlightened being comes from a woman known as Echammal who had experienced the loss of husband and two children and was distraught. She had visited many sadhus but her grief was not assuaged. Finally she heard of Ramana and went to him for his darshan. She stood quietly before him for an hour and that brought about a complete change in her feelings. Her mind had received a deep impression.

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An example of the healing of a physical problem is illustrated by the account of a devotee, Ramaswami Aiyar, who was dyspeptic and who had for many years been living only on rice gruel. He wrote, “I was all along dyspeptic and I could not digest food, nor sleep a wink. I was worrying myself and the swami asked about it. I told him about my health. My head was hot, but in about a minute my whole brain got a cooling sensation. Then a lady brought in cakes and food as a special treat. Many invited me and I declined... But he (Ramana) pressed me and I had a good feast of very hard and rich food. That night was so strange, I slept profoundly.”

Ramana never claimed to perform miracles and would take steps to dispel talk about healings and other occurrences. Nevertheless, his devotees all knew that many cases of healing and even more remarkable occurrences were attributable to him. Papaji (Poonjaji) a renowned Advaita teacher of the second half of the 20th century - see Chapter 12, recounted an incident of bringing a young boy back to life. He wrote, “A woman brought her dead son to the Maharshi, placing the body before his couch. The boy had apparently died from a snake bite. The woman begged the Maharshi to bring him back to life, but he deliberately ignored her repeated requests. After a few hours the ashram manager made her take the corpse away. As she was leaving the ashram she met a snake charmer who claimed that he could cure her son. The man did something to the boy’s hand, the place where he had been bitten, and the boy immediately revived, even though he had been ‘dead’ for hours. The devotees in the ashram attributed the cure to the Maharshi, saying, “When a problem is brought to the attention of a being such as Ramana, some automatic divine activity brings about the solution.” Paul Brunton (see below) points out that according to this concept, the Maharshi had done nothing consciously to help the boy, but at a deeper level, his awareness of the problem had caused the right man to appear at the right place and time. Ramana, typically, disclaimed all responsibility for the miraculous cure. ‘Is that so?’ was his only response to news of the boy’s dramatic recovery.
Papaji claims to have received enlightenment from Ramana Maharshi. It appears that after many disappointments at the hands of business-oriented gurus, and other non-enlightened teachers, he finally came to Ramana’s ashram. As had always been his approach he bluntly asked Ramana, “Have you seen God? - and if you have, can you enable me to see him?” Ramana replied thus: “I cannot show you God or enable you to see God because God is not an object that can be seen. God is the subject. He is the Seer. Don’t concern yourself with objects that can be seen. Find out who the Seer is. Then you alone are God.”

Papaji recounts the following as his reaction to these words: “Under that spellbinding gaze I felt every atom of my body being purified. A process of transformation was going on - the old body was dying, atom by atom, and a new body was being created in its place. Then, suddenly, I understood. I knew that this man who had spoken to me was, in reality, what I already was, what I always had been.” (A fuller account of Papaji’s enlightenment experience is given in Chapter 12.)

Ramana’s mother came to live permanently in Tiruvannamalai in 1916 and became a devotee - receiving no special treatment until her death in 1922. In fact he would sometimes tease her in front of others in regard to her strict Brahmin ways. For example he would remark: “Oh! Your cloth has been touched by an untouchable - it is polluted. Religion has gone!” Or, (because strict Brahmins do not eat onions) he would say, “Beware of this onion, they are a great obstruction to moksha.” In this way Ramana made her shed her old ways and withdraw into herself. In 1922, as her end approached, he spent many hours at her bedside with his right hand over her heart and his left on her head, until the life had passed away. In explaining what happened in those ten or twelve hours, he said, “Innate tendencies (vasanas) and the subtle memory of past experiences leading to future possibilities became very active. Scene after scene rolled before her in the subtle consciousness, the other senses having already gone. The soul was passing through a series of experiences, thus avoiding the need for rebirth - and so effecting union with the Supreme Spirit. The soul was at last disrobed of the subtle sheaths before it reached the final destination: the Supreme Peace of Liberation from which there is no return to ignorance.”

The body was interred at the site of the present ashram. This is now the site of the temple of Sri Matrubhuteswara - the Lord in the Form of the Mother. This event, in fact, was instrumental in the formation of the ashram as it is today, for from that time onward Ramana came down regularly from Skandasramam on the hill, and eventually resided there permanently. He said, “Not of my own accord did I move... Something placed me there and I obeyed... it is the Divine Will.” And from that time onwards his teachings began to spread widely within and beyond India. (Ramana, in fact, maintained that the body of a woman, enlightened while alive, should not be cremated, as it is a temple of God - See The sayings of Ramana Maharshi.)

**Foreign visitors:** The French writer Pascaline Mallet in her book Turn Eastwards, writes of her reaction to Ramana’s presence: “I took in slowly the strange unforgettable scene, my whole attention fixed on that central figure, whose calm majesty, serene strength and perfect poise seemed to fill the whole place with unutterable peace... The Maharshi was busy writing, reading letters and newspapers... (But) somehow I had the feeling that all the while he was living in a state where time and space do not exist. ... (Yet) His utter impersonality and supreme detachment did not exclude an all-embracing compassion.”

One of the first western visitors to the ashram, in the early 1930’s, was the writer Paul Brunton, whose book A Search in Secret India is now a classic - see Bibliography. Paul Brunton, after extensive travels is search of esoteric experiences and a true master in India, became a devotee of Ramana. He was shortly to sail to Europe, strongly disillusioned with ‘holy’ men and Hindu wonder workers, when a mental voice thrust itself into his attention. It said, “Life itself is nothing more than a cinema play unrolling its episodes from cradle to grave. Where now are the past scenes - can you hold them?” Then, as he contemplated the experience of these words in the light of his immanent departure the voice again intruded. It added, “Fool! - So this is to be the empty result of years of investigation and aspiration!... Are you sure none of the men you met here in India can be the master you seek?” And from the gallery of faces that were conjured up, he recounts, “A single face disentangles itself... It was the calm, sphinx-like countenance of the Maharshi.”

Paul Brunton decided to delay his departure and return to Ramana and, almost miraculously, felt that he was already a changed man - that a “dark burden of wretchedness and doubt” was lifting from his shoulders. His descriptions of encounters with Ramana and his experience of Self inquiry are summarized below. They are also among the most explicit in capturing the atmosphere of that period in the ashram and in rural southern India generally. They are summarized here but are best read in full:

As Brunton entered the meditation hall he witnessed the ‘Maharishi’ sitting on his divan, the joss sticks burning slowly on a nearby table, “His eyes are clearly open and glance at me comprehendingly as I bow, and his mouth is stretched in a kindly smile of welcome.” In his heart Brunton knew that he had come as one seeking to become a disciple. He put his request and his explanations to the ‘Maharishi’ and at length he answered: ‘What is all this talk of masters and disciples? All these differences exist only from the disciple’s standpoint. To the one who has realized the true Self there is neither master nor disciple...”

It began to voice itself in Brunton’s thoughts. “That the Maharishi was not to be drawn into a direct affirmative response, and the answer must be found in some other way.” The ensuing weeks absorbed him into a strange, unwonted life. His days were spent in the hall of the ‘Maharishi’, where he would slowly pick up fragments of wisdom and faint clues to the answer he sought: was he to become a disciple?

Each day, after breakfast, he made a quiet lazy stroll to the hermitage, halted beside the sweet smelling rose...
bushes in the compound garden, or rested under the drooping fronds of palm trees. He felt: “It is a beautiful experience to wander around the hermitage garden before the sun has waxed in power and to see and smell the variegated flowers.” He would then enter the hall, bow to the ‘Maharishee’, and quietly sit down on folded legs. He never failed to become gradually aware of the mysterious atmosphere of the place, of the benign radiations which steadily percolated to his brain. By careful observation and frequent analysis he became completely certain that a reciprocal inter-influence arises: “Something that was most subtle but quite unmistakable.” And it dawned on him with increasing force that in that quiet and obscure corner of South India, he had been led to one of the extremely few of India’s “spiritual supermen.” He wrote, “He makes no claims to occult powers and hierophantic knowledge, and strongly resists every attempt to canonize him.” It seemed to Paul Brunton that the presence of men like the ‘Maharishee’ ensured the continuity down history of a divine message.

Later Paul Brunton described something of his experiences of Self inquiry while sitting before the ‘Maharishee’. He would enter the hall and in a few seconds compose himself and bring all his wandering thoughts to a strong centre, for the mental questionings which had marked most of his earlier meditations had begun to cease. He wrote, “Following his frequently repeated instructions I endeavour to pierce into that which is formless.” - His real being and inner nature, his “soul”. To his surprise the effort meets with almost instantaneous success, leaving him with nothing more than a strongly felt sense of the master’s intimate presence. He would then apply the attention of consciousness to its own centre, striving for the real Self to reveal itself” is what he taught. So with the feeling that he had “found the birthplace of thinking”, he would surrender himself to complete passivity, “yet still keeping as intently watchful as a snake of its prey.” The waves of thought begin to diminish and time seemed to reel as his rapidly growing intuition began to reach out into the unknown. And finally it would happen: “Thought is extinguished like a snuffed candle. The intellect withdraws into its real ground, that is, consciousness working unhindered by thoughts.”

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In the next stage Brunton would become aware that he stands apart from the intellect, conscious though that it is thinking, but warned by an intuitive voice that it, the intellect, is merely an instrument. He watched these thoughts with a weird detachment and realized that the power to think, which had hitherto been a matter for pride, had now become a thing from which to escape, and he would perceive, “with startling clarity” - that he had been its unconscious captive for all of his life. He would realize intuitively that he was about to penetrate onto the mysteries which hide the innermost recesses of man’s soul: “But how to divorce one’s self from the age-old tyranny of thoughts?” He remembered that the ‘Maharishee’ had never suggested that one should attempt to force the stoppage of thinking. “Trace thought to its place of origin - watch for the real Self to reveal itself” is what he taught. So with the feeling that he had “found the birthplace of thinking”, he would surrender himself to complete passivity, “yet still keeping as intently watchful as a snake of its prey.” The waves of thought begin to diminish and time seemed to reel as his rapidly growing intuition began to reach out into the unknown. And finally it would happen: “Thought is extinguished like a snuffed candle. The intellect withdraws into its real ground, that is, consciousness working unhindered by thoughts.”

After these sessions he perceived that the mind takes its rise in a transcendental source while brain passes into a state of complete suspension, as it does in deep sleep, yet there is not the slightest loss of awareness. His sense of awareness had been drawn out of the narrow confines of the separate personality; it has turned into something sublime all-embracing. Of this he wrote: “Self still exists, but it is a changed, radiant, Self... Some deeper, diviner being rises into consciousness and becomes me... I am in the midst of an ocean of blazing light - the primeval stuff out of which worlds are created... It stretches away into unlimitable infinite space, incredibly alive... My arms embrace all creation with profound sympathy, for I understand in the deepest possible way that to know all is not merely to pardon all, but to love all. My heart is remoulded in rapture.”

As Brunton left the hall that night with his iron lantern softly glowing and followed the path on the lonely walk to his forest hut, countless fireflies moved amongst the flowers and plants and trees in the compound. He had to, as one does today, be careful not to tread on scorpions or snakes in the dark. His recent meditation had seized him so profoundly that he was unable and unwilling to stop it, so he paid little heed to the narrow path of lighted ground on which he walked. And so he retired to his modest hut, closed the tightly fitting heavy door, and drew the shutters over glazeless windows to keep out unwelcome animal intruders. His last glimpse was of a thicket of palm trees which stood on one side of his clearing in the bush - “the silver moonlight coming in streams over their interlaced feathery tops.”

(Paul Brunton’s observations during the period of his residence in Tiruvannamalai gives a penetrating view of the experiences of other visitors to the asram. Each day it brought fresh indications of the greatness of the ‘Maharishee’. He wrote: “Among the strangely diversified company of human beings who pass through the hermitage, a pariah stumbles into the hall in some great agony of soul and pours out his tribulation at the Maharishee’s feet. The sage does not reply; instead he gazes quietly at the suffering man, whose cries gradually diminish until he leaves the hall two hours later a more serene and stronger person.” For others it was clear that the mere presence of the sage provided them with spiritual and emotional assurance. Those in doubt would gain renewed faith in their creeds and beliefs: “For the ‘Maharishee’ treats all creeds alike, regards them all as significant and sincere expressions of a great experience - and honours Jesus no less than Krishna.”) Bronnton describes a peasant family who had traveled over one hundred miles to pay silent homage to the sage.
They had heard that there is a God in human form living at the foot of the hill. They stay for a few hours, hardly speaking, and gaze in reverence and awe at the 'Maharsihee'. Yet another man in the hall is bespectacled, silken-clad and prosperous-looking. He is a judge who has taken advantage of a law vacation to pay a visit to the 'Maharsihee'. Brunton writes: “This cultured, refined and highly educated gentleman squats democratically among a group of Tamils who are poor, naked to the waist and smeared with oil, so that their bodies glisten like polished ebony. It is clear that that which brings them together also destroys the distinctions of caste and produces unity - the deep recognition that the true wisdom is worth the sacrifice of superficial differences.”

**Animals**

Ramana’s regard for animals was no different to that for humans. Dogs, cows, cats, monkeys and peacocks abounded in the ashram, as they do in fact today. None of the animals were treated as anything less than human and never referred to as 'it' - they were usually called “the boys”. He would say, “We do not know what soul may be tenanting these bodies... and for what portion of their unfinished karma they seek out our company.” One of these animals was Lakshmi the cow. Lakshmi was believed to be the incarnation of an elderly lady who used to take delight in feeding Ramana when he lived on the hill. Lakshmi would take every opportunity to meet Ramana and she seemed to understand what was spoken to her. When she passed away she was given an honourable burial near the hall, and her samadhi shrine is there for all to see today. This is Ramana’s description of one dog called Karuppan. He said:

“He was a person of high principles. When we were at the cave, some dark object used to pass but always keep his distance. We would see his head peeping over a bush sometimes. His vairagya, non-attachment, seemed very strong... We respected this and used to leave food for him... One day as we were going past, Karuppan suddenly jumped across the path and romped around me wagging his tail in glee... From that time onwards he lived with us at the ashram as one of the inmates.”

Ramana’s attitude was the same towards dangerous animals and snakes were often fellow inhabitants of the caves. He would say, “We have come to their residence... We have no right to disturb or trouble them. They do not harm us if we take the correct attitude towards them.”

One of his almost last concerns when he was on his death bed was for animals. A peacock flew on to the roof and he said, “Remember to feed the peacocks.”

**The sacred mountain**

The hill of Arunachala, the ‘Hill of Enlightenment’, has been venerated since time immemorial as one of the most sacred spots in India. It was called the Tejo Lingham and is reputed to be the abode of a legendary Siddha called Arunagiri Yogi. It is much older than Mount Kailas, being a granitic monolith dating from the first formation of the earth’s crust. In an ancient scripture, the Scanda Purana, Lord Shiva speaks of Arunachala as the most sacred of all the holy places, the Heart of the world: The translation is as follows:

“Though in fact fiery, the hill is dull in appearance because of his loving solicitude for the spiritual uplift of the world. Here, I always abide as the Perfect Being. Meditate on the fact that in the Heart of the Hill surges the spiritual glory within which the whole world is contained.”

Ramana’s own hymn to the hill is as follows (From Sri Arunachala Ashtakam and Pancharatnam):

“You are Yourself the One Being ever aware as the self-luminous Heart! In You there is a mysterious Power (Shakti) which without You is nothing. From it proceeds the phantom of the mind emitting its latent subtle dark mists, which, illuminated by Your Light of consciousness reflected on them, appear within as thoughts whirling in the vortices of paraboda, later developing into the psychic worlds and these are projected without as the material world transformed into concrete objects which are magnified by the outgoing senses and move about like pictures in a cinema show. Visible or invisible, oh Hill of Grace, without You they are nothing!”

(And) “O Arunachala, in You the picture of the Universe is formed, and has its stay, and is dissolved; in this enigma lies the miracle of Truth. You are the Inner Self, Who dances in the Hearts as ‘I’. Heart is Your name. O Lord!”

At first sight the hill looks fairly nondescript but on closer inspection it is discovered that it has its own energy and contains many beautiful spots and patches of forest. At the time of Ramana the hill was much more densely forested and because of concern over its further deforestation there is currently a program to plant many forest trees in places where the hill has become denuded. There are also many caves where Yogis live and where visitors can go to meditate. It is said that every part of the hill was familiar to Ramana. At the highest point of the hill there is a cauldron that is lit on the last day of the festival of Karthikai Deepham on full-moon night - as the culminating act of the festival. On this occasion a hundred thousand people visit the hill to pay homage while ghee and camphor are burned for several days producing a flame that can be seen for miles around. One of the acts of homage to the hill is its circumambulation and many people walk this eight mile course almost daily.

**Last days**

The illness and death from cancer of Sri Ramana Maharshi was just another demonstration of his extraordinary detachment from worldly matters. In late 1948 a small growth appeared on his left elbow which the doctor removed. But within two months it had appeared again and this time was removed by an eminent surgeon from Madras, who identified it as a sarcoma and also treated the area with radium. Sarcoma in an excruciatingly painful form of cancer and usually fatal.
Before the wound had healed a fresh growth was observed and the doctors advocated amputation of the arm. Ramana simply smiled and replied, “There is no need for alarm. The body itself is a disease. Let it have its natural end, why mutilate it? Simple dressing of the affected part is enough.”

Herbal treatment was tried and in August 1949, some eight months after the first appearance of the tumor, a third operation was tried followed by radium treatment. At first the treatment appeared successful but some three months later the tumor reappeared and a fourth operation was carried out. At that time it was said that if the tumor reappeared the prognosis would be very bad. Then another tumor appeared in the left armpit and grew rapidly so that the whole arm became one huge swelling that oozed blood; and the poison of the disease spread to the whole body. When it was realized that human treatment was to be of no avail devotees prayed to Ramana to set his own health to right, but he simply said, “Everything will come right in due course.” (And then) “Who is there to will this?”

Throughout the long course of the illness Ramana remained quite unconcerned and the doctors who attended him were amazed at his tranquil appearance and gracious smile and almost complete indifference to the pain. At the beginning of the disease he had quoted and translated a verse from the Srimad Bhagavatam, as follows:

“Let the body, the result of fructifying karma, rest or move about, live or die. The sage who has realized the Self is not aware of it, just as one in a drunken stupor is not aware of his clothing.”

Until the very end Sri Ramana continued with his duties and even when he was unable to leave his room, up to the last evening, he continued giving darshan. That evening there was a vast gathering of devotees and all had his darshan. He asked his attendants to raise him to a sitting position and as a group of devotees began chanting the hymn he had composed they were overwhelmed every one present, both in the room and outside.

**The present-day scene**

As a result of Ramana Maharshi’s presence in Tiruvannamalai for more than fifty years, the place, already a holy location since ancient times, has become a centre of pilgrimage for thousands and a place where whole communities of seekers have settled to pursue their sadhana. The Ramanashram and the temple and hill of Arunachala are the focus points of this devotion. Many visitors first spend a short time staying at the ashram itself, and then, if their stay is to be longer, find accommodation in the near vicinity.

**Practicalities**

Tiruvannamalai can be reached by bus from the major centres of Madras (Chennai), Bangalore, and Pondicherry. Accommodation at the Ramanashram, which is located at the edge of Arunachala hill around three kilometers from the centre of the town, is usually granted (generally for one week) to those who apply a few weeks in advance. Contact details are as follow:

Shri Ramanashram, PO Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu 606603, India.

Tel. (international) + 91 4175 23292/27200, (local) 04175 23292/27200

E.mail: alagamma@vsnl.com

The Ramanashram is a very sacred place with the samadhi shrines of Sri Ramana and the Mother. Guests may meditate in Ramana’s original meditation hall and attend the various ceremonies and pujas that are conducted throughout the day. The ashram provides comfortable accommodation and meals on a donation basis. There is a book shop and a good library of spiritual books and magazines. The path up the mountain starts from the back gate of the ashram.

For longer term visitors there are many other places to stay adjacent to the Ramanashram including other ashrams, rooms, apartments and houses, which can be rented at reasonable rates. In some instances the Ramanashram will extend the period of accommodation for several weeks.

A present day teacher who holds satsang is the grand nephew of Ramana, V. Ganesan. His home is approximately two km. from the Ramanashram. An elderly recluse (year 2000), Lakshmana Swami, who lives near the Ramanashram and is said to have been enlightened by Ramana, gives occasional silent teaching. Yet another teacher who is sometimes in Tiruvannamalai is Nanna Guru, who has an ashram near the Ramanashram.

A Swiss spiritual teacher called Werner also lives nearby and may conduct satsang.

The Yogi Ramsuratkumar Ashram, close to Ramanashram, was built for the late Yogi Ramsuratkumar, known as the beggar sadhu because of his dress of rags and his wild bushy hair. He was considered to be an enlightened soul. This ashram is still open to visitors.

Just 35 km from Tiruvannamalai on the Tirukoilur road, is the Tapovanam ashram of Sadguru Gnanananda who died at a great age (some say 160 years) in 1973. Shortly after the death of Ramana he began teaching Self inquiry. His devotees feel that this was to fill the gap left by Ramana.

Circumambulating mount Arunachala (13 km.) in a clockwise direction is a popular way of paying homage. A map of the route showing the various sacred stopping places is available from the Ramanashram bookstore. At the foot of the mountain to the north, in the town of Tiruvannamalai, lies an ancient temple of Shiva, which is one of the largest and most spectacular temples in India. The oldest parts of the temple date from the 9th century. This was the temple in which Ramana first meditated, before moving to the mountain itself.
Chapter 5

JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI - A RELUCTANT MASTER

Suddenly it is there, a presence, waiting patiently, with great tenderness, yet never the same. There is a sense of watching from infinite depth. Time as a measure and time as thought had stopped. It is an energy without border and it does not leave a memory behind it.

Although Krishnamurti was undoubtedly one of the greatest spiritual teachers of the twentieth century, he was, throughout most of his life, strongly opposed to the guru movement and the cults of the times, and also to all types of formal religion. A possible reason for this may be traced back to his early experience of being ‘discovered’ by the Theosophical Society and trained to be the vehicle of the ‘World Teacher’ - a kind of latter-day Messiah, who, in collaboration with the Esoteric Branch of the Theosophical Society, would spawn a hierarchy of greater beings and bring order to the world. After he had matured and after certain spiritual experiences described further on had occurred, he came to regard religions as the products of the egoic mind, invented out of insecurity and a desire of the egoic mind to perpetuate itself. The essence of his teachings were and still are, that the ego and the attributes of mind which thrived on memory and habits, must be stripped away so that the true essence of love can manifest itself. He maintained that this needed great energy which most of us were unwilling to expend, because our energy was always being wasted on the maintenance of the status quo of the egoic self.

Although Krishnamurti was cast as an intellectual, a jnani, those who knew him would say that he had huge physical beauty, sensitivity and caring. He could transmit a state of deep meditation - thoughtless awareness - by mere look, or by his presence.

Much of the information in this account was sourced in the three books on Krishnamurti by his principal biographer, Mary Lutyens - see Bibliography. Comments received from The Krishnamurti Foundation Trust of the UK are also acknowledged, as is the information provided by Mr. Antonio Eduardo D’Agnino.

His early history

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born on May the 11th 1895 in Tamil Nadu, India, in the small hill town of Mandanapalle located between Madras and Bangalore. He was the eighth child of an orthodox Brahmin family and his birth was considered to be auspicious by his mother because the Lord Krishna was also an eighth child, and because of a premonition she had that he was to be in some way remarkable.

From an early age he was a dreamy child, poor at school work, but nevertheless extremely observant. His biographer, Mary Lutyens, in her wonderfully illuminating book *Krishnamurti: His Life and Death*, writes: “He would stand for long stretches of time, watching trees and clouds, or squat to gaze at flowers and insects.” He also had a generous nature, a characteristic which he retained throughout his life. As a child he demonstrated clairvoyance; when his older sister, and later his mother, had died, he would often have visions of them.

In 1909 his father, who had been retired from government service, obtained a post as assistant secretary with the Theosophical Society and moved the family to Adyar in Madras (Chennai), where the headquarters of Society had been located since 1882. This was to lead to the discovery and identification of the young Krishnamurti as a potential vehicle of the ‘World Teacher’ of the Theosophical movement of that period - a celestial being who needed a very pure and egoless vehicle in order to take on physical form.

The leaders of the Society at that time were the elected president, Mrs. Anne Besant, and her colleague Charles Leadbeater, who had also arrived in Adyar in 1909. Leadbeater was a former Church of England clergyman who became a disciple of the clairvoyant Madam Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society. The Theosophists at that time, and in particular the members of an Esoteric Section of the Society, supported a strange concoction of beliefs taken from several religions that had been formulated by Madam Blavatsky. They believed that a ‘Master Maitreya’, who was one of the ‘Bodhisattvas’ who had earlier taken over the body of Christ, would some time soon, take over another ‘human vehicle’ that needed to be especially prepared for him. The Master Maitreya and a hierarchy of spiritual beings referred to as the ‘Great White Brotherhood’, were supposed to live in a ravine in the Himalayas of Tibet. They communicated instructions to the leaders of the Esoteric Section, those of whom were clairvoyant, and they could also visit them through the medium of astral travel. Leadbeater would escort candidates for discipleship to visit the Masters, and then announce to them on the following mornings whether they had been successful or not. He and Mrs. Besant were both very ‘highly evolved’ individuals within the hierarchy, and had already taken advanced levels of initiation with the Masters at the time the young Krishnamurti came to Adyar. Apart from the Masters there were, in the beliefs of the adepts, other celestial beings who were of a yet higher order than the Masters, one of whom was the Buddha.
Shortly after his arrival in Adyar in 1909, Leadbeater discovered Krishnamurti (then known as Krishna) on the beach near the Theosophical Society headquarters. He proclaimed that Krishna had the most wonderful aura he had ever seen, “Without a particle of selfishness in it.” Later, in January 1910, Krishna was taken by Leadbeater and Mrs. Besant (by astral travel), to an occult ceremony held before the Masters in the house of the Lord Maitreya in the Himalayas. After answering correctly the questions put to him, he was formally accepted into the ‘Great White Brotherhood’. Mary Lutyens, supported by how he looked in a photograph, asserted that the initiation had wrought a noticeable improvement in his appearance, and when he returned from his sojourn with the Masters, everyone prostrated themselves before him. In January 1911 an organization called The Order of the Star in the East was started with Krishna as its head. The Order had the aim of preparing the way for the coming of the ‘World Teacher’ who would occupy Krishna’s body. Later that year the first manifestation of the power of Krishnamurti occurred when he was giving out certificates to new members of the Order, when, according to most of those present, the hall was filled with a tremendous power - which was apparently flowing from the young Krishna.

In 1912 Mrs. Besant took Krishna and his younger brother Nitya to England (for the second time) where they stayed until 1920 - by which time Krishna would have been 25 years of age. The years were mainly taken up with their education and during this period Krishna remained completely unspoiled by all the attention and adulation he had been receiving since being discovered. In 1920 he was sent to France - to learn French. In 1921 it was discovered that Nitya had tuberculosis (from which he would later die), but after a period of treatment he was pronounced cured and both young men returned to India, Krishna to play his part as the head of the Order of the Star. He was at that time twenty-six years old and in December 1921 he gave four talks at a Theosophical Convention on Theosophy and Internationalism. This was clearly before the onset of his ability to talk without preparation and it was obvious that public speaking was, at that time, very difficult for him.

In 1922 Nitya’s illness returned and the two young men went to California where they stayed in the Ojai Valley, south of San Francisco, 1500 feet above sea level and with an ideal climate for Nitya, who soon began to feel better. It was here in 1922 that Krishna underwent the first of the spiritual experiences which were to change his life. This was referred to by the Theosophists as ‘the process’ and was believed to be a purification so that the Master could take over the body. A witness account of the experience, which indicates its deep spiritual dimension, is described further on. The experience took the a form that could be described as an intense tapasya - a burning purification and the intensification of his psyche which charged the body with great energy. It also marked the beginning of the end for the old ideas of the Theosophists and those of the Order of the Star. He wrote to a devotee (Lady Emily, mother of his biographer Mary Lutyens), as follows : “I have changed and with that change I am going to change the lives of my friends.. My whole inner nature is alive with energy and thought.” After the experience he began to write poetry and he also took on a new aspect of authority among the members of the Order.

From the beginning of 1923 Krishna began to take the duties of running the organization seriously and also visited England and Europe where, in August and September the ‘process’ started again and was very intense. Then in 1924 Nitya became ill again and the brothers returned to California where Krishna cared for and nursed his brother. But in 1925, because Nitya was a little better, he embarked on a visit to India to attend the Jubilee Convention of the Theosophical Society, leaving Nitya behind in California. While he was on the trip out, Nitya died.

**The breaking of the ‘Order’**

The news of Nitya’s death affected Krishna deeply and it is thought that this experience was central in breaking his implicit faith in Theosophy and in the ‘Masters’. He wrote the following piece on Nitya which was published in the magazine of the Order, *The Herald of the Star*, and in this he assumed the name Krishnamurti :

“On the physical plane we could be separated and now we are inseparable... For my brother and I are one. As Krishnamurti I now have greater zeal, greater faith, greater sympathy and greater love, for there is also in me the body, the Being of Nityananda... I know how to weep but still that is human. I know now more certainly than ever before, that there is real beauty in life, real happiness that cannot be shattered by any physical happening, a great strength that cannot be weakened by passing events, and a great love that is permanent, imperishable and unconquerable.”

He broke his association with the then leaders of the Order, except perhaps Mrs. Besant, with whom he retained a personal connection. Then, at a Star Congress meeting in December 1925, he spoke for the first time as a World Teacher in his own right, using the first person, and not as a body taken over by any ‘Master’. During this talk his voice changed noticeably as he said:

“He comes only to those who want who desire, who long. (Then) I come for those who want sympathy, who are longing to be released, who are longing to find happiness in all things. I come to reform and not to tear down, I come not to destroy but to build.”

The following years were characterized by a progressive change in his thinking that lead to his closure of the Order in 1929 in Switzerland. He also then came to be known generally as Krishnamurti, rather than Krishna.

**A “guru” for intellectuals**

Notwithstanding Krishnamurti’s views and wishes with regard to his guru status, his own words sealed his role as a *de facto* guru for several generations of followers; among whom there were a very high proportion of intellectuals. From around 1926 onwards he had been distancing himself from the Theosophists’ concept of a ‘World Teacher’ who would
guide them step by step on their spiritual journey; but at no time did he indicate that he would abandon seekers of the truth. In his summer talks of 1926 and 1927 at Ommen in the Netherlands, he made this statement:

“I would ask you to come and look through my window, which will show you my heaven... Then you will see that what matters is not what you will do, what you read, what any person says you are or are not, but that you should have the intense desire to enter into that abode where dwells the Truth. No one can give you liberation, you have to find it from within, but because I have found it I would show you the way... He who has attained liberation has become the teacher - like myself. It lies in the power of each one to enter the flame, to become the flame... Because I am here, if you hold me in your heart, I will give you strength to attain.”

And in 1929, at the time of the termination of his role as the ‘World Teacher’ as envisaged by the Theosophical Society, he made the following statement:

“You can form other organizations and expect someone else (another vessel for the World Teacher). With that I am not concerned, nor with creating new cages and decorations for those cages. My only concern is to set men absolutely, unconditionally free.”

It will be clear that these are not the words of someone who is wiping his hands of his followers as a teacher - a ‘guru’ for want of a better word - for guru is simply the Sanskrit word for teacher, but rather those of one who is changing the rules. The pursuit of the truth was no longer to be carried out according to the beliefs and prognostications of the leaders of the Esoteric branch of the Theosophical Society, with Krishnamurti as its ‘vessel’, but rather by personal effort - and in this regard he would show the way.

**What was Krishnamurti?**

Krishnamurti’s principal biographer (Mary Lutyens) and many other close associates, were greatly concerned about finding out exactly what Krishnamurti was, and in particular whether he was indeed a ‘vessel’ for a higher being - the Lord Maitreya or other, which would have been an affirmation of duality; or was he a great being in his own right - as the Self so-to-speak. To them, the easiest explanation was the former, for this would explain how the rather vacant boy who by his own frequent statements was “completely free of thought” and had a “vacant mind”, could astound the ‘guru’ for want of a better word - for guru is simply the Sanskrit word for teacher, but rather those of one who is changing the rules. The pursuit of the truth was no longer to be carried out according to the beliefs and prognostications of the leaders of the Esoteric branch of the Theosophical Society, with Krishnamurti as its ‘vessel’, but rather by personal effort - and in this regard he would show the way.

“**There is a sense of vacuity and then something comes. But if I sat down to it I might not be able to.** Schopenhauer, Lenin, Bertrand Russell etc. had all read tremendously. Here is the phenomenon of this chap who isn’t trained, who has no discipline. How did he get all this? What is it? If it were only K [himself] - he is uneducated, gentle - so where does it come from? The person hasn’t thought out the teaching,... "It is like - what is the biblical term? - Revelation. It happens all the time when I’m talking."

He invited Mary Lutyens and another close associate to try to find out what he really was. But much of the confusion in the minds of the reviewers and commentators on Krishnamurti (who were mostly Westerners) seems to come from a lack of understanding, or unacceptance, of the basic tenets of Vedanta and Eastern philosophy in general. In the East there would be no confusion; for the Self (the higher Self) dwells in all men, and is singular (not with duality) - and is the same as God. It embraces the ‘Masters’ and everything else, and since there is only one Self who is shared by all - it therefore matters not one jot whether it is the Lord Maitreya or anyone else - there is only one and it is equally within Krishnamurti as it is from without. Even in Christian philosophy, duality, the perception of the ego, is nothing more than the separation - when man ate of the fruit of the knowledge of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. If this is confusing, it is only because the common mind is unable to perceive a meaning for reality - the singularity of God, the Trinity, and so on. Krishnamurti’s own words on the matter were: “There is a factor we are missing. We have come to a point where our brains, our instruments of investigation... have no meaning.” Furthermore, confusion arising from his use of the third person during his talks is also of no consequence for this is a common feature among enlightened beings; in them the ego is so subdued or eliminated that they need not refer to it as ‘I’ at all. So as long as we are not insistent on understanding the understandable, there is no reason to be concerned about whether Krishnamurti was or was not someone else; for he was nothing more than the Self and as such was nothing less than everything. One may speculate, was his invitation to find out what he really was - an invitation to ‘Self inquiry’?

From early life Krishnamurti seemed to have a vacant mind and as mentioned before, was almost completely free of ego. He emphasized this at a briefing with Mary Lutyens in 1975. He said:

“What is important in this is the vacant mind... How is it that the vacant mind was not filled with Theosophy? Right through life it has been guarded, protected. The vacancy has never gone away. At the dentist for four hours not a single thought came into my head... Only when talking and writing does ‘this’ come into play... Is the vacancy a lack of selfishness - the (ego) - my house, attachment? “

He maintained that the meditative state, that connection with a higher reality - the Truth, only manifests when there is this vacancy and it is something positive that can be felt. He said: “Can you feel it in the room? It is stronger and stronger. My head is starting... I will tell you something that happens; I said yesterday, ‘Thinking about something is different from thinking.’ I said, ‘I don’t quite understand it, let me look at it,’ and when I did, I saw something clearly’”.

At the same time Krishnamurti could use the ordinary mind as occasion demanded and when this happened the
'vacant mind' ceased to be empty: "When it is necessary to use thought, to communicate. Otherwise it is empty. During a seminar, when I am talking it comes out."

**The process:** Although this may not be agreed to by all Krishnamurti purists, some aspects of 'the process' were typical of Kundalini experiences - see below, and they also had attributes of tapasya - the 'way of the cross' or 'the dark night of the soul' so-to-speak. The 'process' was described by a witness as follows: "Suddenly the whole house seemed full of a terrific force and Krishna was as if possessed and was conscious of intolerable dirt in the house. He cried aloud that he wanted to go to the woods in India. Later he began to chant a mantra from Adyar ... then silence."

According to his brother Nitya’s account, who witnessed the 'process', "The place seemed to be filled with a Great Presence and a great longing came upon me to go on my knees and adore, for I knew that the Great Lord of all our hearts had come himself, and though we saw him not, yet all felt the splendour of His presence."

After the first event Krishna wrote: "I was supremely happy, for I had seen. Nothing could ever be the same... The fountain of Truth has revealed to me and the darkness dispersed. Love in all its glory has intoxicated my heart; my heart now can never be closed."

Later he described accurately a classical Kundalini ‘symptom’ (see Devatma Shakti), as follows: "My spine and neck have been going very strong and the day before yesterday, I had an extraordinary evening. Whatever it is, the source or whatever one calls the bally thing, came up my spine, up to the nape of my neck, then it separated into two, one going to the right and one to the left of my head till they met between the two eyes, just above my nose. And I saw the Lord and Master. It was a tremendous night."

A consciousness of the undifferentiated nature of a universe ‘without duality’ is one of the characteristic signs of enlightenment. During the period of the ‘process’ he had a clear and unequivocal experiences of universality. This is what he said on one occasion:

“There was a man mending the road; that man was myself; the pickaxe he held was myself; the very stone which he was breaking up was part of me; the tender blade of grass was my very being, and the tree beside the man was myself. I also could feel and think like the road mender and I could feel the wind passing through the trees, and the little ant on the blade of grass I could feel. The birds, the dust, and the very noise were a part of me. Just then there was a car passing by at some distance; I was the driver, the engine, and the tyres; as the car went further away from me, I was going further away from myself. I was in everything; or rather everything was in me, the inanimate and animate, the mountain, the worm and all breathing things. All day long I remained in this happy condition."

**The notion of guru:** The question may be asked - did Krishnamurti have a guru? This may best be answered by his own words on the occasion of the Theosophist’s summer camp of 1929, which was the precursor of his closing of The Order of The Star of the East; he said:

“When I was a small boy I used to see Krishna, with his flute, as he was pictured by the Hindus, because my mother was a devotee of Krishna... When I grew older and met with Bishop Leadbeater and the Theosophical Society, I began to see the Master K.H. (The Master Kuthumi, one of the Great White Brotherhood) - again in the form that was put before me, the reality from their point of view - and hence the Master K.H. was to me the end. Later on, as I grew, I began to see the Lord Maitreya. That was two years ago and I saw him constantly in the form put before me... Now lately, it has been the Buddha whom I have been seeing and it has been my delight and my glory to be with Him. Now I have been asked what I mean by the “Beloved”. I will give a meaning, an estimation, which you will interpret as you please.

To me it is all - it is Shri Krishna, it is the Master K. H., it is the Lord Maitreya, it is the Buddha, and yet it is beyond all these forms. What does it matter what name you give? ... What you are troubling about is whether there is such a person as the World Teacher who has manifested himself in the body of a certain other person, Krishnamurti; but in the world nobody will trouble about this question. It is an unfortunate thing that I have to explain, but I must. I wanted to be as vague as possible, and I have made it so. My Beloved is the open skies, the flower, every human being... Till I was able to say with certainty, without undue excitement, or exaggeration in order to convince others, that I was one with my Beloved I never spoke. I talked of vague generalities which everyone wanted. I never said : I am the World Teacher; but now that I feel I am one with my Beloved, I say it, not in order to impress my authority on you, not to convince you of my greatness, nor the greatness of the World Teacher, nor even of the beauty of life, but merely to awaken the desire in your hearts and in your minds to seek out the Truth. If I say, and I will say, that I am one with the Beloved, it is because I feel and know it. I have found what I longed for; I have become united, so that henceforth there will be no separation, because my thoughts, my desires, my longings - those of the individual self, have been destroyed... I am as the flower that gives scent to the morning air. It does not concern itself with who is passing by... Until now you have relied on the two Protectors of the Order for authority, on someone else to tell you the Truth, whereas the Truth lies within you... It is no good asking me who is the Beloved. Of what use is explanation? For you will not understand until you are able to see him in every animal, every blade of grass, in every person that is suffering, in every individual.” (Source: Lutyens loc. cit.)

Krishnamurti always had the feeling that his life had been planned and that something looked after him - something that existed and had to be respected but not interfered with. And there seems little doubt that, notwithstanding his antipathy to the concept of a guru or master, that he was, in the classical sense, just such a one - an enlightened master, a satguru. As indicated before, it is quite likely that in his briefings with Mary Lutyens and other close associates, he was inviting them to find out, to realize - for themselves. From his meditation experiences he gave some remarkable descriptions, which could aid the cognisance of the un-enlightened mind to the elusive enlightened state. Some are as follow.
Meditations

Krishnamurti did not give instructions in meditation but he did give pointers in regard to his own meditations. He would always meditate without any expectation of what should happen - so that memory of previous experiences would not get in the way. Towards the end of his life, from the late 1970’s, his meditations reached what can only be described as their highest peak. This is an example, spoken in the third person:

“For a long time he had been awakened in the middle of the night with that peculiar meditation which had been pursuing him for many years. This had been a normal thing in his life. It is not a conscious, deliberate pursuit of meditation or an unconscious desire to achieve something. It is very clearly uninvited and unsought. (He had been adroitly conscious of preventing thought making a memory of these meditations.) So each meditation has a quality of something new and fresh in it. There is a sense of accumulating drive. Sometimes it is so intense that there is pain in the head, sometimes a sense of vast emptiness with fathomless energy. Sometimes he wakes with laughter and measureless joy. These peculiar meditations, which naturally were unpromeditated, grew in intensity... One night in the strange stillness of that part of the world (the Rishi Valley in India), with the silence undisturbed by the hoot of owls, he woke up to find something totally different and new. The movement had reached the source of all energy... This must in no way be confused with, or even thought of, as God or the highest principle, the Brahman, which are the projections of the human mind out of fear and longing, the unyielding desire for total security. It is none of these things. Desire cannot possibly reach it, words cannot fathom it, nor can the string of thought wind itself around it. One may ask with what assurance do you (Krishnamurti) state that it is the source of all energy? One can only reply with complete humility, that it is so... Every night he would wake up with this sense of the absolute. It is not a state, a thing that is static, fixed, immovable. The whole universe is in it, measureless to man... and there was the perception that there is nothing beyond this. This is the ultimate, the beginning and the ending and the absolute. There is only a sense of incredible vastness and immense beauty.”

And in his Notebook p. 121, which he began late in life, speaking about Meditation and Love, he wrote:

“Meditation... was freedom and it was like entering into an unknown world of beauty and quietness; it was a world without image, symbol or word, without waves of memory. Love was in the death of every minute and each death was the returning of love. It was not attachment, it had no roots; it flowered without pause and it was a flame which burnt away the borders, the carefully built fences of consciousness (ego consciousness). Meditation was joy and with it came benediction.”

Teachings

As indicated before, Krishnamurti taught that we must find the Truth primarily by our own efforts; but in this regard, “because I have found it” he would show the way. And in all his subsequent long and active life, this is what he did - virtually right to the last moment. He maintained that he had found the Truth through his own efforts and that others could, if they were serious enough, do the same. In a letter written in 1930 to a devotee who was devastated at his resignation from the old order (above) he said:

“The ecstasy that I feel is the outcome of this world. I wanted to understand, I wanted to conquer sorrow, this pain of detachment and attachment, death, continuity of life, everything that man goes through every day. I wanted to understand and concur it. I have. So, my ecstasy is real and infinite, not an escape. I know the way out of this incessant misery and I want to help people out of the bog of their sorrow...”

In all his talks and books he prescribes the same formula; that man must examine his own consciousness and strip away everything that is not the Truth. In essence it was ‘Self inquiry’. He maintained that the Truth is a “pathless land” that cannot be arrived at through any organization, creed, dogma, priest or ritual. Nor can it be achieved through philosophical logic or psychology. It can only be found through the “mirror of relationship”, through observation and understanding of the contents of the mind. He said: “When man becomes aware of the movement of his own consciousness he will see the division between the thinker and the thought, the observer and the observed, the experiencer and the experience.” And he will then discover that the division is an illusion. There is only pure observation which is insight, without any shadow of the past: “This timeless insight brings about a deep radical change in the mind.”

A central part of the procedure of self examination is to witness the mind and its parade of thoughts and, in essence, though not enunciated in quite the way of Ramana Maharshi, his dialogues with those who attended his talks were to guide them into self examination through contemplation of thoughts and concepts. The mind, he explained, thrived on memory and habit and produced nothing new. Its incessant flow of thoughts, being derived from the store of memories, cannot break through to anything new; they are always the past parading itself as the present. Of this he said:

“Thought is born of experiences, of knowledge, which is inseparable from time, so man is always a slave of the past.” By contrast: “Freedom is pure observation without direction, without fear of punishment or reward. Freedom is without motive... is found in the choiceless awareness of our daily existence.” (And) “Thought is always trying to find a place where it can abide, abide in the sense of hold. But what thought creates, being fragmentary, is total insecurity. Therefore there is complete security in being absolutely nothing - which means not a thing created by thought. To be absolutely nothing means a total contradiction of everything you have learnt... You know what it means to be nothing? No ambition - which does not mean that you vegetate - no aggression, no resistance, no barriers built by hurt? The security that thought has created is no security. That is an absolute truth.”... (And)... “We fill our hearts with the things of the mind and therefore keep our hearts ever empty and expectant. It is the mind that clings, that is envious, that holds and destroys.”

Krishnamurti maintained that the ego, through its attachment to thoughts of the mind, wants to experience a
continuation of pleasurable experiences ad infinitum; and it is this, the continuation of experience, that binds us. But this fact must be seen through introspection - not through belief or intellectualisation. It must be seen by direct examination; and then when it is understood, the unravelling of the mind and the ego and the surrender of it all can take place. There must be total negation and a stripping away of all that is not love. Only then can the Truth be seen. He said:

“Total negation is the essence of the positive. When there is negation of all those things which are not love - desire, pleasure etc. - then Love is, with its compassion and intelligence... Truth, happiness lies only through elimination, then there is a timeless understanding. This is not negative. Most people are afraid to be nothing. They call it being positive when they are making an effort, and call that effort virtue. But true virtue is effortless. When you are nothing you are all things, not by aggrandizement, not by laying emphasis on ‘I’ and ‘me’ - on the personality, but on the continual dispersion of that form of consciousness which creates power, greed, envy, possessive care, vanity, fear and passion.”

It is about discovering love through negation:

“You can only find out what love is, by knowing what it is not. Not knowing intellectually, but actually in life putting aside what it is not - jealousy, ambition, greed, all the division that goes on in life, the me and the you, we and they, the black and the white... And this needs energy, and energy comes only when you observe actually what is and don’t run away from it... Just observe actually what is, then you have an abundance of energy and then you can find out what love is. Love is not pleasure - really find that out, inwardly, for yourself. Do you know what that means? It means that there is no fear, no attachment, no dependency, but a relationship in which there is no division.”

Although Krishnamurti reiterated these principles in many talks throughout his life he became particularly lucid in his later years when his meditations were reaching what he described as “a sense of incredible vastness and beauty.” He had started several schools for young people and held strong views on the need of man to change - to evolve from a life based on the egoic mind and to promote “the awakening of intelligence” - which was consciousness of the higher Self. He was very adamant about the difference between learning and the accumulation of knowledge: “To know is not to know, and the understanding of this fact, that knowledge can never solve our human problems, is intelligence.” In education he believed there should be no psychological wounding - when you have a first and a second, you wound both of them.

An end to sorrow is love: Krishnamurti maintained that the eroding of the ego also means the embracing of sorrow: “We are seeing the fact, ‘what is’, which is suffering... I suffer and the mind is doing everything it can to run away from it... So, don’t escape from sorrow, which does not mean that you become morbid. Live with it... What takes place? Watch. The mind is very clear, sharp. It is faced with the fact. The very suffering transformed into passion is enormous. From that arises a mind that can never be hurt. Full stop. That is the secret.” In a talk given in Washington in 1985, less than a year before his death, he spoke again with great feeling, about love and sorrow:

“When there is unacceptance there is no love. When you are suffering, concerned with your own suffering, how can there be love? What is sorrow? Is sorrow self pity? Please investigate. We are not saying it is or is not... Is sorrow brought about by loneliness - feeling desperately alone, isolated? Can we look at sorrow as it actually is in us, and remain with it, hold it, never escape from it? Sorrow is not different from the one who suffers. The person who suffers wants to run away escape, do all kind of things. But to look at it you look as a child, a beautiful child, to hold it, never escape from it - then you will see for yourself, if you really look deeply, that there is an end to sorrow. And when there is an end to sorrow there is passion; not last, not sensory stimulation, but passion.”

Teaching by dialogue: Much of Krishnamurti’s teaching took the form of dialogues between himself (the Speaker) and the audience, in which he would guide the audience into the heart of the message. For example in a dialogue at his annual summer camp of 1971 entitled “Thought and the Immeasurable” the following exchange took place:

Questioner: “I remember when I came to Switzerland as a small child and I saw a mountain for the first time, it was without any remembrance. It was very beautiful”.

Krishnamurti: “Yes, Sir, when you see it for the first time you don’t say. ‘It is a mountain’. Then somebody tells you that is a mountain and the next time you recognize it as such. Now, when you observe, there is the whole process of recognition. You do not confuse the mountain with a house or an elephant, it is a mountain. Then the difficult problem arises: to observe it non verbally. ‘That is a mountain’, ‘I like it or I don’t like it’, ‘I wish I could live up there’, and so on. It is fairly easy just to observe it, because the mountains do not affect your life. But your husband, your wife, your neighbour, your son or daughter, they affect you; therefore you cannot observe them without evaluation, without an image. This is where the problem arises - can you look at the mountain and at your wife or your husband, without a single image, then you are looking at them for the first time, aren’t you? Then you are looking at the earth, the stars, the mountains, or the politician, for the first time. That means your eyes are clear, not dimmed with the burden of past memories. That is all. Go into it, work at it. You will find out the enormous beauty that is in this.”

Questioner: “If you look at a factory that way, without being aware of what it does to the environment, you cannot act.”

Krishnamurti: “On the contrary, you see that it is polluting the air, belching forth smoke, so you want to do something. Don’t confuse it, keep it simple. Do it and you will see what action comes out of it.”

There is a volume of these dialogues entitled The Awakening of Intelligence - see Bibliography. In this it is possible to discern the difference between ‘mind’ - the comments of most of the participators (pundits and professors), and the no-mind of Krishnamurti.
The effectiveness of his teaching

Although Krishnamurti taught for more than fifty years and has inspired, and continues to inspire, generations of ‘thinkers’, the extent to which others managed to achieve the same level of enlightenment that he had achieved is not known. From the accounts of his biographer (Mary Lutyens) who had known him from a young age, it appears that if there were such they were either very secretive or very few in number. But other sources of information indicate that there were probably more and perhaps many. One of these is Vimala Thakar, an Indian woman spiritual teacher who currently (2001) lives in retirement at Mount Abu, a hill station in Rajasthan. Her book, On an Eternal Voyage written in 1966, contains a moving account of her association with Krishnamurti, with whom she experienced a dramatic change in consciousness (see What is Enlightenment Fall/Winter 1996). She wrote, “Something within has been let loose. It can’t stand any frontiers. The invasion of a new awareness, irresistible and uncontrollable... has swept away everything.” In a letter to some friends and colleagues she wrote: “No words could describe the intensity and depth of experience through which I am passing. Everything has changed. I am born anew. This is (not) wishful thinking. It is an astounding phenomenon. Everything that has been transmitted to our mind through centuries will have to be discarded. I have dealt with it. It has dropped away.”

She began, in her own quiet way, to speak with friends who were interested in her life and her experience but when she met Krishnamurti again he said, without preamble, “Why don’t you explode? Why don’t you put bombs under all these old people who follow the wrong line?.. Go out and set them on fire.”

At that time, 1961, Krishnamurti intimated that there were no others who had seen the light in the way she had, but it is also possible that other associates may have realized a high state of spiritual awareness in later years. One of these could well have been Aldous Huxley, who was very close to Krishnamurti in the years before his (Aldous Huxley’s) death in 1964. Christopher Isherwood, in his book My Guru and His Disciple, gives an account of Huxley’s death: “Aldous was in obvious discomfort, but there was nothing poignant or desperate in his manner, and he clearly didn’t want to talk about death... Each time I did so, Aldous commented acutely, or remembered an appropriate quotation. I came away with the picture of a great noble vessel sinking quietly into the deep; many of its delicate and marvelous mechanisms still in perfect order, all its lights shining.”

There are many instances of the audience at Krishnamurti’s talks being moved by the teaching. That is what brought them back again and again. Throughout the world there are Krishnamurti addicts and a good example is a monk and spiritual teacher in Thailand called Ajahn Santatito who plastered the trees in his forest monastery with Krishnamurti quotations. Santatito’s principle teaching to cope with the vicissitudes of the worldly life was: “Keep your life simple.” And the “saintly scientist”, Amit Goswami, (see Appendix II), who now writes books on enlightenment, had a spiritual breakthrough in the understanding of cosmic phenomena after attending a talk by Krishnamurti.

But in the end it seems that the effort needed to make the transformation was, in most instances, lacking. A man who had been going to Krishnamurti’s talks for many years wondered why he had not changed. Krishnamurti replied: “Is it that you are not serious? Is it that you don’t care? Is it that you have so many problems that you are caught up in them; no time, no leisure to stop, so that you never look at that flower?”

The energy needed to make the quantum leap and abandon the clinging to established habits, seem to be the main stumbling block. Krishnamurti frequently said the energy required is considerable. And, in most of us, this is dissipated in worldly life - in the ego’s desperate drive to ‘save’ its creations. At a talk given in Switzerland at one of his annual summer camps he had this to say:

“One needs a great deal of energy, vitality, interest to bring about a radical change in oneself. If we are interested in outward phenomena, we have to see what we can do with the rest of the world in the process of changing ourselves; and also we must see not only how to conserve energy, but how to increase it. We dissipate energy endlessly, by useless talk, by having innumerable opinions about everything, by living in the world of concepts, formulas, and by everlasting conflict within and between ourselves... It needs energy not only for a superficial external change, but also to bring about a deep, inward transformation or revolution. One must have an extraordinary sense of energy which has no cause, which has no motive, which has the capacity to be utterly quiet, and this very quietness has its own explosive quality... One sees how human beings waste their energy, in quarrels, in jealousies, in a tremendously sensate energy, in the everlasting pursuit of pleasure and in the demand for it.”

It is not the enjoyment of pleasure itself, which includes both physical and psychological pleasure, but man’s attachment to it and his wish for it to be endlessly repeated and embellished, that is the problem; the pursuit of pleasure - one of the rights enshrined in the American Constitution (as it is generally understood), reduces the mind to seeking the acquisition of things and makes it dull and indifferent. We should be able to enjoy pleasure as it appears and leave it at that. He said, “Pleasure is such an enticing thing! I look at a tree: it is a great delight. To see a dark cloud full of rain and a rainbow, and this seems a tremendous thing. That is pleasure, that is a delight, that is a tremendous enjoyment. Why can’t I leave it there? You understand? Why do I have to say, ‘I must store it up’? Then when I see the next day the dark cloud full of rain and the leaves dancing in the wind, the memory of yesterday spoils the sight of it. I have become dull. Thought has spoiled it.”

It seems that the main legacy that Krishnamurti has left to the world lies in his books which remain as an inspiration and, perhaps, in their way, contribute greatly to the spiritual journeys of many seekers. He ordained no followers and said that no one was to represent him after his death. The schools that he founded should continue but, he explained, would not be the same as when he was alive. These are some of the views he has expressed on different matters.
His views on psychic powers

Although Krishnamurti’s life itself was a miracle, since it is certainly miraculous to produce such enlightened and profound material in talk after talk without the slightest preparation, the meaning here is the performing of demonstrative miracles. Of these he did not approve. In a letter to a devotee (Lady Emily, the mother of Mary Lutyens) he wrote:

“Which would you rather have: a Teacher who will show the way to keep permanently whole or one who will momentarily heal your wounds? Miracles are fascinating child’s play… Many friends of mine are spiritual healers. But although they may heal the body, unless they make the mind and heart also whole, the disease will return. I am concerned with the healing of the heart and the mind, not with the body. I hold that no great Teacher would perform a miracle, because that would be a betrayal of the Truth.”

Notwithstanding this statement, it was known that Krishnamurti was himself, a powerful healer and cured Vimala Thakar (above) of almost total deafness, considered un-treatable by the medical profession.

His views on sex

Krishnamurti was apparently celibate throughout his entire long life. But he was, according to his biographer, completely normal physically and was extremely attractive to almost everyone with a charming and playful personality. Young women, and not so young women, fell in love with him in droves, but it seems that at no time were his relationships with them anything but platonic. His early life, from the age of around fourteen, and after he had been adopted by the Theosophical Society, was carefully observed; because of the belief that the “Masters”, the architects of the “new order”, wanted the main human guides of the project to be celibate.

In later life, after he had broken away from the Theosophists, he had many occasions to refer to sex in his talks. The following statement probably sums up his views on the matter.

“It (sex) has become a problem because there is no love. When we really love there is no problem, there is an adjustment, an understanding. But when we have lost the sense of true affection, that profound love in which there is no sense of possessiveness, there arises the problem of sex. It is when we have completely yielded ourselves to the mere sensation, that there are many problems concerning sex. As the majority of people have lost the joy of creative thinking, naturally they turn to the sensation of sex which becomes a problem, eating their minds and hearts away.”

His views on ‘God’

Krishnamurti frequently referred to his disbelief in religions and ‘god’, and, from what we know about him and his state of development, it is plain that he is referring to the ‘ordinary’ egoic and unenlightened view of ‘god’, and to the practices of the religions. In a talk given in 1982, when he was eighty six he said the following:

“We have invented God. Thought has invented God - that is we, out of misery, despair, loneliness, anxiety, have invented that thing called God. This ‘God’ has not made us in his image - I wish he had. Personally I have no belief in anything. The speaker (Krishnamurti) faces only what is, what are facts, the realization of the nature of every fact, every thought, all the reactions - he is totally aware of all that. If you are free from fear, from sorrow, there is no need for a God.”

He also extended the same views to what he saw of the Eastern religions, and to the guru cult movements in general. He had a low opinion of the hippie movement and considered it to be “not too serious.” He maintained that the young of today (those in the hippie and social reform cults of that period) will become the dull middle class of tomorrow - and that is exactly what has happened.

His views on death

Krishnamurti maintained that physical death is of little importance, but that it is assigned paramount importance by most men, who suffer terribly at the time of dying - something that is not necessary. The horror with which men regard death is related to our attachments and storehouse of memory, which is also the barrier to spiritual enlightenment. In 1981 in Amsterdam he said:

“Death means the ending of the known… and I am frightened to let all that go, which means death. Death means the ending of attachments, which is dying while living: not separated by fifty years or so, waiting for some disease to finish you off. It is living with all your vitality, energy, intellectual capacity and with great feeling, and at the same time, for certain conclusions, certain idiosyncrasies, experiences, attachments, hurts, to end, to die. That is, while living, also live with death. Then death is not something far away, death is not something which is the end of life, brought about by some accident, disease or old age, but rather the ending of all the things of memory - that is death, a death not separate from living.”

In 1983, at the age of eighty seven he wrote in his Journal the following:

“Why do human beings die so miserably, so unhappily, with a disease, old age, senility, the body shrunk, ugly? .. What is wrong with us? … As you teach children mathematics (etc.)… they should also be taught the great dignity of death… as something of daily life - the daily life of looking at the blue sky and the grasshopper on the leaf. It is a part of learning, as you grow teeth and have all the discomforts of childish illnesses. Children have extraordinary curiosity. If you see the nature of death, you don’t explain that everything dies, dust to dust and so on, but without any fear you explain it to them gently and make them feel that living and dying are one… There is no resurrection - that is superstition… To grasp the whole movement of life requires intelligence, not the intelligence of thought, or books, or knowledge, but the intelligence of love and compassion with its sensitivity… As one looked at a dead leaf with all its beauty and colour, maybe
one would very deeply comprehend, be aware of, what ones own death must be, not at the very end but at the beginning. Death isn’t some horrific thing, something to be avoided, postponed, but rather something to be with day in and day out. And out of that comes an extraordinary sense of immensity.”

**His last talk**

In his last talk he was very frail and spoke so quietly that the audience had to strain to hear it. He said: “Creation is something that is most holy. That’s the most sacred thing in life and if you have made a mess of your life - change it. Change it today, not tomorrow. If you are uncertain find out why and be certain. If your thinking is not straight, think straight, logically. Unless all that is prepared, all that is settled, you can’t enter into this world of creation.”

His last words were almost inaudible. They were: “It ends.” He died shortly after this in his sleep, just after midnight on the 17th of February, 1986 - at the age of ninety one.

**Practicalities**

Although Krishnamurti said that there were to be no successors to him, the records of his life and teachings have nevertheless been a basis for spiritual pursuit for many since his death. The Krishnamurti Foundations offer the opportunity to study and contemplate the teachings (unguided) at their Centres. All have comprehensive libraries and audio and video recordings.

The Krishnamurti Foundation of India is located at the Vasanta Vihar Study Centre, 64 Greenways Road, Chennai 600 028, Tamil Nadu, India. Tel. (Internat.) + 91 44 4937803 or 4937596 (local) 044 4937803 or 4937596 Fax. (Internat.) + 91 44 4991360 (local) 044 4991360 Web: www.jk Krishnamurti.org / kfpage

The Indian branch has a comfortable guest house and a good library for those interested in studying Krishnamurti’s teachings.


The Krishnamurti Foundation of American is located at the beautiful Ojai Valley, California. Contact details are as follow: PO Box 1560, Ojai, CA 93024. Tel. (805) 646 2726 Fax. (805) 646 6674

Web: www.kta.org

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**Chapter 6**

**PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA**

*A sad saint is a bad saint. Spirituality is something that can be expressed joyfully.* - From S.R. Magazine 2003.

**Background**

Paramhansa Yogananda is well known in the West through his book *Autobiography of a Yogi* first published in 1947. He is considered by some authorities to be one of the very few fully realized masters to come to the West, and among devotees he is considered to have been a *premavatara* - a divine incarnation of love. From the earliest days he was enraptured with the idea of God. He was born in 1893 in West Bengal and died in California in 1952. In 1920, at the request of his guru, he went to the USA to impart the teachings of Kriya Yoga; a type of yoga that is said to have originated with the legendary guru Babaji - see below. Apart from a brief return to India for approximately one year in 1935 - which coincided with the passing away of his guru Sri Yukteswar, he spent most of his adult life in the West. He personally initiated hundreds of thousands of people into Kriya yoga and in 1935 founded the International Society of Self Realization Fellowship - SRF, of the Yoga Satanga Society (YSS) of India. The SRF has its headquarters at Mt. Washington in Los Angeles. Later, in 1938, the Yogoda Math (Monastery and Ashram) was built at Dakshineswar, Calcutta, on the banks of the Ganges river - see Practicalities below.

**His lineage**

Paramhansa Yogananda was a disciple of Sri Yukteswar, who was in turn the disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya - who is said to have attained enlightenment through the legendary guru, Babaji, a semi-mythical figure of great age who is believed to live in a secret location in the Himalayas and to travel astrally from time to time, to other parts of India. To the Western mind it may seem improbable that gurus who are hundreds of years old really do exist but there is some reliable documented evidence to support their existence. The instance of a demonstrably very old guru was mentioned in the
Preface of this book. Furthermore, it is well known that highly advanced yogis can stop their heartbeat, lower their body temperature and refrain from visible breathing for periods of, at least, several hours and sometimes much longer. If these are documented facts then it is not inconceivable that advanced yogis, who spend much of their time in deep meditation and in the practice of altering physiological states, could slow down the aging process.

Babaji is believed to be a Mahavatar (Great Avatar), who has lived for many centuries in the Himalayas. It seems that Babaji has refused to reveal to his disciples, information about his date and place of birth. However, Lahiri Mahasaya has said that when anyone utters his name with reverence, that person attracts instant spiritual blessing. He moves about by astral travel in the subtle body and can thus appear anywhere almost instantaneously. An Australian woman described what she believed to be an encounter with Babaji in some Shiva caves near Rishikesh in Northern India. She had made her way with great difficulty into the caves and there she found sadhus dressed in spotless white. She wondered how this was possible because she had to crawl on all fours to gain access. Presently, when she was looking at the formations of the rocks - which are supposed to resemble the locks of Shiva, she felt a sudden stillness and noticed that the sadhus had all prostrated themselves on the ground. She followed suit but not before she saw what she was later told was Babaji, pass quickly across the cave and disappear on the far side.

Babaji is said to have guided and instructed both preceding gurus of Yogananda, Lahiri Mahasaya and Sri Yukteswar, in the science of Kriya Yoga. Kriya Yoga is more than simply a yogic meditation technique and therefore Babaji insisted that anyone who seeks initiation should undergo a period of spiritual training before they could be instructed. Although it does not require celibacy and renunciation in the initiates, the acceptance of certain spiritual disciplines is necessary. To this day the SRF / YSS follow the same injunctions.

Lahiri Mahasaya is alleged to have met Babaji briefly near Ranikhet in 1861 and became immediately enlightened. He was instructed in Kriya Yoga and given permission to teach it to others. As he was already married he became a householder saint and, for much of his adult life was a junior government officer in British India. His superior officer and supervisor of the office where he worked, was one of the first to notice the change in him and to experience his acquisition of supernatural powers. It happened like this: The supervisor’s wife at that time was seriously ill in England and he had no news about her. Lahiri offered to get some information and went to sit for a short time in a secluded spot. Shortly he returned and said that the wife was much better and was at that moment writing a letter - some parts of which he quoted. The superintendent was somewhat relieved but also still doubtful. That is, until the letter arrived, which not only contained news of her recovery but also used the same phrases that Lahiri had quoted. Lahiri Mahasaya, in due course, initiated his disciple Sri Yukteswar, who became Yogananda’s master.

Sri Yogananda claims to have had prenatal memories of his guru, Sri Yukteswar, when he was a young student of around seventeen years of age. His vision was of a Christ-like man in the ochre robes of a swami. Yogananda writes: “I sensed that my guru knew God and would lead me to him. The obscuration of this life disappeared in a fragile dawn of prenatal memories.” Later he met him in the physical form in his present lifetime, upon which Sri Yukteswar said, “How many years have I waited for you.”

Sri Yukteswar had met Babaji on a number of occasions in a previous life. The first time was at a Kumbha Mela, a religious fair, in the 1880’s, and then later when he when he was thirty-nine years old. On the first occasion he was not yet a swami but had received Kriya initiation (see below) from Lahiri Mahasaya. He described Babaji as a bright unusual figure with sparkling dark eyes. He said he was instantly engulfed in a wave of spiritual blessing. Babaji had the power to still Yukteswar’s wandering thoughts and surmise his essential nature and his interest in the West. Babaji said, “I see you are interested in the West, as well as in the East. East and West must establish a middle path of activity and spirituality combined. Some years hence I shall send you a disciple whom you can train for yoga dissemination in the West.” This disciple was Yogananda.

After Yogananda’s death in 1952, he was succeeded, until 1955, by Rajarsi Janakananda (formerly James J. Lynn, a self-made business magnate with spiritual inclinations) as head of the SRF, and then by the Reverend Mother Daya Mata. Of Rajarsi Yogananda said, “Some people say that the Western man cannot meditate. That is not true. Since Mr. Lynn first received Kriya Yoga, I have never seen him when he is not communicating with God.” Mr. Lynn described the effects of his first meeting with Yogananda thus: “I became aware that I was sitting very still... I had found entrance into a spiritual realm previously unknown to me.”

Daya Mata succeeded Rajarsi in 1955. She had met Yogananda in 1931 as a young girl of seventeen. She was taken by his love of God and entered the Mount Washington Mother Centre to be trained by Yogananda. Over the years she was given special organizational responsibilities and placed above other disciples as an example to follow in the monastic life he envisaged for followers of the teachings. Daya Mata wrote: “Paramhansa Yogananda taught us the way, not only by his words and divine example, but by giving to us the scientific SRF methods of meditation. It is not possible to satisfy the soul’s thirst merely by reading about the truth. One must drink the direct experience of God.”

**An experience of Cosmic Consciousness**

Probably the nearest Yogananda comes to describing an experience of enlightenment was an occurrence at the ashram of his master Sri Yukteswar. He had returned from a visit to the Himalayas and describes the meeting with his master. He said that a blissful wave engulfed him and he became conscious that the Lord, in the form of his master was “expanding the limited ardour of my heart to the vast reaches of cosmic love.” A few days later Sri Yukteswar tapped him gently above the heart, upon which his body became rooted, the breath was drawn out : “as if by some huge magnet,” and
soul and mind seemed like a fluid of light coming from every pore. Although his flesh then appeared dead, he had an intense awareness and his sense of identity was no longer confined but embraced the circumambient atoms. He experienced, with omnivision, people in distant streets, a white cow approaching the ashram gate, the roots of trees in the soil and the movement of their sap. All objects trembled and vibrated, sometimes violently, and then melted into a luminescent sea. An oceanic joy broke upon him as he realized that the Spirit of God is exhaustless bliss, and his body is countless tissues of light. He felt that a swelling glory within him enveloped the whole universe and the entire cosmos, gently luminous, glimmered within his being. Again and again creative beams condensed into constellations and then: “by rhythmic reversion, sextillion worlds passed into diaphanous lustre.” He knew that all this came from “a point of intuitive perception in his heart.” And as the “nectar of immortality” pulsed through him he heard the primal sound Aum, “the voice of God.” For the full description see Autobiography of a Yogi, Chapter 14.

Kriya Yoga; Yogananda’s principle teaching

The essential teaching of the Self Realization Fellowship is Kriya Yoga, which is considered to be a science by its adepts. It became quite widely known in India through the activities of Lahiri Mahasaya and Sri Yukteswar. Its introduction and propagation in the west was due to Yogananda, and subsequently by his successors at the SRF. Yogananda wrote of it as follows:

“Kriya Yoga is a psycho-physiological method by which the blood is decarbonated and re-charged with oxygen. The atoms of the extra oxygen are transmuted into life current to rejuvenate the brain and spinal centers. By stopping the accumulation of venous blood, the yogi is able to lessen or prevent the decay of tissues. The advanced yogi transmutes his cells into energy. Elijah, Jesus, Kabir (said to be the originator of Radha Soami Satsang Beas - another organization with secret teachings), and other prophets were past masters of the use of Kriya or similar techniques - by which they caused their bodies to materialize or dematerialise at will.”

Because of certain ancient yogic injunctions Kriya Yoga is not given to the general public. It has, in the USA and Europe, to be taught by authorized adepts of the SRF / YSS organization. Seekers must agree not to impart the techniques to any others. (Generally it is inadvisable to dabble in any form of yoga, and particularly the various forms of prana yoga, without the guidance of a competent adept. It appears that there are many partly qualified and unqualified ‘teachers’ who can do serious and sometimes permanent harm to the unwary.)

The techniques of Kriya Yoga, which were known since ancient times and are mentioned in the Bhagavad-Gita as having been imparted to Arjuna by Krishna, were lost through the Dark Ages. In the Gita one stanza reads as follows: “Offering the inhaling breath to the exhaling breath and offering the exhaling breath to the Inhaling breath, the yogi neutralizes both breaths. Thus he releases prana from the heart and brings the life force under control. Yogananda further commented:

“The interpretation is: ‘The yogi arrests decay of the body by securing an additional supply of prana (life force) through quieting the action of the lungs and heart; he also arrests mutations of growth in the body by control of the apana (eliminating current). Thus, neutralizing decay and growth, the yogi learns life-force control.’” [Bhagavad Gita V: 27-28].

Another stanza of the Bhagavad-Gita states: “The muni (meditation expert) becomes eternally free who, seeking the Supreme Goal, is able to withdraw from external phenomena by fixing the gaze within the mid-spot of the eyebrows and by neutralizing the even currents of prana and apana [that flow] within the nostrils and lungs, to control the sensory mind and intellect and to banish desire, fear and anger.” [Bhagavad-Gita IV: 29].

The adept in Kriya Yoga is said to mentally direct his life energy around the chakras (spinal centers of the subtle body); and it is believed that one half minute of Kriya is equal to one year of natural unfoldment of the kundalini. Yogananda explains further:

“One thousand kriyas practiced in 8.5 hours gives the yogi, in one day, the equivalent of one thousand years of (spiritual) evolution... In three years, a Kriya Yogi can accomplish by intelligent self effort the same result that Nature brings to pass in a million years... A yogi who dies before achieving full realization carries with him the good karma of his past Kriya effort.”

Yogananda points out that Kriya Yoga has nothing in common with the unscientific breathing exercises taught by “misguided zealots”. He says that Kriya practice is accompanied by feelings of peace and by soothing sensations of the regenerative effect in the spine: “The Kriya Yogi uses his technique to saturate and feed all his physical cells with undecayable light and thus keeps them in a spiritually magnetized condition. Many illustrations could be given of the mathematical relationship between man’s respiratory rate and the variations in his states of consciousness. A person whose attention is wholly engrossed, as in following some closely-knit intellectual argument, or in attempting some delicate or difficult physical feat, automatically breathes very slowly. Fixity of attention depends on slow breathing; quick or uneven breaths are inevitable accompaniment of harmful emotional states: fear, lust, anger.”

(According to accomplished yogis such as Swami Anubhavananda, formerly of the Chinmaya Foundation, very slow breathing softens and dissolves the prana, which is the ‘glue’ holding together the gross physical and the mental sheaths of the soul.)

According to Yogananda, ‘introspection’ or what he calls ‘sitting in silence’, is ineffective in trying to force the ‘mind’ and senses apart. He said, “The contemplative mind, attempting to return to divinity, is constantly dragged back towards the senses by the life currents. Kriya, controlling the mind directly through the life force, is the easiest, most
Meetings with great saints and deities

Yogananda, in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, describes many encounters with miracle and wonder workers, as well as his meetings with some of the great saints of the twentieth century, including the Divine Mother (the wife of Ramakrishna), Ramana Maharshi, Anandamayi Ma, and the Master Mahasaya (a disciple of Ramakrishna, see Chapter 1).

In his youth, while still having trouble with his family over becoming a sanyasi (monk), he visited the temple of Ramakrishna and meditated before the idol of Kali. After several hours, and to the exasperation of his older brother who wanted his lunch, he came out into the stifling heat of the day feeling somewhat disappointed. He mentally remonstrated with the Divine Mother and immediately felt a cool breeze and went into a state of altered consciousness. He writes:

“To my amazement, the temple became greatly magnified. Its large door slowly opened, revealing the stone figure of the Goddess Kali. Gradually the statue changed into a living form, smilingly nodding in greeting, thrilling me with joy indescribable. As if by a mystic syringe, the breath was withdrawn from my lungs; my body became very still, though not inert. An ecstatic enlargement of consciousness followed. I could see for several miles over the Ganges River to my left, and beyond the temple into the entire Dakshineswar precincts. The walls of all the buildings glimmered transparently; through them I observed people moving to and fro over distant acres... Spiritual sight penetrates into all matter; the divine eye is centre to everywhere, circumference nowhere... If escapism be a need of man, cramped in his narrow personality, can any escape compare with that of omnipresence?”

Meanwhile the older brother was fuming over his lack of lunch - could the ‘Divine Mother’ please provide this? He asked sarcastically. At that moment one of the priests appeared from the temple and said that usually they would not provide lunch unless prior arrangements had been made - but in this case, because of the young Yogananda’s serene meditation, they had made an exception and had put some aside.

Later Yogananda visited the Master Mahasaya, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and himself a great saint of the twentieth century. Paul Brunton regarded him as one of the very few truly enlightened individuals that he had met in India. Yogananda, describing the occasion of his visit, wrote: “Silently I entered the room in great awe. The angelic appearance of Master Mahasaya fairly dazzled me. With silky beard and large lustrous eyes, he seemed an incarnation of purity.” See Chapter 1.

In the presence of the Master, Yogananda felt a strange and violent bitterness about his own mother’s death some years before. Then the Master said, “Little sir, quiet yourself.” It seemed that he had, as Yogananda put it: “... control over the floodgates of my soul... This time my tears welled from bliss, and not from pain past bearing.” He wrote of the Master Mahasaya:

“He spread his wisdom by spiritual contagion rather than impermeable precept. Consumed by an unsophisticated passion for the Divine Mother, the saint no more demanded the outward forms of respect than a child... From him I learned the sweetness of God in the aspect of the Mother - or divine Mercy. The childlike saint found little appeal to the father aspect - or divine justice. Stern, exacting, mathematical judgment was alien to his gentle nature. Shrinking from personal assertion, the saint usually ended his council with the tribute, ‘My Master told me so.’ So deep was his sense of identity with Sri Ramakrishna that Master Mahasaya no longer considered his thoughts to be his own.”

Yogananda had had an earlier experience of ‘omnipresence’ with the Master Mahasaya. They were walking in the noisy streets of Calcutta when the Master gently tapped him on the chest. Of this he wrote:

“A transforming silence ensued... Pedestrians as well as the passing trolley cars, automobiles, bullock carts, and iron-wheeled hackney carriages were all in noiseless transit. As though possessing an omnipresent eye, I beheld the scenes that were behind me, and to each side, as easily as those in front... Like a glow of fire dimly seen beneath a thin coat of ashes, a mellow luminescence permeated the panoramic view.” Then, with another soft blow from the master, “The pandemonium of the world burst again upon my unwilling ears.”

Sri Yogananda also met Anandamayi Ma (Chapter 7) much later during his visit to India in 1935 - after some fifteen years in the USA and Europe. It seems that Sri Ma instantaneously recognized his greatness; and one could regard this as the best of all possible seals of approval and the strongest evidence of his exalted spiritual state. On a visit to Calcutta he set out with his traveling companion to find Sri Ma. He wrote:

“As the Ford (their mode of transport on the Indian tour) neared the Bhowanipur section of Calcutta, my companion and I observed an unusual street scene. - Ananda Mayi Ma was standing in an open-topped automobile, blessing a throng of about one hundred disciples. She was evidently on the point of departure. Mr. Wright (Yogananda’s companion) parked the Ford some distance away and accompanied me on foot towards the quiet assemblage. The woman saint glanced in our direction; she alit from the car and walked toward us. ‘Father you have come, I am meeting you for the first time in this life! Please do not leave yet.’ She said. With these fervent words (in Bengali) she put her hand around my neck and her head on my shoulder... I had instantly seen that the saint was in a high state of samadhi. Oblivious to her outward garb as a woman, she knew herself as a changeless soul; from that plane she was joyously greeting another devotee of God. She led me by the hand to her automobile... We sat together in the rear seats of the car. The blissful mother soon entered the immobile ecstatic state. Her beautiful eyes glanced heavenward and, half opened, became stilled, gazing into the near-far Elysium”

It appears that this encounter may have been the closest that could have opened the possibility of Sri Ma going to the West. Yogananda invited her but this produced an immediate and highly alarmed reaction from her devotees. One of
them told him firmly, “Twenty or more of us always travel with the Blissful Mother. We could not live without her. Wherever she goes, we must go.”

On the 1935 expedition, while on pilgrimage in South India with members of the SRF, Yogananda also made a visit to the holy hill of Arunachala near Tiruvannamalai, to meet Ramana Maharshi (Chapter 4). He wrote, “At his ashram the sage welcomed us affectionately and pointed to a stack of East-West magazines. During the hours that we spent with him and his disciples, he was mostly silent, his gentle face radiating divine love and wisdom. To help suffering humanity regain its forgotten state of perfection, Sri Ramana teaches that one should constantly ask oneself: ‘Who am I?’ - The great inquiry indeed. By stern rejection of all other thoughts the devotee soon finds himself going deeper and deeper into the true Self, and the sidetracking bewilderment of other thoughts cease to arise.”

**Interest in science and miracles**

Yogananda understood by direct experience the reality of miracles. That is, events and happenings that are not possible within the framework of material science and man’s perception of the material world. Long before modern writers such as Fritjof Capra, Gary Zukov and Amit Goswami - see Bibliography, began to draw attention to the inadequacy of Newtonian physics in describing the universe, Yogananda pointed out that science had, as yet, no answer to these mysteries; although he foresaw that the age of atomic physics and quantum physics - the ‘new physics’ in contemporary parlance, would bring changes in scientific thought. He wrote, “The word ‘impossible’ is becoming less prominent in man’s vocabulary.” It has now come to pass that science, to a degree at any rate - although it has yet to percolate down to the level of biological and medical science has caught up and recognizes the role of Consciousness in manifestation - See Appendix II, Science and Religion.

Yogananda pointed out that the Vedic scriptures describe the world as operating under the law of maya, the principle of relativity and duality, while God, the sole Reality, is Absolute Unity that “wears the false veil of maya” - the dualistic veil of maya, in manifesting the world. In scientific terms this is the material world described by the physics of Newton and the laws of chemistry and biology. In duality, to have a single force is impossible. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction; electricity and magnetism is based on positive and negative, and so on. He explained that no law of that form of science is free of inherent contrasting principles, and these are all the laws of maya. In the social sciences opposites are represented by the judgment, good and bad, right and wrong. The ancient sages of Vedanta perceived all this in extraordinary detail by direct intuition and did not distinguish between material science and social science. It was all described minutely by the laws of maya. And the laws of maya can only operate in a universe of space and time. Nor did the sages fail to cognise the Prime Mover of the mayic universe and to point out the role of man: “To rise above the duality of creation and perceive the unity of the Creator was conceived as man’s highest goal.”

Yogananda explained that when Einstein unified the mayic world of space and time to a single constant, the speed of light, it brought us to an understanding of the law of miracles. He said that a material body can only attain the speed of light whose mass is infinity and time has stopped. Therefore masters who are able to materialize and dematerialise their bodies and other objects, and appear in different places at the same time, have fulfilled the condition of infinity. The mayic physical laws are powerless to make a master exhibit the gravitational property of weight. He who knows himself as the omniscient absolute, is not subject to the laws of maya: “The imprisoning ‘rings-pass-not’ have yielded to the solvent I Am He.”

**On maya**

In Chapter 30 of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogananda expounds the Vedic explanation of maya and how the power of illusion underlies the phenomenal worlds. In the world the mayic principle of duality operates not only in nature but also in the moral aspect of man. Yogananda said that maya, because of its structural inheritance in the phenomenal worlds, is ever in flux with the Absolute Reality. He illustrated this aspect of maya through an experience that he had following seeing a newsreel of the European battlefields of World War I. He was very disturbed and prayed, “Why do you permit such suffering?” Immediately he felt himself transferred to the actual battlefield with scenes of the dead and dying. Then a gentle voice said,

“Look intently. You will see these scenes being enacted in France are nothing but the cosmic motion picture, as real and as unreal as the theatre newsreel you have just seen... Creation is light and shadow both, else no picture is possible... Without suffering man scarcely cares that he has forsaken his eternal home... The tragedy of death is unreal; those who shudder at it are like an ignorant actor who dies of fright on the stage... My sons are the children of light; they will not sleep forever in delusion.”

He became convinced by this experience that creation is nothing more than a vast motion picture - and it is not in it, but beyond, that lays Reality. Nevertheless, Yogananda experienced many ups and downs in the illusion of maya, including one of his temples falling into the sea in America. He had no illusions about the problems of worldly existence. He said on one occasion that, in the world - though it is an insubstantial and temporary dream, if you are bitten by a dream snake you will get dream sick, and you will need dream vaccine or you will dream die.

**Yogananda’s death**

The way that the great beings of this world die, or in the parlance of the East, enter mahasamadhi (the great samadhi), is of significance in understanding an important aspect of enlightenment and gaining an appreciation of the
impermanence of the world.

Yogananda said that in sending his thought vibrations to the thousands of Kriya Yogis, he would often think gratefully: “Lord, Thou hast given this monk a large family.” Towards the end of his life he began to divest himself of responsibilities and on a number of occasions said, “This body is living on borrowed time.”

Paramhansa Yogananda died after concluding a speech at a banquet held in his honour in 1952. In a note following his death it was stated that he demonstrated the power of Kriya Yoga in death as in life. For weeks after his departure from this world his unchanged face shone: “with a divine lustre of incorruptibility.” No physical signs of decay appeared and no odour of decay emanated from the body at any time before his interment.

**Practicalities**

The Dakshineswar ashram in Calcutta is a gracious place with quiet grounds on the banks of the Ganges. It is primarily a facility for resident Swamis and other permanent residents.

There is a guest house for visiting male members of the Self Realization Fellowship (SRF) but other serious visitors on a spiritual path may be permitted to stay for short periods with prior permission. Women are only admitted if accompanied by a father or husband.

On Sundays there is a satsang with one of the resident monks between 10.30 a.m. and noon. Daily meditations are at 6.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. Monday to Saturday. Payment is by donation. Contact details are as follow:

Yogoda Satsang Society of India, Yogoda Satsanga Math, 21. U. N. Mukherjee Road, Dakshineswar, Calcutta 700 076, West Bengal, India. Tel. (Internat.) +91 33 553 1931 (local) 033 553 1931. Fax. (Internat.) +91 33 553 2208 (local) 033 553 2208.

The Headquarters of the SRF in the USA are in Los Angeles. Contact details are as follow:

Self-Realization Fellowship, 3880 San Rafael Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90065, USA. Tel. (213) 225 2471.

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**Chapter 7**

**ANANDAMAYI MA - THE BLISS-PERMEATED MOTHER**

_The young woman lifted the veil from her face and said: ‘Purna Brahma Narayana’_

_I am the all pervading reality._

Anandamayi Ma was born in East Bengal in 1896, in a location that is now part of Bangladesh. Over her long lifetime she came to be considered one of India’s most revered mystical saints of modern times. She had a luminous beauty and exercised a divine intoxication over those who came before her. It is said that waves of happiness ran across the crowds that formed around her. Even today, some 20 years after her passing, her energy can still be felt at her samadhi shrine and at the many ashrams and institutions that were established in her name in Northern and Central India. There are numerous stories of her healings, miracles, and of the divine energy that was felt in her presence. During her lifetime she came to be considered as an avatar, a divine incarnation and enlightened from birth. Her behaviour and often spontaneous and unpredictable actions were stated by her to be the result of divine promptings (kheyalas), and were not in any way related to desires of her own. For example, at a spiritual gathering she suddenly left and took off to another town miles away by boarding a mail train that made an unscheduled stop, and then strode purposefully to a certain hotel. Here, it appears, there was a disciple stranded penniless, who had been praying to Ma in distress. The rest of the night was spent in innocently teasing the now laughing and overjoyed disciple.

The information in this chapter was obtained through the kindness of people still living in Ma’s ashrams who knew her when she was alive, and from books written by individuals who also knew her personally; in particular, those of Bhaiji, Swami Vijayananda, Prof. Lipski, Dr. Bithika Mukerji, and Prem Lata Srivastava - see Bibliography. Appreciation is also expressed to the Trustees of the Shree Ma Anandamayi International Centre and to Dr. S. K. Ghosh, for the hospitality given during the research carried out for this account.

It is said that, notwithstanding Ma’s ruthless smashing of egos and her apparent indifference to worldly drama - see below, she was always pained by people in distress. Much of her life, since the mid 1920’s, was spent in virtually continuous travel around India, giving darshan, conducting satsangs, guiding people’s spiritual journeys and performing various other religious duties, in a manner that would have exhausted a normal person. Yet no one had ever seen her doze off or yawn. And during the many arduous travels, those of her close associates who might momentarily doze off during a program, would awaken with a start and find Ma’s eyes on them.

By her own statements, Ma was nothing less than divine. To Paramhansa Yogananda, in 1936 - see Chapter 6 and his book *Autobiography of a Yogi* - she said, “Before I came on this earth Father, I was the same. As a little girl I was the same... Ever afterwards, though the dance of creation proceeds around me, I shall be the same.” She followed no
particular philosophy nor gave many messages for mankind save one repeated utterance:

“Talk of God alone is worthwhile; all else is pain and in vain.”

Ma’s education was very rudimentary but she could write in Bengali script. However, only one specimen of her writing exists. It says:

“Oh you supreme Being, You are manifest in all forms - the Universe with all its creations - man, wife, husband, children, mother, are all in the One. Man’s mind is clouded by worldly ties. But there is no cause for despair. With purity, unflinching faith, and burning eagerness, go ahead and you will realize your true Self.”

At other times, when asked to write something, she would make a dot and say, “This contains everything.”

So, in effect, accounts of her life, the historical events and the biological changes that took place in her body throughout her life, can only be regarded as things that happened to a detached onlooker, performing voluntarily a play in the earthly theatre, on a stage limited by time and space. Her teachings were herself, her vehement adherence to and promotion of celibacy and the practice of austerities for herself and her close associates, and the effect she had on others.

Throughout her life, Ma showed almost complete indifference to pain and physical matters concerning the body. On one occasion a burning coal fell on her foot while she sat there and let it burn, until someone removed it.

**Early days**

Ma’s birth name was Nirmala Sundari Devi. Though poor, the family were not peasants but strict and devout Vaisnava Brahmins (worshipers of Vishnu) with significant spiritual leanings. There were many pundit (religious scholar) ancestors and at least one sati (widows who throw themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands). Her father would often sing bhajans all night long, and her mother, who was to become enlightened herself late in life - see further on, would dream of Gods and Goddesses both before and after the birth of Sri Ma; and at one point in her confinement a divine ray of light is said to have entered the mother. Does this sound like romantic imaginings? Maybe, but for anyone who knew Sri Ma, it has the ring of truth.

At birth the baby, as in the case of Amma - Chapter 19, was completely silent. Later when this was commented on Ma, it has the ring of truth.

She said, “Why should I cry, I was looking at the trees through the holes in the wall.” She was said to have an astonishing light is said to have entered the mother. Does this sound like romantic imaginings? Maybe, but for anyone who knew Sri Ma, it has the ring of truth.

Throughout her life, Ma showed almost complete indifference to pain and physical matters concerning the body. She was married to Bolanath, a Saivaite Brahmin, and by 1913, when Bolanath had secured a suitable job, the young couple moved in together. However, it appears that the marriage was never consummated. Linda Johnsen in her book *Daughters of the Goddess* - see Bibliography, describes what may have been an early marital encounter. She writes:

“Laughing and joking, Bolanath Chakravati was bringing home a friend to show off his pretty wife. When they burst into the door, however, Bolanath’s wife didn’t move but continued sitting silently on the floor with a shawl draped over her head. Annoyed that she didn’t leap up to greet them, Bolanath snapped, ‘Can’t you see you have a guest? Who do you think you are?’ - Slowly the young woman lifted the shawl from her face. The energy emanating from her was so intense that, as they recalled later, both men involuntarily leapt backward. ‘Purna Brahma Narayana,’ She replied, - I am the all pervading reality. One of the most extraordinary sages of modern times had just unveiled herself.”

Concerning why she rejected the legitimate enjoyment of marital relations she later said, “For this body there is no question of enjoyment or rejection. Whatever happens to it is necessary for all of you - perhaps this aspect is not so necessary.” - see *Life and Teachings of Sri Ma Anandamayi*.

**Self initiation**

In the Brahmin Hindu tradition, initiation (diksha) by a guru in which the guru imparts a mantra, is considered to be of central importance. In her case she initiated herself in 1922; she was the guru, the sisya (disciple) and the mantra itself, and all of the complex process of ritualistic prayer and initiation took place automatically. One pious Brahmin who witnessed the event was outraged and demanded proof that things had been done properly, upon which an overwhelming stream of Slokas (Vedic aphorisms) and mystical syllables flowed from her so that he became dumbfounded and humbly said no more. Some time later, and against all traditions, she initiated her own husband - who had by then become her disciple and worthy, hard-working assistant.

**Bhava samadhi**

As with Amma (Chapter 19) and Ramakrishna, Ma’s spiritual development was characterized by extreme forms of Bhava samadhi. She maintained that she had always been fully realized, but said that she would play the role of a sadaka - someone undergoing spiritual transformation. Although the beginnings of this phase occurred earlier, the main events took place over the years 1918 to 1924. Her sadhana grew steadily in intensity over this period and the spiritual
occurrences - for in Sri Ma’s case they could not be termed transformations, took the form of divine experiences which included visions of various deities, and the generation of the feeling of oneness; worshiper, worshipping, and object of worship merged. During this phase she was hardly conscious for much of the time and hardly touched food. A witness of some of these bhavas, Dr. Nilini Kanta, described one event:

“After sitting veiled her veil suddenly loosened and her face was visible in a brilliant lustre. Hymns and seed mantras recited in uncommon accents produced a wondrous resonance which affected the whole surroundings, and a sense of holiness prevailed. Those present felt an indescribable elevation of spirit and depth of silence - ’a peace that passeth all understanding.’”

Night after night, after sitting like a statue, her limbs would start brisk motion and her body would perform various asanas (yogic postures) and mudras (hand and finger movements and positions), in quick succession. Her complexion changed and sometimes her breath would become explosive pranayanas (forms of yogic breathing), and then she would faint. Sometimes her fingers would automatically draw mandalas (sacred drawings), and sacred mantras would come out and the meanings would become known to her. Of all this she said, “When I pray, repeating God’s name - an indescribable joy descends.”

These events were the stages of her voluntary sadhana leading to a state of complete fulfillment and enlightenment. Towards the end of 1922 she observed complete silence except when absolutely necessary. If she had to speak she would make a circle on her hand upon which mantras would gush from her mouth, enabling her to speak. After speaking she would wipe the circle, repeat more mantras, and resume complete silence.

At one time she hardly ate for several months - see below. After this she would eat very little and it seemed that her hands would have difficulty in delivering food to her mouth. They would only rise so far and then she would have to bend her head to take the food. (This was to continue throughout her life). Because of this the family had to feed her like a child, but she still ate very little. But on one occasion, on being admonished for not eating properly, she ate enough for seven or eight people, and on another occasion, she ate around 60 poories (Indian pancakes) and drank twenty litters of milk - which produced no signs whatsoever of her being over stuffed and seemed to just disappear in her body. After this people ceased commenting on her eating habits.

At first the bhavas were, for the most part, kept within the family circle, but by 1925, after her silent period was over, they began to attract public attention. One of her actions, which caused a great stir, was instructing the priests of the local temple to permit entry to non Brahmins. Then, at a public Kali Puja of a type confined to Bengal, in honour of the Divine Mother in her terrifying aspect, Sri Ma assumed the role of the priest. Instead of addressing the idol Sri Ma addressed herself, putting flowers, sandalwood paste and so on, on herself (as did Ramakrishna - Ch. 1). And for all this time, witnesses proclaimed, her face glowed with an intense and uncommon beauty, and there arose a feeling of great sanctity and deep absorption among those present. In Bengal at that time, the sacrifice of a goat was carried out at Kali pujas, but in all celebrations in which Sri Ma participated, she allowed no animal sacrifice. She explained to the presiding priests, that the true meaning of the sacrifice, lost on many pious Brahmins, was the sacrificing of one’s own lower (animal) instincts.

Her ‘lilas’- divine plays, constantly assumed new characteristics which often overwhelmed the devotees present. She would be effortlessly drawn up from a sitting position and would seem to float and whirl like a weightless leaf in the wind, as if being driven by a hidden force. And then, seemingly of its own accord, her body would sit and assume the form of a statue with an effulgence of light about it; and she would sing the names of God in a voice of heavenly rapture. On one occasion, in the presence of others, she appeared to shrink to nothing while seated at an altar. At that time, in British India, many devotees who held important public appointments in government, had to tread the delicate path between devotion to this strange and ‘occult’ woman, and credibility in their jobs.

**Miraculous happenings**

Throughout the first half of her life Sri Ma followed the promptings of her kheyalas. In some instances she seemed propelled into a healing, while in others she would ignore someone in distress. Generally, however, Ma did not set out to affect cures. In cases where people asked for help in healing she would say, “Pray to God. He will do what is best for the patient.” When people persisted she would look around and say to her companions, “What do you think? Will the patient recover?” Generally the answer would be in the affirmative and she would ask them to repeat their affirmation three times. In such cases, it is said, recovery invariably occurred. But if, unaccountably, they would stammer or make weak rejoinders, then, it seems, the patient would not recover. At other times Ma would, for various reasons, take on the physical suffering of others.

Once, when asked about the outcome of a legal trial she said that it would be successful - which it was, but then she took a live coal and placed it on the back of her hand. Later she explained this action by saying that if yogic powers are used deliberately, then the sadaka has to perform penance for it. She said, “This body sometimes has the attitude of a sadaka.”

But apart from the usual actions and personal experiences interpreted as miracles by numerous individuals, there are others that seemed to show that Ma, in fact, knew everything that was going to happen and, in some cases directed evasive action. In an incident recorded in *Life and Teachings of Sri Ma Anandamayi*, the family was on a river trip in an area known for its river dacoits (pirates), and was being pursued by a faster boat full of such individuals. Ma was completely unconcerned but at one point told the boatman to turn suddenly into a side channel. The larger boat missed the turn and flashed past, while just a little up the channel the family came to the safety of a village where they could
spend the night. Similarly, on the epic journey to Mount Kailas (see further on), there were also threats from bandits that the likely consequences of which seem to have been averted by Sri Ma.

Her disciples also experienced the omniscience of Sri Ma in strange ways. One disciple, exhausted by the continuous travel in trains and the fact that he often could not even get a seat, devised a means of overcoming this problem by positioning himself with all his baggage near where he knew the door of a carriage was to stop. He waited expectantly but as the train pulled up he found Sri Ma’s eyes on him. He knew she had read his mind when she sent him on a short errand, just long enough to allow the crowd to surge forward and take all the seats in the carriage. This was not a malicious cruelty, but her ruthless attacking of the ego - for the ultimate enlightenment of the person. On another occasion when Ma was giving out oranges as prasad, the same disciple decided, as a sacrifice and because there seemed to be far too few oranges for everyone, that he would go without. He hung back in the wings so to speak. Somehow, and in the manner of the loves and fishes, the huge crowd all received oranges; and then Sri Ma asked where the evasive one was? He felt too embarrassed to step forward but somehow the crowd parted from before him and exposed him to her eyes - then she carefully picked up the last orange and held it out to him.

In regard to the ‘miraculous’ events that occurred during her bhavas, the going without food, as indicated before, had a concern for many. On this she said:

“Once this body lived on three grains of rice a day for four or five months. Nobody can live for so long a time on such a meager diet. It looks like a miracle. But it has been so with this body... As a result of sadhana (spiritual practices) the body becomes so constituted that, though no food is taken physically it can imbibe from the surroundings whatever is necessary for its maintenance. In three ways the body can be maintained without food: one way has just been referred to... Secondly it can live on air alone, for I have just said that everything exists in all things, so that the properties of all things are in the air in some measure... Again, it may so happen that the body is not taking anything at all, yet it is being maintained unimpaired as in a state of samadhi.”

Sri Ma was also in touch, in an intimate way, with the kundalini and the chakras of the subtle body. Once she was seen drawing diagrams on the floor with a piece of coal. She said:

“This afternoon I sat in an asana (yogic posture) and measured the distances from the centre of the head to the middle of the eyebrows, then to the neck and heart and down to the end of the spine. I have a kheyala that there are centers at these specific spots in the human body... From the lowest to the highest they range from the gross to the refined... These diagrams have drawn themselves as it were. The stream of vitality flows through them slowly or fast, determining the emotions and actions of the individual. The vital force lies somnolent at the base of the spine. By perseverance and faith, thought and action are purified. The vibrations engendered by the actions of inner and outer purity shake this sleeping power into motion. When the power moves upwards, penetrating level after level, the sadhaka feels freed of many ties.”

Once, when certain Muslim fakirs visited the place where she was staying, they found that a kirtan (chant) was in progress. But Ma rose from the gathering and led the fakirs to a nearby mausoleum of an Arab holy man, Shah Sahab. Here, to everyone’s amazement, she performed the namaz ritual of the Muslim faith - in absolute detail and perfection. The Muslims felt that, at that time, Sri Ma was a Muslim as devout as Shah Sahab himself.

**Her close associates**

A medical doctor, Sasanka Mohan (who became a sanyassin and was referred to as Swamiji) and his unmarried daughter Didi, became devotees in the early days of her public phase - and Didi became virtually Ma’s life-long assistant and biographer, producing twenty-six volumes based on her notes in Bengali and Hindi. An Austrian woman who became a sanyassin, Atmananda, edited most of Sri Ma’s English translations and was close to Sri Ma from 1945. (See Ram Alexander’s book *Death Must Die*).

Ma’s husband Bolanath became her tour manager, and another close associate, Bhaiji, whose association with Sri Ma might have started in a previous incarnation, also became, until his death, her constant companion. Later in life, after she became widowed, her mother, known as Didima (later Swami Muktananda Giri), also became her assistant and travel companion. And since Sri Ma did not think of herself as a guru, she used to ask Didima to initiate devotees.

Many others were attracted to her and became renunciates, some dropping out after some time, and others staying the course. One such was a French doctor who, on a spiritual search in the East, came across Sri Ma in the 1950’s. He became a devotee and later took sanyas and became Swami Vijayananda. And since then, to the present time, he has never returned to his native France. He currently (2002), looks after the many foreign visitors that come to the samadhi shrine in Kankhal.

Most of Sri Ma’s early associates died before her. Bhaiji died after the Kailasha expedition in 1937 (see below) and Bolanath died of smallpox in 1938. Didima died in 1970, aged ninety-three and her chief assistant for so many years, Didi, died in 1980.

**Travels and public life**

The sadhana and Bhava phase of Ma’s life was ostensibly over by 1926. Then she began a long period of more than fifty years, virtually until the end of her life, of travel and attending to public duties. Her travels were throughout India, but principally in the central and northern regions, and on one occasion she mounted an expedition to Mount Kailasha in Tibet. However, and notwithstanding the fact that she has many foreign devotees, she never left the region of South Asia. Wherever her travels took her she attracted the saints and sages of India. Mahatmas flocked to her and were profoundly impressed by the ‘Divine Mother Incarnate.’ In a jungle area of northern India an ashram was established and
later, on Sri Ma’s prompting, the buried ruins of an ancient temple were uncovered there and excavated. This location became a favourite place of retreat for her.

By 1928 her life was virtually filled up with spiritual duties and as her popularity grew, planning for her movements became more and more elaborate. The following of spontaneous kheyalas became virtually a thing of the past. Birthdays became elaborate events and a means of focusing attention on the divine. Her life came to be shaped around a succession of religious festivals, kirtans and satsangs, as she roamed around India with her close followers.

In 1932 she embarked on a period of uninterrupted travel, staying only a few days or weeks at any one place. Of this she said, “I find one vast garden spread over all the universe. All plants, human beings, higher mind-bodies, are about in this garden... Their presence and variety give me great delight.”

Her followers included many powerful political figures including Mahatma Ghandi, Mr. Nehru and Indira Ghandi, and also foreign dignitaries and royal personages. And thousands of people would await her coming to experience the upliftment that her presence brought, or followed her, sometimes with great difficulty, to the most remote locations of her travels. However, Sri Ma showed little or no interest in political events including the freedom struggle, the Punjab massacre (when a British general ordered his troops to fire on civilians at the Sikh Golden Temple), Mr. Ghandi’s activities, the war and the partitioning of India and Pakistan. Her views on political and historical events were that they simply happened because they were bound to happen. Her one goal was the outpouring of divine council and facilitating the transforming power of her own presence - towards the realization of the divine Self in others.

As the number of followers increased, ashrams sprang up all over northern and central India. A sanga (code of practice) was established in 1950 under a Council that had the pursuit of Self realization through sadhana as its primary objective. The organization of religious events and an annual Samyam Vrata (vow of restraint and self control for one week) were part of this. The Council was also responsible for the promotion of charitable activities including free medical clinics and a modern hospital at the holy city of Varanasi, and two schools - one for boys at the location of the main ashram in Kankhal and one for girls at Varanasi. The number of ashrams dedicated to Sri Ma now stands at twenty-five.

At very big gatherings many arrangements had to be made but nobody ever seemed to be in charge. Everyone just cooperated under a banner of love. By the 1970’s Ma was a public figure of great renown in India. The pattern of satsangs, audiences and functions changed from small intimate affairs and took on huge dimensions. Darshan was given collectively, by simply being present at a function. To pass before Ma long queues had to be formed. In her book The Life and Teachings, Bithika Mukerji writes, “Crowds would follow even to remote destinations and generally all the mahatmas graced her functions. The days of intimate gatherings, brilliant conversational sessions, interspersed with hilarious laughter convulsing entire groups of people, seemed to be over.”

At the age of 77 Sri Ma was quite run down but remained unperturbed and active. She said, “For this body there is no concern whatever for inconvenience or discomfort. This body observes in minute detail what is taking place in every nerve and vein... For this body everything, without exception, is a play... Whatever be the kheyala at any particular moment, according to that, things may happen.”

**The Kailasha expedition:** This expedition in 1937 was nothing less than an epic journey through dangerous territory full of dacoits, to the holy Mount Kailasha. The journey was completed with little or no fanfare in around thirty days, although over the Indian sections large retinues of people sometimes followed. Most of the several hundred kilometres of rough hill country, from the starting point in Almora in northern India, was done on foot or horseback with Sri Ma being carried in a sedan chair. Kailasha, at 22,000 feet is considered by devout Hindus to be the home of Shiva. The pilgrimage also involved circumambulating the mountain (around 100 km.) and then bathing in the icy waters of Lake Gaurikund at 18,400 feet. The journey was considered to be very difficult, particularly for people from the plains unused to the high elevations and rugged terrain of the mountains.

The party comprised Sri Ma, Bolanath, her assistant Didi, Swamiji (Didi’s father) and Bhaiji, who died at the end of the expedition, and three others. Other local devotees followed the group for certain sectors of the journey, and after leaving Indian Territory various guides were engaged to show them the way. At one stage they were followed by armed dacoits who, it appeared, were carefully gauging their strength with a view to robbing them. It seems that Sri Ma’s presence somehow had the effect of dissuading them from robbery, which would have been an easy task.

On the return journey and after bathing in Lake Gaurikund and having a series of spiritual experiences overseen by Sri Ma, Bhaiji, who had been a devotee of Ma since early days, died. It is considered that he attained enlightenment just prior to his demise.

**Teachings**

Anandamayi Ma’s relationships to people fell into two classes. There was the general public to whom she gave darshan and, in instances, healings, miracles, and so on; and there were the disciples, those destined for enlightenment, with whom she was both ruthlessly strict and lovingly attentive. Everything was designed to smash the last traces of ego from the disciple’s psyches. And there were those who couldn’t make it, like a would-be disciple, Daniel Roumanoff, who at first said, “With vision of her there is a flash of happiness, of a bliss that I know and recognize to be the most intimate and profound part of myself.” But when the “romance” was over and the ego needed to be disposed of, he changed his opinion to the view that Sri Ma was a ‘sorceress’: “Who catches you in her net and then eats you up.” But those who understood would know the truth and say, “Yes! She is Kali. She is destroying egos”. See What is Enlightenment 5 (2) 1996.

For another devotee, the young French medical doctor who became Swami Vijayananda, it was a meeting for life.
On his first encounter, which he had approached brimming with serious questions, his mind went blank and he forgot what to ask. He felt that she had read his thoughts and disposed of the questions. He concluded that she appeared to each person in the manner that was most suited to their state of development; mother, sister, goddess - she could playfully open nadis (psychic centers of the subtle body) appropriately for each devotee. On his first meeting with Sri Ma, he knew she had infused him with something that made him think, “What kind of love is this.” For Swami Vijayananda, all worldly attachments lost their attraction on that meeting.

Notwithstanding the view that Sri Ma seldom responded to intellectual spiritual questions, she, on occasions, expounded answers of great depth, meaning and profundity. From the 1940’s with the partitioning of India, devotees from Dhaka and elsewhere came to settle near the ashram at Varanasi, and a new era of satsangs began. One of these was Amulya Kumar who kept a record in question and answer form of the proceedings and published these in many volumes as *Sri Ma Anandamayi Prasanga* - see Bibliography. In these satsangs Sri Ma spoke with great depth on matters relating to duality and the spiritual practices of mantra japa, tapasya and so on. On the question of volition in sadhana, she said: “All spiritual practices begin with the mind that is in duality but, at the proper time, the pilgrim attains the state of no-mind - and that is when the Self is realized… Do not be thinking of sins; nobody should think of themselves as sinners. You are in reality the ‘sons of immortality’ but you do not know this at present. If one concentrates in living steadfastly in the light of God’s presence, then there will be no danger of erring. Faith is all that is required of you.”

Sri Ma’s views on the existence of nothing but God were unshakable and based on absolute knowledge; and on many occasions she made this point. Some examples are as follow: A renowned Mahatma, a saint in his own right, spoke to Ma of Maya and Brahman. Ma replied, “I know but One.” The Mahatma seemed put out but a little later he smilingly agreed. On the death of her husband Bolanath from smallpox, Sri Ma nursed him and was with him when he said, “I am going - I am going.” She responded by saying, “Why do you think so? There are no comings and goings but just one totality of being in which there is no scope for separation.” Bolanath seemed to agree and said quietly just before he breathed his last, “Yes, so you have always said.”

On another occasion during a visit to Tiruvannamalai in South India - after the death of Ramana Maharshi, the question on why we are so attracted to transient objects was raised. She replied: “It is God’s Lila… Even so, does not the *Durga-Saptasati* say ‘In the guise of delusion it is You only’? It is He who is manifest in the form of these distractions. It is to be remembered, however, that if one is attracted to worldly things, one is going towards losing oneself; if one is attracted to God then that leads to liberation. It is necessary to realize that there is nothing but One alone. If you stay with the world, you are purchasing a return ticket!”

Sri Ma consistently adhered to the philosophy of Advaita in which everything was under the divine control of God. One day during World War II a visitor asked, “Who will win this war? Is it going to have an adverse effect on India? Sri ma burst into ringing laughter and said, “Is there a war? How can there be a war without an ‘enemy’? Is there more than One? The war you talk of is like the clapping of hands. So where is the question of defeat or victory?” Nevertheless, a great Yagna (fire ceremony) was carried out for the three years of the Japanese war.

For close devotees Sri Ma always recommended the sadhana of renunciation. She spoke often of what she called samyamavrata as a practice for householder devotees. For example on one occasion she said: “Once a week one should make a strong resolve to live in the sphere of Truth only. On that day one should eat sparingly, watch one’s speech and action carefully to avoid the least incorrect utterance or unworthy behaviour; emotions should be controlled. One should look upon children as child manifestations of the Divine; one’s wife or husband as not only an object of love but reverence as well. One should render services to all members of the family, including servants, in a spirit of humility. Even if there should be occasions for anger one should respond with calmness and not be jolted out of a tranquil frame of mind.” Then she laughed and said, “Maybe some naughty children will take advantage, but it will pass. Then, when you feel confident, you may increase the number of days for it to become a way of life rather than something for a special occasion.”

In her book *Life and Teachings of Sri Ma Anandamayi*, Dr. Mukerji explains that renunciation and celibacy is thematised as essential in the Advaita philosophy of Shankaracharya (though not in other schools of thought in India), and is at the very heart of the identity of the Self and the Supreme Being. In the world the ‘I - consciousness’ becomes superimposed on this Unity and needs to be cancelled so that the Supreme Self can shine through. To this philosophy Sri Ma added her own ‘personality’ and way of living in the world - which was compassionate involvement, which somehow lent added credibility to the Advaita theme, through her power of bhakti or divine love.

In the 1960’s an American professor, Dr. A Lipski, met Ma together with other visitors, when she was sixty-nine years old - see *Life and Teachings of Anandamayi Ma*. She welcomed them and he was struck by her “almost girlish” appearance and ready laughter. Then he discovered that this “almost illiterate” woman responded to the most erudite questions from the visitors. He recounts that he felt as if he was being mentally stripped naked and having pointed out some of his glaring, unflattering and painful shortcomings, such as his initial patronizing stance - but in such a loving and compassionate way that he did not feel condemned. This is an example of Sri Ma’s generation of bhakti - said to be the easiest path to liberation for the Western devotee. On another occasion a devotee said: “You have found peace but we are at the mercy of numerous distractions. Why don’t you distribute some of your peace to us?” Sri Ma replied, “If you live with things un-peaceful, how can you hope for peace? People are affected by things in their vicinity. But to find peace you do not need to stay in forest retreats. Live with something that is of the nature of peace. I say to you, keep God always in mind; God alone is peace. Accept me as a little girl and give me a place in your hearts. Little girls need to be loved and looked after. So this is my request to you - make a place for me in your hearts.”
In general it may be said that Sri Ma awakened and still awakens an intense desire for spiritual life in those who approach her. From his experience Swami Vijayananda writes:

“Love for Mother, although it is still illusion, purifies the mind and the heart, awakens and greatly increases yearning for the divine... What may take long years of struggle in the practice of yoga and self inquiry, is accomplished in a short period of time, effortlessly as it were, by pure and intense love for Mother. This is the best sadhana. This love is then expanded progressively to the all-pervading presence. The seers, saints and yogis who attained self realization have almost all followed a definite line of approach. After becoming spiritual preceptors they led their disciples along the path they have themselves trodden... Most prescribe a definite method; self inquiry, japa, and so on - and only aspirants of a special type can benefit from such practices. But the divine power that manifests from Sri Ma is characterized by an extraordinary versatility... No path of sadhana is unknown.” Sri Ma said, “I can tell you that this body has not followed only one particular line of sadhana, but has covered all known lines... An ordinary individual may need to be born again and again, but in the case of this body everything was a matter of a few seconds.”

On the guru: According to Swami Vijayananda, Sri Ma would, on occasions, awaken the Kundalini and give yogic ‘krias’ to individuals, but only when the nadis had been suitably purified and ‘disciplined’. As indicated before, Sri Ma’s understanding of the nature of the subtle body was total. On one occasion when she was drawing representations of the chakras, her disciple Bhaiji, commented on them and referred to Woodroof’s book on the Kundalini, showing her the pictures from the book. Her reply was:

“I have not read about these centers in any book, nor have I ever heard anything about them from anyone. The descriptions I give are from my actual experience...” She added, “The colours of these vital centers that you find in the pictures are but their external tinge. The substance of which our brain is made also forms theseplexuses, but their shapes, structures and functions vary. Each one has its special characteristics and distinctive qualities, like the eye, or the ear, or the navel, or even the lines on the palms of your hands. In them there is an ever-changing play of various colours and sounds and their symbols called seed mantras, all being natural results of the movement of the life force and the flow of the vital fluid. During the earlier stages, when various mantras issued from these lips accompanied be transformations of the breath, at times questions like ‘what are these?’ flashed across my mind. The reply came from within the inner structures of all theseplexuses and became distinctly visible like the pictures you have put before me. When a person regularly prays, performs pujas and yogic practices, meditates and reflects on the higher truths of existence with sufficient concentration, the mind substance gets purified, thought becomes refined and the centers unfold themselves. Otherwise no human can find an escape from the storm of physical urges like lust, greed and anger.”

On particular meditative states that may occur, Sri Ma said that we should not try to induce them if they don’t occur naturally - experiences such as discursive thought, colours, sounds, visions, peace and bliss, and out-of-body experiences. Such experiences are meaningful but could be dangerous if not adequately guided by an adept. In regard to intuition, often associated with divine intervention, she said that it could easily be confused with subtle ego and subtle desires. Instead we need humility and to consider if it is dharmic. Her teachings to devotees were mostly concerned with the cultivation of discipline and elimination of the ego. For devotees, as indicated before, she initiated the idea of observing five yamas: non violence, truth, honesty, absence of avarice and chastity, for periods of one year; and, for some individuals, the yamas would continue throughout their entire lives.

On the guru: Sri Ma did not consider herself to be a guru. She maintained that one could engage in effective sadhana (spiritual practice) without a physical guru. The “One” may manifest through people, objects, circumstances, even though we may not be aware of it, and these would be our “guru”. She maintained that the quest for a physical (outer) guru will eventually lead to the discovery of the inner guru: “Go and sit under a tree. Saints may be compared to trees; they always point upwards, and they grant shade and shelter to all. They are free of likes and dislikes and whoever seeks refuge in them wholeheartedly will find peace.” However, the mind and ego can easily delude us into thinking we have discovered the inner guru. To succeed we have to be totally free of ego; anger, pride, greed and delusion. For this reason, if for no other, Sri Ma recommended a physical guru: “Just as water cleanses everything by its mere contact, even so the sight, touch, blessing, even the remembrance of a real satguru, little by little clears away all impure desires and longings... A true guru emphasizes: “Be a vehicle for God - it is false gurus, still with ego, who emphasize personality cultivation.” She said (with reference to herself), “From attachment to this body (herself), all other attachment will vanish. Whoever has loved this body will never be able to erase it from his mind, however hard he may try.”

As indicated before, Sri Ma’s teachings were simple and based on total surrender to God. But this was applied, in practice, only to those close to her. She was, to them, a constant and ruthless mentor for surrender to God and for following the life of renunciation. To others, the public, her teachings were the love that emanated from her, and it was this that kept people flocking to be near her.

Our energies, she would often point out, usually dissipated in pursuing gross pleasures, should be focused to conquer the habits and cravings acquired over countless lives. We must cultivate a craving for God, repeat the divine name, listen to religious talks by mahatmas (enlightened beings), chant kirtans and bhajans, and study sacred writings. This should be pursued until God becomes an ever-present reality in our lives; until worship and the worshipper are one. For young people Ma advocated a celibate life before marriage, with spiritual control - to learn discipline.

In regard to court cases and such altercations, she said: “We should consider who is cheating who, for anything
that is lost is not our due anyway. For example would we sue someone if it was our own brother? (Also) ... let karma punish the wrongdoer, or be generous and cause the culprit himself to change - we should consider carefully and transcend the region of multifaceness.”

On the role of women she believed that women do have a duty to the family but envisaged a revolutionary change in woman’s status. Women should be at the helm of society while men ply the oars. Although she was not against technical progress she questioned whether it had done much other than enhance greed, envy, hatred and fear: “Has it supplied peace and happiness?”


divi Ma on social service and suffering

While Sri Ma clearly agreed that alleviating physical suffering, if carried out in a selfless spirit, contributes to one’s spiritual progress, she might say that each plays a definite role in the cosmic dance. She, herself, was more concerned with getting to the root of all suffering so that it may be eliminated once and for all. Not understanding ones true Self is the source of all suffering and excessive attention to physical suffering may actually prolong the disease of suffering. In fact, from the spiritual viewpoint, suffering can be seen as the means of ending suffering.

Sri Ma urges people to accept their destiny because whatever happens is bound to happen. Adverse conditions lead us to liberation. Man is attracted to material pleasures because they are tangible but, in this world, the greatest stimulant to spiritual endeavour is pain and suffering. She said, “Remember, one is born to experience various joys and sorrows according to our vasanas (desires and tendencies). For the time being God comes to you in the guise of suffering. He is purifying you in this manner... The suffering is for your own best, as a mother slaps her own child for its own good... Always bear this in mind; everything is in God’s hands, and you are a tool to be used by him as he pleases. Try to grasp the significance of ‘all is his’, and you will immediately be free of all burdens. What will be the result of your surrender to him? None will seem alien; all will be your very own. Your Self.”

Sri Ma’s attitude to death was not the Western one in which death is an enemy. She said: “To this world man is a visitor and it is not necessary to tarry unduly. As long as we cling to attachments and desires (vasanas) we have a return ticket to the world. So use correct will power to get rid of desires, attachments and aversions. Then ‘Grace’, which is also necessary, will come... By meditation on the immortal the fear of death recedes far away; remember this: In the measure that your contemplation on the One becomes uninterrupted, you will advance towards full, unbroken Realization. Just as a leech does not leave its place without looking for something else, so the soul at the time of leaving the body hooks onto some kind of new existence according to the state of mind of the dying person - man is a creature of habit and his mind will dwell on the habitual thoughts at the time of death.”

Sri Ma said that we should not indulge in excessive mourning for the departed as the soul of the deceased is kept earthbound by the thoughts of the mourner. When one man’s wife died she laughed, and when remonstrated against, she simply said, “It’s one less barrier for him to cross.”

Although she said we should not cling to life, she also condemned suicide - as an attempt to change karma - leading only to more karma; but there are exceptions, as in the case of ritual suicide as in sati, or for enlightened beings who do not wish to prolong life; perhaps like Rama Tirtha - Chapter 2.

These views are poles apart from the standard Western views, which are centered on the enhancement of physical pleasure, the promotion of longevity, and the aggrandizement of the ego - the ‘personality’. But what seems to happen when too much emphasis is placed on increasing material status, is an increase in mental suffering. In the Western world man seems to have forgotten how to be happy without an endless supply of material benefits. The result is that if you want to see happy people and children joyfully playing with little or no aids, you must now go to the third world countries.

Sri Ma’s Mahasamadhi (her death)

The way in which great beings die is of particular interest to many seekers because it throws light on the mental state of such individuals. Some of Sri Ma’s views on death have already been mentioned. Towards the end of the 1970’s she began a process of withdrawal from public life and eventually went into a phase of inapproachability. Devotees felt heavy and there were many serious faces. It was given out that Ma was not well, and indeed there were indications that the end was approaching. In 1980 her closest assistant, Didi, passed away after a period of intermittent illness.

Bithika Mukerji wrote that in 1981 and 1982 Ma was “on course for final dissolution.” One of her last activities was to officiate at a special Yajna (fire ceremony) in which, contrary to all tradition, woman devotees took the leading part. It was held at a sacred site close to Ma’s present samadhi shrine, where, it is believed, a legendary rishi (Vedic seer) abandoned a Yajna many years ago over an altercation with the king - who had insulted the deity. Sri Ma was to put this to rights. The Yajna went on for eleven days and nights. Bithika Mukerji writes, “Vedic mantras were chanted and flames arose from eleven kundas (fire places) in tongues of yellow, orange, red, saffron, gold, white and grey colour.”

After the Yajna, Ma still continued to officiate at religious functions among crowds of thousands, and she attended her last birthday celebrations. In June 1982 she received the high Mahatma Jagadguru who had implored her to cure herself. To him she said, “Pitaji this (her condition) is not illness. It is a state of tension between the manifest and the recall to the unmanifest.” And later, in response to his further pleas that she should make herself well, she again explained, “This body has no illness Pitaji. It is being recalled to the unmanifest... As the Atma I shall ever abide with you.”

Her last messages to her devotees were: “Strive to become an aspirant towards the fulfillment of the Grace of your Guru.” And later, “Wherever you are immerse yourselves totally in one-pointed sadhana.” Sri Ma stopped eating
some three months before her death except for a little water at infrequent intervals. She had spent most of her last year in a house in Kankhal but had been moved to Dhera Dun where, on July 25, 1982, she spoke the reversed form of the Shiva Mantra “Shivaya Namaha.” It is said in this form as an indication of the severance of all earthly ties. She died at eight p.m. on August 27. Sri Ma made no farewells and left no specific instructions. The place where Sri Ma spent most of her last year, in Kankhal, is now a museum and the incredible presence of Sri Ma can still be felt there.

Practicalities

Most of Sri Ma’s devotees were strict Bengali Brahmins, as indeed many are today. Although she herself showed no caste sensitivity and would touch and associate with “untouchables”, Westerners and Muslims, she understood and respected the sensitivity of the Brahmin devotees; even though, on a number of occasions, she was subjected to criticism for breaking cast taboos. She maintained that people would change in time, but this was not to be forced on anyone. And, in fact, the situation is changing. The devotees at her main ashram in Kankhal near Haridwar in Northern India have built a magnificent guest house for the accommodation of foreign and non-Brahmin guests, and even in the main ashram, the building of apartments for non-Brahmins is taking place.

Sri Ma’s samadhi shrine is at the site of the main ashram and the International Centre and is visited by hundreds, and sometimes thousands, daily. The centre also has a comprehensive book store. Visitors proposing to stay for up to ten days should contact the Shree Ma Anandamayi International Centre, Daksh Mandir Road, PO Kankhal, District Haridwar 249408, Uttar Pradesh, India. Tel. / Fax. (Internat.) +91 133 416345 (local) 0133 416345. Accommodation is in comfortable rooms. A moderate charge is made for meals and payment for accommodation is by donation. Visitors are made very welcome and, for English-speaking and French visitors, satangs may be held in the early evenings at Sri Ma’s shrine. Sometimes elderly devotees will talk about the old days.

Opposite the International centre there is a small museum of memorabilia of Sri Ma, in a house that she occupied for the last four months of her life. Close by, also, are a number of ancient temples including a large Shiva temple where Sati, the wife of Shiva, in alleged to have thrown herself onto a Yajna fire to avenge an insult to her husband.

Travel to Haridwar is best undertaken by train or bus from Delhi. It is probably better to use the train or public bus services than to become a victim of the many private bus touts that hang around the railway stations, airport and tourist spots in Delhi. Train bookings can be made at any of the International booking centers on the stations of all towns and cities with international airports. From Haridwar bus or railway station the Anandamayi Ma Centre is around 7 km. and reached by auto or pedal rickshaw or taxi.

Visiting other Sri Ma ashrams, including the one in the Himalayas, is more difficult and would have to be negotiated at the main ashram in Kankhal.

Chapter 8

NEEM KAROLI BABA

Love all, feed all, serve all, and don’t try to figure God out.

Background

Neem Karoli Baba, also called Maharajji by his devotees, is a modern saint who died in 1973. His origin, like that of Bhagawan Nityananda, is shrouded in mystery but he is thought to have come originally from the Akbarpur region of Uttar Pradesh. He became known to the West following his discovery by counterculture guru, Ram Das (Richard Alpert) in the 1960’s. Ram Das became his devotee and wrote about him in his book Be Here Now. He also wrote and assembled information about him in Miracle of Love - see Bibliography. There are many ashrams and temples founded in his name throughout India and some in the West. There is also an ashram in Taos, New Mexico - see Practicalities.

Little is known about his early life except that he may have been born to a well-to-do family. He is said to have told one devotee that at the age of seven or eight he used to skip school and go to the jungle to practice tapasya (austerities, spiritual practice). He left home at an early age to wander about as a sadhu, wearing only a blanket most of the time, in the tradition of the Kamal Posh - ‘blanket wearers’ who preceded Sufism (see Chapter 11), and it appears that he may have been known by different names at different times and in different parts of India. He had a reputation for appearing in more than one place at the same time. In the early days he took his food and water in a broken clay pot which he also used as a hat, and through this he was called Handi Walla Baba - the Baba with the broken pot. At another stage he spent time around Aligarh and Manpuri where he performed tapasya by sitting up to his neck for long periods in a triangle-shaped reservoir. Here he came to be called Tikonia Walla Baba - Baba of the triangle-shaped tank. Later he began to pass his time in the town of Neem Karoli, from whence he derived his last name of Neem Karoli Baba. Here he lived in various underground caves and came out from time to time to sit in between hot fires - as a further type of tapasya. There is a story
similar to the one about Bhagawan Nityananda (Chapter 3) of him being turned off a train at Neem Karoli station and the train, apparently in perfect working order, refusing to go until the desperate and repentant conductor allowed him back on.

In the 1930’s he began to spend time in villages in the foothills of the Himalayas and the northern plains. He would sometimes play with children and would allow people to take him into their houses. It was then that his extraordinary spiritual power and miracles of healing began to be known and he acquired followers who were interested in spiritual matters. He had a special affinity for the deities Hanuman and Rama and instigated the building of temples to these deities at many places. He was also fond of the Sufi saint Kabir and often quoted his sayings. He would chant a Persian song that was attributed to Kabir:

\[ \text{I am in the world but not concerned with the world,} \\
\text{I go to the market place but I am not the purchaser.} \]

Those who were close to him said that there would often be manifested a strange sweet perfume where he had been or where he was expected to be coming. Early photographs showed him as long haired and aesthetic looking. But by the time he became known to the West, he was already quite old and had become a cuddly teddy-bear of a man, with a stubby beard and a moustache.

His two best-known and most frequented ashrams are in Nanital and Vrindavan, both in Uttar Pradesh, but he had the habit of disappearing for extended periods of time and then suddenly reappearing again, or, as indicated before, of being in more than one place at the same time. An example, recorded in Miracle of Love, is as follows:

*Once a Nanital devotee met him in Kanpur, a town several hundred kilometres to the south. When the devotee was leaving, Maharajji gave him a message to deliver to the temple at Nanital. The message was to the effect that they should expect him back there within a fortnight. When the devotee arrived back at Nanital the following day, he went straight to the temple even before going home. There was a crowd there and the devotee wondered why so many people would come to the temple when Maharajji was away. But he overheard people say that Maharajji was inside one of the rooms. “I can’t believe it,” the devotee said, “I just saw him in Kanpur.” Others said “No, Baba has been here for fifteen days.” The mystified devotee then went to Maharajji’s room: “Babaji, what is this?” he asked, and Baba shouted at him, “Hap! Get out! Go away! - Don’t tell anyone anything. You are telling lies!”*

East and West

Maharajji was totally indifferent to cast, creed and social status, and to him everyone was the same. In his later days in the 1960’s and early 1970’s, when he began to be assailed by droves of Westerners, the counter culture use of hallucinogenic drugs was at its height. Ram Das, when he was still Richard Alpert, (he was named Ram Das by Maharajji), was a strong proponent of the use hallucinogens in the search for ‘higher’ experiences. At one point Maharajji demanded that the “medicine” be brought to him. He then, to the amazement of the assembled hippies, swallowed 900 micrograms of LSD - an unbelievably high dose guaranteed to scramble the brains of anyone many times over. But there was no visible effect. His comment on this was:

“These medicines were used in Kulu Valley long ago. But Yogis have lost that knowledge... To take them with no effect your mind must be firmly fixed on God.”

Maharajji avoided general publicity but received devotees, including a large number of Westerners, whenever they could find him. His darshan (personal blessing) was, to say the least, sporadic. He would sometimes appear unexpectedly to a particular devotee and give personal darshan. Once he waited for the arrival of Ram Das to give darshan to him. To many, his darshan was received simply when he showed up somewhere and conducted ceremonies or feeding bhandaras (feasts for the poor). When he was in his various ashrams he would lay or sit on a bench wrapped in a plaid blanket and devotees would squat or stand around him. He was tubby and humorous and there was frequent gossip around him. He would slap people on the head or back and sometimes he would hug people. Such actions would be taken as the greatest of blessings by devotees.

It was apparent that he knew peoples minds and understood their problems intuitively, and there are many accounts of problems being solved and diseases being cured simply being in his presence. Many people became devotees and ‘disciples’ but his elusive nature precluded the formation of close master - disciple relationships. There are thousands of records of healing and other miraculous happenings attributed to him, but the most significant were concerned with the profound changes of ‘consciousness’ that people experienced in his presence, and feelings of love that were engendered - see Miracle of Love.

He strongly supported and promoted the celebration of religious festivals - because they helped devotees to become more like the deities worshipped. He was also well known for the feeding bhandaras that he often conducted in many temples around India. It was said that food materials, such as sacks of rice, would mysteriously appear at the particular temple preceding such an event, even when he was not there. He said that, for the hungry, “God appears as food”.

Teachings

Maharajji’s principle teaching, often repeated, was: *Love all, feed all, serve all*. Thus it could be said that he was a great bhakti master with love and service the principal ingredients of his teachings. He said that love given always comes back multiplied. However, he did not give formal discourses, so that his teachings were disseminated through parable-like
stories and comments, and through his silent presence. He seemed to have had the ability to know what was required and gave specific teachings to suit the circumstances, whatever they may have been. Each individual would then get the teaching appropriate to his spiritual and mental development. His main form of teaching, judging from the effects he had on people, appeared through the silent transmission of grace - that stirred people at the deepest levels. Ram Das said, “Bliss and peace poured down on us.”

Maharajji said that people should always have God in their minds and stressed the need for total surrender to God. He said people should chant: Oh Supreme, my life is a thread in your hands. He advised people to live dharmically (righteously) and to always remember God. He said always speak the truth: “People may hate you but never worry. Christ died for the truth. If you live in the truth, God will always stand with you.” This was not just a matter of not telling lies but was the “loving of the truth”: that is, the loving of ‘what is’ - which is God. He said, “This was why Jesus was put to death - people could not stand what he said, but it was the truth, and so he said it.”

To devotees he encouraged the visiting of temples and holy shrines. But, above all, he recommended the feeding people - as a spiritual practice, and he said that this could awaken the kundalini and purify people, without recourse to yogic practices. Some comments on specific matters are as follow.

**Surrender:** He used to say, “I do nothing. God does everything. Change is the way of the world and if in Kali Yuga (the present Dark Age), it has to go this way so let it go. Unless you are the Lord, you can’t stop it, so why berate it. Worship God in every form and don’t try to figure God out. Don’t think ‘I’ or ‘you’ have done this. All is God’s play in His own way. It has to happen according to your karma. You reap as you sow. It has to happen so don’t resist it.”

**On maya:** He said, “What is maya? Where is it? It is nothing at all. It’s illusion. Just keep God in your heart and worship God in every form without trying to figure it out.”

**On stress:** He said that stress was worldly and is really nothing. “Counter it by getting rid of attachment. Don’t provoke, stay cool in a hostile atmosphere”. And, since the mind has both positive and negative aspects, concentrate on the positive: “Thought processes will change and you will feel more relaxed. Then you will be able to remove the rest of the stress problem.”

**On renunciation:** Although he had performed severe tapasya as part of his sadhana, he later taught that such extreme physical forms of tapasya were not necessary: “Renunciation is tapasya and is just getting rid of attachment”. It’s not leaving the family and living in a cave. It’s the breaking of the link between you and your desires. It’s giving up of satisfying your appetites and desires. Fasting is therefore a very good practice. Maharajji encouraged family life but said that every family member should become disciplined and follow the teachings of the elders and the scriptures. He said: “Attachment is the strongest block to realization. If you desire a mango at the moment of death, you will be born an insect. If you want to see God, kill desires... When you have a desire for something, don’t act on it and it will go away. If you have enough faith you can give up money and possessions. God will give you everything you need for your spiritual development. Money should be used to help others. A true saint never accepts money. Money brings anxiety.”

**On the ego:** He said, “What is this with the ego? It’s a cheat, an impostor! One of these days you will leave the world and become earth. Clear the mind of all worldly things. If you can’t control your mind, how can you realize God?

**On Service:** “Work is God. Work is worship. Whoever works for God serves. His work will be done by itself. Always give love, service, caring and sharing. Serve the poor and remember God”.

**Religious differences:** There are none! You become one with Christ. The world does not need creeds and religious divisions so worship God in all forms. Freely exchange ideas but don’t force or divide.

**On love and relationships to others:** He said, “Never hurt another’s heart. Cleanse the mirror of your heart and you will see God. Love all men as God, even if they hurt you or shame you. Be like Ghandi and Christ”.

**On the Kundalini:** He said, “Kundalini rests below the navel. It can be raised by the Guru’s Grace, by the gentle, simple touch of the Guru’s hand. The Kundalini can be awakened by feeding people. Sexual energy is the power to create God. If you raise the energy above the lowest level then you can feel and meet Brahma”.

**The guru**

He said always listen to the inner guru. God, the Self and Guru are the same. The guru is a guide to realization. It is an inner journey and total surrender gets the guru’s grace. The guru’s grace is beyond thought and action. Mind and body become purified so that you become sensitive to receiving spiritual perceptions: “How can you purify yourself without the guidance of a guru? So silence your thoughts and fix your attention on the inner master, which you cannot see but you can feel. When the traveler is ready the guru will be found. You may not meet a physical guru in this life but the inner guru is always there”.

**Some devotees’ experiences**

Ram Das, in *Miracle of Love*, reviewed the experiences of more than two thousand devotees and put them into various categories. These are some examples:

A man traveling in India found his way to Maharajji. He had been thinking about his mother and how she died of a spleen condition. When they met Maharajji said, “You were thinking about your mother... Spleen, she died of spleen.” The man was amazed. He wondered, “Who is he? Who does he represent? Where’s the button he pushes to make the file appear? Why have I come here?” None of it made any sense. He had classified experiences into those that were drug induced and other ‘ordinary’ experiences, but he felt that neither of these categories applied to the present situation. (This
was at the height of socially accepted drug use in counterculture philosophy). His mind raced and raced. And then he felt a
tremendous wrenching pain in his chest and a tremendous wrenching feeling, and he started to cry. He cried and cried but
he was neither happy nor sad. He had not experienced this kind of crying before; it felt as if he had finished something - he
had come home.

A woman related her experience on being drawn to Maharajji. She knew about the hardships of India and was
nervous about going there. Nevertheless she found herself at the airport in New York and was experiencing a degree of
panic. What bothered her was that she was not sure that Maharajji would accept her as a devotee - as she had been led to
believe that this was a distinct possibility. She said, “I hadn’t the temerity to chance rejection - I was going to visit the
ashrams of some South Indian saints and perhaps visit up north (to Maharajji’s asram) - if there seemed to be any chance
of being received.” But coming off the plane in Bombay she found tickets to New Delhi had been left for her. No one
knew where they had come from. Again in Delhi there was a message that said: “Go to Vrindavan, Maharajji expected
soon.” She didn’t know who sent it.

Attempting to get to the indicated destination she ended up in a market late at night with shops beginning to close.
Her panic grew with exhaustion and hunger and she began to envision herself huddling in a doorway among cows. Then
suddenly a Westerner approached and she discovered that where she was supposed to be going was just around the next
bend. At the temple an old gatekeeper, after scrutinizing her, let her in. At the far end of the front of the temple Maharajji
was sitting. When she saw his great form, her heart jumped so that she staggered against the gate. The first sight of him
remained piercingly clear in her memory. Maharajji was bouncing, smiling and clowning. She said that during that first
darshan, she understood everything even though it was in Hindi. And she recognized the love that had poured into her, that
had irresistibly drawn her to India: this, she felt, was The Source.

Another visitor was pretty indifferent about meeting the great sage. As she came up for darshan Maharajji started
bouncing up and down and speaking in Hindi. Then he hit the visitor with a rolled up paper. She had both a sense of great
confusion and a feeling of the most incredible “oneness” that she had ever felt in her life. At that moment she felt all the
suffering, all the pain from the past several years, dissolve completely. And though the pain was to come back, the love she
felt at that moment made it all less important later.

A man gave an account of how Maharajji dealt with those who had committed serious crimes. At a gathering of
people with Maharajji, two men, one dressed as a lawyer and another in peasants dress, said they had a request. Maharajji
said, “Go on.”

The man in peasant dress said, “My friend is in great trouble.”

Maharajji said to the other, “You are not a lawyer, are you?”

He replied, “True, I am not.” And indicated that he had been involved in a murder, Maharajji asked:

“Did you commit the murder?” He replied, “No.”

Then, “Was not the murder arranged by you?” And he replied, “Yes.”

Maharajji said, “The victim has four children. It is a heinous crime, Are you not sorry?” - “Yes.” was the
reply.

“Will you do it again in your life?” The man replied, “No.”

Then Maharajji said, “You can go... you will be pardoned.”

And he added, “Look after the children. Help them, and you will realize what you have done.”

It appears that the judge had already written a decision to convict the man, but late at night some impulse made him get up
and change the judgment to acquittal.

Once in Haridwar (in Northern Uttar Pradesh), a man was bathing in the river and lost his footing. He was tossed
about and carried to a whirlpool like a log. His wife, after crying out Maharajji’s name, jumped into the water and sav ed

people with Maharajji, two men, one dressed as a lawyer and another in peasants dress, said they had a request. Maharajji

A doctor met Maharajji in 1942. He was on the run for involvement with the independence movement and was

staying in a small hostel for pilgrims where Maharajji was also staying. Maharajji came to him with food and then told him
to run. The police would be there within an hour. He said, “Go to Tibet but follow another route, not the usual one”. The
doctor took the advice but because he never believed in saints he left a colleague there to see what would happen. In an
hour a district superintendent of police came with a search party looking for the doctor. Maharajji said to them “Who
would come at this hour?” - The police searched and then started towards Tibet but Maharajji called them back and
warned them not to go. He said that if they went there they would be killed in an avalanche. They decided not to pursue the
matter.

His death

Maharajji died in 1972 after experiencing diabetic convulsions and going into a coma. He was taken to hospital
where he was given injections and put under oxygen. Presently he roused and pulled the oxygen mask off and shouted
“bekar” (useless), and asked for Ganges water. He then repeated “Jaya Jagadish Hare” - Hail the Lord of the Universe,
several times at a decreasing pitch. His face became very peaceful and he died.
A few days before his parting a close devotee felt a longing to see Maharajji. He went to see him and during the visit Maharajji predicted his going by saying, “Ask anything you want - then I am going to go.” The devotee said that on this statement, “everything that was in his mind evaporated.” He asked for nothing but only afterwards realized the prediction that was to come about.

Practicalities

Kainchi Ashram: In the Kainchi Ashram Neem Karoli Baba is still honoured. The ashram is overseen by an Indian woman called Siddhi Ma, who was a devotee of Maharajji for many years. She does not give any direct teachings except to remember and honour Maharajji. Devotees say that they still feel his presence, “enveloping one like a plaid blanket.”

The ashram, which is located in a picturesque, forested steep river valley amongst a number of temples, has accommodation for around 150 guests who must be devotees or intending devotees. Permission to stay must be obtained in advance in writing, and guests must follow the daily ashram schedule of morning and evening chanting.

The postal address is Sankata Mochana, Hanuman Mandir, PO Kainchi, via Bhowali, District Nanital, Uttar Pradesh 26313, India. The ashram is reached by bus or taxi (30 km.) from Nanital. Simple vegetarian food is provided to guests and payment for accommodation and food is by appropriate donation.

It is said that his presence can be felt in all the temples that he frequented. One such is a Hanuman temple located between Haridwar and Rishikesh and marked by a large Hanuman statue visible from the road.

In Germany, Durgamayi Ma claims to be a disciple and a successor to Neem Karoli Baba. She gives Darshan and conducts retreats. E.mail. info@SriDurgamayiMaAshram.de

Information on other ashrams and temples associated with Neem Karoli Baba can be sourced on the website: www.neemkarolibaba.com

In the USA there is a Neem Karoli Baba Ashram, PO Box, W .Taos, NM 87571.
Tel. + 505 751 4080   Fax. +505 737 0180   E.mail: board@nkbashram.org

Chapter 9

SWAMI SIVANANDA - A DIVINE LIFE

Your only duty is to realize God; and this includes other duties.

Background

Swami Sivananda was the founder of the Divine Life Society and became one of the best known spiritual teachers of the twentieth century. He was a supreme bhakta yogi with service to all as his main doctrine. His teachings are today available in every corner of the world and many of his disciples, such as Swami Chinmayananda - see following Chapter, became famous spiritual teachers in their own rights. The activities of the Divine Life Society are further augmented by splinter groups based on Swami Sivananda’s teachings. These include the Integral Yoga Society founded by a leading disciple, Swami Satchidananda, which has branches throughout Europe the America, and the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers founded by the late Swami Vishnudevananda - see Practicalities below. At the present time the Divine Life Society has around two hundred centers with some ten thousand active members.

Although a was a believer of Advaita Vedanta, Sivananda’s teachings are firmly rooted in the world and are based on service to humanity, understanding of the philosophy of Vedanta, and leading a dharmic life. The slogan over his samadhi shrine reads:

“Be good, Do Good”.

He was born in Kerela in 1897 and is believed to be a descendant of the 16th century scholar-saint Appaya Diksitar. He was given the birth name was Kuppuswami and from an early age he became devoted to Shiva. Although a Brahmin, he was indifferent to caste and used to feed beggars and animals - sometimes to the consternation of his parents. At school he was bright and also good at sports. Doing regular physical exercise to keep the body healthy became one of his teachings. As a youth he liked to wander about, sometimes for days at a time, visiting temples. He opposed family wishes that he become a religious scholar, and chose to study medicine. He attended the Tanjore Medical College and was an outstanding student. Here he again showed total disregard of all caste distinctions.

After graduation he went to Malaya as the chief medical officer of the hospital of a large rubber plantation. His service was excellent but being sensitive and compassionate in nature, he was appalled by the suffering and death that he had to witness daily in his work. After ten years in Malaya he felt the call to return to India to pursue a spiritual life. He gave up his job, abandoned his profession as a career, and became a renunciate wanderer in India.
He devoted the next ten years to intense yogic practices and lived in caves, shacks and temples, and subsisted on a diet of rotis (Indian bread) and Ganges water - literally bread and water. In 1924, when he was 37 years old, he met a saintly man called Sadhu Vishwananda in Rishikesh, who initiated him into sanyas (monkhood) and named him Swami Sivananda. Then, in addition to continuing his extreme tapasya, he was able to withdraw his savings from Malaya and began caring for sadhus, who were mostly undernourished, with food and medicines. He saw that many of the holy men who wandered about India suffered from tropical diseases and malnutrition. He started a charitable clinic in 1932 in Rishikesh at Swarg Ashram, where he also lived. Although at this time he did not have disciples he would often give talks and print and distribute religious pamphlets.

His concern with the clinic seems to have marked a turning point in his life for he began to gather a following of devotees. His attitude towards the more extreme forms of tapasya changed and he began to see that matted hair and emaciated bodies had nothing to do with the divine life. In 1934 he started to take disciples and moved from Swarg Ashram to set up his own ashram in a deserted cow shed on the banks of the Ganges. The ashram rapidly grew, acquired other buildings and attracted many more disciples. Today the ashram houses several hundred resident monks, lay residents and visitors. In addition many more day visitors attend meditation and chanting sessions, satsangs, and daily lecture and question and answer sessions given by resident swamis.

After the Divine Life Society was formed, Swami Shivananda started on a life of tireless work, travel and lecturing throughout India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). His talks and the singing of God’s names were so irresistible that they attracted large crowds. Even the hearts of the usually arrogant British would become softened and some would even come up to the stage to dance and sing the sweet names of God with the Swami. This type of activity continued for almost 20 years during which time he developed the practice of recording his thoughts almost daily. These notes have become the source of many teachings. Over the same period the ashram of the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh grew into the large establishment that it is today.

As a medical doctor he was very much concerned with health, and the promotion through hatha yoga as a part of health care. He founded many hospitals and clinics based on both auryvedic and western medicine. His special mild brand of hatha yoga is aimed at not only the promotion of health, but also the generation of a feeling of well-being and control of the mind. It is quite different to the often ego-fired contortions of the hatha yoga practitioners in the West.

He forbade the discriminatory practices of caste and the religious privilege of the orthodox priests in all his institutions. He also supported the movement towards equal rights for women in India.

Teachings

The Sivananda teachings are characterized by an emphasis on practical service and living a dharmic life. They recognize the essential unity of all religions and, in the main ashram and centers, festivals of religions other than Hinduism are respected and also celebrated. Christmas Eve carols and bible reading, pujas and celebrations for the Buddha and Guru Nanak (of Sikhism), are held at appropriate times. He explained that Sanatana Dharma, was not just the origin of Hinduism, but was the basis of all religious philosophies. The essence of Sivananda’s teaching was based on the Bhagavad Gita. But, above all, his emphasis was on love and service.

Swami Sivananda was a prolific writer and is the author of around three hundred books. He realized that the priestly classes, who used Sanskrit, were keeping ordinary folk in the dark, so he wrote in English and Hindi - to bring yogic teachings and the teachings of Vedanta to the masses. He promoted yoga for householders - by explaining how yoga can be incorporated into family life. These activities were probably his major achievement and resulted in promoting the understanding of Vedanta globally. The essence of his teachings is: leading a dharmic life based on moral behaviour, self discipline, generosity and devotion to God. They have been condensed into twenty ‘Instructions’ that are inscribed on a pillar in the courtyard of the main Ashram in Rishikesh. They are as follow:

1. Get up at 4 a.m. daily. Do japa and meditation.
2. Sit in Padma or Siddha Asana (postures) for japa and meditation.
3. Take satvic food (simple non-spicy vegetarian). Eat frugally.
4. Do charity, one tenth of your income or one anna per rupee.
5. Study daily one chapter of the Bhagavad Gita.
7. Give up smoking, narcotics, drink and rajasic (spicy food).
8. Fast on holy days or take milk and fruit only.
9. Observe mouna (silence) two hours daily and during meals.
10. Speak the truth at any cost; speak little and sweetly.
11. Reduce your wants. Lead a happy, contented life.
12. Never hurt the feelings of others. Be kind to all.
13. Think of the mistakes you have made (self analysis).
15. Think of God when you wake up and go to bed.
16. Have always a japa mala on your neck or in your pocket.
17. Adhere to the motto: Simple living and high thinking.
19. Have a separate meditation room under lock and key.
20. Keep a spiritual diary and stick to your routine.

In Sivananda teachings, women are treated as equals in all matters - (unlike the usual scene in India). Women are permitted to learn and practice all aspects of yoga, and, if they wish, to take sanyas (the vows of monkhood). The German-born Swami Sivananda Radha was the first woman to take the vows of sanyas within the Sivananda organization. There are also Indian woman disciples of Sivananda now teaching in India. Nevertheless, tradition still prevails to a some extent, even within the Divine Life Society - and out of respect for this tradition, it seems to have been necessary to restrict the long term residence of women in the main ashram. Long term residency for women, at the present time, must be negotiated on an individual basis in each case.

At the present time (2000) the daily question and answer sessions are still held by the aging Swami Krishananda who is known for his blunt humour, wit and a marked aversion to spiritual pretentiousness.

His death

At the beginning of 1963, when he was seventy six, he began to give indications that his life was approaching its end. But even while his health was failing he continued to record his daily thoughts. He had a paralytic stroke on the 23rd of June 1963 but continued occasionally to talk and could answer questions. He seemed fully aware and remained calm and even cheerful throughout the days before his death. When asked questions by an attending physician he would give medically astute answers, sometimes correcting the doctor on some point. On the 24th of June he dictated the last of his ‘daily thoughts’. It was: “When the individual merges in God happiness comes.” Then he said, “Enough,” and lapsed into silence. On the 13th of July, though he had not taken anything for some days, he asked for a glass of Ganga water, and ten days later, on the 24th of July, late at night, he left this world.

Practicalities

The Sivananda Ashram is the main ashram and headquarters of the Divine Life Society, a world wide organization started by Swami Sivananda in 1932. It is a large and rambling ashram on the banks of the Ganges in Rishikesh. After the death of Swami Sivananda in 1963, the Divine Life Society was headed by Swami Chidananda who was the President, and Swami Krishananda, who is the main teaching Swami at the ashram.

Serious students of Sivananda’s teachings, with prior permission of the management, are permitted to stay at the ashram for periods of several months. They are expected to follow the ashram schedule of meditation, chanting and pujas and to attend the daily lecture and discussion sessions.

Day visitors or visitors for shorter periods may stay nearby where there are many guest houses and hotels. Courses in Sivananda’s special brand of mild Hatha Yoga are also available. The contact details are as follow:
Sivananda Ashram, Divine Life Society, PO Sivanandanagar, District Tehri-Garhwal 129 192, Uttar Pradesh, India. Tel. and Fax. (Internat.) + 91 1364 31190 (local) 01364 31190.
The new website (1993) is www. swami-krishnananda.org

Rishikesh is about 6 - 8 hours by bus from Delhi. There are direct busses but most busses and trains terminate at Haridwar which is some 30 km. from Rishikesh. From Haridwar there is a branch line train service and many busses, taxis and shared auto rickshaws ply between Rishikesh and Haridwar.

There are many other Sivananda-type organizations in India. In Kerela, located amidst the lush foothills of the Sahyadri Mountains, there is a Sivananda Yoga Vedanta ashram which was started by Swami Vishnudevananda, a senior disciple of Sivananda. It is unrelated to the Divine Life Society. Since Swami Vishnudevananda’s death in 1993, this ashram has been run by an Italian man, Swami Mahadevananda. The ashram conducts two-week yoga retreats. Daily charges for accommodation and food are around Rp 400 - 500 per day. The ashram also conducts yoga teacher training courses. Contact details are as follow:
Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Dhanwanthari Ashram, PO Neyardam, Trivandrum DT 695 576, Kerela, India. Tel. and fax. (Internat.) + 91 471 290493 (local) 0471 290493.

There are Sivananda organizations in many other countries and details can be sourced on the Internet. Contact details in the USA are as follow: Divine Life society, 6606 Hardwood Lane, Keedysville, MD 21756, USA. Tel. + (301) 432 4918.

Chapter 10

SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA
(And other swamis)

True Hinduism is the Sanatana Dharma, the eternal Truth of the Upanishads.

Background

Swami Chinmayananda was born in 1916 and died recently in 1996 while on a visit to the USA. He was born to a
wealthy family in Ernakulam (Cochin), Kerela, and given the birth name Balakrishnan Menon. He studied liberal arts and journalism and after a hectic youth, which included being imprisoned by the British for involvement in the independence struggle, he became a reporter and columnist for the National Herald, a newspaper started by Nehru. While still a student, in 1936, he met Ramana Maharshi and had his darshan. Of this he said that he felt his “whole life had gone up in a wave.” Later, after becoming a successful journalist, he began to feel the hollowness of worldly life and in 1947 he visited Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh. He was greatly influenced by Swami Sivananda and by the life of the monks, but at the same time he noticed that many of the sadhus seemed quite ignorant of the lofty ideals of Hinduism. This marked the beginning of his notion of teaching Vedanta; but first he had to learn about it himself - and for this he had to learn Sanskrit. In 1949 he took sanyas as a disciple of Swami Sivananda (Chapter 9) and, on his advice, went to study under Swami Tapovanam, who was a great Sanskrit scholar, at Gangotri, in the Himalayas. Here again, he met many visiting sadhus and was shocked at their inadequate understanding of the scriptures.

Prior to acquiring his abiding interest in spiritual pursuits he had become a good writer with a commanding knowledge of English. In 1951 he resolved to take the knowledge of the Vedas directly to the people. He wanted the teachings to be accessible to ordinary people, not just to the priests; and to do this he would use English and Hindi. He became an avid campaigner for teaching the essential essence of Vedanta, which he maintained was a far cry from the usual show and expostulations of the priests and pundits. He established a teaching procedure which he called a Yajna. He said that, in the old days, Yajnas were fire sacrifices in honour of the Gods; his yajnas were to burn ignorance in the fire of knowledge. This is an example that illustrates his conviction of the need for reform in the teaching of the scriptures:

_In India Hinduism has come to mean nothing more than a bundle of sacred superstitions, or a certain way of dressing, cooking, eating, talking, and so on. Our gods have fallen to the mortal level of administration officers at whose altars the faithful Hindu might pray and get special permits for the things they desire - that is, if he pays the required fee to the priests. But Hinduism is not the external show that we have learned to parade about in our daily life... True Hinduism is the Sanatana Dharma (eternal Truth) of the Upanishads._"

During his lifetime Swami Chinmayananda established eight major teaching centers in India, and more than 150 smaller centers in other parts of the world. The regional headquarters for India is the Sidhbari Ashram near Dharmshala in the Himalayas, and there are large teaching centers in Bombay, Chennai (Madras) and elsewhere. The mission offers three-year full time courses on Vedanta for prospective monks of the Shankaracharya Order, or simply for those who are interested in Vedanta. Residence of the ashrams requires the acceptance of renunciation and celibacy. The courses are tailored for modern, principally well-educated, Indians and foreigners who want to get in touch with the traditional values and teachings of Hinduism.

Swami Chinmayananda’s successor and current head of the Mission (2001) is Swami Tejomayananda, aged around fifty, who speaks excellent English and was at one time head of the large Chinmaya mission in San Jose, California. He is highly educated and an articulate speaker and dedicated teacher, but also a humble and unpretentious man.

And Swami Anubhavananda of the Bombay Mission is another example of the brilliant teachers who are attracted to the Chinmaya Mission. He is well known for having his audience rolling in the isles with mirth. For example he gave an account of an address he made at a school function in which everyone was laughing away except one woman teacher in the front row. At the luncheon which followed, he asked her if she had suffered bereavement in the family. She said that, in the old days, Yajnas were fire sacrifices in honour of the Gods; his yajnas were to burn ignorance in the fire of knowledge. This is an example that illustrates his conviction of the need for reform in the teaching of the scriptures:

_In India Hinduism has come to mean nothing more than a bundle of sacred superstitions, or a certain way of dressing, cooking, eating, talking, and so on. Our gods have fallen to the mortal level of administration officers at whose altars the faithful Hindu might pray and get special permits for the things they desire - that is, if he pays the required fee to the priests. But Hinduism is not the external show that we have learned to parade about in our daily life... True Hinduism is the Sanatana Dharma (eternal Truth) of the Upanishads._"

Teachings

The teachings are based on classical Vedanta and follow the methods advocated by the ninth century sage Shankaracharya, who was responsible for reviving and popularizing the ancient teachings of Advaita Vedanta - that branch of Vedanta that rejects duality. To this day there are Shankaras in different parts of India who are spiritual successors to the original Shankara. The succession of Shankaras is followed in much the same way as the succession of Popes and Dalai Lamas. They are all highly evolved souls and interpreters of Vedanta. Paul Brunton in his book _A Search in Secret India_ wrote about his meeting with the sixty-sixth bearer of the title in Southern India, who was instrumental in leading him to Ramana Maharshi... An example of their highly developed spiritual perception was given by Paul Brunton who, in 1936, told the Shankara about his seeking for someone who had "high attainments in yoga", he replied thus:

_"I know of only two masters in India who could give you what you wish. One of them lives in Benares, hidden away in a large house, which is itself hidden among spacious grounds. Few people are permitted to obtain access to him; certainly no European has yet been able to intrude upon his seclusion... The other man lives in the interior, farther south... He is called the Maharishee (Ramana Maharshi). His abode is on Arunachala, the mountain of the holy beacon... I will provide you with full instructions, so that you may discover him."_

It is significant, perhaps, that at virtually the exact time that Paul Brunton asked this question, Balakrishnan Menon, who was to become Swami Chinmayananda, was having the darshan of the great sage.

In Advaita Vedanta there is no essential differences between the pure soul of man, the Atman, and God - the Ultimate Reality (not the deities, which are also manifestations of duality). Realization of this Ultimate Reality, the
The Self is always present and can be perceived as that which Anubhavananda said:

“We live honestly the noble life of love and service, producing more than we consume and giving more than we take. Without us, we seek the Lord’s grace to keep us on the path of virtue, courage and wisdom. We serve as an army courageous and disciplined ever ready to fight against all low tendencies and false values within and without us. We stand as one family bound to each other with love and respect. We live honestly the noble life of love and service, producing more than we consume and giving more than we take. We seek the Lord’s grace to keep us on the path of virtue, courage and wisdom. May Thy grace and blessings flow through us and the world around us. We believe that the service of our country is the service of the Lord of Lords, and devotion to the people is devotion to the Supreme Self. We know our responsibilities give us the ability and courage to fulfill them.”

The Chinmaya Mission Pledge is as follows:
We stand as one family bound to each other with love and respect. We serve as an army courageous and disciplined ever ready to fight against all low tendencies and false values within and without us. We live honestly the noble life of love and service, producing more than we consume and giving more than we take. We seek the Lord’s grace to keep us on the path of virtue, courage and wisdom. May Thy grace and blessings flow through us and the world around us. We believe that the service of our country is the service of the Lord of Lords, and devotion to the people is devotion to the Supreme Self. We know our responsibilities give us the ability and courage to fulfill them.”

Practicalities
Chinmaya Missions:
There are Chinmaya Missions in many locations in India and abroad. Contact addresses in the USA are as follow: Chinmaya Mission West, PO Box 129, Piercy, CA 95587, USA. Tel. 707 247-3488. Chinmaya Mission West, Tri-State Centre, 560 Bridge Town Pike, Langhorne, PA 19053, USA. Tel. + (215) 3960390 Fax. + (215) 3967910. E. mail: swami-siddhananda@juno.com
The Chinmaya Mission of the Chinmaya Tapovan Trust has a beautiful ashram in the Himalayas to conduct three-year courses in classical Advaita Vedanta for students hoping to become monks. Residential retreats in both Hindi and English are also conducted. Accommodation and meals are provided for an appropriate donation or fee. The ashram has a very good library. Prospective visitors should check beforehand for dates and the medium of instruction of upcoming retreats. The address is as follows: Chinmaya Mission, Chinmaya Tapovan Trust, Sandeepany Himalayas, Sidhbari 176057, Himal Pradesh, India. Tel. (Internat.) + 91 1892 22121/24951 (local) 01892 22121/24951. Fax. (Internat.) + 91 1892 24956 (local) 01892 24956.

The ashram is reached via Dharmshala (The location of the home of the Dalai Lama - see Chapter 13).

There are many other Chinmaya centers and ashrams that teach classical Advaita Vedanta. Some of these have residential facilities for students and visitors. The Bombay mission conducts classes in English. The contact details are: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, Saki Vihar Road, Mumbai 4000 072, India. Tel. (Internat.) + 91 22 8572367 / 8575806. (local) 022 8572367 / 8575806. Fax. (Internat.) + 91 22 8573065 (local) 022 857396 E.mail: chinmaya@bom2.vsnl.net.in

Swami Dayananda Sarasvati
Swami Dayananda also has schools of Advaita Vedanta. Useful websites are: www.vedicculturalcentre.com www.arshavidhyapitam.org & yogirama.com Other information can be sourced on the Internet. An ashram address is: Sri Gangadhareswara Trust, Purani Jhadi, P.O. Box 30, Rishikesh, A.P. India.

Chapter 11

BAHI SAHIB - THE SUFI WAY

If I knew how painful love is, I would have stood at the entrance of the lane of love, 
I would have proclaimed with the beat of the drum: Keep away, keep away.

General background

Sufism is a mystical form of Islam and is today of considerable interest to non-Muslims in the West and elsewhere. There is also an interest in Sufism among born Muslims, tired of the materialism of the modern world and perhaps tired of the dogma of the established branches of Islam. They may see Sufism as a basis for strengthening, and in some instances rebuilding, their faith in Islam. The practice of Sufism is said to be the seeking of the experience of Truth through love, devotion and surrender to God. Surrender of the mind and ego enables the divine attributes the soul to come to the fore. In Sufism it is believed that the help of an enlightened teacher is necessary for this to happen.

According to some authorities Sufism preceded Islam. Long before Islam there was a sect called the Kamal Posh (blanket wearers), who wandered about and went to see all the prophets and sages of those times, but none could satisfy them - that is, until they met the Prophet Mohammed. One day, so the story goes, Mohammed predicted that many Kamal Posh would be coming, and so they did. It seems that Mohammed said nothing and just looked at them, and through this a silent teaching was transmitted so that they became completely satisfied. He had created love in their hearts, and with this understanding they became Sufis, for love is the essence of Sufism. In true Sufism, to this day, the same understanding is infused from master to disciple.

There are many different Sufi groups and each alleges a spiritual chain of authority extending back to the Prophet. But having said this, it is necessary to point out that, according to many careful observers, very few of the Sufi groups are genuine - see Sufi Thought and Action. The popularity of Sufism has led to a proliferation of false schools in which there is no genuine master. For example, Rosalie Marsham, in the above book, writes: “One group, which has branches all over the East, has done a great deal to give Sufis a bad name, because the following almost invariable signs are found among its leaders: fondness for liquor; sexual excesses and handing out ultimatums to their followers. Prospective followers are given the impression that a mystery is, at first, kept from them. But later, given suitable submissive behaviour, the leaders will impart it to them as a reward.”

This chapter describes a master of a Sufi tradition from India called the ‘Golden Sufis’ or the ‘Silent Sufis’. The information here is largely sourced from the diary and spiritual autobiography of a Western woman (Mrs. Tweedie) who was a disciple of a master of this tradition, known simply as Bahi Sahib (literally elder brother). Mrs. Tweedie’s association with him took place in the 1950’s and 1960’s and, on his instruction, she kept a diary of her experiences. The diary subsequently became a remarkable and popular book called Chasm of Fire - see the Bibliography. The information presented here, though derived from this book, concentrates on ascertaining the state of the master, rather than the state of the disciple. It emphasizes the great mystical similarity that is seen in all enlightened individuals, irrespective of their religious background. Bahi Sahib explained that, although Sufism is normally thought to be a form of Islamic mysticism,
The master will not do anything to damage the disciple’s reputation, give a bad example, or take advantage of what he, himself, has assimilated. The master will constantly manipulate those ideas for it is they which took him to the Truth, through his personal effort, and teaching — only those ideas which he has absorbed and which led him to realization are of significance. He cannot give to the disciple what he himself has not assimilated. He explained that every master has only a few “seed ideas” which represent the fundamental note or chord of his teaching — only those ideas which he has absorbed and which led him to realization are of significance. He cannot give to the disciple what he, himself, has assimilated.

Bahi Sahib

Bhai Sahib was born in the late part of the nineteenth century and died in the mid nineteen sixties. His teacher was the revered Guru Maharaj of Kanpur, and his own father and his uncle were also students of Guru Maharaj. Bahi Sahib’s home was in the district of Aryanagar in central Uttar Pradesh, not too far from Kanpur. Today Kanpur is an industrial city and a centre of the cotton weaving and dyeing industry. It is on the Ganges river and there are disused or derelict burning ghats there. Nearby, in Bithur, there are ghats that are still in use, and the principle shrine, one of the few in India dedicated to Brahma, is at the site of these ghats.

Bahi Sahib was described by Mrs. Tweedie as bearded and handsome, with a kindly face and “strange eyes like dark pools of stillness, with a sort of liquid light in them.” His smile was infectious and he had a deep baritone voice. He seemed to pray almost continuously; bead after bead of his mala sliding through his fingers, rocking gently in samadhi. Mrs. Tweedie thought he looked Tibetan - a reference perhaps to Theosophy and the ‘Great White Brotherhood’, for Mrs. Tweedie was at that time a Theosophist and believed in certain masters who lived in the Himalayas and had a great deal to do with the spiritual development of mankind (see Chapter 5). Bahi Sahib had become a teacher of the Sufi order of the ‘Golden Path’ at the age of twenty seven. But in the tradition of the lineage, he did not become a ‘master’ until the death of his Guru. He was given permission to teach before this, but considered himself to be “nothing” until the death of his master. He said, “Until the last moment of his death, he kept testing me. Then I caught the thread. The power of transference was given. I could give to anybody.”

When Mrs. Tweedie first came to Bhai Sahib she said that she wanted to find God; but not the Christian idea of an anthropomorphic deity. “I want the Rootless Root, the Causeless Cause of the Upanishads,” she said. Bhai Sahib raised his eyebrows and asked “Nothing less than that?” Mrs. Tweedie continued by explaining that she was both a vegetarian and a Theosophist, and as such believed that a guru was unnecessary and that one becomes enlightened by one’s own efforts. She asserted: “We must try to reach our Higher Self by our own efforts”. His replied thus: ‘Not even in a hundred years! It cannot be done without a teacher… How can you vacate, clear out your mind, if you are constantly working through the mind. How can the mind empty itself? You must be able to leave it, to forget everything, and this one cannot do alone. For the mind cannot transcend itself.”

At that time Bahi Sahib had many disciples, including some who did not live nearby or were even overseas. He also had a number of Western disciples. Although he was the head of a large household and performed all the duties of a Sufi master, he was often in a state of deep meditation. He walked very fast with long strides, so that it was sometimes difficult to keep up with him, but he often appeared to be completely unaware of his surroundings, even while walking. Thus he needed others with him to be “on the outside” - to protect him from the traffic. Mrs. Tweedie explained that on occasions there was a wonderful fragrance in the air, as sometimes occurs around great beings. Once he told her to try to find its source - but she couldn’t. He frequently sang poignant songs in Persian or Urdu, which Mrs. Tweedie said, “Disturbs something very deep.”

I am here and I am there and I show myself in different shapes,
And you may wonder what or who am I, and you will not understand,
But in time the answer is given,
I am here and I am there and it is all the same,
Everywhere all the time, am I alone.

He lived a simple life and took care of his family. He had six children, and a brother with his family also lived in the house. The house was a long white bungalow with a large door and wooden shutters. A wide wooden gateway led from the street to a dry garden with shrubs and a few trees that formed the compound of the house. It was full of the comings and goings of the many devotees and all kinds of activities took place there. Mrs. Tweedie wondered why the master’s premises were so full of the most “objectionable people” - those who were without work, the lay-abouts and rejected of society, the awkward, the too loud, the too weak in mind and the too sick. She wrote in her diary, “So many people inhabit his courtyard, and in thatched huts too, and even the garden.” Bahi Sahib explained that it is the Sufi way; to such he must give refuge and hospitality.

The Sufi master

Bahi Sahib explained about the attributes of a Sufi master, which also gives pointers to the expected behaviour of devotees and disciples: “A Sufi master must be completely without desires and such a master can actually be identified by his absence of desires. The disciple will still have desires, but not the master - he has none. The same is with a saint.”

He explained that every master has only a few “seed ideas” which represent the fundamental note or chord of his teaching - only those ideas which he has absorbed and which led him to realization are of significance. He cannot give more. He will constantly manipulate those ideas for it is they which took him to the Truth, through his personal effort, and they which represent a living truth to him. Consequently, no teacher ever conveys the whole amount of the teaching, only what he, himself, has assimilated.

The master will not do anything to damage the disciple’s reputation, give a bad example, or take advantage of a
situation. Sometimes it may seem to be the case that the guru is taking advantage of the disciple, but this will always be only to curb the disciple’s ego. It is the task of the master to help the disciple grow: “How is it done? - One has to merge into the teacher. Only then the little self, the ego, will go. It represents a voluntary death in the master’s essence. In Sufism it is called fana. A complete surrender to the teacher is the first step leading to the complete surrender to the will of God. Only little by little can we get used to this idea. It must be absorbed and become part of the blood. The teacher must be integrated as a wholeness into the mind - and this is the goal of spiritual training.” But, he would add, no teaching can be transmitted until the disciple has reached the stage of comprehension. “One cannot teach a small child the principles of higher mathematics. We have to grow up to the Truth; only then is it communicable.”

We must live within the very turmoil of life but not be influenced by it. We must get rid of likes and dislikes. We must return to the very core of our primal being in order to become whole. This will naturally produce conflicts for we have to accept ourselves as we are and not as we think we are. If we suffer from fear or some sadness, it means there is still some attachment to get rid of.

Bahi Sahib explained that a true master, if his sexual vitality is well transmuted, can have thousands of disciples; it matters not how many. The vital energy in human beings is the most precious thing. It makes a saint fly - it takes him directly to God. The vital energy must be transmuted, so that it will function from the navel upwards and not below. Only then are high states possible. To expand, to flow out without any destination, this is the path. On the questions of sexual transmutation and merging with the teacher, there is no paradox with ascetics who practice celibacy, but in Sufis, who traditionally are householders, much discipline is required. Bahi Sahib expanded on the meaning of mergence with the teacher, when two souls become one, as follows:

“When I was young with my first wife, I rarely had intercourse with her. Every night I merged with my revered Guru Maharaj. There can be no greater bliss imaginable than two souls merging into one with love. Sometimes my body is also merged. How is it done? The body partakes of it, is included in it, by reflection so to speak. And no bliss in the world is greater than this: when you are one with your teacher.” Later he said to Mrs. Tweedie: “… the surrender of the body can be achieved much deeper, more intimately and more completely than in sexual union. In sexual union there will always be two. How can there be oneness? But it is done and it can be done... The Atman, or the soul, pervades the body; it is present in every cell, in every atom of the body. So you see, spirit merges into spirit, there are not two bodies as on the physical level - but one. That’s why it is complete. Physically, naturally there will always be two in union; but not so in spirit. There is nothing to understand really - so simple.”

The master may also have many yogic powers that are usually concealed but nevertheless often make themselves apparent. One of these is clairvoyance, the ability to see events to come. An example is described by Mrs. Tweedie. She was sitting with him while he was in samadhi meditation - and she: “mindless but full of great peace.” Then suddenly he sat up and said, “Yes” and instructed her to open the door. The Collector Sahib - the local Government representative - was coming. She went out but nobody was there and she came inside again; but at that moment a car pulled up and the Collector Sahib got out and made his way to the house.

Another power was exorcism. On one occasion a man brought a demented boy to the compound. The events were described in detail by Mrs. Tweedie: The young man had the appearance of a simpleton and suddenly uttered a loud cry and began to howl like an animal. The expression on his face was terrible and he cried, “Don’t touch me, don’t touch me, I will destroy you!” Bahi Sahib looked steadily at the unfortunate boy and then with a pointed finger, very slowly described a circle around the body, and said, “Go away.” From the boy came the cry, “I am going, leave me, leave me.” Then, making a stabbing movement with the finger, Bahi Sahib said again “Go!” All of a sudden there was silence and the tormented body became motionless. He slowly sat up and his simple face now wore a perfectly human expression. Bahi Sahib said, “If he comes back, I will burn him.” Later he explained that the possessing spirit was a type of “powerful elemental”. They want an experience on the physical level and they attach themselves to a human being - usually a simple person. He explained that we all have good and evil spirits in us: it is the good and evil in us, and the mind also - and who wins is the master. Of such spirits he said that to burn them is not so lightly done; they also have the right to live. They are a parallel evolution to man, they are “shaitans” - demons, and have no notion of how to behave. If a powerful saint removes them they are afraid to come back.

But yogic powers may also be rejected by a master. At one stage he said that his Guru Maharaj offered to give him a mantra to cure the bites of venomous snakes (see example in Chapter 4), but he refused to accept it. He explained that this is quite a low siddhi that can be obtained by many fakirs; if he had possessed it there would have been a continuous flow of patients to his compound. He would not have had time for teaching.

Bahi Sahib never forgot his guru, the revered Maharaji: “He is always with me,” he would say - “And a tender far-away look would come into his eyes.”

Methods of teaching

Bahi Sahib explained that all the Sufi systems demand the surrender of the disciple to the teacher but the methods of the Nakshmandia Dynasty, to which the Golden Sufis belong, and the Chishtia Dynasty, the principle Sufi sect in India, differ considerably. In the latter many things are done through the physical body, “So the body becomes very magnetic. The Chishtiats use music, ceremonies and breathing techniques without which they are useless”.

With the Golden Sufis, everything is done in silence, and only in this system is love created. But, he said, “Our system has never been widespread; it is for the few… It is from heart to heart. The method is not popular with the majority
of people - who want the contortions of hatha yoga and the discipline and mind control meditation… They are not happy otherwise; they think nothing is being done. But if you say, ‘Sit in such and such a posture, meditate in this way or that’, you put a man in prison.” Bahi Sahib explained that very few of us are prepared to surrender to the truth so that the disciple can find God in his own way. He maintained that there are now only very few people in the world who can teach the Nakshmandia method. In this method there is not much explanation given because there is nothing much that the disciple could even understand - but people want explanations so the method is not popular. (According to Bahi Sahib, and also other great spiritual teachers, as indicated before, the practice of hatha yoga and kundalini or laya yoga may be harmful; principally because there are many poorly-trained ‘gurus’ using these methods, and having once awakened the kundalini, they may not know how to control it).

The two paths: Teaching in the Golden Sufis is mainly by the transmission of spiritual energy and there are essentially two paths that may be followed: the path of contemplative meditation, and a faster way, the path of Tyaga or complete renunciation, which has been called the ‘path of fire’. The aim is to achieve enlightenment in this life. In the path of fire the master activates the heart chakra, and although more rapid, it can be deeply disturbing as purification takes place. This was the path chosen by Mrs. Tweedie. What is required of the disciple is absolute surrender to the master - and the development of love for the master which takes place. But, in reality, even this, the development of love, is achieved by the master’s power. Progress does not depend much on what the disciple believes. Bahi Sahib said that it is of no importance if one believes in karma, evolution or whatever; humanity is taken along in progression and it makes no difference if we believe in certain things or not. But first, from the disciple, faith is necessary - absolute faith in the master: “Feel deeply you are in the presence of God, and wait for his Grace - full of alertness and surrender.”

For the disciple the establishment of union with the Master is essential. Bahi Sahib explained that in Sufism a chain of processes exists back to the Prophet. The master will ascertain if the union is complete and will then pass the disciple to his master (who may not be in the physical body at the time); and at the last stage the pupil is passed on back to the Prophet, not as Mohammed, the man, but as God - the supreme essence. In this most of the work is done by the master who uses his powers to purify the disciple. And in the Golden Sufi method, much is done in dreams.

At the beginning the disciple cannot communicate with the master’s master, but later he will learn how to communicate directly. Sufi masters recognize a number of stages (manazil) on the path to perfection that are linked to the acquisition of particular subtle virtues and powers, and all these stages must be traversed before final realization is achieved.

Bahi Sahib told a story of how his master sent him out to yogis and sadhus all around the area to ask, “Can you get enlightenment for absolutely nothing.” They all said, “No - go away.” But in the Golden Sufi method it is absolutely true; the disciple actually doesn’t have to do a thing. He can just sit around and let it happen. He said, “Just come here and sit - if one has a real master… The spiritual guide does not make conditions; he is like a loving mother. Shishyas (disciples) can and do leave the guru, but the guru will never leave the shishyas… And where can the shishya run to? The guru and shishya relationship is for ever.”

He explained that meditation involves complete abstraction of the senses, a yogic state. It is definitely not a trance state induced by a medium, nor is it hypnosis. In meditation the flow of prana is reversed. The energy of prana is absorbed in the heart instead of being extroverted. For the first few times the teacher has to do it for the shishya but later he does it himself. However, it is necessary to be serious. Some disciples practice meditation for forty years but are still full of mind.

One of the two paths, meditation or the path of complete renunciation, the path of fire, is decided between the master and the disciple - with the master making the final decision.

The chakras: In the path of fire (tyaga), the burning away of all dross occurs. And it is again of no importance whether the disciple believes in it or not - as long as he has faith in the master. But, Bahi Sahib explained, “It is for the few. It requires complete surrender and not many want to sacrifice everything for the sake of the Truth. Love and devotion to the master are essential ingredients but in the beginning only willingness is required - the master will cause love to grow. It is done with one chakra, the heart chakra, which opens the others. The disciple cannot love like this himself for it is not a question of human love but something entirely different.”

He explained that some force is used: “Something has to be forced, and then it will go on, not only for the present but for years onwards - while the physical body lasts.” In all the great schools it is basically the same, “We awaken the king of chakras, the heart chakra, and leave it to the king to awaken the others.”

Bahi Sahib continued: “It is not done through sex impulse but transmuted sexual energy is part of it.” The kundalini is usually dormant at the base of spine and the Sufi system will awaken it gently: “It will not give much trouble - not much. But with hatha yoga and prana yoga it can give much trouble.” (In Mrs. Tweedie’s book Bahi Sahib makes a number of references to a recurring problem one devotee had as a result of practicing hatha yoga). He explained that the master has to know how to take the energy up and down through all the chakras. With Sufi methods it is noticed by the disciple only when it reaches the heart chakra: “It means peace, bliss, states of expanded consciousness. You think your kundalini is asleep, but it can wake up at any moment.”

In explaining about the chakras Bahi Sahib said that the whole of life would not be long enough to open them all. He had even discovered new chakras not mentioned in the scriptures, and because of this discovery he had changed the system of meditation used. But unlike Sufis, Sanyasins (Hindu renunciates) work mainly through the brow chakras: “And there’s not much love in that. The Sufi system uses the heart - such force, such power flows through it that one forgets everything and no effort is needed.”
The suffering of love: In contrast to meditation, the method of tyaga requires great stamina and endurance. Mrs. Tweedie, imbued in the beliefs of Theosophy - that everything can and should be done through the mind, was concerned about losing “awareness” - and also by the need for “complete annihilation in the master”. Bhai Sahib explained that the lower consciousness, ego consciousness, is the type of awareness that she was thinking of, and that type of “personal” consciousness must go. In order to become conscious on all levels of being she would have to go through a period of unconsciousness: “How will we transcend the physical plane otherwise?”

Complete abstraction of the senses and elimination of the thinking process is necessary and that represents a temporary loss of consciousness. Force is necessary in such a case and it may cause doubt and disturbances of many kinds. But, he explained, the suffering only really begins when the disciple begins to love the master and fears separation: “The greatest worry will be when one begins to love the spiritual guide. At the beginning there are no real worries; the teacher wants the disciple to remain but as soon as the disciple loves him, as soon as there are no doubts, the troubles commence for the disciple. He will feel like crying: “Why does the master not notice me, does not speak to me? Is he angry? … And so on.” Bhai Sahib used to sing these plaintive lines about the power of love:

\[
\text{It is not a thoroughfare, there is only one way in;} \\
\text{Once entered, I am helpless, I stay here;} \\
\text{But you who are outside, look out!} \\
\text{Think before entering how painful it is,} \\
\text{Full of sorrow, to walk the lane of love!}
\]

Mrs. Tweedie wondered, “How could he say, as he had again and again, that this is an effortless path?” But he also repeatedly said that surrender must be complete, she must be lost in the master: “If you smell the fragrance of a rose, say how sweetly art thou my Lord! If you taste a sweet thing, say how sweet art thou my Lord! … Thank! Thank! - go and thank him always, for everything; for good things, for difficulties, for everything. That is how you will progress!”

Some explanations and sayings of Bhai Sahib

During her time with Bhai Sahib Mrs. Tweedie made detailed notes on his sayings and his explanations on various spiritual matters. Some of these are summarized here:

Creation and illusion: The world is as you create it; if you say there is a ghost in that tree, then there will be one for you. This is all manas (mind). But what is mind? Nothing. Mind is maya, illusion. In Sufi philosophy there are three mental activities or agents; mind, memory - acting through the mind, and unconsciousness (subconscious), where all the memories of the heart are kept - emotions and so on.

On samadhi (deep meditation): The memory does not work because mind has been suspended, and though memory does not belong to the mind, strictly speaking, for it is a different centre, it still has to work through the mind, and it too is suspended.

The primary locas (worlds): There is the mirt loca on the physical plane, the kama loca of desire which is of the physical body, and the swarga loca - heaven, the world where good deeds done in the physical body reap their rewards. These are the three locas from which one comes back into reincarnation and experiences the effects of karma. In the mirt loca, if we have a master, we can get rid of all desires, for the love of the master is also a loca, a vasana, which will lead you beyond the locas of change.

There are also four other locas in which there is neither birth nor death. According to desire or necessity one goes from one to another in a glorious body of light. So let us say that there are a total of seven locas.

The sheaths of the subtle body: They are annamayakosha - the sheath of the physical body; pranamayakosha - the sheath of etheric energy; manamayakosha - the sheath of the intellect; the gnayakosha - knowledge; and anandameyakosha - the sheath of the soul, bliss. All sheaths have to be removed before final enlightenment is reached.

On different levels of enlightenment: Bhai Sahib said that realizing Atman is one thing. Realizing Brahman is something else. So there are levels of enlightenment - and there is also beyond enlightenment.

Spiritual differences between men and women: Women do not reach the highest state in the same way as men. Men have a substance in the body that women do not have. It makes men absorb the very essence of the master. But men have to control prakriti (primal matter) in themselves, and for this they are given certain practices (holding breath or inward breathing, ghat pranayam, and singing certain sentences in a certain way to take the sexual power to the crown chakra. Women, because they are nearer to prakriti, are fertilized by that divine energy which they retain in the chakras and, because of this, very few practices are needed. Women are taken up through the path of love, for love is a feminine mystery. Viriya shakti is the creative energy of God. On the lowest plane it appears as seminal fluid in men, in women it is preserved in the chakras. Bhai Sahib explained that he sometimes gave certain practices only to men (to the chagrin of Mrs. Tweedie), but for women it is only necessary to get rid of a greater attachment to maya; material things like children, possessions, security.

Bodies, in general, are different - they need different kinds of nourishment; some need laughter, some need solitude.

On depression: “It is snakalpa-vikalpa, projections, distractions of the mind, restlessness of thought. The mind is bad and nothing has ever been solved by the mind… Depression is always the mind… It will come again and again, until
the mind merges somewhere… Mental sufferings come to those who are “dwellers on the threshold”. Bear them; they create the friction necessary to cause suffering which will defeat the mind.”

**Karma has to be burned up :** You have to suffer injustice, be attacked, it will hurt. When you are on the path earnestly, seriously, your karmas are taken away from you in dreams… Either you have to suffer them in your physical life, or they will come to you in dreams. One second of dream suffering is like three years of real suffering in life. When you are on the path you are speeded up, and you pay for it in your dreams. If you stay away from the path, once decided, all karmas you will pay for in full in your daily life. But once on the path, the grace of God reaches you, and the mental karma will go away in dreams. Emotional sufferings are cleared up by the suffering that love causes, but physical karmas one has to suffer in the physical body… *Ahimsa* is not to injure others or your own feelings. Your own are injured by creating habits. So if you can’t follow your habit your feelings are injured by your created habit.

**On altercations :** If someone speaks ill of you, give him the place of honour in your courtyard - for he will be the cause of you being able to better yourself. A Persian song says: “A friend will not tell you the truth but an enemy will. And you will be thankful that you have a master so that you can bear the cutting remarks and become better.”

**On miracles (addressing Mrs. Tweedie on her sadhana) :** True miracles are the changes that take place on the path: “Have you still the courage to speak of miracles? - The mind is not there at all, or you don’t sleep but are not tired, while in the master’s presence your thinking process is slowed down so much that you ‘sleep’; there is a peace not of this world which you cannot explain, or a longing so strong that life is not worth living - upheavals, premonitions occur. Tell me, are these not miracles? Great and important miracles?“ His voice was soft and gentle as if full of deep compassion. Mrs. Tweedie lowered her eyes and felt small. “Smaller than a grain of sand”.

**Relationship to the master :** He said, “One does not need to be acquainted with the teacher personally. Many of my disciples have never seen me. They get the same as everyone else. But in attending the satsang of the master, one gets the chance of becoming the master, because the body is included. The body gets used to the vibrations and is quickened as well; but not everybody needs to be a master.”

**Some sayings**

Put all your doubts and worries into cold storage and leave them there… Do not ask questions any more. Only the will of the Beloved matters. The lover is a dead thing in the hands of the Beloved. Love cannot be more or less for the teacher. For him the very beginning and the end are the same. For the disciple, of course, it is different, he has to complete the whole cycle. It takes time to make a soul pregnant with God. Some disciples have been practicing meditation for 40 years but still full of mind. The goal of every type of Yoga is to lead a guided life… That is why we insist on surrender. The master must be strict, he has to be hard, because he wants the disciple to reach a high state. You prove to an atheist the existence of God by letting him experience it. In our system we live in the world, have worries about money, family, and the like. How can you progress without worries? If you are worried you make an effort, you make a leap. Service is an attitude of the heart. Never think you did something great, something special. Think you did your duty. Don’t lie down after eating, walk and meditate: Try to meditate while falling asleep.

**Mrs. Tweedie**

Mrs. Tweedie’s remarkable book *Chasm of Fire* has entranced readers interested in esoteric and spiritual matters for two generations. Some of her experiences with her master, Bahi Sahib, are summarized here.

She felt his power from the first encounter: She became aware of a great energy in the room so that she could scarcely breathe, and felt a great disturbance in the throat and in the heart - and the force in the room seemed to become greater and deeper, increasing all the time. She had the perception that the “mind” was hardly present at all. She began to feel a sleep which she described as great peace: “The seemingly eternal stillness”.

Sometimes she had a feeling of great loneliness… “Dark, eternal longing”, and she would also experience palpitations. Bahi Sahib explained that these were due to: “A restless mind and fearful imagination”. He said: “There are two hearts; the physical and the non-physical - when the latter is activated the other is bound to be affected.” Then he explained that the master controlled the heart of the disciple, and could make it race or be still. It was at this point that Mrs. Tweedie felt that she had become “bound” - perhaps unwillingly, and should break the association. But he explained: “It is your lower self that feels this. The Higher Self prevents you from leaving, who is telling you to stay.”

At other times a strange sweetness pervaded her heart: “Subtle - like the beginning of falling in love”, and at other times there was: “Peace, like a deep still pool, full of silence.” She began to experience an intense longing like a burning fire inside her heart; and it was the longing for God. Sometimes she had great energy, physical restlessness with no tiredness at all, and restless nights crammed with dreams - once she woke with a sentence repeating itself over and over in her mind: “There is no other way to go.” At some point her mind, the thinking process, seemed to be slowing down: “Sometimes there was a space between seeing something and the cognisance of it.”

Then she felt: “How easy is prayer now! The mind is still, transparent, as though paralysed, and the heart flies
away like a trembling bird.” Sleep was full of colourful dreams that are forgotten immediately, but he, the master, was always present, as if he were part of her dream life. She lost interest in everything material but felt much peace when looking at things - the trees, the flowers, the lovely transparent sky. And she had moments when thought was completely suspended in nothingness; “just looking, just feeling”.

Once she had an experience of a blue flame: It slipped itself into her heart and she looked at it with wonder - “It was still, small, a light-blue flame trembling softly, and it had the infinite sweetness of first love, like an offering of flowers made with gentle hands, the heart full of stillness and wonder and peace.”

Mrs. Tweedie had many enlightening experiences but Bhai Sahib said to her, that on the Path of Fire she will also encounter many difficulties - she will: “Suffer injustice and be hurt where it hurts most, where you are most afraid of being hurt.” She remembered the master’s words: “Love will be produced.” She had just begun to appreciate her relationship with the master when the dismantling of the ego began. From her account it was clear that, in the beginning, Mrs. Tweedie was very disapproving of some of the Indians around Bhai Sahib. She was told to change her attitude - not to criticize her superiors. Although she had been having marvelous spiritual experiences, she was still very self centred and complained a lot. It was apparent that Mrs. Tweedie was riding for a fall. One day, in the compound, Bhai Sahib suddenly turned to her.

He was full of fun and sparkle and he said: “Supposing there are four doors leading into the spiritual life: one of gambling, one of drink, one of theft, and one of sex. And supposing you are told that you have to pass through one of them in order to reach spirituality - what would you do? Tell me, if it is only through these doors that you can reach God?” Mrs. Tweedie considered the doors of gambling, drink and theft, and then faltered. There were many smirking Indians, mostly men, listening to every word. Then Bhai Sahib said: “And if it is the door of sex - what then?” There was a mischievous twinkle in his eyes and the hint of a smile. She said, “Well I suppose I would have to do that too.”

That evening when she was in bed, without warning, the elderly woman and Theosophical renunciate, was “flooded by a powerful sexual desire.” She went cold with terror; this was not just desire but was a madness in the lowest animal form. Then she detected strange shapes moving about, hideous animal-like creatures, leering and obscene and all coupled in sexual intercourse. She did not even know that such practices were possible - with dogs, men, women and horses. She felt that she was going mad and cold terror gripped her mind. A black depression slowly overcame her.

Back at the master’s compound she went up to him and fell in the dust at his feet, clasping them with both hands, and pressed her forehead into the dusty soil. He asked quietly of her: “Is there fire without smoke?” She said “no”… “And what is smoke?” She said it was the impurities which are expelled because they cannot be consumed by the fire. “Correct” - he nodded briefly. Later he explained that what had happened was not caused by him. It was part of her own psyche: “Souls are very old - there is so much there that needs to be uncovered and expelled.”

On the following night she realized that this particular trial was over. She woke up with the remembrance of a vivid picture of her master. As her mind cleared she realized that her body appeared to be singing - and resting in him, in a deep pool of peace and tranquility. She tried to grasp what was happening and she contemplated: “Was this the feeling of the perfect love of surrender?” Whatever it was it became a turning point for Mrs. Tweedie. She knew that the mind was really slowing down: “The world became silly, devoid of meaning.”

But she continued to vacillate between having marvelous experiences, feeling depressed and rejected, and asking unanswerable questions. On one day she would feel “loneliness and depression” and a few days later: “great stillness. A kind of inner security.” When she asked about depression, Bhai Sahib explained that it was always the mind; mental sufferers are dwellers on the threshold - just bear the depression... “You must understand that you have to change completely. Everyone says, ‘my’ character, ‘my’ intelligence; everybody desires self-expression, to assert his individuality. You, for instance, have been successful in the world. Your will, your character, still runs after the worldly concepts, as you were used to doing for many years... Now it must be changed.”

Mrs. Tweedie was sent to England, for a period of “teaching”. She was at first absolutely distraught. But she adjusted to it and saw it as part of the process. Then she returned, after two and a half years, to India on the master’s instructions. She felt that she had acquired a measure of liberation, but there was still more training to come. Although she felt that she was gaining control over the mind, she saw, as the master had explained, that between her and her spiritual practice there was still a veil, a barrier, caused by the flood of ideas that still brought confusion into the mind. He said that it was due to her turning away from the guide - there was no current, no flow. It was due to desires of the mind and of the body. But, he intimated to her, the worst was passing: “Hard times, in one way or another, are passing away.”

Then she began to experience the deepest peace and a feeling of nothingness before him which represented unsurpassed happiness. She wrote, “Lately it becomes increasingly lovely. Deep happiness welling up from within.” And Bhai Sahib said, “There is nothing now but nothingness.”

Six days after this exchange Bhai Sahib, who had been ill for some time, left his body. Mrs. Tweedie went to live in an ashram in the Himalayas for a time and then returned to England where she held meditation meetings until her retirement in 1991.

Practicalities

Finding links to Sufi orders in India would require a personal search. An organization which represents the Golden Sufis in the USA and has meditation groups in Germany, Switzerland, England, South Africa and Australia is: The Golden Sufi Centre, Inverness, CA 94937-0427, USA. It publishes Mrs. Tweedie’s book Daughter of Fire and books entitled Working with Oneness and The Signs of God by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee.
Chapter 12

PAPAJI (H. W. L. POONJA)

Surrender to that Source through Whom you speak; and plunge into eternity.

Papaji was a renowned Advaita teacher of recent times who was born in 1910 and died in 1997. His teaching, until his recent death, was centered on Self-inquiry as expounded by Ramana Maharshi - the finding of one’s identity with the true Self. He taught without formality and had many Western visitors. As indicated in Chapter 4, after years of following various gurus and getting nowhere, he become enlightened as a result of his contact with the great master Ramana Maharshi. It is said that Ramana divided seekers into three categories: Those who only need to hear the Truth from an enlightened master once to realize the Self; those who need to contemplate for some time before knowledge of the Self comes to them; and those, the majority, who have to undergo a long preparation before they are ready to experience Reality. Papaji seemed to have been one of the former. Much of the information on Papaji’s early life, up to the stage of his enlightenment, is recorded by David Goodman in a sub-section of the book Papaji, Interviews and Reflections, entitled H. L. W. Poonja - see Bibliography.

Early days

Papaji came from a devout Hindu family and his mother was a sincere worshiper of Krishna. At the age of eight he had an experience which he later came to know was an experience of enlightenment. He was so consumed by this experience that it left him immobile, and for two full days, in a peaceful, blissful and happy state, unable to communicate with anyone, but aware of all the things going on around him.

Subsequently, while growing up, he followed his mother’s example in becoming a Krishna devotee and was particularly attracted to a picture of the child Krishna. He became an intense bhakta of the juvenile form of Lord Krishna. As a result of this, visions of Krishna began to appear to him. He lost interest in schoolwork and also lost sight of his earlier experience of realization. But nevertheless, from this early experience, he retained an intense desire to search for God.

His next major spiritual experience occurred when he was about thirteen, when he came across a picture of the Buddha. He writes: “I immediately felt an attraction for him, even though I didn’t know any of his teachings... I simply fell in love with the beautiful face and decided that I should try to emulate him. I didn’t even know what meditation was… but undeterred, I began to sit in a cross legged position in our garden.” For some time after this, somewhat to the consternation of his family and the neighbours, he emulated other activities of the Buddha - such as begging and preaching sermons.

His next unusual experience was when he went into deep samadhi meditation - to the point where a doctor was called. He could not be aroused although he was aware of what was going on. He began to utter strange words which mystified everyone, until a local pundit recognized them as portions of the Yajur Veda spoken in Sanskrit. On another occasion, while at school, he passed into immobility after hearing the words Om Shanti Shanti (Om Peace Peace) recited at the school assembly.

His search for enlightenment

As a result of all this spiritual activity his school work suffered and his marks were not high enough to continue on to tertiary education. Instead, for a time, he joined the Indian army and eventually became an officer. But then his desire to “find God” re-asserted itself and he began a concerted effort to find a spiritual master to help him in this endeavour. He felt that such a master would necessarily have seen God himself, and that he should have the ability to pass this experience on to others. He was still, at that time (around 1947), a sincere worshipper of Krishna but there was a problem; Krishna was not always present, and nor could he be called upon at will.

He began to tour India visiting almost every well-known ashram and guru in the country. These included Swami Sivananda, Tapovan Swami, two of the Shankaracharyas (current representatives of the sage Shankara), Swami Kailasananda of the Ramakrishna Order, and many lesser-known individuals. Of this period he wrote: “At each place I stopped I asked the same question: Have you seen God? Can you show me God? All of them responded in much the same way. They tried to give me a mantra, or they tried to make me meditate. All of them made a point of saying that God could not be produced like a rabbit out of a conjurer’s hat, and that if I wanted to see him I would have to undergo years of strenuous sadhana.”
At the conclusion of the words he looked at me, and as he gazed into my eyes, my whole body began to tremble and shake. Within me I became aware of the spiritual Heart. This is not the physical heart; it is, instead, the source and support of all that exists. Within the Heart I saw or felt something like a closed bud. It was very shining and bluish. With the Maharishi looking at me, and with myself in a state of utter silence, I felt this bud open and bloom. I use the word 'bud' but this is not an exact description. It would be more correct to say something that felt bud-like opened and bloomed within me in the Heart. And when I say Heart I don’t mean that the flowering was located in a particular place in the body. This heart, this Heart of my Heart, was neither inside the body nor out of it. I can’t give a more exact description of what happened than that. All I can say is that in the Maharshi’s presence, and under his gaze, the Heart opened and bloomed. It was an extraordinary experience, one that I had never had before.”

Nevertheless, Papaji’s inclination to look for God outside of himself still persisted. He formed the opinion that the Maharshi and his followers were a lazy bunch because they mostly just sat around all day. The Maharshi hardly said anything nor gave talks about God, and he didn’t appear to be chanting God’s name - he was just sitting there doing nothing. Papaji moved out of the ashram and engaged in playing with his visionary Krishna again - who at that time appeared to him quite frequently.

But after a few days he was drawn back to the ashram again and the Maharshi gave him a clue to what was going on. He inquired about the visitations from Krishna and asked, “Do you see him now?” Papaji replied that he did not at that actual moment see Krishna but that he appeared quite often. He recounts that there was a distinct element of ego in this assertion. Then the Maharshi continued, “So Krishna comes and plays with you and than he disappears; what is the use of a God who appears and disappears? If he is a real God he must be with you all the time.”

Papaji had been feeling quite smug at having visions from Krishna, which the Maharshi obviously did not, but he experienced a deflation of ego at this last remark. After this he left the ashram and returned to his home in Madras. Here he resolved to intensify his worship of Krishna, mostly through the repetition of the divine name and by attempting to repeat it 50,000 times a day - synchronizing the name with each breath. Then, after some time, he received a celestial visitation of the deities Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman. They explained that they were visiting him because he was such an ardent bhakta of Krishna. However, after this visit, he began to find great difficulty in repetition of Krishna’s name. He went to the Ramakrishna Mission in Madras and was told that this sometimes happened. It was what the Christians called ‘the dark night of the soul’ - he should continue to try and also attend the regular satsangs held at the Mission. But for some reason he didn’t find this advice very satisfactory and his thoughts turned once more to Ramana Maharshi.

Shortly he returned to the Maharshi’s ashram and managed to secure a private audience. He explained that for twenty five years he had been repeating the name of Krishna, but now, “My mind refuses to engage in thoughts of God. What has happened to me and what should I do?” The following conversation ensued:

The Maharshi replied by asking, ‘How did you come here from Madras?’ I didn’t see the point but I politely told him, by train. ‘And what happened when you got off the train at Tiruvannamalai?’ ‘Well I engaged a bullock cart to take me to the ashram.’ ‘And when you reached the ashram, what happened to the cart?’ ‘It went away, presumably back to the town.”

The Maharshi then explained what he was getting at: The train brought him to Tiruvannamalai and then he got off because he didn’t need it any more. Then the same thing happened with the bullock cart - it was needed only for the journey to the ashram. And that was what had happened with his sadhana, it had brought him to his spiritual destination. He didn’t abandon his sadhana; it had abandoned him, because he didn’t need it any more. Then the Maharshi gazed steadily at him again. Papaji described this experience, which was to be his enlightenment, thus:

“I could feel my whole body and mind being washed with waves of purity. They were being purified by his silent gaze. I could feel him looking intently into my Heart. Under that spell-binding gaze I felt every atom of my body being purified... A process of transformation was going on - the old body was dying atom by atom, and a new body was being created in its place. Then, suddenly, I understood. I knew what this man who had spoken to me was, in reality, what I also was, what I had always been. There was a sudden impact of recognition as I became aware of the Self... I knew unerringly, that this was the same state of peace and happiness that I had been immersed in as an eight-year-old boy... I cannot describe exactly what the experience was or is because the books are right when they say that words cannot convey it... The source of that knowledge will always remain indescribable.”
Papaji had spent a quarter of a century in obsessive searching for God and had at last found God within as his own Self. He maintains that many people have temporary glimpses of the Self, as had happened to him when he was eight years old. And this happens to man in the presence of a realized master. But, he said, to maintain and make permanent the experience one must develop a consuming desire to want God: “A single thought or desire other than the thought ‘I want God’ or ‘I want Self realization’, is enough to prevent the realization from taking place.”

In the first few months after his realization, Papaji didn’t have a single thought. He explained, “I could go to the office and perform my duties without ever having a thought in my head… Whether I was sitting in the hall with the Maharshi, … or shopping in town, everything I did was performed without any mental activity at all. There was an ocean of inner silence that never gave rise to even a ripple of thought. It did not take me long to realize that mind and thoughts are not necessary to function in the world. When one abides in the Self, some divine power takes charge of one’s life. All actions take place spontaneously, and are performed very efficiently, without any mental effort or activity whatsoever.”

Subsequent to his realization he came to know that in his previous life he had been a yogi in South India. He had been a great Krishna bhakta who had frequently reached the state of nirvikalpa samadhi (a high state of meditative consciousness), but had not attained enlightenment.

**His knowledge of other enlightened beings**

Papaji maintained that, in all his travels to ashrams and meetings with yogis and gurus, up to the beginning of his wanderings in 1966 (see below), he had seldom met a truly enlightened master. He sites this as an indication that the state of total enlightenment among gurus is quite rare. Apart from the Maharshi, he claimed to have met only two other men who had, in his opinion, attained full and complete Self-realization. A Muslim pir (priest of a Sufi order) was one. The other was an unknown forest sadhu whom he met in Karnataka. Of this encounter he said:

“I was waiting for a bus in an isolated location near Krishnagiri, a town located between Tiruvannamalai and Bangalore. An extremely disreputable looking man approached me. He had tattered filthy clothes and open wounds on his legs... We talked for a while and I offered to treat his wounds but he wasn’t interested in having assistance from me... He just said ‘Leave the maggots to their destiny’ and then said ‘good-bye’ and walked off into a nearby forest. I had recognized him to be a jnani and was idly speculating on what karma had led him to neglect his body in such a way, when a woman approached me. ‘You are a very lucky man,’ she said, ‘that was a great mahatma. He lives in this forest but he almost never shows himself. People come from Bangalore to have his darshan, but he never allows anyone to find him unless he wants to meet them’.”

Of the Muslim Pir, Papaji makes the point that when he stayed at his house in Madras, he kept himself locked up and refused to see visitors who wanted to see him. And these two encounters: “reflect great credit on the Maharshi, for only the Maharshi made himself available to any who wished to see him.”

**His later life**

After his enlightenment in 1944 until 1966 when his family was grown and the children married, Papaji led the life of a householder. In 1947, just before independence and the partitioning of India and Pakistan, there were frequent conflicts between Muslims and Hindus fleeing the areas to be partitioned. There were many cases of the robbing and killing of the fleeing refugees. At this time Papaji’s parents were still in Lahore, an area about to become part of Pakistan, and were in danger. He did not want to leave Madras but the Maharshi persuaded him, and somehow he knew that this was to be the last time they would be together. The Maharshi also told him where to sit in the train - in a Muslim carriage. As a result of this, and in spite of the fact that he wore all the marks of being a Hindu, he escaped being massacred and also brought thirty-five members of his family and extended family to the safety of Lucknow. For the next twenty years he held many jobs in many parts of India; one for several years as the manager of a mine in the deep jungle of South India.

In 1966 he retired from family life and became a wanderer. He traveled to all parts of India and met many great beings, including Krishnamurti and the great yogi Nisargadatta, - see Chapters 5 and 15. During this phase of his life he never settled anywhere. At one stage he became involved with ‘hippies’ from the West and, at the invitation of some, visited Australia, South America, Europe and the USA; but at no time would he consider setting up an ashram.

That was until the early 1990’s when failing health forced him to return to Lucknow. Here he would meet small groups of seekers in his family home; and later, when the numbers swelled, in a hired house nearby - see Practicalities further on. This period can be considered the one in which he gave regular teachings, chiefly by following the methods of Self inquiry. His followers were mostly Westerners and included many of the Osho Rejneesh community looking for quick fix enlightenment. He would always turn the attention of his visitors inward while fielding question both genuine and ridiculous, such as, “I like to have sex with many women - is this OK?” Some of his teachings are given below.

**Some Teachings**

In recent times and until his death, thousands of people have sought Papaji in their search for enlightenment. He was known for his quick wit and sometimes bluntness of approach in discourses. In all cases, when fielding questions, he would guide the questioner back to the ultimate query: “Who is asking this question?” When asked by an interviewer if he could explain his teachings in a single sentence he said, in true jnani manner: “No teaching, no teacher, no student.” When the interviewer said, “Then why am I here?” He replied, “To find out who you are.” In the same taciturn style, when asked what kind of shrine he would like to commemorate his teachings and his life, he said, “Not one brick.”
Like other great masters he would say that we are all already liberated - but we just don’t know it:

“You are already here and you are already free. You think or have a notion that you have to search for something, to meditate. You have been told this many times. Now just for a short while, sit quietly and do not activate a single thought. You will discover that what you were searching for through many methods or sadhanas was already there. It was what was prompting you to meditate. The desire for freedom arises from freedom itself. Most meditation is only mind working on mind. - You are somewhere where the mind can’t trespass.”

He would explain that our true nature is unbounded, unlimited Consciousness. We simply need to realize the fact. We do not need to practice anything to become what we already are. Going within means listening to your own guru - and your own guru, is your own Self. A true external guru will not ask you to do things; he will introduce you to your inner guru, and ask you to keep quiet. In an interview with Catherine Ingram, published in Papaji: Interviews and Reflections, he expounded many of the views that illustrate his teaching method. Some fragments are summarized as follow:

**Surrender:** The persistent inquiry on the Self does require surrender. Surrender to what? He would say:

“Surrender to that Source through Whom you speak, through which you see, through which you breathe, through which you taste and touch, through which this earth revolves and the sun shines, through which we ask this question itself. Everything happens through that consciousness in which even ‘emptiness’ is housed - but which is beyond the concepts of eternity or emptiness or space - which accommodates the space or emptiness or eternity, within which everything is existing, unborn and undying. To That supreme power which is beyond the beyond - Your own Self - to that you have to surrender.”

**Duality:** In Self inquiry, getting rid of notions that we are separate from anything is necessary, and this includes identifying with all names and forms. He said:

“You have to disidentify with things which are not true. No need to identify with the ocean of the Source because you are the Source. When your identification with the unreal has vanished, then you will be what you have always been, what you are, and what you will be… I don’t indulge in any kind of differences. The divine is playing. Whatever it is doing, it is being done by the commands of that supreme Source. All are my own Self - having different roles to play, and they are being beautifully played.”

**Mind:** Papaji often talked about the nature of mind and thoughts and of the central nature of the ‘I’ thought. On this he would say:

“Mind is thought existing as subjects and objects. The first wave of consciousness is ‘I’; then ‘I am’, then ‘I am this, I am that’, and ‘this belongs to me.’ Here the mind begins. Now keep quiet, and do not allow any desire to arise from the Source. Just for an instant of time don’t give rise to any desire. You will find that you have no-mind and you will see that you are somewhere indescribable, in tremendous happiness. And then you will see who you really are.”

**Ego:** He explained that ego also arises from the ‘I’. “The ‘I’ arises, then mind, then senses - seeing, smelling, tasting, hearing, touching. There must be ‘I’ before ego arises. This notion of ‘I’ is the root cause of the ego, the mind, manifestation, happiness, and unhappiness, in fact samsara - the stuff of the world. Now return to ‘I’ and question what this ‘I’ is, what is it? Where does it come from? - this is the essence of Self inquiry.”

“Just jump in without sense of doership. You have only to be watchful, - vigilant, attentive, serious. No doing, no thinking, no notions, no intentions - leave everything aside, simply keep quiet and wait for the result. You will have broken at least this process of ego, mind, senses and manifestation.”

**Spiritual Practices:** Practices, such as the Buddhist practice of awareness - vipasana, are, according to Papaji, something different from Self inquiry, because any ‘practice’ has an objective - something to be gained. We should find that through which we practice anything:

“What is that through which we practice? Through what do we derive the energy to put anything into practice? If you want to go somewhere, you have to walk, so there must be some energy. People are doing practices for freedom. If you want freedom then find out what is the bondage. Sit down calmly, patiently, and question - How am I bound? What binds you except these notions, concepts, perceptions? Forget about all these things - instantly. Now who is seeking freedom? The seeker himself is not yet tackled. There is a saying, - What you are looking for is what is doing the seeking.”

**Thoughts:** Quelling thoughts is very difficult and of the nature of a tug of war. This is not the best way to deal with them. He said:

“So long as you are powerful and you are checking, they are not there. When you don’t check the thoughts quickly come back again. So don’t worry about thoughts. Let them come and play with you as the waves play with the ocean. When the waves disturb the tranquility of the ocean, it doesn’t mind. Let the thoughts arise, but don’t allow them a landing place.

“So much emphasis is placed on getting rid of thoughts, as though a mind without thoughts is tantamount to an awakened state. - No, no, no. Let the thoughts come. If you reject them they will forcibly invade through your door. So remove the door.

“This door is ‘I am different from consciousness.’ Let us not fight anything. Let us be one. You will see your own face in everything. You can speak to plants. You can speak to rocks, and you are the hardness of rock itself. You are the twittering of birds. You have to see: You are the shining of the stars.”

**Afterlife:** Papaji was not interested in speculation on an afterlife He said, “This experience I speak about is here and now. What is not here and now in not worth attempting or attaining. To enjoy this here and now is to get rid of notions that you are not here and now. The Truth must be simple, no complications, falsehood. Where there is two there is fear, and there is falsehood.”
Life is a dream: On the question of the reality of life, he said: “Life has been referred to as a dream because it is not permanent. The great sages don’t differentiate between the waking state and the dream state. In a dream you are seeing mountains, rivers and trees which appear real. It is only when you wake up that you say, ‘I had a dream’, and see that those things were transitory... Our waking state seems permanent when compared to the dream, but, like the dream, when we wake up to consciousness itself, this so-called waking state also appears to be a dream.”

On Compassion and Service: He said, “When we know the supreme state, our own Self, from within there arises compassion. Automatically we are compelled. It is not the same as service, doing things. Service has to do with somebody else. When the command is compassion, there is no one doing any service for anybody else, as when you are hungry you eat. You are not in service to the stomach, nor are the hands the servant when they are putting food into the mouth. Like this we should live in the world. Service is the responsibility of the Self. Otherwise who is doing the service? When the action is coming from the ego, there is hypocrisy, jealousy, crisis. When the doer is not there, then compassion arises. If a person is realized then all his actions are beautiful.”

Desires: When asked about the view of some teachers that one should work out desires by indulging them to completion, he replied: “I don’t think that to extinguish a fire, you go on pouring gasoline on it. This is to continue the desire with the wrong desire. It will not end the desires. The best way is to know what is real. Once you know what is real and what is not real, then you will stand with absolutely one weapon in hand and that is discrimination between the unreal and the real - the desire to be free. When you have this desire it merges with freedom itself.”

Mental suffering and the past: “Mental suffering denotes that you are digging in the graveyard of the past. Without touching the past, tell me who is unhappy? If you are living in the present, you are happy. In between the past and the future, who are you? You are bliss; I don’t even call it love. When you utter the word ‘love’, if you carefully watch, you see it taking you to some previous objective experience to translate this love into the past. As far as my experience goes it is not even love. It is something - a fullness as when there are no waves in the middle of the ocean.”

On Love: He said, “The word ‘love’ is misused. I could believe in love if there is no lover and no beloved. No subject and no object. This is true love. It is not from any individual towards something else. The silence is itself surrendering to the Source. Every moment; and every moment one is going beyond and beyond.”

On gurus: Papaji’s views on the guru is that he or she must be someone who knows the Truth, actually knows the Truth, and can impart it to others who need help, This is a guru. And the guru then removes ignorance: “The darkness of ‘I am the body’, ‘I am the mind’, ‘I am the senses’, and ‘I am the objects and manifestation’.” Consequently, it seems that, as with Ramana Maharshi, most of his real teachings were of the ‘silent type’; because most of the effective teaching took place not by listening to dialogues, but by just sitting in his presence. At the present time and since his death, seekers still report that his presence can be felt in the satsang hall and in his home, both of which are open daily for ‘meditation’.

Practicalities

Poonjaji died as recently as 1997 and there is still a strong ‘sangha’ associated with his place of residence. Long-term devotees have established a centre in a large suburban house in Luknow, not far from Poonjaji’s former residence. It has been named Satsang Bhavan and videotapes of Poonjaji’s satsangs are screened daily from about 10 a.m. to noon and 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.

There is a vegetarian restaurant at the house called “Papaji Restaurant” but no accommodation is available. However, there are guest houses nearby and information on these can be obtained from Satsang Bhavan. Meals are charged for at reasonable rates and donations are accepted at the centre to cover running expenses. Contact details are as follow:
Satsang Bhavan, A 306 Indra Nagar, Lucknow 226016, Uttar Pradesh, India. Tel. (Internat.) +91 522 381189 (local) 0522 38119. Fax. (Internat.) +91 522 388578 (local) 0522 388578. Books and videotapes are available from Satsang Bhavan - see also the books Papaji: Interviews, and the three volume biography of Papaji by David Godman, both published by the Avadhuta Foundation. Website: www.papaji.com

Chapter 13

THE DALAI LAMA - TIBETAN BUDDHISM

As a Buddhist, I view death as a normal process, a reality that I accept will occur as long as I remain in this earthly existence... I see no point in worrying about it. I tend to think of death as being like changing your clothes when they are old and worn out, rather than some final end. (From The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying.)

Background
Tibetan Buddhism recognizes the need for enlightened masters to assist man in spiritual progress. In the Mahayana schools of Buddhism such beings are called Bodhisattvas, and they are supposed to be individuals who have reached the penultimate state of individual enlightenment but choose to reincarnate, sometimes many times, to help man and the entire universe along the path. The Lamas of Tibet are considered to be such beings and among them the Dalai Lama is the best known.

Buddhism in Tibet developed as a result of a synthesis of Buddhist and Tantra philosophies. It first reached Tibet in the seventh century and became strongly established by the end of the eighth century. The first monks were ordained by the Tantra master Padmasambhava who was said to have extraordinary powers. Buddhism in Tibet then declined in the mid ninth century until its revival and firm establishment in the eleventh century - with the arrival of the Indian master Atisa, who emphasized the importance of monastic discipline and the direct transmission of doctrine from master to disciple. During this period the monks of the famous Sa-skya monastery of the ‘yellow hats’, with the assistance of a Mongol warlord Gu-shri Khan, overcame rival sects and rose to prominence. They established the order of Dalai Lamas - the leaders of an order that is based strongly on the belief in reincarnated abbots who are given the honorific title of Lama. They acquired the territory of western Tibet as a ‘religious gift’, and until the communist occupation, the successive Dalai Lamas (of the sect of Dge-lugs-pa) have been the political and religious leaders in that territory - see Buddhist Spirituality (1994) Ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori. The lamas are all considered to be reincarnations of Chenrezi - the Buddha of Mercy.

Over the same period the heads of the Tashilhunpo monastery to the West of Lhasa became known as the Panchen Lamas. They were without political power and were considered to be purely spiritual rulers and are reincarnations of the Amitabha Buddha.

The Dge-lugs-pa is a reformist sect that arose to counter a general decline in monastic discipline and morals, and deviations in the interpretation of the Tantras. It places emphasis on a process of mental purification through dogmatics and logic, and conclusions arrived at by debate between competing groups of monks. The path to enlightenment is known as the ‘Great Gradual Path’. It is represented by an ascending through ten spiritual levels to states of quiescence, enhanced vision and Buddhahood. In the early stages the sacred scriptures are learnt by heart under the guidance of teachers, but there is also an additional Tantric element known as The Great Gradual Tantric Path, which is open to those students who have already mastered theoretical learning.

Some forms of Tibetan Buddhism particularly, and all generally, stress the direct transmission of esoteric teaching from master to disciple and are concerned with the interpretation of dreams, and with a state of existence between life and death during transition from one existence to another (the Bardo state), of which the Dalai Lama speaks - see further on.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that there will be a thousand incarnations of supreme and perfect Buddhas in the present cosmic age. This wonderfully liberal idea means that each incarnation will apply teachings and establish doctrines appropriate to existing conditions and the stage of development of man in general, and of certain groups of men in particular. Although excessive zeal for liberalization, especially in regard to celibacy and easy living, may mark some Buddhist schools, it is this flexibility that seems to be a major impetus for the popularity of Tibetan Buddhism in Western eyes.

The Dalai Lama

There is an opinion among many Westerners that the Dalai Lama is principally a political figure and a campaigner for the ‘freedom’ of Tibet from the Chinese; but to Tibetans and to all Buddhists he is truly a Bodhisattva and an enlightened being. The guru researcher, Surjan Uban Singh, in his book The Gurus of India, described a meeting with him shortly after he arrived in India. He writes that, notwithstanding the political stance that is associated with him, the Dalai Lama is a man of peace. He exudes peace at all times and is almost always smiling - a charming smile which says: “I understand everything - these are children’s pranks. They will understand in the course of time and all will be well.” He laughs at even small matters and his laughter is bewitchingly honest and directly from the heart. Uban Singh felt that every word the Dalai Lama spoke came from the soul, “For it was a soul, a very high soul, who was speaking.”

The system of reincarnation of abbots was not an invention of the Dge-lugs-pa, but had its origins in the Indian theory of high yogis having the power to control their destiny and to be reborn wherever they wished. This ability is believed to go back to the Buddha’s order of monks, the original Sangha.

The lamas of Tibet (not just the Dalai and Panchen Lamas) are thoroughly tested before being accepted as reincarnations of particular individuals. The principle indicators are the occurrence of visions, dreams, unusual events and other signs, by lamas, monks and oracles, and by testing the knowledge of the aspirants (who are always small children) - on details of the former Lama’s life.

Usually the particular signs that are taken into account in locating candidates are more than one or even several. The present Dalai Lama is the fourteenth in the present lineage. His whereabouts were discovered when he was two years old in the Amdo region of Tibet, three years after the thirteenth Dalai Lama had died in 1933. Uban Singh described the events leading to the discovery:

“The search for the fourteenth Dalai Lama began according to the old custom, by consulting the oracles and learned lamas. Curious cloud formations northeast of Lhasa were one sign pointing towards the birthplace of the incarnation. Then the dead body of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, which had been placed on his throne facing south, had in a few days changed its position so that the face had turned to the east, another indication of the direction to look.
The Regent, a renowned lama, then went to the sacred lake of Lahmoi Latso of Chokhargyal, about ninety miles southeast of Lhasa. In this lake, pious lamas can see visions of the future, which take the shape of letters as well as pictures of events and places. After several days of prayers, the Regent saw a vision of letters Ah, Ka, Ma followed by a picture of a monastery with jade-green roofs and a house with turquoise tiles. A party of lamas went to Kumbum Monastery in the Amdo area and recognized the roofs seen in the vision. They also recognized the turquoise tiles on the roof of a farmer’s house in the village of Taktser close by and learnt that the farmer had a two year old son. The real leader of the party, Lama Kewsang Rinpoche of the Sera Monastery, then dressed as a servant and went to the servant’s quarters of the farmer’s house while a junior official, disguised in good clothes, posed as the leader. The infant boy went straight to the real leader, told him his real name and removed from around his neck the rosary which had belonged to the thirteenth Dalai Lama. He further identified and named the other members of the party.

More tests were carried out in which two identical black rosaries were offered to the boy who unhesitatingly picked up the one belonging to the thirteenth Dalai Lama. The boy also recognized the drum and the stick of his predecessor. It was later learnt that the thirteenth Dalai Lama had halted in this area and appreciated the farmer’s house, saying it was beautiful.

The boy was proclaimed the present Dalai Lama in 1937 and he ruled that region of Tibet until the time of the Chinese military action. He fled to India in 1956.

Some Teachings

The whole of Buddhist teaching emphasizes the disciplining and reorganization of the mind. As indicated before, the teachings of the Dge-lugs-pa are divided into two parts: ‘The Great Gradual path’ and ‘The Great Gradual Tantric path’. In his book The Heart of the Buddha’s Path, the Dalai Lama expounds the essential aspects of the teachings and some of them are summarized here:

On general behaviour: Concerning general behaviour in life, the Dalai Lama points out that there are positive and negative aspects which distinguish different states of ego. For instance compare a loving, caring smile with sarcastic smiles or ‘diplomatic’ smiles, the latter only create grievance and suspicion. Similarly, the following mental factors are quite similar but have very different aspects: self-confidence and conceit; humility and lack of confidence; loving kindness and attachment; desire for oneself and desire for everyone. In Buddhism there is a good example of the latter which demonstrates an aspect of the ‘Middle Way’ of behaviour. Mahayana Buddhism points out there are two types of aspiration; desire for enlightenment, and desire to benefit all sentient beings. In this there must be a balance so that the middle way should be followed. Such a way will lead to contentment, which is the antidote for desire. And in the same way, if our attitude to material possessions is not properly balanced and attachment is strong, there can be no contentment.

The Six Perfections: The same balance is necessary in human relationships. Buddhist literature mentions the practice of the Six Perfections in daily life. The Dalai Lama explains that according to Buddhism, generosity and the act of giving are seen as the causes of wealth, and this is the first perfection (1). But in order to practice generosity and giving successfully, one must first of all have a sound ethical discipline - which is the second perfection (2); and that ethical discipline can come about only if one has the third perfection, which is the ability to bear hardships and adverse circumstances when confronted with them (3). For that you need a certain degree of exertion and joyful effort which is the fourth perfection (4); And in order to practice the application of joyful effort successfully, one must have the ability to concentrate - so that this is the fifth perfection (5), necessary to focus on events, actions and goals; and finally, that perfection depends on whether or not you have the ability to exercise the power of discrimination (6), the perfection that enables one to judge between what is desirable and what is undesirable, what is negative and what is positive.

It may be assumed that the six perfections are attributes that greatly enhance the power of understanding, and the Dalai Lama maintains that the essence of following the Buddhist Path to salvation, is the understanding of the Four Noble Truths - the understanding, which must be deeply instinctual (not merely intellectual), that the cause of suffering comes about through delusion, and that the cessation of suffering is possible.

An exposition on the Four Noble Truths

The Truth of suffering: The first of the Four Noble Truths is the Truth of Suffering. And, the Dalai Lama says, an important aspect of suffering is the coping with problems, with sickness and with death, in the correct way. On such problems, there are two distinct approaches. One is to simply avoid thinking about them. But the other much more effective way is to face the problem directly so that one becomes fully conscious of it. Then, when unfortunate things happen, there are two possible results: mental unrest (anxiety, fear, doubt, frustration and eventual depression), or the using of the experience to become more realistic and closer to reality. And this is what has the potential to make you stronger and increase your self-confidence and reliance. (This is not different to the concept of “what is, is God”; and the embracing of sorrow so that it becomes love and compassion).

Three types of suffering can be recognized. The first is the suffering of those in the samsara of worldly life - birth, sickness, old age and death. Recognizing these states of suffering is the main catalyst of the spiritual quest in man. The second level of suffering is the suffering of change. Experiences that are perceived as pleasurable are only so in a relative sense to less pleasurable or painful experiences. For example becoming jaded about conditions of good living and requiring more and more bizarre forms of stimulation is a consequence of change. Or in relationships, the initial passion wears off and leads to discontent and even hatred. The Dalai Lama says, “In reality, as long as we are in the unenlightened
state, all our joyful experiences are tainted and ultimately lead to suffering." Finally there is the suffering of conditioning. This level of suffering refers to unenlightened existence itself. As long as we exist in a state of confusion we experience the negative karmas to which confusion gives rise. And, the Dalai Lama explains, it is called the suffering of conditioning because it is not only the basis of the painful experiences of life, but also for those of future lives.

Understanding all aspects of The ‘Truth of Suffering’, being based on Buddhist concepts of causation, is made more complex because of different realms of existence which engender different forms of suffering. In Buddhist philosophy there are three primary realms (locas) in which suffering occurs, and the nature of the suffering and its relationship to cause and effect are different in each. The realms are the ‘desire realm’, the ‘form realm’, and the ‘formless realm’. The Dalai Lama explains that if a person’s ordinary mode of being is very much within the realm of desire and attachment to physical objects, then such attachment leads to a form of existence which is confined within the desire realm, both at present and in future lives. While individuals who have transcended attachment to objects of immediate perception and to physical sensations, but are still attached to the inner states of joy and bliss, future rebirths will be where physical existence has a much more refined form. Finally there are yet those who have transcended attachment not only to physical sensations but to pleasurable inner sensations of joy and bliss as well, and they tend more towards a state of equanimity and to the formless realms - of which there are several. From the fourth level of the Formless Realm upwards, existence is beyond the processes of evolution and change that is characteristic of the physical universe.

In Buddhist philosophy, and Eastern philosophy in general, the human state is regarded as the highest because it offers the opportunity to progress towards enlightenment. Even though spirits may possess supernatural powers such as precognition and so on, such are still in the unenlightened state of samsara - which is always a sorry state of suffering. One great being, Lama Tsongkhapa, describes the coils of samsara as like being tied up very tightly by the ropes of negative karma, delusions, afflictive emotions and thoughts, and encased in a tight net of ego and self-grasping. One is tossed around aimlessly by the currents of fluctuating experiences, of suffering and pain: “This is what samsaric life is like.”

The Truth of the Origin of Suffering: In the Dalai Lama’s commentary on the origin of suffering, he says that the origin of suffering is due to those emotional experiences that lead to confusion and afflict the mind. To perceive the truth of the origin of suffering we need to develop an understanding of “dependent origination” - that everything we perceive and experience arises as a result of the interaction and coming together of causes and conditions. We need to understand that there is a fundamental disparity between the way things appear and the way they actually are. We grow to understand that although certain types of mental or emotional state seem real, and although objects appear to be so real and vivid, in reality they do not exist in the way we think they do. It is only by truly coming to know the illusory nature of the everyday world - that is, the world of conventional reality where the causal principles operate, that we can appreciate it. The acceptance of the empty nature of this world is, according to Buddhism, the understanding of the ultimate truth of the origin of suffering, the paramathasatya. The Dalai Lama says, “It is through this type of reflection and analysis that we will be able to gain an insight into what in technical Buddhist language is called ‘the origin of suffering’.”

Ignorance is therefore one of the causes of suffering but there are many other derivative causes which are described as “afflictive emotions and thoughts.” In the various branches of Buddhism, detailed lists of different types of afflictive emotions and thoughts are given. Such thoughts and emotions arising from delusion give rise to volitional actions and they cause suffering because they both create immediate disturbance in the mind and also afflict the mind from within. The Dalai Lama points out that the most important thing for us to know is that afflictive emotions are our ultimate enemies and ultimate source of suffering. Once such an afflictive emotion forms in the mind, it destroys our peace of mind, affects our health, and even our relationships with other people: “All negative activities such as killing, bullying, cheating and so forth, stem from afflictive emotions.”

Causation is, of course, directly related to karma which is unique in that it involves intentional action and the belief in doership. The Buddhist scriptures recognize ten types of negative action, three of the body, four of speech and three of the mind. The three of the body are killing, stealing and sexual misconduct; the four of speech are lying, engaging in divisive speech, using harsh words, and engaging in senseless gossip; and the three of the mind are coveting, harmful thoughts and intentions, and holding wrong views. With regard the effect of emotions on karma, it is the internal negative emotions that are the worst enemy. The Dalai Lama says that if there is a possibility of eliminating this inner enemy then we should take the opportunity offered by having a human body, brain and good heart, and combine these strengths to uproot it - to take advantage of the Truth of Cessation.

The Truth of Cessation: The cessation of suffering is related to moksha or liberation and in Buddhist philosophy liberation is very closely related to the understanding of ‘emptiness’. What is commonly understood by emptiness in Buddhism is the need to counter the grasping of the self, the idea of a ‘soul’ of the religions, which is the notion of ego. But it is, nevertheless, right to ensure that negation does not defy the apparent reality of the conventional world. In applying the understanding of ‘emptiness’, the Dalai Lama explains that when strong emotions arise (attachment, anger and so on) - we should examine the experience of them. This will show that in underlining the experience, there is always an assumption that there is something objective or real on to which we project desirable or undesirable qualities. Strong emotional reactions always assume the existence of some form of objective reality. But once you know that this assumption, and thus the emotions themselves, are actually based on a fundamental misconception of reality, the purpose of the reactions is eliminated. When we have developed such an understanding of ‘emptiness’, even if it is an intellectual one, we may have a new outlook on things and events; and this can modify our responses and reduce the generation of strong negative emotions. We will realize that most of our strong emotions arise from assuming the reality of something
that is unreal. We can then see the disparity between the way we have perceived something and the way things really are; we see that strong emotions that afflict our minds arise from a fundamental state of confusion thorough apprehending things as real and existing independently, when they do not.

The Dalai Lama maintains that our potential for knowledge is intrinsic to our consciousness and is an inherent, natural quality, but all those factors which afflict the mind are not an essential part of it - they are acquired through a state of delusion. He says, “The mental afflictions are distinct from the essential nature of the mind, and are therefore called adventitious.” Consequently when we talk about gaining the perfect wisdom of a Buddha, we should not think that we need to create qualities in ourselves that are not already there. Rather we should understand about removing the defilements of the mind that hamper the flowering of wisdom. Then we can conceive of the possibility of eliminating those afflictions completely.

**The Truth of the Path:** The Dalai Lama explains that the true Path should be understood, at first, in relation the development of an intellectual understanding of ‘emptiness’ - and that will lead to a direct intuitive ‘realization’ of ‘emptiness’. This was achieved in the Buddha’s day by his ‘progressive talk’, but now the recommended method is ‘single-pointed’ meditation. But before this method can be effective, the Dalai Lama explains, it is necessary to have a high level of morality, concentration ability and insight, in order to acquire ‘wisdom’. The wisdom that realizes ‘emptiness’ requires the union of single-pointedness of mind and penetrative insight. And for this training in the meditative practice of calming the mind so that it rests free from the disturbance of thought, is necessary. In such training one applies mindfulness and mental alertness.

The question arises as to whether an aspirant to enlightenment can attain the wisdom of understanding the Four Noble Truths, without direct transmission from an enlightened master. The Buddhist scholar and Pali translator, Peter Masefield, maintains that according to the original sayings of the Buddha, it is hardly possible without an intuitive “flash of awareness” that comes through the agency of an enlightened master. (See *Divine Revelations in Pali Buddhism*). In the Dalai Lama’s explanation, this is the direct intuitive ‘realization’ of ‘emptiness’. Thus the true understanding the Four Noble Truths would seem to be the attainment of Right View, the first step of the Eightfold Noble Path, and a prerequisite of the treading the other steps of the Path. In Right View it is clearly seen that the suffering of the ordinary world is brought about by craving, and clearly seen that there is another realm that can be attained - and that it is attained through the treading of the Path. Then, with a clear understanding of the sham of worldly life, the second step of renouncing the things to which we were previously attached is achieved and Right Renunciation attained. With renunciation it then becomes possible to have right speech, action and livelihood, so that a strong moral foundation can be attained; which will enable right effort, mindfulness and concentration to be pursued - because desire and guilt are not disturbing the mind’s tranquility. At this stage, the Dalai Lama points out, a high level of morality, concentration ability and insight, are attained through the union of single-pointedness of mind and penetrative insight.

**Some practical applications**

In practical terms the Noble Truths merge with each other and lead to an understanding of the essentiality of the Noble Path. In considering the Truth of Suffering, an important aspect is the coping with problems and with death in the correct way. As indicated before, one can simply avoid thinking about them, but a much more effective way is facing the problem directly so that one becomes fully conscious of it, so as to become stronger and increase self-confidence and reliance.

In dealing with death, the Dalai Lama says that it is very important, in fact essential, to have a right understanding of ‘impermanence’ - so that the suffering that centers on death can be correctly perceived. The Truth of suffering should be understood in relation to the ‘characteristics of existence’. The first of these is impermanence of both coarse material things and subtle mental things. If one understands the nature of impermanence correctly it will be possible to comprehend that any existence that is causally produced, entirely depends on various causes and conditions for its existence. Consequently the very causes and conditions that produced it also bring about its disintegration and cessation. When this is related to the understanding of the impermanent nature of the body and mind, then here the cause refers to our ignorant state of mind (the egocentric mind). Our bodily existence is very much entwined with the power of an ignorant state of mind. Understanding this will enable us to counteract “grasping at impermanence.” This grasping for something that is impermanent forces us to cling to the matter of one’s present lifetime alone. But by releasing this grasping within us we will, the Dalai Lama explains, be in a better position to appreciate the value of working for our future lifetimes.

It should be noted that the Buddha is believed to have had many lifetimes during which he developed the Perfections (above) and that in Mahayana Buddhism, reincarnation is a basic element of the theology; and especially the need for reincarnation as Bodhisattvas. In this regard the type of rebirth is of absolute central importance.

**The Bardo state:** In Tibetan Buddhist belief, and as a general truth, one’s state of mind at the time of death has a very great effect in determining what form rebirth will occur. The Bardo state of mind, (and the state of mind during other transitions - even in going to sleep), which one experiences at the time of death, is extremely subtle - and because of the subtlety of that level of consciousness, it has the power to impact upon one’s mental continuum. In the tantric practices of Buddhism there is great emphasis on death-related meditations and on the process of death itself. It is considered important that the individual at the time of death not only retains his presence of mind but is also in a position to utilize that subtle state of consciousness effectively towards realization of the Path.

That this subtle state exists and that all bodily functions and states are connected in some way with mind states,
can be verified by experience. When the body ceases the egoic mind also ceases, but there are both gross states of mind, associated with the physiological body, and a subtle state of consciousness which is associated with the transition, that is evident during death. This has been called the Bardo state - and has also been described as the ‘clear light state’. The Dalai Lama explains that there are definite indications of the existence of the ‘clear light state’ of mind. There are frequent occurrences among religious practitioners, not only Buddhists, where people have been pronounced clinically dead but the onset of decomposition of the body is delayed - sometimes for many days. The Dalai Lama gives the example of his own late tutor, Kayabje Ling Rinpoche, who remained in that state for thirteen days. He was pronounced clinically dead and he had already experienced the death of the brain, but his body remained fresh and did not decompose for thirteen days.

The Buddhist explanation for this is that, during the Bardo state, the individual is not actually dead but rather in the process of dying, and although the mind-body relationship may have ceased at the gross level, it has not ceased at the subtle level. The body of Paramahansa Yogananda - see Chapter 6, did not decompose for several weeks and was still fresh at the time of interment. The transitions from the living states of waking, deep sleep, and the dream state are considered to be similar Bardo states of transition. A good reference text is *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* - see Bibliography.

Tibetan Buddhism, in particular, is very concerned with the process of transition during death and uses Tantric practices while living to ensure a satisfactory transition. Meditations, using the mental dissolution of deities, train the practitioner in coping with the transitional state. In this type of meditation the acquisition of what has been called ‘wisdom’ is first necessary. Wisdom is attained by altruistic practices and development of the understanding that selfish realization is an inadequate goal. The adequate goal should be to wish enlightenment for everyone. Then by practicing equal vision - imagining everyone to be equal to oneself, or by feeling empathy with everyone by imagining that all beings are someone close and dear - this wisdom is attained. The unifying conjunction of ‘wisdom’ with the Tantric practices, leads again to the concept of ‘emptiness’ - which is then very effective in securing a spiritually high rebirth.

The Dalai Lama explains: “The profundity and sophistication of Tantra or Vajrayana, stem from the practice of unifying method and wisdom.” The practitioner must first subject his or her perception of self and the phenomenal world to the cognisance of ‘emptiness’ - see Consciousness further on. Everything is dissolved into ‘emptiness’. The cognition of ‘emptiness’ is then visualized as the form of the chosen mediational deity. Next the practitioner reflects on the non-substantial or empty nature of the deity. Thus, both method and wisdom are present and complete: “There is visualization of the deity, and at the same time an understanding of the empty nature of that deity”.

**Escape from suffering:** As indicated before, the state of mind attained through practice, effort, and correct understanding (of impermanence, emptiness etc.) which erases all negative emotions, allows the escape from suffering. Naturally, emotions can be positive or negative and even anger, though mostly negative, can have positive aspects - as for example in disciplining someone to protect them from danger. But generally anger has negative consequences on health and at the same time creates hatred. The expression of anger in the form of attack, or attack thoughts, is what projects and maintains the illusory egoic world. So, the Dalai Lama points out, it is important to be able to distinguish between good states and negative states of mind - and to recognize the value of, and to increase through appropriate practices, the good states of mind. There are meditative techniques which affect the transformation of negative emotional states, and through mental discipline and effort, change is really possible and a totally new attitude can develop: “Each person should feel that he or she has great potential and gain self-confidence.” He says that if one feels that one’s present way of life is unpleasant and has some difficulties, then don’t look at these negative things. One should see the positive side, the potential, and make an effort: “Unless you adopt a certain method, there is no possibility of escape. Therefore, hatred and anger - and here I mean negative anger - is ultimately the real destroyer of peace of mind.”

In practicing change of attitude it is necessary to identify and analyze any apparently negative situation at an early stage, to facilitate the stopping of the causal process. One must adopt a good attitude to adverse events, situations and circumstances; to companions, friends and partners, so that dissatisfaction does not arise. By change of attitude: “All phenomena and events can become the source of happiness. And even enemies can provide us with a good opportunity to practice tolerance and patience.” The recognition of, and development of a positive attitude to adverse events and circumstances, provides the opportunity to grow spiritually. For if life is too comfortable, then there is no opportunity to change for the better.

The question arises about what to do if people take advantage of one’s humility and tolerance - how should one react? The Dalai Lama says that it is quite simple: One should act with wisdom and common sense, without anger and hatred. If the situation is such that some sort of action in required, then take counter measures without anger. And it is a fact that such actions based on true wisdom rather than anger are more effective. In the very competitive modern society, and in abusive relationships, it sometimes becomes necessary to take appropriate counter measures - but without anger.

**The Eightfold Noble Path**

The first and essential step is the acquisition of Right View which, the Sutras say, is only attainable with the help of a ‘Buddha’. It is not an intellectual process of understanding that is required but is of the nature of an ‘enlightenment’ itself - a seeing that has been compared to the momentary vision of a dark landscape during a flash of lightening. It can be said to be a spiritual rebirth that enables man to tread the hard and apparently austere path to enlightenment. From an intellectual point of view, as indicated above, the process would obviously be enhanced by seeing that all things of the material world are transitory and that the only certain thing is change.
In the Mahayana path it is also a necessary part of the path to practice the enhancement of a good heart and an altruistic mind - called the generation of bodhicitta. As indicated before, Mahayana also takes on the task of helping others along the way to enlightenment. Attaining liberation for oneself is not enough, and is considered not to be a state of true awakening. To reach a sufficiently altruistic state of mind it is necessary to gain a thorough insight into the nature of suffering by contemplation of the first injunction of the Path - which, as in Theravada Buddhism, places this step in the special position of being a precursor to the Path, and, it is said, a guarantee of enlightenment. Shantideva - the consideration of all others to be the same as oneself, or all others to be someone dear to oneself, as already mentioned, is also a practice for the promotion of ‘Right View’. In Tibetan tradition both methods are combined and then meditated upon.

The second step of the Path is ‘Right Resolve’ and this has sometimes been said to mean Right Renunciation. It has been interpreted as resolving to eliminate desires and attachments in the light of the revelation of Right View.

The next three requirements are concerned with actions; Right Speech, Right Conduct and Right Livelihood. We must speak the truth, to help but never to hurt others, avoid propaganda which is a popular way of deceiving people in commerce, politics and religion. Right Conduct, from the Buddhist viewpoint must be the avoidance of involvement in the world of Maya - the pursuit of sense pleasures and the acquisition of attachments. Actions should be moral, ethical and motivated by love rather than the negative tendencies of hate, envy, greed, lust, anger and so on.

Right Livelihood will involve not manipulating events and circumstances to feather one’s own nest. If we look carefully at society we will see that almost everyone and every organization, engages in manipulation to feather various nests. Therefore choose an occupation that is fair and balanced.

The last three steps of the Eightfold Noble Path are concerned with mental and attitudinal behaviour and discipline; Right Effort, Right Awareness and Right Contemplation. Right Effort may mean striving to keep on a balanced middle path and Right Awareness or attentiveness to be aware all the time of what we are doing, thinking or saying, and ceasing to be creatures of habit reacting in predetermined ways. We watch ourselves and our thoughts as a witness viewing ourselves in action. Right Contemplation may be a necessary adjunct to all aspects of spiritual development and may be the final step in arriving at the direct experience of reality.

The practices of Tibetan Buddhism may well seem complicated, but when boiled down it resolves into nothing more than living dharmically - and, one could say, a matter of choosing Truth or choosing the world. Tibetan Buddhism, and indeed all forms of Buddhism, are wonderfully explicit, and provide wonderfully guided techniques for spiritual practice.

**On consciousness**

The Tantric (Vajrayana) literature discusses different levels of consciousness or different subtleties of mind that correspond to subtle levels of energy. The Dalai Lama says that most of our conscious mind consists either of states related to recollections of past experiences that inform our present consciousness - or it consists of some kind of feeling or sensation. Because of this it is very difficult to glimpse the actual nature of consciousness, which is the sheer state of ‘knowing’ or the ‘luminosity’ of mind. One technique that we can use to comprehend this is sitting meditation. We aim to free our mind from thoughts of the past and from anticipation of the future, so that we come to abide in the “nowness of the present.” He says, “When we are able to clear away thoughts of the past and the future, or at least relegate them to the limbo of un-attachment, slowly we begin to get a sense of the space between past and future. That space is the present moment and in that space we can glimpse what is called ‘emptiness’. If we can remain in that emptiness for longer and longer periods, gradually the nature of consciousness itself - the sheer luminosity and natural awareness of mind will slowly dawn.”

However, The Dalai Lama says, this experience of luminosity of mind, of the nature of mind, is not profound realization in itself. Rebirth in the formless realms of samsara (see before) is considered to be the result of abiding is such states of clarity. On the other hand, if we know how to use that initial experience of luminosity as a basis of spiritual growth, then we can build on it by complementing our meditation with other practices, and in this way it will become truly profound. In Tantra, as already indicated, realizing emptiness can also be achieved by dissolving a selected deity into nothingness. The Gu-lugs-pa sect of Mahayana recognizes four different classes of Tantra: Kriya Tantra, Carya Tantra, Yoga Tantra and Highest Yoga Tantra (Anuttarayogatantra) and in all of them the aim is to achieve insight into emptiness. The meditative practices of the Highest Yoga Tantra, involve the energy channels, the energies which flow within the channels, and what are called ‘subtle drops’. (One may reasonably conclude that these channels and ‘subtle drops’ and the energy that flows in them, are the same as the kundalini energy and the channels and ‘chakras’ of other traditions). In Buddhism, this form of Tantra is considered suitable only for adepts who have traversed all the other elements of the ‘Great Gradual Path’ and the ‘Great Gradual Tantra Path’. For it to be used by ordinary worldly individuals may result in mental or physical illness and even in madness. Also, if experienced by those who are not well grounded in morality and discipline, the ego can be stimulated and this may lead to even deeper levels of worldly delusion. The Dalai Lama’s concluding advice in his book *The Heart of the Buddha* is first and foremost to establish a firm grounding in Buddhist dharma, and then, and simultaneously, develop an understanding of the Four Noble Truths through meditation - and for this there must be continuous determination.

**The Lama tradition**

The history of Buddhism in Tibet has been quite turbulent, but a stable period arose when the dominant group, the
Ge-lugs-pa, gained ascendance, and the tradition of a reincarnating Dalai Lama as the central spiritual figure, was established. The title of Panchen Lama as a reincarnating lineage was also established around that time and traditionally the Panchen Lama has been revealed by the Dalai Lama. Aside from these high profile figures, Tibet is blessed with many high lamas who are believed to be Bodhisattvas - reincarnated for the purpose of guiding all beings on the path to enlightenment. Among these is the Karmapa who has been in the news lately. It is said that the Buddha Shakyamuni predicted that two thousand years after his death the ‘Lion-voiced Bodhisattva Karmapa’ would appear in this world. He was to be so powerful that many beings, on just seeing, hearing or thinking of him, would attain peace. The Karmapa is said to be an emanation of Avalokiteshvara and the sixth Buddha of the age; Buddha Simha, the Lion.

The present Karmapa was born in 1984 and is therefore a very young man. He has been seen world wide in video footage which depicts his first Dharma teaching at his monastery in China in July 1999. There is also video footage of him debating, performing lama dances, giving empowerments, and performing other activities. It will be apparent to those who view this footage with an open heart, that the Karmapa, like the Dalai Lama, is a very holy being who is fulfilling the role of a fully realized Bodhisattva.

Although he was performing, apparently unhindered, all his religious duties in China, he has recently fled to India and is now living close to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Whatever precipitate views Westerners may have on the defection, it would be best to ensure that they are tempered with the practice of tolerance that the Dalai Lama teaches. Traditionally the Karmapa has been instrumental in identifying and training new Dalai Lamas. The Karmapa has not commented publicly on the reason for his move and nor has he commented on the political situation in China. Whatever the facts may be in this instance, there is no doubt that the military action in Tibet has had the effect of opening up the ‘Forbidden Land’ to all comers and has facilitated the spread of Tibetan Buddhism to all parts of the world. At the present time, with China’s softening of its stance on religion, many Tibetan Buddhists and Buddhist monks are returning to their homeland. The Dalai Lama has repeatedly asserted that Tibet has always been part of China.

Practicalities

The present headquarters of the Dalai Lama in exile is in Dharmshala in Himachal Pradesh, Northern India. India continues to host refugees from Tibet and it has now become a place of pilgrimage to Buddhists in its own right. The spiritual vibrations of so many devoted souls, under the guidance of the Dalai Lama are a most powerful force on the side of peace and universal love. Although it is no longer easy to have private interviews, the Dalai Lama regularly meets groups. Any one visiting Dharmshala can have the opportunity to meet him in this way when he is in residence and public audiences are arranged. Dharmshala has many guest houses and hotels for visitors ranging from neohippies to serious Buddhist pilgrims. Some monasteries also offer accommodation.

Chapter 14

THERAVADA BUDDHISM - THE VENERABLE AJAHN CHAH

Wisdom is to see the truth of the various manifestations of body and mind.

Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism is regarded as the modern transmission of the ancient form of Buddhism dating from the time of the Buddha. It is predominant in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, and does not place emphasis on the need for the divine abbots of Tibetan Buddhism or the bodhisattvas of the Mahayana schools in general. In Theravada the teachings of the Buddha are considered to have been complete. The Buddha and his Noble Disciples, who started life as ordinary bound souls, became liberated through their own efforts and set the stage for others to follow. The venerable Ajahn Chah (Pra Bodhinyana Thera) said that it is comparable to someone who plants an orchard and thereafter invites anyone else to partake of the fruits. This is all subsequent individuals need to do. They do not need to plant more orchards for themselves. All one needs to do to attain enlightenment is partake of the fruit - which is to undertake the practices enunciated in the Buddha’s teachings.

Nevertheless, this should not be taken to indicate that Theravada is in any way less flexible than the Mahayana schools, or that there are not enlightened, or potentially enlightened beings comparable to the bodhisattvas of Mahayana (dedicated, as we understand, to the helping of all sentient beings towards enlightenment through delaying the state of Nirvana in themselves and choosing rebirth). In Theravada there are no doubt exalted beings who appear, in most observable instances, in the form of meditation masters, mystics, forest renunciates and ascetics. But Theravada is much less popular in the West than the esoteric schools of Mahayana, which seem to be more adaptable to Western tastes; and to have been the consequence of waves of Tibetan Buddhist teachers moving to all parts of the world, following the establishment of military rule in Tibet.

Because the Buddha was born as an ordinary man, human existence is considered to be a privileged state. Man
has the ability to choose that which will lead him to acquire better karma, which for the ordinary man will result in superior future births (superior, that is, in the spiritual sense), or that which will lead him to bad karma resulting in inferior future births - but in either case such remain in the illusion of karma and volition. For monks and serious aspirants to spiritual advancement, practice embraces the need to surrender to and accept all aspects of worldly life and, in particular, the unpleasant ones, and see them as opportunities for advancement towards enlightenment. Above all, in a human birth, man has the possibility of becoming a Buddha - of becoming enlightened.

Ajahn Chah described aspirants with measures of wisdom in three categories: Firstly there are those who understand that they must practice the teachings and know how to do so. He says, “They take the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha (the community of like-minded individuals) - the triple jem - as their refuge and have resolved to practice diligently according to the Teachings.” They do not simply follow customs and traditions but use reason to examine the state of the world. These he calls true “Buddhist believers”. Above this in spiritual evolution is a middle level comprised of those who have practiced until they have unshakable faith. They have: “penetrated to the understanding of the unsatisfactory nature of all compounded formations” - that is, everything of the material world. Such persons have reduced clinging and attachment: “They do not hold onto things and their minds reach deep understanding of the Dhamma - the liberating laws enunciated by the Buddha. Depending upon their degree of non-attachment and wisdom they are progressively known as ‘stream-entrainers’, ‘once-returners’, or simply, noble ones”. The highest level of individual comprises: “those whose practice has led them to the body, speech and mind of the Buddha. They are above the world, and completely free of attachment and clinging. They are known as Arahats or Free Ones, the highest level of the Noble Ones.”

**Ajahn Chah (Pra Bodhinyana Thera)**

The Venerable Ajahn Chah was the founder of the Bung Wai Forest Monastery in Thailand. He was born in 1917 and ordained as a novice monk as a child. At the age of twenty he took higher ordination as a bhikkhu (Buddhist monk). As a young monk he studied meditation under several Thai meditation masters, including what has been described as an enlightening period with the most revered and venerable of the modern Thai masters, the late Ajahn Mun. He wandered as an ascetic, sleeping in forests, caves and, as recommended by the Buddha, in cremation grounds. After many years he was invited to settle in a forest grove in Northeast Thailand inhabited by cobras, tigers and ‘ghosts’ - in Buddhist tradition, a perfect place for a forest monk.

From the beginning a forest monastery began to form around him peopled by other ascetic monks and nuns. This grew to become a large monastery where many came to hear his inspired teachings and discourses. Subsequently Western seekers began to come to the monastery and, in the course of time, this led (in 1975) to the formation of a parallel organization: Wat Pah Nanachat, dedicated to the training of foreigners interested in undertaking monastic life - see the book *Bodhinyana: A Collection of Dhamma talks.* Now there are disciples teaching in more than forty mountain and forest temples throughout Thailand and also in England and elsewhere.

In the early days of Ajahn Chah’s wandering monastic life, when his teacher Ajahn Mun was still alive, monks suffered many privations. He writes, “If someone caught malaria and went to ask for medicine, the teacher would say, ‘You don’t need medicine! Keep practicing.’... Sometimes one had to walk ten or twelve kilometres on alms round... One didn’t get much either.” But, he said: “One could live and breathe meditation.” Ajahn Chah died in 1992 after a long illness.

**Dhamma and dhamma:**

Dhamma (with a capital D) is the Buddha’s teachings and all the capacities inherent in a birth and those which manifest in life, and the activities that manifest from them, are the worldly dhammas. They are described as: “Any quality, thing, object of mind and any conditioned or unconditioned phenomena; ever changing states which appear, age and disappear.” These are the things that manifest, for each individual, in life, including life itself, and we should come to understand their nature of impermanence and become disenchanted. In a talk Ajahn Chah said:

> “When we come to the impermanence in ourselves, in the world, we find a kind of boredom will arise... This isn’t everyday boredom... It’s the kind of boredom the Buddha talked about... We call it Nibbada – disenchantment with the things of the world.”

The conditioning factors of worldly dhamma are “gain and loss, honour and dishonour, happiness and misery, praise and blame.” Dhamma, with a capital D, refers to the liberating laws discovered by the Buddha. In the teachings of the Venerable Ajahn Chah, Dhamma and dhamma together constitute the central focus and lead to the arising of wisdom. He says that if we contemplate with wisdom and understand the changes which occur between birth and death, they will show the Way of the Buddha’s Dhamma. If we see the three characteristics of existence: Anicca - Dukkha - Anatta...
(impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-Self), we will realize the inexistence of the ego state. Everything is dhamma; not only the things we see with the physical eye, but also, and particularly, the things we see in our minds: “A thought arises, then changes and passes away. It is ‘nama dhamma’... If one does see one will have the wisdom to listen to the Dhamma as proclaimed by the Buddha - the ‘Buddha Dharma’.” In enunciating this relationship, Ajahn Chah said:

Where is the Buddha?
The Buddha is the Dhamma.
Where is the dhamma?
Right here and now!

He maintains that the mind must first be that mind which knows the Dhamma... Then, bringing everything back to this point of Dhamma, we will come to know that Truth does exist in, and thus it is possible for us to practice and realize it: “And where is dhamma? Speaking simply that which is not dhamma doesn’t exist - dhamma is nature.”

Thus the Buddha advises to take refuge in the ‘Triple Jem’ - the Buddha, the Dhamma (the teachings) and the Sangha (the company of righteous people), when engaging the worldly dhamma. This way we will come to know that suffering is universal, which is the First Noble Truth. It is the basic nature of the world, and all mankind swings between the highs and lows of delusion when they fall for the trap of the world - which is the trap of Mara (the Buddhist tempter figure who represents maya). The other Noble Truths enunciated by the Buddha are that there is a way out; and the way out has been clearly explained. To see it clearly is the arising of wisdom and the acquisition of ‘Right View’.

Through correct understanding all beings can be free from suffering - and in this regard man is different from other creatures only in the degree that he should be enlightened by the Dhamma and the cognition of the attributes of dhamma. Ajahn Chah said:

“If we don’t think rightly, if we don’t practice rightly, we will fall back to being animals or creatures in hell, hungry ghosts or demons. How is this? Just look in your mind. When anger arises, what is it? There it is, just look! … When greed arises, what is it? Look at it right there! By not recognizing and clearly understanding these mental states, the mind changes from being that of a human being to that of a demon, right in this present life. All things are in a state of becoming. Becoming gives rise to birth or existence as determined by present conditions. Thus we become and exist as our minds condition us.”

Elements of the teachings

Ajahn Chah maintained that the Buddha is the greatest doctor in the world who enunciated the way of controlling the mind. He said that mental ills are found in each one of us without exception and that, in looking to the Dhamma for support, we obtain medicine to cure these ills. So that: “Traveling the path of Buddha-Dhamma is not done with the Body. You must travel with the mind to reach the benefits.” But, like any journey, the end will not be reached by thinking about traveling. It must be embarked upon and for this there must be the intention; and in Ajahn Chah’s view this may be an additional factor in the following of the ‘Path’. When we are mindful and self-recollected, we have right intention, and right intention will lead us to undertake the practices in a timely manner and, in this life, as a matter of urgency. He quotes a Lao folk-saying thus:

Many rounds of merriment and pleasure past and it approaches evening. Drunk with tears now, rest and see, soon it will be too late to finish the journey.

The simple and profound teachings of Ajahn Chah engender the arising of ‘wisdom’ through the Dhamma that is taught in a balanced way - not in broad and vague terms that cannot provide a focus and are difficult to put into practice, nor in a highly intellectual way requiring great scholarship and involving concepts and interpretations difficult to understand and invoke. Ajahn Chah had what has been described as a wonderfully simple style in expounding the Dhamma teachings - which in essence comprise instructions in methods of stilling the mind and the practice of constant awareness in examining the khandas - see below. Generally his technique is known in Buddhism as Vipasana; but how it is expounded by the teacher is important in the transfer of the wisdom state to the student.

The teachings (from any master) hold a mystery and there arise different levels, and ever deepening levels, of understanding with the sincere and diligent seeker. It is said that Ajahn Chah always taught from the deepest level of wisdom. His teachings can be compared to those of the Buddha who gave what has been described as a “progressive lecture” - leading the seeker who’s “eyes were free from dust,” to the understanding of the Four Noble Truths. In Buddhist philosophy, at least in its original essence, the understanding of the Noble Truths at the deepest intuitive, level rather than at an intellectual level, is the same as the attainment of ‘Right View’ - the first element of the ‘Eightfold Noble Path’. And it is only with ‘Right View’ that it becomes possible to tread the Path at all. But having attained ‘Right View’, the progress towards enlightenment (Nibana) is, according to no less an authority than the Buddha, guaranteed. In considering Ajahn Chah’s classification of individuals (above), it may be that those whose development has reached the stage of having unshakable faith in the teachings of the Buddha, and who take refuge in the Triple Jem, have attained ‘Right View’.

Ajahn Chah’s teachings have been encapsulated in a talk given at various times and translated under the title of “Fragments of a Teaching”, and more expansively in the book entitled Bodhinyana - see reference in Bibliography. In the “Fragments” Ajahn Chah says that one who wishes to comprehend the Buddha-Dhamma must have faith and confidence and must understand the meaning as follows:
Buddha: the One-Who-Knows, the one who has purity, radiance and peace in his heart.

Dhamma: the characteristics of purity, radiance and peace which arise from morality, concentration and wisdom.

We must cultivate and develop morality, concentration and wisdom within ourselves by following diligently the correct practices: “And we must travel along the proper path of morality until we find the blessings of purity, radiance and peacefulness of mind, that are the fruits of traveling the path.” Morality is restraint and discipline of both the body and speech, and on these points Ajahn Chah advises:

“Speak little - Eat little - Sleep little”.

This brings about the right state for the development of concentration. Training in concentration then brings about peacefulness through stilling the restless mind and making it firm and steady; and this, in turn, begins to set the stage for the arising of wisdom - which, “is to see the truth of the various manifestations of body and mind. When we use our trained and concentrated minds to examine the five khandhas, we will see clearly that both mind and body are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and soul-less; and this is the attainment of ‘Right View’.

According to Buddhist philosophy the essential khandhas (those “instant points of continual motion” - the primary elements of dhamma - which appear, age and disappear), are the ones concerned with man’s psycho-physiological person. They are: *rupa*, materiality or form; *vedana*, feelings of pleasure or pain or their absence; *samjna*, cognitive perception; *samsara*, habitual emotions; and *vijnana*, consciousness and apprehension related to the five senses. Samsara is considered in both Buddhism and Hinduism to be comprised of defilements having their source in previous lives and stored in the subtle body, but also comprising beneficial capacities such as the ability to concentrate. In Western understanding the attributes of the subtle body are relegated to the little-understood ‘sub-conscious’.

Ajahn Chah maintained that the mind, or the nature of mind, is naturally pure, but becomes defiled by impressions both pleasant and unpleasant. He said, “When a comfortable mental impression ‘drops’ into the mind, the mind is comfortable. When the mental impression is uncomfortable, the mind becomes ‘cloudy’ just like polluted water.” It is through the study of Dhamma with this understanding, throughout our daily lives, that the problem is resolved. The less we know of Dhamma, the more the mind will pursue mental impressions: “Feeling happy and succumbing to happiness, experiencing suffering, it succumbs to suffering. It’s in constant confusion.” Ajahn Chah maintained that the mind isn’t really any ‘thing’ at all, and it doesn’t have any Self or any form. It is only that which receives and experiences mental impressions. If the mind is taught to have ‘Right View’ it won’t have any problems. He said:

“Problems are common to all of us... If we don’t know how to solve them, we will always be subject to suffering and distress. That which solves problems is wisdom, and to have wisdom we must develop and train the mind... In worldly life there isn’t really any peace and tranquility. There are only things which give rise to worries, which make the mind troubled and confused.”

Meditation and self examination

The primary meditation method taught by Ajahn Chah he called ‘kammathana’ which means ‘action - base’. Kammathana is used to train the mind in concentration. Ajahn Chah said: “The Buddha and his Noble Disciples all started out in the same way as us - with untrained minds; but afterwards look how they became the subjects of reverence for us all, and see how much benefit we can gain through their teachings.” Although there are many ways to train the mind, he maintained that the most useful primary meditation method involves simply watching the breath - mindfulness of breathing. We should concentrate on the tip of the nose and with the mental repetition of a mantra word (such as Bud - Dho) develop awareness of the in and out breaths. But if the meditator wishes to use another word, or simply be mindful of the air moving in and out, this also is fine: “Adjust the practice to suit yourself.”

In walking meditation - another primary meditation practice much used by monks - one tries to be constantly mindful of the sensation of the feet touching the ground. These meditations need to be pursued continuously to bear fruit. Ajahn Chah said:

“If the attention wanders to other things, try to pull it back to the object of concentration. If we are mindful of thoughts as soon as they arise and keep diligently returning to the meditation subject, the mind will become quieter and quieter.”

But if the mind continues to wander, accept that, and then keep trying. Now, when the mind is calm from the practice of the primary meditation, begin to examine the khandhas; which Ajahn Chah encapsulated simply as: “material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness.” He said:

“Examine these five khandhas as they come and go - appearing, changing, and disappearing. You will see clearly that they are impermanent, that this impermanence makes them unsatisfactory and undesirable and that they come and go of their own - there is no ‘Self’ running these things. There is only nature moving according to cause and effect.”

Ajahn Chah maintained that all things of the world are like this - unsatisfactory, unstable and being without Self or soul. That is what maya is - just illusion. Seeing the whole of phenomenal existence in this light, it becomes clear that the clinging to such things will, by the regular pursuance of the practices, be gradually reduced. And because we see the true characteristics of the world we attain wisdom - we attain ‘Right View’. He said:

“It can be looked at in this way: first there is the disciplining of the mind to be attentive to breathing. This gives rise to
morality - because there is no listening to the disrupting thoughts. When mindfulness of breathing is practiced continuously until the mind is quiet, this is the arising of concentration. Then examination showing that even the breath, the object of concentration, and the other khandas, are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-Self, gives rise to non attachment. This is the arising of wisdom... They all come together.”

And when these are all developed, there is the following of the ‘Eightfold Path’ that brings liberation: “The Eightfold Path is above all others, because if properly pursued it leads directly to Nibana, to peace. We can say that this practice reaches the Buddha-Dhamma truly and precisely.”

**Learning from nature**

Ajahn Chah used many allusions to nature which, better than books, can be our teacher. He compared the state of concentrated awareness that we need to develop to be like that of a spider. The spider doesn’t run around needlessly in a state of confusion but sits with great concentration waiting for an insect to land in its web: “Then whoosh - the insect is captured.” If our minds are as concentrated as the spiders then we will catch each thought, each khandha, as it alights - and by observing it dispassionately, see its impermanence and eliminate it.

The Buddha understood the impermanent nature of things through observing the phenomena of nature and those around him. He found that they were all essentially uncertain and impermanent. In one talk Ajahn Chah explained how the Buddha, in an earlier life, before he became the Buddha, said that his teacher was a mango tree. In this incarnation he was King Chanokomum and a “bodhisattva”.

The story says that on one occasion, when the king was traveling on elephant back with a retinue of ministers, they passed a grove of mango trees with ripe fruit. The king made a mental note to return there later to enjoy some of the fruit. But when he did so he discovered that his ministers had preceded him and picked all the fruit. Not only that, but they had used poles and sticks to knock the fruit down: “beating and breaking the branches and tearing and scattering the leaves.” Then the king noticed a tree that hadn’t been touched and pondered on this. He came to realize that the tree had not been disturbed because it had no fruit, that it “had nothing”. Reflecting thus the king ordained and became a monk and: “From then on, wherever he (the Buddha to be) went, when asked who his teacher was, would answer, ‘a mango tree’.”

In yet another allusion he used the description of a fruit tree:

“Sometimes, when a fruit tree is in full bloom, a wind blows and some of the blooms fall! Others may become nearly ripe fruit, or some even fully ripe, before they fall. And so it is with people. Some people die while still in the womb, others within only a few days of birth. Some live for a few years and then die, never having reached maturity. Men and women die in their youth. Still others reach a ripe old age before they die.”

So we should reflect on this matter and consider the similarity of life to the nature of fruit; both are very uncertain. And our minds are also similar; when mental impressions arise they draw in and pull the mind - and then the mind falls, just like a fruit.

In another allusion to nature Ajahn Chah compared the mind to a cobra. He said:

“Regard all activities of the mind as you would regard a cobra. The moods that we dislike are poisonous; the moods that we like are also poisonous. For example, when a child that plays and frolics and annoys us, so that we may want to spank him, we should understand that it’s natural for a child to act that way. Then we could let go and leave him. In that way our troubles are over.”

**The forest of the senses and the ego**

The Buddha taught that the objects of the senses are traps of Mara, the Buddhist tempter figure. Desires arise in the mind but they are Mara’s trap - things that bind us. But remember that the senses are just sensations that arise and then pass away. They are manifest but they are void of anything stable. Ajahn Chah said:

“If we understand according to this reality, then the senses cease to be substantial. In truth there isn’t any ‘thing’. If there isn’t any ‘thing’ then there is no ‘we’ and no ‘they’. If there is no ‘we’ as a person, then there is nothing belonging to ‘us’. It’s in this way that suffering is extinguished. There isn’t anybody to acquire suffering - so who is it that suffers?”

But attachment to these feelings of we ‘and they’ gives rise to the concept of ego and then thoughts of ‘we’ and ‘they’ continually manifest: ‘Nah! Here is where it all begins and carries us around in its never-ending cycle.’ It follows that the asking or wishing for things; even, as Ajahn Chah points out, asking for the health and well-being of family and friends in prayers, is not something to be encouraged in Buddhist practice.

**The training of the heart:** In the teachings of Ajahn Chah the training of the “heart” is the same as the training of the mind. (Here a distinction must be made between egocic mind and heart, and ‘Mind Nature’ which is pristine and is the equivalent of ‘Self’ or the ‘Heart’ in Advaita). The egoic mind (and the egoic heart) is seen as something that needs to be trained in concentration and morality, by meditation and mindfulness. In this way the mind comes to comprehend Anicca - Dukkha - Anatta, the three characteristics of existence: impermanence or instability, unsatisfactoriness and suffering, and not-Self (the inexistence of the ego). And, as a prerequisite to the arising of wisdom, the untrained heart must be considered in much the same way. He said:

“Listening to the heart is really very interesting. This untrained heart races around following its own untrained habits... Therefore train your heart! Buddhist meditation is about the heart; to develop the heart or mind. If this maverick heart of ours doesn’t get what it wants, it makes trouble. You must discipline it with meditation. At the very beginning is the establishment of moral discipline... Whatever it may be of worldly habits, lessen them, go against their power. Don’t just
do as you like; don’t indulge in your thoughts... When the heart is prevented from doing what it wants to do, it starts wandering and suffering. Suffering (Dukkha) becomes apparent to us... the first of the Noble Truths.”

On Emptiness

Ajahn Chah told a story of two monks arguing over how a flag was blowing in the wind: One claimed that it was because of the wind, and the other that it was because of (the nature of) the flag. Eventually their teacher intervened and said, “Neither of you is right. The correct understanding is that there is no flag and there is no wind.” So, one should contemplate on this in accordance with Truth: “If considered well there will remain nothing - it’s empty, void... In the great Void there is no flag and there is no wind. There is no birth, no old age, no sickness or death. Our conventional understanding of flag and wind is only a concept. In reality there is nothing. That’s all! There is nothing more than empty labels.”

The arising of wisdom

For wisdom to arise practice must be diligent and continued for a long time. We must not be anxious to hurry and advance the practice. Meditation must be built up gradually step by step. And if peacefulness happens then accept it; if not, accept that too. Perhaps wisdom does not arise! On this Ajahn Chah said, “I used to think about my practice, that when there was no wisdom that I could force myself to have it. But to contemplate things that we don’t have cannot be done. So, just practice with equanimity. Then there will be no problem - and if there’s no problem then we don’t have to solve it.”

There is a very subtle relationship between wanting and the practice of meditation. In the beginning there is always wanting - it is what makes us start. But wanting is something that must be eliminated. Remember that even the Buddha and his Noble Disciples started by wanting. So, like the Buddha, we must come to understand that wanting, and also not-wanting, are all just mental activities. Wanting and even not wanting are all cravings. But when there is wisdom, we don’t identify with them - and then there is no clinging. Ajahn Chah explained that with continuous practice understanding gradually arises. We must keep feeling the way - carefully, mindfully and with clarity. Thus wisdom is the guide. He compared the path of meditation to a fisherman who nets a very large fish. He must play the fish carefully and mindfully, or he will lose it. We should look at the mind with mindfulness and clear comprehension to develop wisdom. We will see that there is just arising and passing away. When knowing this is constant, a tranquil feeling of dispassion to the world arises and we see that there is nothing worth wanting - when happiness arises, or when dissatisfaction arises, the “knowing” of them is accompanied by the understanding that they are not ours. The mind then arrives at just letting everything go, according to its nature. The Buddha said enlightenment is “extinguishing.” Delusion, the opposite of enlightenment, is samsara; and it exists in the same place as enlightenment; but we put an end to it - “an end to the ever-turning cycle of confusion.”

Practicalities

Ajahn Chah’s first monastery was Bung Wai Forest Monastery at the temple of Wat Pah Pong in Northeast Thailand. Subsequently, in 1975, because of an increasing following of Western and other non-Thai seekers, a new monastery was established nearby at Wat Pa Nanachat. In addition to this there are some forty other establishments in Thailand and in the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand and Italy. Information on visiting any of the establishments should be sought by writing to:

The Abbot, Wat Pah Nanachat, Ampir Warin, Ubon Rajathani Province, Thailand.

Some websites are:  www.dhammaloka.org  www.inthelight.co  and have a look at “Ajhan Chah” on Google.

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Chapter 15

NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ - EXPLANATIONS OF REALITY

A master doesn’t live in memory but sees the world as it is:
A momentary appearance in consciousness.

Do you know what happened in your mother’s womb? Did you have any choice in being born? Can you not see
your body is nothing more than a manifestation of the five elements - so what is there to be proud of in that? But indeed you are something ‘else’ - find out what it is that gives sentence without which you would not even know you exist. Then go deeper and examine if this consciousness is not time-bound. Nisargadatta Maharaj was probably the most lucid of all the great teachers in explaining the nature of Reality and it was with hammer blows like these that for many years, twice daily, he held discourse with whoever came to listen, in his loft apartment in one of the poorer parts of Bombay. His powerful logic and his silent emanations affected many and produced enlightenment in some. The information in this Chapter was derived mainly from the book *I Am That* and from Ramesh Balsekar’s book *Pointers From Nisargadatta Maharaj* - see Bibliography.

**Background**

Nisargadatta was born around 1897 to a poor family and given the birth name Maruti. As is dear to the hearts of Hindus when considering the birth times of great individuals, it may be significant that he was born at a most auspicious time, on the full moon day of the Hanuman Jayanti festival. His father worked for a time as a domestic servant and later became a small farmer near the village of Kandalgaon in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra, south of Bombay. It appears that Maruti was an inquisitive child with an interest in spiritual matters. A Brahmin friend of the family spoke to him often about Vedanta. Later he went to Bombay and took up petty trading with some success. He married, produced three children, and led an unremarkable householder life until middle age, with no indication of the greatness to come. But of himself he said that he had an intense interest in understanding his own consciousness and pursued the investigation of this for many years. Then, well into middle age, he met Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj who was a spiritual teacher of the Navanath Sampradaya sect of Hinduism - the Nath Gurus: who have a long and auspicious tradition embracing both bhakta yoga and Jnana yoga. They emphasize that Supreme Reality can be found only within the heart - see *I Am That*, Appendix II.

Sri Siddharameshwar gave him a mantra and meditation instructions and shortly after this he began to have visions and falls into trances, and attained realization. For a time he became a wandering mendicant traveling to the Himalayas and places of religious significance, but then returned to family life. He became recognized as the living head of the Navanath Sampradaya sect in Maharashtra and known by the name Nisargadatta Maharaj, but he said that this has significance only as a tradition; it is just a way of teaching and does not denote any particular level of consciousness. He maintained that, in reality, there is neither guru nor disciple, neither theory nor practice, neither ignorance nor realization - there is only what you understand yourself to be. He often said:

> Know yourself correctly. There is no substitute for self knowledge.

He is generally recognized as having been a great enlightened teacher of Advaita and, some would say, the clarity and power of his teaching has never been exceeded. In life he always possessed total spontaneity and was always exhilaratingly fresh. He lived in a mental state so peaceful and joyful that all else paled into insignificance. He was warm-hearted, humorous, fearless and absolutely true - and although uneducated his knowledge penetrated to the ultimate depths of all knowledge. Devotees said that many miracles happened around him but of this he said, “I know nothing about miracles, unless we agree that everything is a miracle. There is consciousness in which everything happens. It is quite obvious and within the reach of everybody: Look well and see what I see.”

Maharaj died in September 1981 from the effects of throat cancer - which brought about considerable physical suffering and progressive debilitation. Ramesh Balsekar (Ch. 20) wrote of this period as follows: “During his last days - from May-June to 8 September, his body visibly withered day after day, but his spirit remained indomitable till the end. He continued to talk, though in a weak voice, with inherent authority, and at his mere word, as it were, the listener’s illusions and delusions shriveted.”

**Fragments of the teachings**

**Liberation and the worlds:** Maharaj said that the liberated see beyond the world. What may occupy the whole field of consciousness when bound in the personal world based on memory, will be only a speck to an enlightened being. Such an individual doesn’t live in memory but sees the world as it is: A momentary appearance in consciousness. But can this be explained? Only by negation - every positive explanation is from memory and is therefore inapplicable. Yet the enlightened state, he said, is supremely actual and therefore possible and realizable.

**The personality mind:** The mind of the world is always restless and disturbed, seething with thoughts. Yoga, religion and all that may seem to give some peace but such peace is very brittle and any little thing can crack it. Even striving and seeking in spiritual pursuits is a form of restlessness. The Self, the true ‘I am’ does not need to be put at rest because it is peace itself - not at peace. It is the mind that is restless. Man regards the pleasant as more peaceful than the unpleasant but any worldly changes are not peace because they must have a beginning and an ending. The true Self is timeless but the ‘personalities’ of the world are time-bound products of the imagination and the egoic self, which is itself the victim of this imagination. Man looks for true knowledge but it is not something found by this kind of searching. What is thought of as knowledge is but a memory and pattern of thought, motivated by pleasure and pain? Being seduced by pleasure and goaded by pain man searches for knowledge, but only attains it when he has understood that all existence, in separation and limitation, is painful, even if it is pleasurable. When you learn to live integrally, in oneness with all life, you have gone beyond the world and all need of help.

**Master and seeker:** To a visitor Maharaj said, “My life is a succession of events just like yours. Only I am detached and see the passing show as a passing show, while you stick to things and move along with them.” An
enlightened person, though still a person, has realized that he is the Ultimate Reality: “He sees every being as he sees himself, i.e. not as a ‘person’ nor as a mere ‘form’ or ‘thing’. On the other hand, a seeker expects to learn something. But how can a mere conceptual object know something?”

It is first necessary to give up identification with the body as a separate entity. Then, in the presence of an enlightened master, a guru if we wish to use that word, grace will bloom and the seeker will realize that the guru is none other than the consciousness within - the true Self - not the consciousness that is identified with the body and with an individual personality. It is that consciousness, pleased with the faith and love of the seeker that will unfold the knowledge of Reality: “But there cannot be any progress if you continue to regard yourself as an entity, and the master, though different in some way, as another entity.”

Maharaj explained that he sees himself in everyone and everything: Things happen and I just see them happen. I accept and am accepted - being all, what am I afraid of. And being also nothing, no-thing is afraid of nothing. Conversely, all things in the world, all personalities, are afraid of nothing. It is like a bottomless well - whatever falls in disappears. He said: “I am not attached. It is attachment to a shape or form that breeds fear. I may be angry - furious perhaps - but at the same time I know that I am and what I am: a centre of pure love and wisdom. All subsides and the mind merges into silence.”

A questioner asked if the world is an accident, the capricious play of God, or a divine plan to awaken consciousness throughout the universe - from lifelessness to life, dullness to bright intelligence, from misapprehension to clarity - to actualise infinite potentials of life and consciousness. Do enlightened beings see this good purpose even though the world is a mental construct? When God takes rest do enlightened ones remain aware of the universal silence, while those not ready become unconscious for a time before the emergence of a new universe? Mahatmas say this and that distaste for the world is necessary but temporary and becomes replaced by love and a will to work with God; but it seems that Maharaj maintains that the world is no good and should be shunned altogether? Please explain.

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Maharaj agreed that this is all true for the ‘outgoing’ path when consciousness becomes manifest. For the path of return to the Absolute, naughting oneself is necessary. He said, “Words do not reach there nor thoughts. To the unenlightened mind it seems all darkness and silence.” It was a statement like the Buddha’s explanation of enlightenment: Where water, earth, heat and wind find no footing, there no stars gleam, no sun is made visible, there shines no moon, (but) there darkness is not found; When the sage, the Brahmin, himself in wisdom knows this place he is freed from the form and formless realms.

Maharaj continued: “Then consciousness stirs and wakes up the mind which projects the world based on memory and imagination. The mind imagines goals and strives for them seeking means and ways, displaying vision, energy and courage. We cannot deny that this is what happens”. But that the world displays an ‘ongoing enrichment of consciousness’- taking place through cause and effect, may not be so even though it may appear to be so from the mind’s point of view. In pure being consciousness arises and in consciousness the world appears and disappears. But before all these beginnings and endings there is always ‘I am’. Even not-being is unthinkable without ‘me’. ‘I’ must be there to witness it. So while the world can be said to appear it cannot ever be - as long as the mind is there and the body and material things are there. To the questioner he said: “Your world is mind-made, subjective, enclosed within the worldly mind, fragmentary, temporary and hanging on the thread of memory.”

Maharaj explained that in the ‘outgoing’ world man may die and emerge into another life as the worlds of desire and fear form and dissolve. But the Supreme Self never sleeps and never dies. Eternally the Great Heart beats, and at each beat a new universe comes into being. He is beyond all that the mind conceives, and his (Maharaj’s) stand is where no
difference exists, where things are not, nor the minds that create them. There one is at home; free from memory and expectation - ever fresh, innocent and wholehearted. Needing nothing one is unafraid. Whom to be afraid of?

**Causation:** Causation means the succession of events in time and physical and mental space. These events are mental categories that arise and subside in the mind. In worldly life we are always initiating actions with a view to results, but people do not know that nothing can happen unless the entire universe makes it happen. In existence no thing has a particular, or personal, cause because the universe contributes to the existence of the smallest thing. But, Maharaj said, the universe is not bound by its content because its potentialities are infinite - and besides it is a manifestation itself, or an expression of a principle that is fundamentally and totally free. The Source and Ground of everything is the only cause so it is not correct to speak of causality as a universal law... When the past and the future are seen in the timeless now, as parts of a common pattern, the idea of cause and effect loses its validity and creative freedom takes its place: "Causality is just a worldly thing - a vortex into which the 'personalities' are drawn and whirled about, and to which they contribute."

Maharaj explained that the enlightened being understands that he is a non-doer and the eternal witness to the transient. God alone is the All-Doer. All is done by God and there is no difference between God and nature. To Him things happen by their own nature. Both the All-Doer and the non-doer, the enlightened, know themselves to be the immovable centre of the movable. The centre is a point of void and the witness a point of pure awareness. They know themselves to be no-thing, therefore nothing can resist them. From the highest point of view the world has no cause, yet everything is interlinked. Things just happen. There is no separation, we are not separate selves. There is only one true Self, the Supreme Reality, in which the personal and impersonal are one. But when you create a world for yourself in time and space it is governed by what appears to be causality: "And although one may appear to hear and see and talk and act, in reality it just happens - like digestion and perspiration." The mind-body machine just looks after things.

**Consciousness is the key:** Ramesh Balsekar, who was a close and intuitive follower of Maharaj, said that when Maharaj spoke it was as if consciousness was speaking to consciousness about the nature of consciousness. He would explain that what is born in the physical body is 'consciousness' which needs an organism to become manifest. Awareness, which is much more fundamental and has been called Godliness, becomes consciousness - the separate 'personality' I - when there is an object, the body, to reflect against. Then a 'gap' is formed between Awareness and its reflection as consciousness that the mind does not bridge. But it is a mere concept of being a separate 'I' which activates the physical body and separateness. Thus, consciousness, which arises in Pure Being, produces the worlds that appear and disappear like waves and ripples on the sea.

The worldly personality 'I', the 'you' and the 'me' are only appearances in consciousness. So, the world can be said to appear but not to be. And all the appearances are bound in time - that is, they exist only for a period of time which may range from a few hours for an insect or bacterium, to aeons for Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva - but ultimately they are all just appearances and cannot have any reality. But they are also basically the 'I' consciousness, which arises from Awareness - and this is the key, the portal, to regaining that awareness.

Even though distinctions cannot really exist between the manifest and the un-manifest, the notion of 'I', Maharaj explained, could be considered in three aspects: The impersonal Absolute beyond sensory perception and unaware of itself, the super-personal which is a reflection of the Absolute in the manifest - as light which pervades the universe cannot be seen until there is something there to reflect it, and the personal which is a construct of the physical and mental apparatus in which consciousness manifests itself. This 'individual' in the form of a body-mind is always the object and consciousness the witnessing subject, but the ego deludes itself into thinking it is a subject seeing others which are its objects. Their relationship is interdependent and sentience cannot exist without consciousness; and this relationship, Maharaj says, is proof of their basic identity with the Absolute. Each of us - the 'I' - is all that there is.

**The body and ego consciousness:** A visitor asked what is the difference between 'awareness' and 'consciousness' - if any? Maharaj explained that awareness is the absolute and beyond the three gunas (attributes of behaviour) while consciousness, in its worldly aspect, is limited by the food body and mind. This consciousness depends on the food body for its existence and is subject to the three gunas while awareness simply is - the primordial state, before the concept of space-time, in which there is only unity; the unity of God if you like. Consciousness is time-bound but in death only the body dies together with that attribute of consciousness which is the personality or the ego, which dissolves. This did not exist when you were born and has been built up in the world - and, in any case, is constantly changing. But the 'I am' attribute of consciousness, the super-personal, does not die - Reality does not, and, Maharaj maintained, "Life is never so alive as after death."

Although birth and death are nothing more than movement in the consciousness of events set in time and space, we become so accustomed to thinking of ourselves as bodies and egos that it is very difficult to understand the real position - that we have no control whatsoever. In dreams we have no control and also in the 'dream' of the waking state we have no control. We know that we have no control in the dream state but, usually, we think we do have control in the waking state. In deep sleep consciousness retires so to speak, and there is no awareness of a separate 'I'. Indeed there is no sense of the existence of the world and its inhabitants at all - there is just existence and presence. But when a dream occurs it is a speck of 'I' consciousness stirring and then an entire dream world appears including the dreamer himself - fabricated only out of memory and imagination. Then, as in the waking world, the dreamer has no control over what the dream figures are doing. Most worldly people know of the waking, sleeping and deep sleep states but know them only separately, But to the enlightened there is only one state of being. Maharaj said that such a person transcends the mental states and even when asleep he is aware of being asleep: "He accepts the world and has no desire to lock it up in mental pictures."
Awareness is primordial, beginningless, endless, the original state. Consciousness is a reflection and there can be no consciousness without awareness - but there is awareness without consciousness.”

**Self inquiry:** The moment the concept of consciousness arises on the primordial state of unity (with the formation of the body), the sense of ‘I am’ arises, causing duality. But awareness is always there - and we can know this because at the moment of waking we are aware of having been asleep - before the busy egoic mind gets involved with its affairs. Maharaj said that continuous attention to one’s stream of consciousness takes one into awareness - which is the basic existence of life, love and joy. Even the consciousness of consciousness is a movement towards awareness, and this is the basis of Self inquiry. The mind, by its nature, is dualistic and tends to go outwards but when it is directed towards the Source within, it is almost like beginning a new life. Awareness replaces consciousness and the ‘I am’, which is merely a thought in consciousness, ceases and is replaced by awareness - which is the source of consciousness. This is enlightenment.

**The knower and the subtle body:** Even witness-consciousness is not permanent. Maharaj said, “It is the ‘knower’ - which is an attribute of being born into the world. But with awareness in deep sleep the knower knows that he is there. It is not just a matter of escape from memories for the memory of well-being is there. There is a difference in saying that “I was deeply asleep” and “I was absent”. But, like the ego personality, the knower disappears with death. Consciousness needs a vehicle in life and when life produces another body another knower comes into being. However, there is some connection between bodies through the subtle body or the causal body - which is like a cloud of images held together.” If soul (jiva) is something different from the Self then this is what it is: the images held in the subtle body.

**Living in the present:** Living in the present is flowing with life. Life flows like a river between the banks of pleasure and pain but the mind gets stuck in the banks. Flowing with life means acceptance: “Letting come what comes and go what goes.” Maharaj said that we should observe what actually happens without desire and fear for we are not what happens, and we are not in control of what happens. And ultimately, as indicated before, even this observer, the witness, we are not. This is what we are:

“We are the ultimate potentiality of which the all-embracing consciousness is its manifestation and expression.”

The mind becomes obsessed with past memories but memories are feeble in comparison to the present because of the difference created by presence. I am real for I am always in the present, and what is with me now shares my reality. There is nothing special about an event in the present over an event in the past except presence - it is my own reality that I impart to the present event. On the other hand the mind hankers after the past. Instead what we should be after is discovering the: “Other mind - which unites and harmonizes, and sees the whole in the part and the part as totally related to the whole.” In going beyond the limiting, opposing and dividing mind and ending the mental process, the true mind, the mind of God, the inner Self - the Atman, is revealed. And that inclusive mind is love in action. It creates an abyss and the heart crosses it: “It becomes a question of love seeking expression and meeting with obstacles, and becoming ultimately victorious.” This is why suffering, poverty, abuse and so on, and the witnessing of them, have a role - they are the catalysts for love to become.

**The enlightened teacher and sadhana**

The intellect can be a barrier: In talking to a Sanskrit scholar well versed in Vedanta, Maharaj asked him, just for a moment, to forget all the knowledge he had accumulated and to try to grasp what he was about to say. “Remember; keep an empty mind, empty but alert - not just void and inert”. Then he said:

“Whatever the state is when we did not know anything, that is our true state, that is reality. In that state, we did not even know our own existence. Then, spontaneously, came the message or the knowledge ‘I am’. This started duality, subject and object, sin and merit, and all the interrelated opposites. Whatever was before the knowledge ‘I am’ - is truth; whatever is subsequent to it is false... That ‘I-am-ness’, the sense of being present in it, is maya, prakriti, Ishwara etc. - and is an illusion. It is maya that creates the world and peoples it with many forms - from gods to bacteria. It makes consciousness (from which arises sentience) mistakenly believe it is a particular form itself existing in duality, and makes it forget its true nature. It is like an illness - for certain duration - subject to the three gunas of behaviour. Then, on death, consciousness will be freed. The process will have reached its allotted end. A true master can help the seeker to become liberated from the illusion”.

Then Maharaj said, “My guru told me that that I am nothing but myself and I believed him - so I ceased caring for what was not me or mine... Be aware of your own existence and study the prison you have built around yourself. The way back is through rejection. Once this obsession with the body goes and once you become convinced that the only thing you can say about yourself is ‘I am’, then, when nothing that can be pointed at can be yourself, the need for ‘I am’ is over. All you need to do is get rid of the tendency of defining yourself. All definitions apply to the body and once these go you will revert to your natural self... And we discover it by being earnest, by searching, inquiring, questioning daily and hourly, by giving one’s life to this discovery.”

Maharaj maintained that the root of realization is trust in the teacher, but even without this the power of his words would be there, latent - waiting to be realized. The words of a realized master never miss their purpose. Teacher and disciple are each part of the other. The true guru will never humiliate. He will constantly remind you of your inherent perfection and encourage you to seek within.

**The dualistic illusion:** Maharaj explained that even satvic (spiritual) things, are still gunas - they are attributes of
the world. He said, “Understand that to be, to be liberated, reality need not be ‘known’. The good people, who have read a lot and have a lot to say, may teach many useful things - but they are not enlightened. They talk of ripeness and effort, of merits and achievement, of destiny and grace. But all these are mere mental formations, projections of an addicted mind. Instead of helping they obstruct. The real knowledge is a state of mind, while ‘teaching’ another is just a movement in duality.” But it does help to know this – how it really is; and this is what a Master teaches.

So all knowledge is a form of ignorance from the aspect of the Absolute, for it is worldly knowledge of an illusion... You need not reach out for what is already with you. Give up the idea that you have not found it and just let it come into the focus of direct perception, here and now, by removing all that is of the mind. As long as you believe that only the outer world is real, you remain its slave. It is not you who suffers fears and desires, it is the personality that you think you are, the false self, built on the foundation of the body by circumstances and influences. You are not that person with a name and shape that experiences joys and sorrows. When you ‘see’ an object what really has happened is that your senses have reacted to something and your mind has identified it as an external object. But this is nothing but an appearance in your consciousness that is construed as an event in time and space – like the figures in a dream. That person was not there before you were born and nor will it be there after you die. So, “Instead of struggling with the person to make it become what it is not, why not go beyond the waking state and leave the personal life altogether. Break the spell of the illusion that only what you perceive is real. How can a person, a gasp of pain between life and death, be happy?”

What is unchanging in the world? Maharaj said that people feel they are in “bondage” but it is that which is the false ‘I’ that feels it. As we go through life the idea about one’s self constantly changes - so, which image is real? Is there an identity which is unchangeable? The answer is that there is something that remains unchanged and that is the sense of presence - that we exist. We know this without doubt and need of confirmation from anyone else. But when we are in deep sleep we are unable to sense this existence. But in the morning - the very first moment - we can feel our existence simply as ‘I am’ - not as an individual but just as presence. A master explains that all manifestation depends on time and space and in the absence of these no manifestation could possibly arise in consciousness. Maharaj said:

“We only exist in consciousness as one another’s objects and only in the consciousness that cognizes us. When objectification ceases, as in deep sleep, the objective universe disappears. So long as one imagines oneself as a separate entity, a person, one cannot see the total picture of the impersonal reality. And this idea is an illusion of time and space - which have no independent existence for they are only media to make manifestation cognizable. Think of ourselves as momentary, without a past and future (without time) and where are the personalities?”

The best sadhana is achieved in silence: A visitor complained that the austerities prescribed by many gurus were just too much to bear. And, he said, this suffering gets you nowhere. Maharaj explained that austerities are necessary because the egoic self is so confident; it needs to be totally discouraged. Sadhana, like yoga and prolonged meditation, may seem like suffering but they are only to remind yourself not be drawn outwards. What helps most is silence. Look at yourself in total silence and do not describe or judge what you see. You are not what you seem to be. Being like this will be a movement into Self inquiry.

In going into Self inquiry you start by giving attention to the ‘I am’ - the witness. The witness too is transitory but through the witnessing of the consciousness of ‘I am’ the path to reality is opened. (As reality you were never born and shall never die). Now, go within, into a state which you may compare to a state of waking sleep, in which you are aware of yourself but not of the world. In that state you will know that at the root of your being you are free and happy. But now you imagine that you are born and have a body - which, within the limits of illusion, was born from desire based on memory. This illusion is true only in a relative sense - in time and space. In fact there is no body, nor a world to contain it. There is only a mental condition, a dream-like state, easy to dispel by questioning its reality.

So, if we can realize this we can witness our original state of pristine awareness and bliss, separate from the movements of consciousness. Maharaj said that this is an indisputable fact because the perceiver of duality cannot be what he perceives - he must be different! It is only the inner Self that can be ‘aware’ and through which the Supreme Awareness can be contacted. The personal self is delineated by the physical body and the mind - it is the ‘object’, and the object can never know the subject. Maharaj said that the most likely situation under which the personal self can perceive the Self is when the mind is “fasting” - when the mind fasts reality appears; when the mind feasts, reality disappears. When consciousness is tainted with self-identification (with the ‘object’) the person appears, and when consciousness witnesses the object, when it is in its supreme purity, there is Awareness.

The true master is the Self: Maharaj said that a real living guru is very rare. But when there is complete surrender, life dawns: “full of love and beauty”. Then a guru is not important for the disciple has broken the shell of self-defense. So make your goal your guru. The real Self is not affected by the comedy that plays in this world for a time. Duality is a temporary state. Leave others alone and examine yourself. “What are you? How did you come to be born? What is the purpose of life?” These are weighty matters and need to be attended to. The fact is that we are never really without a guru, for the inner guru is timelessly present in the heart. In life this guru may externalize as an uplifting factor - a mother, spiritual teacher, a propensity to be moved by words or events, or simply as an inner urge towards goodness, humility and perfection. What the guru wants is simple - learn self-awareness, self-control, self-surrender. Maharaj says that may seem arduous but it is easy if you are earnest - and compassion is the foundation of earnestness. Respond to the sorrows of others as the Buddha did. But if you are callous your own suffering will propel you to ask the inevitable questions. This is why some masters impose austerities. It’s like the suffering of sadhana in either entered on ‘voluntarily’, or is imposed by the guru - which may be just life experience – the dhamma of Buddhism. In either case it is just
happening. Work in the world should be done without making it a means to something else. A thing is worth doing for its own purpose and meaning.

Maharaj said that for some simple folk singing the praise of God is enough. To these the teacher may give a mantra. The constant repetition of a few words is all the food that is needed to live on: “It may seem like madness but it is divine madness. It may seem like tamas (inertia) but it is also sattva (spirituality). It will take the form of complete dispassion, detachment, immutability. And it becomes a foundation on which an integrated life can be lived.”

Should one change Gurus? Maharaj said, “Why not? Gurus are just like milestones. It is natural to move from one to another. The eternal guru is the road itself - the road is life and life is the best teacher. It is the same as dharma. Once you realize that the road is your goal, enjoy its beauty and its wisdom - life ceases to be a task and becomes natural and simple, in itself an ecstasy.”

On how will you know you are succeeding he advised: “Watch yourself. If you see yourself changing, growing, you will know you have the true guru. More essential is becoming a true disciple - life will bring you a guru. Until you realize yourself you cannot know who is a real guru.”

How an enlightened master helps the world

In answer to a question about whether he could help the world Maharaj said, “I do help always - from within. My Self and your Self are one. The thought of a master pervades all humanity and works ceaselessly. And being anonymous and coming from within, it is more powerful and compelling.”

To a visitor who was grieving the loss of his son in an accident he explained that there is no ‘me’ and no ‘you’. What he called his son was just a chance event over which he had no control - and now it had come to an end. Most of us go through life enjoying the usual pleasures and suffering the usual pains without ever once seeing the true perspective. But grief, such as the man was experiencing, presents an opportunity to see the transient as transient, the unreal as unreal, and to realize one’s true nature. From the point of view of the false, you are a ‘person’ who enjoys, suffers etc. It is the Self that mistakenly identifies as a ‘person’ and is conscious of being it. As long as you identify yourself with the body-mind organism you are vulnerable to sorrow and suffering: “Outside the mind there is just being, not being father or son, or this or that.”

Maharaj explained that our attention is fixed on things. When, through the practice of detachment, you lose sight of sensory and mental states, pure being emerges as the natural state. By focusing the mind on the sense of being, the ‘I am so-and-so’ dissolves. Then all becomes one and the One is yourself. The master constantly points this out: “Unmanifest, manifest, individual, personality, all are merely mental attitudes - points of view. There is no reality in them. The real experience is silence. You cling to personality but you are conscious of it only when you are in trouble - Otherwise you do not think of it.” The use of the unmanifest is like sleeping in order to wake, dying in order to live, destroying in order to build (not the body which is a dead thing anyway until it gets prana). But the Supreme is the universal solvent: “Without the absolute denial of everything, the tyranny of things would be absolute. The supreme dissolves you and thus re-asserts your true being.”

A master always will say that we should try to find this out for ourselves. Only in memory and anticipation, in space and time, is there a feeling that there is a mental state under observation. Space and time come along with consciousness and make manifestation perceivable. And the moment there is the thought of ‘me’ as a separate identity there is the feeling of ‘bondage’: “To realize this is the end of bondage. You stand aloof in the realization of the false as false and that all there is, is ‘I am’.”

His death

Maharaj died of throat cancer but throughout the months that his body succumbed to the painful disease, he remained calm and detached, and continued teaching, though with a voice growing weaker and weaker, till the end.

Practicalities

Nisargadatta Maharaj has influenced many seekers and, in the tradition of the great sage Ramana Maharshi has become a landmark and a milestone in the search for Reality. Yet there has been formed no monument or ashram to commemorate his existence. Rather, his legacy has been a number of enlightened successors who follow his teachings. The best known is Ramesh Balsekar - see Chapter 20 of this book.

Chapter 16

ROBERT ADAMS - SILENCE OF THE HEART
The mind and the body are not your friends.

Never forget the purpose of why you’re here, said Robert: Although it is true in the Absolute Reality there is no purpose, as long as you believe you are a body or a mind, or both, then your purpose is to become no purpose. Spend your energy becoming nothing. But do not believe you’re nothing when you haven’t become nothing yet. Sounds like nonsense?
Maybe, but by now the perceptive reader who, like most of us, may have given his trust to the world, should have become less certain about what he or she thinks is real, and more receptive to the idea that there may actually be another Reality. Things may not be what they seem. And perhaps such a Reality is where God is found - not as a judging, rewarding and punishing super being - but as something intimate and unifying, and free from the monstrous thought of time stretching into an endless future that must be coped with - listening, perhaps, to endless talk shows and watching endless soap operas.

Even the few years that we have in the world are enough for the mind to become stunned with boredom. If anyone could expound the notion of a Supreme Reality and an end to the notions of space and time, to the satisfaction of the Western reader, it was Robert Adams. The only source of information on Robert generally available is a remarkable book which records satsang from the last few years of his life, called Silence of the Heart - see Bibliography.

**Background**

Robert Adams was born a very special person in 1928 in New York and departed this world in 1997. His earliest memories included a small white-bearded, gnome-like figure that used to look over the edge of his cot and mutter what seemed to be gibberish. This little man stayed with him until he was seven. Then he developed a supernatural power, a siddhi. With this he could conjure up candy bars and other items and, by repeating God’s name three times, obtain the answers to test questions at school.

Then, when Robert was fourteen, he had the experience of awakening - of enlightenment. It happened during a math test. Rather, as he put it, his body and mind were taking the test. He felt his body expanding - which proved to him that the body did not exist in the way that he had come to perceive it. A brilliant light, which he could see in all directions (through omnivision), came from the “heart”. He understood that this was really his true Self, which became brighter and brighter like the light of a thousand suns but nevertheless did not burn him to a crisp... And the light was ONE - it was not his body and the light, and it expanded through the universe which he could feel as himself. It was ineffable, indescribable, bliss. Then the light began to fade but there was no darkness. It was void - there was no time, no space, just the pure awareness of “I Am That I Am”.

After this things returned to ‘normal’ but he was able to understand that the universe - planets, people, flowers, earth, were myriads of energy, and he was in everything. At the same time he felt extraordinary love, compassion and humility. But the love was not the ordinary love perceived by the world. There was no room for anything else but love because there was no space and no time. This love did not judge and discriminate - and simultaneously everything was himself. And it was also a game as all the myriad energy surged and pulsed and changed. Creation came into existence but there was no creation. Suns were born and dissolved, life formed on planets instantaneously, evolution took place instantly (as, in fact, required by quantum physics), yet nothing was taking place at all. But through all this the Love, capital ‘L’ Love, never changed. That is why, Robert explained, the scriptures tell us to love everything and everyone without exception and under all circumstances, and why they say that God is Love. Then, as awareness flowered, there was compassion for everything, and there was humility - because everything was “all right” and nothing needed to be changed at all. There was no need for the idea that he, Robert, had to do something to correct things. But, he said, “The human mind - the brain, the intellect cannot understand any of this”.

**His life**

After enlightenment Robert lost interest in worldly things and his mother thought he was going mad. He felt alone in a world of people with whom he had no common ground. One day he happened on a book by Ramana Maharshi called Who Am I and on seeing a photograph of the sage his hair stood on end. It was a photograph of the little man who had appeared to him when he was a child - but now he could understand the “gibberish” that had been spoken to him.

When he was around sixteen Robert went to meet Paramhansa Yogananda (Ch. 6) with a view to becoming a monk, but Yogananda said that his dharma lay with Ramana Maharshi and that he should go to India and stay with him because their enlightenment experiences were so similar (see Ch. 4). Some time after this he went to India and was able to stay in Tiruvannamalai for the last three years of Ramana’s life. Thus Robert, like Papaji, was one of the very few direct disciples of Ramana to survive to the latter years of the 20th century and to recent modern times.

After Ramana had died, Robert traveled for the following seventeen years meeting many spiritual teachers and confirming that his understanding of enlightenment was complete. He was a very private man and preferred to live, as much as was possible, in silence and refraining from involvement in the world. This in fact is his recommendation for the pursuit of enlightenment - see further on. However, wherever he stopped for any length of time people were attracted to him. His editor, Ananda Devi, said of him that he was everyone’s friend. Through his deep understanding, compassion and humour, those who came to him became like children: “Innocent, open-hearted, natural and simple... The fullness of his presence left no room for anything else - no mind, no past, no attachment. One was relieved of all but the Here and Now.” Fortunately, a few years before his death, Robert had a vision of many great teachers, including the Buddha, coming together, and he understood this to mean that it was time to take on some devotees to whom he could recount his understanding of Reality. It is from these satsangs that the book Silence of the Heart was produced. The book is the source of information in this chapter.

**An example of satsang with Robert (a synopsis)**

Karmically we are put on this world to go through certain experiences and the body, thus, is an instrument for experiencing them. We should accept this just as it is. There is no need for pujas, adjusting planetary influences - these are for the worldly. The sincere spiritual seeker just accepts. Really nothing can happen to you because you are really
Consciousness and immortality. You're just having a bad dream - maybe a nightmare. So work on love (God's Love), compassion and humility, and also practice Self inquiry - see further on. Refuse to participate in the worldly dream and practice Self inquiry. See what you do, your thoughts, feelings, everything going on inside you. Leave the world alone and always: “Have in the back of your mind I am not the body, the mind, the doer - feel this deeply but do not feel good or bad about it.” And do not try to prolong your life - it’s a waste of energy. Let your life, the body, take care of itself. Give it balanced food and exercise - that’s all. Then remain in silence and ask: “Who has this body?” ... If you have pain or discomfort, ask: “Who has this pain?” ... 'I' do ... Then who is this 'I'? - You, the real you is free of pain. It's the ‘I’ thought that has pain - the experience of being born and dying and having problems - not you.”

You have to let all things go. All that matters is liberation - work towards it through love, compassion and humility. Humility means we don’t have to straighten things out, to get even, to stick up for our rights: “That’s something to think about - getting involved in politics, family life, work, so that we forget that we only have so many years in the body and we’re wasting time and energy on things that do not really exist - things that make no sense. So instead, put your energy into finding yourself that you never really lost. And you do this be developing love, compassion and humility.”

And, he said, we should destroy thoughts through Self inquiry. Observe, watch, look, without judgment. Don’t think you won’t be able to function - you will. What the body is up to has nothing to do with you. Be yourself and let your thoughts get slower and slower, thoughts that judge good and bad - then love, compassion and humility come into being. This pretty well sums up Robert’s teaching.

**The Path to Enlightenment**

Robert always maintained that the fastest ways to enlightenment are to have satsang with enlightened masters and to practice Self inquiry. But Self inquiry is for the seekers who are like gunpowder - ready to explode into enlightenment with the slightest spark. For others it takes a little longer but the satsang is nevertheless efficacious and cumulative. But, as in the case of all the individuals sketched in this book, except possibly Nisargadatta Maharaj (and Rama Tirtha perhaps), their own enlightenment experience did not come from the concerted practice of Self inquiry in this life. It either came with them when they were born, or came spontaneously with only once questioning “Who am I?”; or it followed on a period of intense suffering. It was only after the experience that they were able to conclude that Self inquiry was the most direct course for reaching liberation. For this reason, Robert maintained that enlightenment through Self inquiry usually takes place after earlier lives of doing intense sadhana or experiencing intense suffering. He said that, though the goal is someplace within, we do all kinds of practices - hatha yoga, meditation, trying to awaken the kundalini, practicing Taoism or Tantra, memorizing the bible, the Koran and so on - which are all actually a waste of time because, without awareness, you don’t actually do them, they’re being done to you in the dream of the world. But somehow, they also are necessary - if only to realize that they are not. Robert asked, “How can both these statements be correct? It’s simple: They’re not a waste of time because, after long and arduous practice, they lead you the conclusion that that it’s not the teachings or practices that are going to awaken you.” They merely give you the power of concentration that you need and they keep your egoic, dualistic mind off the temptations and involvements of the material world. So, although they do not bring enlightenment, they bring the acquiring of an understanding of enlightenment that is the beginning of wisdom. You realize that all the practices are also part of maya and in the world of the ego, and this is what leads you to your true master, external or internal, in the form of the Self, or to your spontaneous awakening. And in many cases, though not in the case of Robert and Ramana in their present lives, the practices have included intense tapas, suffering - spiritual or otherwise, self chosen or not, in which the ego just gives up. This has also been called ‘the way of the cross’ - ‘the dark night of the soul’ or “the agonizing pincer-jaws” of Yates.

**Duality**

But why give up duality and the world? One may say: “Leave me alone and let me have a drink.” The answer to why most people do not want to give up the world is that the highest human attainment is not for everyone. Most people want to stay in the world, but they are going to experience the law of cause and effect, of karma. The pendulum of life is going to swing one way and things will go well. Then it will swing the other way and the world starts falling apart. You get cancer or AIDS, your family is killed in an accident, you lose all your savings on the stock market and your house is taken away from you by the bank. You curse life and may become suicidal. This really is the way of the world and it happens this way to everyone - there are no exceptions. And for everyone their egoic minds and their bodies are going to die. First they may get senile and then there will be a mortal fear, and then you die.

Then, Robert pointed out, if you have not attained liberation, you will be born again. Your vasanas, accumulated tendencies and habits, likes and dislikes, will follow you - they will never leave you alone. You will meet the same people you don’t like. One may have been your daughter whom you censured unreasonably, and now she is your father and gets her own back. Robert said, “If you have not worked on yourself to transcend good and bad, you keep appearing again and again and again on these various worlds, taking on various bodies and going through various experiences... You may come back when the planet is in the dark ages... And you’re tortured. Your fingers are cut off one by one... Then you come back in another life and you’re the Vice President of America.” And then you will really be confused. The higher you go in the one direction the lower you go in the other and vice versa. If anyone doubts that the pendulum swings in this way (both within and between lives) then just read some honest biographies - of anyone. Or examine the life of anyone closely - anyone who is not enlightened that is. In the Western world people may appear comfortable and well off on the surface, but inside there is a raving manic, or a depressive lunatic.
Finding the Truth: Robert said that the Truth is found in silence, not in lectures and sermons. “If you don’t react to things, silence is magic… Peace comes, happiness comes, joy comes - you remember who you are, the One Self. Think of that - we are all the One Self.”

He explained that what people call the Kingdom of Heaven, the Reality, you are already. But you have so many concepts that cover it up. So, he explained, open your heart. How? By keeping silent, by not being judgmental, by leaving the world alone: “You can never fix the world - you can only fix yourself (your egoic self, with a small ‘s’) by coming to the understanding of who you are. That brings peace and joy and happiness. Do not question and analyse.” Just allow the presence to take over. The power of it starts in the heart and spreads until all around become it: “It is consciousness, omnipresence. Forget what you think you are: male, female, your name - Fred, Ethel. Let go of your beliefs, emotions, yourself, and others. Allow your mind to remain empty.”

He told people to realize: “I am pure Awareness - the body, the world, they cannot fool me any longer and make me miserable. The universe, the planets cannot fool me - they do not exist”. There is only an amazing play of energy that is all linked. No thing that transpires in my life can hurt me - the real Me. Forgive everyone and everything and forgive myself - no matter how heinous are the things they may appear to have done: “Realize - I am the power and the glory - and so is everybody and everything else - all is well.”

Love, compassion and humility are the things that need to be developed. Then the Self, the Atman, will pull your egoic self into the Heart centre, capital ‘H’ Heart, and you will become liberated.

These are some examples of Robert’s explanations and teachings:

**Consciousness is all there is**

Consciousness, Robert said, is nothing that you can describe and pin down because the egoic intellect cannot understand it and words cannot describe it, yet it is all that there is. That is why the seers have usually described it in terms of what it is not, or used words that are nothing more than indications or analogies: like love (God’s Love not connubial love), bliss, Sat-Chit-Ananda, knowledge, liberation, being, awareness and so on. The words sound good and may give a good feeling for a while but, you don’t ‘digest’ the words because you have not yet become “a living embodiment of Consciousness”. Consciousness is given a capital ‘C’ because it stands for God.

In reality, you are perfect just the way you really are, but not the way you think you are - the way the world shows you. So Robert said, “Stand up tall. (Not the egoic, ‘better than’ tall.) There is nothing that can hurt you - the real you... You are the substratum of all existence because everything is an image of Consciousness.” He pointed out that, when practicing Self inquiry, don’t let the ego get the idea that it is invincible.

The only way to being peace and to overcome problems that appear to be in what appears to be the world, is to bring peace to yourself. And that is done by realizing that everything is Consciousness: “And what do I mean by that? Take everything in the room: lamps, chairs, the bodies. They are not what they seem to be. They are Consciousness. I am not saying that Consciousness produced these things... I am saying that everything that appears to arise, that you hear with your ears, that you taste with your mouth, that you feel with your hands, is Consciousness; and as you merge with it, it becomes you. It is your true nature... The world did not come out of Consciousness, and we have to return to Consciousness... because there is no “we” to return... Consciousness is just pure Awareness, aware of itself, and the world is like a reflection... Where did the reflection come from? From nowhere because it doesn’t really exist... When you awaken you understand that you are a mirror... And the reflection is a mirage that only appears to happen.”

It can be said that Consciousness is a power that knows itself and that it is a “screen of reality” on which all the images of the universe are projected. (And the egoic mind, which is a thought of Consciousness also has the power of projection - the projection of dualistic illusion). We believe, because of universal mind-set acquired through many incarnations, and from what we are taught again and again in lifetime after lifetime by our parents and mentors (who are also in the same illusion), that we are the illusory image, the person. And we believe there are also other persons and we have external things to contend with in the world. But in reality it is all just a dream; but you can never tell it’s a dream while you are dreaming. But, Robert said, “I can assure you that there will be a day in your life, or a future life, when you will awaken to the truth that you are living in a mortal dream. If you pinch me I feel only a dream pinch. Consequently, the great sages have always told us to identify with Consciousness, not with what’s going on in the world. The only freedom we have got is to not react to anything, and to turn within and know the truth... This doesn’t mean that you have to give up everything. While engaging in your work you simply have to be aware that everything is Consciousness.”

**The world hangs on the ‘I’ thought:** Robert explained that the world hangs on the ‘I thought’ - that is, the thought that arises from the Atman and assumes independence. Hindus call it the Jiva. From the ‘I thought’, which gives rise to the ego, the world is created as an illusion of opposites, opposing each other. Moreover, the world depends on these opposites, on duality, and requires that there is conflict, perceptions of right and wrong, good and bad, and so on. Without these opposites the world can’t exist. If there was no conflict the world would simply disappear - everyone and everything would be enlightened.

**Maya is the world - don’t choose it**

Maya has been described as the ‘magnificent fraud’ by Nisargadatta - see Chapter 15. It is what appears to create problems, animosity, and sorrow. Robert explained that maya is very powerful. It makes you believe that things are happening in the world, believing things about your body, about somebody else, about a situation and feeling it - that’s maya. Every time you grab on to it, it gains more power and over lifetime after lifetime it becomes stronger and stronger:
“You reach such a state that it takes many lifetimes to get rid of all your fears and frustrations. Thoughts about the past have made these things seem real for you, but in actuality they do not exist.”

Then, if you are in this state, when you leave the body, you appear to go through an ‘astral’ plane, and you may get a rest: “You meet your long lost relatives that you couldn’t stand. And you continue and continue and continue. But it’s all a lie. You are making it the truth because you believe it and refuse to let it go.” Robert said that there seem to be many wonderful things in the world, and yet there also seems to be so much destruction. You say so many things appear to be happening, but you have to ask the question. To whom are these things happening? Who is experiencing it all? The answer is the ego: “Then remember that the ego is an illusion - there is no ego. Be aware that the world of reality is egoless. The world has no cause, so where is the effect? How could the world have a cause? Where would it come from? The answer is that you seem to be the cause, because you are dreaming. But can you say, while you are in the dream, that the world has a cause? It becomes very confusing to the mortal man. You see yourself getting older and older. All your material plans have gone by the wayside. And even great achievements you have to leave. You start to think to yourself, what is life all about? Who am I? What is the source of everything? You have no idea what’s going on… And because no one has ever explained these things to you, you come to believe that life is a chance… That you were born, and have gone through prevailing conditions, and you get old and die.”

Therefore Robert always said that we should leave the world alone. You have got to realize that your mind and your body are not your friends. They feed you the wrong information. They appear right for a while and then become wrong. Do not listen to your mind. Stop the thoughts before they get to the end of your nose. You have got a choice. And the choice is this: Believe in God or believe in the world which keeps tricking you. And the world, for the most part, is the world of mammon - of the “cold corridors of cash”. When you choose God, you’re really following your true Self: You’re following the dharma, swarupa - your real nature is swarupa: “This is the real world. The world of the Self. The world of bliss, of unalloyed joy and happiness. Then you don’t feel sorry for yourself. You no longer feel guilty. Your mind becomes clear and peaceful - like a mirror. And since a mirror is unable to see itself, it sees its reflection in the world as peace, love, harmony, joy.” This is what the enlightened see, what Jesus saw. And, Robert explained, when you continue to work on yourself, there comes a time when all this is gone and you become nothing: “Good for nothing. You go beyond nothingness, which is ineffable... There are no words or thoughts to explain this. Yet, you have got it all within you. Everything you need is within you. You are the One.”

**The no-mind state and enlightenment** : Robert said that the no-mind state is the place of Silence that you come to by practicing. It is where thoughts don’t bother you any longer. And Self realization or enlightenment is when the mind that’s left over in the Silence is pulled into the spiritual Heart centre: “At that time the whole of the mind, that is the personal mind, dissolves completely, and you are free.” The personal you ceases to exist. The ‘no-mind’ state is a very high spiritual state but there’s still ‘somebody’ left that experience it - bliss etc. But with liberation there’s nothing left. You can’t say “I am in the no-mind state” - you can’t say anything.

**Spiritual practice and Self inquiry**

With all spiritual practice, the lesson to be learned is how to stop thinking. You have to want it yourself and you have to turn within. See the truth. Become the truth. Be a lamp unto yourself as the Buddha said. A master is a guide, a mirror for you to see yourself. When you look at a master you see silence: “That is, if you’re looking at the mirror have to turn within. See the truth. Become the truth. Be a lamp unto yourself as the Buddha said. A master is a guide, a

Robert explained that the ordinary person usually only experiences Consciousness at the moment of falling asleep, during dreamless deep sleep, and momentarily on waking. And almost immediately he starts to identify with the world. But just before you wake up and start thinking, the true ‘I’, the ‘I Am’ the Absolute Reality, presents itself. Robert said, “Remember this. If, when you go to sleep, you tell yourself, ‘Tomorrow morning, when I wake, I am going to identify with my source, the ‘I AM’ - you will. If you do, perhaps only for a second, then it will change your life… Immediately, before thoughts come, identify with the Self. How do you do this? Simply say to yourself, ‘I - I.’ If you do this every morning before thoughts come and the ‘I’ is the Self - the time will come when there will no longer be a
personal, false you. Then when thoughts come and you ask to whom they come, they are coming to the Self. Then you hold on to it. But because the finite cannot understand the infinite, you have to identify when the ‘I thought’ has moved to the brain. You should inquire, “What happened to the I? Apparently it must be in my head. It has become my mind. Talk to yourself. Ask, “How did that thought get into my brain?” Now you are probably beginning to be concerned with the body and the world so work on yourself to stop this trend: “You should not continue the game of the ‘I thought’ telling you things about your body, about the world.” Contemplating in this way, you start to abide in ‘I’ again as the thought begins to travel back to the Heart. This way you begin to see that the mind is nothing but a conglomeration of thoughts.

In the practice of Self inquiry you also need to remember to catch yourself during the day: “Who believes this? To whom does this come? Who feels this? - Over and over again. When you say, ‘Who am I?’ or, more correctly, ‘Who is I’, what you are really doing is finding the source of the ‘I’ - the source of the personal ‘I’. When you ask: ‘Where did it come from? Who gave it birth?’ You are seeking the origin of the ‘I thought’ - so never answer those questions. “Pose the questions, but never answer them.” And keep it up. Don’t give up. Sit in a chair and take time. Forget about time. Don’t worry about anything. And inquire, “To whom do these thoughts come?” They come to me. I am thinking these thoughts. I and me are synonymous: “Who is this ‘I’. How did it arise? Where did it come from? Who is the ‘I’?” And remain still. Do nothing, just watch the thoughts come, and as soon the thoughts come ask, in a gentle way, “To whom do these thoughts come?”

Robert explained that you will soon realize that everything comes to you: “I believe this. I feel hurt.” and so on. And a revelation comes to you that ‘I’ - the ‘I thought’, is the culprit: “All day long it’s I, I, I.” So do not accept your thoughts. If you are feeling miserable you can watch the misery as a witness and it will go. But, Robert said, a better way is to ask, “Why am I feeling miserable? And realize that you said why am I feeling miserable. I’m, the small personal I, which is identifying with the body. And this ‘I’ doesn’t even exist - you’re making it exist.”

In the practice of Self inquiry, and this is very important, you don’t make statements - give answers etc. You just ask questions to yourself: “The egoic mind hates this… It becomes weak. You don’t say I am the Absolute Reality… The egoic mind likes that because it wants to become God.”

Robert said that when you realize that the ‘I’ is just a thought, it can have the effect of making you happy. When you realize this you realize you have nothing to fight. Some people become still and the ‘I’ just disappears: “You will feel wonderful - then you can get dressed and go to work… As you keep doing this every morning, you notice a subtle change is taking place. You develop a semblance of peace… You will notice the things that used to make you angry no longer have the power to do that… You will be happy for no reason… The lesson you have learned is how to stop thinking. And this happens not by trying to stop thoughts but be asking to whom they come.

**Negative thoughts:** When someone asked why the mind always seems to go to the negative, Robert said that it’s because it is trying to save itself from annihilation. It will try to scare you and cook up all kinds of ideas to make you forget about Self realization. But remember there is nothing that can hurt you. There are no devils, demons, no anti-Christ; all that is from the mind. So ask, “To whom do these fears come?” and they will disappear. And sometimes the mind will cook up wonderful things also. The mind wants to continue its nonsense: “Your job is to destroy the mind that thinks these things… The mind makes us see things and identify with things.” So transcend both the seer and the things by inquiring to whom do they come: “You must ask this question all day long. What is the source of my misery? What is the source of my happiness? If your mind gets judgmental ask, “To whom does this judgment come?” It comes to me. I think this. But am I really the ‘I’ that thinks this? Am I an ‘I’? Where did ‘I’ come from? Who is the thinker? And go beyond everything that comes to your mind. Go beyond all the answers until you’re left in peace. When there are no more answers you’re totally free and peaceful.”

**Surrender:** As indicated before, not all have the constitution to practice Self inquiry. Robert said that there are only three paths to heaven: the path of Self inquiry; the path of Vipasana meditation - seeing that everything that thought and the world brings you is impermanent and therefore unsatisfactory and without Self or ‘soul’, and finding that only Void remains; and total surrender to the love of God. Robert said, “For many, surrendering to God is the way. Just surrender to God and say God take everything - ask God for devotion, for bhakti, and combine this with selfless service without the sense of doership. If it means that you worship a form of God, either mentally or in the form of an image then do it for God.” Perform rituals for God. Sing bhajans for God. Meditate for God. Actually, although meditating starts with forms of meditation (keeping quiet, back must be straight, lotus position is best) that is under the control of the egoic mind. Meditation is actually something that just happens - like sleep. When meditation actually happens then it’s being controlled by the higher Self. But first you must be silent – without expectations.

Robert said that there are many people who try to practice Self inquiry and give up: “Then I tell them to surrender, surrender completely… Do whatever you have to do. Keep silent. Keep still. All the roads lead to the same goal… There is really no difference between Jnana and Bhakta.” The Bhakti surrenders to God and has no other life. They realize that whatever they do, it is God (Consciousness) doing it. They never complain or think of their problems. They think of other’s problems instead. The other, the Jnani, realizes that the ‘I’ is responsible for all problems and traces it back to the Self: “At that stage there is merging of Bhakti and Jnana.” But above all, in every type of spirituality, give up the body and the mind - “they are not your friends”. So the other side of the coin of Robert’s teaching was surrender. These are some of the things that he has said about it:

- You must always have gratitude for the way you are. Love yourself the way you are. Don’t feel sorry for
yourself. Then you will transcend those things that appear to annoy you and cause pain. They will go because you will no longer give attention to them. Let go of everything, have no desires whatsoever and dive deep within yourself. Do not react in any way to the outside world or to your body.

- In practicing any kind of sadhana the only essential thing is to not be in conflict with anyone or anything. When you are not in conflict the mind begins to surrender itself and goes back into the Heart.

- Realize that we all have to go through experiences; but the truth is there’s really no world, no universe because nothing is as it appears. It is only the mind that creates these things - and your mind is only a thought.

- When you were growing up they tried to teach you to be extroverted, to have an outgoing personality. But what has it done? It makes us into a bunch of idiots. Look at the world, our leaders and officials, our idols and our role models. They are all extroverted people. We have been told that to be introverted is to be a loner, a loser – you will never get anywhere. Where do you want to get? These people don’t realize that the world in which they are playing games is karmic, and everything is as it is supposed to be because there are no mistakes.

- In Western psychology we are told never to give up - keep on fighting. Western psychology has never gone beyond this idea of pandering to the ego. But there’s nothing to fight. Western psychology says you are a body and a mind so fight to the end. Stick up for your rights. But in the highest teachings you have no rights. Therefore you give up your body, your mind, the world. And when you do this you go beyond psychology. Something happens that psychology is not aware of. You rise to a higher dimension. You make a quantum leap, to where there is happiness, peace beyond understanding, compassion, love and joy. That is why Jesus said do not even resist evil.

**The three virtues - compassion, humility and service**

Yet another way in which Robert appears to combine the principles of pure Advaita with Bhakta is in his descriptions of the three virtues, compassion, humility and service. It goes something like this: **Compassion** is reverence for everything in the universe. Everything is alive and you are against nothing: “Think about that.” He said that too many advaitists, non-dualists, go around saying they are one with everything and yet have many bad habits. It’s true that everything is preordained and you could not care about anything or anyone. But Robert explained that while this is true at one level, it is not true at the illusional, karmic level. In addition to not caring, you also have the freedom to find out to whom the preordination comes, and for this reason compassion is very important. A master, and an aspirant, should have compassion and do things that make people happy. For example, if a homeless person asks you for a couple of dollars, the mind may analyse this and think he wants it to buy whiskey - so you don’t give it. But it is of no consequence why he wants it. It is your duty to help anyone who comes into your space if you can. Turning him away is turning yourself away - as people should understand if they really understand Advaita: “We should have great compassion for every animal on earth, whether they are ants or cockroaches, or goats or sheep... We must have compassion for flowers, vegetation... We must have compassion for the minerals, everything... Some of us wonder why we have been on this path for a long time and we do not seem to make much progress. It is because your compassion is not big enough.”

Next we have **humility**. Robert explained that everyone wants to win and to stick up for their rights - to get even, but if you have humility, notions like this will never come into your head. Humility, he said, is possible by understanding karma: Suppose someone slaps you... your ego tells you to beat them up, to get even. But if we have humility, we will understand the reason is somehow linked to karma. To retaliate is just perpetuating and setting up new karma - so, instead, you can back off graciously: “Anything that ever happens, no matter how it looks that someone is picking on you, trying to hurt you, if you do not react, and send out a message of love and peace, then you transcend that karma and it will never come back again.” Therefore Robert says that whatever seems to be wrong in your life, you should rise above it... This is not being a coward or a wimp. He told a story about Ramana stepping on a wasp nest. The wasps stung him but he didn’t react. He thought: “I stepped on your nest so you can sting me. You can sting the other leg also”. He wasn’t phased one bit. He had a smile on his face that said: “All is well”. (The case of Ramana with the robbers is recounted in Chapter 4.) Now, Robert said, “Look at your lives and think of the things that bother you and make you angry, that make you want to retaliate; then get rid of them.”

The third virtue is **service**: “As we are trying to unfold, to be liberated, be of service all you can, without looking for recognition or anything in return.” Robert pointed out that the bible says the first shall be last and the last first. So if we put our egos first and try to become top dog, we will meet all kinds of problems. Look at life and you will see that this is true. You are not the doer. You are not the body and the mind - you are actually totally free as Consciousness but you don’t know it: “Therefore practice these three virtues and you will be amazed how fast you become free.”

**Sat Guru**

In Advaita Vedanta God is everything, but many great Advaita masters of recent times, like Ramana and Nisargadatta, also worshipped Deities. Ramana prayed to Shiva in the form of Arunachala and Nisargadatta also prayed to Shiva... Why did they do it? The answer, Robert explained, is that they do it for their devotees - for those who were still attached to form. Other great spiritual teachers said: Why limit God? Got is Consciousness, and the universal Consciousness appears to individual consciousness in ways that are appropriate for individuals to perceive it. In reality we are already free but we don’t know it. So, Robert said, “It is the responsibility of a true master to awaken you. That is why you have to find a guru who has gone all the way. If a person advertises and charges money you can be assured he or she is not a true guru. That’s the first clue to let you know... The guru is not to be considered a personal ‘I’... There is no ambition left in a Jnani.” So the first thing is to find a true guru; those who are ready will be attracted to such a guru. And
then you should learn to love him: “And immediately you will see results in your spiritual life… You will feel profound peace in yourself that you never felt before… You will feel love for everything… When you really love the guru you will see very fast changes in your life - this is more important than doing spiritual practices… True love means total surrender.”

You will be going through karma of one sort or another but the sage is beyond karma. The body of the sage may suffer but the sage is not a body. It is essential for you to have a true spiritual guide and to stick to one if he or she is true. You may know of saints that attained enlightenment without a guru or were born enlightened, but these are few and far between. Almost all ordinary seekers need a guide who has completely overcome the mind. And such a one may sometimes behave strangely or appear to be unkind. Robert told about his first guru, Paramhansa Yogananda (see Chapter 6). Yogananda said, “Robert, do you promise to love me no matter what you see me do.” He thought: “What’s this guy going to do? I’d see him in different moods, become angry… But I realized that these were tests to see if people were fit or not.” So, while the guru is responsible for the student, the student has to let go of everything. All the things you are holding on to need to be given up; and then Divine Grace flows by itself. You have to be totally honest and see how thoughts have been ruling you. Your mind is telling you all sorts of things, this is good and that is bad - but being judgmental has to be given up completely: “Work on yourself. Get rid of all the stuff that’s kept you bound for so many years.” Even though everything is preordained and your entire life seems to be karmic, when you begin to work on yourself and inquire, “Who am I?”, you realize that there is something called Self realization, and remember that this too is preordained.

Practicalities

The only legacy to the life of Robert Adams accessible to the general public is a privately published book of edited satsangs entitled Silence of the Heart. It is available from Nicole Adams at 2370 W. Highway 89A, Box 182, Sedona, AZ 86336, USA.

Chapter 17

SATYA SAI BABA
FROM SHIRDI TO PUTTAPARTHI

Be like the sandal wood tree - that gives its fragrance even to the axe that fells it.

Background

Satya Sai Baba claims to be a reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba (see further on). He is certainly the most popular of the present-day gurus of India, with devotees and others that know of him probably running into the hundreds of millions. He also has strong followings in other parts of Asia and in the West, in Africa, Australia, Russia and its former possessions, and almost everywhere. Throughout the world there are thousands of Sai Centers. Unquestionably though, Satya Sai Baba is a man of India, who serves the people of India. He has only once traveled physically outside the region, when he went to Uganda to help the Ugandan Indians, during the Idi Amin days.

The most authoritative and official works in the English language about Sai Baba are the four volumes by Dr. N. Kasturi called Sathyam Sivam Sundaram. Dr. Kasturi, now deceased, was a history professor and the principal of Mysore University. In the West, Sai Baba is best known from the books of Howard Murphet: Sai Baba - Man of Miracles, Sai Baba, Avatar, and Walking the Path with Sai Baba - see Bibliography.

Sai Baba’s enormous popularity initially stemmed from the fact that he was, and to a lesser degree still is, a spectacular performer of miracles. In the days when he performed miracles almost daily he explained that he did this to “give the people what they wanted, in the hope that they would come to want what he really had to give” - that is, the path to enlightenment. In modern times he is in a teaching phase of his life, though miracles still occur, and are “performed” by him on special occasions. Now, it seems, his hoped-for wish that people would want to know the Truth rather than just experience miracles, has to some extent come to pass. His best known public miracle is the production of sacred ash called vibhuti, from his hands. This sacred ash also emanates from pictures of Baba, sometimes to the consternation of the owner, and from statues. Vibhuti is given out at all Sai gatherings and is used by devotees for spiritual upliftment, healing, attaining wishes and so on. It is said that the production of sacred ash by the present Satya Sai Baba is done in reverence to his predecessor, Sai Baba of Shirdi, who always gave ash from his fire place to his devotees.

His other regular public miracle at the present time is the materialization of Shiva lingams which he ejects from his mouth on certain ceremonial occasions. Howard Murphet described one such event at a ceremony in India some years ago. He was with a group of Indian devotees. He wrote as follows:

“They (the lingams) are always hard (ellipsoidal), being made of crystal clear or coloured stone and sometimes metals like gold or silver. ‘Are you sure he doesn’t pop them into his mouth and then eject them at the right moment?’ I asked. My hearers looked at me with amusement and pity. One of them said ‘He talks and sings for a long time before the lingam
comes out and it’s always much too big to hold in the mouth while speaking’. Well, I thought, even if he does bring these things up from somewhere inside him, what is the point of it? - To this question I received a number of answers, but it seemed to me the most satisfactory explanation was as follows: The Shivalingam belongs to a class of ‘natural’ Hindu symbols… If the centre, or the one focal point of a sphere (representing the absolute Brahman), divides itself into two, we get the ellipsoidal shape. So the lingam gives a symbolic representation of the primary pair of opposites formed out of the original harmonious One (Brahman) - which emerges as Shiva-Shakti. And from this first duality comes all manifestation, all creation, and all the multiplicity of things in the universe.”

Another plausible explanation is they are representative of sculptures of temples (simple village temples have oval roofs). Poor people, who can’t afford to dedicate real temples, make offerings of these made in clay.

Satya Sai Baba has sometimes been criticised for the miracles he performs. It is said that all advanced yogis can perform miracles and that they are, in fact, obstacles to spiritual development. Howard Murphet refutes this and tells of an interview with a devotee of Sai Baba, Swami Karunyananda, who said that the first time he met Sai Baba was in 1957, and that in the beginning he thought that Baba’s miracles may have been demonstrations of common yogic powers that were less than divine. However, as he was drawn closer to Baba and after much meditation, and after more experience of the miracles in their context, he came to the conclusion that they were truly divine and of the highest type.

Satya Sai Baba is considered by his devotees to be an Avatar - that is, a direct divine incarnation. Christianity believes that Christ was the only Avatar, but Hinduism and Buddhism hold the more reasonable belief that there have been many such beings - and, of course, there is no reason to believe that Avatars have now died out completely. At the same time Satya Sai Baba claims to be a reincarnation of the well known saint known as Sai Baba of Shirdi. Moreover, he says that there will be yet another Sai incarnation in the not too distant future.

Whatever the ‘world’ thinks of him (and there are many detractors, and even clandestine political movements and ‘secret service’ attempts to discredit him), the evidence for his genuineness is overwhelming.

Sai Baba teaches and follows the path of karma yoga - the yoga of selfless service, and nothing could be more appropriate than this for India, where the majority lives in poverty. Sai Baba’s service to India is enormous and includes (apart from his own presence and the faith he engenders in devotees), many charitable and educational services overseen by the Sai Foundation, not only in India but all over the world. His teachings are based on service and the cultivation of morality, and devotees are encouraged to undertake charitable works in their sadhana. The Sai organizations never solicit money from devotees or charge money for spiritual services. If anyone wants to donate anything they have to contact the Sai Foundation, or local centers that oversee the various charitable activities that are performed in Sai Baba’s name. In a recent talk on the occasion of the Telegu New Year in 1999, Sai Baba, speaking in the third person, said: “Swami does not ask for anything for himself. Today there are many Swamis and others who are making money in the name of spirituality. The Sri Sathya Sai Organization has no connection whatsoever with them. You should not have anything to do with them. Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization should progress only with the spirit of sacrifice.”

**Early life**

Satya Sai Baba was born in 1926 in the village of Puttaparthi where the present ashram, Prasanthi Nilayam, is located. It is said that before he was born, musical instruments in the house would mysteriously play in the middle of the night. And soon after he was born the women who attended the birth noticed a movement under the bed clothes, which turned out to be a cobra, but it didn’t harm anyone and soon went away. (Cobras have a special place in Hindu mythology because of Shiva’s association with them). The baby was given the birth name Satyanarayana, from which his present name Satya Sai Baba is derived.

In those days Puttaparthi was a small sun-baked farming village of whitewashed mud houses and sandy streets, lying in a valley surrounded by low hills. His family was not of the priestly Brahmin caste but Satya’s paternal grandfather was a man of status and a minor landlord, who dedicated a temple to the goddess Satyabhama. The grandfather led a devout religious life and was also a good musician and actor, often performing from the Indian spiritual epics such as the Ramayana (the story of the God Rama’s battle against evil). It is said that young Satyanarayana was fascinated by these performances.

The boy had a sweet nature and ready smile and was loving towards all creatures. Although the family was not vegetarian, he always refused to eat meat or fish, and when an animal had been selected for slaughter he would hold it closely and lovingly in the hope of persuading his elders to relent and spare the creature. He was always giving food to beggars and when his mother scolded him, would say that it could be his share of the food that is given. On one occasion his mother noticed that he hadn’t eaten for several days but was still full of energy. So, as happens with many saints, it seems he was sometimes nourished from a celestial source - (see Chapter 7).

At primary school and later at secondary school, Satya was the most popular boy because of his ability to produce sweets from the air. In the world of an Indian village the children had little difficulty in accepting these manifestations simply, and without intellectual analysis, as a boon. Satya told them that a certain minor deity (a grama shakti) obeyed his will and gave him whatever he asked. He soon became a leader of the children in most activities and some boys began to regard him as their guru. He would arrive a little early at school and collect children around him to conduct pujas of ritual worship. He was also highly regarded by teachers but on one occasion a teacher, who had been unfairly punishing students, found that his chair had stuck to his bottom - that is, until he had made appropriate verbal reparations. Satya confessed of this incident that his intention was not revenge but that, as Dr. Kasturi writes, “Only to reveal a little of his uniqueness ...
and to make the world around him sit up and ask, Who is this boy?"

Howard Murphet wrote that Satya was a quiet and deeply religious boy. He seldom answered back when spoken to and had little interest in food. He would suddenly burst into song or poetry and sometimes quote long Sanskrit passages far beyond anything learned in his formal education or at home. Sometimes he would become stiff and appear to leave his body and go ‘somewhere else’. At times he would show extraordinary strength and at others he was as “weak as a lotus stalk”. There was also sometimes an alternation of laughter and weeping, and sometimes he would become very serious and give a penetrating discourse on Vedanta philosophy. On occasions he spoke of God, and sometimes he described far-off holy places to which - certainly during his life as Satya - he had never visited.

A celestial scorpion bite? A new phase of Satya’s life began in 1940 when he was thirteen years of age. In the evening, while walking barefoot through the village, he suddenly leapt into the air with a loud cry. The area has lots of black scorpions and it was assumed he had been stung - on the big toe of his right foot. To Indians, steeped in Hindi mythology, this event itself was thought to be auspicious because, in the Guru Gita, one verse says that “the right big toe of the Guru’s foot is the abode of all places of pilgrimage”. Nevertheless, everyone was worried because the scorpions of that area have a very bad reputation. Satya remained collapsed and unconscious all night long. His body became stiff and his breathing faint. A doctor administered an injection and the next morning he recovered and seemed quite normal. However, people noticed that from that time onward he seemed, at times, to be a different person, and speculated that it marked the beginning of a change in his development.

N. Kasturi gives a different interpretation of the ‘scorpion’ event in Part I of Sathyam Sivam Sundaram. According to him, Satya was already well recognized for his supernatural powers before the time of the alleged scorpion sting. He could read other’s thoughts and see into the future and past. He could travel astrally to help people, and could perform many other wonders. Mr. Kasturi speculated that on the day of the alleged sting, he could not (for some reason) leave his body and go to the succor of a devotee in dire distress, and that his imposition and apparent collapse, was misunderstood by his brother and others as a scorpion sting. Satya, he wrote, had come to save humanity from downfall and this event marked the beginning of the spiritual discipline he was to impose in all corners of India, and in many other parts of the world.

Whatever the reason, his family at the time was incensed because of an assumed insult to his father; when his father had admonished him over producing miraculous candies before a group of people and demanded an explanation of what was going on. He had caused offence when he calmly said: “I am Sai Baba.” His parents had, for some time, been concerned over his sanity because they thought he might be possessed by a malevolent spirit - one that could quote Sanskrit scriptures and expound Vedanta philosophy! They had taken him to a number of doctors and sorcerers in an attempt to alleviate the ‘problem’.

Later that year he left home and spent most of his time in another house in Puttaparthi, steadily serving the people by performing the miracles for which he became famous: granting wishes, curing diseases, materializing items, causing visions, and so on. He also organized people to chant devotional songs, an activity which now forms one of the main acts of worship in all Sai Centers. He stressed the worship of the guru and said that the singing of praise should be in the mind as well as in the voice. One frequently sung bhajan is:

Oh, you seekers, you seekers,
Worship the feet of the Guru with all your mind;
You can thus cross the ocean of grief and joy,
And birth and death.

As a prelude to the affirmation that he was indeed an incarnation of the saint Sai Baba of Shirdi, and when people were still mystified about who or what he was and asked for a sign, he picked up a cluster of jasmine flowers and threw them on the ground; they landed as a display in Sanskrit lettering of the name - Sai Baba.

The Shirdi connection

Sai Baba of Shirdi died in 1918, some eight years before Satya’s birth. He was also a man of miracles who had appeared in the small town of Shirdi in Maharashtra State as a young man. His origin is unknown but the most plausible theory is that he was the son of an impoverished Brahmin family who gave him to a wandering Muslim fakir - who became his teacher and guru. Whatever his origin, the first Sai Baba took up residence in a dilapidated mosque in the town of Shirdi, wore the clothes of a Muslim fakir, but knew the Hindu scriptures in minute detail. Consequently, through his knowledge of both the Hindu and Hindu faiths, and his frequent performance of miracles, he became revered by both Hindus and Muslims. Satya Sai Baba also has both Hindu and Muslim devotees, as well as many devotees of other faiths.

Following Satya’s announcement of his connection with Sai Baba of Shirdi, devotees became very interested in checking its veracity. The best evidence probably came from those who had known both. At that time, the 1940’s, there were many such individuals still living. One of these was the Rani (queen) of Chincholi, whose deceased husband had been a devotee of the first Sai Baba. Baba had visited the palace on several occasions. Over the years a number of changes had been made and when Satya visited he immediately commented on them. He asked why they had removed a large margosa tree that had once grown there, and why a certain well had been covered over. He also commented on new structures and pointing to a line of buildings said, “They were not built when I was here in my previous body.”
Another devotee of Satya was Mr. M. S. Dixit who had met the first Sai Baba in 1916. Many years later in 1959, with no knowledge of Satya, he had a dream that a man followed him and poured ash over his head. Later he came across a photo of Satya and recognized him as the man in the dream. He became a devotee and Satya correctly identified individuals from an old photograph that Mr. Dixit had.

Aside from these examples there are many others dating from the 1940’s and 1950’s and later, when many Shirdi Sai devotees were still alive. But there is also much indirect evidence of the connection between the two Sai Babas. For example a news photographer was taking a picture of Satya and asked him to move away from a large un-photogenic rock. Satya declined and the picture was taken. When developed a clear image of Sai Baba of Shirdi could be seen sculptured into the rock. Many people who are devotees of Satya, have visions of the first Sai Baba. One involved a swami of the Shankaracharya Order, his Holiness Gayanthri Swami. On a visit to Satya’s ashram the swami was only half convinced about the reincarnation story, but there he had a vision of the old Sai Baba who explained that he had returned from his mahasamadhi after eight years (the period before Satya was born), and that he had brought his ‘properties’ with him fifteen years later. This was a mystery at first but when discussing the vision with devotees, they explained that Satya had first announced his reincarnation at the age of fourteen and began manifesting the miraculous powers of the old Sai Baba at that age.

**The present-day Sai Baba**

Physically he is quite tiny and unlike the rugged former incarnation. Nevertheless, dressed in his simple red robe and with his ‘Afro’ hair style, his appearance is quite striking. But he is now frail and moves slowly. From the earliest knowledge of him, Sai Baba has always been the embodiment of love and generosity. He has always remained accessible, and even in these days when there are millions of devotees, he maintains accessibility in the most democratic manner. He appears for darshan almost daily at his ashram Prasanthi Nilayam and it is always strictly a matter of first-come-first-served. Those who assemble early get to sit at the front of the hall - where he walks slowly before the devotees. They can pass letters to him which, it is said, are always read and acted upon appropriately. He also still sings bhajans, in a sweet melodious voice, at public gatherings almost daily.

His life, it seems, is entirely about service and the spreading of goodness and optimism. And he asks devotees to serve others selflessly in their own communities. In a talk given on the occasion of the Hindu New Year in 1999, he said:

“The name of this new year is Pramadi, which implies dangerous prospects. But no danger will befall the world... There are no dangers either for the world or for the nation or for the family... Nothing will happen. What we encounter depends on our thoughts. So entertain good thoughts and you are bound to be successful.”

He is a great believer in the sacred place of India in bringing enlightenment to the world. He said:

“Since Ancient times, this sacred land of Bharat (India) has shared its spiritual wealth with the rest of the world to foster peace and security... Without Bharat there will be no trace of spirituality in the world. There is Sathya (Truth) in the air of Bharat; there is Dharma in the dust of Bharat. The land of Bharat is suffused with love. The water of Bharat overflows with compassion... you must always uphold and sustain the principles of truth, love, righteousness and compassion...”

Sai Baba also has the ear of political leaders. For example in a recent talk on the occasion of his birthday, he made the following statement:

“I told Vajpayee (the Prime Minister of India), Vajpayee, you are a good person. But develop friendship with Pakistan and China. If India, Pakistan and China become united, they will make a formidable force for goodness in the world.”

It seems that this statement, coming from someone as influential in India as Sai Baba, was received with considerable alarm in certain quarters.4

**Sai Baba miracles**

Although many saints and spiritual teachers disassociate themselves from miracles, Sai Baba is not one of them. Moreover, as a reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba, performing miracles would merely be a case of being true to type. Consequently, this account would not be complete without a description of some of the miracles. But, it should be noted, Satya has said that the first thirty two years of his mission would be marked mainly by lelas and mahimas (different types of miracles), and the subsequent years would be characterized by emphasis on teaching - and this is how it seems to be turning out, because at the present time there is a marked emphasis on teaching.

However, miracles still continue to occur with great regularity by simply happening. Recently a woman from Penang, in Malaysia, sent an E. mail saying, “The Sai Centre in Penang is really marvelous. There’s vibhuti, kumkum (the red powder used for marking the forehead) and sandalwood paste materializing on the walls and the statues of Mother Mary, Kwan Yin, Buddha and Durga, and from all of Baba’s photos.”

It is known that many advanced yogis and great beings possess the power of ‘astral travel’. (In fact it is also known that even some ordinary people can make excursions out of the body). Sai Baba has often been reported as being in

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4 Reliable sources of information in India indicate that this and earlier statements have spawned a smear conspiracy against Sai Baba.
more than one place at the same time - his physical body being in one place while his astral body travels to some other location. Devotees believe that he keeps an eye on things around the world in this way. In Penang again, where there are many Sai followers, a devotee took some photographs at a Sai gathering, showing people seated and facing the altar, on which there were two candles burning. The first photo was perfectly ordinary, but a second, taken a few seconds later, showed the candle flames flaring up a meter into the air. In this picture there was what appeared to be a reddish figure standing outside in the dark, looking in at the window behind the altar. No one at the gathering noticed anything unusual about the behaviour of the candles at any time but there was no doubt about the authenticity of the photos and the negatives, which were taken with an ordinary simple camera and processed in the usual way.

In the early days, Baba’s miracles were spectacular and numerous, and witnessed by so many people as to be irrefutable. Among the most spectacular are those that occurred on a stretch of sand on the bank of the Chritvati River in Puttaparthi, where crowds used to gather. Here he would produce scores of images of various gods and saints from the sand. He would scratch the surface and an idol would pop up. Those made from metal would often still be hot as if just recently cast.

Almost everyone who knows anything about Sai Baba will have had a personal experience of a miracle. Howard Murphet describes a spectacular demonstration of the production of vibhuti as follows - see Man of Miracles:

“On the stage is a silver statue of Sai Baba of Shirdi... Mr. Kasturi takes up a wooden urn filled with vibhuti and lets the ash pour over the figure until the urn is empty. Then he continues to hold it above the statue with its open top downwards. - Now Baba thrusts his arm in as far as the elbow and makes a churning motion with his arm. Immediately the ash begins to flow again from the vessel in a copious stream and continues to do so until he takes his arm out. Then the flow of ash stops. Next he puts in his other arm and twirls that around. The ash streams over the statue again. The process goes on; finally Shirdi Sai is buried in a mound of ash. - There is a joyous, elevated atmosphere all around: Mr. Kasturi’s face is more radiant than ever, Baba’s movements and manner are the acme of unselfconscious grace.”

Sai Baba’s miracles frequently involve materialization of objects and he himself has said that some of these are ‘apports’, that is, the moving of an existing object from one place to another, while others are manifestations from ‘nothing’. It is generally understood, in India, that great gurus and saints are attended by celestial beings - in the Western tradition these would be angels. Baba has said that such beings attend to his wishes, and also sometimes do things unbidden. For example, when he was in conversation with a devotee in her house, he interrupted her by saying that a celestial being wanted to give something to her, and then was manifested before the amazed woman’s eyes, a crystal bowl filled with candies from different parts of India.

An example known to one of the compilers of this book concerns a no-nonsense high court judge. The judge was visiting a friend who was a Sai Baba devotee. He would have nothing to do with such things and said to the devotee, pointing to a picture of Sai Baba, “How can you say that a fellow like that is the same as Jesus Christ?” As he said this and glared at the picture, two perfect tears appeared from the eyes of the picture. The judge was not one to stand on ceremony. He pulled the picture off the wall and took the frame apart to find out if it had some device for producing tears. He then had to apologize - and subsequently became a Sai devotee himself.

A common type of miracle is that of healing. Baba has actually said that he sometimes goes to the aid of a devotee, who may be having a heart attack for example. In other instances the healing is in response to the prayers of the devotee. Such miracles of healing are too numerous to mention.

Some individuals who criticize miracles may miss the point that they are a tremendous source of inspiration and encouragement to ordinary simple people. Every miracle can be regarded as a prompt to the recipient to pursue his spiritual practices diligently - but many may not obtain the full benefit that is possible. Those who dodge such opportunities may simply become surfeited with miraculous phenomena. Another problem is that close devotees may themselves become imbued with miraculous powers, which could then go to their heads and fortify the ego. Howard Murphet cites an example from Sai Baba of Shirdi. One of his devotees had just noticed that he had developed clairvoyance. Instantly he felt Baba’s eyes on him, who said, “Why are you gazing at the strumpet’s performance?” On this occasion the man’s wife happened to be present and caused a disturbance because she assumed that Baba was referring to some other woman in the assembly. But the devotee himself understood that he was being warned not to be carried away by this newly acquired power.

There are countless examples of miracles that endear Baba to the hearts of his devotees, and also help them to hearken to his teachings: be virtuous, help the needy, and participate in service activities. Skeptics say that these events are merely coincidence, but the fact is that such occurrences number in the many millions - and they can’t all be ignored.

But it seems, to devotees, the greatest miracle is the presence of Baba himself. There is a divine power that reaches to the depths of their hearts and, on occasions, to the hearts of even those who know little about him. As indicated before, Baba remains mostly in the region in India (in the physical body at least), but on the occasion of his visit to Uganda in 1968, to give comfort the Indian population there, not only Indians but many thousands of Africans from all walks of life, from high government and military personnel to lowly tribesmen, paid homage to him. Howard Murphet wrote thus: “Crowds danced with joy at the sight of him, and ranks of police guards went on their knees as he walked between them.”

Baba receives much criticism in the press, from those who proclaim themselves to be ‘rationalists’, and also from those with more nefarious agendas, but this is meaningless to those who have experienced his grace. The real miracle is the love of Baba himself. Recently, Howard Murphet, who was then over ninety but still alert, attended a Sai gathering in which various people were making comments on the matters under discussion, the nature of the ego, morality and so on;
Some teachings

Sai Baba recommends the threefold path of karma yoga (selfless service), Jnana yoga (knowledge) and bhakti yoga (devotion). They conform to the understandings of the classical Hindu scriptures; the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranams and the Shastras. He also regards the great Hindu epics of the Mahabarata and Ramayana as vehicles for the transmission of Truth. These are some examples of his teachings:

“Base your action on knowledge, the knowledge that all is One. Let the action be suffused with bhakti; that is to say, humility, love, mercy and non-violence. Let bhakti be filled with knowledge, otherwise it will be as light as a balloon which drifts along any current of air, or gust of wind. But mere knowledge will make the heart dry; bhakti makes it soft with sympathy, and karma gives the hands something to do, something which will sanctify every one of the minutes that have fallen to your lot to live.”

He emphasizes that man is not the gross body but is, in essence, spirit (Atma) - which is the higher Self. The Atma is formless but creates the forms it requires, which are associated with sheaths. The grossest of the sheaths is the annamaya kosha (the food sheath), the next is the pranamaya kosha (the vital breath) - these two make up the gross body. The subtle body or astral body has two more sheaths, the manomaya kosha (mind sheath) and the vijnamaya kosha (the intellect - also known as the buddhi). The fifth sheath is the anandamaya kosha (the sheath of bliss) which serves the highest body of man’s individual psyche, the causal body. Yet all these components together serve the Atman, or the true Self - the One.

On this he says:

“You are the invincible atma (spirit), unaffected by the ups and downs of life. The shadow you cast while trudging along the road falls on dirt and dust, bush and briar, stone and sand, but you are not worried at all, for you walk unscathed. So too, as the atma substance, you have no reason to be worried over the fate of its shadow, the body ... Man is not a despicable creature, born in slime and sin, to eke out a drab existence for ever. Man is immortal and eternal. So when the call comes from the region of immortality, he responds with his whole heart... He seeks liberation from his bondage to the trivial and the temporary. Everyone craves for this in his heart of hearts. And it is available in only one shop - that is, in the contemplation of the atma, the highest self, which is the basis of all this appearance.”

Baba’s esoteric teachings also sometimes differ from the usual to some degree but conform to the cosmology in which the ‘Mother’ is the Source of everything; perhaps, it has been said, to bring home a message to the people. An example is his interpretation of the gunas (which usually refer to behaviour in the world). In a recent talk, he compares the gunas to the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara (Shiva) see Sanatana Sarathi, Vol. 39, 1995. He said:

“In this human body, constituted of the five elements, God dwells in the form of the three gunas. Bharatiyas (Indians) adore the trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara. The Trinity is not embodied beings. No one has ever seen them. Nor is it possible to experience them in any way. The Trinity dwells in the human body as the three gunas: Sattva, Rajas and Thamas. The three qualities are forms of the Divine. Brahma is responsible for creation. The process of creation is subtle and cannot be perceived by the senses. This transcendental process is taught by the mother. All are creations of the mother. Hence, the Upanishad declares: ‘Revere mother as God’. The mother is to be adored as Brahma, the Creator. Revere the mother, serve the mother and trust the mother. This symbolizes the worship of God.

Next comes the father. He protects the child, takes care of his upbringing and leads him to God. The protective function is attributed to Vishnu. The father symbolizes Vishnu as the protector. Hence the injunction: ‘Revere the father as God’. Thus the mother and the father are images of Brahma and Vishnu.

Then there is Easwara. He is called Bolaasankara. He gives whatever one prays for. He never says ‘no’ to any suppliant. Such an embodiment of Truth cannot be hidden. To experience this embodiment of suspiciousness (Shiva), Thamas is the means. The thamasic quality is usually associated with slothfulness and indolence. But this is not the proper meaning of Thamas (as an attribute of Shiva). Shiva’s role is to lead man on the right path to realize his divinity.

The trinity, in the form of the three gunas, is present in every human being. This is borne out by the scriptural aphorisms: ‘Easwaras - sarvabhothaaanaam’ (The Divine dwells in all beings), ‘Isaavaasyam idam jagath’ (The Lord is the in-dweller in the cosmos). When the significance of the three gunas is understood, the nature of the Trinity can be understood” [This explanation of the gunas has also been given by Amma - Chapter 19]

But Baba’s teachings to the mass of his devotees take the form of encouragement to lead a virtuous life, to serve others, and in particular, to control desires. The road to liberation is a long one and, as we should understand, does not usually end at death; for all the psychic scars, desires, attachments, aversions, and habits, that we have not gotten rid of, are carried over in the subtle body and become the vasanas. On the question of desires, he says:

“Man is like rice. Provided the husk is not removed it will grow. Man’s husk is his body of desires; if this is liquitated, he will not reincarnate... Man’s many desires are like the small metal coins he carries in his pocket. The more he has, the more they weigh him down. But if he can convert them all into one paper note of higher currency, he will not feel any weight. In the same way if he can convert his many desires into one desire - into the aspiration for union with God, then there will be no weight to pull him down to the earth level.”

Howard Murphet tells of an encounter of a rich man with the first Sai Baba. The man had come to ask the way to salvation and Baba put him to the test by elaborating ten points that need to be observed. They are summarized here because they are considered to be the essence of the basic requirements for realization:

1. Realize the absolute triviality of the things of this world and the next. In fact, feel disgust for honours and the fruits of
both this world and the one to follow - because the aim is higher than these.
2. Realize we are in bondage to the lower worlds and then develop an intense desire to get free, and work earnestly and resolutely to this end, caring for nothing else.
3. Ignore the outward pull of the senses and turn the gaze inward to the inner Self.
4. Turn away from wrong-doing and become composed so that the mind is at rest. One cannot gain Self realization in other ways even though one has great knowledge.
5. Lead a life of truth, insight, penance and right conduct.
6. Two classes of things constantly present themselves to man for acceptance - the good and the pleasant. The wise choose the good, the unwise; through greed and attachment choose the pleasant.
7. The aspirant must control his mind and senses. If these are unrestrained a man cannot reach his destination. But when the enlightened intellect will exercise control, then the true Self reaches the supreme abode of the all-pervading God. (Sometimes the new Baba uses the example of an electric cable: ‘Do not establish contact with the mind; that is as bad as contacting a naked cable! Watch it from a distance; then only can you derive bliss’. That is to say, becoming too closely identified and involved with the mind incapacitates one from seeing the reality that lies beyond the mind).
8. Purify the mind by performing satisfactorily and without attachment, the duties of one’s station in life (Dharma). Get rid of the delusion ‘I am the body’, ‘I am the mind’ - this will help to get rid of the ego. Get rid of avarice and purify the mind of the lower desires.
9. The aspirant must have a guru; that is, a true guru, not a self-styled person who fancies himself or herself as a guru. The knowledge of the Self is so subtle that no one by his own effort can ever hope to attain it. When a pupil has done all he can in self-training and self-inquiry, the guru will come. Baba has said, “If necessary God himself will come down and be your guru.”
10. Last but not least - in fact, the most important of all - is the Lord’s grace. This comes when the pupil realizes his own utter helplessness, then the divine grace comes, the light shines, the joy flows, the miraculous happens. He takes another step forward on the spiritual way.

It appears that after the dissertation was over Baba told the rich man (correctly) that he had two hundred and fifty rupees in his pocket, and said, “Roll up your bundle for God. Unless you completely get rid of your greed you will never see the real God.” Apparently the rich man, unlike the one who walked sorrowfully away from Jesus, gave his 250 rupees for the poor and went away happy and contented.

One of Baba’s most stressed teachings is that of selfless service, and particularly service to the poor and hapless. On the occasion of his seventy-fourth birthday address he said, “Swami (Himself) needs nothing. Do not offer even a small robe. Swami belongs to you. He is not separate from you, nor are you separate from swami - this is an inextricable relationship. Promote the well being of backward and poor villagers. You must have listened to the list of offerings of gold ornaments made by some devotees. What is an ornament to Bhagavan? Only Love is the ornament. He is beauty itself. Why cover him with a shower of jewelry?” Later in his address he said:

“Today devotees from 137 countries have gathered here. (They had brought many offerings). How much work is being done in those countries? That is the test. In all countries there are people who are hapless. They are embodiments of ‘Darida Narayana’ (God in the form of the poor). What need is there to serve Sriman Narayana? He has a host of persons to serve him. You must serve the ‘poor Narayanas’, who have nobody to serve them.”

Baba’s teaching of selfless service combined with bhakti, love or devotion, he recommends as the fast way to liberation. Service alone he describes as the slow passenger train; with stops, changes, and junctions. But if you add bhakti you will be on the express train, and get to the destination more quickly. Concerning Baba’s declared mission in the world these are some of his own words:

“I have come to repair the ancient highway leading man to God. Become sincere, skilful engineers, overseers, and workmen, and join me… I came to sow the seeds of faith in religion and God. You might have heard some people say that I became Sai Baba when a scorpion stung me. Well, I challenge any one of you to get stung by a scorpion and transform yourselves into Sai Babas. No, the scorpion had nothing to do with it… I came in response to the prayers of sages, saints and seekers for the restoration of dharma.”

On his human form and why it should be necessary, he said, “A person wishing to save a man from drowning must jump into the same pool; the Lord must come here in human form to be understood by men.” And on the frailties of the human body, he said, “Man must pay taxes.”

Most recently Sai Baba has issued instructions to the International Sai Organization of Great Britain and other Sai Centers, to divert attention from deities and even from himself and direct attention inwardly - to the Self within everyone. He has advised devotees to get rid of photographs of himself and depictions of deities on their puja altars, and to concentrate on the inner journey. In the UK (and probably elsewhere) he has advised devotees to disregard any of his teachings prior to 1996.

Practicalities

The postal address of the Sai Baba Organization is: Prasanthi Nilayam, P.O. Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh 515134, India. There are also many Sai Baba websites that can be explored.

Although Sai Baba seldom leaves India, he does move around - usually between the main ashram and his residences in Bangalore and the Nilgiri hills of South India. Visitors are not permitted to stay in the main ashram when he
is not in residence and advanced booking, except for organized group visits, is not generally accepted; but if he is in residence visitors are seldom turned away. Often group visits are arranged through local Sai Centers which may offer some advantages in travel convenience and also increase the chance of securing a private audience. For Western visitors too, it is advisable to check on religious festivals and the birthday, because the town becomes inordinately crowded at such times. It is said that around Christmas is the best time for Westerners to visit.

Puttaparthi is reached by bus or taxi from Bangalore (around 5 hours), or from the nearest railway station of Dhamavaram in less than one hour. There is also an airport at Puttaparthi and there are plans to run a railway connection directly to the town. The ashram offers very economical accommodation to visitors and there are three restaurants serving Indian and Western food at bargain basement prices. The main activity for visitors to the ashram is attending darshan and the bhajan singing. To get a good place close to the front will require queuing very early in the morning.

Chapter 18

MOTHER TERESA

Something beautiful for God.

Most people have heard of Mother Teresa but few understand that she was an enlightened soul acting out God’s role for her in this world. Instead arguments are invoked about her mission on earth which range from a Christian conspiracy to wipe out Hindu Gods, to a belief that she converted to Hinduism on her deathbed and therefore would not qualify for a place in heaven.

This account is not concerned with such matters. Mother Teresa always said that there is only one God and that everyone should be seen as equal before God. She said that we should help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim, and a Catholic a better Catholic.

Background

Mother Teresa was born in 1910 in Skopje, now in Macedonia, and had a particularly loving family life. For several years after the age of puberty she wanted to lead an ordinary married life but later she resolved to serve God and become a nun. In 1928 she joined the Order of the Sisters of Loreto, in Ireland, and in 1929 was sent to teach at St. Mary’s High School in Calcutta. She was much loved at the school but in 1946, while on a train to the hill station of Darjeeling (to recover from suspected tuberculosis and malaria), she received what she described as a “call within a call” - to serve the poor.

In 1948 she was released from her duties at the convent, had some medical training in Paris, and, coming across a half-dead woman lying in front of a Calcutta hospital, comforted her and stayed with her until she died. From that point onward she dedicated her life to helping the poorest of the poor, and in 1950 founded a religious order called the Missionaries of Charity. In 1952 she started the Nirmal Hriday Home for the Dying (Nirmal Hriday meaning Pure Heart), in an abandoned Kali temple in Calcutta. Half a century later the Mission has 50 branches in Indian cities and has centers in 126 other countries, including, most recently, China. With Mother Teresa’s death in 1997 (see further on), leadership of the Order - the fastest-growing Order within the Catholic Church - fell to Sister Nirmala, an almost 70-year-old Indian woman of whom one of the biographers of the Order (Navin Chawla) wrote: “I saw this sister with a very gentle smile and twinkling eyes that seemed to take in everything... There is an enormous piety about this woman. She is deeply religious.” So, contrary to the views of many detractors, it seems that the Missionaries of Charity are healthy and have survived the passing of their founder.

What Mother Teresa was like

Contrary to the usual view that saints undergo great hardship and live in misery, awaiting their rewards in heaven, the situation seems to be quite the opposite; and in the case of Mother Teresa (and most of the other sisters) her life, though hard in the extreme, was filled with joy. On this matter she held the conviction that the more you have, the more you are occupied with it and the less you give… But the less you have, the more free you are. She said: “Poverty for us is a freedom. It is not a mortification, a penance. It is a joyful freedom. There is no television here, no this, no that; but we are perfectly happy.” The broadcaster, Malcolm Muggeridge, said that he had never met such delightful, happy, women - nor experienced such an atmosphere of joy that they create.

In the presence of Mother Teresa people may burst into tears, and in a fleeting moment she could create an ineffable impression of great deep and abiding love. Malcolm Muggeridge described the faces of people gathered for a talk. He wrote:

“I was watching the faces of people - ordinary people listening to her. Every face, young and old, simple or sophisticated,
was rapt with attention, hanging on her words - not because of the words themselves which were quite ordinary, because of her. Some quality came across over and above the words. A luminosity seemed to fill the hall, penetrating every heart and mind.”

Nevertheless Mother Teresa, it is said, was a shrewd administrator and ran a ‘tight ship’. In no other way could the organization have expanded to its present size and international status.

**Mother Teresa’s exalted state:** Christian dogma does not talk much about altered states of consciousness, but that Mother Teresa had discovered the secret nature of God’s love and experienced its mind-altering properties should be clear to anyone who studies her life and hearkens to her sayings. Mother Teresa discovered that the strange alchemy of God’s love, as it manifests in the world, requires the presence of suffering and that there is a need for those who, in worldly eyes, are less fortunate or less than perfect specimens of the human race. This need for suffering she personified in the suffering of Jesus - as the role model for suffering - and saw Christ (the universal Jesus) in all the dying, the diseased, the homeless and the chronically poor of the streets of India; and also in the spiritually impoverished and the mentally disturbed of the developed world. On the occasion of a visit of a Catholic Bishop to the Home of the Dying in Calcutta, she asked him if he would like to see Jesus. On receiving an answer in the affirmative she took him to a man lying on a pallet who had “clearly visible things crawling over his body.” As the Bishop stood there in a state of partial shock, she knelt down and wrapped her arms around the man, holding him like a baby in her arms. “Here he is,” she said.

The Bishop asked, “Who?”

“Jesus,” she said, “Didn’t he say that you find him in the least person on earth? Is not this Jesus challenging us to reach out and love?”

The Bishops reply is unrecorded - see 32 Quotations from Mother Teresa <www.wam.umd.edu>. What Mother Teresa realized, and it was a spiritual revelation of deep profundity, is that suffering crystallizes love as nothing else does. On this she said:

“The dying, the cripple, the mental, the unwanted, the unloved - they are Jesus in disguise... Speak tenderly to them. Let there be kindness in your face, in your eyes, in your smile, in the warmth of your greeting. Always have a cheerful smile. Don’t only give your care, but give your heart as well... The poor give us much more than we give them. They’re such strong people, living day to day with no food, and they never curse, never complain. Really we don’t have to give them pity or sympathy. We have so much to learn from them... Only in heaven will we see how much we owe the poor for helping us to love God better because of them.”

By contrast, the sterile nature of the egoic world, and the belief that everything can be solved through technology, sociology, medical science, psychology and the like, along with the nightmare of life without other than a stereotyped, officially-approved “God”, stands starkly against the exalted state of those like Mother Teresa. In his is book about Mother Teresa, *Something Beautiful for God* Malcolm Muggeridge cogently expressed this. He wrote:

“Surely when we can go to the moon and ride through space; when our genes are known, and our organs replaceable; when we can arrange to eat without growing fat, and copulate without procreating, to flash a gleaming smile without being happy - surely suffering should be banished from our lives... If the eugenist’s wish were ever to be realized - the sick and the old, and the mad - all who were infirm and less than complete and smooth-working, would be painlessly eliminated, leaving only the beauty queens and the athletes, the Mensa IQ’s, and the prize winners, to be our human family. That we should go on suffering would be, they would surmise, an outrage; and a deity that still allowed it to continue would be a monster... If this came to pass, along the ice-bound corridors of cash, God really would be dead.”

When technology fails, we look around for someone to blame and, Malcolm wrote: “In the eyes who see men as machines, ‘God’ is the manufacturer and the priests are his mechanics.” But to Mother Teresa and her worthy successors, things are seen differently. To them suffering and death is not the malfunctioning of a machine but part of the everlasting drama of our relationship with the Creator: “that enhances our human condition.”

Muggeridge pointed out that if ever it were possible, as some arrogant contemporary egoic minds believe, to eliminate suffering and even, through the use of cryogenic preservation, cloning, growing tissues and so on - (or when medical science has sufficiently advanced in the implanting especially-grown organs and the injection of hormones and other chemicals), live for ever - our lives, as should be apparent even now, would not be enhanced but would be demeaned: “to the point that they would become insignificant, too banal to be worth living at all.”

**The licking of lepers:** Among Christian saints of the middle ages it was popular to lick the sores of lepers to cure them. More recently too the tending of the sick by close physical contact and the human touch is undertaken by those, like the Missionaries of Charity, who have severed their ties to the material world - as indicated by the above account of Mother Teresa and the Bishop. Farther Damien was also one of the saints of modern times who took the extreme step in his ministrations of lepers. (Recently too, Amma - Chapter 19 - much to the horror of her devotees - cured a leper by licking his suppurating sores. To this day the same leper, now cured, visits her ashram from time to time).

To judge that this is simply absurd, even obscene and carrying things far too far, would be to miss the point. It would be to not understand that enlightened souls, or those in the exalted state of union with God, do not belong to the same system of logic and behaviour as does the world. And to say that this is absurd is to say that God is absurd - an idea that only the most deluded or reckless would entertain. The fact is that the enlightened are so detached from the usual worldly dramas that haunt the ‘personality’ aspect of our psyches, that they are, for the most part, completely indifferent to what the world brings them and completely confident that God is in charge. They understand that if the world seems out of control, it is because it is out of control - that is, out of our control. To the world-bound, when things happen as we expect
them to happen, we feel that it is because we have arranged it so, but when they don’t, as more often seems to be the case, we became angry and frustrated - we fume and rage: “It’s not right” we judge, this or that should be done. “Society should look after the poor - they can do it better, they have the resources. And this is, in fact, the view of many about Mother Teresa’s Organization; but, as we can easily see, society never does.

The suffering of the developed world: Mother Teresa could become angry when seeing the wealth and the squandering of wealth of the developed world: She said, “When I see waste here (the USA) I feel angry on the inside. I don’t approve of myself being angry but it’s something you can’t help after seeing Ethiopia.” Still, she maintained, the world is not just hungry for bread but hungry for love as well: “Hungry to be loved; hungry to be wanted… There is a terrible hunger for love. We all experience this in our lives - the pain, the loneliness. We must have the courage to recognize it. The “poor” you might have right in your own family. Find them and love them... We have been created to love and be loved... We must make our homes centers of compassion and forgive endlessly.” This is why there are now almost 600 centers of The Missionaries of Charity throughout the world, not just in the poor countries.

Some controversies

On birth control: Mother Teresa is often criticized over her stand on birth control. To the worldly-bound birth control, including abortion, may seem to be a good thing for society. But what is this society? Is society a well-functioning and altruistic thing that should be hearkened to? World events now and throughout history would incline one to the view that it is not. To a saint the question of doing something to one person for the comfort and convenience of another, does not have any meaning - the ends do not justify the means. Malcolm Muggeridge wrote that Mother Teresa had difficulty in even grasping the notion that there could, in any circumstances, be too many children. To her the life of a child was a particularly beautiful thing. He describes her holding a tiny baby girl, and with an expression of exaltation most wondrously moving, saying, “See! There is life in her!” - It was a divine flame that no man dare presume to put out.

On the controversies surrounding the Catholic Church: Mother Teresa simply said, on many occasions: “They are temporary - they will pass”.

Miracles

In the Catholic Church you can only be a saint after you are dead. Moreover, the Church requires three authenticated, physical miracles to be attributed to any candidate as a pre requisite for canonization. In Mother Teresa’s case these were about miraculous cures that occurred as a result of her intervention:

One of the beneficiaries was a Bengali woman who was cured of a malignant stomach tumor through the agency of a locket with Mother Teresa’s photo in it.

Another was a French woman in the United States who broke several ribs in a traffic accident, and who was miraculously made whole because she wore a medallion of Mother Teresa around her neck.

A third was a Palestinian girl suffering from cancer who was cured after Mother Teresa appeared to her in a dream and said: “Young girl, you are cured.”

A very striking miracle that is still in evidence is related to a documentary film that was made by the BBC in the sixties. The miracle concerns the filming of the interior of the Home of the Dying in Calcutta, and the events are fully described by Malcolm Muggeridge in his book Something Beautiful for God.

The interior of the hall was very dark with only one small window and the film crew was not equipped with lights. The very experienced BBC cameraman was quite adamant that nothing would come out, but because of Mother Teresa’s insistence went through the motions of filming. When processed it was found that: “The film was suffused with a particularly beautiful soft light.” Muggeridge wrote that The House of the Dying is overflowing with love, and this love is luminous, like the haloes that artist paint on saints. The luminosity that is registered on the film, everyone agreed, is quite extraordinarily lovely. The same batch of film was subsequently tested under similar circumstances elsewhere and produced images that were dark and completely useless. Furthermore, back-up footage that was shot for the Mother Teresa documentary outside and in better illuminated parts of the Home of the Dying, turned out to be blurred and unusable.

At the time the report of the film received short shrift from the top brass of the Roman Catholic Church in the USA. It seems they were not interested in hearing about the miracles of Mother Teresa at that time. Now, as a recognition of Mother Teresa’s world-wide service to humanity, her beatification was speeded up by the Roman Catholic Church, to be the fastest on record.

Some teachings and sayings

On love: Love does not measure; it just gives. In the world love cannot remain by itself but must be put into action through service. Whatever we are like, able or disabled, rich or poor, it is not how much we do but how much love we put into the doing... (so) Put your love into loving action. In loving others you are loving God Himself... The hunger for love is much more difficult than the hunger for bread. We cannot do great things. We can only do little things with great love... Keep the joy of loving God in your heart and share this joy with all you meet, especially your family.

Smiling : Smile at each other, smile at your husband, smile at your children, smile at everyone - it doesn’t matter who it is - and that will help you to grow up in greater love for each other.

On prayer: Love to pray. Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God’s gift of himself. Ask and seek and your heart will grow big enough to receive him as your own... Start and end each day with prayer.
On dryness; on what to do when prayer becomes a struggle: Pray some more. (Such was Mother Teresa’s ‘dark night of the soul’ and her antidote for it).

Be as a little child: Come to God as a child.

On surrender and work: The spirit of our Society (the Missionaries of Charity) is total surrender, loving trust and cheerfulness… To God there is nothing small. The moment we have given it to God, it becomes infinite… There is always the danger that we may do work for the sake of the work. This is where the respect and the love and the devotion come in - that we do it for God... and that’s why we try to do it as beautifully as possible. I was expecting to be free, but God had his own plans... I will work all day. That is the best way.

On presence: To keep a lamp burning we have to keep putting oil in it. (Keeping alert to the movements of the mind and trusting God continuously - waiting attentively for His grace.)

On silence: God is found in silence. See how nature: trees, flowers, grass - grow in silence. See the stars, the moon, sun, how they move in silence... We need to be silent to be able to touch souls.

On being holy: You have to be holy in the position you are in, and I have to be holy in the position that God has placed me. So it is nothing extraordinary to be holy. Holiness is not a luxury of the few. Holiness is a simple duty for you and me. We have been created for that.

On peace and war: Please choose the way of peace... In the short term there may be winners and losers in this war that we all dread. But that never can, never will, justify the suffering, pain and loss of life your weapons will cause... I have never been in a war before, but I have seen famine and death. I was asking myself, “What do they feel when they do this? I don’t understand it. They are all children of God. Why do they do it? I don’t understand.”

Understanding the poor: Rich people, well-to-do people, very often don’t really know who the poor are; and that is why they can’t forgive, for knowledge can only lead to love, and love to service. And so, if they are not touched by them, it’s because they do not know them... The other day I dreamed I was at the gates of heaven. And St. Peter said, “Go back to earth. There are no slums up here”... Nakedness is not only for a piece of cloth, but nakedness is a loss of dignity, human dignity: The loss of what is beautiful, what is pure, what is chaste, what is virgin. Loss, homelessness is not only for a house made of bricks - homelessness is being that people are completely forgotten, rejected, left alone, as if they are nobody to nobody.

Modern life: Everybody seems to be in such a terrible rush, anxious for greater development, greater riches and so on. So children have very little time for their parents. Parents have very little time for each other, and in the home begins the disruption of peace in the world.

Sharing: We have to share with people. Suffering today is because people are hoarding, not giving, not sharing. Jesus made it very clear: Whatever you do for the least of my brethren, you do it for me. Give a glass of water, you give it to me. Receive a little child, you receive me. Is that clear?

Loving what is : No matter who says what, you should accept it with a smile and do your own work.

On always wanting things: More tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones.

On time: Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin.

Miracles: Every day some miracle happens.

On seeing God in everyone: I believe in person to person. Every person is Christ for me, and since there is only One, that person is the one person in the world at that time... I see God in every human being. When I wash a lepers wounds, I feel I am nursing the Lord himself. Is it not a beautiful experience?

On abortion: It is poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish.

Kindness: Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless. Let no one ever come away without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God’s kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile.


Her death and beatification

Mother Teresa died in 1997 at the age of 87 after a long period of ill health. She died surrounded by her close associates after experiencing difficulty in breathing. She spoke of her love for Jesus several times before dying. She was canonized (beatified) by the Roman Catholic Church in October 2003. The Church requires that at least five years must pass before anyone can be proclaimed a saint and Mother Teresa must have broken all records. Usually the process of investigation for sainthood takes much longer, sometimes centuries.

During the time that her body lay in state, street sweepers clutching flowers came to pay their respects. Beggars, some with crippled legs, dragged themselves to the church to gaze at her body.

On the occasion of her death the Dalai Lama said she was “an example of the human capacity to generate infinite love, compassion and altruism.”

The Prime Minister of India compared her to Mahatma Gandhi, a “great soul”.

Practicalities; The Missionaries of Charity
Chapter 19

AMMA - MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI
A SPIRITUAL AVALANCHE

Life and Love are not two; they are inseparable, like a word and its meaning.

It is appropriate to end this section on the great mystical saints of the 20th century, as it was to begin with India’s most revered saint of the 19th century, Sri Ramakrishna (Chapter 1). The one hundred and eight attributes (names), the Astottara Sata Namavali, traditionally assigned to great saints in India, for Amma, makes several references to Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi:

“She, in whom is reflected the dual form of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi... who is the ocean of ambrosia in which the waves of the various plays of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi arise.”

And like Sarada Devi, Amma inhabits a world made up entirely of Her children.

The British writer, Christopher Isherwood, who reviewed the life of Ramakrishna, speculated that if God really does come to the world from time to time in human form, these are the forms He would assume. Like passing minstrels they suddenly appear and bring light into the world: “They dance and sing for a while, and then, just as suddenly, they disappear.” And for those who are fortunate enough to be influenced by them - they bring liberation. In a recent issue of Matruvani magazine (see Bibliography) the editorial speaks of the Silence of Sound with regard to Amma: In Her presence there is “a sudden hushing of mental activity... where many feel their doubts dispelled... and though she talks and acts, sings, dances and laughs, she yet abides in silence.”

Amma (Mother) or Ammachi as she is called in the West, is one of the best known Indian woman saints of the present time who is widely considered to be a spiritual prodigy. With what have been described as miraculously simple acts of love, she holds close to her heart many of the suffering of the world. Her panacea for spiritual and worldly life is bhakti, unconditional love - the love which is said to be the nature of God. She dispenses bhakti to all-comers without choice or favour. And to society her panacea is selfless service, which takes the form of numerous charitable, spiritual and social programs and projects - see further on.

At Amma’s ashram and at her many retreats held all over the world, you will find devotees and visitors from many faiths and disciplines, coming to receive the blessings of a truly great enlightened being. In her main ashram in Kerela, South India, there happens a significant quieting of mind activity and an ambiance of peace and happiness ensues. Yet to others it may seem more like a front line war hospital where can be treated the wounded, the lame, the halt and the blind, and those ‘poor in spirit’ who, we were told by Jesus, are the ones who will attain the Kingdom of Heaven.

What Amma is like

In approaching Amma it is always best to remember that she is fully and constantly in a divine state that most of us cannot even imagine. When referring to herself she mostly uses the third person, and she lives totally in the present moment. Throughout her strange and sometimes horrendous upbringing (see further on) - to her present state of international recognition, Amma has never looked back and never worried about the future. On this she has commented:

“Amma feels no difference of any kind. Amma is always the same. At the time when the so-called difficulties existed, I lived within my Self, and now when so-called name and fame have come, I continue to live within my Self.”

Probably the most common reaction to first meeting Amma, or sometimes only on hearing about her or coming across a book, is an experience that can best be described as the dislocating power of love. It seems to stir the deepest depths of the heart and frequently brings tears to the eyes - but tears with a joyful release of tension. The Indian scripture, the Srimad Bhagavatam, has described it thus:

“The devotee whose voice is choked with emotion, whose heart melts out of love, who sobs again and again, and at times begins to laugh - and shaking off bashfulness begins to sing loudly and dance, sanctifies the whole world.

It seems that that around Amma, holes are punched in the sheaths that surround the great soul, and puffs of bhakti escape to stir and calm the busy mind. Amma says that such tears are not tears of sorrow but are a form of bliss. They will flow when the jivatman, the individual ‘soul’, merges with the Paramatman (the Supreme Spirit): “Our tears mark a moment of oneness with God.” Amma maintains that the devotee who cries for God always experiences the bliss of his love for God: “What then is the need for liberation?” That is why Amma promotes the path of Bhakti as the best spiritual sadhana.

To look at, Amma is plumpish, dark-skinned and always happy, bubbling over in fact, and very pleasant to see. She accepts everyone, no matter what they are like, with the same tenderness and compassion. She is almost always cheerful and no task is too great for her to tackle with enthusiasm. Even when talking about difficulties Amma is cheerful.
Whenever she can she meets her devotees, listens to their problems and stays until every one has been received and consoled; sometimes right through day and night. In Amma’s biography, Mata Amritanandamayi - Life and Experiences of Devotees, the author, Swami Amritasvarupananda, writes: “She not only listens to their problems but also solves their problems by mere touch, look, or through pure resolve... Mother knows that spiritual advice won’t satisfy the hunger of a person who is plunged in poverty.”

Amma’s particular form of darshan (audience with a holy individual) involves the hugging of each and every person who comes to her - an activity that absorbs long hours four to five days in the week. When asked why she hugs people she said, “Why does a river flow?” Or she may explain that in each and every one of us she sees only her own Self - the immaculate form of God. Linda Johnsen in the book The Daughters of the Goddess (see Bibliography) describes a typical scene when Amma was surrounded by over 20,000 devotees in India: “Amma had just completed a program of devotional singing and was taking time to greet her devotees personally - all of them... The evening passed, and then the night, and then the morning. But there was not a trace of fatigue on her face with still around 5,000 devotees left to go. She beamed her blessings at the enormous crowd and touched every person who came to her. She was completely present with each one, and pressed vibhuti (sacred ash) into their palms.”

So how is it possible for someone to do this year in and year out? A visitor to the ashram once asked Amma if she didn’t get bored doing the same thing every day? She answered something like this: “Son, boredom happens only to human beings... A Mahatma (liberated soul) experiences a constant sense of wonder and freshness in all his outlook and all his actions. Boredom and dryness come only when you have a feeling of duality, the attitude of ‘me’ and ‘you’... Oneness with the entire universe eliminates any such feelings... When your existence is rooted in pure love, how can you ever be bored?’... Actually, newness lies within us. A child looks at the world with so much wonder! For him there is newness in everything because there is newness within him, so much love within him.”

Amma has said that she will never give up hugging people while she is alive and will be doing so until she breathes her last breath. She said, “Each and every drop of Mother’s blood, each and every particle of energy, is for her children... The purpose of this body and of Mother’s whole life is to serve her children.” And devotion is to Amma, better than enlightenment - for it flowers when one is still in the world and in the body.

Thus Amma’s work takes up most of the 24 hours of any day and she sleeps, if at all, for only for very short periods. No one has ever seen Amma yawn. She remains humorous and perfectly normal through all her activities. Once when a devotee asked “Are you God?” she broke into peals of girlish laughter and said, “Amma is just a crazy girl. The only reason Amma is sitting here now is because no one has put her behind bars. Amma does not ask anyone to believe in her. It is enough for you to believe in yourself.”

Amma abhors the tendency to turn spiritual activities into business and instructs her disciples never to ask for money. Spiritual teaching and transmission are never charged for in Amma’s ashram and on her tours. But donations are accepted and received gratefully, and tapes, CDs, pictures, publications and craft works are sold (at very reasonable prices) - to support her many charities and social programs.

In the residential ashram only very low charges are made for accommodation and food - and this arose only as a necessity because the ashram had become a place where many would come to relax, enjoy good food, and leave without contributing anything in the way of work or payment - so that at one point Amma had to borrow money to keep the ashram going.

**Early times**

Much of the information in this section is sourced from the excellent biography of Amma by Swami Amritasvarupananda - see Bibliography. It is recommended for more details of Amma’s early life. Amma was born in 1953 into a moderately poor fishing family in the village of Parayakadavu, in Kerela State, South India, and given the birth name Sudhamani. Like Anandamayi Ma (Chapter 7) she did not cry during the birth and, as sometimes occurs before the birth of great beings, the mother dreamt that she would give birth to Krishna. Nevertheless, this period marked the height of belief in the ideology of communism in Kerela. There were many groups describing themselves as ‘rationalist movements’ who were opposed to all forms of religious exhibition. Amma’s older brother, Subhagan, who was to torment her through most of the early years, was a member of the local ‘rationalist movement’ and also of a ‘committee to stop blind beliefs’ - both of which were active in the area. They opposed the young Amma at every opportunity. And the brother’s attitude was not helped by the fact that Amma had a brilliant mind and perfect memory, while he was a bit of a dunce.

The parents and other family members seemed to have had it in for the young girl and could not reconcile the signs and predictions of the exalted state with the child herself. It seems that, while adults did not, in general, recognise the signs, children knew that she was something special. From the parents’ point of view, their attitude may have had something to do with her dark colour (the colour of Krishna), for the parents and the siblings were relatively light-skinned - which is always good for marriage prospects in India. Further, this period marked the height of belief in the ideology of communism in Kerela. There were many groups describing themselves as ‘rationalist movements’ who were opposed to all forms of religious exhibition. Amma’s older brother, Subhagan, who was to torment her through most of the early years, was a member of the local ‘rationalist movement’ and also of a ‘committee to stop blind beliefs’ - both of which were active in the area. They opposed the young Amma at every opportunity. And the brother’s attitude was not helped by the fact that Amma had a brilliant mind and perfect memory, while he was a bit of a dunce.

So the young girl was treated virtually as a slave and given most of the household and other domestic chores to do. She was taken out of school at fourth grade to devote all of her time to household tasks. She got very little sleep and if, occasionally, she didn’t wake and get up to start the chores by 3 a.m., her mother would pour cold water on her.

To the parents (Sugunanandan and Damayanti), the behaviour of their daughter was strange indeed and they were
for many years convinced that she was quite mad. Her devotional moods intensified almost daily through this period of her life. She had a most loving nature was often surrounded by children - who were less filled with mindstuff and opinions. She would involve them in enacting scenes from the life of the child Krishna. At other times she would dance in ecstasy while singing devotional songs. Her biographer writes:

"The little one’s songs were filled with poignant longing for the beloved Krishna. The enchanting, soulful singing of these simple, yet at the same time deeply mystical songs, became well known throughout the village... Some villagers would arise early in the morning just to hear the little one’s angelic singing greeting the newborn day: ‘Oh Lord of the ocean of milk, Who is the colour of rain clouds, Oh You with the lotus eyes, I adore You with joined palms’.

With an eye to practicality, and perhaps to enhance the chances of a suitable marriage (a very serious matter for the parents of girls in India), Amma was allowed to learn sewing for one hour a day - provided it did not interfere with her household duties. She went to a Catholic workshop where the priest was very touched by her obvious divine nature and the fact that she also, without hesitation, took part in the Catholic prayers and rituals. Swami Amritasvarupananda again writes:

“Gazing at the little one, the priest would weep with emotion like a little child. She would look at the crucified form of Jesus and would feel it was her beloved Krishna, and immediately she would become enraptured. She would think: ‘Oh how they have sacrificed everything for the world. People turned against them but they still loved the people. If they have done it, then why can’t I? There’s nothing new in it.’ “

As time went on her rapture became indescribably intense. Her biographer wrote: “How can we imagine the spiritual depth of this innocent girl whose heart knew no bounds when it came to loving her Lord Krishna? What force but God Himself was leading the little one deeper and deeper into the depths of Self Realization?” Thus the child became established in the ocean of “pure existence and bliss” and attained perfect peace of mind. She remained unaffected by abuse and showed no evidence of holding grudges against her persecutors. On a number of occasions she said that those who are enemies now will become the greatest friends.

Around this time the parents and older brother Subhagan began to try, without success, to marry Amma off. Still not understanding her true nature and thinking that she was merely uncooperative and somewhat demented, they became affronted at her resistance to marriage plans. On one occasion the family tried force her cooperation and one of the cousins held a knife to her chest. And notwithstanding Amma’s indifference to persecution, the antagonists, and others, did experience the ‘wrath of God’. The man who had threatened to stab her collapsed and died vomiting blood. A wealthy boat owner who ridiculed Amma in public, lost his boat in a freak storm - though his life and those of his crew were saved. And her older brother, who had abused her mercilessly over many years, developed the dreaded disease of elephantiasis and eventually took his own life. Even so, Amma says, through her grace, his soul was born again nearby - but with a notably improved attitude towards spiritual matters.

**Divine states; Krishna Bhava and Devi Bhava**

Later Amma was to undergo a change in spiritual development; the advent of divine states (bhavas) took place - akin to those that were experienced by Ramakrishna. Divine states, which occur in all spiritual traditions, are evidenced by behaviour representative of particular forms of a deity - the person may take on the appearance and mannerisms and exhibit physical changes, associated with the deity. In Christianity the stigmata of Jesus that saints and people in deep spiritual union manifest, is an example of a bhava. In Amma’s case the bhavas first became apparent to others when she was twenty-two. On passing a certain house in the village she stopped to hear some verses from the Srimad Bhagavatam being read out by someone in the house. She became overwhelmed with divine bliss and her inner devotion overflowed to assume some of the physical features of the Lord Krishna. The devotees from the house came out and felt that the Lord Krishna had come in the form of this village girl to bless them.

At this time Amma attained omniscience - knowing all things; and it is a fact that the village girl, whose education never went beyond grade four and who hadn’t, and still doesn’t, read scriptural texts, has encyclopedic knowledge of the Hindu scriptures, and also those of other religions. Further, it was the Krishna Bhavas that first motivated Amma to have a deep concern for the suffering of the world.

Later Amma had a vision that marked the beginning of further spiritual development in this extraordinary young woman. As she sat in meditation a beautiful globe of light appeared in front of her. It was reddish like the setting sun but also soothing like the moon, and it was slowly rotating. Then from the globe emerged the most enchanting form of Devi, the Divine Mother - represented in her different forms in Hindu mythology as Durga, Lakshmi, Kali and Lalita Devi. From this time onwards Amma, who had never contemplated any form than Krishna, acquired an intense longing to behold the Divine Mother again.

During this period Amma no longer lived at home. Her body would become extremely hot and she could hardly bear to wear clothes. She would stand immersed in the backwaters near the home, deep in meditation. Her family’s conviction that she was demented gained strength and they continued in their habit of taunting her - all except, by now, her

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5 Therese Neumann is the best-known example from Christianity. Timothy Conway, in his book *Women of Power and Grace* (Which also has a Chapter on Amma - see Bibliography), writes: During her reliving of Jesus’ passion, Therese would experience lucid visions of his suffering and death.. (and) .. the symptoms in her body would appear and disappear suddenly, defying etiologic pattern.
father, who tried to help in various small ways. Seeing her sitting in the open in a state of intense meditation he would make a small shade of palm leaves over her to protect her from the elements.

Animals came to love her, a cow would lie down beside her exposing its udders, a cat would constantly follow her, an eagle would present her with fish, and a dog would also bring food offerings and would allow itself to be used as a pillow. One day the dog was caught by the local dog catcher and was howling pitifully. When Amma approached the dog began shedding tears. This was too much for the dog catcher who then released the animal. Later she had the premonition that the dog would get rabies - and it did. Nevertheless, Amma nursed the dog even putting her hand into its mouth so that it became covered in the highly infective saliva. Witnesses to the event were alarmed but Amma shrugged off their concern. Later the dog died, but peacefully and without the usual manic symptoms of this terrible disease. When asked if she was sad about the event she said, “I am not at all sad about his death. Even though he died, he will come to me. Therefore why should I be sad.” Later she recalled:

“How blissful indeed were those days! Strangely enough, those animals could understand my feelings and act accordingly. If I cried, they also would join me in crying. If I sang, they would dance in front of me. When I lost my external consciousness they would crawl over my body and protect me. All the traits of various animals can be found in human beings. When one gets rid of all attachment and aversion and attains equal vision, then even hostile animals will become friendly in one’s presence.”

**Devi bhava:** Amma’s longing for the Divine Mother increased in intensity. Then one day the vision appeared again and after this Amma started manifesting Devi Bhava - the mood of the Goddess. She said of herself: “From that day onwards I could see nothing as different from my own formless Self wherein the whole universe exists as a tiny bubble.” To this day Amma continues to dress as Devi as a celebration of the event, at certain darshan sessions. She maintains that such manifestations are to bless and uplift devotees and a palpable energy can be felt on these occasions - but it is as yet only a pale reflection of the totality. She explained thus:

“Mother is not manifesting even an infinitesimal part of her spiritual power during the bhavas. If it were to be manifested as it is, no one could come near! ... Here is a crazy girl who puts on the garb of Devi, but it is within this crazy girl that everything exists. However, it should be remembered that all objects having a name or form are mere mental projections... All these are merely external aids meant to create an impression. Mother dons the garb of Devi in order to give strength to the devotional attitude of the people coming for darshan. The Atman or Self that is in Mother is also within you. If you can realize that indivisible principle that is ever shining in you, you will become That.”

Amma places great emphasis on the chanting of the divine names of God in the form of Lalita Sahasranama (see Bibliography) as a panacea against suffering. Generally life is full of sorrow and no one knows this better than Amma, who has listened to the sorrows of millions of people. She says:

“In the present age, the instincts of the heart and the motherly instinct have been lost... Feminine qualities like compassion and love should become stronger in men, and masculine qualities like steadiness and courage should grow in women. The worship of the Divine Mother is ideal for enhancing these good qualities. Rapid progress will then become possible in both worldly and spiritual life.

This is the promised benefit of Sri Lalita Devi when the 1,000 names are chanted - as they are twice daily in Amma’s ashrams and centers.

**Dattan the leper**

In the middle ages the licking of lepers to cure them was undertaken by Christian saints who did not regard it as a mortification. In Recent years too Father Damien took the extreme step in his ministrations to lepers; and Mother Teresa showed the propensity for, and benefit of, close contact with the sick and dying. Likewise Amma, who seems to have total disregard for her own body, much to the horror of her devotees, licked the suppurating sores of a leper and cured him. This is an account summarized from Swami Amritasvarupananda’s book:

A man named Dattan became a victim of leprosy at a young age and was turned out of his own home to become a beggar. As the disease advanced his whole body became covered with infective oozing pus and his body would emit the foul odour of putrefaction. For years he heard no loving word nor saw a compassionate face. Then he heard of the Holy Mother and went to see her on Devi Bhava day... Full of abhorrence people urged him to go away, but the Holy Mother called him to her, held him close and consoled him, to heal him. For those who witnessed the healing it was a blood-curdling sight to watch the Holy Mother licking the pus-infected wounds. Some of the witnessing devotees vomited, some fainted. But others watched in awe and reverence, weeping with love and devotion on realizing they were sitting in the holy presence of the Divine Mother Herself. She said, “Who else is there to take care of him and to love him? Mother doesn’t see his external body. She sees only his heart. I cannot discard him. He is my son and I am his mother. Can a mother abandon her son? Following this, on each Bhava Darshan day she gave him a bath, pouring pots of water over his body and treating the wounds with holy ash. She treated him with the same love and compassion that she showed to other devotees.

Now Dattan is transformed. His eyes are open and he can see clearly. Hair has grown back on his head. He can travel on a bus, and people will talk to him and serve him food. Though the scars of the terrible disease remain on Dattan’s body, he is happy. The Holy Mother had given him new birth. He has found meaning and joy in life through her blessings. He still visits the ashram from time to time.

**Amma’s first Ashram**
From 1976, when Amma was twenty-three, young and well-educated people began to come to the small temple she had established at Parayakadavu on the coast of the Arabian Sea. For the most part they had come to follow her teachings and to become devotees and disciples. But this was much to the consternation of the ‘rationalists’. Amma’s father, still with unmarried daughters, also objected to the mostly young men hanging around, as did the parents of the young people themselves. Together a smear campaign was started, but in spite of this endeavour, the area continued to develop as the nucleus of the present ashram. The story of its establishment goes something like this:

Amma sent a young aspirant called Chandu to Tiruvannamalai - which had been the abode of the great contemporary saint Ramana Maharshi until his death in 1950 - see Chapter 4. Chandu was supposed to go there to observe silence and meditate for a period of forty days - which he did. But he also met there two foreign seekers and told them about Amma. All three of them immediately felt a stream of love binding them together. Chandu then met another foreigner named Nealu (Neal Rossiter) who had been living near the Ramana ashram for a number of years, and told him also about Amma. Together they made the journey to Kerala to meet Amma and as a result of this ‘invasion’ of foreigners, Amma’s father gave her a small piece of land to build a hut. This became the first building of the ashram. That, together with the small temple, was all that there was to it and in those days. Amma and the devotees mostly slept in the open under the numerous coconut trees there, or stayed in the houses of villagers.

Later Amma arranged the marriage of her two sisters (who’s unmarried state had been an impediment in the eyes of the father to having the aspirants around), and at the same time the ‘rationalists’ and the ‘committee to stop blind beliefs’ finally gave up their endeavours.

As predicted, the parents and the ‘enemies’, became friends. It now became possible for the first group of brahmacharis and brahmacharinis (novice monks and nuns) to settle with Amma. Many of the early devotees are still with her and have embraced the monistic life. They help to run the ever-expanding activities.

Nealu (above) is now Swami Paramatmananda and for many years was manager of an Amma ashram in California. He has recently published a book, in two volumes, describing his own spiritual journey and his meeting with Amma, entitled On the Road to Freedom; A pilgrimage in India - see Bibliography.

Teachings

The teachings of true saints or enlightened beings (leaving aside the discoveries of quantum physics) are the only views that we get of the existence of another reality to the material world. The revelations of such individuals are both as rare as they are surprising to world-bound minds. The essential elements of Amma’s teachings are bhakti, unconditional love - which is the essence of the true Reality, and seva - selfless service, without the notion of doership. And they are taught within the framework of Advaita - that God is present within everything.

Such teachings are, for the most part, unspoken and are transmitted silently from master to devotee. They do not take the form of erudite lectures delivered with great poise and acumen - as would need to be the case in worldly life. Amma once said of herself, “Amma doesn’t know how to give satsang, she just blurts things out.” However, it would be a grave error to take this statement literally. Collections of Amma’s actual verbal explanations and sayings have been recorded in a two volume book called Eternal Wisdom and in an ongoing series of books called Awaken Children, presently in the ninth volume. These are derived, principally, from satsang sessions with Mother. There is also a small volume called For My Children - Collected Teachings of Divine Mother Ammachi - see Bibliography. Together they give the lie to the notion that Amma may be just a simple incarnation of love - a Premabhakti (though this could well be the basis of the silent teachings), because of all the questions asked during the very many satsang sessions that have taken place, Amma has never given an answer that does not hit the nail squarely on the head. She speaks with nothing less than divine authority.

Even so, Amma has said that of every hundred thousand people that come for darshan, only around 5 to 10, on average, are interested in spiritual matters. Nevertheless, whether they seek it or not, they all receive the silent teachings. And always, she says, she is chirping away at egos - even though we may not know it.

As indicated above, Amma’s teachings reflect traditional advaita (non dual) philosophy. God exists in all beings as the Self - the Atman or the ‘soul’ of man in one of its definitions, which is the same as the immortal soul. The realization of the Atman should be the aim and end point of all spiritual practice. But, like Ramakrishna, Amma knows that she has to come down to the level of ordinary people in order to raise them up. In a recent issue of the magazine Matruvani (Vol. 15 - Sept. 2003) Amma wrote as follows:

“The revelations of the Rishis (Sages) was called Sanatana Dharma. It embraces everything and gives seekers freedom to choose - even in believing or disbelieving in God. Buddhists don’t believe in a personal God. A master of Sanatana Dharma will prescribe methods that suit the physical, mental and intellectual nature of the individual. It’s like a river with many tributaries, so that many people can benefit from it. The Rishis developed Jnana, Karma, Bhakti, and Raja, Kria, Seva and Laya yoga, - and mantra and other spiritual practices. Sanatana does not even reject materialism. In this way the sciences of linguistics, architecture, geometry, astrology, mathematics, medicine, economics, musicology, logic, and even sexology and other sciences, flourished. Sanatana respects every kind of animal and even inert objects. Everything is pervaded by Brahman. So the shamanistic beliefs are also Sanatana Dharma... Nothing should be rejected. An illusory...

6 The word ‘soul’ may refer to the Self (the Atman of Vedanta), or jivatman, the bound individual egoic self (the I - thought), or to the subtle body. Only the Self (Atman) is the true immortal soul.
In the ashram too, visitors who have no interest whatsoever in spiritual matters are also welcomed. They are simply left to their own devices, adhering only to the ashram restrictions on drugs, alcohol and sex while in residence. But guidance; and these often find whatever it is that they are searching for.

For devotees who are not renunciates no rigorous lifestyle is required, even in the ashram, but there is teaching involving strict discipline, celibacy and long hours of service. Although in India ‘gurus’ are by no means always tied to celibacy, Amma herself is and always has been celibate. To keep up the spirits of her renunciate followers, Amma often makes fun of marriage: Marriage, she says, is like licking honey off the point of a needle. It’s sweet no doubt but you get pricked a lot, and you don’t get much... Most people think there are two rings in marriage but there are three; the engagement ring, the wedding ring and the suffering.

But for serious devotees, Amma says that they should come to a master with the innocence of a child and always have the attitude of a beginner - that is, empty and willing to receive. Then devotion will be attained. And particularly for her Western devotees, Amma recommends the path of devotion - of bhakti. She says that those of us brought up with Western values are usually well developed in the intellectual sense and are very aware of our ‘personal’ importance, but they lack understanding of the concept of devotion as a means of self improvement and spiritual development. In this regard her teachings are often extremely subtle. She says:

“In the beginning a true master won’t give strict instructions to a seeker. He will simply love him. He will bind the seeker with unconditional love. The strong impact created by love will make the seeker fit for the master to work on his vasanas or mental tendencies. Slowly the master, with strict yet loving instructions, heard and unheard, will discipline and remould the disciple’s ‘personality’. In such relationships it will become difficult to distinguish mentally who is the master and who is the seeker because the master will be humbler than the seeker and the seeker will become humbler than the master. Then the master will start disciplining the disciple, but with love.”

Serious spiritual practice is directed to the goal of realizing the Self - the Atman, and achieving enlightenment. And all progress depends on bringing the mind under control; and because the mind can’t entertain two thoughts at the same time, Amma says that mantra repetition, even when doing activities, is like putting up a sign “Post No Bills”. From ancient times to the present, countless sages have attained Self realization through the constant repetition of the Divine Name. Therefore, serious aspirants should repeat the divine name in the form of mantra japa - the silent repetition of God’s name in the form of a mantra given by a true satguru. Formally this is done in the Ashram by repeating the Sri Lalita Sahasranama, the thousand names of God, each morning and evening.

Another task of the master is to help the devotee to meditate and this is also done through concentration on a sound or a form. It is not the worship of the form, which can be many things, but the centering of the mind that is of importance. Amma relates a story of a guru who saw that one of his disciples was having great difficulty in meditating so he asked him what he most loved in life. The disciple replied, “My buffalo.”... “Fine,” said the Guru. “Go into your room and make your buffalo your mantra.”... Later the Guru noticed that the disciple had been in his room for a very long time so he asked him to come out; whereupon a very deep voice came from the room saying, “I would like to come out and have some grass but I can’t get my horns through the door.”

Amma, through her grace, has helped many people in centering the mind and one can say that serious devotees would find that living in Amma’s presence is like receiving structured and guided assistance on the spiritual path. Often this is quite intense and assumes the nature of tapas - spiritual burning.

But rather than instructing and lecturing, Amma often uses opportunities that arise to discipline the minds of devotees. Some examples recounted by Swami Amritasvarupananda are as follow: A disciple had typed “Mother, make me your slave” on a portable typewriter. Amma, who was sitting nearby, asked him what he had typed and he translated it for her. She said nothing but after some time she said to another devotee within his hearing, “I am going to send Balu (the disciple) abroad - residents are increasing and we have no income to support them all. So, he must go and work.” This was a severe shock to the disciple - all his inner foes raised their heads. He wanted only to stay near Amma and said with vehemence, “No, I cannot go away from here!” Then Amma said in a soft voice, “Son, what did you type just a few minutes ago? ... To become God’s servant is to accept all experiences, ‘good’ and ‘bad’, with an equipoised mind. See everything as God’s will... Son, I don’t want your wealth. When I see you crying for God I am so happy and my heart overflows for you.”

Sometimes Amma uses direct intervention to teach something to a devotee. In the case of Nealu (Swami Paramatmananda) - see before, Amma said: “You have been treading the path for a long time and still you have not achieved what you set out to accomplish. Why not try crying to God? You may be able to succeed that way... Take a photo
of your guru (Ramana Maharshi) and, keeping it next to you weep to him to reveal himself to you and rid you of all your sorrow. Just try it. It’s not as impossible as you think.”

After that Amma left to visit devotees across the backwaters and when Nealu tried to eat his lunch, each time he raised the spoon to his mouth, he would burst into tears. At the same time Amma’s image became indelibly imprinted in his mind’s eye. His friend was deeply alarmed; these emotional outbursts were entirely uncharacteristic of Nealu. He thought, “It’s taking Amma a long time to return. I’ll sit outside and chant my mantra - wherever she is, she may hear me and return immediately.” Some time later Amma’s mother came rushing in. “Amma is coming,” she announced breathlessly. “We were on the other side of the backwaters and could not get a boat to take us across and Amma started to shout, ‘Chandu (the friend) is sitting there in the hot sun and Nealu is weeping to see me. If you don’t find a boat soon, I’m going to swim across!’ ” At that moment Amma walked into the room: “Crying?” she asked innocently. Nealu experienced this episode as a much needed attack on his ego.

Amma has always said that a true master adapts teachings to suit the devotee. For most people the way of bhakti is the easiest. Recently Amma said: “All the great masters, including the advocates of Self inquiry, said that this (bhakti) is the way for the majority of men and women in the world today.” Amma says that an enlightened spiritual guide will prescribe methods that suit the physical, mental and intellectual nature of the individual. In the world learning for life, as in learning a profession, and learning the meaning of life, are both part of the path. But learning just for living, as sophisticated as it may be in the modern consumer society, is just samsara. “Even cannibals,” Amma said, “Consider themselves to be sophisticated - their way of life, their eating habits; and mental attitude is as important as actions.” She recounted a story of two neighbours - a spiritual teacher and a prostitute. The spiritual teacher was always preaching and couldn’t get the prostitute out of her mind. While the prostitute, who had been forced by circumstances into her way of life, always admired the spiritual teacher and wished she could live that way. Eventually they both died and the spiritual teacher went to hell while the prostitute went to heaven. Naturally the spiritual teacher lodged an objection and brought a case against God. So God had to explain about attitude of mind. The spiritual teacher got another chance in her next life.

Some of Amma’s views on different matters expressed during satsangs are as follow.

Some comments on specific matters

Love : The mind can’t actually understand God’s love because it belongs to another thought system. God is love but can we understand love? Even ordinary human love we can’t understand. We can’t understand even the love between lovers. To the mind it may be very unsatisfactory and irrational, like a young girl running away with a rascal. But the emotion that can’t be understood, nevertheless, is real. So God’s love, which is infinitely more potent than human love, is also not understandable by the mind.

On Jnana and Bhakta : Amma explained that not everyone has the spiritual stamina to follow the direct path of Jnana and points out that even Sri Shankaracharya founded temples and worshipped deities: “Didn’t he? And he wrote the Saundarya Lahari, describing the Divine Mother’s form. Amma knows he said that God was Consciousness, but didn’t he show that even mere stone is also God? Realizing that the philosophy of non-duality and Vedanta cannot be digested by ordinary minds, he tried to strengthen the devotion of people. Amma knows Her own nature very well, but the people of today need some instruments to realize that Supreme Principle. Images of God are needed to increase peoples’ faith and devotion. It is easier to catch a chicken by offering it food than by chasing it… And in order to uplift ordinary people to the spiritual plane, we first have to come down to their level.”

Bhakti involves devotion which is an exalted state. It is not just a matter of following a particular teacher. Bhakti is total surrender to God and, for the ordinary person, is the easiest path to follow. Bhakti may involve also the worship of idols as symbols of God and there is no need to limit the perception of God - idols are also God. Recently Amma published a two-part explanation of the origin of idol worship. Total worship is the means of attaining God. God is all-pervasive and dwells even in a stone pillar, see Matruvani 15, Nos. 4 and 5, 2004. She said that people do not actually worship idols: “They worship the all-pervading supreme consciousness through the idol. When a son sees a picture of his father he remembers the father, not the photo… If objects can induce emotions in an ordinary person, how much more precious will an image be to the devotee? … To see an idol as a mere statue is ignorance. ‘I am going to worship the Lord through an idol’ - it is with such a resolve that one usually starts ritual worship.”... The image helps immensely to enhance devotion and make the mind one-pointed.”

“There is idol worship in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Christians light candles. They offer wafer and wine seeing Christ’s body and blood respectively in them. They pray while kneeling before an image of Christ on the Cross. Muslims pray facing Mecca, seeing it as holy. They sit before the Kaaba, contemplating on the attributes of God. The purpose of all prayers is to awaken noble qualities within us.”

The unsatisfactoriness of worldly life: Almost everyone comes to know that they are not experiencing real peace - real happiness in this world. The Buddha expressed this in the First Noble Truth - the truth of suffering: that suffering is universal and sees its final expression in sickness, old age, dementia and death. Amma put it this way in an interesting story:

Brahma, the creator, conceived the multitude of species and was allocating lifespans to them. To man he gave a span of thirty years, but man was not content with this and demanded a longer life. Brahma explained that the total number of years could not be arbitrarily increased, but if any of the other creatures did not want their apportioned life spans, he would give the remaining years of their allotments to man. First came the ox who was given forty years. The ox said, ‘Oh
Lord, I couldn’t bear to live such a long life pulling carts, please cut it short by half.’ - So man got another twenty years. Following this man got time from the donkey, the dog, and finally from a worm. The worm had been allotted ten years. Hearing this, the worm almost fainted. It pleaded with the Creator. ‘Kindly reduce it to just a few days’; so man got another ten years and achieved a longevity of a hundred years and he began to live his life on earth. Amma explained: ‘Children, until the age of thirty, life is a period of education for man, when he leads a carefree, easygoing life. Then he gets married. From then on his life is like the ox. Man strains himself pulling the heavy cart of his family. In this way he reaches the age of fifty. Still he is carrying a heavy burden but he no longer has the health and vigour of his earlier days. His life at this stage can be likened to that of a donkey, and when the years of the donkey have come to an end, man is, by then, totally exhausted. Then he is left only to guard the house, like a dog, and to look after the grandchildren. Most of his time is spent sitting by himself, or lying down, completely ignored by his children. He is now constantly thinking about the past, reviving old memories. And then, for the last ten years which he borrowed from the worm, man spends crawling like a worm. He is helpless due to old age and sickness. His body and senses have become powerless. All he can do is to lie down, brooding about the past which is all he has left. Finally, he passes out of this life, verily like a worm. The awful face of such a life is marked by despair, regret and misery.’

The mind and ego: Amma has explained that the egoic mind is the root cause of all our troubles and unhappiness. The mind has four functions, the storage of memories (chit), doubting and questioning (manas), determining (buddhi) and maintaining the ego (the ahankara) - the ego is actually a product of the mind that exists because we identify with and attach to the thoughts produced by the mind - and the thoughts are only past memories. Further, the mind attains its power from the true Self which misidentifies itself (from being an object of Consciousness to being a subject that reacts with objects), and so it thinks it is the egoic mind. Amma says, “The ego has two principal powers: the veiling power and the power of projection - even the projection of the body. First, the mind veils the true nature of phenomena, and than it misinterprets them... What we are identified with is an ancient dream, based on thoughts and past experiences that are projected by the mind. At our present stage, we believe that the dream is real.”

In our dream the ego believes that it is in charge. It demands to be recognised and seeks continuous attention. It forms endless attachments and aversions. Amma says, “We are attached to husbands, wives, friends, toys... and countless things that keep the mind busy, but they all soon become boring and we run to new things to keep the mind quiet... We are bound to get bored with all the objects and experiences we get in the world... Most people are only intent on feeding the ego... They point their finger at insane people but they don’t know that they are actually crazy themselves; whoever has a mind is mad - because the mind is madness.”

Amma told a story of a man whose mind made him think he was a rat. He was so convinced of this that his wife made him go to a psychiatrist and after a long session the psychiatrist convinced him he was really a man and he left happily. But a few minutes later he ran back crying in great agitation. The psychiatrist asked him what happened and he said: “You know I’m not a rat and I know I’m not a rat - but there’s a big tom cat out there on the stairs.” This, Amma says, is how crazy the mind is: “In this world a child is taught everything: religion, culture, training, education - everything except how to simply abide in his own nature.”

Even though the egoic mind is very difficult to control and one needs the help of a master; this mind can nevertheless be trained and the ego can be disciplined. Amma draws attention to the difference between boys and girls in India. For social reasons boys are usually spoiled and pampered in the Indian family and, as a result, may develop ten to twenty egos. Girls develop much lighter egos. To have a controlled ego is a great step in the right direction. It’s like the difference between a good bus driver who understands that the road has bumps, potholes and other vehicles, and controls himself and the bus appropriately, and a road-rage driver who is like a coiled spring that goes off at the slightest upset. Even just tooting at him in America, Australia etc. can make him want to kill you.

Anger and hate: These negative emotions have grown to reach alarming proportions in the modern world. At the time of the Ramayana, devas (deities) and demons existed in their own worlds - symbolically in India and Sri Lanka in the Ramayana. Later, by the time of the Bhagavad Gita, they had come to abide in the same family - the Pandavas and the Kauravas. But now they exist in the same mind. That is why we need to observe extreme vigilance. The demons of anger, hate and greed must be countered with compassion, service and the love of God. We should look upon an angry person as we look upon a person with a physical disability, with compassion. The demons within reside in the egoic mind.

On depression: Amma has said that the wounds that cause depression are psychic wounds, not only from this life but also from previous lives as well, and no doctor or psychologist can heal them. Counselors and psychiatrists, using analysis and drugs may help people to cope with life to a certain extent in spite of those wounds, but they cannot actually heal them. Amma said, “They cannot penetrate deeply enough into their own minds to remove their own wounds, let alone those in the minds of their patients. Only a true master, who is completely free from any limitations and who is beyond the mind, can penetrate into a persons mind and treat all those unhealed wounds with his or her infinite energy.”

Spiritual life under the guidance of a true master does not weaken the psyche as some may think, but greatly strengthens it because it is towards union; for the ultimate cause of all our psychological wounds is separation from the Atman, from God - which is our true nature. It may be necessary for a person to go to a psychiatrist to seek temporary relief - and that is fine - but to put spirituality aside in order to strengthen the ego, which is the basis of all modern psychological treatment and counseling, is to strengthen the sense of separation and it will only lead to further suffering. Amma says, “What is the use of thinking, ‘I will go to the doctor (a true master) as soon as I feel better?’ To wait for the inner or outer circumstances to be ‘just right’ is like standing on the seashore waiting for the water to be completely calm
Desire and attachment: On these Amma has said something like this: Human beings have two problems. One of them arises when you don’t get what you desire, and the other is strange, because it arises when you do get what you desire. Because of your attachment to what you have attained, your next move will be to protect it, and your sense of possessiveness will continue to increase... You will lose your peace of mind... A lot of tension builds up in the mind: thought accelerates and exacerbates the chaos of the mind... You don’t know in which direction to turn, and you lose all sense of clarity. The burden becomes too heavy and you lose your grip on life... Your thoughts will overwhelm you and swallow you up - as you become identified with the mind and all its negative emotions... Then an emotional breakdown takes place and you may even go mad! (Madder than you were before).

Mother will tell a story: “A man was being shown around a mental hospital by his friend who was a doctor there. In one cell a patient was sitting on a chair endlessly repeating the name ‘Pumpum, Pumpum, Pumpum’ over and over again. The visitor said, ‘Poor fellow. What’s his problem? Who is Pumpum?’ The doctor replied, ‘Pumpum was his beloved. She jilted him and ran away with another man.’ The visitor sighed and they went on the see other patients. As they approached the last cell he was surprised to see another man banging his head against the wall and crying out the same name, ‘Pumpum, Pumpum’ with great anguish. The visitor asked the doctor, ‘Has the same Pumpum got something to do with this man too? And the doctor replied, ‘Yes, this is the man who Pumpum ran away with’.”

When asked whether satiating desires (in this case a desire to go on safaris to see wild animals), would be the best way of getting rid of them, Amma said that indulging desires is always falling into a trap. Maybe satiation takes place for a while, but the desire always comes back and if indulged develops into a habit or an addiction. “Happiness does not lie in anything external.” She said, “Learn to see God in everything. Then you will see all the animals just by looking at your friends in the ashram - gorillas, chimpanzees, and elephants, all of them.”

On sex: When asked to comment on problems relating to sexuality Amma said that the only way was to behave dharmically. The West is too liberal and has lots of problems. But in the East there are problems too, because men may be already in their thirties before marriage, and there are problems of prostitution. But anyone can live dharmically. Sometimes a husband lives away from the family to earn money for long periods of time. Dharma can be taught to children (how to behave properly), rather than exposing them to unsuitable kinds of media.

Does time exist? Amma has said that time exists to the mind. The mind is made up entirely of a flow of thoughts which create an illusion of time. The ego arises by attachment to these thoughts and then projects them into the ‘future’. To that which is beyond the mind, God or Brahman, or Consciousness - whatever you want to call it, there is no time. There is only the moment Now. But the mind can’t comprehend this. So, Amma says, instead of worrying about if there is time, it is better to train the ego. With a trained ego our lives can have equipoise and spiritual development can proceed smoothly.

Impermanence: Amma says that your wife, children, house, job etc. are all temporary - we are all tourists in the world, yet we always forget this. What is permanent in the world? Only the moment Now. If you ask a condemned man on the gallows with the noose already around his neck and knowing that the hangman is about to spring the trap, if he wants a delicious meal, or a box of jewels, he won’t be interested. But just like him we all, without exception, already have the noose around our necks - yet we still run after the things of the world.

The karmic pendulum: The pendulum of karma which swings within and between incarnations and the body - which is what incarnates, is a learning device. Mahatmas also have bodies and experience the vicissitudes of life, but to them it’s a ‘movie’ that they themselves create and enjoy.

Saying ‘yes’ to life: To surrender is to accept - to say ‘yes’ to everything. Amma has said that even when everything goes wrong in your life, still you should find yourself saying, “Yes, I accept. Thank you God.” The word “no” exists only where duality exists. Amma says, “When you see life as a gift you will be able to say yes to everything... If on the other hand you see it as a right, you can only say no. That is, when everything goes wrong, you feel unhappy and discontented... And when you always feel insignificant and unsatisfied, Why is this? It is because you are always wanting. You want money, fame, a new house, a new car; the list goes on and on. Thus you become unhappy, you get bored and life becomes dry... We need to give far more importance to the ‘soul’, to the realization of the Self, so that we can lead truly contented, blissful lives - even in times of hardship. And we need to give far less attention to the body.”

On tapas: Deep suffering and deep sorrow, when confronted and recognized as ‘what is’ - turns to clarity and peace. It becomes spiritual burning. The master induces spiritual burning as required in a disciple. Amma has said that spiritual burning is the most effective means of dissolving the mind. She said, “While it is true Amma is trying to please all her devotees who come to her to unburden their sorrows... Amma doesn’t believe that she should treat those who wish to devote their lives to God in the same way. Their minds need to be churned and churned, so they will become clearer than the clearest - so transparent that you will be able to perceive your real existence, the Atman. The mind is dissolved by the heat of tapas. The master creates turbulence in the mind in strange incomprehensible ways, so that the vasanas (attachments, aversions, tendencies, ingrained habits) are exposed, and then the devotee attains a sincere desire to work with the master to eliminate them. The mind along with all its judgments and preoccupations, will melt away and you will begin to function from the heart - (but) great patience is needed.”

As indicated before, Amma says that crying for God marks the exalted state of devotion. It can be induced by closeness to the master, or through deep suffering. All suffering is separation from God, and that which brings tears is a form of grace: “Such tears are not tears of sorrow. They are a form of inner bliss. Those tears will flow when the
individual, separated, soul merges with the Paramatman - the Supreme Spirit. Such tears mark a moment of oneness with God.”

**Seva (karma yoga):** Selfless service is a spiritual practice relating to bhakti. The mind must be kept on God when engaged in each action. Amma says, “Our minds should dwell on God, and our every action should be a form of worship. We should see our beloved in everyone, and offer them our love and service... We should have the attitude that everything is God - then it is bhakti... On the other hand, if we think of other things then it is not bhakti.” Amma tells a story: “There was a poor woman who used to utter the words Krishna-parnam astu (let this be an offering to God) before doing anything... There was a temple next to her hut and the priest didn’t like the woman’s prayer at all, especially when throwing out rubbish. One day she threw out some cow dung which landed in front of the temple. As usual, she didn’t forget to say ‘Krishna-Parnam astu’. The priest trembled with rage and made her remove the cow dung and then beat her... The next day the priest found that the arm that had struck the woman was paralysed and he cried out in anguish to the Lord. That night the lord came to him in a dream and said, ‘I enjoyed that cow dung my devotee offered me much more than the sweet pudding you gave me. What you do cannot be called worship, whereas every one of her actions is a form of worship. I will not tolerate you harming such a devotee of mine. Only if you touch her feet and beg her forgiveness will you be cured.’ The priest realized his error. He asked the woman to forgive him and was soon cured.”

Selfless service is not a matter of the aspirant acquiring ‘merit’ by doing good works for others. In performing actions through selfless service the main problem is to avoid the concept of being the ‘doer’. Amma understands that it is very difficult for people immersed in the activities of the world to get away from the doer notion, but around a master it “immediately cut it off.” Amma says that we should practice becoming the witness of actions; this will enable us to see actions through selfless service the main problem is to avoid the concept of being the ‘doer’. Amma understands that it is very difficult for people immersed in the activities of the world to get away from the doer notion, but around a master it “immediately cut it off.” Amma says that we should practice becoming the witness of actions; this will enable us to see how the ego works. It must be watched by the witness. In this way, with practice, we will get to know the characteristics of the ego and will not be so easily taken by it. In karma yoga service is the essential element, and because of this the person served is actually the one who is helping the aspirant in his or her spiritual quest - not the other way around. If this fact is appreciated it will help to generate the right attitude and avoid the notion of being the helper or the doer.

**Worldly effort and grace:** Striving for what the world calls ‘the pursuit of excellence’ is a form of arrogance and pride. Amma says: “Humans have the wrong notion that they can attain everything through effort. Effort, in fact, is pride in us. In our journey to God, all effort that stems from ego will crumble and result in failure. This is a divine message, the message of the need to surrender to grace. This eventually helps us to realize the limits of our effort, of our ego. In short, effort teaches us that through effort alone we will not attain our goals. Ultimately, grace is the determining factor.

Whether it is striving for God-realization or for achieving worldly desires, grace is the factor that fulfils the goal.” (See: From Amma’s Heart, Translated and Written by Swami Amritaswarupananda)

**Detaching from doership:** Amma says to detach from the fruits of actions. This encourages a sense of non-doership. Actions, thought of as duty according to dharma, may not produce the expected result, but it will be okay. For example, a seed planted may be eaten by birds or insects, trampled on, die of drought, or it may grow into a large tree - this is in the hands of God, not in the hands of the person performing the action of planting the seed.

**The need for a true master:** Amma maintains that there is a need for the guidance of a real master who has no ego - to replace all the other attachments of the mind. She says, “You need to be attached to something higher than the mind which is the noisiest place in the world. The pull of attachment to the master’s external form, in the beginning, is that which balances out all other attachments. It is hard to surrender and accept everything so to begin with the need for a true master arises - someone you can relate to and from whom you can learn true surrender... It will develop in you from the tremendous inspiration you receive through the master’s physical presence. Then the disciplinarian in the master will be invoked. This is meant to teach the disciple detachment, self surrender and acceptance, not only to the external form of the master, but to all creation - to your Self, to God.”

**Gurus and subtle ego:** In an interview with the magazine What is Enlightenment, for an issue devoted to the ego - see Bibliography, Amma expressed the view that she does not agree that certain gurus referred to are fully enlightened. If they have to derive their satisfaction from sources outside themselves, then they are obviously not fully established in the Self. The problem seems to arise from ‘subtle ego’. Amma said, “Unfortunately it may happen that a spiritual person learns to hide his ego and pretends to be very humble... A person who wears the false mask of a spiritually advanced person does not know what terrible harm he or she is doing, misleading others - and also paving the way for his or her own destruction. A number of sincere people may get trapped in the deception. And once they realize they have been misled, they will lose their faith. They will even be suspicious of genuine masters. The ego of such a ‘guru’ is very subtle and is difficult to get rid of.”

**Pranayana and shaktipat:** Amma does not, as a generality, encourage the practice of extreme yogic methods such as awakening of the kundalini through pranayoga or shaktipat. In her handbook of teachings For My Children - see Bibliography; she says: “Pranayama should (only) be practiced with utmost care. While doing these exercises, one should sit with the spine erect. Ordinary diseases can be treated and cured, but not the disorders caused by the incorrect practice of pranayama. Children, the number of times pranayama is to be performed is specified for each stage. If these specifications are not followed, the exercises can be dangerous. Their effect will be like trying to stuff a five kilo sack with ten kilos of rice.”

“When pranayama is practiced, there will be movement of the intestine in the lower abdominal area. There is a
time duration and order specified for pranayama exercises. If this order is not observed, the digestive system will be irreparably damaged and food will pass through undigested. And the nervous system can also be damaged. Therefore, pranayama should be practiced only under the direct guidance of an adept, someone who knows what should be done at each stage and someone who can give guidance and appropriate herbal medicines if needed.

Kumbhaka is the stillness of breath that occurs when one gets concentration. It may be said that the breath itself is thought. Thus, the rhythm of the breath will change according to the concentration of the mind... (However) even without doing pranayama, kumbhaka can happen through devotion. It is enough if japa (mantra repetition) is done continuously.”

It is said that some practices can over charge the nadis of the subtle body in a way similar to the application of excessive voltage or electrical power to sensitive electronic equipment such as a computer. In Amma’s ashrams and centers one does not hear the words pranayama or shaktipat very often; there it is more a matter of bhaktipat or the master’s love in setting the devotee up for spiritual growth. In fact, although the movement of the kundalini, which may take place through extreme forms of yogic practice, is considered to purify the nadis, this happening in spiritually retarded people can exacerbate the problem of the ego. People may feel that having visions etc. is a sign of their spiritual superiority. In contrast, when this takes place of its own accord, through conventional spiritual practices and by helping people selflessly, it does not inflame the ego. Neem Karoli Baba (Chapter 8), one of the great yogis of modern times, said that the kundalini is best awakened by “feeding people” - in other words, by selfless service. It seems that Mother discourages the pursuit of esoteric experiences - unless they happen without seeking for them.

Nevertheless, Amma has recently allowed the teaching, by trained instructors, of a type of prana meditation called ‘I am’. This involves an exacting three-day training session which can now be obtained, free of charge, at Amma ashrams and during Amma’s tours.

Humility: To be a good disciple we need to cultivate the attitude of a beginner and so be able to absorb what the teacher says. Many people come to advise Amma, rather than the other way around. We should avoid focusing on the me aspect of our minds; wanting things and being jealous of others - or the attention Amma may be giving to someone else. Rather be empty and focus on absorbing the master’s teachings and performing selfless service. We should be like little children listening to a story - they listen with their whole beings, their eyes wide with attention, not just with their ears and minds.

On scholarship: As a generality Amma recommends that the understanding of spiritual matters is best attained by attending satsang, asking questions, and observing the lessons of life. Simply reading the scriptures without correct interpretation can be misleading. For example, a young boy, after reading the story of Arjuna may conclude that there is nothing wrong with killing your uncle. But the ashram does conduct classes on Vedanta and other spiritual themes for renunciates and others interested in attending them. And Swamis tour the world giving talks and conducting retreats. On occasions learned teachers, such as Swami Anubhavananda of the Chinmaya Foundation, are invited to give classes.

However, for some individuals (who may be past the ability to approach the master as an innocent child), Amma has recommended Self inquiry.

The witness state and enlightenment: At a recent satsang gathering someone raised the question of the usefulness of the ego; is ego necessary for the fulfillment of life in the world? Amma countered by asking what we think it will be like to be enlightened. Various answers were forthcoming: it would be like the feeling of love we experience in the presence of Mother; and various scriptural explanations were also given. Then Amma said: “When you are enlightened there will be no ‘you’ to say what it is like - the you that you think you are will have ceased to exist.” Amma explained that the Self is not person or a ‘personality’ or something that the egoic personality will become, but is a state of being. To a degree in life it is associated with being in the witness state, for here the ‘personality’ is being watched - so at such times you are not the ego personality. Amma said that the experience of witnessing actually does occur in the day-to-day lives of people under certain circumstances. It comes down to a question of actually being aware of it. And if the ability to witness can happen at certain times, then we should be able to experience it constantly. Amma says that this state can be achieved because it is, in fact, our real nature.

The Self (the awareness of which takes place with enlightenment), unlike the ego, is always present and is perceived as that which - whether thought is present or not, whether the ‘doer’ is there or not, the ‘observer’ is there or not or the ‘knower’ knows or not. When both the knower and the doer are quiet, what is left is the Self. When the struggle stops with complete surrender then the Lord is revealed. The more struggle and striving there is, the more there is ego. The Self is above the gross body and the subtle body, the prana, the mind, the ego and the supracausal body, so all experiences that we can perceive through these, including, visions, blissful experiences and non-blissful experiences, anything we can describe, are all within the framework of the mind and duality. Hence they are not the Self. The very nature of the Self is experience; it is not an object of experience. We encounter the Self often in the state of deep sleep, but nevertheless we continue to struggle for it - and that struggle holds us back.

In sadhana, spiritual practice, the mind must be brought under control and as long as the mind is associated with the gross body we have no chance of purifying it. So we must tune in to the master with the innocence of a child. Be empty and humble and have the attitude of a beginner: “The mind is your past. Die to your past (your thoughts and memories) and you will suddenly become fully conscious... Get rid of the mind and you will be a new person with a fresh and ever-new outlook on life. Get rid of it and you will learn how to witness. When you truly exist in the present, you are simply witnessing. When the thoughts are eliminated, the past disappears... Children, at this time you are leading an unconscious life... You may wonder - ‘How can I possibly be unconscious?’ You may have a hundred arguments to prove that you are
conscious - but you are not.”

**Amma’s recent image**

Since the formation of the ashram in 1978 the organization has grown steadily from a grass hut and small temple with a few Indian and foreign devotees, to a large mission incorporating several ashrams, and many temples and centers in India and abroad, and a very large residential ashram the state of Kerala, South India, where visitors from all parts of the world are made welcome. The main ashram has seventeen story buildings and Amma has said that building and expansion of work will never cease as long as she is alive. The high-rise character of the main ashram is due to the acute shortage of land at that location, and in fact much of the land on which the ashram is built was given over to the Trust by Amma’s father.

Amma’s first visit overseas took place in 1987 and the number of locations visited and the time spent away from the mother ashram have steadily increased since then. Amma now spends more than half the year touring India, Europe, North America, Japan, Southeast Asia, Australia, West Asia, and even the islands of Mauritius and Reunion, from which some of her earliest devotees came and where is presently an ashram and a temple. The main activity of her tours is the giving of her form of hugging darshan described earlier.

**International recognition:** In recent years Amma has gained an international reputation as an ambassador of peace and harmony. 1993 Amma attended the centenary of the first Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. There were over 6,500 delegates representing 125 religions and sects at this meeting. (It was at the first meeting of this body in 1893 that Swami Vivekananda rocked the audience with his views on the universality of all religions). Amma’s talk at this meeting gave an insight to her conviction of advaita. An observer, reflecting on the impact of the various speeches, made this comment: “Every other speaker had treated the subject of religion and spirituality as if they were two separate disparate entities. However, Amma’s powerful words struck deep into the centre of religion and spirituality, effacing the contradiction, bridging the gap and affecting a harmonious blend of both, thus unfolding their very essence. It was one of the most significant and powerful speeches.”

In New York in 1995 Amma was one of the invitees from all over the world to an Interfaith Conference convened to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the United Nations. In her address she made this moving statement:

“The chain of limitations that binds us must break in order to open our hearts; to know each other and to understand the pain and suffering of others by putting ourselves in their place. According to science, the world falls into two categories: the known and the unknown. In the future scientists may discover much of what is not yet known. But it is the unknowable, that which is far beyond the intellect, that we really know nothing about. That is God, or our own true Self.

We may deny the existence of God but the intellect cannot completely prove or disprove God. If the intellect were able to prove God’s existence - if it could contain God within its grasp - it would only mean the intellect is greater than God. If God can be understood through the intellect, then God and religion are not necessary. Science and the intellect would be enough. What we have to inquire about is the very source of that Power which exists within ourselves.

There is one Truth that shines through all of creation. Rivers and mountains, plants and animals, the sun, the moon and stars, you and I - all are expressions of this one Reality. It is by assimilating this truth in our lives, and thus gaining a deeper understanding, that we can discover the inherent beauty in this diversity. When we work together as a global family, not merely belonging to a particular race, religion or nation, peace and happiness will once again prevail on this earth which is now drenched with the tears of division and conflict.”

In August 2000 Amma addressed the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the United Nations, on the ‘Role of Religion in Conflict Transformation.’ Part of her address is as follows:

“The reason for the fighting (between religious factions) is that people are not going into the depth of their religion. Our ties to a religion, society, or country should not make us forget our basic human values... There is a lack of awareness of our true nature, the one living power within us, of which we are all a part. The role of spirituality, true religion, is to awaken this awareness and to help us develop such qualities as love, empathy, tolerance, patience and humility.

Religion is the science of the mind. Today we are able to air-condition the external world, but we have yet to learn how to air-condition the mind. We are trying to clone human beings, but we do not attempt to create within ourselves a perfect, loving and peaceful human being. An important role of religion should be this purification process... Though the founders of all religions realized and practiced the noblest ideals in their lives, many followers have failed to live up to them. Instead of focusing on the essence of religious principles of love and compassion, we focus on the external rituals and traditions, which vary from religion to religion. That is how these religions, which were originally meant to foster peace and a sense of unity among us, became instrumental in spreading war and conflict. Amma will tell a story:

The leaders of three religions - A, B and C - decided to convene a meeting to bring about peace. God was so pleased with their efforts that he sent an angel to them during the meeting. The angel asked the leaders what they wished for. The leader of religion A said ‘Religion B is responsible for all the problems. So please wipe them off the face of the earth!’ The leader of religion B said ‘Religion A is the cause of all our troubles. You have to reduce them to ashes! ‘On hearing this, the angel was very disappointed. He turned expectantly to the leader of Region C. With an expression of grave humility, C’s leader said, ‘I wish nothing for myself. It will be enough if you merely grant the prayers of my two colleagues!’
But we cannot lose sight of the essential needs of people, for until these needs are met, it is impossible for anyone to aspire to higher states of awareness and understanding. If, in any part of the world, people are dying of hunger or suffering in poverty, or being exploited, it is a matter of shame for all nations. Based on the religious ideal of universal brotherhood, all nations that are in a position to help should share their material wealth and resources. There is enough for the survival of all living beings on this earth, yet not enough to satisfy the greed of just a few.

Lending a helping hand to a neglected soul, feeding the hungry, giving a compassionate smile towards the sad and dejected - this is the real language of religion. We should invoke God's compassion in our own hearts and hands. Living only for oneself is not life but death.”

The following are some of the globally recognized problem areas listed by Amma, in which the UN should strengthen their efforts:

1) In God’s creation, men and women are equal. But over the centuries, the sad condition of women had not significantly improved. Women, who give birth to humankind, should be assured an equal place in society.

2) Millions of people are suffering from AIDS, which continues to spread like wildfire. This disease must be brought under control.

3) Let the UN lead the transformation from a world of conflict to one of the peace by training a group of youth in community service. These young emissaries, serving selflessly throughout the world, will inspire people to cultivate universal spiritual and human values. What cannot be achieved through bloodshed, can be easily achieved through love.

4) Terrorism and violence against human beings in the name of any religion (whether official or unofficial) should be condemned at the international level and the appropriate strong action should be taken - not military action, which is also terrorism. Love is the only medicine that can heal the wounds of the world. Just as the body needs food to grow, the soul needs love to unfold. Love is more nourishing than breast milk is for baby. Love is the very foundation, beauty and fulfillment of life. Where love exists, there cannot be conflict of any kind - peace alone will reign.

Charities and social works

Amma’s service to society in India cannot be faulted. She has established around 750 spiritual centers and 12 temples, and has initiated thousands into spiritual life. In Amma’s centers women disciples are trained to perform religious rites and can become Swamis - in opposition to main-stream views of Hinduism and Islam. And principally in support of widows, often hard done by in India, Amma’s organization has, at the time of writing (2000), supplied more than 25,000 homes to the poor, and pays pensions to around 50,000 destitute women.

Amma believes in the necessity for material progress in underdeveloped countries like India, but at the same time she supports the preserving of traditional values and promotes spiritual development and harmony.

A marvel of modern medicine, said to be the best in India, is the Amrita Institute of Medical Science (AIMS), with its medical and nursing schools and state-of-the-art medical and surgical services. It offers treatment at lower then average charges for all and free or subsidized treatment to the needy. In addition Amma has started many free hospitals and clinics throughout India.

Amma has established 33 secondary schools and vocational training centers in areas where government schools are poor or lacking, and a school of nursing. She also promotes technical progress through the Amrita Institute of Technology and Science, the Amrita Institute of Management, and the Amrita Institute of Advanced Computing. In line with the aim of raising the material standards of the poor she offers 5000 scholarships to poor students who will each undertake to sponsor a further student for training when they get jobs.

Peace Award: In 2003 Amma was received the Gandhi, Martin Luther King Award for the promotion of global peace.

Practicalities

Amma’s residential ashram in India welcomes visitors from all over the world. Visitors are housed in high rise apartments. Charges (2004 rates) are Rp. 150 (c. $ 3) per day or $100 per month with simple ashram food. The ashram also has Western and Indian canteens that sell food at very reasonable prices. Visitors staying more than a few days are encouraged to do one or two hours of seva per day during their stay.

There is a small hospital for inmates, visitors and local villagers and an auryvedic clinic. Homeopathic treatment, massage and other treatments are also available from specialists by appointment. There are resident astrologers and a puja service is also available.

There are also libraries, a bank, laundry service, E. mail, and fax. and telephones, and a service for booking and confirming flights.

Getting there: The closest cities with international airports are Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram) 120 km. south, and Kochi (Ernakulam) 150 km. north. The nearest railway station is Kayamkulam (12 km. North). From these locations there are buses, rickshaws and taxis, and from Cochin and Kollam (Koilam) also tourist boats that traverse the backwaters of Kerela.
If contacted in advance (always a good idea) the ashram will send transport to the airports to meet arrivees. The cost of car transport from Trivandrum is around $25.

Information on Amma’s movements can be ascertained from the website below.
Postal address: Mata Amritanandamayi Math, Amritapuri PO, Kollam District - 690525 Kerela.
Phones: (Internat.) + (91 476) 897578 / 896399 / 896278 (local) ; (0476) 897578 / 896399 / 896278.
Fax : (Internat.) + (91 476) 897678 (local) (0476) 897678
E.mail : <mam@amritapuri.org>
Overseas visitors: <inform@amritapuri.org>   Web :  www.amritapuri.org

PART: II

ENLIGHTENMENT TEACHERS OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Even though the ‘new physics’ has opened up a Pandora’s Box of cosmology - see Appendix II, the 21st century, if it differs at all from the 20th in anything other than the fructification of consumer technology and post-Darwinian ‘scientific’ thought - then that difference seems to be of the nature of a speeding up. The inhabitants of the 21st century, reflecting perhaps the happenings of the 20th century, seem to need speed. There is a compulsion, like a powerful urge to commit an irrational act, for speed. Even the most innocent among us can be dangerously armed with a hand-held telecommunication device that eliminates his or her traditions and way of life - because the need for speed is contagious. A website <www.1912.com> that devotes itself to considerations of control by a higher reality (what the enlightened have always said), maintains that there is evidence that time is actually speeding up, or collapsing. The reference factor is the ‘earth’s heart beat’ - the Schumann Resonance Pulse. This is an electromagnetic pulse that surges from the ionosphere to the earth and averages 7.83 cycles per second, but fluctuates slowly between 9 and 12 cycles per second; and by what could be a strange coincidence the Human alpha brain waves, associated with the meditative state, also fluctuate between 8 and 12 cycles per second. The Schumann Resonance Pulse is now over 12 cycles per second and could be speeding up. Could this ‘speeding up’ mean that the happenings that used to fit into a 24 hour day are now crammed into 16 hours? And could it be that when the speeding up reaches the point where ‘events’ all take place in no time at all, that a new dimension arises and there will be only the moment Now? Something to contemplate perhaps?

In the modern world it seems that many people could be reacting to a surge of clock time with an intensification of anxiety and other mental and physical symptoms. Modern symptoms of change that have been noted are more migraine headaches, tiredness, electrical sensations, cramps in limbs and spine, flu-like symptoms, intense dreams, and other changes - see Chapter 24 for some more. Could they be ego’s last ditch attempts to shore up its vulnerability? People, from religious groups to the guy down at Joe’s Bar and Grill, are asking: “Are things spinning out of control?” Let’s face it there is the problem of the technological consumer society that was not there before - and it is affecting the environment. Just ask whales or any of the other honourable members of the endangered species club. But is the world out of control? The website <www.2012.com> and many others say no - though it is out of ‘our’ control, as it always has been. The strange physical and mental symptoms may simply be part of a forthcoming change - a shift of consciousness if you like.

And these symptoms should not be taken as negative for there are positive things happening as well. In spite of the agendas of ‘coalitions of the willing’ and the like, terrorists have not struck at America, even though it would be easy and no amount of homeland protection could prevent it. And though official and un-official wars rage, they are not more than have been throughout history. So it seems that God, or Consciousness if you prefer, is still in charge of that which seems to be a spinning out of control.

Nevertheless, things really could be speeding up. Are you feeling a quickening? Many have said so and some say that earth-changing events that the scriptures predict, are looming closer. So while the cosmic pendulum may be swinging faster, some also believe that man’s consciousness is also evolving faster - the rate of ‘enlightenment’ is speeding up. Perhaps there really is a divine plan and a purpose to life other than the dismal prognosis of the post-Darwinian science and the mechanical society. But consider this: If anyone knows, it is not the worldly wise; it can only be those who have been able to see beyond the world - like the individuals sketched in this book.

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7 Discovered by the physicist Heinrich Schumann in the 1930’s the ‘pulse’ is an electromagnetic phenomenon that exists between the earth’s surface and the ionosphere. Its rate seems to be strongly affected by temperature so that global warming could be a primary factor causing speeding up.
Here we have separated the accounts of the great beings of the 20th century from those of the new millennium (partly to appease traditionalists), but in truth there can be no possible distinction. It seems certain that what is said in the present age can be found in the ancient scriptures. All we can do is hearken to what is said, taking care not to fall into the trap of the unreal. We can use the ‘heart’ as the divining rod to find those who speak the truth and then we can contemplate it - remembering that contemplation is not the same as thinking. Thinking can’t help anyone because it belongs to the worldly logical system of Socrates and Descartes - and history shows that it has never helped anyone. It is the thinking of God that needs to be found. In the new millennium the difference between ‘spirituality’ and ‘religion’ is breaking down more overtly, and since the 1960’s there has been a great proliferation of teachers that cater to Western tastes - often with an Eastern flavour. But, as in days of old, be aware that very few of them are genuine. These are some of the few.

Chapter 20

RAMESH BALSEKAR
An enlightened mind-body organism.

Ramesh Balsekar was a disciple of Nisargadatta Maharaj and could be called his best-known successor. He lives in a modern apartment in Bombay and meets devotees and interested visitors in an informal style. Many Westerners attend sessions in which Ramesh fields their questions or expounds his beliefs and the philosophy of Advaita; and particularly that part of Advaita about non-doership - that God, or Consciousness, does everything. His explanations are extremely penetrating and as clear as those of the great Nisargadatta himself.

Ramesh was trained as an economist and until his retirement in the 1970’s was in banking, which included a period as head of the Bank of India. But throughout this career, and through marriage and family life, there was always a thread of spirituality which had started in childhood. He followed the teachings of Ramana Maharshi but never actually met the great saint. And he spent many years with various other gurus but, it seems, got nowhere until he met his final guru, Nisargadatta Maharaj.

His enlightenment: Ramesh began to be a regular attendee of Nisargadatta daily talks and would translate for English-speaking visitors. After some time, while translating, he had the experience of witnessing the translation taking place. There was a clear impression that he was not ‘doing’ the translating; it was taking place so spontaneously and with such precision that he realized the translation was simply being done to or through him. This was a liberating experience and Nisargadatta later confirmed that he had become realized - he had come to understand the profound meaning of Advaita.

Some teachings

Ramesh says that the principle on which all his teachings are based are summed up in the words: ‘Thy Will be done’. This concept has a strong spiritual foundation for the Buddha too said, “Events happen, deeds are done, but there is no individual doer thereof”. And the Bhagavad Gita proclaims that the ‘personality’ cannot actually commit a sin nor do a meritorious act in volition, because the light of knowledge is covered by the darkness of the ego’s delusion. The unenlightened person believes that he or she is a ‘personality’ who is the doer of actions, and as a result of these actions, either expects a reward, or if they go wrong, is in fear of punishment or experiences guilt. Ramesh explains that the individual ‘person’, does not really exist and is merely a concept of Consciousness, which through misidentification and association with the thoughts of the mind, becomes the egoic mind, the body and the ‘personality’. Ramesh put it this way: “In the mental space of time, perception and cognition of innumerable forms get created and destroyed, but the Absolute is immanent in all of them. So although individual ‘personalities’ figure nowhere, they are yet everywhere - because we are the manifestation, the functioning, and the life being lived. We are the living dream.” This is what the enlightened being understands - whatever happens is part of the general functioning of Consciousness. And, Ramesh says, the only difference between a sage and an ordinary person is that the sage knows this.

Ramesh explains that understanding is not derived from the study of books and religious texts - which are nothing more than hearsay, but through experience of the sense of ‘Conscious Presence’ - which reveals the knowledge of one’s own true identity. Consciousness cannot be aware of itself without a form, a body; and the force behind the conception and growth of the body throughout its lifespan is also Consciousness. Consciousness, Ramesh explains, is the ‘taste’ or the ‘I-am-ness’ of the physical body - like the sweetness in sugar; and without Consciousness there can also be no world. Thus, Consciousness can be thought of as the highest ‘God’ that the individual in dualism can conceive, and as such it has been called Krishna, Shiva, Allah, the Trinity, the Creator, or just plain God. Consciousness really does not have any relationship to the notion of the individual ‘personality’. The existence of the individual and the world, however, relate to Consciousness; but when Consciousness leaves the body, that is the end of that individual and his concepts of the world and of his ‘God’. Such a God was conceived by the individual in duality simply as a concept, albeit a part of a total ‘functioning’ of the Impersonal Consciousness.
The sense of duality: Ramesh says that the sense of duality starts with a stirring of Consciousness, in which it becomes manifest through a process in which Consciousness, the subject, perceives itself as object in duality. Then the object assumes a pseudo-identity as the subject that cognizes objects (other personalities, things etc.) in the world of duality, external to itself. It then regards itself as an autonomous identity - a ‘self’ - with the power of volitional action. This is the ego and what it perceives in the dualistic world. But, in truth, the body, mind and ego of the ‘individual’, are nothing more than a psychosomatic apparatus created by Consciousness - and each is only one of the untold millions of forms that are activated by Consciousness. Furthermore, these phenomenal manifestations depend on the concepts of space and time, for in the absence of space, no object could become apparent with its three dimensional nature. And similarly, in the absence of time, the object could not be perceived, nor any movement measured, without the duration necessary to make it perceivable. In reality, Consciousness has worked out for each phenomenal form its allotted span of actions, and at the end of its lifespan it disappears as spontaneously as it appeared. Then Consciousness, relieved of its physical limitation, merges in Awareness.

Spiritual practice

Self Inquiry and escape from illusion: Ramesh says that the principle of duality which perceives itself as a ‘subject’ starts with the sense of ‘I am’. It then carries things a step further in its role as a pseudo-subject and begins a process of reasoning and identifying ‘objects’ through comparing and judging inter-dependent counterparts - such as mine and yours, good and bad, merit and sin, presence and absence, and so on. All the so-called problems of the world arise with this individual personality, who, in ignorance, believes that it is he who acts, and so binds itself in illusory bondage. The ‘individual’, in its relationships to other forms, and its belief of being the doer of actions and the acceptor of the consequences, creates bondage and the necessity of the idea of karma and rebirth. The doership sows the seeds of karma and although it is nothing more than a concept, for those bound in its illusion, it is very real.

Ramesh explains that the escape from bondage is best achieved through Self inquiry: “Where is the question of a you?” Find out what you really are through Self inquiry: “How did I arise? What is the Source? What sustains it? What is its nature? Who then are you? The answers to these queries lead to true knowledge.”

Getting rid of volition: Ramesh says that people sometimes ask me, “If nothing is in my hands, should I or should I not meditate?” His answer is always very simple: “If you like to meditate, meditate; if you don’t like to meditate, don’t force yourself to meditate. Whatever is spontaneous is correct because, in the absence of conceptualization, the spontaneous is natural and therefore correct without any reasoning, comparison or any cause-effect.” Or he may say: “Who is the one who thinks he must do something? Understanding is all.” And no amount of ‘doing’ will achieve anything. There must be a total annihilation of the erroneous concept of an independent entity with autonomy of action.

Ramesh says that seeking is only an obstacle because of the seeker. It is the seeker who is the obstacle - not the seeking. Seeking happens by itself because the programmed individual is programmed to seek what it is seeking. The problem is the seeker who says “I want enlightenment.” For spiritual practice to be true there has to be a kind of un-thought-out intensity in the seeking: “So you see, whether one seeks or doesn’t seek is not under one’s control. And whether seeking for God or seeking for money happens is neither to your credit nor is your fault.” Probably for everyone, the best spirituality, the best sadhana, is listening to, reflecting and meditating on the words of an enlightened master. Such is actually Consciousness that is listening to the words of Consciousness which has, through divine planning, misidentified itself with the ‘personality’. But, Ramesh carefully points out, “Once the intention and meaning of the words of an enlightened master are grasped, they should be discarded - to prevent the ‘personality’ intellect from raising conceptual structures on them.”

Our true identity is the timeless Absolute Unmanifest that becomes Consciousness seeking itself in duality as a reflection of its ‘awareness’: “So understand the whole process of the Absolute and its manifestations. They are not different. Identification of the unicity (or the subject) that we are, with the object of separateness in duality, that believes itself to be the subject, constitutes ‘bondage’ - and disidentification constitutes ‘liberation’. The aim of sadhana, therefore, should be to seek the source of the manifestation… So ask, ‘who has come to this conclusion?’ Who else but ‘I’? ‘I’ who is responsible for every kind of manifestation, ‘I’ who is every kind of manifested phenomenon, ‘I’ who was present before ‘time’ was conceived”. In the true state of wholeness there is only One. Therefore, Ramesh says, every sentient being can say this, not as himself as the ‘personality’ (for the ego personality loves the idea of being immortal), but as the ‘I’ of Consciousness; and, in sadhana, it is important to understand this: it is not the ego personality ‘I’, that in which the world believes, that can make this claim.

Maya: Maya is what keeps us from knowing what we really are. It is not just a simple illusion but a fraudulent, cheating illusion - a “magnificent illusion” as Nisargadatta described it. Ramesh says: “The misidentification of Consciousness becomes the beguiling, bewitching Mahamaya. And the sense of being alive is so intoxicating that Consciousness becomes enchanted by the spectacle it presents. But when it gets so involved in the spectacle as a ‘pseudo-entity’, that one only rarely finds out that it is merely a dream contained in a speck of Consciousness, that the problems of the world are conceived.” Moreover, the dream is not something we are born with. It is cultivated and grows and changes with time, from infancy to senile dementia.

The will of God: Ramesh insists on the view that everything that happens is the pre-ordained will of God. He says: “Once this is clearly appreciated, it cannot but be understood that the idea of ‘living our lives’ is a joke - because it is based on the wrong belief that what we do are acts of volition.” He maintains that the intuitive understanding of Consciousness in all its roles, and that “I am That”, must be what enlightenment is, and not something conceived by an
physically while the rich suffer mostly mentally. Which is the more heinous?

“The fact of the matter,” Ramesh explains, “is that it is impossible for the unenlightened human being - an object in the totality of manifestation - to ever know and understand the basis on which God’s will functions. The rationalist and illusory doer lives only on the surface where everything seems ‘logical’ and ‘reasonable’ - or ‘un-reasonable’. But the this good thing and should be rewarded, and he or she has done that bad thing and should be punished.” In reality the only world of attack and the trading of grievances. Action, Ramesh says, will almost always involve the concept: “I have done it is that God is cruel, but that the false ‘identity’ - which is an illusion and is not responsible for its actions - perceives them as his doing in a bartering of cause and effect. Such actions, heinous or benign, are always performed by those who believe they act, and whom society has trained that way, not by those who know they are not the doers. So the question of responsibility, for those who surrender all happenings to God, does not arise. Ramesh says: “Suppose a killing happens. That event is the destiny of the mind-body organism. Whether the killer would be caught and punished, or an ‘innocent’ man punished in his stead, would also be God’s will - according to the destinies of the individuals concerned.” And is not suffering in the state of illusion, inevitable and exactly equal in the final analysis? The suffering caused by old age, illness and death happens to everyone. And those who suffer in motor accidents experience the same traumas as the victims of bombs. The Bodhisattva proclaimed the universality of suffering in the world of the unenlightened as ‘The Truth of Suffering’ - the ‘First Noble Truth’. And it seems, in the world, that the poor suffer mostly physically while the rich suffer mostly mentally. Which is the more heinous?

“The fact of the matter,” Ramesh explains, “is that it is impossible for the unenlightened human being - an object in the totality of manifestation - to ever know and understand the basis on which God’s will functions. The rationalist and illusory doer lives only on the surface where everything seems ‘logical’ and ‘reasonable’ - or ‘un-reasonable’. But the individual is really in harmony with the totality of phenomenal existence.” Even such differences are also the will of God that have been programmed into the individual. Even the enlightened are programmed, but the difference, Ramesh says, is that they know it to be so, and see this also as the will of God.

Ramesh says that if we truly examine carefully and in great depth, the events of our lives, we will be forced to the conclusion that they were, in every case, not under our control - they simply happened. So you have the Mother Teresas and also the serial killers; and through all this activity they contribute to the amazing spectacles of the universe - which can only be appreciated by those who know they are not the doers. The German mystic, Meister Eckhart, proclaimed that all a human being can do is marvel at the magnificence and variety of God’s creation and functioning. A wonderful ‘personal’ example of how the Self views such contrasting phenomena as Mother Theresa and a serial killer with equivocation is given by Byron Katie - see further on.

The mystic has always held that whatever actions that happen can be traced to programming and they have always advised people not to harbour excessive guilt; this only exacerbates the situation. Instead they advise the perpetrator to make atonement and show compassion. Surrender everything to God they say - whatever happens should be accepted: “Then there is no unhappiness, there is no misery, no pride, no hate, no envy. What is wrong with that?” Accepting that nothing happens unless it is the will of God, Ramesh says, removes the egocentric drive of doership along with the sense of pride in successful accomplishments, and the sense of shame in apparently unsuccessful or disastrous happenings: “What else can you do? ... What you think you should do in any situation at any particular moment is precisely what God wants you to think you should do! But when you cognise that you are not actually doing it, then - no guilt, no pride, no hate, no envy! Life becomes more peaceful.”

It is only the egocentric ‘personality’ that dwells on motivation that wants to control things and as a result creates a world of attack and the trading of grievances. Action, Ramesh says, will almost always involve the concept: “I have done this good thing and should be rewarded, and he or she has done that bad thing and should be punished.” In reality the only choice man may have in this world, and this may not actually be a choice but also the result of programming, is to approach an enlightened individual for help and guidance. Ramesh draws attention to a tragedy in which a Christian missionary from Australia and his two sons were burnt alive by Hindu extremists in India. The wife and mother who survived them had the grace of surrender, so deeply unconditional and total, that her comment on the meaning of the event was simply that: “Their allotted time on this earth had come to an end.” There is a Christian hymn that expresses this:

Though dark my path and sad my lot,
    Let me be still and murmur not,
But breathe the prayer divinely taught,
    ‘Thy will be done’ - the rest is naught.

The effectiveness of Ramesh’s teaching

A good example of how satsang with Ramesh can influence the seeker was described by Chris Parish of What is Enlightenment magazine - see Issue No. 14, Fall/Winter (1998). At the end of the interview Chris wrote that his head was reeling. How could it be that an intelligent man could really believe that everything is predestined? Although “Thy will be done” is the essence of many religions, surely there is more to it than that - and God’s will applies only when all self-centred notions have been eliminated? Then, recovering from the ordeal in a tea shop, something dawned. He wrote: “As the first sip passed my lips, in a flash, it hit me. I was not the one who was drinking the tea. And I was not the one who had just been tormented for an hour in discussion with a man who at that moment was beginning to seem like the same one. It
was as if a burden I had been carrying for my entire life was lifted. It wasn’t even me who was misguided. And the world in which I had been living was not, as I had assumed, a world of human complexity, but one of mechanistic simplicity, of perfect order, a mathematical playing out of programs in motion since the beginning of time... As the clinical perfection of God’s scientific plan started to open for me, the ecstatic thrill of absolute freedom began to rush through my veins... with an absolute cessation of tension, in the recognition that no matter what apparent ambiguity or uncertainty I might encounter thereafter, I could always rest assured that whatever choice I made would be exactly the choice God wanted me to make... I mused to myself what a fantastic game life would be if everyone understood how it all really works.”

The essence of Ramesh Balsekar’s teachings is found in the book Consciousness Speaks: Conversations with Ramesh S. Balsekar.

Practicalities
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Recently Ramesh has been conducting retreat workshops - see Website.

Chapter 21

VIJAI SHANKAR
Tell God your plans and he will have a mighty good laugh.

Background
Vijai S. Shankar is a medical doctor and scientist and the latest of enlightened spiritual teachers to attain serious international recognition. He was born in the late 1940’s into a devotedly religious family in India and was strongly influenced by the teachings of Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj. Since the early eighties he lived in London, and after several years of intense spiritual struggle he spontaneously attained enlightenment - which he describes as the shedding of his ego-based identity. But all that was in the past which, Vijai insists, doesn’t exist. Consequently, since everything that appears to exist is cast in time, however recent, he passionately proclaims that, in reality, he doesn’t exist at all - and neither do any of us for that matter. There is only the one Self - beyond form, beyond name and beyond concept, in which everything exists. All the tragi-comic ‘personalities’ that we think we are, are nothing more than illusions.

Recently Vijai moved to Galveston (or appeared to) on the Gulf of Mexico and set up a small centre in a garage apartment there. Within a very short time he began to attract spiritual aspirants who felt that meeting with Vijai marked a major turning point in their lives. Even more recently he has established an ashram in suburban Houston (see Practicalities). He also travels extensively throughout the USA and Europe to conduct satsangs and preside over retreats.

He says, in the third person, “When Vijai speaks he is clearly spoken through and enjoys watching what is spoken.” The words come from the “Source of all Truth.”

But, one may ask, if there’s no teacher then how can he help others to realize the truth? To this sort of comment he says, “What have I realized? I don’t know. It’s a stupendous joke. Oh, wonderful life. Thank you for making me laugh! There’s nothing to be taught. What are you going to teach about an illusion? People say to sit in Vijay’s presence is a unique experience... With Vijay, in this arena of oneness, duality evaporates - they feel happy. That’s what they say anyway. So you see, it just happens. I didn’t do anything at all. And, why do you want to feel happy? Because happiness is your true nature. Its not out there, it’s within you.. If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans and God will have a mighty good laugh.” But Vijay Shankar, the man - the ‘appearance’, is certainly one of the most powerful and invigorating exponents of Advaita around today.

Vijay is a master of the use of humour in getting a message across. In an interview with Simeon Alev of What is Enlightenment? magazine, he expounds on the theme that God does everything - and does it with supreme perfection: “Listen. You see a painting of an old woman in rags with hardly a morsel of food on her plate, and there’s a skinny looking baby lying beside her, and a large dog. And there may be a man with a broken leg. And the painting is so good that when you stand in front of that picture and say ‘What a masterpiece!’ You never say, ‘Oh! I feel so sorry for this lady, let me go and get some pizza and feed her. Let me take the man to hospital. And this dog is dying, let me take it to the ASPCA. No, it’s a masterpiece! Do you understand? - Yes? - Good for you. So there’s nothing to be renounced and nothing to be done. Just be yourself and find out who you are.” But, he points out, in order to rise to this understanding, first one must fall. One must get rid of the false ‘personality’.

We have to find out that God paints a continuously changing masterpiece of the universe and all the time he is within everybody enjoying and rejoicing in it. But it is the fact that you want to get yourself “involved” in the painting and take it for real that causes so much misery.
Some teachings

As with all enlightened spiritual teachers the silent emanations of the master are of central importance. Devotees say that a meeting with Vijai brings about feelings of affinity, complete acceptance, and love. One devotee wrote, “Turning within to the Self is made easy in the company of such a benevolent presence, offering the opportunity of realization of one’s own true nature.” And another, “For the first time I really understand the expression ‘peace that passeth all understanding’. I used to be at my wits end most of the time. But now when things happen that used to upset me, there’s a strange but wonderful, peaceful feeling that everything is unfolding just as it should.” Vijay’s presence is thus a catalyst and a pointer to the truth. But, he says, once pointed in the right direction, the seeker must finish the journey alone - must find out who he or she really is.

Space and time: Core elements of Vijay’s teachings are the discrediting of man’s learnt and contrived belief systems. In this he questions the reality of space and time. Consider the following: The world is made up of material things and psychological things such as thoughts and emotions. None of these things is possible without space and time. Material objects all take up space and if they did not they would simply not exist. And it is also true they cannot exist without time. If things existed for shorter and shorter periods of time, as soon as the time span reached zero nothing could exist. So then, given these circumstances, is the body-mind complex that we imagine we are, just a concept? Either space and time extend forever, or they have limits and mentally contrived boundaries; and if they have boundaries then we exist in the mid point of them. But both of these possibilities are imponderables. That time and space have a beginning and an end is unthinkable! Yet our imagined existence as mind-body organisms depends on their reality.

In a similar way the future consists of thoughts and emotions, and the concept is of time flowing farther and farther behind into the past and moving ahead inexorably into the future. But the only part of this that really concerns us is the middle portion - here and now. Vijay says that during Now, in which everything and every event appears so real, even the word “during” implies that Now has time, however short; but really there is no time. Now must be timeless and spaceless as the true spirit of Atman is - beginningless and endless, and this is our true nature: “This is what one begins to perceive, the moment one is ready to be receptive to the words which flow through one’s body from beyond the mind!”

And does this mean that things and events of the world have no reality? Vijay says:

“Yes; though there is the timeless now. Within that now, nothing material can exist yet every thing apparently arises. The world merely appears in the morning to disappear at night, though we still exist when the world disappears at night. This is our supreme state. Come, join in the timeless now, wherein reality consists of nothing, yet is everything... Haven’t you realized - even though when you open your eyes in the morning the world appears, and when you go to sleep at night it disappears - you are still existing when you are asleep? If who you really are continues to exist when the world no longer seems to, it can only mean that the person you imagine yourself to be in the morning, is an illusion.”

And when the TV describes things that happened when you were asleep, this is not evidence that the world is real, it too is part of the grand illusion - what Nisargadatta called the “Magnificent Fraud.”

Vijai says that you must understand that we reflect our own world, we see our own world. We also exist in the dream state and the deep sleep state but we only get concerned with one: “Such is the misery of man.” But the moment we witness all three states of existence, then we will understand that the world is nothing but an illusion. So why are we so confident about the existence of the world for us? Maybe we and the material world are just illusions - nothing more than thoughts arising from memory? After all, the Buddha said, “With our thoughts we make the world.” We may say that although the world may seem to disappear for us at night, it still existed because we can read what happened in the world when we wake up. But if the world is all an illusion, a performance so to speak, then for each and every ‘personality’ in duality, it can still disappear at night, though it appears to be a continuum through the agency of time - which is also an illusion. Bodies may exist but bodies are dead things until empowered by prana. And, Vijai says, “Memories can be mistaken. We may falsely remember events that never happened - they are ‘events’ conjured up in the present and projected into an imaginary past. (This happens in what has been called past life regression or regression back to when you were a child, in the womb, that some psychologists indulge in.) So, is it not possible that the past itself never happened? This seems preposterous because we think our memories prove the past is real, but memory is no more than a thought occurring in the present.” And the belief in our reality is also a thought occurring in the present, and, “As such, it provides no evidence for the reality of the past.”

The unity of the Self: In an article in Yoga Chicago Magazine entitled “Everyone is a Flower”, Vijai said that the mind tries to define life with Aristotelian logic, and in so doing puts boundaries around things and events to encapsulate them. But the ‘personality’ mind - the ego, can’t understand the essence of anything. Even modern physics shows that matter cannot be encapsulated into form and consequently cannot actually be understood. (Though the math and the theorems may be understood - see Appendix II.) The ‘personality’ that we think we are, divides life into opposites, light/dark, man/ woman, good/evil. There must be opposites as in past and future: “Logic cannot acknowledge both and...”

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8 Yogananda pointed out that a passage in Eusebius describes an encounter between Socrates and an Indian sage, thus: “The sage asked Socrates what was the scope of his philosophy? ‘An inquiry into human phenomena.’ Socrates replied. On this the Indian laughed, ‘How can man inquire into human phenomena when he is ignorant of divine ones?’ ” The reasoning faculties cannot shed light on man’s ultimate Being - see Autobiography of a Yogi.
become ‘embedded’ in life.”

Vijay explains that in duality life is a confusing mystery because of our conditioning. As children we are taught the handed down belief systems of the world. And by the age of fifteen our belief system is solidified and the rest of life is a collection of ideas that fit into our model of the truth. And if they don’t fit in, we reject them. But if we look at life without ‘logic’ we see that the polarities cannot be separated. Positive exists because there is negative. Remove negative and positive also disappears. “Bliss”, Vijay says, “is a midpoint between happiness and unhappiness - from this midpoint you will see that the opposites are one. The love the world talks about is nothing but an interlude between two flights. Take down the wall of words and you find what love really is... Give up your supportive belief system. You cannot put conditions on life. Accept life as it is happening to you and you will find joy. Life happens - you are not the cause of it; you are not to be blamed, you are not to be praised. You have opinions not facts. Nobody can say anything about life. Life simply happens.”

On Advaita and God: People query; some teachers of Advaita say an individual who has realized the Self has gone beyond accountability, even to God? They say that a realized person could commit a heinous crime and not feel responsible for it; so why teach something like Advaita? In response to statements like this Vijai explains that no one can actually be a teacher of Advaita because the moment a teacher comes about there must be a student - there must be two and that’s not Advaita: “Run away from him if he says he’s a teacher.” Accountability - good, bad and so on, are just mental concepts: “Listen, is there really a crime committed by such a person? Ponder about it. How would the mind ever know one who has transcended the mind? You cannot predict him because he’s suspended in the Now. There are no acts outside there. It only appears to be so. You think a heinous act is happening there but it’s only in the painting.” Even so, there are enlightened people who have transcended the mind - this book is about some of them - and none of them are serial killers, rapists, or the committers of heinous crimes.

The Bhagavad Gita says that what is happening is happening for the good... You are not the doer. He, the ‘all-doer’, is watching it all. Remember: “You cannot commit a sin or a meritorious deed of which the Lord takes note because the light of basic knowledge is covered by the darkness of the ego’s delusion.” Thus it is only the egoic individual that thinks in terms of sin and merit: “How can such things exist in a painting - in an illusion? God is not a magistrate, a peeping tom, waiting to punish you. If God is everywhere, then who are you? A Self realized one has realized his oneness with God. To think otherwise is only ego and to think you also are not also holy is ego going against God!”

Vijai says that nobody listens to the masters: “And neither are you (Simon Alev) listening to me. Do you know that? It may appear that you are but you’re not... You think you are listening but people never listen. You only see through your screen of concepts... You’re cut off from life - follow me? Therefore you should contemplate on words (contemplate not think) - ‘Advaita’, ‘Vedanta’ that’s okay. But in spiritual practice you renounce things, and if it’s an illusion, what is there to renounce?” This illusion is there for you, the spiritual being, to rejoice in - not for the ‘personality’ you think you are to rejoice in or to be censorious about.

So just be yourself and find out who you are: “Life is a song. Life is a dance. The moment you become the fluidity in water, the hardness in rock, the fragrance in the flower, the moment you are in the moment-to-moment, then that is Advaita. The beauty of the flower is God, you see! God is not a person; God is a presence. And God is the Godliness that is present only in the moment Now.”

Self realization and Self inquiry

Vijai says that the concept of Self-realization is really that the blind are leading the blind! - usually by stuffing the mind with knowledge. We should transcend that because the only purpose of life is to know who you are: “You have forgotten your true nature, okay? And you only have to remember it - that’s what has to be done. But the way to do that is not by trying to remember all the time. You can only know your true nature by negating all that you think you are or what you’ve been told you are. Then you’ll end up with who you really are!”

So hold on to your sense of being. Consciousness exists alone without the sense of individuation, which is the false identification of the “I thought” as an independent entity. This is the pseudo-entity that thinks it is the subject. And it annexes other thoughts, emotions and feelings that dominate the mind while awake, and also during the dream state. These thoughts comprise what we understand as the mind. The mind compares and contrasts and desires what it doesn’t have and fears losing what it has. This generates more thoughts and results in our very entanglement in an illusory thought-created external world.

Vijai says that most of us are aware of existence only in the waking state but we also exist in the dream state and the deep sleep state. But that’s enough for a start. When we pay attention to our sense of being during the waking state we have begun the inward journey to the Self or Pure Being. The “I-thought” accounts for the certainty that “I exist.” This is beyond doubt. The appearance and disappearance in waking and sleep states is due to our mistaken identification with the body-mind idea. When these erroneous beliefs are removed one can simply witness all circumstances - and in this state all actions are appropriate and do not lead to entanglements based on desire and fear.

So, as a ‘practice’, be aware of everything happening to you: “Then you will be living fresh, alive, responding to life with a sense of stillness, with clarity and utmost certainty. Don’t criticize, don’t judge, and don’t try to mold. Never find fault with anybody. Everyone is a flower by themselves. Watch the blossoming with all its beauty. When you bring your mind into it, there is only discord.” So, Vijay says, life is not a problem - it is a mystery, a dance. Enjoy the cosmic dance and become the blossoming in the flower - then you are in Advaita. But if you see a beautiful flower, and feeling a sudden sense of beauty inside yourself you say, “What a beautiful flower”, the moment you utter a word, things have
stopped. You have dipped into the past: “Literally you are leading a dead life made up of images of the past and nothing of the life in front of you - as it is blossoming in all its glory. You miss it. You are shaking hands with a corpse.”

And karma is the thought “I am the doer”. Everything you think you do is in your mind. So never think “I did this” or “I did that.” If you just watch everything it just happens. This body is moving and things get done. You don’t take a shower, a shower happens to you. Just watch life as it happens to you. The entire universe is behind every event, and you are as divine as divine can be. Recognize that and be happy.

**Vijay’s book**


**Vijay’s 3-D ashram**

Vijai says that the ashram, opened recently, is a special place where spiritual growth can take place. There is a Three-D approach to address the expression of the Divine in body, mind and soul: “polishing the apparent separate entities to a fine state to eventually allow the manifestation of ‘Lela’ - Gods play.”

**Practicalities**

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**Chapter 22**

**BYRON KATIE**

*Loving What Is.*

Even though she professes no connections with ‘spirituality’ and has said: “Don’t be spiritual - be honest instead”, Byron Katie (Byron Kathleen Reid) must be described as one of the most effective enlightened spiritual teachers of the West in the new millennium. When she was in her thirties and living a normal family life in a small American town, she entered into a decade-long period of what can only be called a ‘dark ten years of the soul’. She rode a downward spiral into a state of dark and debilitating depression and mania, and then, in a facility for women with eating disorders (the only one her insurance would pay for) she suddenly woke without any knowledge of who or what she was: “There was no me.” Of this she said:

“All my rage, all my thoughts that had been troubling me, my whole world, the whole world, was gone. At the same time, laughter welled up from within the depths and just poured out. Everything was unrecognisable. It was as if something else had woken up. It opened its eyes. It was looking through Katie’s eyes. And it was so delighted! It was intoxicated with joy. There was nothing separate, nothing unacceptable to it; everything was its own self.”

To Katie the egoic false-self had died and the true Self was shining through in such a way that others could sense it. And also, there had been revealed a new dimension of the Self inquiry that the masters speak about. The great masters of Advaita talked at great length about inquiry into the Self. Find out what you truly are, they said, - something that has proved quite difficult to do; but Katie talks about inquiry into thoughts, ordinary thoughts to which we have become attached and that are causing distress, and asking “are they true?” This, one could say, is a refreshingly new means of Self-inquiry. Katie maintains that when this question is pursued relentlessly, in every case it will be found that, if they are causing unhappiness, then they are not true. And the cause unhappiness is because they are against reality - they are against “What Is”... When exposed they, with their malevolent influences, disappear, and it will be a case of ‘The truth that has set you free’.

Katie clearly reveals the deeper dimension to what we understand by the truth. It’s infinitely more than just not telling lies because telling lies is not very nice. Rather it is a great profundity and it is what Jesus and all the great masters mean when they used the word Truth.

When people asked Katie if she had become “enlightened” she said: “I’m just someone who knows the difference between what hurts and what doesn’t.” To one questioner who said that so many people are becoming enlightened now,
Katie replied: “I don’t know anything about that. All I know is that if it hurts, investigate. Enlightenment is just a spiritual concept, just one more thing to seek in a future that never comes. Even the highest truth is just one more concept. For me, experience is everything, and that’s what inquiry reveals.”

After her release from the egocentric ‘personality’ mind, Katie began to communicate a means of inner inquiry in the form of specific questions that anyone who wanted ‘liberation’ could use. She called it “The Work” and it is published in book form - see Bibliography. It can also be sourced on Internet. Since the early 90’s Katie has been on the road demonstrating ‘The Work’ to whoever wanted to know about it and use it: church groups, community centers, prisons, therapists, hospitals, people dying, and even companies, CEO’s and commercial organizations. How she works with violent men in prisons illustrates the total universality of ‘The Work’, and also reveals the fundamental Truth that no ‘sin’ is ever committed. She explained it something like this:

When I work in prisons there may be two hundred hard-core violent men, many with life sentences for rape or murder, sitting with their arms folded and looking down at the floor - and I’m the only woman in the room. I don’t say a word until they make eye contact with me. This is not easy for them to do. There’s some kind of unspoken code that they have to keep people like me out of their culture. I wait for just one man to make eye contact. The moment happens. There is contact. No one but me has seen his glance, yet, immediately the code begins to break down all over the room. Then everyone is looking at me, laughing, turning red, and saying things like “Sheeeeet!” or “Man, she crazy.” And it’s done. Now I can speak to them and give them The Work.

I love thanking these men for sacrificing their entire lives to teach our children how not to live - and therefore how to live. I tell them they are the greatest teachers and that their lives are good indeed. Before I leave, I ask them, “Would you spend the rest of your life in prison if you knew that it would keep one child from having to live what you’re living?” And many of these violent men understand, and they just well up with tears - like sweet little boys.

Some explanations

Katie says that doing The Work is finding your own happiness by allowing you to experience what already exists within you - your own Self that is “unchanging, immovable, ever-present, and ever-waiting.” It is the teacher you’ve been waiting for all your life. These are some of the basic principles:

• **Notice when your thoughts argue with reality.** The only time we suffer is when we believe a thought which argues with “What Is”. Katie says that if we pay attention we will notice that we think and utter thoughts like this many times each day: “People should be kinder” ... “Children should be well behaved” ... “I should be thinner”. Such thoughts are really about wanting reality to be different to what it is; and all the stress we feel is caused by arguing with “What Is” - which is reality; which is what Ramana Maharshi said “Is God”.

Katie says that some people feel that not arguing with reality is dis-empowering and that they may lose the desire to act. But, she says: “Can you really know that that’s true? Which is more empowering? - ‘I wish I hadn’t lost my job’ or ‘I lost my job; what can I do now’? ”

• **Stay in your own business:** Katie says that there are three kinds of business in the universe: mine, yours, and God’s. For her ‘God’ means ‘Reality’. God’s business is running things: earthquakes, war, when we will die and so on.” She explains that much stress comes from living out of our own business. To think we know what’s best for anyone else, however well intentioned, is just arrogance. She wrote:

> “If you understand the three kinds of business and stay in your own, it could free your life in a way you can’t even imagine. The next time you’re feeling discomfort, ask yourself whose business you’re in mentally, and you may burst out laughing! That question could bring you back to yourself. And you may come to see that you have never really been present.”

• **Meet your thoughts with understanding:** Katie says that she realizes she is actually **being** “thought” and that thinking isn’t personal. Thoughts come but meet them with understanding. Don’t attach to them ‘personally’. She says that once a painful concept is met with such understanding, it may become merely interesting : what used to be a nightmare becomes merely interesting.

• **Be aware of your “stories”** : Thoughts or sequences of thoughts are like “stories” which we convince ourselves are real. Stories appear in our minds about how things, people, the government or ourselves should be different. Anything can trigger them off. These stories, Katie says, are your untested, un-investigated theories, which we don’t even realize are just theories. Katie calls thinking about, acting and operating on these theories is “the dream” - which can turn into a nightmare. So you should test them by doing The Work on them.

• **Look for the thought behind the suffering:** Behind every uncomfortable feeling there is a thought that isn’t true. Uncomfortable feelings, depression, pain and fear, are wake-up calls to tell you that you are caught in a dream that isn’t true.

• **Inquiry:** Katie uses the word inquiry to mean putting a thought or a “story” up against the litmus test of asking the “four questions - and turning it around” of The Work. She says that it is more than a technique because it brings up something from deep within us : “an innate aspect of our being.”
Some examples of the subtlety of finding the truth

A woman says: “Suppose my child is starving will I think ‘Well that’s reality,’ and just let her starve? Katie replies, “Oh, my! Sweetheart, love is kind; it doesn’t stand still and do nothing when it sees its own need. Do you really think that violent thoughts, such as the ones that come with problems, are necessary to feed a child?”

Another: How can you say that reality is good? What about war, rape, poverty, child abuse? Are you condoning them? Katie says, “How could I condone them? I simply notice that if I believe they shouldn’t exist, I suffer. They exist until they don’t. Can I just end the war in me? Can I stop raping myself and others with abusive thinking? If not I’m continuing in myself the very thing I want to end - can it end it?.. Can you eliminate war everywhere on earth? No, but through inquiry you can begin to eliminate it for one person - you.”

And another: You say it is not possible for me to hurt another person - How can this be? Katie answers: “It’s not possible for me to hurt another person. The only person I can hurt is myself. But please don’t try to believe this. It’s not true for you until you realize it for yourself.”

A man asks: What do you mean when you say that you are my projection? Katie replies, “The world is your perception of it. Inside and outside always match - they are reflections of each other. So the world is a reflection of the people that are in it.”

And: What do you mean by “There are no physical problems - only mental ones”? What if I lose my right hand and I’m right-handed? Katie answers: “How do you know you don’t need two arms? It’s simple - because you have only one. There is no mistake in the universe. To think in any other way is hopeless. The ‘story’ that ‘I need two arms’ - is where the suffering begins.”

The Work - the great undoing

The first step in The Work is to write down your judgments about any stressful situation - about a person, a situation and so on. You can download a Judge-Your-Neighbour worksheet from Katie’s website - see Practicalities. Katie advises to start with someone with whom you are still familiar even if you think you have forgiven them, but not to start with yourself at this stage. If you start with yourself there is always a motive and presumed solutions that may warp your power of discerning the truth. She writes:

“Later, as you become skilled in The Work, you may investigate your judgments about such issues as death, money, health, your body, your addictions and even your own self-criticisms.”

The next step is to write down your thoughts and judgments. This is necessary to prevent the mind from out-smarting you and running away with another story. The mind is stopped through the act of writing and then the words will come. “And,” Katie says, “If you really want to know the truth, if you’re not afraid to see your story on paper, the ego will write like a maniac... This is the day the ego has been waiting for... It has been waiting for you to stop, just once, and really listen to it. It will tell you everything. Then you can inquire.” Your writing can be judgmental, harsh, childish, petty, and you can write like a child who is sad, angry, confused or frightened. Be totally honest and uncensored. Katie explains that some people feel they have nothing to write about, nothing is really bothering them but life will give you a topic. Write it just the way the mind is telling it - not an edited version. All this will enable you to isolate the particular thought or thoughts that are causing all the trouble.

Now comes the inquiry, which involves Katie’s four questions that could change your life, and the turnaround - applied to each thought, as follows:

1. Is it true?
2. Can you be absolutely sure that it’s true?
3. How do you react when you think that thought?
4. Who would you be without that thought?
And - Turn it around.

Absolute truth is necessary and Katie sometimes asks if you could live with the “truth” of that thought for all eternity?

In describing how you react to the thought - it makes you feel depressed, lonely, hopeless and so on - be still and realize how you react when you feel that thought. Then consider who you would be without the thought. Notice what is revealed to you. What do you see? How does it feel? Now turn the original thought around. I feel depressed because of so and so could become ‘I don’t like myself because I feel depressed.’ or ‘I don’t like myself because I think I can do something about it.’

In the turnaround you can rewrite the thought as if it were about you - put your own name in instead.

Katie works through many examples in her book describing The Work: on family relationships, money, beliefs,
self-judgments, the body and addictions, children, and “the worst that can happen” - death and other disasters worse than
death. It is not appropriate to consider such examples here. Suffice it is to say that they probe deeply into the truth of all
being. This is what a great spiritual teacher of the new millennium, Eckhart Tolle - the subject of the next section, said
about her book:
Would you like to:
Reach new and profound understandings about your life?
Replace pain with laughter and joy?
Exchange depression for a lightness of being?
Find freedom?
If your answers are ‘Yes’, this remarkable and extraordinarily simple book explains how using just four questions can
change your life for ever. When applied to different emotional, mental and physical difficulties, these four questions can
awaken peaceful, even ecstatic feelings, and radically alter your perspective.

Practicalities
Byron Katie’s website is: www.thework.com The section ‘do The Work’ is to download the practice worksheet.

Chapter 23

ECKHART TOLLE

The power of Now.

Background

Eckhart Tolle was born in Germany. Later he went to England and graduated from the University of London, after
which he became a research scholar and tutor at Cambridge University. He is currently based in Canada where he attained
the state of enlightenment (see below). He is one of a very small number of present-day enlightened spiritual teachers who
are making a significant contribution to spiritual growth in the West.

Eckhart talks often about ‘Christ’, Jesus and the Bible, and draws on A Course in Miracles - see Appendix I. But
he also has a strong proclivity to refer to Buddhist teachings and Eastern interpretations of reality. Like Satyam (Chapter
24), he holds the view that there may be at the present time an emerging, and necessary, change in the consciousness of
mankind.

Historically, and even in the recent past, very few attained enlightenment, and in the materially oriented West it
seems that almost the only way that the change from worldly consciousness to enlightened consciousness is achieved
is through ‘The Way of the Cross’ - that is, following a period, or a lifetime, of intense mental or physical suffering. In the
East, with its more highly developed spiritual awareness, this is called tapas (spiritual burning) and is, to a significant
degree, entered into volitionally. In either case the egoic mind finally, and often suddenly, gives up. Then the eternal and
pristine inner Self is revealed and union with God attained. This is what happened to Eckhart.

His enlightenment

The story of Eckhart’s enlightenment is beautifully told in his book The Power of the Now and is abbreviated
here. He writes: “Until my thirtieth year, I lived in a state of almost continuous anxiety interspersed with periods of
suicidal depression... Then one night I woke up with a feeling of absolute dread... Everything felt so alien, so hostile, and
so utterly meaningless that it created in me a deep loathing of the world. And the most loathsome thing of all was my own
existence... I could feel a deep longing for annihilation - now becoming much stronger than the instinctive desire to live. “I
cannot live with myself any longer” - this was the thought that kept repeating itself in my mind. Then suddenly I became
aware of what a peculiar thought it was. Am I one or two? ... Maybe only one of me is real? I was so stunned by this
strange realization that my mind stopped... I felt drawn into what seemed like a vortex of energy... I was gripped by an
intense fear, and my body began to shake. Then I heard the words ‘resist nothing’ as if spoken in my chest... Suddenly
there was no more fear, and I felt myself fall into that void. I have no recollection of what happened after that.”

The following morning he opened his eyes to the first light of dawn and knew that: “The soft luminosity filtering
through the curtains was love itself... Everything was fresh and pristine, as if it had just come into existence.” And thus
Eckhart Tolle had become enlightened! He knew that something profound had happened but it wasn’t until several years
later, and after he had read spiritual texts and spent time with spiritual teachers, that he came to understand that, as he puts
it, “What everybody was looking for had already happened to me.”

It became clear to him that the intense suffering had forced his consciousness to withdraw from identification with his egoic self, which was a fiction of the mind, and that what was left was his, and everybody else’s, true nature - Consciousness in its pure state, before identification with form. Later he learned to enter the inner timeless and deathless realm that he had perceived as a void, and remain fully conscious. At times he dwelt in states of incredible bliss and sacredness, but undercurrent to these times that come and go, is a amore fundamental peace that is always there, sometimes strong and palpable and sometimes in the background: “like a distant melody.”

“Later,” he writes, “People would come up to me and say: “I want what you have. Can you give it to me, or show me how to get it?” and he would say, “You have it already. You just can’t feel it because your mind is making too much noise.” And now, as a spiritual teacher, Eckhart has an uncanny ability to expose the ego and set people laughing as they recognize their own clinging egoic activities. If you get a chance to go to one of Eckhart’s talks or retreats, don’t pass it up. If not, get The Power of Now - it is wonderfully moving.

Explanations

Eckhart describes enlightenment thus: “A natural state of felt oneness with the one life beyond the myriad forms of life subject to birth and death. But it is also within every form as its indestructible essence.” There is the awakening from the dream of identification with form. And it is not some super-human state to be attained in the distant future, if at all, when we will begin to glow in the dark and have halos. Eckhart explains that it is the ego that likes to keep the notion of enlightenment this way; because enlightenment is death of the ego. Rather, enlightenment is more likely to make us humble and appear quite ordinary - because enlightened individuals obtain their satisfaction from within and have no need to put on any egoic ‘personality’ show.

**Presence and being:** The felt oneness Eckhart calls ‘being’ - which is God essence. Everything has God essence; people, animals, plants, even stones. And ‘presence’ is something like intense alertness in which the mind and thought find no footing. It is what others have called the state of the ‘witness’, and it comes from a deeper consciousness than that of the mind. But, Eckhart explains, ‘being’ and ‘presence’ are not complete in the manifested world, even with the enlightened. There is an evolution that still has to take place. He uses these terms to explain something in a way that can be comprehended by the unenlightened mind, but points out that all concepts are merely stepping stones and not to be understood intellectually - rather they must be felt and experienced.

Presence is necessary on the spiritual path because something can happen at any moment. And that something is the awareness of the present moment to the exclusion of past and future, which Eckhart calls “The Now”. In presence we have withdrawn consciousness from the mind forms through which we personalize consciousness. Jesus explained the state of presence in the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids, waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom. The former had enough oil (consciousness) to keep their lamps (presence) burning, while the latter did not. The result was that when the bridegroom (The Now) came along, the wise bridesmaids were present and got to go to the wedding feast (experiencing enlightenment), while the foolish bridesmaids, who were looking for more oil, missed out.

The difference between the witnessing state of presence and ordinary waiting for something in the worldly sense, is the absence of thought in the former. This, Eckhart maintains, is the acid test. Someone in a state of intense presence, gives off a very high frequency of energy, especially in silence, which is more potent than words. So, he says: “Listen to the gaps of silence - the inner stillness is presence.”

**A demonstration of presence :** Eckhart says you can’t think about presence - understanding it is being present. If you are present, thoughts can’t arise and this can be demonstrated quite easily. He gives an example: “Close your eyes and say to yourself, ‘I wonder what my next thought is going to be?’ Then become very alert and wait for the next thought. Be like a cat watching a mouse hole. As long as you are in a state of intense presence, you are free of thought. You are still, yet highly alert. The instant your conscious attention sinks below a certain level, thought rushes in. The mental noise returns; the stillness is lost. You are back in time.”

**The ego:** By contrast, Eckhart says, the vast majority of humans live in the grip of the egoic mind and it’s inherited and learned mind patterns that have been around for aeons. This is due to a false identification of consciousness that results in the ego. It attaches to memories and past impressions arising in the form of thoughts. Thus the egoic mind draws on the past and projects an illusory world with an imagined future. This results is the egoic creation of what Eckhart calls “psychological time”. And why there is nothing pristine in the ego’s world is because it is always dredging in the graveyard of the past; and the past brings boredom and a continuous need for stimulation. It is only the present, The Now, without thought or memory, that is ever pristine and never subject to boredom.

Eckhart explains that the main concern of the egoic mind, the false self, is overcoming its own insecurity and the feeling of not being whole. It has to expend a great deal of energy to maintain its imagined creation - the world most of us see - and in overcoming psychological pain associated with the separation from being. He says that this is the reason for always wanting things, and for always putting others down. Getting material and psychological things: recognition, praise, security and so on, is the main occupation of the egoic personality. A current ‘talk show guru’ said that the majority of mankind is bent on, “getting things they don’t want with money they don’t have, to impress people they don’t like.” His solution to this dilemma is to, “hang out with losers”.

Material things bring only temporary relief, as do drugs, entertainment, sex, food and the like. And without these things, Eckhart maintains, the world would be totally and dangerously insane. But they all come at a price and the more we get the more anxiety there is. Understanding this is an absolutely necessity on a spiritual path, otherwise spiritual practices
are hardly possible; but understanding will not bring enlightenment - this comes only when God determines it to be.

**Some teachings and practices**

Eckhart gives many techniques for spiritual practice in his books *The Power of Now* and *Practicing the Power of Now*. These are some examples and explanations that relate to understanding the teachings.

**The Pain Body:** The 'pain body' is comprised of left over emotional pain that creates a negative energy field that occupies the body and the mind. It is trapped negative life energy and it becomes autonomous through the ego’s identification with it. It can be predominately passive but when something sets it going, it creates a situation of generating and even wanting more of the same - more pain as food for the pain body. In accepting negative emotions as something that should be allowed to be, there is a trap in which the acceptance becomes a mental habit. It allows the ego to indulge and wallow in unhappiness, accepting sympathy or wallowing in the absence of sympathy. This is one of the ways that the ego avoids the here and now - which in effect would spell its end. Things get hot for the ego if the individual gets spiritual ideas, so the ego creates physical and psychosomatic ailments to keep attention on the body - as a defense against being found out. Illnesses are created and when cures are found for the old ‘established’ illnesses that exist in worldview, new physical and psychological maladies are brought into the world. These are all part of the pain body and we can come to cherish the egoic association with it. It is acquired because of the normal unconsciousness of ordinary human beings; who really have no choice because they are insufficiently conscious to choose. Thus, the acceptance of pain and negative emotions in this way is nothing more than a cunning ruse of the ego to maintain itself, evident in the lives of almost everyone. This could all be called normal unconsciousness, but there is yet again, acute unconsciousness. This is something beyond cherishing and creates the myriad serious psychological and physiological problems of the worldly life.

Emotions of the pain body are all fed by thoughts, but in contrast, positive emotions like love and joy and moments of deep peace are not the same. Positive emotions arise when there is a gap in the thought stream. They are not dualistic depending on thoughts of ‘this’ and ‘that’, of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, and they have no opposites. Triggers to these positive emotions can be things like natural beauty, poetry, music and even danger and the threat of physical death. Many people have had experiences of this in the form of calmness during danger, such as the immanent impact of two vehicles. Eckhart explains that some people become addicted to dangerous sports such as mountain climbing and parachuting, because the intense concentration needed creates gaps in the thought stream. In common understanding the effect is often attributed to an adrenaline kick.

**Dissipating pain and negativity:** Whenever residual or newly acquired emotional pain appears - as unease, anxiety or depression - it can be dissipated by “making it conscious.” This means witnessing it, shining the light of consciousness on it and accepting it for what it is. Eckhart says, “True acceptance quickly transmutes negative feelings. The pain body cannot stand being witnessed. Sustained and concentrated attention severs the connection between it and the thought process.”

**Fear and psychological fear:** Eckhart says that psychological fear is also a result of mind dominance, mixed with concerns of the future. It has little relationship to real fear. If someone threatens you, he says, you might experience something like real fear but this is something quite different from psychological fear. Anyone who has really been in a life or death emergency situation, such as the impending impact indicated above, will know that it wasn’t a fear problem: “The mind didn’t have time to make a problem out of it.” But psychological fear is always concerned with something that might happen: “You are here now while your mind is in the future creating anxiety and worry. The ego lives in fear, even if outwardly giving the appearance of confidence - and the ultimate fear is the ego’s fear of death. Almost everyone lives in a state of fear in the form of unease, anxiety, dread, paranoia, phobia and the feeling of not being whole... In contrast, real fear is always Now and you can always cope with it one way or another - with the present moment, but you can never cope with the future.” And naturally, in the realm of past and future, the mind is forever planning, scheming and devising on how to secure a fear-free future, ‘homeland protection’ and so on - usually at the expense of other egoic futures.

**Psychological time:** Eckhart says that psychological fear and psychological time give rise to a serious and universal mental illness. To see how you are being run by psychological time ask these questions: “Are you always trying to get somewhere other than where you are? Is most of your doing just a means to an end - becoming, achieving, attaining or chasing some new thrill or pleasure? Do you believe if you acquire more things you will become more secure? Is fulfillment always just around the corner or confined to short-lived pleasures? Are you waiting for a soul mate to give meaning to your life? In psychological time the old patterns of thought, emotion, behaviour, reaction are acted out in endless repeat performances. And the mind creates an obsession with the future as an escape from the perceived unsatisfactory present.”

Eckhart does not believe in giving credence to the past. Some people believe that mental problems can be relieved, as in psychoanalysis, by investigating past experiences - or past lives through psychological regression. But this really is regression and shows only the deficiency of modern psychological understanding, for “The past is a bottomless pit.” Eckhart says that anything emanating from the past can be dealt with as it manifests in thoughts and emotions in the present moment: “The present will bring out the past and only the present can free you from the past.”

**Space and time; emptiness and no-thing:** The Buddha spoke of ‘emptiness’ as the state of enlightenment; that is, to understand the ‘emptiness’ of everything. ‘Form is emptiness, emptiness is form,’ states the Heart Sutra, one of the best-known texts of Buddhism. Eckhart expounds on the concepts of space and time with remarkable lucidity in *The Power of Now*. He says that liberation is the recognition of an inner spaceless and timeless realm - which is nevertheless and at the same time, fully conscious of the phenomenal world - as in the ‘silence’ of the witness state. And, he says, “Even what is
not emptiness is more like a vibration than solid matter, more like a musical note than solidiness. The essence of all things is emptiness - so the unmanifest is not only present as silence, it also pervades the entire physical universe as space.”

But, Eckhart explains, to try to understand the nature of no-thing (like space) is to make it into some-thing, and to miss it: “No-thing - space - is the appearance of the unmanifest as an externalised phenomenon in a sense-perceived world. No-thing can only become a portal into the unmanifest if you don’t try to grasp or understand it.”

**Union and duality:** The reason for duality as expounded in *A Course in Miracles* - see Appendix I. is to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold: That, Eckhart says, “Is how important you are!” The ancient seers believed that duality was God’s play - a cosmic game which, from the point of view of the bound individual may not be so amusing. From the point of view of enlightenment it is the beatific vision, even while in the body everything in the world is seen in its divine splendour. But in the modern world of mind dominance, consciousness has become completely deluded and bound in material things; and to go back to more elementary societies where understanding may be possible, does not seem to be a feasible option. Rather the ‘simple societies’ seem hell-bent on falling into the consumerism trap of the modern world. Eckhart feels that liberation may be the only way for humans to escape from the insanity of mind dominance in modern times, and to avoid destroying the world itself. But, he says, “Even with a great increase in the numbers of enlightened individuals, there is still no guarantee that mankind will survive. A marked increase in ‘presence’, and in the numbers of individuals reaching enlightenment, may simply foreshadow the end of the world.”

Even so, duality is also embraced by the universal cosmology - in which the creation of duality was to enable consciousness to become more acutely conscious of itself. The state of consciousness attained in this way will enable consciousness to be more evolved than before. The essence of consciousness is love and the creation of God’s ‘Son’, presently bound in dualism, may be to expand love throughout all creation. Eckhart says that the parable of the prodigal son is an explanation of this truly cosmic phenomenon. First the son left home (the arising of duality) ; then after living away and squandering all his inheritance he falls into despair (the culmination of worldly life) ; then through the force of circumstance he returns home (enlightenment) - and then with union the Father loves him more than he ever did before.

**About Christ:** This is a matter of concern and interest to many Christians. Eckhart explains that while Jesus was a historical figure, a man who attained enlightenment, he warns against personalizing Christ through Jesus or any other messiah... Christ is ‘God essence’, which is recognised in the state of enlightenment, but remains unrecognised to the unenlightened. Eckhart maintains that the second coming of Christ will not be the return of the man called Jesus. The myths about the return of Jesus - the second coming - or the appearance of any long-waited-for messiah, are a result of misunderstanding by humans who are existing in the state of mind dominance. The ‘second coming’, or for others the coming-to-be, Eckhart maintains, will be a vastly increasing occurrence of enlightenment among humans. There is no more, and probably less, chance that humans would recognize an actual second coming of Jesus any more than they did the first. Would he come on a donkey, or a Harley, and start preaching in the holy places? There are many who do that already. No, Jesus was just a man who became enlightened and achieved union with God as the ‘Son of God’ - something to which all humans will aspire through the shedding of their much-revered ‘personalities’. The Book of *Revelations* expresses the event of the end of the ego’s world as the coming of a new world: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”

Eckhart points out that Jesus spoke about time and admonished the disciples for being concerned for the morrow. And he said: “Before Abraham was, I am”, not “I was.” - or I was around even before Abraham. Jesus had gone beyond the concept of time. And in the Bible God also says, “I am that I am”, not I have always been and I always will be. Therefore, Eckhart maintains, the ‘second coming’ of Christ must be perceived as a transformation of human consciousness: “A shift from time to presence, from thinking to pure consciousness - not the arrival or return of some man or woman.”

**Portals to realization**

Eckhart talks a great deal about portals (doorways) to enlightenment. Accepting the Now is the main portal and is an essential aspect of every other portal. He says, “When you dissolve psychological time through intense present-moment awareness, you become conscious of the unmanifest, both directly and indirectly. Directly, you feel it as the radiance and power of your conscious presence - no content, just presence. Indirectly you are aware of the unmanifest in and through the sensory realm. In other words you feel the God essence in every creature and you realize - that all that there is, is holy.”

These are some of the other portals discussed in detail in *The Power of Now*:

**Witnessing the thinker:** Listen to the mind voice, the thinker, and pay particular attention to repetitive thoughts. The voice, usually incessantly thinking, belongs to the conditioned mind which judges, comments, likes and dislikes, complains, and so on; but listen without judgment. When there is judgment, Eckhart says, it means that the ‘thinker’ is still in charge: “Now be aware of not only the thoughts but also of you as the watcher of the thoughts. You realize that there is this voice but here ‘I am’ listening to it. This ‘I am’ is not a thought but arises from beyond the mind; and through this a new level of consciousness comes into play - your deeper Self, behind the thought.” Eckhart explains that if the thought, or as indicated before, an emotion, is simply watched, it subsides because you are no longer energizing it, and energizing the mind that is processing it, by identification with it. A gap of no-mind occurs. And, Eckhart says, with practice the gaps of no-mind increase and a growing sense of stillness and peace can be felt. A subtle emanation of joy arises and you realize your state of pure consciousness. You feel your own presence with such intensity that everything else pales into insignificance: “This presence is you, but it is also inconceivably greater than you.” Thus, for the ‘logical’ mind, the notions of both ‘duality’ and ‘non-duality’ can be sustained.
The inner body: Another effective way of bringing consciousness back to the present moment is to focus attention to the ‘inner body’. He says, ‘Direct your attention into the body. Feel it from within. Is it alive? Is there life in your hands, feet, abdomen, chest? Can you feel the subtle energy field that pervades the entire body and gives vibrant life to every organ, every cell?... Keep focusing on your inner body. Do not start to think about it. Feel it. The more attention you give it the stronger the feeling will become.’ The inner body, the ‘subtle body’, is the link with the unmanifest. It is the Source from which worldly consciousness, the ‘personal’ consciousness arises. And presence, Eckhart explains, is consciousness that has been reclaimed from the world of form in which mind dominance prevails.

Breath and the inner body: Entering the inner body may be made easier by focusing on the breathing first: “Follow the breath with your attention. Breathe into the body, and feel your abdomen expanding and contracting with each inhalation and exhalation. If you find it easy to visualize, see yourself immersed in a luminous substance - a sea of consciousness. Then breathe in the light. Feel the luminous substance filling your body. Then gradually focus more on the feeling. You are now in your body. Don’t get attached to any visual image.”

Cessation of thinking: Another portal may be created through the cessation of thinking. Thought is part of the manifested world which keeps us from becoming conscious of the unmanifest. Focusing on the breath can create a gap in the stream of thought: “This can start with a very simple thing, such as taking one ‘conscious’ breath and then perceiving the silence without thought that follows, or looking, in a state of intense alertness at a flower, so that there is no mental commentary running at the same time: ‘When you are intensely present, you don’t need to be concerned about the cessation of thinking.’” (In fact, Eckhart’s ‘one conscious breath’ followed by presence, repeated periodically, is for some more effective than continuous attention to the breath).

Silence: “Do you hear that dog barking in the distance? Can you feel the presence of the unmanifested in that? You can’t? Look for it in the silence out of which sounds come and into which they return.” If we pay more attention to the silence than to the sounds, an inner silence is created: “A portal opens up.”

Eckhart says that it is silence that enables sound to be, and in the world the unmanifest is present as silence. It has been said that silence is very close to God. All you have to do is pay attention to it. This can happen even during conversation if you become conscious of the gaps between words, even your own. And as you do that, stillness grows within you: “You have entered the unmanifested.”

The space portal: In the same way as no sound can exist without silence, every physical object has come out of nothing and will eventually return to no-thing. Buddhists have known this for 2,500 years and call it ‘emptiness’. ‘Form is emptiness and emptiness form.’ Though, Eckhart says, this is not something that can be grasped with the mind; it is something that must be ‘felt’ - something ‘holy’ that cannot be encapsulated by the mind. Finding the space portal goes something like this: Become aware of the space that is all around you. Feel it, don’t think about As you pay attention to this ‘no-thing’, a shift in consciousness takes place. Here is why: “The inner equivalents to physical objects are your mind objects - things, emotions and so on. And the inner equivalent of space is the consciousness that allows your mind objects to be. So if you withdraw your attention from physical objects - you automatically withdraw your attention from your mind objects as well. This is how the contemplation of space can become a portal for you.”

Surrender: The letting go of mental/emotional resistance to “what is” is also a portal to the unmanifest. This resistance isolates you from yourself and others and generates a sense of separateness which binds you to the world of separate forms. But in a state of surrender, of acceptance, the form identity becomes ‘softened’ and then the light of the resistance isolates you from yourself and others and generates a sense of separateness which binds you to the world of forms.

Coping with the world as a spiritual practice

Eckhart caters well to the Western mind. Although almost all human beings live in a state of unconscionness, which varies from ordinary unconscionness to a pathological level of extreme and dangerous unconscionness, it is in the developed ‘Western’ world that the most extreme forms of un-conscionness and insanity prevail. Ordinary unconscionness is easier to deal with, before it gets out of hand. Of this he says: “Make it consciousness. Observe the many ways in which unease, discontent and tension arise within you through unnecessary judgment, resistance to what is, and denial of the Now. Make it a habit to monitor your mental-emotional state through self-observation: Catch yourself complaining? Drop negativity before you take any action... Is there something you should be doing? Get up and do it now. Alternatively accept your laziness. Go into it fully. Enjoy it. What’s going on inside? Look inside more than outside.”

And, Eckhart explains, old emotional pain that resurfaces without warning and appears as unease, vague and unidentified anxiety or depression, is dealt with the same way. Make it conscious, witness it - because the unconscious always dissolves when you witness it in a state of presence. If the smaller problems are dealt with through the development of discipline, then it will be much easier to deal with deep unconsciousness when it is triggered by events. As an measure of your state of awareness, observe how you listen. Eckhart explains that your consciousness level of can be measured by how we listen. Most people don’t really listen. They are thinking all the time while another is talking, noting points, forming opinions, how they will reply or react. This is a basic problem, not only of ‘intellectuals’ and academicians with whom it is endemic, but also with almost everyone else. When there is a gap between hearing and perception and the onset of thought, then there is more consciousness.

Life and life situation: Eckhart points out that it is important to see the difference between ‘life’ and ‘life situation’. Our ‘life’ is what is at every moment and is never less than perfect if we but realize it. A great Zen master used
to hold up his finger from time to time and ask his disciples, “What is not perfect at this moment?” On reflection none of them could ever find anything to say - even though life situation, in a Zen monastery, is harsh and rigorous. So if what is cannot be changed we have but two choices: surrender and become calm - and then act in an appropriate way if action is possible, or resist and become a frustrated mind-victim.

Eckhart says that each individual’s ‘life situation’ is different and on the surface it may appear that there is a very unfair distribution of happiness and unhappiness in the world. However, this assumption does not stand up to close examination. We cannot judge a person’s state of happiness in the world by physical conditions or appearances. Individuals in very poor countries are often much happier than those in the rich countries - which gives the lie to the relationship between physical ‘well-being’ and happiness. If there is doubt of this just travel around and see.

But, in a relative sense, one’s life situation in the world can be changed through surrender. An important aspect of Buddhist thought is to realize that the world is insubstantial and ever changing - this is its nature. And spiritual practice is undertaken to reach the understanding that everything has impermanence and unsatisfactoriness. Eckhart says that taking action from such a position of clarity may involve such things as moving away from an abusive relationship, calling a mechanic to fix the car, selling the car and taking the bus - and so on. But in all endeavours, to remain in surrender, each step is taken only one at a time. Then surrender gives way to presence.

**Surrender is beyond ‘happiness’ and ‘unhappiness’**

Eckhart says that in worldly life happiness depends on things being perceived as ‘positive’, and happiness is always relative and measured against conditions of less or more ‘positiveness’: “But do we truly know what is positive and what is negative? Do we have the whole picture?” From the perspective of the mind there is good and bad, like and dislike, love and hate. In schools children are taught the opposites of things as part of the learning of language, so that there are opposites is early inculcated into the psyche of everyone. However, all these opposites give rise to conflict, problems, power struggles and emotional and physical violence is often the result. On a larger scale the concept of opposites gives rise to war, genocide, racism and so on. This is ‘un-consciousness’ - and exploitation, the cause of much conflict in the world, takes place as a result of such massed and collective unconsciousness - the unconsciousness of the egoic mind.

All the disturbing things that happen in the world may be referred to simply as **drama**: “When egos come together, whether in personal relationships or in organizations or institutions, ‘bad’ things happen sooner or later.” And under the stress of modern times, in the nightmare world created by the modern technological consumer state, there are many new ways in which drama can arise.

**The mid-line between all pairs of opposites**: From a higher perspective things are neither positive nor negative, neither good nor bad - they are as they are, they are what is. And to perceive yourself as a vulnerable body that was born and a little later dies, is an illusion created by the egoic mind. If you believe deeply enough, for whatever reason or because of what you have been told, that life is a struggle for survival, then that is what will appear all around you. You will inhabit a world of wars and conflicts, of death and of: “bodies fighting, killing, and devouring each other.” But the truth of the nature of the world is that there is growth and dissolution taking place in cyclical patterns: “There are cycles of success and cycles of failure when things wither or disintegrate, and you have to let them go in order to make room for new things to arise. This applies to all manifest phenomena; stars, planets, trees, the rise and fall of nations and empires, and to the changes in physical body.” But, Eckhart says, it is not true that the up cycle is good and the down cycle bad, except in the mind’s judgment. It seems that the down cycle may be essential for spiritual realization, and when negative things happen there is always a lesson to be learned: “If we fail deeply or suffer some deep loss or pain we become drawn to the spiritual dimension.” Eckhart writes of what a Buddhist monk once told him: “All I have learned in the twenty years that I have been a monk I can sum up in one sentence, ‘All that arises passes away. This I know.’ - And what he meant is that through surrender to ‘what is’ he had found peace... There is something within you that remains unaffected by the transient circumstances that make up your life situation, and only through surrender do you have access to it. It is your life, your very being - which exists eternally in the timeless realm of the present.” Eckhart says that finding this life is the one thing that is needed - that Jesus talked about.

It also seems to be true that surrender often brings about a change in circumstances: “Doing nothing when you are in a state of intense presence is a very powerful transformer and healer of situations and people.” Through acceptance of what is - through “Loving What Is” - the world often seems to respond in a positive way, things happen, relationships change, conditions become better.

**The illusion of making choices**

In the world we are merely acting out God’s plan but we may feel that we should be making choices. The notion that we can make choices, which may result in better conditions, is just an illusion. The fact is that while in the unenlightened state, we don’t have the ability to choose. Eckhart explains: “Choice implies consciousness - a high degree of consciousness. Without it, you have no choice. Choice only begins when you disidentify from the mind and its conditioned patterns. Until you reach that point you are unconscious, spiritually speaking, and you are compelled to think, feel and act in certain ways according to the conditioning of your mind. When people come to understand that there can be no ‘salvation’ in anything they do, possess or attain, they may become world-weary and depressed and say: ‘What is the point of anything?’ But when you reach this point, you are one step away from despair - and one step away from enlightenment.” But more often than not the ego simply generates a kind of negative capital out of failure. People come to ‘love’ their particular forms of life drama. Since the ego runs their lives the sense of self is invested in their drama
which is used to attract sympathy: “Then what they most fear is the end of their drama.”

A different reality: forgiveness

When there is loss or death approaches, Eckhart says, “It is impossible to be ‘happy’, but you can be at peace. Underneath the sadness there is a deep serenity, a sacred presence, … the good that has no opposite. The alternative to the egoic world happens when you live in complete acceptance of what is. That is the end of all drama in your life.” And as Paul said: “The whole of creation is waiting with eager expectation for God’s sons to be revealed.” And the Buddha’s statement that every tree and every blade of grass will eventually become enlightened, points to the same truth: that a “New heaven and a new earth” will be revealed”. This is the different reality.

But in accepting ‘what is’ Eckhart explains, forgiveness is essential - forgiveness for perceived wrongs and all grievances. Forgiveness for those who hate and offend. Forgiveness is also forgiveness of yourself - because all minds are linked, and forgiveness replaces fear with love. Compassion, Eckhart says, is the other face of love: “Compassion, springs from an awareness of the deep bonds we share with all living beings, a bond of having physical bodies, and a bond of the divine presence which we all truly share. These two aspects of compassion, representing sadness and joy, merge and become transmuted into the peace of God. It is one of the most noble feelings that humans are capable of.”

Practicalities

Eckhart Tolle gives talks, and conducts satsangs, workshops (intensives) and retreats in Canada, the USA, Europe, India and elsewhere. Details of his current schedule can be seen on his website <www.eckharttolle.com> or at www.namastepublishing.com.

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Chapter 24

SATYAM NADEEN

From seekers to finders.

Background

Satyam Nadeen (born Michael Clegg) has the strong conviction that there is a major shift in the numbers of individuals attaining enlightenment in modern times; a shift that may be necessary if the human race is to avoid destroying itself and perhaps all life of the planet. Satyam calls it the “millennium shift”.

Satyam had spiritual leanings from early youth. He entered a seminary and became a Catholic priest and practiced Catholicism until he was twenty six years old. Then he switched to Eastern spiritual disciplines: Yoga, meditation, guru-hopping, and hanging out in ashrams, and also getting into all the self-help programs and life-enhancement courses and workshops that spiritual psychology had to offer. But for all this, he felt he was getting even worse than nowhere.

Then, after discovering the drug ‘ecstasy’ in the 1970’s, he was so impressed by its effects that he took up a self-appointed role as one of its leading promoters and distributors. At that time ecstasy was a legal prescription drug in the USA but subsequently it was removed from legal drug status on what appeared to be the thinnest of medical excuses; but more possibly because it interfered with the marketing of valium and other similar drugs. Undaunted, Satyam moved operations to countries where ecstasy was still legal and eventually set up a headquarters in Puerto Rico. But in the end, against the might of the global drug companies, he could not prevail. He was arrested in the USA and sentenced to a long jail term in a maximum security prison. Furthermore, his wife was also hassled and only narrowly escaped going to jail, and an attempt was made to remove his daughter and place her under social care. These happenings, together with the prolonged horrendous experience of incarceration in the American prison system, were indeed a ‘dark night of the soul’ for Satyam, and it was in prison that he experienced enlightenment - on reading one of Ramesh Balsekar’s books (Consciousness Speaks). After this his life changed dramatically and when he was released he became a spiritual teacher. All these events have been described in Satyam’s books From Onions to Pearls and From Seekers to Finders - which are a must for all spiritual seekers - see Bibliography.

Satyam on enlightenment

Satyam defines enlightenment as the “fourth dimension” and suggests that there may be yet other dimensions. In a new and at the time of writing (April 2004) forthcoming book called Beyond Enlightenment - A daring escape from conventional wisdom, he explores the matter further. The fourth dimension is that which is perceived as the inner witness state and the “intuitive heart function” - which are beyond all emotional reactions and judgment. For him enlightenment
was a sudden and, at that time, total shift from the third dimensional world to the “fourth dimension” - which simply and effortlessly opened up in his consciousness: “I just woke up one day and remembered who I was.” He remembered, beyond any experience or knowledge, at a soul or “essence” level - “maybe even at a cellular level” - that consciousness is all there is and that “I am That.” He says, “In a flash of insight and remembrance - from a very dark night of the soul - I went from a confused, lonely victim of this horrible third dimension to the total freedom, joy, peace and clarity of the fourth. Rapture followed, which is part of the Shift - that feels like being swept away in relief, safety, and the freedom of being home at last.”

At this stage of the Shift, he maintains, you can start the process of reversing all the “old concepts” and all the conditioning that had been getting you nowhere. In the fourth dimension there was surprise at just how simple life can be, and amusement at how serious, mysterious and complicated the ego makes the journey of spiritual seeking.

**Some explanations**

Satyam says that the Shift cannot be understood with the mind and that, even if he had known something, there still wasn’t anything he could have done about it. This is the core of Satyam’s belief. Everything is under the control of the Consciousness of God - or just Consciousness if you prefer. The word used by Satyam is the “Source”. As with all the truly enlightened individuals that we have considered up to now, and in contrast perhaps to many religious scholars, authorities and pundits, Satyam believes that what happens and how we act is preordained - we are not the ‘doers’ of anything. All we can do is what we feel we should do - which is also what God has planned for us to feel and consequently, in some instances, ‘do’. And, indeed, whether we will achieve enlightenment in this life or not, is also preordained. However, when we feel that we should associate with and hearken to truly enlightened individuals, and this translates into action, we are on the right track.

The essence of the awakening experience is total surrender; not an intellectual understanding of surrender but total surrender of the egoic false self. Nevertheless, even intellectual understanding can be of benefit. But in the light of total surrender there is no difference between ‘actionless action’, non doership, and non attachment. And as in the case of the mind/body organism of Ramesh Balsekar, if the egoic mind is not capable of choosing but just blunders here and there, then all action is either randomly chaotic (a notion that Einstein had difficulty with), or everything is under the control, for want of a better word, of God. Thus, Satyam maintains: “We can’t possibly screw up.” Understanding this is an essential part of liberation. He says that once we have understood that the concept of the “Source” is that we are not the doers, we have cleared the path: “To someday getting an intuitive hit of full memory and understanding.”

Although everything that happens is preordained and happens only by the will of God, the “millennium shift” seems now to be occurring more frequently with those who attend satsang with an enlightened individual - which is also something that is preordained. Satsang is one of the things that Satyam prescribes and can be defined as the gathering together in “holy company” to discourse on the Truth. (Jesus also promised that things will happen: “When two or more are gathered in my name”). However, it is essential that any gathering is well grounded. At least one person must have a foot in the “fourth dimension” - otherwise satsangs can turn into ego fests. Satyam advises as follows: Enter the circle with an open heart. Realize, as he puts it, that “We don’t know squat!” Look around and see the “Source” in each face; realize that what anyone says is the sacred truth. The words don’t matter; satsangs’ power comes from the transmission of energy when you come together - and the power of silence is also part of it. Further, there should be no agenda except for an agreed starting time and period - usually one to two hours. Satsang is not a session to solve anyone’s particular personal life problems or to give advice. We may share negativities “contractions” but the answers will come from within, not from without. Examples of what are often shared are: Individual experiences of the Shift; The human dilemma; contractions and recurring negativities; a poem or song; writings; a joke; and, of course, silence. Some details of Satyam’s Satsang Circles are given in ‘Practicalities’ below.

**Signs of an approaching Shift**

Satyam maintains, on the basis of what he has learned in conducting many satsangs, that there are indicators that may precede awakening; some may reflect a state of consciousness of individuals, and some may manifest because the organism is being “rewired” to withstand the much higher energy of the fourth dimension. They are summarized as follow:

1. Deep questions about God and the meaning of life as a child;
2. Feeling somehow different - stranger in a strange land;
3. Starting with following traditional religious paths;
4. Looking for the soul mate, and later getting divorced;
5. Perhaps having glimpses of reality, in childhood or later;
6. Experimenting with mind expanding drugs;
7. Embarking on an endless search through new age remedies: meditation, yoga, ‘Eastern’ gurus, positive thinking, visualizations, macrobiotic diets, and seeing thousands of dollars spent on self-improvement workshops - none of which delivered Self realization;
8. Slipping or falling into the ‘dark night of the soul’ in which all relationships and interests dissolve. We enter a limbo of despair because, “while the third dimensional pulls of conventional wisdom are falling away, we have not yet arrived at the freedom of the fourth dimension”;
9. A building up of the intensity of longing and the development of physical and mental maladies: “depression,
directs our ancient memory. Then our deliverance is directed to resonate more with the ramifications of our daily lives.

10. For those of us with “gurus”, a realization that whatever they had (or said they had), wasn’t being transferred to us. It may be that anyone still attached to a guru, “is not ready to Shift. Somehow the idea of anyone being so special keeps the illusion of separation alive”;

11. The start of a slow drift towards a new understanding that: “Maybe, just maybe, we are not the doers or controllers of our destiny after all”;

12. Coming across a book or a person that explains that Consciousness is all that there is, and You Are That! You are not the third dimensional doer - or God’s little helper. Maybe you don’t have to do anything special to be what you already are and always have been;

13. Because the Shift is not necessarily a: “sudden or dramatic awakening, it takes trust that all is well, as it subtly directs our ancient memory. Then our deliverance is directed to resonate more with the ramifications of our daily lives. Instead of thinking we are the doers, we now can take a non-doer attitude in the middle of any action. Thus life just unfolds around us according to our manifest destiny, no longer needing any intentional effort to make it happen.”

More on enlightenment

Satyam questions whether anyone really knows what ‘realization’ is. Certainly no one who hasn’t experienced it can know what it is. The accounts of enlightenment experiences are so often steeped in mystery and the idea of how difficult it is to achieve, that it seems to be the ego tries to keep it this way - for enlightenment spells the end of the ego. Satyam’s view of enlightenment is that it is nothing more than the gradual or sudden remembering of who we really are at the level of our core essence: “The ancient memory that Consciousness is all there is, and that I am That comes from a forgotten, deeply hidden place in our own consciousness.”

Moreover, Satyam says, enlightenment is not a peak experience of un-understandable bliss. Such experiences mysteriously come and go - even to those who are obviously not enlightened; and the ego can revel in such ‘cosmic’ experiences; but usually a blissful experience is followed by an exactly equal and opposite let-down. Many individuals experience moments of bliss but even among the great awakened ones - Ramana Maharshi, Anandamayi Ma, Amma - there seems to be a moving in and out of bliss. Ramakrishna said that he: “borrowed one sixteenth of his mind back from The Mother, so that he could dance and sing and talk with you all”. Rather, it seems, enlightenment is a “valley” experience that is permanently with us.

Satyam maintains that on birth we enter the body in a state of forgetfulness. Then consciousness becomes the egoic notion of doing - the false identification of the pristine Self with the “personality” and the things of the world. And then the inevitable disappointments of the world create all our negativities. The big illusion is that we are the doers - the ‘object’ of Consciousness that perceives itself to be the ‘subject’ and the doer of actions to other ‘objects’. But even so, this is how it should be, because: “The whole purpose of life is to know ourselves fully. And that includes the shadow side of the Source in the dimension of duality and polar opposites.” Satyam believes that most of us experience awakening only close to or at the point of death.. Then comes the big “Ah-ha” experience: “In a flash Source has found itself and obviously loves this experience of finding after a lifetime of confusion and seeking for the very meaning of life itself.”

And enlightenment, Satyam says, in the sense of the Shift, is a “no brainer” and is not connected with any feelings. In the midst of chaos we simply know that: “All is well! No thoughts about it. Just a gentle, loving gratitude that is always present.” The Shift to enlightenment starts when “witness” consciousness is regained: “When you were a small child, you heard your Witness speak to you, and you listened. Then the mind grew strong and dominated your life - as it is supposed to do in the third dimension. Then, after a lifetime of futile seeking, followed by a ‘dark night of the soul’, the Shift begins when the Witness comes back into the forefront of your awareness... The Witness never forgets that it is Consciousness itself... All you have to do is be silent for a moment and then ask, ‘Who is it right now that is aware of this silence?’ ... Once you know you are the Witness and not the doer, you are living within the valley experience of the Shift.”

Satyam calls this witnessing “presence” - in the sense of the present moment. He says that the act of witnessing never comes and goes and is always present. And the Witness is not passive; there is a passionate acceptance of what is, and: “Suddenly we discover, in this release, that as the Witness we are actually the one and only Source of all there is.” The Witness observes all things without emotion - warm sunshine, a knot of fear, the smell of coffee (and onions), a contraction of impatience from being caught in traffic. In the witness state: “Life just lives itself through you, and you are the witness of it, lost in ‘presence’ - observing it in the present moment.”

Being “special” : Satyam says that the perceived need to be “special” is a basic problem with seekers. We must have a “special” guru - and only “our” guru is special. Moreover, the notion held by most seekers is that when we become enlightened we must also be special - glow in the dark, levitate, and have omniscience and omnipresence. But the fact is that the “we” that we think we are and who will become this special enlightened person, will no longer be there at all. Truly enlightened beings have always been very simple. Jesus, the Buddha and the individuals considered in this book, rubbed shoulders with ordinary people. There is no need to be special because enlightened people don’t have egos to bolster and maintain. Being “special” strengthens and promotes the concept of duality: “Instead of the oneness we are looking for.”

The myth of the norm : Another myth that Satyam addresses is that there is an absolute norm when describing enlightenment. In reality there are many concepts. The Catholic Church emphasizes the ability to do miracles. But in the
East, all and more of such powers are associated with yoga - and may be regarded by truly enlightened beings, including those of modern times, as being unnecessary, or even retrogressive (for a seeker). The Buddha described enlightenment as “emptiness” - what is left after everything else has been eliminated; and Ramana described it as “fullness” - like having a large elephant in a grass hut. Satyam says that the only common denominator is the waking up and remembering that Consciousness is all there is, and that “I am That”.

Furthermore, enlightenment is definitely not the end of all your troubles: “Your bills are still overdue. You still don’t meet your soulmate - if you are still looking for one. Your car still breaks down. Your mother-in-law still nags you, and you may never get that promotion that you hanker after.” Moreover, you are most likely not going to be recognized as a saint; especially by your immediate friends and family.”

Yet another myth, no doubt strengthened by observation of views in religions and in the ashrams of many “gurus”, is the paucity of enlightened beings. In the Christian sects ‘enlightenment’ as it is known in the East, is hardly recognized. Saints are people who suffer a great deal and await their reward in heaven; here on earth they are not supposed to be very happy. But even the Catholic mystic (not yet an official saint) Therese Neumann, who suffered the agonies of the stigmata of Christ throughout her adult life, seemed to be wonderfully happy and joyous - giving the lie to the standard notion about saints (see Women of Power and Grace and Yogananda’s account in Autobiography of a yogi). It is the ego that promotes the belief that enlightenment has got to be complicated and difficult to attain - because, as indicated before, enlightenment means the end of the ego. The ego screams out: “Wait a minute here! This is too simple and easy to be true!” Satyam says that seekers miss out because they are “other” orientated, “future” orientated, “doing” orientated and “image” orientated - and have the notion that enlightened ones should be ‘spacey’ looking, have long hair and penetrating, soulful eyes: “Or they are “lineage” orientated - who was your guru?.. your guru’s guru?” .. and so on.

Satyam maintains that our so-called spiritual lives will be completely demystified and rendered utterly simple by the energy field of the Shift - by remembering our true nature while still very much alive - and becoming “finders”. They are and will be those who have a deep longing and yearning to “go home” and know the thoughts of God: “Then, out of the blue, comes some new kind of cosmic energy field that changes our perception of everything that used to get us through the third dimension.” These are things like family life, careers, recreational activities, missions and “zeals” of various sorts, and so on, that can never fulfill us. “The old, tired concepts just don’t stand up anymore.”

However, all this does not mean that a seeker does not need spiritual guidance. Use an enlightened teacher for instruction and, more importantly, for the intense presence and silent teaching that emanates from him or her. We should know that we are the “Source” - identify with the “Witness” instead of the mind; and instead of resisting everything, develop a non-doing attitude and embrace life just as it is - just love “What Is”.

Satyam on cosmic laws

The infinite intelligence behind the “dream of appearance” is an impersonal energy, so certain cosmic laws are necessary: “Laws that cause the universe to run on autopilot without the need for some personal entity, dispensing justice and favours.”

There is a law of balance between freedom and limitation that ensures that each life form, each of which presents a unique one-of-a-kind situation to Source, will have an exact total balance of positive and negative experiences. Although this may seem absurd in the light of different observed situations, it becomes credible when we hear, for example, that happiness surveys find that people in poor countries seem to be much happier than people in the USA and other wealthy “developed” countries. It seems while one experiences physical hardship, the other experiences mental problems. For any one that finds this hard to believe just investigate: kids in developed countries with all their gadgets are screwed up and hate their parents, while in poor countries they play among the garbage and open drains and help their parents. And then there is a law of contrast which states that for every high or low, good or bad, happy or tragic experience your mind may encounter, there is a contrasting emotion or feeling waiting for you somewhere down the road. This is necessary because the world is in duality - which means that there has to be opposites, you can’t have one, indeed the world can’t exist, without the other.

Another is the law of humiliation which happens when we think that favourable circumstances have resulted from our superior abilities; then an event of humiliation takes place. This can vary from a fall from power of an important individual… Satyam quotes the case of Osho Rajneesh - to a puncture on the way to an “important” meeting. He says, “Please don’t feel that this law of humiliation is the avenging angel of the Lord. Quite the contrary; it is merely the loving, intelligent energy of a finely tuned and perfect universe.”

And the law of karma is that if you believe that you are responsible for your actions and that they will bring either reward or blame, you are sowing the seeds of karma which will keep liberation away. All enlightened individuals know that doership sows the seeds of karma. When you act as the doer: “Then you will be affected to the degree that you attempt to control those actions.” This is the law of cause and effect. Seen in the light of the actions taking place in the world of the egoc mind, the law begins to make perfect sense. Any news broadcast will show the scenario of actions done and reactions to them - played over and over again ad nauseam. The good news, Satyam says, is that: “In the shift from the third dimension to the fourth, a very significant release happens as soon as you wake up and realize that you are only pure Awareness and Consciousness and are definitely not the ‘doer’ of all your so-called deeds and their scheming results!”

The law of desire is another one. It springs from judging - which engages the “desire” to do something about the person or event judged. It absorbs most of our energy and we will experience suffering from every situation judged as
unacceptable. This law stresses the need to give up grievances and embrace What Is.

And finally the law of love is actually the embracing of every situation just as it is. Satyam says, “When the first insights of the shift start to grab you, you will experience the subtle transition from the law of judging whatever is, to the delights of embracing what is - this is the law of love… And just as judging spawns desire, the law of love has a wondrous child called the law of inspiration. The difference between being driven by desire and being guided by inspiration, intuition, is such that the mind doesn’t even get to ask whether something is really inspiration or just another desire; it is just too obvious for doubt to enter.”

**Satyam and ancient scriptures**

In the world there is nothing new under the sun and, as indicated before, the ancient scriptures - those that are not the figments of the ego’s imagination, embrace everything. In Satyam’s first book, *From Onions to Pearls*, he talks about the wisdom of Lao Tzu - the Tao; and in *From Seekers to Finders* he talks about the ancient Indian scripture, the Astravakra Gita. These are some excerpts and comments (from the Tao):

- Those who talk don’t know. Those who know, don’t talk.

This sums up the mystery of the enlightened state over the apparent ‘logic’ of worldview. “All you can do when absorbed by the Presence of Source is to try and describe how it feels and hope that Grace will bridge the gap between the words and the understanding beyond them”.

- The Tao cannot choose sides - what is judged good or is judged evil. The sage lives in the world of non-doing. He finishes his work but without dwelling on it. Because there is no doership, one is content to simply be, then there is no fault, no praise, no blame.

- You can deal with life’s vital affairs by simply letting them follow their unfolding. In standing back from your mind you begin to understand all things.

- Chase after gold and security and you will never be able to protect them.

- Thoughts weaken the mind, desires weaken the heart.

Satyam says that the following verses from the Tao sum up his “wake-up call” and the deliverance that followed:

Simply see the world as yourself,
Embrace things as they are.
If you know where you come from,
You know the essence of all wisdom.

Satyam considers that the Astravakra Gita is another scripture that is: “Packed with incredible wisdom.” These are some of his favourite verses:

- If you wish to be free, know you are the Self, The witness of all these, The heart of awareness. You will at once be happy. Forever still, Forever free.
- Formless and free, Beyond the reach of the senses, You are the witness of all things.
- Right and wrong, Joy and sorrow, They are not yours. It is not really you who acts or enjoys. But if you see yourself as separate, Then you are bound.
- The mind desires this, And grieves for that. It embraces one thing, And spurns another. Now it feels happiness, Now anger. In this way you are bound.
- But I am pure awareness. I live beyond all distinctions, In unbroken meditation.
- He is pure of heart who knows the whole world is only the Self. His heart is not smudged by judgment of right and wrong.
- All things arise, suffer and change, And pass away. When you know this, Nothing disturbs you, Nothing hurts you, You become still, Knowing I am in all things, From Brahma to a blade of grass.

**Practicalities**

Satyam Nadeen spends much of his time traveling to conduct satsang workshops and holds periodical retreats, principally in Puerto Rico. Information of current events can be obtained from his website: <www.SatyamNadeen.com>.

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Satyam assists interested parties in getting their own “Satsang circles” going, with a starter kit of videos and audios, and with continued “ticklers for priming the inspiration pump.”

He disclaims the dispensing of medical advice or the recommending of any techniques for the treatment of physical or mental problems, without the advice of a physician - either directly or indirectly.
Appendix I

A COURSE IN MIRACLES; REVELATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - A SYNOPSIS

Background

The Course says that the ego weaves the fabric of illusory creation - the creation of the separated ones that thrives on grievance and attack, but in reality it is nothing more than an ancient dream in which we must play our part. And miracles are the means revealing Love and the vision of Christ, and they work through forgiveness - for when we forgive others we forgive ourselves.

A Course in Miracles is a revelation of the Holy Spirit that came to two American academics. It started when one of them, the head of their department, unexpectedly (and uncharacteristically) announced that he was tired of the angry and aggressive feelings and attitudes that prevailed in his department, and proclaimed that “there must be a better way.” A colleague immediately, and automatically, responded by saying that she agreed and would help to find it - see Practicalities for sources of information. This was all that was needed - the “little willingness” of the Bible - for the process of revelation to commence. The revelations came from the Holy Spirit and took the form of inner dictation to the colleague, which she took down in shorthand and then translated to her Head for transcribing. But before the dictation actually began, she experienced three startling months of highly symbolic and apocalyptic dreams and descriptions, after which the inner voice introduced itself by announcing:

“This is a course in miracles.”

The revelations comprise three books: an explanatory Text, a Workbook for Students, and a Manual for Teachers. The total length is more than 1200 pages and the dictation took several years to complete. The material of the course is explained with impeccable logic that is both theoretical and practical, but with an emphasis on application. Although recognizably Christian, the Course deals with universal spiritual themes. It recognizes that while a universal theology is hardly possible, universal experience is not only possible but absolutely essential. Its aim is the realization of the unity of man with God as the ‘Son of God’, not as a particular enlightened individual - for all mankind is the Son of God, only dreaming that he is separate.

The words ‘Christ’ and the ‘Son’ are used in the Course as plurality in unity - as is the ‘Self’ in Eastern philosophy. This plurality was confirmed by Jesus when he said, “The kingdom of God is within you.” The Course says: “You are the spirit in whose mind all time stands still; the miracle in which a minute spent in using these ideas (of the lessons) becomes a time that has no limit and that has no end.” Miracles, the means of liberation and union, are things that take place through the collapse of time; and they correct not-right-mindedness as the means of liberation.

Obviously nothing like justice can be done in these few pages, to more than a thousand pages of Revelations of the Holy Spirit. For this it is recommended that the Course should be pursued. Only the barest outline is given here, with emphasis on some of the aspects which resonate with the philosophy of Advaita - non duality.

Some revelations

The basic tenet of the Course is the fundamental distinction between what is real, which is the knowledge of God, and what is unreal and does not exist, but which is what is perceived by the ego. The Course proclaims thus:

Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God...

The ego’s perception is the world of space and time but it is not real because space and time are illusions. The Course explains that the ego made up names for everything and each became a separate entity with space between them, which emphasizes separation: “This space you lay between all things to which you give a different name; all happenings in terms of place and time; all bodies are greeted by a name. This is the means by which the world’s perception is achieved... You see something where nothing is, and see as well nothing where unity is... Thus do you think that you have given life to separation and think you are established as a unity which functions with an independent will.”

The ego’s believes in separation and scarcity and operates on the basis of judgment, attachment and antagonism - and the need to plan, attack and defend. This can easily be seen as the nature of the world. It is always inaccurate, unstable and chaotic. Moreover, unlike the world of God, it is something that must be learned, as the ‘personality’ of man learns to be competitive and divisive. The results of its thinking is the world in which most of us see and believe.

The ego is the false identification of the Sons of God after the separation; which is symbolized in the Bible by the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden. But, in the Course, the separation was the choice of man, rather than expulsion by a wrathful god after the eating, contrary to his injunction, of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of ‘good’ and ‘evil’.

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Man wanted to create a world based on judgment, punishment and reward, so God obliged with a dream which the dreamer does not know is a dream until he awakens - until he becomes enlightened. Moreover, the dream is a means of multiplying God’s love through his Son. (The parable of the prodigal son as an illustration of this was mentioned in Chapter 23).

The ego’s dream permits only illusory thoughts of the past (being illusory because time itself is illusion). Furthermore, thoughts are not isolated but are projected outwards and shared by the collective egoic mind of all mankind. They rise and fall, surge and pulse, to create worldview and make the world we think we see. The Course maintains, the ego’s preoccupation with the past (fabricated in the dream) is the reason for the misconception about time from which our seeing suffers. In truth, the present moment, is the only ‘time’ that is real. Forgetting all our misconceptions, with nothing from the past to hold us back, we can remember God. In God’s world the mind holds only what we think with God, and with the Son as co-creator, as participator - its purpose is to expand God’s kingdom.

The Course emphasizes that every mind contains all minds, which is complete abstraction and the natural condition. But the egoic mind, that taught itself to think specifically, can no longer grasp abstraction. In the world, the body aids the ego as the medium of attack, as only specifics can be attacked; there must be a specific thing to be attacked, and to which hate and fear can be attached. The body, though only a symbol, presents as the symbol of love’s enemies: fear and hate.

Thus, liberation can be described as the realization that you are purely Mind, as the Self, in the Mind of the Father. And, the Course explains, as the Son is in the Father, you are created in love - sinless and unafraid. Moreover, the thought of God, which we all hold, fully guarantees the salvation of all mankind: “For in His Mind no thought can dwell but those the Father shares.”

The world of the false self - the ego

The ego’s world is based on thoughts of death: “What but the thoughts of misery and of death obscure the perfect happiness and eternal life your Father wills for you? God does not withhold his world; rather we choose to believe in the unreal, and the gifts of God do not become available to one who holds such strange beliefs.”

The body, attack and defense: The body is a means of keeping man from God through attack on everything by everything, and through the body the ego gains credence as the thief of time and makes correction doubly difficult. The ego gives the body all the functions that we see in it and sets its value high. The Course says, “You think defense offers safety. Yet it speaks of fear made real and terror justified... The body is in no need of defense. It will be strong and healthy if the mind does not abuse it by assigning it roles it cannot fulfill. Defend the body and you have attacked the mind, and enslaved the body to the plans of an unhealed mind which in saving itself makes the body sick.”

It is the egoic mind that fears. And the mind that plans, always based on past experience, ensures the continuity of old ideas and sick beliefs which are hardly representations of loving thoughts. Worldly thoughts are all made in duality and even when the ego forms alliances, the ‘alliances of the willing’ perhaps, that appear to be righteous, sanctimonious and godly - they are simply the results of striking deals and are always temporary and changeable. Through attack, fear and pain are generated - because attack exposes the existence of venerability. And, the Course says, the ego, though it depends on the body, also hates the body because of its vulnerability. In the world there is always attack - physical, emotional, economic or other - on someone by someone and all attack thoughts and the reactions produced by them are shared - because there are no private thoughts. And attack, the Course points out, is always an attack on God.

The gods of cruelty: The gods of vengeance, punishment and attack, demanding sacrifice, are the inventions of the ego. When you think you attack in self defense, you imagine you are safe because of cruelty: “How thoroughly insane is this idea, for here is fear begot and fed with blood to make it grow and swell in rage... You, who conceived to attack, separates your mind from who is to be attacked. You make what you defend against, and by your own defense against it, does it become real and inescapable. Your defense sets up an enemy within, splitting your mind into two camps which are wholly irreconcilable. For love now has an “enemy”, an opposite, and fear now needs your defense against what you really are... This is the basic premise which enthrones the thought of fear as god. Where else can the totally insane belief in gods of vengeance come from?” Thus are the personal gods of religions established and allowed to wage war after war in ‘defense’ of their beliefs. But, the Course explains, if we look upon these cruel gods dispassionately, we note that: “Though their lips are smeared with blood, they have no power and we are not bound by them.” So will we restore to love what we have laid before a worthless god, or will we make yet others to replace it? The god of cruelty has many forms as it masquerades as ideologies, religions and cults, and even the insane notion of the ‘fear of God’ is one of its forms. “Understand that your eyes belong to Christ and He looks through them. Choose him over gods of vengeance and your heart will remain at peace for ever: Understand there is one life only that we share with God and all Creation.”

Sickness: Sickness, the Course explains, is the ego’s defense against truth when it is threatened. When, for an instant, truth rises in the deluded mind, the ego’s world appears to totter and fall. But sickness “proves” that the body is not separate from you, and thus becomes ego’s defense. The egoic mind can create disease, and it is the belief in this that produces the physical symptoms of disease in the body. Marvelous though it may seem, medical science can make only crude attempts at treating the symptoms that ego produces. True healing comes only from healing the mind of its dream of separation in the world; and when we are healed we are not healed alone, for healing is the opposite of the world’s ideas which dwell on sickness and on separate states. If the mind is healed then the body becomes merely an instrument that runs its course. It will perform its actions and will not feel at all: “There will be no sense of feeling ill or feeling well; the body’s usefulness remains and nothing more.”
God’s Creation

The true Self that God created seeks nothing and is forever complete and loving. It seeks to share and extend rather than to project and get. God’s thoughts, unlike the ego’s thoughts, are real and belong to a different thought system to that of the world. It is the purpose of the Course to learn how to think like God. In the realm of knowledge there is only true vision where no thoughts exist apart from God - because God and his creation, the Sons, (of which there is only one), share one will. It is totally different knowledge from that of the ego-created gods and ideologies of the world.

God’s will is beyond “learning” in the sense of worldly learning, because it is beyond time and has no beginning, no end and no opposites. The world of God is ever only in the present moment and this is the real meaning of eternity; hence everything in God’s world is eternally pristine and new - because it draws nothing on the past and past memories. But this is something that must be learned by the intervention of God. This is because, in separation, we are caught in a dream and cannot escape without help, for everything we see merely verifies the reality of the dream. It is only through “Christ’s vision” that the Truth can be ascertained.

Enlightenment and union

The Course explains that “union” comes at its own time but “vision” (enlightenment) can be given by a teacher. Vision brings the realization that we are purely Mind, as the Self is Mind in the Mind of God, and as the “Son” is in the “Father”. Further, in reality, we have never left the Source and remain as created - sinless and unafraid, because: “Time is a trick... Time is already set and the script is written. We see but the journey from the point at which it ended, looking back on it; reviewing mentally what has gone by. But the revelation that the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son, will come to every mind.”

A teacher gives “Christ’s vision” - a quiet place within the world, made holy by forgiveness and love. Vision sees a light beyond the body and everyone and all events and happenings are seen without the slightest fading of the light beyond them. Therefore, the Course says: “See no one as a body. Greet him as the Son of God he is. Thus are his sins and yours forgiven. It matters not how heinous they appear to be, nor who seemed to be hurt by them. If you remember in your brother you see but yourself, and if he be lost in sin so must you be; but if you see the light in him, your sins are forgiven by yourself!”

Christ’s vision thus is the miracle of which the Course speaks, and is the bridge between the worlds: “Things which seem quite solid here are merely shadows there... Christ’s vision is the holy ground in which the lies of forgiveness set their roots, and here does the world remember what was lost when it was made.. Christ has dreamed a dream of a forgiven world and this is the Holy Spirit’s gift... His vision gives the means of our return to the unlost and everlasting sanctity in God.”

An explanation of duality and our part in it : God loves His Son whether asleep or awake. There is no certainty but that he loves him with a never-changing love; and God’s love is carefully preserved in all hearts as the inner Self. With grace you see a light that covers all the world in love, and fear disappears from hearts as they claim the light as theirs: “What can be still undone when forgiveness abides on everything?”

The Course explains that grace is an aspect of God’s love which is beyond learning, yet is the goal of learning until the mind prepares itself for acceptance. It lies beyond the vision of Christ (beyond enlightenment) and beyond all experience - as the Son of God has disappeared in the Father and the Father has in him. But it is by grace we accept the love of God within a world of seeming hate and fear - and the form of grace in the world, is forgiveness. Yet, the Course explains, Father and Son as one is already set - God is, and Mind, united with the Source, also is, in the endless present - and in this knowledge words are meaningless. This is the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Here past and future cannot be conceived. Yet forgiveness taught and learned brings the experiences that bear witness to the truth that the time the mind has itself set, is at hand: “We merely take the part assigned long since, and fully recognized as perfectly fulfilled by Him Who wrote salvation’s script in His Creator’s Name - and in the Name of the Creator’s Son.” Everything that happens is and always has been since the beginning of time, gently planned by the One - whose only purpose is our good. But we misunderstand the plan, and our defenses and lack of forgiveness prevent us to see his blessing shine in every step we take.

The Course explains that our work is to play our part, with the ending still obscure, for this part is still on what all the rest depends, and: “In the interval miracles are laid; to be returned by you from holy instants you receive. For the face of Christ is but his who went a moment into timelessless and blessed the world as witness to the truth.” It is an egocentric fallacy that there is cruelty in God (in condemning man to separation and only allowing him back after the completion of almost impossible tasks), for God has placed a limit on the ability to mis-create: “Through a limit on the pain that an imprisoned will can tolerate.” The limit is the will of the Creator from which we cannot depart: “Eventually everyone will begin to recognize, however dimly, that there must be a better way; and as this recognition becomes more firmly established, it becomes a turning point.”

Escape from the egoic world : The Course explains that, given to the Holy Spirit, the separated ones become holy through the miracles that lead them back to God. The Holy Spirit transforms them into lessons of forgiveness and of awakening from the dream created by the ego’s wish. The process is affected through mediation between the two worlds. The Holy Spirit can do this because, on the one hand, He knows the truth of God, while on the other he can also see our world of illusions. He can teach us how to reverse our thinking and unlearn our mistakes. Remember that we are not victims of the world we see. Nothing holds us to this world except our wish to stay. In reality we cannot walk the world apart from God, so there must be the light of holiness in life. The light is what the universe longs to behold. Moreover, we do not actually need to understand this for the Holy Spirit to be effective. We merely have to “show a little willingness”.

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We should declare: “I am willing to follow the guide God has given me to find out what my own best interests are, recognizing that I cannot perceive them for myself.” As the ‘personality’ steps back the light in you steps forward and encompasses the world: “Because the quaint absurdity of this ‘personality’ is seen... So ask, who walks with me? This question should be asked a thousand times a day.”

Escape must involve giving up attack thoughts and no other way will suffice: “Herein lies salvation, and nowhere else.” Each grievance that we, the ‘personality’ holds is an attack thought, and grievances are always associated with something somebody else does. By contrast, forgiveness is natural and we offer it, not because forgiveness is being ‘good’ or ‘charitable’ - but because what we are seeing is not true! It is not the sacrifice of imagined righteous wrath for sins that are perceived to be real and need to be forgiven, for this sundering confirms illusion. True forgiveness is an earthly form of love, and salvation of the world depends on you who can forgive. This is our function here. Such forgiveness brings a deep relief to those who offer it: “It sees their nothingness... It does not heed the self-accusing shrieks of sinners mad with guilt, but looks on them with quiet eyes, and knows that what you think is not the truth.” It is through forgiveness that the thinking of the world will be reversed and peace attained. As we learn to recognize our perceptual errors, we also learn to look beyond them to the Self that God created in us and as us. We come to understand that our minds are part of God’s mind, and we begin to understand that the peace that this brings, comes from deep within ourselves.

How to forgive: The Course explains how to forgive, Select one who you think has offended: “Then think this of him, ‘What you are seeing now conceals from you one who can forgive all your sins; whose sacred hands can take away the nails that pierce your own’... Then ask this of him, that he may set you free: ‘Give me your blessing, holy son of God. I would behold you with the eyes of Christ, and see my perfect sinlessness in you’.”

Moreover, the salvation of the world depends on the acceptance of divinity - for it has never been denied. This is the part assigned to us by God. Arrogance is the insistence on the roles of ego’s world, the roles of doership: “It is not our idea (our role in salvation of the world) and the means are given us by which it will be perfectly accomplished... All false humility we lay aside as we listen to God’s voice reveal to us what we should do... Accept the plan you did not make... Judge not your value in it.” We must want only the peace of God and it will be given.

This, the Course maintains, is the way appointed for you by the Holy Spirit. Let grievance be replaced by miracles so that you can see the light in him shining beyond: “It is important to remember that miracles and vision necessarily go together. This needs repeating and frequent repeating. It is the central idea in your new thought system and the perception that it produces.” Forgiveness is something that must be practiced because it is alien to the world. To practice it consider what are believed to be sinful and evil acts perpetrated by others and ask, “Would I condemn myself for doing this?” And ask of the Holy Spirit, who understands the meaning of forgiveness: “Let me perceive forgiveness as it is.” Atonement can only be accepted by releasing the inner light. And in this liberation the enlightened ones walk the path that others walk, nor seem distinct from them, although they are indeed.

Since the separation, the ego has defended its position against atonement and has used a perceived need to protect the body to give it credence: “The many body fantasies in which minds engage arise from the distorted belief that the body can be used as a means of affecting atonement.” Perceiving the body as a temple is a step in the right direction but it does not negate the ego’s belief that atonement is possible only through the body. Rather it underlies the ego’s reverence for physical structures and symbols: “But the ‘temple’ is not a thing at all except that it refers to the inner Self - which un-does the separation and restores the wholeness of the mind. Its beauty cannot be seen with the physical eye but only with spiritual vision which cannot see error.”

Miracles and magic

The emphasis of the Course is on the healing of deluded minds in which “miracles are the means, atonement the principle, and healing the result.” Healing works through the correction of not-right-mindedness, which is the cause of sickness. In God’s creation there is no sickness, and this is the means whereby Jesus cured the leper - he saw no sickness there. Sickness arises because of belief in the ego-created perception of the world and the confusion of spiritual and bodily levels. Bodily and mental illness, on the other hand, represent a belief in ‘magic’ that is associated with the physical level - and with the belief that body and mind are the same (body and brain physiology). Thus, the effects of medicines, charms, incantations and other mind-created ‘cures’ are of the nature of spells.

Miracles arise from a miraculous state of mind acquired through correct perception, mediated by the Holy Spirit, and even without the knowledge of the miracle worker. They allow healing, because all minds have the power of creation. Thus the world of suffering, sickness and death that the ego has created, can be abolished. But before miracles can be affected by a miracle worker, it is essential that he is in his right mind himself, however briefly - to be able to restore right mindedness in someone else. Otherwise, to the ego, it may unwittingly foster the belief that release in wrong - a belief that is very prevalent in the egoic world and in religions.

The Course

The teachings of the Course take the form of short daily exercises that present parcels information that must be contemplated, and are designed to correct misunderstanding and reverse the mode of thinking of the egoic mind. That we learn to think like the world is a phase that everyone must go through, but, the Course says, “The sooner we perceive how questionable are its premises, how doubtful are its results, the sooner do we question its effects... Thus we need intervals each day in which the learning of the world becomes a transitory phase... Here you understand the Word, the name God has given you; the one Identity which all things share.”

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The thrust of the lessons is that everything we see in the material world is illusion created by the ego, because “nothing unreal exists.” The unending problems of the world are resolved by the understanding that the only real problem is not-right-mindedness - which perceives separation. And this, truly understood through vision, will bring salvation. The lessons repeatedly point out the divine nature of the separated ones, the Sons of God, and explain that nothing we see or think has any real meaning. They are interspersed with meditation and visualization instructions designed to produce true vision of the world that God created. Vision is not knowledge, but something that will enable us to realize divinity and live in a divine world that is written on the space vacated by the meaningless ego’s world.

**Practicalities**

The receiver of the Revelations, Helen Schumann, and the collaborator William Thetford, do not identify themselves as ‘authors’ in *A Course in Miracles*, for it comprises revelations of the Holy Spirit. Some other related materials are: *Supplements to A course in Miracles* - Psychotherapy and Prayer; *Gifts of God* - poems by Helen Schucman; *Journey Without Distance* - an account by Robert Skutch. Videotape and audio versions of the materials are also available from The Penguin Group. The *Course* in print and tape and other material, including interpretations of the principle themes of the Course by Dr. Kenneth Wapnick (who also leads workshops and seminars), is available from the Foundation for Inner Peace. PO Box 598, Mill Valley, CA 94942, USA.

A book by Marianne Williamson - *A Return to Love - Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles*, may also be of interest. It quotes: “Be not afraid, but may your world be lit by miracles.”

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**Appendix II**

**SCIENCE AND RELIGION**

Though hardly understood, the beginning of the 20th century saw the dawn of a new brand of science in which the mechanistic world of natural selection appears to exists only as a manifestation of consciousness. The new science indicates that the mind fashions the world and that the way in which the world presents itself is, in large part, the result of worldview and mindset. It is not something that is set in concrete for it can be changed in accordance with man’s thinking. Some have considered the mysterious findings of the new science to be close to the teachings of the sages, the prophets and the great mystical saints, but this analogy may be only so in a worldly sense - and to the degree that the world is considered to be real. What seems to be much more likely is that the mind that forms the world is but a manifestation (an object), of the great Consciousness, and notwithstanding worldly views on the man’s possible enhanced ability to control things, the world, the mystics tell us, is still not under the mind’s control; it is still what the sages have called *maya* - illusion.

**Technology, science and belief**

Since the establishment of the Church of Rome, religion in the West has always been at loggerheads with science. This reached boiling point in the 19th century with the Darwin/Wallace theory of evolution - which ridiculed established Church views on the creation of the world. There followed a revolution of atheism and agnosticism, fuelled by the technoscientific advances of that period - which continues today. Science and technology were perceived as a better bet than religion, but even so, the reaction to the Darwin/Wallace revelations was an example of the pendulum swinging too far in the direction of supposed rationalism. Although genetic variation and natural selection can hardly be refuted as a means of evolution between and within of species (as any dog breeder can confirm), more than a century of proselytising has failed to demonstrate any believable evolutionary connection between phyla, families and even genera. Here it almost looks as if the supreme creative mind had said ‘Let there be fishes’ and there were fishes; and after a respectful interval, ‘Let there be amphibians’ and so on. And after all, Darwin did call it the ‘Evolution of Species’. And Wallace, towards the end of his life, became strongly ‘mystical’ and had reservations about the way things were going.

While in the West comprehension of any compatibility between science and religion lay carefully hidden in the *Gnostic Gospels* and in the very few revelations of great saints like Meister Eckhart that were allowed to be aired, in the East, religious mysticism has always been accepted and understood as scientific. It is expressed in the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, in the great religious epics, and in Buddhist thought - (The Buddha said, “With your thoughts you make the world”). In the East the revelations to the reactions of natural selection were more balanced. Visionaries like Vivekananda (see Chapter 1) were quick to spot the flaws in the extrapolated versions of natural selection; and though little known, they strike at the roots of the post Darwin/Wallace materialistic theory of the modern world.

Vivekananda’s ideas on the nature of evolution and its relationships to natural selection, were that selection may well apply to the natural world of bodies - be they human, animal or vegetable, but they do not apply to the evolution of higher consciousness. The former conform to the world of maya, while the latter have something to do with a higher Reality - (From: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*). And even within the lower strata of physical and mental ‘evolution’, there is serious questioning as to whether the egoic mind/body aspect of man is really in charge and could
affect any process of evolution whatsoever. World events would suggest not, for here any ‘evolution’ would seem to be much more clearly related to the laws of causality - which are the laws of maya that seem to delude man almost completely.

Notwithstanding any prognostications on the Darwinian effect on the world views of science and religion, the real questioning on the nature of reality is now coming from the science of physics. Up to the beginning of the 20th century science conformed very well to the observations of the physical world. This aided in an unprecedented manner the world of invention, machines and technology, and cemented worldview into a materialistic whole. Science described with unerring precision the trajectory of cannon balls and satellites, the acceleration and deceleration of objects, the motion of celestial bodies, and all the inventions of the mechanical world. From the point of view of biology we had a world of life forms produced by the interactions of atoms, forces, electromagnetic waves and chemicals, that had produced man as the highest creation - and because of this the rest of the world was there for his exploitation, comfort and pleasure. This worldview existed, and continues to exist, in a three dimensional format that could be visualized by the mind. Physics, the ‘old physics’, (and chemistry), further cemented materialistic concepts by finding the building blocks of the universe in the form of atoms and molecules.

But from the beginning of the 20th century these ideas started to become shaky. Einstein combined time and space into a space/time continuum, and through deeper and deeper probing into the nature of sub-atomic particles, a ‘new physics’ was born, which began to question and challenge the very foundations of materialist belief. Things began, and continue, to look much more like what the seers and mystics had been saying all along. This Appendix considers some of these revelations and the questions that are arising from the ‘new physics’, and discusses some of the possible changes in worldview that they could engender.

Science and Eastern philosophy

The coming together of Western science and Eastern philosophy has the potential to bring about a turnaround in worldview that could enhance the wish for a more peaceful and happier world. And this may be something that has never been more urgent because science and technology have become exceedingly dangerous. Not too long ago Bertrand Russell, in Impact of Science on Society, wrote cogently as follows:

“The human race has survived hitherto owing to ignorance and incompetence; but given knowledge and competence combined with folly, there can be no certainty of survival. Knowledge is power for evil just as much as for good. It follows that unless men increase in wisdom, knowledge will only increase sorrow.”

For an increase in wisdom to happen it would first be necessary for man, particularly the youth, the workers and the leaders of the future, to be aware of the momentous scientific changes in the understanding of reality that are taking place - for at no time in human history, has man been so close to self-destruction. The only possible solution would lie in a deepening and strengthening of man’s moral and spiritual awareness. The dynamism of human evolution will need to demand that the education of man rises from ego-centeredness to ego-transcendence, and from knowledge to wisdom. Is this happening? Some feel it might be. The director for ‘echoliteracy’ at Berkeley, California, Fritjof Capra, in the preface of the second edition of his book, The Tao of Physics wrote:

“The 1960’s and 1970’s have generated a whole series of social movements which all seem to go in the same direction, the rising concern with ecology, with a strong interest in mysticism... Thus the new awareness of the profound harmony between the world view of modern physics and the views of Eastern mysticism now appear to be an integral part of a much larger cultural transformation, leading to the emergence of a new vision of reality that will require a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions and values.”

Modern environmental and ecological problems may be a reason for the growing disenchantment with technology, especially in the developed countries of the West; but pure science, with its passion for understanding and human welfare, one of the noble pursuits of man, also seems to be helping. The true aim of science is the study of nature and human experience objectively. Objectivity and precision are the important characteristics of the scientific temperament. Karl Pearson, in Grammar of Science, summed it up neatly:

The classification of facts, the recognition of sequence and relative significance, is the true function of science, and the habit of forming judgments upon these facts, unbiased by personal feelings, is the characteristic of what may be termed the scientific frame of mind.

If there is to be any reprise though, it is likely to come from countries like India, which have always demonstrated a love for the pursuit of truth in the physical sciences, religion and philosophy; and if they do not become too much under the sway of Western economics. They may yet hold the best chance for man to nurture the traditions of dharma and service in human endeavour. In this context the idea of an alloy of science and religion in the study of the inner world of man and molecules, would become a scientific discipline of far reaching significance. The ancient Indian scriptures of the Upanishads and the Gita, continue to foster ‘adhyatma vidya’ - the science of man in depth; the science and the technology of a comprehensive spirituality, which encompasses action and contemplation. Eastern philosophy sees no conflict between physical science and the science of spirituality.

The world in which we live today is a product of modern science and technology. Pure science tries to understand the truth about nature through dispassionate inquiry and technology, applied science, converts the numerous discoveries of science into inventions for the enrichment of our lives. That is, at any rate, the rosy view, and the saga of scientific discoveries and their exploitation is a fascinating one. Unfortunately, until very recently, this was not the scenario in the West. But now, with the advance of the ‘new physics’, the scene may be changing globally. Consider the potential
differences between the ‘old physics’ and the ‘new physics’ as they may impact on society.

**The impact of science on society**

The ‘old physics’: Galileo Galilei, the French mathematician Rene Descartes (mentioned in the Preface to this book), and Sir Issac Newton may be considered to be the architects of ‘Old physics’ and of the modern scientific age. ‘Old physics’ is often spoken of as Newtonian physics.

This physics (and chemistry) concerned itself with the study of natural phenomena in the material world. It studied the movement, composition and changes of matter and its components. In Newton’s age (the 1600’s), the atomic world was not even one of speculation. However, the idea that the atom (parmano in Sanskrit) as the indivisible building block of all matter is found in the *Vedas* - and also in Ancient Greek philosophy of around 400 BC.

But it was only at the turn of the 20th century, when the technology to observe the effects of sub-atomic activity were developed, that two important discoveries were made that paved the way for the rising of the ‘new physics’. Firstly it was discovered that the atom was not, as earlier imagined, indivisible, but was made up of yet smaller units - electrons, protons and neutrons. These were now called the elementary particles, and physicists believed that they had at last discovered the ultimate ‘building blocks’ of matter; and, therefore, saw the universe as an enormous ‘machine’ which man could, indeed had already to a large extent, control. The euphoria of this idea and the demonstrable wonders of science, through and between wars and revolutions, led to the consumer society of the second half of the 20th century. Newtonian physics had given rise to the worldview that man was not part of the great machine. Man was a special creation - of God, for those who could still see a place for him - who should exploit the great machine and make use of, in the most convenient way possible. The discoveries and inventions that were motivated by this mechanistic worldview are too many to contemplate but were in no small way related to a perceived need to defend and attack other men, and also insects and anything else that threatened his imagined well-being. But now, following this hypothesis, man had reached a pinnacle of self-indulgence that is bordering on self-destruction.

**The mechanistic worldview and modern society:** Man acts as he thinks (or appears to) and the mechanistic worldview has influenced and directed the development of the modern Western consumer society. Its culture, undiluted Hollywood and Disneylandism, and socio-political and economic development, can be seen to be a direct fall out of this worldview. (In the 1950’s Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck were used with great effectiveness to explain consumerism to the public).

Materialism and consumerism is the main product of technology but, as they say, too much of a good thing becomes bad. In developed countries this too much has reached alarming proportions. The drive to consume seems insatiable, grows daily, and is termed growth economics. When growth falters there are cries of despair, and in economics, in the ‘markets’, the words growth, productivity and consumption have become mantras. But, it now seems, development that is dependent on this economic growth, does not bring happiness. Ramesh Balsekar mentions an important world happiness survey carried out some years ago by the London School of Economics, in which countries like Bangladesh, India, Ghana and other poor nations, were much happier than developed countries. The USA was close to the most unhappy country in the world. In recent years ‘happiness’ has become a new subject for social science and is attracting the attention of governments, but now the concept of happiness seems to have become somewhat obscured. Happiness has, for the most part, become the perception of the satisfactoriness of material life - rather than something with a spiritual dimension. The *New Scientist* (4 October 2003) reported the results of a 1999-2001 World Values Survey, which was based on the present perceptions of physical / material satisfaction of the subjects interviewed (which could change from moment to moment), and a recollected assessment on the satisfactoriness of their lives. Quite understandably countries like Palestine, Iraq, Russia, Pakistan and Romania were very unhappy - although in the earlier survey, when the USSR was still intact, Romania was one of the happiest countries. Nevertheless, even in the 1999-2001 survey, some of the poorest countries (Nigeria, Mexico, Venezuela, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, Vietnam, and Colombia) were still the happiest, with the wealthy countries being in the middle. Now it seems that more and more surveys and in-depth studies are showing that the desire for and pursuit of material things, contrary to the established view, is a happiness suppressant.

When thinking of consumerism we need to realize that nature is the bank from which all the cheques are cashed; and nature, not growth, is faltering. What we consume today determines how we live tomorrow. So, what is the social and economic fall out of this zeal for growth and consumption going to be. How is the environment being affected? And how does the consumption pattern of the developed world affect the poorer countries? These are some of the issues that are being raised today. With regard to the first, it is clear that runaway growth and consumption over the last 50 years is putting strains on the environment never before seen. The major crises nudging humanity toward the outer limits of what the earth can stand are global warming and pollution, and the growing deterioration of commodities such as water, soil, forests, marine resources and biodiversity. With regard to atmospheric pollution it is now agreed by most environmental scientists that global warming is a real and serious matter. Yet, even though the use of renewable and non polluting energy sources is technologically simple and well understood (and actually cheaper), the use of fossil fuels continues and increases without adequate check. Why is this? Simply because fossil fuel is the raw material of very profitable business and the determination to stick to it is firmly entrenched.

And what about the poorer countries? There are individuals and pressure groups in developed countries that say that the development should stay with them - the un-developed countries should stay un-developed. Institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, and the way aid is directed from some donor countries,
have been instrumental in promoting this philosophy. But now the developing countries have gotten wise to it and will have none of it. The consumer virus has spread everywhere and, barring a major shift in worldview, we can only anticipate yet more strain on the environment; the undeveloped countries have a lot of catching-up to do. In 1998 the world’s private and public consumption expenditure was estimated at $24 trillion - six times that of 1950. And UNDP’s Human Development Report of 1998 showed that the inequalities are stark. Globally 20% of the world’s people in the wealthy developed countries (not just the fat cats) account for 86% of the total private consumption, while the poorest 20% accounts for a mere 1.3%.

We can read about numerous other manifestations of the social and cultural crisis facing Westernised countries and spreading across the globe in our daily newspapers. The decay of moral values has led to a permissive society, high rates of crime prevail and mental health has degenerated, while depression and stress-related diseases have increased. A survey carried out in the UK comparing mental health in 1950 and 2000, showed that people who were classified as seriously deranged in 1950, would have been considered normal in 2000.

At the same time, terrorism arising from inequality, exploitation and pre-emptive aggression, is spreading across the globe. The reason perhaps, at least as far as man is concerned, is this: We are still trying to apply the concepts of an outdated mechanistic worldview to a reality that can no longer be understood or combated in terms of these concepts. Today we live in a globally interconnected world in which biological, psychological, social, economic and environmental phenomena are all interdependent. To describe the world appropriately we need an ecological and holistic perspective which the mechanistic worldview does not offer. What we seem to need is a new vision of reality, a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions and values. This implies both a spiritual change and, from the point of view that can be highlighted by science, the changes that are already visible - the proof of a new reality. Whether these changes are destined to materialize is yet to be seen.

The ‘new physics’ and Eastern mysticism: The conflict between science and spirituality is being resolved by the startling discoveries of quantum physics, the ‘new physics’, on the nature of matter, and the role of ‘mind’ in the phenomenal universe. The discoveries of this physics now seem to accord closely with Sanatana Dharma, the eternal principles, values and injunctions revealed through the personal experience of the many mahatmas from Bharat (India)” - see Matruvani 15, October 2003. No 2. The Rishis even predicted accurately the age of the universe, now confirmed by science, by direct perception. But according to Eastern philosophy, the physical world, the world of matter, is finite, changeable, and therefore not real - it is maya or mithya. It is said: “Nothing real can be destroyed, and nothing unreal exists”. The only reality is Brahma - and all the various objects, animate and inanimate, that appear in the world, are interconnected - like beads on a string or knots in a net. They are all manifestations of the One and there is only the One, not two. (The meaning of advaita is ‘not two’). The physical world, including you and me, are but manifestations of Brahma. The Chandogya Upanishad expresses this concept as “Tat Tham Asi” - That Thou Art. How science has come to the same conclusion, is the story of the ‘new physics’.

The first three decades of the 20th century changed the whole situation of physics radically. Two separate developments, the Theory of Relativity and the discoveries of Quantum Mechanics, shattered all the principles of the Newtonian-based worldview. The notions of space and time, of elementary solid particles, the strictly causal nature of physical phenomena, and the idea of an objective description of nature, can not find acceptance in the ‘new physics’.

At the beginning of the modern era stand the intellectual feats of Albert Einstein. In two articles published in 1905, Einstein initiated two revolutionary trends of thought. One was the Special Theory of Relativity and the other was a new way of looking at electromagnetic radiation - which was to lay the foundations of Quantum theory, the theory of atomic phenomena. There was no linear flow of time as in the Newtonian model. For, example, two events seen as occurring simultaneously by one observer, may be seen as occurring in different sequences by other observers.

Relativity also stated that an object moving in space at velocities approaching the speed of light, would contract in size, and time, for that object, would pass slower relative to objects moving at a slower velocity. These discoveries called for a complete modification of the whole framework that was used to describe nature. The most important consequence of the modification was the realization that mass is nothing but a form of energy, and that the relation between the two is given by the equation Energy (E) = M (mass) times C squared (the square of the speed of light). Thus the changing mass that occurs when uranium 235 decays, and when it decays explosively if enough of it is put together, enabled man to make atomic bombs - and to blow up two whole cities in Japan.

As the study of the sub-atomic world became deeper, it became apparent that the nature of sub-atomic ‘particles’ or sub-atomic ‘waves’ was such that even Einstein would be confused. Such particles did not exist in the ordinary sense - like particles of dust, but were more like particles with a ‘tendency to exist’ - or there was a ‘probability’ that they may exist. Einstein could not accept the evidence that they were ‘probability waves’, and until his death he maintained that God doesn’t play dice - but God does. Quantum objects (and we shall see further on, possibly all objects) appear like particles or like energy waves, depending on the type of experiment being conducted by the observer, and the belief (the thought) that the observer has. The observer became an important link in the experiment and he was no longer an observer, he was a participator. Metaphysically it amounted to saying that we create certain properties because we choose to measure those properties and look for what we want to see. John Wheeler, a well known physicist at Princeton, wrote:

“May the universe in some strange sense be ‘brought into being’ by the participation of those who participate? The vital act is the act of participation. Participator is the incontrovertible new concept given by quantum mechanics. It strikes down the term ‘observer’ of classical theory, the man who stands behind the thick glass wall and watches what goes on without
taking part. It can’t be done, quantum mechanics says.”

The observer, according to quantum physics, cannot be objective because his thoughts, which motivated his act of observing, influence the outcome. By this time the language of the Eastern mystics and the physicists was becoming strikingly similar.

In 1927, physicists working with the ‘new physics’ met in Brussels to ask themselves the question: “What is it that quantum mechanics actually describes?” What they decided there became known as the Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum mechanics. The importance of the Copenhagen Interpretation lies in the fact that for the first time, scientists attempting to formulate a consistent physics, were forced, by their own findings, to acknowledge that a complete understanding of reality lies beyond the capabilities of rational thought. This is exactly what the Eastern scriptures proclaimed thousands of years ago. To experience reality, Brahman or Atman, or the Self, you have to go ‘beyond the mind’. And the cognisance of this has something to do with enlightenment. Experience alone, (not the experiencer and something) is true knowledge. All that the mind can ponder on is ideas about reality; and language can only describe aspects of experience, it cannot be experience.

Quantum objects appear to possess information and to act accordingly, and in this sense may be considered to be ‘organic’. Anything organic is living and therefore has ‘mind’ - so matter and mind are inseparable. The mind, or consciousness, pervades all matter, and this, in the semantics of Eastern philosophy, could be an aspect or manifestation of Brahman. Manifestation is used because what quantum physics exhibits is manifestation, not the ‘Absolute’ - it is more like maya.

Quantum mechanics, the Shrodinger wave equation, says that since what the ‘wave function’ describes is ‘idea-like’ and also ‘matter-like’, then physical reality (the universe) must be both ‘idea-like’ and ‘matter-like’. What we perceive as physical reality is our mental cognitive construction of it. In other words the universe cannot be what it appears to be, rather it is what the seers and rishis have always said, a projection of the mind. Henry Strapp, a physicist at Lawrence Laboratory, Berkeley, put it this way: “If the attitude of quantum mechanics is correct, in the strong sense that a description of sub-structure underlying experience, more complete than the one it provides, is not possible, then there is no substantive physical world - in the usual sense of the term. The conclusion here is not the weak conclusion that there may not be a substantive physical world; but rather that there definitely is not a substantive physical world.” Here we have a scientific and independent description of the Eastern concept of maya.

An end of linear time

The Rishis and all enlightened beings know that linear time of a past without beginning that stretches to an infinite future, is an illusion. The only real time is the moment now. That is, the past, present and future (so-to-speak) exist only in an infinite now. Eckhart Tolle said that everything that ever happened or will happen takes place in the moment now. And it is even incorrect to think of this as a ‘moment’, for a moment is also a parcel, albeit a very small one, of linear time. Infinity therefore, in so far as it can be understood by the rational mind, is the infinite now of no-time at all. And the same is true, in reality, of space - for space comes into existence only when there are two, and God, the Absolute, is only one.

Imponderable as this may be to the egoic human mind, it is nevertheless what quantum physics proves to be the truth. In 1982 the French physicist, Alain Aspect, and his co-workers, performed an experiment that questioned the veracity of space and time: by showing that objects (quantum objects in this instance) do have connections outside of space and time. In this experiment an atom emits two photons going in opposite directions at the speed of light. But somehow they are in contact with each other and affect each other without exchanging any signals whatsoever - instantaneously. This experiment contradicted earlier views that all objects would need to communicate through signals, because any such signals would have to travel greater than the speed of light if their movement was taking place in space and taking a finite time - which would be an Einsteinian impossibility. Aspect’s experiment showed that the connection between the particles must be recognized as transcendent to the concepts of space and time. The experiment gave rise among quantum physicists to the Bell’s Theorem.

Bell’s Theorem forces us to consider the universe not as a collection of physical objects, but rather as a complicated web of relationships between the various parts of a unified whole. A vital aspect of the enlightened state (and also sometimes as a transcendental experience from the ordinary human state), is the experience of an all-pervading unity. ‘This’ and ‘that’ are no longer separate entities. Everything is a manifestation of the of the ‘One - I Am That’. It is not possible to put into words the answer to the question: manifestation of what? - Because the ‘what’ is that which is beyond words and beyond space and time. Beyond all these lies the experience of ‘That Which Is’. This too can’t be understood with the ordinary mind, because any explanation would come from the world of time, and, as Nisargadatta said (Chapter 15), any explanations from the world of time are invalid.

Eckhart Tolle - see The Power of Now - described enlightenment as perceiving everything, even ordinary objects, as something pristine and ever new. He said, “Nothing is what it seems to be. The world that you see through the egoic mind may seem a very imperfect place, even a vale of tears; but whatever you perceive is only a kind of symbol, like an image in a dream. It is how your consciousness interprets the molecular energy dance of the universe.” Every molecule, every configuration of energy, knows each other and an effect on one resonates through the entire universe. Within this concept, miracles, things that are perceived impossible in the mechanistic universe, would be commonplace and normal.
A saintly scientist

Notwithstanding the advances of the new physics, the way in which the bewildering properties of sub-atomic quantum objects related to the material world, remained obscure until the revelations of a veritable saint among scientists became known. Until then, the question of forging a universal explanation was shunned by physicists. Physicists, like most other scientists, depend on universities, research institutes, and government and private commercial scientific laboratories, for their grants and jobs. These always have their eyes on the economic spin off of research and look for quick results: the publishing of papers, the lodging of patents and so on. Tackling the momentous task of explaining quantum physics in relation to the ordinary material world was regarded as too hard and amounting to professional suicide. Most quantum physicists still cling to the ideas of the ‘old physics’ - which is more immediately rewarding - and pay only lip service to the ‘new physics’. Then, appropriately perhaps, an Indian physicist, Dr. Amit Goswami, took on the task. How it came about followed on a revelation in thinking and was something like this (see What is Enlightenment Spring/Summer 2002, for a more complete review):

When Dr. Goswami was around 37 years old the world started to fall apart for him. He lost his grant, went through a divorce, and became very lonely. The enjoyment that he used to get from science just wasn’t there any more; but he was discovering a form of suffering that was to bring him to spirituality. He cognized that the material world, in which the brain with its brain chemicals was believed to be the highest form of development, and where brain pursuits and self gratification were the most exalted activities and rewards, had lost their meaning for him. Amit took to meditation, and from 1975 decided to investigate truth - through what he calls a mystical breakthrough. He went, with a spiritual-minded friend, to hear a talk by Krishnamurti (Chapter 5). The talk, of course, was excellent, and afterwards, over dinner, Amit started to discuss the problems of quantum theory and consciousness. The friend responded by saying, “Can consciousness be explained? You are putting on scientific blinders. Can’t you realize that consciousness is the ground of all being?” Something flipped for Amit and with this cognition, he said, “All the problems of quantum measurement theory, the measurement paradoxes, just melted away.” He realized that the quantum experiments show that when consciousness is taken as the ground of all being, the source so-to-speak, then the behaviour of objects can be understood - the ‘participator effect’ on the behaviour of quantum objects in particle physics, can be understood. This was a ground-breaking revelation.

Amit worked through all the maths relating to the behaviour of sub-atomic ‘objects’ and came up with what he called the “Physico-transcendent God Hypothesis”. Then a demonstration of this astounded scientific and religious communities by giving conclusive and irrefutable proof of the existence of ‘God’, or Consciousness, as the creator of the physical world. On January 1, 2000, scientists and religious leaders from all over the world converged on Oregon’s Institute of Theoretical Science, to witness the results of Amit’s painstakingly exacting calculations, through the “Quantum Divinity Wave Detection Experiment.” The New York Chronicle of Jan 1, 2000 reported thus: Minutes later Dr. Goswami shocked and amazed international scientific and religious communities by offering conclusive proof of the existence of God... Pope John Paul II immediately invited President Clinton and the Prime Ministers of the EEC nations, as well as the Dalai Lama and Muslim and Jewish leaders, to meet with him and discuss how best to implement the sweeping changes which Dr. Goswami’s discovery are sure to bring about.”

However, notwithstanding this demonstration and also incidentally, the verification of many things in the Bible, some religious leaders were put out. The evangelist Oral Roberts, an associate of Billy Graham, was quickly on the phone to God, who told him to tell that “neutron head” (Dr. Goswami) that he (God) was definitely not a wave function.

Dr. Goswami has now authored a number of books on the matter of the self-aware universe. - see The Quantum Physics of Soul and Spirit and The Visionary Window - A quantum Physicists Guide to Enlightenment. Even more books, some co-authored with Deepak Chopra, can be sourced on the Internet.

God or mind, or God and mind: God is known to be an enigma not understandable by the human mind, but some of the attributes of God can be explained. Here we must again turn to the Rishis, the enlightened ones, who tell us, without reference to quantum physics, that the world, made up of material and psychological things such as thoughts and emotions, cannot be possible without a belief in space and time - which are illusions. This is what one begins to perceive, the moment one is ready to be receptive to words which flow through one’s body from beyond the mind! Vijay Shankar (Ch. 21) points out that memory is no more than a thought from an illusional past occurring in the present, and the belief in our reality is also a thought occurring in the present. As such it provides no evidence for the reality of the past and of ‘time’.” (See - The Illusions of Life by Vijay Shankar). It is only when duality arises - when there is another, a manifestation, that the idea of time and space, as the space between them, even needs to arise. So if, in reality, consciousness is all there is, the enigma of space and time, and the material world, are just a concepts - illusions experienced in duality. This is what the seers have always maintained: The physical world is maya and is but a dream of the mind; with Consciousness being both the Absolute and the manifestations of the absolute in the form of the worlds.

In the present case of science and quantum physics, the ephemeral nature of the physical world has been demonstrated along with the need for consciousness to think it up. So which attribute of consciousness projects the world - the absolute of the manifested? The mind, the egoic mind, the sages tell us, also has the power of creation - which is the power of projecting illusory universes, albeit very convincing ones. The things that we cognise with the senses are all products of the egoic mind. And this power, they say, is derived from the Absolute, the Atman, or the Self, for the egoic mind is a ‘thought’ of the Self - a ‘thought’ of duality - as in a dream. And how can the dreamer know that they are not
real? The complexities of maya may be better understood through the observations and participations of scientists in the world of quantum physics, but they are presumably, for the most part at least, the understandings and perceptions of egoic minds rather than liberated ones. The Physico-Transcendent God Hypothesis must apply to the power of projection and the system of logic of the egoic mind, and therefore must be maya - illusion. And the enlightened tell us that the illusion is not that the world does not exist, the waves of interacting energy that form it and so on; but that it is ephemeral and ever changing - and therefore possessed of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and no-soul, Anicca-Dukkha-Anatta.

Are all objects quantum objects?
Science shows that material objects are not what they seem to be. Solid as they appear, they are almost only empty space. Rutherford showed in the early 1900’s that far from being hard and solid, atoms turned out to be vast regions of space in which extremely small ‘particles’ called electrons, moved around the nucleus, bound by electric forces. The diameter of an atom is about a hundred millionth of a centimeter and most of it is space. To visualize this, imagine an orange blown up to the size of the earth; the electrons of a such-expanded atom would then be the size of cherries. And if the atoms was blown up to the size of the dome of the Sistine Chapel or the Gole Gumbaz9, the nuclei would be the size of grains of salt. Thus the atoms that make up solid objects, as visualized by Rutherford, are mostly space.

Now, the study of sub-atomic particles reveals that atoms do not even exist in this sense but exhibit ‘tendencies to exist’; and only when ‘detected’ or cognized, do they exhibit the characteristics of worldly particles and behave according to the beliefs of the experimenter participators. So, we may ask, why do objects like cannon balls and rockets behave in the predictable way that they do? Perhaps it is because the world believes that this is the way they should behave and the mindset for cannon balls is very strong. It could be that only at the frontiers of knowledge do objects behave like sub-atomic particles; that is, when some totally new ‘knowledge’ is evolving. Rupert Sheldrake, in his book A New Science of Life, described many instances of new exploration where there appeared to be a progressive speeding up and solidification with the spread of the understanding, appreciation and knowledge of the thing or event. For example, if a researcher observed that a certain time was needed for rats to learn a maze, when other researchers repeated the experiment, with different sets of rats in physically different locations, the time taken for the rats to learn the maze would be significantly reduced. Something had happened; a pattern had been formed, and even though relatively few individuals were involved in comparison to worldview, the effect was nevertheless there. Another example was how long it took to learn typing. When the typewriter was invented more than a century ago it became fashionable for ladies to learn to type. Intelligent young women, many from upper-middle-class families, took ages to learn; but now, anyone can learn to type efficiently in a few weeks. This reduction of time also applied to inanimate things like crystals - that is, the ease and speed with which the crystallization of new chemicals, or newly discovered chemicals, took place. So was it the experimenter / participator’s ‘knowledge’ or expectation that was increasing in strength?

In the world, the pattern that establishes how most objects should behave has been set in concrete so-to-speak. But for new phenomena, it takes a little longer. At the time of publication of Sheldrake’s book, in the early 1980’s, it received short shrift from the scientific community and was branded “a book for burning” - the pattern had not yet set.

How miracles work: Quantum physics shows that time and space are illusions and its objects exist in a different reality to that of the worldview. Solid objects are not really solid and quantum objects exist in a reality without time. Now if all objects are ‘quantum objects’ instantly ‘in touch’ and there is no time, then all objects are one, and so also there is no space. To the sage, who understands this reality, miracles, even physical miracles - like appearing in two places at the same ‘time’ - are therefore possible by thought alone. A Course in Miracles talks of them being associated with the collapse of linear time - that is, a moving from worldly reality to quantum reality. And there are many recorded and verified instances of time collapsing. Colin Wilson (see The Book of Time), describes the example of a woman, who had recently had a traumatic experience, entering an old cathedral in England and seeing it in the configuration that it had in the 15th century. On a subsequent visit it had reverted to its 20th century condition, but investigation and reference to old documents, showed that time had indeed collapsed on her first visit. Looking further we may ask then how it is that the sun and planets are as they are, before present worldview was established - before Galileo, why was the world not flat if that is what man believed? Maybe it was but more likely it was round because the sun and moon were round. That the world was probably round in spite of man’s belief may be because man’s mind belongs only to a lower echelon of consciousness - at the most a mere ‘reflection’ or ‘thought’ of the Absolute. Such things as planets were perhaps created by a higher authority long before modern man came on the scene. Moreover, archaeology shows that great civilizations were present on the earth in even relatively recent times - the civilizations of the Rishis perhaps, before man of the dark ages came into existence. At this time, and this of course is just conjecture based on the Vedas, language was not necessary because everything was one. But much later, when society had declined, language became a necessary tool for communication, and so it was invented - the ancient languages of Pali and Sanskrit.

What the God Hypothesis could mean to the modern world
We may speculate on what effects the God Hypothesis may have on the world. Would the understanding that the

9 The giant mausoleum of Muhammad Adil Shah, the seventh ruler of the Adil Shah dynasty in Maharashtra, built in 1656.
physical world is ephemeral reduce the pursuit of pleasure, comfort, power and security - the root causes of all aggression? Not without a significant increase in enlightenment would be a reasonable answer. Would the knowledge that the God Hypothesis brings give veracity to the religions? Possibly, once the waves have subsided, for even the Western religions stand to gain in credibility. Thus, the description of creation of the world that appears in the Bible may be a more accurate account than the prognostications of ‘old physics’ - of the expanding universe of the Doppler effect, and the evidence of geology, astronomy and paleontology - which are all set in space and time. When all creation comes about through the thoughts of Consciousness, then God could truly create the world in 6 days - or 6 ages as has been mooted by some of the arbitrators between religion and science. In quantum physics, God would have created the world in six parcels of no-time. Let there be mud he would think, and there would instantaneously be mud. Let the mud separate into land and water, and so on. Religions could definitely gain status in the way that materialism gained status after Darwin. And because religions all promote dharmic behaviour, the world could become more peaceful.

Medical practice could also become more ethical and effective when it is realized that faith healing is real; that homeopathy is real; that miracles are true and can take place by mind power - even the power of egoic minds; and that advertising diseases significantly increases their incidence. Recently a French team was having extraordinary success with homeopathy, even though the ‘medicines’ were so diluted that, in fact, they were nothing but water and alcohol. (The numbers of dilutions were such that the probability of even one molecule of the active substance being there was remote). The medical community believed that there was trickery afoot and sponsored an investigation, offering a prize. One of the investigators was actually a stage magician. Initially they could find nothing wrong; but when the homeopaths and the workers were asked to perform without knowing which were the ‘medicines’ and which the placebos, the demonstrations failed. The scientific community took this as proof of trickery, but the real explanation is that mind power has to be focused in some direction. When the workers believed, and believed strongly - as was the case - then the demonstrations showed the expected results according to the direction of the belief - the workers became participators. Even so, the team was ridiculed and the ‘scientific’ conclusion was that they were all charlatans - worldview had prevailed.

But, the sages say, the egoic mind is not your friend. When cures for diseases are discovered, the mind thinks up new ones. Is this not what is happening today? As cures are found for old diseases, new ones spring up like mushrooms - this and that syndrome and many others, even perhaps AIDS. The enlightened say that the ego uses the body to keep the mind from God, which would mean its annihilation.

Self improvement guruism, definitely in the realm of ego, may also increase significantly. Such gurus already believe in the power of mind, even at the level of hyping up for sales and business success. But their belief is not really set in concrete - and does not have the seal of science - so naturally efficacy is variable. When these gurus find out more about quantum physics and spirituality, and this is already happening, their trade in self-improvement products and procedures may be greatly enhanced.

Would inequality be reduced? Not likely; religions have always been used as a political force to gain power, comfort and security for their functionaries and members. The new knowledge could be channeled to gain power and augment the pursuit of these commodities - that is, having more than others in a world of perceived limited resources. The powerful multinationals could engage rooms-full of psychics to bring down the share prices of competitors. And the knowledge that thought can be channeled to do things may simply add another weapon to the armories of aggression and competition - as the knowledge that energy equals mass multiplied by the square of the speed of light, enabled man to make bombs, blow up cities and pollute the environment - rather than led him towards enlightening thoughts of God.

Will the new knowledge bring happiness? An increase in material wealth can easily be envisaged as a result of the new knowledge, and perhaps also an increase in ‘peace’ may ensue; but will it bring more happiness? The answer must again be not without an increase in enlightenment. The egoic mind, whether it is in the religious mode or the techno scientific mode, is incapable of true happiness. Many of the really serious problems in the world come from religion, and material wealth does not bring peace of mind and happiness. Reference has already been made to two world happiness surveys, which showed that, above very low levels of wealth needed to provide food and shelter, there was an inverse relationship between wealth and happiness. Comfort and pleasure are not peace and happiness. Wealth brings a sense of insecurity, and indulgence exacerbates boredom, which is one of the characteristics of the egoic mind.

A higher consciousness: To look beyond the revelations of science as it stands today we again have to turn to the sages. They maintain that there is a Higher Consciousness that is running everything - above and beyond the consciousness that affects the world and the universe. This Higher Consciousness is the true nature of man, which he has forgotten, and consequently to return to this should be the true goal of man in the world. The enlightened say that what will happen or not happen is in the hands of this Higher Consciousness, which we may call God for want of a better word; but from man’s perspective this matter can be nothing more than conjecture, based perhaps on the scriptures. It may be that the new revelations of science will cause the consciousness of man to accelerate in a positive direction and give rise to a better world; or it may simply mean that the end of the world, the time of dissolution or correction, that is predicted in the Scriptures, is approaching.
POSTSCRIPT - A SUMMARY

A band of minstrels suddenly appears, dances and sings for a while, and then just as suddenly it departs. This was how Christopher Isherwood described the “phenomenon” of Ramakrishna and his disciples, and it could well be an apt description of all the great enlightened masters - they appear, dance and sing for a while, and then disappear. And what they leave behind, though it may become an organization, a sect or even a religion, is but a pale reflection of what they were in life. Isherwood speculated that if God does actually visit the world in human form from time to time, then such are the forms he would assume.

So how should we interpret these phenomena, how react? Are the enlightened and the spiritually exalted something irrelevant and quite out of line with everyday experience? The latter they certainly are; but should their presence be seen as an opportunity to seek the true meaning of life? This is a good question but the answer may not be a matter of personal choice. To seek the truth may be something that happens for some and does not happen for others - a matter, perhaps, of destiny or karma. In the world very few would regard such individuals as the means to liberation, even if they were closely associated with them. Even the ‘spiritual’ new-agers are much more interested in things like seeing auras, crystal power, awakening the kundalini and so on - and such things are very much in the world of maya. Almost all the world believes in the mayic things of the body and the mind - those phenomena that Robert Adams said “are not your friends.” And liberation, if it is to be attained, can only be through the agency of the liberated.

The choice - the world or God

On the whole we pay scant attention to words of wisdom that come from the enlightened masters. Rather we believe our teachers, our friends and peers, our leaders, scientists, thinkers and philosophers, and the religious pundits of the day. Yet they always mislead us because they, themselves, only understand the world of maya. Today man is bombarded mercilessly with maya through the media and it seems that the more the world ‘develops’ the more it becomes confused, stressed and unhappy; and, quantitatively speaking, the more dangerous and the more unequal. Unlike the experts, the masters recognize the un-satisfactoriness of the mayic worldview, and even amidst the chaos they see the hand of God.

Ego’s world: The enlightened tell us that the egoic mind creates the things of the world - and even science is beginning to understand this. Amma, Chapter 19, has said that the mind has four functions: storage of memories (chit), doubting and questioning (manas), determining (buddhi), and masking (ahamkara - the ego). The ego, she says, is actually a product of the mind that exists because we identify with it and attach importance to thoughts produced from past memories. Its two principle powers are veiling and projecting - even projecting the body. The ego veils the true nature of phenomena and then misinterprets them as a dream. Amma says, “We are identified with an ancient dream that is projected by thoughts of past experiences - and we believe the dream is real.” And when it is said that the world is an illusion, what is meant is that the world is temporary and bound in time; and time is the illusion in which the ‘dream’ is taking place. But to the ego it is populated by figures that seem to interact. They judge, trade grievances and guilt, and they always attack - for ‘defense’ is also a form of attack. And even under what appears to be the best and most favourable circumstances, there is still always a concept of lack and need which must be fought over.

Further, the ego’s preoccupation with past thoughts is the source of boredom in the world. The egoic mind needs constant stimulation to battle boredom. Clearly if thoughts are endlessly churned and rearranged they must become boring - and it is only when they cease to be perceived that boredom can cease. But in Western psychology, which is rooted in the ego’s world, these thoughts are highly esteemed. It has been estimated, with some feeling of awe, that a human being can experience around ninety thousand thoughts a day - and these are the smorgasbord from which the ego draws its sustenance, even though the elements of the smorgasbord quickly become boring. With such a scenario it is not surprising that the nature of the world is always chaotic to those bound in its illusion. In the state of limited consciousness of the vast majority of mankind, we are compelled to recreate situations in a way that is virtually choiceless. In short, we behave much more like mind/body organisms than beings that are in charge of their own destiny. But people cling to maya because of its attractions, which they understand. To seek something else is to leap into the unknown, and for the vast majority of mankind this is just not an option; and even for the few that would consider it, a guide is needed to embark on such a fundamental journey. And such a guide must have gone beyond the common mind of mankind - where things are seen exactly as they are, without any reference to memory. In this book the authors have tried, with a minimum of commentary, to give sketches of individuals who’s consciousness, they believe, has gone beyond the egoic mind; in the parlance of the new-age spirituality, they are enlightened.

What the enlightened see: Enlightened individuals, who have shed the egocentric ‘personality’ (see below) - all say that the apparent insanity of the world is simply the result of a lack of awareness of the truth of God’s plan and of our part in it. In reality the world is a marvelous spectacle created by God, and although its misery seems real enough it does not actually happen; rather it appears to happen in the illusion of time. The beatific vision is glorious and suffused with the divine bliss of God’s love and there is “peace beyond understanding”; worldly dramas then are of little significance. And
that the enlightened do, indeed, see the world this way is evidenced by their own lives. Many of the individuals considered here did not have an easy life, yet they saw a world of divine perfection. For example, when Anandamayi Ma was asked by delegates of the Indian Philosophical Congress in 1929: “If the human character changes and everybody becomes unselfish, will the world then become perfect?” - She at once answered, “But, such it is already!” The ‘suffering’ that saints appear to endure, and this applies equally to the enlightened who would not consider themselves to be saints, does not prevent them from being divinely happy. Probably the most extreme and best known case of ‘suffering’ in such a person (not yet an official saint) is seen with Theresa Neumann, a German woman who lived through the first half of the twentieth century. Her case is well known and the facts surrounding her ‘suffering’ are extensively documented.\(^\text{10}\) Her particular form of suffering was to re-live the crucifixion of Jesus every Friday for a large part of her life. The stigmata, Christ’s wounds, would appear on her body and she would bleed profusely; and she would also suffer the mental torments of Christ. Moreover, her life during this period of more than 40 years, was a living demonstration of the truth of miracles for she lived on no more than one communion wafer (which would mysteriously dematerialise on her tongue) and a sip of communion wine - yet this absence of eating was accompanied by an actual slow increase in weight reaching 215 pounds towards the end of her life. During this long period Therese slept only 2 to 3 hours a week, worked constantly, but was always exuding joy and happiness. Thus it is a mistaken, principally Western, view that suggests that saints live miserable lives of abstention and sacrifice and await their rewards in heaven. Quite to the contrary, saints live divine lives of peace and happiness, interspersed with periods of bliss, in this very world. Reading the foregoing chapters will indicate that, in every case, the state of enlightenment bought about an indifference to personal physical suffering and hardship, and engendered a total harmony with the unicity of life.

Because such a state of awareness cannot actually be perceived by the unenlightened mind, it has usually been described in terms of what it is not: ‘Peace beyond understanding’ is a good example; but sometimes also more directly: Eckhart Tolle said, “The soft luminosity filtering through the curtains was love itself.. Everything was fresh and pristine, as if it had just come into existence.” Ramakrishna said: “With the blue mountain for her ink, let the goddess Sarada describe your greatness.. She could not. Oh great Lord God - How can I tell them of your glory?” And Anandamayi Ma said, “I find one vast garden spread over all the universe. All plants, human beings, higher mind-bodies, are about in this garden.. Their presence and variety give me great delight.” These are probably some of the best explanations that we are ever likely to get from the mouths of enlightened individuals.

Most of the world-bound would wonder how someone like Mother Teresa could spend a large part of her life in poverty helping the destitute and dying from the slums and streets of Calcutta. “Such sacrifice,” they would say, “I couldn’t do that - I like my comforts too much.” They mull over how she lived and, in religious circles, assess what she has done. Should she have been declared a saint? What ‘real’ miracles did she do? And some find fault - this or that was wrong, she did not agree with birth control - and so on. But what they miss is that this person, speaking of the love of God in her slow guttural voice, was so absorbed in its dislocating power that the world of the ego disappeared into meaningless nothingness. The reward far exceeds anything an ego-powered worldly life can possibly offer; far more than the sanitized Disneyland world can conspire to create.

**Some explanations - the world and liberation**

As the world and the concept of liberation are primal enigmas, how can such things - which cannot be grasped by the worldly mind, be explained? Liberation (or enlightenment) cannot be explained simply because it is concealed by the ego and the phenomena of maya - which are based on personal vanity and worldly logic, in a vortex of causality. Yet some explanations can at least be contemplated, and in spite of the ego’s best efforts to isolate its creations, the mind can never be entirely removed from the truth. There is always a hint of recognition, usually ignored, that has been described as the highest form of thinking that the ego is capable of. And it can be perceived momentarily even by the most worldly individuals. It could be in response to the wonders of creation, to the words or presence of an enlightened being, or to music, art or poetry. It generates occasional feelings of love, compassion and forgiveness, which may be evidenced by tears, goose bumps, and occasionally by the hair standing on end. Moreover, the great beings considered in this book have given many clues to the enigma of liberation in life, and many guidelines towards its attainment. These are some of them:

**Consciousness and cosmology:** The enlightened tell us that Consciousness is all that there is. So how does this relate to the worship of deities to gain benefits in a dualistic world? An understanding of the meaning of worship lies in the 1000 names of God, the *Sri Lalita Sahasranama*. A Commentary by Narayana Menon explains thus.\(^\text{11}\) The 1000 names (attributes) are addressed to the Divine Mother who, the Commentary says, is the same as Consciousness and is the ultimate Source. At the simple level of ordinary worshipers it is the visualization of worship of the Mother - through an

\(^{10}\) Yogananda (Ch. 6) devotes a Chapter to Therese Neumann in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, as does Timothy Conway in *Women of Power and Grace*. Therese Neumann’s suffering was often undertaken to relieve the suffering of others, as was the case of Christ. Timothy Conway writes: “During her reliving of Jesus’ Passion, Therese would experience lucid visions of his suffering and death (and) the symptoms in her body would appear and disappear suddenly, defying etiological pattern... (yet) In spite of all this suffering... Therese was a most happy, joyous and unpretentious woman, with merry eyes, a childlike innocence and a quick sense of humour.”

\(^{11}\) The sacred *Sri Lalita Sahasranama* is part of the second canto of the *Brahmanda Purana*. The commentary explains that it is a mantra of secret import, only to be given to sincere devotees of the Divine Mother.
idol for example, and the chanting her praises. At the intellectual level of a Jnani it is the acknowledgment of and aspiration for non-dual Consciousness. In the *Sahasranama*, verses 894 and 895 are the mantras ‘Ayonih’ and ‘Yoni nilaya’. In cosmology yoni means ‘origin’ and Ayonih means: “She who is without origin.” If She has no origin she also has no end - i.e. is timeless, and “Even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva arise, exist and perish in Her.” Verse 895, *Yoni nilaya* further means “She who is the seat of all origins.” This, the Commentary says, means that that Devi, as parashakti, is the One who is the source even for the Original Cause, and the support even of the creator Brahma. (From the standpoint of yoga the verse also means: “She who dwells in the form of the Bindu in the triangle of the Srichakra - see Cover of this book). Krishnamurti (Chapter 5), in his meditations said that such must in no way be confused with the concept of the “gods” of religions: ’It is none of these things. Desire cannot possibly reach it, words cannot fathom it, nor can the string of thought wind around it... The whole universe is in it, measureless to man. Krishnamurti had the perception that there is nothing beyond this: “This is the ultimate, the beginning and the ending and the absolute. There is only a sense of incredible vastness and immense beauty.”

Thus there is no difference between the explanations of Jnanis like Nisargadatta and the meaning of the ancient hymn of the *Sahasranama*. But in the worship of the Divine Mother, Amma explained that there is room for all to participate to the level of their own understanding, “without any notion of compromise”. In this we see that the ancient scriptures are not, as is usually perceived by the worldly knowledgeable, a lot of mythological nonsense, but that they have deep meaning, far deeper than the simple interpretation given here, that speaks of the essence of the origin of everything.

**The different states of consciousness:** One of the best explanations of the different states of consciousness was given by Nisargadatta Maharaj. He said that although it is not really like this (because any explanation that can be understood comes from the world of time), we can think of consciousness as existing in three modes: the Supreme Absolute, totally beyond worldly understanding, the enlightened state of the beatific vision, and the deluded state of egocentric vision. This latter is the state of consciousness of almost all of mankind and it is the state of being an ego-bound ‘personality’ living in duality. The ‘personality’ - which did not exist before birth, learns to be a personality by association with the creations of the ego’s mayic world. Nisargadatta called maya the “magnificent fraud” - because almost everyone is fooled by it. But in spite of the apparent allure, it is a sad and miserable state dominated mostly by suffering. For the poor and impoverished the suffering is mostly physical, and for the wealthy, mostly mental. He explained that all the “appearances”, in the form of body/mind ‘personalities’, are time-bound manifestations of the Supreme Consciousness - like waves and ripples on the sea. They exist only for what may range from a few hours for an insect or a bacterium, to aeons for Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. And they are all ‘objects’ of the witnessing consciousness that have no volition of their own - although they believe that they are subjects and the doers of actions, interacting with others who are perceived as objects. And, Nisargadatta said, all “knowledge”, as perceived by the intellect, including the wonderfully detailed knowledge of philosophers and thinkers, is a form of ignorance - because it is the knowledge of an ‘appearance’ which is only an ‘object’ of consciousness.

**Buddhism does not believe in God:** Maybe so, because God is a very mysterious thing that appears in many forms. The Buddha certainly recognized the deities but said they were of no significance because they belonged in the realm of maya. The personal ‘God’ of the egoic mind is also something that belongs to maya. But of Consciousness, “All that there IS” - there can be no doubt. Enlightenment relates to the perception of Consciousness and it doesn’t matter if we want to call it God or not. Certainly Buddhists believe in Consciousness and enlightenment. These are Buddhist and Hindu descriptions of the elusive enigma of God which, to use a neutral phrase, we can call the ‘Primal Absolute’.12 The Buddha described it thus: “Where water, earth, heat and wind find no footing, there no stars gleam, no sun is made visible, there no moon is found; when the sage, the brahmin, himself in wisdom knows this place he is freed from the form and formless realms; from suffering and opposites.” And this is how the Brahmins describe the absolute, Brahman: “In the highest golden sheath is Brahman, stainless. without parts; Pure it is, the light of lights. This is what the knowers of the Self know. The sun shines not there, nor the moon and stars, these lightings shine not, where than could this fire be? His shining illumines all this world. Brahman verily, is this deathless.”

**The unsatisfactoriness of worldly life:** The sages recognised the hand of God even in the apparent chaos of the world. The Buddha became just such a great enlightened master. He studied worldly life and concluded that it was unsatisfactory; it had impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and no-soul - Anicca-Dukkha-Anatta - and it always ended in misery. This was the ‘First Noble Truth’ and as he found no answers in established religion nor in the distractions of worldly life, he set out to find the cure for the dilemma. He first went to the forest and became a renunciate but no answer came. Then he heard a passing musician say, “The instrument should be tuned not too tightly and not too loosely, or it will not play”. Through this comment the Buddha discovered the ‘Middle Way’ - the exact mid-line between all pairs of opposites. It was not simply the notion of being reasonable and striking a balance, though it was that too - it was a divine intuition of deep profundity, an expression of no-time or the moment ‘Now’ - the exact midpoint between past and future. This was the precursor of liberation and the basis of ‘Right View’ - the first injunction of the ‘Eight-fold Noble Path’. And it was in pursuing the middle way that the Buddha discovered the other noble truths and the means of escape from misery: That the cause of misery is desire, attachment and aversion; that there is a way of escape; and the way is to follow the

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12 Adapted from *What is Enlightenment*, Issue 14, 1998. The Buddha’s quotation is from the *Udana* and the description of Brahmam is from the *Mundaka Upanishad.*
‘Path’ - to follow the Dhamma (the liberating law enunciated by the Buddha) and to live dharmically in recognition of the impermanence of the world.

**Liberation is inward, not outward:** All enlightened spiritual teachers say that liberation involves an inward journey. It is the discovery of what we really are as a part of the absolute - as union in God. We are not the busy ‘personality’ that is so concerned with matters of the world. This has to go - to die - because liberation does not lie in the world or in worldly pursuits. Such activities draw the mind outwards and are counter to the pursuit of freedom. And it is not the ‘personality’ that becomes liberated - rather it is its dissolution that allows liberation to simply be. This is why spiritual practices (see further on) are mostly about avoiding the world and negating the ego’s attachment to it; not because God is a mealy-mouthed, sombre entity that doesn’t want anyone to have fun, but because pursuing worldly matters impedes the inward journey, causes misery and negates happiness. It is only in liberation that there is any real fun.

**In liberation there is oneness:** Many instances have been given of the dissolution of duality: Swami Prabhavananda (Chapter 1) spoke of Brahmananda, Vivekananda, the Holy Mother and Ramakrishna saying “They are all the same.” Rama Tirtha said: “The whole universe serves me as this body. I shine in the lightning and roar in the thunder. I flutter in the leaves - I am in all.” Bhagavan Nityananda used to say, “This one is everything.” Once when a photographer asked if he could take a picture, he replied, “Take a picture of the world - This one is the world - Is there any place where I don’t exist? In everything there is a glimpse of me.” Krishnamurti said, “The tender blade of grass was my very being... The birds, the dust, and the very noise, were part of me.” One man even felt he had become a drum, and a piano - a subtle change from listening to being took place, as if on the flicking of a switch. Anandamayi Ma talked of how everything is connected, and Amma sees herself in everyone and everything. Bahi Sahib spoke of union of the disciple with the master, and the master’s master, back to the Prophet, not as the man, but as the pathway to God. Papaji said: “Let us be one. You will see your own face in everything. You can speak to plants. You can speak to rocks, and you are the hardness of rock itself. You are the twittering of birds. You have to see: You are the shining of the stars.”

Nisargadatta said, “From the highest point of view the world has no cause, yet everything is interlinked. Things just happen. There is no separation, we are not separate selves. There is only one true Self, the Supreme Reality, in which the personal and impersonal are one.” And Robert Adams said, “The light was one - it was not the body and the light, and it expanded through the universe which he could feel as himself. The light was ineffable, indescribable, bliss.” These are a few examples of explanations of the oneness.

**Say yes to life - what is, is God:** The world has to have opposites, past and future, good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant and so on. This is the nature of the world, and if it was not like this it would simply disappear because everyone and everything would be enlightened. Within the world the liberated see God in everything and love everything, and for liberation it is essential to see everything as God - not just those things that are perceived as pleasant. Does this seem absurd? Maybe, but nevertheless it is so. Byron Katie said of the liberated ‘Self’: “It was so delighted! It was intoxicated with joy! There was nothing separate, nothing unaccepting to it; everything was its very own self.” And for this to be, it is first necessary to distinguish the Truth from imaginings of the mind; all suffering is caused by believing or wishing that things were different from Reality. Krishnamurti talked about love as the acceptance of sorrow. He said, “When there is unacceptance there is no love. When you are suffering, concerned with your own suffering, how can there be love?... So what is sorrow? Is sorrow self pity? .. Is sorrow brought about by loneliness - feeling desperately alone, isolated? ... Can we look at sorrow as it actually is in us, and remain with it, hold it, never escape from it? Sorrow is not different from the one who suffers. The person who suffers wants to run away escape, do all kind of things. But to look at it you look as a child, a beautiful child, to hold it, never escape from it - then you will see for yourself, if you really look deeply, that there is an end to sorrow. And when there is an end to sorrow there is passion; not lust, not sensory stimulation, but passion”. Mother Teresa was talking about this when she said, “The poor, the sick, the mental: are Jesus - that’s what he said, in them you will find the Lord”.

God’s trump card is Love, but, as indicated before, God’s Love is not the same as worldly love. It will tear you apart - the egoic personality that is. The poet sang: If I knew how painful Love is, I would have stood at the gate of Love and cried, “Keep away, keep away”. But God’s Love is the only thing that can stand for eternity. Ramakrishna visualized God, the Source as a beautiful woman giving birth to the universe, and then devouring it in the form of a sweet golden child. In this kind of Love how can there be anything that cannot be forgiven?

Buddhists eliminate opposites by seeing everything of the world as impermanent, and through this they attain a state of peace in which everything is perfect. Ajahn Chah put it this way: “It’s very important to know the mind and senses well. Know how they come and go, how they arise and pass away. Understand this thoroughly! .. If you know these things are impermanent, bound up with suffering and that none of it is you, then you would be crazy to go after them! .. Even though they may seem worth going after, really they are not... Why do you want them when their nature is pain and suffering? It’s not ours, there is no egoic self, no ‘personality’... If there is no me and you, there is nothing belonging to us. Those who really see this have a gentle restrained manner... No matter what arises, they will remain firm and unshakable.”

**We are not the doers and the thinkers:** There is a subtle connection between accepting everything that comes our way, and not being the doers of the world. Enlightened spiritual teachers say that what happens in the world is not under our control. The ‘personalities’ think they think and plan and act but they are actually being thought and are acting out pre-ordained scenarios. Probably the greatest misconception that was ever perceived was that of Rene Descartes, the father of modern Western philosophy, who said: “I think therefore I exist”. Correctly he should have said: “Because I think
I think, I am actually deluded!” Does this seem strange? Maybe, but God is strange to the worldly mind, and the laws of the universe are even stranger - ask any quantum physicist. The philosophers and thinkers may be wonderfully clever but as Satyam Nadeen (Chapter 24) might say, “They don’t know squat.” When things go as the ego thinks they should go, we think it is because of what we have planned and caused to happen, but when they don’t we blame others or, if religious, cry out to God to remedy matters.

**What happens when we die:** The sages say that if we have not attained enlightenment, we are bound in the worlds of karma and the body will reincarnate. But will the mind reincarnate? Some of it will because the impressions accumulated in life will be in the subtle body as a kind of cloud of memories, habits, tendencies, likes and dislikes - the vasanas, and even special talents and cultural tendencies, samsaras. The reincarnation will take a form determined by these, in a world appropriate to their nature. But the new ‘personality’ will not, except in rare cases, remember any particular thing, event or person. Some of the ‘personalities’ of this world like to ‘regress’ and see themselves as princesses, gladiators and important individuals of earlier incarnations but, for the most part, this is just the ego’s dreaming.

Ramana Maharshi explained that at the time of death there may be a tussle between the old body and a new one if the transfer is to be immediate, because the dying person thinks he is the body and is attached to the body: “This will be evidenced by the heavy breathing of the dying person and violent spasms - that indicate lingering attachment to the dying body - Then the mind, attaches itself to the new body. Others, who do not reincarnate immediately, may have their innings in other worlds in subtle bodies and ultimately come back to the world to go through their quota of unfinished karma.” Ramana said that in the realm of karma it is essentially the body that reincarnates. The enlightened understand that they are not the body - so the enlightened do not reincarnate. However, as Nisargadatta said, “There is an interdependent relationship of the ‘personalities’ with consciousness - the relationship itself. And this is the proof of the basic identity with the Absolute. ‘Reality,” Nisargadatta said, “Does not die - and life is never so alive as after death.” That is, until rebirth and the scenario of living out unfinished karma takes place.

**The fate of the personality:** The personality, the enlightened tell us, is something that is moulded by the vasanas and samsaras from previous incarnations and from the experiences it encounters in the present world. It is simple when it is a baby but pretty soon the personality starts to make its appearance: Isn’t he cute we say... He likes this... He doesn’t like that, and so on. Slowly the personality becomes more and more complex as it takes its place in the magick dream of the world. In accordance with its tendencies it discovers how to put on masks in relationships with other personalities. And because it is bound in duality the best it can achieve in unity has been called bonding. Fragile bonds are formed with peers and partners, between parents and children, and within clans, businesses, religions, races, nations and so on. Their bonding and their altercations become the stuff of novels, soap operas, newsreels, documentaries, and of wars and history.

Then, as time goes on, the personality starts to experience a reversal of growth and development; aches and pains appear, wrinkles, the flesh sags, loss of vigour and mental ability take place, and if it doesn’t die early of some accident or disease, senility and dementia come about as a prelude to death. Poor old Fred we say, can’t even remember his name. Naturally, the ego personality gets very disturbed by the degenerative processes preceding death and refuses to think about them. Those of us who have to care for them and who have not yet reached the stage of degeneration ourselves, are even more disturbed - for we see the fate that is in store for us. Yet, in most instances, they do little other than try to keep up the facade of worldly life. They sit the old biddies in front of TV sets, feed them, have parties and give them hairdos. And all the doctors, psychologists and priests can’t help because, wonderfully clever though they may be, they know only about maya. Help can only be obtained from an enlightened individual - and such are, for the most part, this is just the ego’s dreaming.

We may feel that something is wrong, that God screwed up, but God did not. The world is just the result of thoughts of a thought that originated in the Atman. The thought believed it could run things better than God. It would judge ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and dispense reward and punishment. So God said okay, have a go: this is what it will be like - and created the scenario of duality, set in time and for a time, and complete with material things and bodies that can interact with each other. The Sri Lalita Sahasranama says the same thing: The Divine Mother, Consciousness, creates illusion that even deludes Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and the Sages with Mahamaya, making them victims of anxiety; but it is the same Devi that: “Finally lifts the Jiva (the soul in duality) up from the darkness of illusion and immerses it in the ocean of bliss. The Jiva’s parabhdha karma is the deciding factor in both cases.” This then supplies the answer to one of the most perplexing questions: How a merciful God could have allowed the suffering caused by heinous acts such as rape, pedophilia, war, and old age, disease and so on. Duality, man’s judging of opposites, works on causality - ‘a tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye’; and we can’t see the connections between actions and happenings because of their complexity and separation in time, even incarnations. All the aberrations of the world are created in this duality, and ignorance of this

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And it has not changed significantly today; death still occurs and even more intense suffering than death. In the world it is even yourself, what is the use of trying to understand the world... He bears the burden of the world, not you. But as you are, where a benevolent regard (for man) came in, replied thus: “There is One who governs the world. Without understanding vengeance - and this vengeance is the enemy of liberation. So is the world.. (So) First find out the truth behind yourself; then you will be in a better position to understand the truth behind the world, of which you yourself are a part.”

The enlightened approach to suffering: The enlightened see things differently, even though they also suffer the same physical traumas, and the reason for this is Love, with a capital ‘L’ - which could be called God’s trump card. Nisargadatta put it this way: “When the Atman is revealed, that inclusive mind is love in action. It creates an abyss and the heart crosses it: “It becomes a question of love seeking expression and meeting with obstacles - and becoming ultimately victorious.” This is why suffering, poverty, abuse and so on, and the witnessing of them, have a role - they are the catalysts for love to become. In the modern-times causal vortex of war and hate in America, Europe, the Middle East, the case of Etty can be mentioned. She was a young Jewish woman who lived through the German occupation of Holland and was finally put to death - although she could have escaped. She could see no evil in the German guards and in the excesses of the occupiers; it was all nothing compared to the “glory within” - see Bibliography. And some survivors of those conflicts where death was almost certain - Dunkirk, D-day, remember a bonding and a feeling of love, even for the enemy, that was quite extraordinary. The only explanation is that, under the circumstances of almost-certain death, the ego had simply given up.

Robert Adams said that through karma, the consequence of causality, we are on this world to go through certain experiences, and the body is a necessary instrument for experiencing. We should accept this just as it is. There is no need for pujas, adjusting planetary influences - these are for the worldly. The sincere spiritual seeker just accepts.

The enlightened always give advice to those trapped in duality. The words of a realized master never miss their purpose. In countering suffering within families, in a period when the death of children was common, Ramakrishna said that it was necessary to render everything to God, otherwise it will not be possible to endure tragedy when it strikes. And it has not changed significantly today; death still occurs and even more intense suffering than death. In the world it is quite unavoidable - but man has forgotten God and therefore fumes and rages with anger and remorse and calls for vengeance - and this vengeance is the enemy of liberation.

Ramana Maharshi, when questioned on this matter by Paul Brunton - who claimed that it was difficult to see where a benevolent regard (for man) came in, replied thus: “There is One who governs the world. Without understanding even yourself, what is the use of trying to understand the world.. He bears the burden of the world, not you. But as you are, so is the world.. (So) First find out the truth behind yourself; then you will be in a better position to understand the truth behind the world, of which you yourself are a part.”

Even though the Bible portrays a vengeful god bent on punishment, in expelling man from Eden (for eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ - which he should not have done) - this notion, though much used as ammunition by the Church, is wrong; it is a notion that is ego-created. The Bible also says that God is love - and that, in fact, is the experience of liberation. God is not just a loving entity but actually is love - and love does not condemn because it does not judge and has no opposite. God has placed a limit on the pain that an imprisoned soul can tolerate, and the limit of this pain has been described as the ‘way of the cross’ and the ‘dark night of the soul’. The case of the prodigal son (see Ch. 23) is a good Biblical example - and is also an indication of the divine plan: one of increasing Love, increasing Godliness. The leaving of home is the separation and the arising of duality. The squandering of his inheritance and falling into despair is the experience of worldly life, and finally, through desperation, the return home is enlightenment and union: “And the Father loves him more than he ever did before”. This is why Eckhart Tolle has said, “You are here to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold. That is how important you are.” You are needed, like the poor and the maimed and the mental of Mother Teresa, for love to grow: “The poor, the sick, the mental - they help us to love God better”.

Surrender to sorrow: Amma said that even suffering will not be experienced as suffering if there is surrender; it is a form of divine grace: “To lift you to a state of peace” And Krishnamurti said look at sorrow intently. “We are seeing the fact, ‘what is’, which is suffering... I suffer and the mind is doing everything it can to run away from it - loneliness, whatever... So, don’t escape... Live with it... What takes place? Watch. The mind is very clear, sharp. It is faced with the fact. The very suffering transformed into passion is enormous. From that arises a mind that can never be hurt. Eckhart Tolle put it this way: “You don’t want to feel what you feel, but there’s no escape. There are only pseudo escapes - work, drink, projection, suppression... So don’t turn away from the pain... Feel it - don’t think about it! Don’t create a script around it... Give your complete attention to what you feel, grief, fear, dread, loneliness, whatever it is... Stay alert, stay present.” As you do this a light comes into the darkness - which is your consciousness. The acceptance of suffering brings the death of the ego - and then there is ‘Peace beyond understanding’. This is how ‘the way of the Cross’ works.

All inequalities and injustices are temporary and part of the relationship between man and the Creator, for in these
sufferings is love and compassion created. And if we can comprehend the scriptures correctly, not just the story of Jesus as a role model for suffering, but those of other religions as well; and if we listen to the teachings and the interpretations that come from enlightened beings, we can at least begin to understand the reason for suffering - and this will begin to destroy the ‘Satan’ of ignorance.

**The great escape:** Both Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta said that duality is something like an illness, taking place for a certain duration, after which Consciousness is freed from duality. In life it comes to be where no difference exists: “Where things are not, nor the minds that create them.” But escape, it seems, is hardly possible without the guidance of someone who is already liberated. And whether we encounter such a person, though it may be related to the amount of suffering we experience (to quell the allure of maya), is something that is, for the most part, just too complex to understand. One of the signs may well be to become ‘propelled’ to take up and investigate spiritual practices; though not a propulsion engendered by the fear of eternal damnation, though this must also be part of the equation. It will mainly take the form of an internal longing to know the Truth. When this happens then, it seems, things begin to move: we can embark in the great escape by compulsion rather than with a sense of doership, and the guide, in some form, will appear.

**Spiritual practice**

All enlightened spiritual teachers give recommendations on spiritual practice for those in duality, even those who assert that there is nothing one can do about it and that no ‘practice’ can produce enlightenment. The recommendations of those individuals considered in this book have been outlined in foregoing chapters, and it could be said that practices, and explanations, help to de-delude and re-educate the ego-centred mind, and lay the foundations for spiritual advancement to take place. Ajahn Chah pointed out that even the Buddha and his Noble Disciples started out with egoic minds; but at some point wisdom arose. And Anandamayi Ma said, “All spiritual practices begin with the mind that is in duality, but, at the proper time, the pilgrim attains the state of no-mind, and that is when the Self is realized.”

There are different types of spiritual practice with different degrees of efficacy for different people. We could say that there is meditation and mantra japa - to focus the mind against thoughts; there is chanting the names of God - discussed before under Consciousness and Cosmology - and this is also a kind of mantra japa ; there is contemplation of the khandas as a form of meditation (see Chapter 14) - so that every thought and emotion is seen as impermanent and therefore unsatisfactory and not something to be attached to; there is Self inquiry - which seeks to return to the Self by investigating the ‘I - thought’ - that which is the awareness of self and marks the difference between a thinking machine like a computer and a person ; and there are various techniques of mental inquiry - finding out who the thinker is, getting rid of the doer, recognizing the witness and the state of ‘presence’, examining thoughts, exploring the inner (subtle) body, and practicing the techniques recommended for this type of inquiry. The more overt forms of yoga are not considered here except to say that they need to be approached with caution, if at all. Some, however, can be recommended and have been mentioned: The ‘I - Am’ meditation of Amma and the ‘Kria Yoga’ of Yogananda. To learn these it is necessary to approach the organizations mentioned in their relevant Chapters.

Then there is yet another class of spiritual practice which is not a ‘practice’ at all but rather the absence of practice in the mental sense, and that is surrender to God and selfless service. It is characterized by a complex of becoming dharmic and humble, unattached but helping others, giving up opinions and doership, being passive and non-judgmental and, most importantly, forgiving everyone and everything. But be aware, without an enlightened guide these are vulnerable to being taken over by the ego, the subtle rather than the overt ego, and becoming a holier-than-thou type of mental syndrome. True surrender, under the guidance of an enlightened master, generates love; and devotion to the teacher is a catalyst for true surrender to take place. It will engender ‘loving what Is’ - ‘saying Yes to life’ - ‘self naughting’ and disengaging from the cloying egoic mind.

All spiritual endeavour involves renunciation and tapas, for the spiritual journey is inward - where the Truth abides. Avoiding the attractions of the world that draw outwards rather than inwards, and being less concerned with the body (remember “the mind and the body are not your friends”) seem to be essential elements of renunciation and tapas. And it is not as difficult as it seems because renunciation brings a kind of peace and happiness. It was the Buddha who said: “We want so much but we need so little - and the illuminated want nothing”; And tapas is not standing on one leg in the rain. Mother Teresa put it nicely when she said, “Poverty for us is a freedom. It is not a mortification, a penance. It is a joyful freedom. There is no television here, no this, no that; but we are perfectly happy.” In the Astravakra Gita, which is the story of the enlightenment of King Janaka under the guidance of the Sage Astravakra, the sage said, “If you are seeking liberation, shun the objects of the senses like poison, seek forgiveness, sincerity, kindness, and seek truth like you would seek nectar.” Following such advice will bring happiness and contentment in this very life and a desire for enlightenment. “Then, give up the idea of doership. Detach from the body. Remain relaxed and simply aware as consciousness. Realize that you are the observer not the doer - and be happy.”

Finally, and most importantly, there is satsang with an enlightened spiritual guide, which combines all the foregoing and is probably the only spiritual practice which really works. This is where the ‘silent teachings’ manifest most strongly - see below.

**Bhaktas and Jnanis:** The type of spiritual practice, inquiry or surrender, that a master would advocate, depends of the nature of the seeker. Inquiry is for the spiritual athletes but it is not immune to the ego; it can easily lead to a ‘higher-than-thou’ type of arrogance, to self-indulgence, lack of concern for others and to laziness. Non doership is the essence of both surrender and Inquiry but not being the doer is not the same as doing nothing. Doing nothing is laziness and requires a
conviction - which is the mind ‘doing’ something.

Many, the Jnanis, say that there is no ‘form’ of God, for any ‘form’, any ‘deity’ must be in duality. There is only One, only Consciousness. But Amma explained that even Sri Shankaracharya, the reviver of non-duality and the role model for Jnanis, founded temples: “Didn’t he? He said that God was consciousness, but didn’t he show that even mere stone is also God? And didn’t he write the Saundarya Lahari, describing the Divine Mother’s form? Realizing that the philosophy of non-duality and Vedanta cannot be digested by ordinary minds, he tried to strengthen the devotion of people... It is easier to catch a chicken by offering it food than by chasing it.” Recently someone pointed out to Amma that when Moses came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments, he found the people worshipping the “golden bull” and was exceedingly angry - therefore shouldn’t this be a reason to stop idol worship. Amma explained that, although we don’t know the origin of this idol, at the time of Moses it had degenerated into a symbol of desire, lust and greed, the bull is symbolic of lust and gold is a symbol of greed. In the case of Kali, which was being alluded to, Kali is cutting off the head of the ahankara - the ego.”

All the great masters considered in this book, be they ‘Jnanis’ or ‘Bhaktas’ or both, advise discrimination and action dedicated to God. Surrender to God is even an attribute of pursuing Inquiry. Ramana Maharshi expounded a lot on this matter. He said that doership belongs to the world of karma and the body and brings rebirth. It is the sense of doership, the action of the body that sows the seeds of future births. As indicated before, residual memories of such actions, vasanas, with their intellectual and emotional content, lie dormant in the subtle body and become active when circumstances are favorable. It is this that needs to be broken and why a spiritual guide is needed. Doing sadhana by ‘choice’, through discrimination, is possible only with a spiritual guide and after attaining some presence - otherwise the vasanas and the samskaras compel the actions of worldly life. But, Ramana said, free will can be exercised to direct action along the right lines: “Were it not so there would be no meaning to spiritual injunctions and the code of ethics enjoined in them. To believe one is the helpless victim of karma is to fall into a trap of the mind’s making.” (See Meditations - The Ramana Way).

Thus there is really no difference between the Jnani and the Bhakta. Doing no-thing, not being the egoic doer, and accepting everything that God ordains, is the essence of surrender and the basis of all spiritual practice. Even the ancient religions proclaim this. When catastrophes strike we console ourselves by thinking it’s all God’s will. Voltaire ridiculed the notion of everything being God’s will in Candide and was ex-communicated by the Catholic Church for his trouble. But at the end of his life he rescinded and agreed that everything was, indeed, God’s will. People who feel that the shedding of responsibility (in spiritual practice) may promote the doing of heinous crimes have missed the point, for all worldly life perceived by the egoic mind is heinous. Children with cystic fibrosis suffer horribly. Individuals who die of painful diseases suffer as much or more than those who are murdered by felons. And death by automobile accident is just as sudden and the results are just as painful and distressing as being blown up by bombs. Suffering is just part of life and at least one liberated soul, Satyam Nadeen (Ch. 24), believes that an exact quantum of suffering is metered out to each separated soul. That spiritual practitioners who have given up the notion of doership, will entertain the roles the ‘doers’ of crimes in an absurd notion. That criminals perform crimes is just because of the nature of the world, governed by causality - for everything is interlinked, and everything is a part of our relationship with the Creator. When a devotee came to Ramana in great distress because his son had died and demanded an explanation for this action of God, Ramana, after administering a dose of his silent teaching, said, “What is, is God.” The man went away consoled.

Surrender means accepting what is and not striving and grasping. Ajhan Chah, in a talk entitled A Still Forest Pool, summarized the correct attitude to surrender by saying: “Don’t want to become anything, do not make yourself into anything. Do not even want to become ‘enlightened’. Grasp at nothing, resist nothing. Just let everything be”. Enlightenment is; enlightenment is not what any person becomes. And Papaji said: “Just be watchful, vigilant, attentive, serious. Be silent and do not allow any desire to arise - just for an instant of time. Then you will find that you have ‘no mind’ and you will see, in the same world, that you are somewhere indescribable, in tremendous happiness. And you will see who you really are.” But anything to do with intrigue and power, with plotting, planning, scheming, devising and controlling; and anything ‘personal’ - the pursuit of security, excitement, entertainment and pleasure - which is what the world is mostly about - is ego.

Training the ego: It is said that although we attain liberation through Grace, which is an aspect of God’s love, liberation actually lies in the acceptance of love, for it has never been denied us - by whatever means fate provides. Moreover, although very few in the developed world get involved in any kind of serious spiritual practice, those that do seem to be happier, more centred and less anxious about life. Perhaps because spiritual practices involve discipline and the training of the ego this could promote happiness and be considered a step towards liberation. Amma, when talking about the differences between boys and girls in India, said that boys were pampered and spoilt and developed ten-ton egos. Girls had much smaller egos and this was a giant step towards enlightenment.

The bottom line - ‘Resist not evil!’: The enlightened tell us that liberation can never be attained without total forgiveness. In this there is no exception. It’s not a matter of forgiving those who repent or those we may feel are actually quite nice. Everyone and everything must be totally forgiven. So how can this be? How can there be no difference in the way we regard an axe killer and Mother Teresa? The reason has already been discussed. It lies in the nature and meaning of ‘sorrow’ and its relationship to Love. Deep sorrow, in a world without judgment, is the same as Love - God’s Love. Mother Teresa explained: the lame, the halt the poor, the mental, are Jesus in disguise - “that’s what He said”. And Krishnamurti said: “Look at sorrow… can we see exactly what it is … that there is an end to sorrow and that there is
compassion, that there is Love? In God’s mind there are no differences, no opposites, so how can there not be forgiveness. The Buddha said: “Everything you do do to yourself”; and in the same way, because all minds are joined, when we forgive, we forgive ourselves.

Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist, in mid life and after a long period of depression, found himself coming to the conclusion that life was hateful and should be ended. He said that everyone (in the upper classes) knew this but only the brave ended their lives. The others were either too stupid or ameliorated their feelings of anxiety and distress through “epicureanism” - in much the same way as happens in the modern developed world today. Later he expanded his observations to the peasantry and discovered that, although their life was hard, they did not feel this way at all. On the contrary, they felt that life was good and should be lived to the full. He then discovered that they felt this way because of what he called “faith” (in the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church) - but, he asserted, it could also be faith in other religious beliefs and was not confined to Christianity. Among the educated classes, however, who knew that the Church was corrupt, there was no sincere belief in the Church or its scriptures, and consequently no sincere belief in God.

Tolstoy then, against the belief of his logical mind, entered on the practice of religion as presented by the Church. After some time he experienced “faith” - as an “internal” awakening, coming from the heart, and this allowed him to surrender to the teachings of Jesus. Of these he realized that forgiveness and non-violence were the central themes and the precursors of the acceptance of love, and that this must be without the slightest taint of personal judgment. He wrote a number of books (which were banned by both the Church and the Government - see A Confession and Other Religious Writings and A Confession, The Gospel in Brief and What I Believe), about the need to follow Christ’s injunctions to “Resist not evil” and “Love your enemy.” He expressed these concepts of non-violence thus:

“However much the blindness of those who believe in the necessity of violence may strike me as strange, it is not reasoned conclusions that convince me. Rather it is true love, which comprises the essence of man’s soul; that love which is revealed in Christ’s teaching, and excludes even the suggestion of any kind of violence. The supreme bliss is my love for others... However strange these things may sound to someone who has not felt this, it is so, and when you think about it and experience it you are only surprised at how you could ever have failed to understand it before. But it is only true love that affords the happiness, which is free from anything personal, from the smallest drop of personal bias towards its object. And such love therefore can only be for those who hate and offend. Thus, the injunction to love but those who hate us is not an exaggeration, nor an indication of possible exclusion... Therefore, all non-violent resistance to evil brings well-being. And this well-being, by sublimating the personality, leads to the greatest bliss - and also destroys the scarecrow which evokes resistance: the fear of death.”

Accepting ‘what is’ for those who hate and offend, springs from the deep bond we share with all beings - where sadness and joy merge and where “a new heaven and a new earth will be revealed”. This is the Reality of God.

Though it is not generally known, Tolstoy’s most lasting influence was in India where he became the inspiration for the passive-resistance movement of Mahatma Ghandi. Ghandi, in fact, sometimes referred to himself as Tolstoy’s “humble follower”.

Silent teachings - Grace of the master

Many who have been subjected to spiritual searching will agree that the silent emanations associated with an enlightened individual are the best catalyst for spirituality. Even ordinary people at times emanate such an energy, but the enlightened do so constantly. The subtle emanations bring feelings of peace, love and joy, and generate feelings of humility, self-naughting and surrender. Ramana said that the silent teachings were the most effective because written or spoken teachings are merely the great-great-grand children of the original silent teachings: “First there is the abstract knowledge and out of it there arises the ego, which in turn gives rise to thought, and that thought to the spoken word. So the word is the great-great-grandson of the original source. If the word can produce effects, imagine how much more powerful must be the source - obtained in silence.”

The Master Mahasaya, a disciple of Ramakrishna (see Chapter 1), spoke about this to Paul Brunton. He said, “It is nearly half a century since he (Ramakrishna) left us, but his blessed memory can never leave me; always it remains fresh and fragrant in my heart. I was constantly in his society for the last five years of his life. The result was that I became a changed man; my whole attitude to life was reversed... By means of a single touch one could understand the deep mysteries of God by means of direct perception.”

And of Anandamayi Ma it was said that waves of bliss would pass to all who came before her. Swami Vijayananda, a disciple of Sri Ma, writes as follows: “Love for Mother, although it is still illusion (in the realm of duality), purified the mind and the heart, awakened and greatly increased yearning for the divine. What may take long years of struggle in the practice of yoga and Self inquiry, is accomplished in a short period of time, effortlessly as it were, by pure and intense love of Mother.”

The same feeling of the dislocating power of love is felt around Amma. And she has said that bhakti is the best form of spiritual practice for Western-oriented people because we are developed ‘intellectually’ but lack true love and compassion and understanding of spirituality. She said, “Cry out for God. Only by crying for Him will your minds become one-pointed... A true devotee always experiences the bliss of love for God.”

Bahi Sahib’s view was that ‘yogic’ practices are completely superfluous. The disciple actually doesn’t have to do a thing - except surrender. He said: ‘Just come here and sit. The spiritual guide is like a loving mother and does not make conditions. Everything is done in silence and love is created.” And, he maintained, progress does not depend much on what
the disciple believes: “It is of no importance if one believes that karma is; evolution is. But first, from the disciple faith is necessary, absolute faith in the master. Feel deeply you are in the presence of God; and wait for Grace - filled with alertness and surrender”. “But,” he added, “No teaching can be transmitted until the disciple has reached the stage of comprehension.”

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