



Spiritual Teachings Of

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS
OF MAHARAJ

I

GOD IS

MAHARAJ

Hold fast to the Lotus Feet of the Lord. Remember Him constantly. Don't waste your time with worldly thoughts. Struggle to control the outgoing mind and fix it on God. Struggle ! Struggle hard ! Then you will realize what joy there is in spiritual life, what fun it is ! You must overcome maya (ignorance) even in this life. It won't be easy unless you devote yourself to the work of the spirit. You must have faith, intense faith. Let no doubt enter your mind.

DISCIPLE

But if doubt creeps in ?

MAHARAJ

Doubts will come until you have realized God. When doubts disturb the mind hold fast to God and pray. Think : " God *is*. It's only

because of the impurities of my mind that I don't see Him. But through His grace, I shall gain His vision, when my heart has become pure enough."

This mind cannot know Him. He is beyond this mortal mind and far beyond the human intellect. This apparent universe which you see is within the domain of the mind. The mind is its author, the mind has conjured it up. It cannot go beyond its own domain.

Behind the mind of which we are aware is a subtle, spiritual mind, existing in seed-form. Through contemplation, prayer, and japam,¹ this mind develops and with its unfoldment a new vision opens. The aspirant realizes many spiritual truths. However, this is not the final experience. This subtle mind also cannot reach God, the Supreme Atman. But it leads you nearer to him. At this stage the world loses all its charm for the aspirant. He remains absorbed in the consciousness of God.

Next comes samadhi. The experience of samadhi is indescribable—beyond *is* and *is not*. In this blessed experience there is neither happiness nor misery, neither light nor darkness. All is Infinite Being—inexpressible.

¹ See Appendix.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how should we perform our worldly duties ?

MAHARAJ

Do your duties conscientiously, but always be aware that you are an instrument in the hands of God. There must be no attachment to the work. Know in your heart of hearts that God is the only doer.

Keep your mind forever fixed in Him. Oh yes, you may fail while you are working to keep your mind steady in God. Your ego may creep in. But never be depressed by your failures. Redouble your efforts. Failures are inevitable in the beginning, but keep faith in yourself and never lose courage. Try hard, again and again, to live up to your ideal. Do or die—let that be your motto.

“I must realize God in this very life,”—that must be your watchword. What use is this body or this mind if they don't help you to reach God ? Never mind if you have to die in the attempt.

II

THE SUPREME IDEAL IS TO
KNOW GOD

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, is it true that the gods and goddesses exist? How should I consider ritualistic worship?

MAHARAJ

These many gods and goddesses are only various aspects of one Godhead.

Men incline to different ways of worship. To satisfy the various temperaments, the scriptures describe four distinct methods of reaching God.

One method is ritualistic worship—that is, worshipping God in the image or symbol.

Higher than this is the worship of God with prayer and japam. The aspirant meditates on the shining form of his Chosen Ideal. He prays to Him and makes japam.

Higher still is meditation. That is, a constant flow of thought towards God. When

a man follows this way of worship, he remains absorbed in the living presence of his Chosen Ideal. Here there is neither prayer nor japam. But the sense of duality remains. He *is* and I also *am*.

The highest method, which leads directly and immediately to God, is to meditate on the unity of the Atman with Brahman ; to experience Brahman constantly, to know always that He *is*. It is an actual realization of the Omnipresent Reality.

These are the different stages through which the aspirant progresses. A man should begin from where he stands. If, for instance, an ordinary man is told to meditate on the union with the Absolute Brahman, he cannot grasp the truth of it ; nor can he follow the instructions. He may make the attempt, but soon he will be tired and give it up. However, if the same man is asked to worship God with flowers, perfume, and other accessories he will find that his mind gradually becomes concentrated on God and he will soon experience a joy in his worship. Through ritualistic worship, devotion to the performance of japam grows. The finer the mind becomes, the greater is its capacity for higher forms of worship. Japam inclines the mind toward meditation. Thus the aspirant

moves toward his Ideal by a process of natural growth.

Suppose you are standing in the courtyard of a house and you want to reach the roof. Instead of climbing the stairs, you let someone throw you up on to the roof. What will happen? You are sure to get hurt. Just as there are laws that govern the physical world, so there are laws in the spiritual world, also.

DISCIPLE

What should I do if a distracting thought persistently arises in my mind?

MAHARAJ

“This thought is immensely harmful to me. It will be my ruin.” Impress this idea again and again upon your mind. The mind will be freed from that distracting thought.

The mind is susceptible to suggestions. It learns whatever you teach it. If through discrimination you can impress upon it the joy and fullness of life in the Spirit and the folly of worldly attachments, then your mind will devote itself more and more to God.

Everyone must have an ideal firmly established in his life. This ideal must never be lowered. The supreme ideal of human life is

to know God—God, “who is smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest.” He shines forth always and everywhere. He dwells within you, He dwells within me, He dwells within all creatures, and in the plants and herbs as well. He dwells everywhere. The only difference is that in some He is more apparent, while in others, He is more hidden. The one supreme Spirit pervades everything. Make Him your ideal, Him and Him alone. Make a little effort to realize Him and then you will see what fun it all is ; what an inexhaustible fount of joy He is. You have seen enough of the world, now see the other side of life, the real side. “Knock and it shall be opened unto you.” There is only a screen hiding the Reality. Remove it, and you will find Him. Apply yourself to the attainment of this ideal and the whole world will be transformed before your eyes.

DISCIPLE

What rules should be observed about diet ?

MAHARAJ

That's a difficult question to answer. Men differ so widely in their constitutions that it is hardly possible to lay down any hard and fast rule about food. One kind of food may be

agreeable to your constitution, and do me harm. That's the reason the scriptures do not specifically advise any diet but only warn against rich foods.

DISCIPLE

Should we avoid eating meat, since it entails killing ?

MAHARAJ

Nonsense ! The Buddhists say, " Harmless-ness is the highest virtue." What does this mean ? You understand its significance only when you have attained samadhi, when you have reached enlightenment and have seen God in all creatures. Until then no amount of talk helps us. When you can see the same God in the ant as in yourself, with no difference at all, only then can you practise this virtue. You may talk of not killing any creature but can you possibly avoid killing ? What would you eat ? Potatoes ? Plant that potato underground, it shoots forth young sprouts. Has the potato no life ? Would you eat rice ? Plant the paddy grain in the earth. It grows into a rice plant. You want to drink water ? Examine a drop of water under a microscope and see how many millions of tiny lives are there.

You must breathe to live. Yet with every breath you kill millions of creatures. Do you see any harm in that? Yet you are surely killing. You think you lose your religion if you take a little fish. Such arguments against meat diet are foolish. The ancient Hindus held no such ideas. These are later Buddhist and Vaishnavite interpolations.

III

THE BODY IS THE TEMPLE OF GOD

MAHARAJ

Samadhi is generally classified as of two kinds. In savikalpa, the first sort of samadhi, there is the mystic vision of a spiritual form of God, while the consciousness of individuality still remains. In nirvikalpa, the other type of samadhi, a man loses his individuality and goes beyond the vision of the form of God. The whole universe then disappears. There is yet another kind called Ananda (blissful) samadhi. If an ordinary man reaches this experience, his body and brain cannot bear the supreme ecstatic joy. He does not live more than twenty-one days.

One day, in the course of his teaching, Sri Ramakrishna spoke at length about the manifestation of Brahman as sound — the Logos. I took this as the subject for my noon meditation. As I sat in meditation, suddenly the sound Brahman became revealed to me.

Sri Ramakrishna once said to me : “ Once, while I was meditating in the temple, screen after screen of maya (ignorance) was removed from my consciousness. Mother showed me a Light more brilliant than a million suns. From that Light came forth a spiritual Form. Then this Form melted away into the Light itself. The Formless had taken Form and then melted again in the Formless.”

The body is the temple of God. Worship and meditation should be practised within it. When the consciousness merges into Sahasrara (the thousand-petalled Lotus in the brain) the mind does not feel inclined to come back. There you realize that what is in the vast universe outside is all within yourself. There is a saying : “ If one sees God in the temple, he will not return.” The real meaning is that a man attains liberation as he realizes God within the shrine of his own heart. Temples built in the external world are aids for beginners. They are but symbols of the greatest temple of God, the human body.

There is a spiritual eye of wisdom between the two eyebrows. When its vision opens a fountain of joy is released. The whole universe is seen to be merged in bliss.

IV

BE PURE AND FIND PEACE IN GOD

MAHARAJ

There is a king living in a palace with seven gates. A poor man begs the king's minister for an audience, and his request is granted. The minister leads him through the gates to the royal presence. At each gate, stands a richly dressed officer. "Is that the king?" the poor man keeps asking. And the minister answers, "No". However, when they have passed through the seventh gate, and seen the king himself, in his marvellous splendour and beauty, the poor man doesn't have to ask. He knows that this is the king.

It's the same with the Guru. Like the minister, the Guru leads the disciple through different stages until he leaves him with the Lord.

But there is no greater Guru than your own mind. When the mind has been purified through prayer and contemplation, it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties this inner Guru will guide you. It helps you like this until the goal is reached.

The way to steady and purify the mind is to retire into solitude ; control all cravings, and engage yourself in contemplation and meditation. The more you occupy the mind with holy thoughts the greater will be your spiritual unfoldment. Just as a cow yields quantities of milk when it is well fed — so when the mind is offered spiritual food it will yield greater tranquility. Spiritual food consists of meditation, prayer, contemplation and japam.

Another means of steadying the mind is to let it wander, but keep watch over its workings. After some time the mind gets tired and comes back to find peace in God. If you watch your mind, the mind, in turn will keep watch over you.

Rise early in the morning. The best hours for contemplation are those at which night passes into day and day into night. It is then that the Sushumna (the central spiritual nerve within the spinal column) becomes active, and a man breathes through both nostrils. As a general rule we breathe through only one nostril at a time. This causes restlessness of the mind. Spiritual aspirants should notice when they are breathing through both nostrils. Then the Sushumna is active. Such moments

are most helpful to contemplation. Take advantage of them.

Free your minds from cravings and attachments. Practise spiritual disciplines and your minds will become pure and tranquil. Then God will be revealed. Struggle — struggle. If a man does not struggle to realize God, he remains buried in ignorance. Accept these struggles boldly. Welcome them. Through them you will find peace.

The easiest method of realization is to remember Him constantly. Know Him as your very own. Just as a man welcomes his friend, and entertains him with food, drink, and conversation, so you must entertain God in your thoughts, feed Him, offer Him flowers, and converse freely with Him. Then you will find peace in God.

Who can fathom the mystery of God? He is Infinite and Formless. He is also with Form. And He becomes incarnate as man. It is beyond our human power to understand the devious ways through which God leads man to Himself. Sometimes the path is smooth, often it is thorny, or it may be through seemingly impassable mountains.

Still God leads man safely to Himself, if we will only take refuge in Him.

Maya prevents the mind and senses from desiring God-realization. But a man who has realized God has risen above all the charms and attractions which maya has to offer. Maya only reveals her mysteries to him who is beyond maya.

Ordinary men live chained to this maya. They do not even realize how greatly they are suffering, on this wheel of birth and death. Such is the absolute power of maya. The body decays, day by day. Man sleeps in maya, forgetting the sacred mission for which he was born. Human birth has one unique advantage. It is only in this birth that God can be realized. Forget the body and its comforts. Shake off the delusion of birth and death. Shake off the illusory peace of maya and find the real peace — the everlasting peace of God.

V

HOLD FAST TO GOD

MAHARAJ

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a man can attain God if he possesses to an intense degree these three kinds of love — the love a devoted wife bears her husband, the attraction a worldly man feels for the world, and the attachment the miser has for his hoarded gold. Do you know what it means? It means that one can reach the Lord and be blessed with His vision only when the mind is freed from all desires, and longs intensely for God. The Lord says in the Gita — “Give up all the formalities of religion, and take refuge in Me alone.”

Surrender yourself whole-heartedly to Him. Pray constantly with a pure, sincere heart : “O Lord ! I don’t know what is good and what is bad for me. I am entirely dependent on You. Grant me everything I need for the spiritual life. Take me along the path that will bring me the greatest good. Give me the faith.

and strength to remember You and meditate on You constantly.”

It is indeed no easy thing to dedicate oneself to the Lord, heart and soul. Many people say : “ I have surrendered myself, my all, to God. I am doing what He tells me to do.” But if we observe their daily lives, we shall see that their actions are quite contrary to what they profess. If they do anything good, they take the credit to themselves, feel highly elated over it, and think : “ Oh, what a great thing I have achieved ! ” But when even a slight trouble comes to them, they immediately throw the blame on the Lord, saying : “ What a great misfortune He is bringing on me ! ” This is how most people spend their lives.

We judge men only by their exterior, but God looks into their innermost minds. God runs to him who prays with a sincere heart. You may be certain of that. Be pure in heart. Let your mind and your lips be as one. Surrender yourself to His care.

Only one in a million ever sincerely longs for God. And of these only a few sustain that longing. Now that you are blessed with the desire to know Him, try to intensify that desire. When you sit, when you lie down, when you eat or when you work, pray, pray

unceasingly : “ Lord, make me able to receive and understand that grace which I know You are ready to give me.”

How many care to take refuge in God — the only Truth? Man in his folly trusts too much in his intellect. Because he cannot comprehend God he may even deny His very existence. Little does he realize how unstable his intellect is. What he regards as true today seems false to him tomorrow. And yet he thinks that what seems true to him at this moment is the final truth and that everybody must accept it as true.

The Divine Mother alone knows all the subtle ways in which a man may be deluded.

Those who have known Him, never put a limit to His Infinitude. To them, God is not a matter of opinion : He *is*. He is boundless love, beyond the grasp of the intellect. He alone knows, he alone understands, His mysteries, to whom God in His infinite mercy reveals Himself. When a man realizes Him, the gates to infinite knowledge open, attachments break. When a man attains enlightenment, he knows for certain that he belongs to God and God belongs to him.

Yes, the gates of infinite knowledge are opened to the enlightened man. The mysteries

of this world and of the next are open books to him.

What we call intelligence is only another name for ignorance. If man wants infinite bliss in this life, if he wants to know who he is, why he was born, and what is the purpose of this life, then let him devote himself to knowing God.

Children in their play swing round a pillar, knowing that if they loosen their grip they will fall and be injured. We also must hold fast to God and know Him to be the Pillar of Life. Hold fast to Him and there will be no danger. Whatever path you follow — the path of knowledge, or of devotion, or of work — you will reach Him. Your life on earth will be blessed and you will be a blessing to mankind.

VI

BE SELF-RELIANT

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, I am practising the spiritual disciplines, but as yet I have acquired no taste for them. What must I do ?

MAHARAJ

Is it possible to get that taste all at once ? No. Struggle hard to attain it. Concentrate all your energies toward its achievement. Never waste them in any other direction. Apply yourself whole-heartedly to it and to nothing else. Onward, onward ! Never be satisfied with your growth. Try to create a burning dissatisfaction within yourself. Say to yourself : " What progress am I making ? None ! " Sri Ramakrishna used to say to God the Mother : " Mother, another day is gone and I have not seen You ! "

Every night before you go to bed, think for a while how much time you have spent in doing good deeds and how much in doing use-

less things, how much time you have spent in meditation and how much you have wasted in idleness. Make your mind strong through the observance of continence and the practice of meditation.

In rich men's houses they keep a porter whose duty is to prevent thieves, cows, sheep, etc., from entering the compound. The mind is man's porter. The stronger the mind becomes, the better. The mind has also been compared to a restive horse. Such a horse is apt to take the rider along the wrong path. Only he who can hold a tight rein and check the horse can go the right way. Struggle on ! Do you think that everything is achieved by the mere wearing of the gerrua cloth (ochre-coloured cloth of the Sannyasin) or by renunciation of hearth and home ? Have you had any spiritual experience, as yet ? Time is flying. Don't waste another moment. You will be able to practise the spiritual disciplines intensively for another three or four years at the most. After that, body and mind will grow weak and infirm and you won't be able to do much. What can be achieved without diligence ?

You are thinking : " Let us first of all have yearning, faith and devotion ; then we shall

start our spiritual practices.” Is that possible ? Can we see the ‘day before dawn has broken ? When the Lord appears, love, devotion and faith follow Him like a retinue.

Can anything be achieved without spiritual discipline ? Do you not see what severe disciplines even the Avataras (Incarnations of God) had to perform ? Has anybody gained anything without labour ? Buddha, Sankara and others — what tremendous austerities they practised in their lives ! What burning renunciation they possessed !

Real faith can’t be had in the beginning. First realization, then faith. But at first the spiritual aspirant has to pin his faith — “ blind faith ” it may be — to the precepts of his Guru (spiritual teacher) or of some great soul ; only then can he advance toward the goal.

Don’t you know the parable of the oyster told by Sri Ramakrishna ? The oyster floats about on the surface of the sea with its shell wide open, just for a little drop of the Swati-rain (rain falling when the star Swati or Arc-turus is in the ascendant). As soon as it gets a raindrop, it dives down to the ocean-bed and there forms a fine pearl. You have received the raindrop, the grace of your Guru ; so dive deep like the oyster into the ocean of Bliss

and form the pearl which is the revelation of God.

Be self-reliant. Effort is indispensable to success in spiritual life. Follow some discipline for at least four years. Then, if you don't make any tangible progress, come back and slap my face !

Japam and meditation are impossible unless you transcend rajas (excessive activity) and tamas (inertia or lethargy) and become established in sattva (spiritual tranquillity). Afterwards, you have to rise above sattva, even, and reach the transcendental plane from which there is no return.

How blessed is this human birth ! Man alone can find God. To realize Him must be man's only purpose. Strive hard to reach Him and be free in this very life.

The mind is to be raised, step by step, from the gross state to the subtle, then to the causal state, then higher still, to the Great Cause (Mahakarana) and finally to samadhi (highest illumination). Resign yourself utterly to the Lord. He is everything. There is nothing besides. "Verily all this is Brahman." Everything is His and His alone.

Never be calculating. Is self-surrender possible in a day ? When that is achieved every-

thing is achieved. One must struggle hard for it. Existence is eternal. The span of man's life is at most a hundred years. Give up the pleasures of these hundred years, if you want to enjoy eternal life and, with it, eternal bliss.

VII

GOD IS BEYOND DUALITY AND NON-DUALITY

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, you spoke to us of the practice of Puja (worship), meditation, continence and study of the scriptures. What does Puja mean ?

MAHARAJ

Puja means both external ritualistic worship and mental worship. In ritualistic worship certain accessories are necessary. It is difficult to procure them regularly. So mental worship is more convenient for you. After worshipping the Chosen Ideal mentally with flowers and incense and such other accessories as are offered in ritualistic worship, practise meditation and mental japam. In purely mental japam the mantram (name of the Deity) is to be repeated without even moving the lips. But in ordinary japam one has to utter the mantram silently and therefore there is a movement of the lips.

In meditation you should think that your Chosen Ideal is luminous and that His light is lighting everything. Think of Him as living and conscious. As you continue meditating thus on the form of the Chosen Ideal, the form will gradually melt into the Formless, the Infinite. Then will come a vivid sense of the Living Presence. Finally, the eye of wisdom opens and the Infinite is directly perceived. Ah! That's another realm, beyond the universe! Then this universe appears as nothing. Then the mind is dissolved and you experience savi-kalpa samadhi. Next comes the realization of nirvikalpa — the absolute union. That experience is beyond thought and speech. Nothing to be seen! Nothing to be heard! Infinite, Infinite alone! That is a direct experience.

When one reaches this state, one can bring the mind down only with great effort to the world of phenomena, which appears to be unreal. It is "beyond duality and non-duality". Some persons who reach this state look upon the body as an obstacle in the way of unbroken spiritual experience, and cast it off in samadhi. It is like the breaking of an earthen jar.

Sri Ramakrishna used to give a beautiful illustration to explain the highest state of spiritual realization. Suppose there are several

vessels of water, the sun reflected in each one. You break the vessels one after another until only one is left, with the sun reflected in it ; finally even this last one is broken. Then what remains ? The sun itself. Similarly, the self-luminous Brahman is reflected in the vessels of the mind, senses, ego, etc. Break one vessel after another ; that is, reach beyond the physical consciousness, beyond the subtle body, and the causal body. Then you reach savikalpa samadhi, when you see God. But here also there is a sense of duality — the sense of ego is still present. Break this vessel of an ego and what remains ? Brahman and Brahman alone. Who is there then to see whom ? Who then can describe whom ?

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, some think of the Chosen Ideal as the all-pervading Spirit. Is this also a form of meditation ?

MAHARAJ

Yes, certainly. Everyone should practice this meditation but only after making some progress in spiritual life ; not at the beginning. The presence of God must be realized

everywhere. He who is personal and with form is also impersonal and without form. He dwells in every being. He pervades land and water, hills and valleys, sky and stars — everything.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, the scriptures speak of service to the Guru as a necessary means to spiritual realization. How far is this true ?

MAHARAJ

It is necessary at the preliminary stage. But afterwards one's mind itself plays the part of the Guru. The Guru should not be looked upon as an ordinary human being. His physical body is the temple where the Lord resides. If the Guru is served with this idea in mind, one acquires an intense love for him, which later turns into an intense love for God.

Meditate upon the Guru in the Sahasrara (thousand-petalled lotus in the brain), and then merge the form of the Guru into that of the Chosen Ideal. Sri Ramakrishna used to say very explicitly : " The Guru appears before the disciple in his spiritual vision. He points to the Chosen Ideal and says : ' Look, there is your Chosen Ideal.' Then he becomes

merged into that Ideal Form." There is really no difference between the Guru and God.

There are so many divine truths and experiences. How can I tell you about all of them? Follow the spiritual path in real earnest. The mind will become pure through religious practices and you will understand many truths. Remember, there is no limit to them. Lose yourself in God. Try to meditate in the shrine of the heart. What this shrine is will be revealed to you as you continue the practice.

DISCIPLE

If the aspirant gets a little taste of joy in meditation, he is very much encouraged to proceed on his spiritual path. Isn't that so?

MAHARAJ

True. But in the higher spiritual state there is neither joy nor sorrow, pain nor pleasure, existence nor non-existence. The joy that you speak of is only a help during the period of spiritual practices. The boat needs a favourable wind until it has reached its destination. But when the boat has once arrived, it doesn't matter whether the wind is favourable or contrary. Joy helps the aspirant in his onward course like a favourable wind.

Knowledge, the knower and the object known — these three lose themselves in the Absolute : that is all the scriptures can tell us. What takes place after this, no one is able to describe. It is directly experienced only by one who practises meditation. Only God knows Himself. Be a god, that you may know the Infinite God. In that knowledge there is neither want nor fear. The very thought of such knowledge is uplifting.

To live in God is such fun. Some enlightened souls experience the one undivided Existence. Then they know that the seeming multiplicity of the universe is God's divine play. They know that Infinite God is born as an Avatar for His divine sport. Once when Sri Krishna was dancing in ecstasy, one shepherdess told another, "Friend, the Truth of Vedanta is dancing." Sri Krishna is the supreme Brahman. He is the infinite, changeless Spirit playing at being a man. There is a further spiritual experience which is beyond this, and fathomless.

VIII

PRACTISE DISCIPLINES METHODICALLY

MAHARAJ

How are you getting along with your spiritual practices ?

DISCIPLE

Not very well, Maharaj. My mind is restless. I have no taste for them yet. There seems to be an obstacle inside me. I feel so unhappy. I must have been born with evil tendencies and these stand in the way of my spiritual progress.

MAHARAJ

My boy, you should not think like that. Practise japam at dead of night. If you cannot do it then, do it during the early hours of the morning. Perform Purascharana.¹ Do not waste your valuable time any longer. Lose yourself in prayer and meditation. How can the door to spiritual truth be opened unless you are up and doing ?

¹ See Appendix.

The spiritual aspirant should not eat much food after sunset. At first take three-quarters of your usual diet. Then reduce the quantity to half. In the beginning you may feel some bodily weakness. But the body will adjust after a time, and will remain active and in perfect condition.

(Maharaj then referred to the days when he practised spiritual disciplines in the company of his brother-disciples and said : “ We used to take only one meal during the twenty-four hours.”)

MAHARAJ

An aspirant should first learn about the spiritual path from some great soul, then follow it methodically. If he does it haphazardly, he cannot make much progress. If he gives it up again, he will have to make twice as much effort to gain the desired result. But, of course, no effort is wasted. Lust, anger, greed, gradually leave a man who practises spiritual disciplines.

Your mind is now covered over by rajas and tamas. It must be made pure and subtle, and raised to the state of sattva. Then you will find joy in spiritual practices and will want to devote more and more time to them. Later

on, when the mind attains perfect purity, you will have no other desire but to devote yourself to contemplation always. At present, the mind is gross. Consequently it runs after gross things. But when it becomes pure and subtle, it will run after God — the pure consciousness. When it grows subtle, its power increases and the aspirant is immediately able to grasp the subtle truth of God.

When you sit in meditation, first think of a blissful divine form. This will have a soothing effect upon your nerves. Otherwise meditation will become dry and tedious. Think of the form of your Chosen Ideal, smiling and full of joy.

Waste no more time. Your senses are strong now and must be kept under control. This is a troublesome task, undoubtedly. But practise meditation continuously for seven or eight years, and then you will enjoy the fruits of your practices, peace and bliss. Even in a year's time you will find some result. Many women disciples are making rapid spiritual progress. Shouldn't you strive for it also? But women have greater faith than men. That is why they succeed in a comparatively short time.

Believe me, the Lord is always with you. If

you practise a little, He will extend His helping hand to you. It is He who is protecting us all from miseries and troubles. How unbounded His grace is ! How can I describe it to you ?

You have merely heard about these spiritual things. Now realize them. You have done enough study and reasoning. Now do some spiritual practice. Take first that aspect of God which most appeals to you. When you feel growing devotion to God in one aspect, and a steadfast love for your Chosen Ideal, you will enjoy loving Him in all His aspects.

One should meditate on the form of the Chosen Ideal while making japam. Otherwise japam isn't effective. If you can't think of the whole form, think of a part only. Begin your meditation on the " Lotus Feet " of the Deity. Even if you fail, struggle on. Why should you stop until you succeed ? Success is certain. Practice will make everything easy.

Is meditation an easy affair ? Remember, it is next only to samadhi. Try to leave everything to the Lord. Resign yourself entirely to Him. Devotion, self-surrender, and other virtues will grow from within as you practise meditation.

IX

HOW CAN THE KUNDALINI BE AWAKENED ?

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how can the Kundalini¹ be awakened ?

MAHARAJ

According to some there are special exercises to awaken it, but I believe it can best be done through japam and meditation. The practice of japam is specially suited to our present age. There is no other spiritual practice easier than this. But meditation must accompany the repetition of the mantram.

DISCIPLE

Does meditation mean thinking of the form of the Deity ?

¹ According to the yogis, there is a store of latent spiritual energy at the base of the spine. This is known as the Kudalini (meaning "coiled-up"), and is pictured as a serpent. When this "serpent-power" is roused it rises up the spinal column and a man's spiritual awakening begins.

MAHARAJ

It is thinking of the Divine, both with form and without form.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, is it the Guru who decides whether one should meditate on God with form or without form.

MAHARAJ

Yes. But the pure mind itself becomes the Guru. At times the mind is inclined to think of the divine form. At other times the formless aspect of God appeals to it. The human Guru cannot always be accessible. As the aspirant goes on with his spiritual practices, his power of comprehension also increases. Then his mind can act as a guide.

The Yogavasishttha-Ramayana says that the mind is bound down by its attachment to the body, the senses, and the sense objects. Thus it wastes its energies through various channels. Snap all the bonds! Collect the scattered forces of the mind, and make them flow toward the one Reality. That's what spiritual practice is.

Concentrate the whole mind and direct it toward God until He becomes revealed. Strive.

Be up and doing. You are young now. This is the time to practise spiritual exercises. You won't be able to do so much when you grow older.

Begin your spiritual life in real earnest. If you can gather all the forces of the mind and direct them toward God, God will be revealed. Do it through japam or through meditation or through discrimination. Know that all these means are equally effective. Take any one of them and drown yourself in the ocean of bliss. Don't question any more. First do something ; then come and ask questions, if you have any.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, does the Kundalini awaken by the grace of Guru ?

MAHARAJ

Through his grace everything can be had, even knowledge of Brahman, to say nothing of the awakening of the Kundalini ! But this grace isn't easily obtained. You must work hard.

Practise some spiritual discipline. Begin now. Devote yourself to it exclusively. Don't think about anything else. Plunge into the very depth of your soul.

X

WORK AND WORSHIP

MAHARAJ

How are you progressing in your spiritual practices ?

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, I don't find enough time for them. There's too much work to do.

MAHARAJ

It's a mistake to think that meditation cannot be practised for lack of time. The real cause is the restlessness of your mind.

Work and worship must go hand in hand. It is very good if one can devote oneself solely to spiritual practices. But how many can do that ? Two types of men can sit still without work. One is the idiot, who is too dull to be active. The other is the saint who has gone beyond all activity. As the Gita says, "Without performing work, no one can attain worklessness." Work is a means to reach the state of meditation. Even those who give up work

and lead an ascetic life have to spend some of their time on the necessities of living.

Instead of working for yourself, work for the Lord. Know that you are worshipping the Lord through your work. If you can work with this idea, your work will not bind you. On the other hand, it will make you better in every way, physically, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Offer up your body and soul at the feet of the Lord. Give yourself up entirely to Him, be His servant and tell Him : " I give you my body, soul and all I have. Do with them what You will ; I am ready to serve You to the best of my power." If you can do this, the responsibility for your spiritual welfare rests with Him. You needn't bother about it any more. But you should resign yourself in the right spirit. You shouldn't do it with a doubting heart, " taking the name of God to cross the river and at the same time lifting your clothes to keep them dry." ¹

¹ This reference is to Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the milkmaid and the Brahmin priest. A milkmaid used to supply milk to a Brahmin priest living on the other side of a river. Owing to the irregularities of the boat service, she could not deliver the milk punctually every day. Once, on being rebuked for her delay, the poor woman said : " What can I do, Sir ? I have to wait a long time for the boatman." The priest said : " Woman ! people cross the ocean

After the passing away of our Master, we led a wandering life for five or six years and then set ourselves to work. Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) called me aside one day and said : "There is nothing in a wandering life. Work for the sake of the Lord." We did work, and I don't think it did us any harm. Rather, it did us great good. We had strong faith in Swamiji's words. I tell you, you must have infinite faith in these two great souls, Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, and work for them.

Work and worship are to be done together. They may seem difficult to harmonize. One has to try again and again. Sri Ramakrishna used to say — "The new-born calf tries to stand up, but falls down many times. It does

of life by uttering the name of God ; can't you cross this little river ?" The simple-hearted woman believed the priest. And from the next day onward she began to cross the river uttering God's name. One day the priest asked her why she was never late as before. The woman replied : "I cross the river by uttering the name of the Lord as you told me." The priest could not believe this ; and wanted to see for himself how the woman crossed the river. The woman took him with her and began to walk over the water, repeating the name of the Lord. But looking behind, she saw the priest following timidly, holding up his clothes. "How is it, Sir," she said : "You are uttering the name of the Lord, but at the same time you are lifting your clothes to keep them dry. You don't really trust Him."

not stop. It tries again. And finally, it not only stands up, but also learns to run." The mind gets good training if one takes up some regular work at the beginning of the spiritual life. Then the trained mind can be applied to meditation and other spiritual practices. The mind that is allowed to drift will drift at the time of meditation also.

To the spiritually advanced man there comes a time when he wants to devote himself solely to meditation and prayer. At that time work falls away from him of itself. This happens when the mind awakens spiritually. Otherwise, if one takes to a life of exclusive spiritual practice by sheer effort of the will, one can go on only for a few days. Then comes monotony. Some who persist even go mad. Others follow the spiritual path in a haphazard way, and keep their minds busy with worldly things as well.

Great strength can be acquired through the practice of continence. A true celibate can do the work of twenty-five men. With continence, practise japam and meditation ; and seek the society of the holy.

All men do not know what is good for them. For that reason one should associate with holy men. Unless a man spends some

time in solitude or in the company of the holy, he can't understand his own mind. It is very difficult to grow spiritually in the midst of tumult and confusion.

I give freedom to all. I want everybody to advance along his own line. But when I find a devotee who isn't able to do so, I come to his help.

Eternal life is before you. What would it matter, if you devoted a few lives to the service of God, even supposing they were spent in vain? But I tell you, that cannot be so. You will see to what great spiritual heights you will soar, through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna.

Don't lead an easy-going life any longer. If you do, you won't be able to practise spiritual exercises properly. No matter what work you take up, do it with your whole heart. That's the secret of work, as Swamiji used to say. Set yourself to work, but work for the Lord.

Before you begin to work, remember the Lord and offer your salutations to Him. Do the same from time to time while you are working, and also after you have finished. Spend all your time thinking of the life, teachings and commandments of Sri Ramakrishna.

Know in your heart of hearts that all the work you do is for His sake.

Strive to attain tranquillity. Don't give way to inertia but struggle to gain spiritual calmness. If you allow your mind to wander and yield to a purposeless life, there will be a bad reaction. Passions will overcome you. Through the practice of japam and meditation, the senses become controlled of themselves. But in the beginning you must try to keep them in check.

Practise japam and meditation. Gradually after continued practice you will enjoy sitting for long hours absorbed in God. The beginner, however, is advised to sit in meditation for short periods only, four or five times a day. Whether you like it or not, practise japam. As you persist, the mind is certain to become absorbed in contemplation. To attain this spiritual tranquillity you must continue your regular practice — even against your inclinations. Spiritual awakening will come. And when it comes, you won't even remember that passions ever existed in you.

XI

DEVOTE YOUR MIND TO GOD : GREAT WILL BE YOUR JOY

MAHARAJ

Do you know why I insist that you devote yourselves heart and soul to the Lord ? When we were of your age, Sri Ramakrishna kept careful watch over our spiritual practices. In youth the mind is plastic like clay and can be moulded into any shape. Your minds are still pure and untainted — not yet baked in the fire of worldliness. They can be directed very easily towards God, and you won't be troubled by distractions. If the mind is now firmly moulded into the shape of the Divine you will achieve your purpose.

The mind is like a package of mustard seeds. If the seeds are once scattered, it is very difficult to collect them. As you grow older and the energies of the mind have been scattered in worldly thoughts, it will be very difficult to collect them and turn the mind toward God.

Make God the be-all and end-all of your

existence. Devote yourselves sincerely to realizing Him, and you will be free from all sorrow and pain. You will inherit everlasting bliss and divine joy.

Man looks for happiness in the world. But does he find it? He toils hard, runs after many objects, always hoping to find happiness, but only catching shadows. Thus his whole life ebbs away. He lives and dies in vain. To realize true happiness, leave the fleeting, worldly pleasures behind. Give your whole mind to God. Devote your mind to God, and your joy will be great. Devote your mind to the world and the pleasures of the world, and great will be your suffering.

You are boys—very young boys. Your minds have not yet received any evil impressions from the outside world. If you can struggle hard from now on, you will be able to escape life's sorrows and miseries.

Never forget the ideal of human life. This life is not given us to while away in eating, drinking and sleeping like animals. Since you have been born as a human being, spurn all worldly enjoyments. Firmly resolve to realize God and attain infinite bliss. Don't waver, even if you die in the attempt. Isn't it wiser to enjoy the present life in an ecstasy of devo-

tion and spiritual practice and then enter the doors of infinite bliss forever ?

To obtain God's grace is the most important aim in spiritual life. The breeze of His grace is always blowing. Just unfurl your sails. Give up worldly enjoyments, and completely resign yourself to the Lord. You can't love both God and the world at the same time. If you want God, avoid temporal pleasures. Decide now what you want. Is it this fleeting life of transient pleasures or the everlasting life of eternal bliss ?

When a man regards God as his very own and has renounced all worldly cravings for His sake, God is very near to him. Such a man binds God with the fetters of his love.

Think of Him as your own, and like a child speaking to its mother, ask Him : " Lord, reveal Yourself to me." When a devotee is in earnest, God can't remain unmoved. He hurries to him and takes him on His lap. Oh, how inexpressible is that joy ! How boundless is that bliss ! He alone knows it who has had that supreme experience. Compared to it, worldly pleasures, so dear to most people, seem insipid and worthless.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say : " He who has given up sense-enjoyments for God's sake has

already covered three-quarters of his journey." Is it easy to renounce bodily cravings? Only if a man has God's grace and has practised severe spiritual disciplines in his past lives, can he possess the strength to renounce, in this life. Purify your mind so that no worldly desire can arise in it at all.

You have renounced everything and pledged your life to God. But remember, it's very hard to lead a pure and unsullied life. It's not so easy as you young boys think. Do you know what it is like? It is like walking on the edge of a drawn sword. Every moment there is the chance of a fall, of being sliced in pieces. Perfect continence is the sole condition of success in spiritual life. And it is difficult, no, it is impossible, to practise absolute purity without love for and faith in God. You have to live in a world full of passions and pleasures. Every day you have to see before you more than ninety-nine per cent of the people running mad after sensual pleasures; there is constant risk of your mind being contaminated. Those who want to lead a life of renunciation must always engage their minds in thinking good thoughts, studying good books and discussing elevating subjects. They must spend their time in worship of God, service to holy

men, and in contemplation. This is the only way to mould one's character.

First of all, be firm in your vow of chastity. Everything else will follow. You can't live a continent life unless you devote yourself to God, and without continence realization of God is impossible. Unless God is realized, real happiness cannot be had ; and without real happiness, human life will be spent in vain. I beg you, my dear children, make some effort and you will see how faith and devotion will be awakened in you.

You will become heirs of immortal bliss ; you will be blessed with the vision of God.

XII

REMEMBER HIM CONSTANTLY

MAHARAJ

The mind rules the senses. Therefore it must be controlled. Next, both mind and the intellect must be merged in the Atman. While you are in the society of holy men, your passions remain apparently dead, but they exist in a latent form. They are only wiped out completely after samadhi has been attained. Always be on your guard until you have transcended the mind.

“God is.” “Religion is true.” These truths are not preached merely to make men moral or to keep society in order. Truly He is, He is the reality and He can be realized. There is no other truth greater than this. Don't be fanatics. You must be calm, tranquil and controlled.

Meditate four times regularly each day ; early in the morning, at midday, at sunset and at midnight. Be steadfast in your ideal, keep up the regularity of your practice under all conditions. Study a chapter of the Gita every

day. If the mind is crowded with unnecessary thoughts and worries, it can be cleaned out by reading the Gita. I know this from my own experience.

Devote some of your time every day to self-analysis. Ask yourself : " Why have I come here ? How am I passing my time ? Do I really want God ? Am I really struggling to find Him ? " A man's mind tries to deceive him. He must not let himself be swayed by his mind : he must curb and rule it. Hold on to the truth. Be pure-hearted. The purer you become the more your mind will be absorbed in God. The subtle deceptions of the mind will become apparent to you and you will be able to destroy them completely. Who are your enemies ? Your own senses. But if you control them they will become your friends. This mind is your enemy and it is also your friend. The man who analyses himself can wipe out the subtle deceptions of the mind ; then you will move forward rapidly along the path of spirituality.

Plunge yourself deeply into the practice of japam and meditation. The mind is gross and feeds on gross objects. But as japam and meditation are practised, the mind becomes subtle and learns to grasp subtle truths. Prac-

tise. Practise. See for yourself if there is really a God. A little practice of physical austerity is sometimes good. For instance, on the day of the new-moon, or on the eleventh day after the new or the full moon, eat only once. Never waste your time in unnecessary talk. Constantly remember Him. Remember Him when you eat, when you sit or when you lie down. If you practise in this way, you will find that when you sit down to meditate your mind will naturally become absorbed in God. As your mind becomes absorbed in its meditation, a fountain of joy will spring forth from within.

Give no time to worries or idle talk. Idle talk wastes much energy. In the Upanishads we read : "Give up all vain talk." Devote your time entirely to meditation upon the Atman. In the Gita it is said : "Give your mind to Me, be My devotee, worship Me and bow down to Me." Sri Ramakrishna used to say : "Never squander the energy of your mind." This means you must remember Him constantly. The worldly man is very careful not to squander his money. But he does not realize how he is squandering his mind. There is nothing greater or easier than constantly to remember God. Such a practice awakens the

Kundalini. The veils of maya will be removed one after another, and a new vision will open. Then you will see what a wonderful treasure there is within you. You will unfold your own Divinity.

Pray to Sri Ramakrishna. He still lives. Pray to Him sincerely and He will show you the path. "You are mine and I am yours." Merge yourself in His consciousness.

As a general rule, a man's mind runs downward like a river—toward lust and gold, name and fame. Turn the current of the mind. Make it flow unceasingly upward, toward God. The mind of Sri Ramakrishna lived always in the transcendental plane. Only with much struggle could he bring his mind down to normal consciousness and to the things of the world.

Japam. Japam. Japam. While you work, practise japam. Let the wheel of the name of God go round and round in the midst of all activities. Do this ! All the burning of the heart will be soothed. Don't you know how many sinners have become pure and free and divine by taking refuge in the name of God ? Have intense faith in God and in His name. Know that God and His name are one. He dwells in the hearts of His devotees. Call on

Him earnestly. Pray to Him : "Reveal Your grace to me. Give me faith and devotion." Pray earnestly. Make your mind and your lips one.

Cover everything with God. See Him in all creatures. As you learn to see God everywhere, you will become "humbler than a blade of grass." Hear only of God and talk only of Him. Shun that place where His name is not uttered as you would a cremation-ground.

Repeat His name and call on Him. He is very near and dear to all. Why should He not reveal Himself? Open your heart to Him. He will guide you along the right path. There is nothing more purifying than His name and meditation upon Him. He is our very own. He easily becomes revealed to us.

There is the path of devotion and there is the path of knowledge. A devotee wants the form of God. He calls on Him, he sings His praise, he chants His name and he sees His shining form. Sometimes he weeps and sometimes he laughs. The followers of the path of knowledge seek for the Light. They become illumined. However, in the end, the devotee and the man of knowledge become one. Ignorance is destroyed by following the path of devotion as well as by following the path of

knowledge. The light of knowledge alone shines. What lies beyond the light of knowledge? He alone knows who goes beyond, no one else. And nobody can reveal that.

Have patience, infinite patience, until you reach the Reality. In the primary stage, meditation is tiresome—it is like learning the alphabet. Gradually, peace overflows within you. There are boys who complain to me after they have been initiated that they are not getting anywhere. I do not listen to them for two or three years. Then later they come and tell me : “ Yes, Maharaj, I am getting somewhere now.” Do not be impatient. Struggle intensely for two or three years, and your heart will be flooded with joy.

XIII

BE LOST IN GOD

DISCIPLE

But Maharaj, do you mean that Sri Ramakrishna is still living ?

MAHARAJ

Are you crazy ? If he were not alive, why should we lead such a life, giving up our homes and all our possessions ? He *is*. Pour out your whole heart in prayer to Him. Ask to see and to know Him. He will take away all your doubts and will show you His true nature.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, do you see Him ?

MAHARAJ

Yes, through His grace, I see Him. Anybody can see Him if His grace is upon him. But how many love Him ? How many yearn to see Him ?

It is not an easy matter to realize God. Without a harmonious development of the mental, physical and spiritual powers, religion

is not possible. Faith, intense faith ! He who has acquired faith has seen God.

If you have faith, a penny has great value ; if you have no faith, a gold piece is worth nothing. He who has no faith in God, doubts everything. He who has faith in God overcomes all his doubts.

Without dispassion toward the world, faith and love do not grow. You must have dispassion. To lose the ego in God is dispassion.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, when I sit down to meditate, I find my mind wandering ; it thinks of endless things. How is it possible to stop this restlessness ?

MAHARAJ

In the beginning this always happens, but you must try diligently to check the mad outward rush of your mind. This is how to do it successfully : never begin your meditation immediately after sitting down. First draw the mind back from its external pursuits by means of discrimination and lock it up inside at the sacred feet of the Chosen Ideal ; then make japam and meditate. If you follow this course for some time, the mind will naturally cease to wander.

The path of japam is the easiest way. By constantly performing japam the mind can easily be made calm and steady, and finally it will lose itself in God. Therefore I ask you to make japam regularly and often ; at the same time meditate on the Chosen Ideal. Perform both japam and meditation simultaneously. This combination brings success more quickly.

Always practise your disciplines with unswerving steadfastness and don't let a single day pass by without them. Whether you like it or not, sit down at the appointed hour every day. If you can carry on your practices for three years with such unerring regularity, I assure you that love for God will grow in you and you will feel yourself nearer to Him. Then you will be prompted from within to call upon Him and Him only : you won't be able to turn your mind in any other direction. It is at this stage that the aspirant feels the joy of spiritual life within his heart.

Without intense love for God, it is very difficult to practise spiritual disciplines in the right way, even after retiring into solitude. When you are alone, there is always a possibility of serious consequences. Therefore, two of a similar type and temperament should live together ; in that case mutual help and guid-

ance may be given should any spiritual crisis befall one or the other at any time. But, on the other hand, if there are more than two, confusion may arise. They may indulge in worldly talk. Such idle talk not only causes the mind to lose its higher tendencies and nobler aspirations, but makes it forget God.

While you are undergoing intense disciplines you must cut down the quantity of your food to a minimum. On a full stomach japam and meditation are not possible because the greater part of your energy will be squandered in digesting the food, and the mind will remain disturbed. That is why moderation in habits, in food and recreation, in everything, has been so strongly enjoined by the Gita. "Yoga is not for the man who overeats," the Lord says, "or for him who fasts excessively. It is not for him who sleeps too much, or for the keeper of exaggerated vigils."

In this sacred monastery, how great are the facilities for spiritual practices! You don't have to worry about food, or clothes, or anything else. All is ready at hand. Live here and apply yourself whole-heartedly to a life of constant prayer and meditation. No good comes of living like a vagabond, my child.

If you think that you can become a mahatma

or a great seer by wandering here and there, let me tell you, you are misguided. You cannot become a saint in that way. Without unceasing practice you cannot have any religious experience ; it can't be got simply by trickery. If you sincerely long for God, you must plunge into meditation and become completely lost in God.

XIV GOD CAN BE SEEN

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how can one control the mind ?

MAHARAJ

Through gradual practice, the mind has to be concentrated upon God. Keep a sharp eye on the mind so that no undesirable thoughts or distractions may enter in. Whenever they try to crowd into your mind, turn it toward God and pray earnestly. Through such practice the mind comes under control and becomes purified.

When you feel and know that you are helpless, that you have no other refuge but God, when you feel you have nothing to look forward to, then only does devotion to God arise.

Practise japam incessantly. With every breath, practise it. Through practice, japam will become your second nature. You will then find that you are chanting the name of God before you fall asleep and you will find yourself chanting His name as you awake.

Know for certain that God can be reached—that His spiritual form can be seen and it is possible to talk to Him.

Practise these spiritual disciplines. As you practise them new visions will open. You will see wonderfully beautiful visions. You may see the many aspects of God, and many spiritual forms. Or you may see the ocean of Light or a steady flame. There is no end to God-unfoldment—the knowledge of the Infinite Existence, Infinite Bliss. Light, Light, more Light! Engage yourself in these practices. With great earnestness chant His name and dive deep.

Learn to acquire love and sympathy for all. Overlook the faults of others. If you can't help an evil man to become good then what use is your spiritual life?

Learn patience. Anger is controlled through patience. Be patient, forbearing and humble. Humility is a great aid in building our character. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "He who can forbear, lives. He who cannot, is lost." Again he would say, "Water accumulates on low ground. When the ground is high, it flows off it." When a man is humble, sweetness of character and other good qualities develop naturally.

Try to remember God constantly—even while you are working. In the beginning it is a little difficult but through practice it becomes easy. Don't stop struggling. It is no use having too many rules and regulations for spiritual practices. The main thing is sincerity and earnestness. If these qualities are in your prayer it will surely reach Him. God looks into the heart and not into the words of man.

People talk of enjoying this world, but do they know how to enjoy it? First become a god and then enjoy. Before that, all your enjoyments are the enjoyments of a brute.

If your mind has become pure and you live with pure thoughts, no evil can touch you.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, there is the song, "I want to taste sugar but not to become sugar." Should that be the attitude of a devotee?

MAHARAJ

"I want to taste sugar but not become sugar," is for the man who has not yet tasted sugar. When a devotee begins to taste the sweetness of God, he will desire to achieve oneness with Him.

DISCIPLE

Are dreams about enlightened men or Divine Incarnations real ?

MAHARAJ

Yes, they are real. Dreams about enlightened souls, gods and goddesses and Divine Incarnations are real experiences. They are actual visitations. Many spiritual truths are revealed to one in dreams. The effect and impression of such dreams remain. But one mustn't speak of them to anybody.

XV

LIVE FOR THE GOOD OF THE WORLD

MAHARAJ

To do good to the world you must be perfectly selfless. Worldly people are such that often if you do them good they in return will try to harm you. You have heard of the great soul Vidyasagar. He lived for the good of the world and those who were benefited by him were the very ones who spoke ill of him and tried to do him harm. If he learned that someone had spoken ill of him, he would say, "Have I done him any good that he does me this harm?" That is the nature of the world. But the truth of the matter is that those who are good will do good by their very nature and those who are wicked will do harm by their very nature.

Once a holy man was meditating, seated on the bank of a river. Suddenly he saw a scorpion floating on the water. He took pity on it and with the palm of his hand helped it out of the water. But as he did so the scorpion

stung him. The holy man suffered great pain. A few moments later the scorpion again fell into the water. The holy man again helped it out. Again the scorpion stung him. This happened a third time. A man, who was watching the holy man helping the scorpion, asked, "Why do you help the scorpion when it stings you again and again?" The holy man replied, "It is the nature of the scorpion to sting and it is my nature to do good. The scorpion does not give up its nature, why should I give up mine?"

Mind moves upward or downward. Jealousy, selfishness, desire for enjoyment, laziness, etc., are its movement downward. Faith, devotion to God, love, sympathy, etc., are its movement upward.

XVI

KNOW HIS GRACE

MAHARAJ

Practise japam and your body and mind will become pure. Have intense faith in the power of God's name and meditate on Him. If you chant His name, your bonds are broken and you become fearless. You will find immortality.

To obtain His grace, to know Him—that is the one object of spiritual disciplines. There is the mud of 'lust and gold' in the mind—that mud must be washed away. Unless the heart is purified, God's grace does not reveal itself.

Sri Ramakrishna used to give a beautiful illustration : So long as the needle is covered with mud it is not attracted by the magnet. But when the mud is washed off, the needle is naturally drawn towards the magnet. The mud of the mind is washed away if one thinks of the Lord and meditates on Him. At once the magnet of God attracts the needle of man's mind to Him. The moment the mind becomes

pure, divine grace begins to flow. This divine grace reveals God.

Can man know God by himself? Can the intellect grasp Him? Surrender yourself to Him. Seek refuge in Him. Love Him. Yearn for Him. Be mad for Him.

To know Him is the one purpose of life. Learn to be absorbed in Him. Activity is not the goal. Work without attachment is only a means to absorption in God. Meditate and dive deep. As you dive deep you will know that God alone is real, everything else is unreal. Never stop but move onward. When a little spiritual awakening comes through your practices, do not mistake that for the goal. Light! more light! Go deep and deeper. You must know Him directly, face to face, and talk to Him.

Enough of study and arguments! Now gather the forces of your mind and direct them toward Him and Him only. Plunge into the Ocean of Bliss.

Do not miss eternal joy for the sake of ephemeral pleasures. Worldly pleasures will seem insipid when once you taste the divine bliss.

Before your eyes you see many attractive sense-objects; but where will they be when

your eyes close for the last time? These objects of enjoyment lead a man from darkness to greater darkness. Which path will you take? The path that leads to darkness, or the path that leads to light?

Ah, my children, you have glimpsed that path of light. Don't turn back to the path of darkness. Sense-attraction is strong indeed. If you yield to it, it creates indelible impressions of evil in the mind and the mind will drag you down and down, without your being aware of it. The only way to remain safe from sense-objects is to give yourselves up whole-heartedly to God. Be strong in His strength and this very strength will free you from the net of maya. Only he alone who has known God's grace can overcome this world.

XVII

WIN THE GRACE OF YOUR OWN MIND

MAHARAJ

To give ourselves wholly to God is difficult because of this doubt which arises in the mind : “ Since I have not known or seen God, how can I love Him ? How can I surrender myself to Him ? ”

This doubt, however, is removed if a man finds the grace of an illumined Guru. The Guru removes all obstacles and shows the path to the Eternal.

Have intense faith in the words of the Guru and follow his precepts. The impurities of the mind will be washed away and the light of knowledge will dawn.

If a man longs for God, if he is earnest about practising spiritual disciplines, he is sure to find a Guru.

The man who has the grace of a Guru knows the path. Let him follow it diligently.

The Vaishnavas have a beautiful saying :
“ A man may have the grace of the Guru, the

grace of God, and of His devotees ; but without the grace of his own mind, he comes to ruin.”

My boys, you have the grace of the Guru ; you have, by the grace of God, the desire for spiritual knowledge, you have the society of the holy. Now you must strive to win the grace of your own minds, by the practice of self-control.

“ God is my very own.” Have this truth firmly fixed in your hearts. Then everything will be easy.

Give this life entirely to Him. Reserve no will of your own. He is the only refuge.

The same instructions for spiritual disciplines do not apply to everyone. The Guru studies the temperaments and tendencies of each individual and instructs him accordingly.

Beyond a few general rules, no individual can be told in the presence of another what particular path he should follow. I have seen in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, my Master, how he would take each disciple alone and give him, in private, the special instructions necessary for him. If you want to ask your Guru anything regarding your spiritual practices, you must do so in private.

I will give you a few instructions which can be followed by all.

First, have faith in God. Be firmly convinced that to realize Him is the only purpose of life. By knowing Him alone a man reaches eternal life and infinite happiness.

Next, practise continence. Without perfect chastity, no one can hold fast to high spiritual ideals. To nourish the body, mind and brain and to secure their fullest development, continence is essential. A special spiritual nerve develops in a chaste man. With its aid, his memory, his capacity for spiritual understanding and his faith in God increase. He is able to experience spiritual truths which lie beyond the reach of the senses. That is the reason religious teachers stress the ideal of chastity.

Thirdly control your appetite. Take nourishing food which is easily digested. Avoid food that excites or produces lethargy. The brain must be kept cool, in order that you may meditate. Eat to keep the body healthy. Health is essential in the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Eat very little after sunset. Then you can meditate during the night. Daytime has many distractions. At night, nature takes on a quiet aspect and so the night-time is best suited for practising contemplation. At dead of night,

with a little effort, the mind becomes absorbed in God.

Do not make a show of your spiritual practices. When you meditate, meditate in secret.

The most suitable hours for prayer and contemplation are those at the junction of day and night, and at midnight.

Sri Ramakrishna never spent the night in sleep, nor would he allow his young disciples to sleep long. When others had gone to bed, he would awaken them ; give them definite instructions and send them to the Panchavati, or the Mother's Temple, or Shiva's Temple for meditation. They would spend the whole night in prayer as directed, and rest during the day. It was in this way that Sri Ramakrishna used to take them through various spiritual exercises. Often he used to say : " Three classes of people keep awake in the night : yogis, bhogis (seekers of enjoyment) and rogis (sick persons). You are all yogis. You should never sleep away the night."

You are young. Strive hard to taste the Divine Bliss. When once you have enjoyed happiness in God, where else can you go but to Him ?

XVIII

KEEP THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY

MAHARAJ

The moment you become absorbed in contemplation, you experience unbounded joy. Days and nights pass away in the blissful consciousness of God.

Be careful not to speak of your spiritual moods and experiences to everybody, least of all to those of a worldly nature. It may hinder your growth. However, if you exchange your experiences with one of a like mind, whose temperament is in harmony with your own, you may be helped in your progress. Both of you are travellers on the same path. Perhaps your companion has already walked along it and is aware of its pitfalls. Benefited by his experiences, you may be able to avoid those dangers and difficulties.

Do you know why you should seek the society of holy men? Their experiences are a great help to a spiritual aspirant. When you visit a new place, if you have the help of a good guide, you will be able to see within a

short time all that is worth seeing there ; also you will be saved from the dangers and difficulties into which strangers are likely to fall. Similarly, from the company of advanced spiritual souls you will gather many valuable hints, and your struggle will be simplified.

This life may come to an end any moment. Nobody knows when. Be equipped for the journey with spiritual treasures. To go empty-handed to an unknown place involves much suffering and sorrow. Birth is inevitably followed by death. Death means going to an unknown place, so you must prepare yourself for the journey. Always be ready for the great call.

Here you have every opportunity to grow spiritually. Struggle now to reach Reality. Hold on to the Pillar. Have tremendous faith in yourself. "I can know God" — with such faith forge ahead and you will reach Him. Then life will be blessed. Free yourself from the wheel of birth and death. Be His eternal companion.

Banish all fear and weakness. Never weaken your mind by thinking of past mistakes. Sin ? Sin only exists in man's eye. In God's eye there is none. One glance from Him and the sins of many, many births are wiped away.

You have come to Sri Ramakrishna. Hold on to him. You will have nothing to worry about.

You must have a regular routine for spiritual practices. You must have certain fixed hours for meditation and study. Under all circumstances follow this routine devotedly. Steadfastness is very important ; without it no success is possible.

By steadfastness alone the mind becomes absorbed in God. Unless absorption is achieved, freedom from the temptations of the world is impossible. Lust, anger, delusion — these are strong foes. Be strong in the strength of God and escape from the net of maya.

You must follow your routine. The mind may rebel at first. Don't yield to it like a slave. Gradually you will find yourselves masters of your own minds. When you have gained control over yourselves and your minds have become naturally absorbed in God, then you need follow no rules or routines.

Life is flowing quickly away, like a stream. The day that is once gone can never be recalled. Make the best use of your time. At the last moment, it will be no good crying, "Alas, alas !"

XIX

KEEP YOUR MIND IN GOD

MAHARAJ

Keep your mind always in communion with God ; then all depravity of mind will vanish. Select a room for daily worship ; retire there every morning and evening. Perform japam and meditation and prayer regularly for as long as you can. The more you can devote yourself to the contemplation of God, the more fruitful your life will become ; the more attached you are to the vanities of the world, the less peace you will feel in your mind. I pray to the Almighty that by His endless grace He may lead you in the right path !

Know this : without worshipping God you can never have peace of mind. Therefore spend some time every day in the worship of God, in japam and meditation, and in singing His glory. True devotion, faith, and knowledge are the results of long persistence in spiritual practices. Many people turn to agnosticism when, after a lukewarm attempt at spiritual practices, they cannot realize God

or attain to the bliss Divine. The reason is not far to seek. These people don't possess sincere attachment to God, so they find it difficult to persevere in the path of spiritual practices. The disciplines prove too arduous an undertaking for them.

Without Divine attachment and Divine love the mind becomes dry and restless. But the more you suffer for God's sake the more peaceful will you become at last. "Persist cheerfully in your attempt," said Sri Ramakrishna, "then you will succeed against all odds." So plunge headlong into spiritual disciplines and persevere in them ; don't shirk, even at the risk of your life.

It is hard indeed to kindle any thought of God within the human heart without the fire of renunciation. I am certain that the more a man possesses this fire within himself, the greater is the peace he enjoys. We saw a true and living representation of discrimination and renunciation in Sri Ramakrishna, the Master. With the progress of time we know him more and more. We read of discrimination and renunciation in the scriptures, but we saw them personified in him.

You mustn't divulge the secret of your spiritual practices to everybody.

There is nothing real outside, everything real is within.

God should be imagined as vast and infinite. To gain an idea of the vastness within, one should look at the Himalayas or the ocean, or gaze at the sky.

True character cannot be formed unless a man becomes God-fearing, that is, unless he believes in God, in the life hereafter, and in such principles.

To conquer lust or control the mind by studying books is as impossible as walking on air.

So long as Mother Kundalini moves in a downward direction, the mind of man runs after things relating to the phallus, the anus and the navel. But as She rises up, the mind also rises ; it then moves toward things spiritual.

With the growth of tranquillity, a man becomes eager to behold the vision of God ; he then delights in singing His glory and meditating upon Him more and more.

Like the Buddha one should be bold. Look, what a mighty renunciation he made ! To realize God he gave up all his royal comforts without a thought. What a severe course of discipline he underwent ! When, in spite of

everything, he could not realize God, he took his bath in the sacred Nirajana (a rivulet at Buddha Gaya), and sat down for the last time with this resolve : “ Let this body go ; but until I have attained illumination, I will not rise.” And the illumination came !

XX

TAKE YOUR REFUGE IN GOD

MAHARAJ

God is the wish-yielding tree. Whatever a man asks of Him, that he receives. But such is the play of maya that man does not want to find the blissful ocean of God ; instead he drowns himself in the quagmire of worldliness, and thinks he is happy. Then as he meets with the sufferings of the world he feels that his life has been lived in vain. You are sitting under this wish-yielding tree. Ask to become divine and you will become divine. Ask to become a brute and a brute you will become.

In the domain of maya there is both vidya (that which leads a man to God) and avidya (which leads a man away from God). Vidya is spiritual discrimination and renunciation of worldliness. By taking refuge in vidya, you take refuge in God. While avidya, which consists of lust, anger, greed, egotism, attachment and envy, lowers a man to the level of a brute. If you cultivate discrimination and

renunciation, avidya will be destroyed. If you yield to avidya, God remains far away and suffering will be your lot. There is both vidya and avidya. Man has the power to choose the one or the other, and he will reap the fruits of life accordingly. Why blame God for your sufferings ? Man falls in love with momentary pleasures. He never discriminates that the consequent suffering follows from his own doing. If you put your hand into the fire it will get burned. Is that the fault of the fire ? Sri Ramakrishna used to say : "It is the nature of the lamp to shed light. Some may read the Bhagavatam (sacred scriptures) by its light, while others may forge a document. The lamp is not to blame."

My Master used to say, "There is a peculiar breeze, known as malaya. When it blows it transforms the trees, which have the right substance in them, into sandal trees ; but the worthless trees remain as they are, although the breeze touches them, too." So also there are two classes of men. The one class of men, as soon as they come into the presence of the holy, and hear their teachings, are awakened. They see the evanescence of the world and become eager to find God, and to solve the mysteries of life and death. They at once

devote themselves to the practice of spiritual disciplines. Such men are sure to succeed in reaching enlightenment.

There is another class. You may hold high spiritual ideals before them but they do not respond. They imagine that they will live forever in this world, and that the world cannot get along without them. They also think it is sheer foolishness to give up the pleasures of the world for the sake of the unknown. Thus they remain in the well of darkness.

Earnestly pray to God with all your heart and soul, "O Lord, give me understanding. Free me from all sense of ego. Teach me to submit to Your will. Make me Your own."

Yearn for Him. Since you have taken refuge in Sri Ramakrishna, be certain that you have his grace. Luckless is he who has received this grace, but fails to recognize it. Do not miss the supreme joy. Be his eternal companion.

Sri Ramakrishna, the avatar of this age, is helping every sincere, earnest aspirant. He is waiting for you. Make a little effort and spread the sails of faith and devotion. The spiritual breeze that is blowing will take you to the goal. Do not look back. Go ahead. Let your life be blessed by His vision.

XXI

SEEK GOD ONLY

No one wants misery. Every one wants happiness. Yet the deluded man ignores God, the source of all happiness, and runs after worthless objects, the toys of life. If you want happiness throw away these toys and yearn for Him. He will run to take you on His lap. Seek the toys of life, and you will get them. Seek God, and you will get Him.

“Eat the mangoes, do not count the leaves.” Life’s purpose is to reach God. Reach Him first. Solve the mystery of life and death. Wake up and plunge into the ocean of nectar and be immortals. Pray to Him unceasingly.

God has many names and many forms. He is also formless. Worship Him. Lose yourself in His contemplation. It makes no difference by what name or in what form you worship Him. If you are sincere in your worship you will be blessed with His vision. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “Sweetened bread will taste sweet in whatever way you eat it.”

Have faith and plunge into the fathomless

ocean. Dive deep and you are sure to find the Eternal treasure. Don't lose heart if after a little struggle, you fail to realize God. The ocean is full of precious pearls, but you may not find them at the first dive. Try patiently to dive deep into meditation. In due course you are certain to receive His grace. Suppose you wish to see an important man. You arrange the interview with the help of his attendants. Similarly, to obtain the Lord's grace, you must seek the help of godly men and undergo many spiritual disciplines.

Knowing Him to be dearer than the dearest, pray to Him with a yearning heart for His grace and vision. Cry to Him like a child. He cannot stay away from you for long.

Make the mind one-pointed like the mariner's compass. In whatever direction the ship may sail, the compass always points to the north, and keeps the ship on its course. Keep your mind pointed towards God and life's boat will sail smoothly. A man who does this never loses his faith and devotion even if he is thrown into an evil environment. The moment he hears of God, he becomes intoxicated with joy. A piece of flint may lie under water for a thousand years, but it will still emit sparks if it is taken out and struck.

Like a fallen leaf tossed to and fro by the wind, the one-pointed man is content to remain wherever the Lord places him. He has no will or desire of his own. He can live in the world and at the same time dive into the ocean of knowledge and bliss.

A pure mind is like a dry match-stick. It ignites the moment you strike it. But if it gets wet, though you may go on striking it, there will be no light. Similarly if the mind becomes soiled by worldliness, you will find it extremely difficult to restore it to its former purity.

XXII

THE REAL AUSTERITY IS THE CONTROL OF PASSIONS

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, my mind is still restless. How can I curb it ?

MAHARAJ

Practise japam and meditation regularly. Don't fail even for one day. The mind is like a spoiled child — always restless. Try to steady it again and again, by fixing it on the Chosen Ideal, and at last you will become absorbed in Him. If you continue your practice for two or three years, you will begin to feel an unspeakable joy and the mind will become steady. In the beginning the practice of japam and meditation seems dry. It's like taking bitter medicine. You must forcibly pour the thought of God into your mind. As you persist you will be flooded with joy. What a terrible ordeal a student undergoes to pass his examination ! Do you know that to realize God is far easier ? Call on Him sincerely with a tranquil heart.

DISCIPLE

That is encouraging, Maharaj. But at times I feel that with all my struggle I am making no progress. It all seems unreal. Despair takes hold of me.

MAHARAJ

No, no. There is no cause for despair. The effect of meditation is inevitable. You are bound to get results if you practise japam with devotion, or even without it. For devotion will follow. Continue your practice regularly for a little longer. You will find peace. One's health also is improved if one meditates.

Meditation, in the primary stage is like waging a war with the mind. With effort the restless mind has to be brought under control and placed at the feet of the Lord. But in the beginning, take care that while you meditate, you do not overtax your brain. Go slowly. Gradually intensify your effort. Through regular practice, when the mind becomes steady, meditation will be easier. You will not feel any strain in sitting for long hours in contemplation.

Just as after a deep sleep, a man feels refreshed in body and mind, so will you feel refreshed after meditation and there will follow an intense experience of happiness.

Body and mind are closely related. When the body is disturbed, the mind also becomes disturbed. Therefore particular care must be given to diet in order to keep the body healthy.

Under no circumstances should an aspirant fill more than one-half of his stomach with food.

Meditation is not such an easy matter. When you have eaten too much, the mind becomes restless. Also unless you keep lust, anger, greed, and such other passions under control, the mind will remain unsteady. How can you meditate with an unsteady mind?

You must practise severe austerities. Not physical austerities or the torture of the body! Such are easy to practise. The real austerity is the control of passions. Never allow any passion to lift its head. But remember, religion is not for the eunuch, nor for the man who maims his body to avoid passions.

Unless you meditate, the mind cannot be controlled, and unless the mind is controlled, you cannot meditate. But if you think, "First let me control the mind and then I shall meditate," you will never enter the path of spiritual life. You must do both at the same time — steady your mind and meditate.

As you sit down to meditate, think of the

cravings and desires of the mind as mere dreams. See them as unreal. They can never attach themselves to the mind. Feel that you are pure. Thus purity will gradually fill your mind.

As you continue in meditation you may experience a divine light, or you may hear the sound of Om. Many such spiritual experiences may come. But pay no attention to them. They are of little value except that they indicate you are on the right path.

If you wish to realize God, practise the spiritual disciplines with patience and perseverance. In due course you will be enlightened. When the time comes, the Lord will reveal His grace to you. Sri Ramakrishna used to say : " Unless the time is ripe the mother bird does not break open the egg." Don't be impatient. Impatience is of no avail. Work and wait. This waiting period is no doubt very wearisome. One moment you feel hope, then again despair ; joy is followed by sorrow. Thus the struggle continues for days and days until God at long last is revealed.

XXIII

IMITATE THE LIVES OF THE HOLY

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how does devotion to God grow ?

MAHARAJ

By keeping the company of the holy. Listen to their teachings and mould your life to the pattern of theirs. But without continence and the practice of meditation, you can't grasp the spirit of the enlightened ones ; neither can you understand the scriptures. Read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and meditate on its teachings. The more you meditate on God the better will be your understanding of holy books. Knowledge of God from hearsay is one thing. To live in God is another. But the knowledge acquired through realization is entirely different from both.

If you have the slightest desire for name and fame or craving for fleshly enjoyments you cannot reach Him. Nag Mahasaya used to say, " It's like trying to row an anchored

boat." He also used to say : "It's easy to get name and fame. But holy is he who can renounce them."

Blessed is he who can associate with an enlightened soul.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, some believe that merely keeping company with the holy is enough. One need do no more.

MAHARAJ

No ! Merely keeping their company isn't enough. Open your heart and ask them to solve your doubts. Carefully observe their lives and imitate their example. It's a lazy man's attitude to think that he has nothing more to do than associate with the holy. Needless to say, the mere association is very important. In their company, doubts are removed and pure thoughts are awakened. No scriptures or books can create such pure impressions on a man's life or transform him as vitally as contact with the enlightened.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, Sri Ramakrishna has said that solitude is an aid to spiritual growth.

MAHARAJ

Yes, that's true ; but you should retire into solitude only when you've attained some growth in the spiritual life. To retire from human society before one is ready is unwise. In this world of time, space and causation it's impossible to find true solitude. It lies beyond the mind and intellect. It is identical with the Most Tranquil.

It is better for a beginner to live in the company of holy men.

DISCIPLE

The other day you said that impatience was of no avail, that we should be content to work and wait. Does that mean that we must not yearn to realize God immediately ?

MAHARAJ

I must have said that in another connection. Yes, you must yearn to realize Him, but don't be carried away by temporary emotions, or give expression to them.

To intensify spiritual emotions, you must hold them within. If you give vent to them, they will exhaust themselves. Then dryness may follow.

The man of true devotion yearns for Lord without becoming impatient. Even if he sees no light he will not give up his devotions. Only those who love God like shopkeepers looking for profit will give up if their prayers are not answered immediately.

XXIV

PEACE DWELLS IN THE MAN WHO LOVES GOD

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how can we develop yearning for God ?

MAHARAJ

When your mind becomes purified by the influence of holy men and when you practise spiritual disciplines, yearning will grow.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how does one attain peace ?

MAHARAJ

Peace dwells in the man who loves God. Realize that your life is barren without Him. Yearn for Him, and peace will follow. When a man finds no peace in the world, dispassion grows within him and he is drawn to God.

The more a man finds that the world is barren, the more intense becomes his devotion to God and the greater is his peace. The greater the thirst, the sweeter is the water. Create thirst and you will have peace in God.

DISCIPLE

How can love grow ?

MAHARAJ

By prayer, meditation, and the practice of spiritual disciplines.

DISCIPLE

Can a man realize God while living in the world ?

MAHARAJ

Is any one outside the world ?

DISCIPLE

No, Maharaj, I mean, if a man lives the life of a householder.

MAHARAJ

Yes, he also can realize God but he must make a greater effort.

DISCIPLE

Should a man renounce the world if dispassion arises ?

MAHARAJ

Yes, he must. If true dispassion is once awakened, it will spread like a forest fire. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say : " Like a fish released from the net, a man of renunciation who is once released from the world never wants to be caught again."

DISCIPLE

Is it possible to realize God without a Guru ?

MAHARAJ

It is not so easy without a Guru. The Guru is one who shows the path to God through a mantram (holy name). He gives the secret of spiritual practices. He watches over his disciple and protects him from going astray. A Guru must be a knower of Brahman.

DISCIPLE

How can one make the mind one-pointed ?

MAHARAJ

By practice. Pray, worship, meditate regularly. Meditation for one or two hours a day is not sufficient. The longer you practise, the more your mind will become one-pointed towards God. Follow a routine with regularity.

The aspirant must begin his spiritual practice by mentally worshipping his Chosen Ideal—God with form. Then meditate on the shining form and gradually let this form melt into the Formless. God is with form, without form, and beyond.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, what is the meaning of the Vedantic saying : “ Brahman is real, the universe is unreal ? ”

MAHARAJ

Its meaning is that the universe of appearance is unreal. In samadhi the universe disappears. If you ask a seer about his experiences he will say, “ All is infinite bliss there ! There is no ‘ I ’ nor ‘ you ’—there is only Existence-Knowledge-Bliss absolute. The joy of that experience is unspeakable.”

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, what is the proof of God’s existence ?

MAHARAJ

The seer says, “ I have seen Him. You also can see Him.” Practise spiritual disciplines. Watch and wait. You will be blessed with His vision.

DISCIPLE

Sometimes as I keep practising japam, the mind becomes blank. What causes that, Maharaj ?

MAHARAJ

That is one of the obstacles on the way to spiritual growth. Meditation must be continued, together with the practice of japam. Meditation means a continuous flow of thought towards God. When meditation ripens, there comes absorption, and samadhi is experienced. The joy that is realized in samadhi remains forever.

XXV

HOW TO MEDITATE

DISCIPLE

How should I meditate ?

MAHARAJ

Hold the mind fast to the Lotus Feet of your Chosen Ideal.

DISCIPLE

In which centre shall I meditate upon Him—the centre in the brain or the centre in the heart ?

MAHARAJ

Meditation can be practised in both centres. I would advise you at first, however, to meditate in the heart.

DISCIPLE

But how, Maharaj ?

MAHARAJ

Meditate upon Him in the centre of the Lotus in your heart. (Maharaj then gave the disciple more detailed instruction concerning

meditation. These details can only be learned personally from a Guru.)

DISCIPLE

But, Maharaj, the heart is made of flesh and blood. How can one think of God there ?

MAHARAJ

I don't mean the anatomical heart. Think of the spiritual centre situated near the heart. In the beginning, as you think of Him inside the body, you will think of your flesh and blood. But soon you will forget the body and there will only remain the Blissful Form of the Chosen Ideal.

DISCIPLE

Shall I think of Him exactly as He is seen in pictures or images ?

MAHARAJ

Let the picture or image be merely an aid in bringing to your mind the living, conscious, and shining Form of your Chosen Ideal.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, what is really meant by meditating on the meaning of the mantram ?

MAHARAJ

What is the meaning of the mantram? It is the name of God. You have a name. If I call you, your form also comes to my mind. Call on the Lord in this same way. Repeat the mantram and at the same time meditate on the Image of the Chosen Ideal.

DISCIPLE

How does one perform japam, by repeating the mantram mentally or audibly?

MAHARAJ

When you are alone, you may repeat it audibly to yourself; otherwise repeat it mentally.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, the last few days during my meditation, the mantram has appeared in shining letters before my closed eyes. Then the form of the Chosen Ideal disappeared.

MAHARAJ

You must not let the Chosen Ideal leave your mind—meditation and mantram must go together. However, your experience of the

mantram shows that you are proceeding along the right path. That was an auspicious sign. Mantram is sound-Brahman.

DISCIPLE

How should I begin to meditate on the Chosen Ideal ?

MAHARAJ

First make your salutations at His Feet, and then proceed. As I have already said, perform japam at the same time. The mantram is charged with spiritual power. The truth of this will be directly revealed to you as you practise.

DISCIPLE

How can one get the mind absorbed in God, Maharaj ?

MAHARAJ

Practise meditation regularly. Early morning is a good time for meditation. Read devotional scriptures before your meditation. This helps to concentrate the mind on God. After meditation sit quietly for at least half an hour ; for during meditation itself the desired effect may not be produced. It may come later. The

mind often grows calm while you are relaxing after meditation and spiritual experiences come. That is why an aspirant must not occupy himself with worldly thoughts or engage in secular affairs immediately after meditation. It may do him great harm.

Practise, practise ! Even though you may not like it, keep up the regularity of your practice. Even mechanical practice is a great help. Devote at least two hours every day to the performance of japam. Sometimes it is beneficial just to sit quietly in a solitary place where the scenery is beautiful.

DISCIPLE

What should I do if while meditating on the Form of the Chosen Ideal, other forms of gods and goddesses appear before me ?

MAHARAJ

Recognize this as an auspicious sign. Know that your Chosen Ideal is appearing to you in various aspects. He is one and He is many. Meditate on your Chosen Ideal, and if He appears before you in another form, enjoy that divine vision. Gradually you will find that all aspects are dissolved into the Chosen Ideal.

There are auspicious days favourable for spiritual practice—new-moon, full moon, the

eighth day after the new or full moon and days on which special celebrations are held. On these days devote more time to japam and meditation.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, the scriptures declare that the Guru must be worshipped before meditation on God. How shall I worship the Guru ?

MAHARAJ

First meditate on him in the heart, realizing that Guru and God are one and the same. Then let the form of the Guru dissolve into the Chosen Ideal, and proceed with japam and meditation.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, you always insist that I must serve my father. Isn't it better to become a monk and serve you ?

MAHARAJ

Indeed it is. But does the mere wearing of the gerrua cloth make you a monk ? You have a duty to perform in serving your sick father. I am asking you to do this, my child, and at the same time to continue your regular spiritual practices. Serving your father will help you in your spiritual growth.

XXVI

WORK AND WORSHIP

MAHARAJ

While Swami Turiyananda and I were living on Mt. Abu, we received a letter from Swamiji just before his departure for America. He wrote, "To devote your life to the good of all and to the happiness of all is religion. Whatever you do for your own sake is not religion." How wonderful this truth is ! His words are embedded in my heart.

It has come to my notice that some of you believe that the part you take in the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission is a hindrance to your meditation and spiritual progress, and that Swami Premananda and I do not approve of such activities. This belief has no foundation. You don't understand our spirit. I will declare again and again and I emphasize this truth—that, however busy you may be in carrying out your duties, you must practise regular japam and meditation. Remember the

Lord always—before you begin to work, while you are working, and after you have finished.

We have heard Swamiji often say, “Work and worship.” Can anybody in the primary stage, live absorbed day and night in meditation? So you must work but without attachment and for the good of mankind. If you do not work, evil thoughts and unnecessary worries will occupy your mind.

The Gita and other scriptures emphasize the ideal of worship and meditation in the midst of the activities of life. I can confirm this from my own experience. “Work and worship” is the surest way to spiritual progress.

You see this disastrous war which is now going on.¹ Out of futile patriotism, men give up their wives and children and all their pleasures, and sacrifice their lives for a worldly cause. Yet you, who have given up hearth and home, renounced all sense-pleasures and surrendered yourselves at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, for the sake of a noble ideal—the good of mankind and the realization of God—you want to avoid a little work! Swamiji used to say to us, “If you think you are wasting your life in doing good to others, let it

¹ Refers to World War I.

be wasted. You have wasted many lives before in vain things. Why not waste one life for the good of mankind ? ”

But I am telling you that your life will not be wasted. You will realize God through work.

In performing japam and meditation, sufficient time and favourable conditions are important, certainly. But those who are inclined to practise spiritual exercises will do so under all circumstances. Those who complain of lack of time or suitable place never make any progress in this life. Cultivate the habit of constantly remembering God whether you are idle or engaged in work.

This constant flow of thought is meditation. Time and place and circumstances need not be taken into account in the practice of remembering God. Plunge in ! Oh, the joy of it ! If you once taste that joy, everything else will lose its savour for you.

Why are you afraid of work ? Work for Him. But do so with a steady mind. Whether it is a great undertaking or a humble one it must be done with the utmost care and attention. Those who are steady in secular work are also steady in their spiritual exercises. To work in the proper manner you must have a profound regard for your work and at the same

time be indifferent to the fruits of work. You can overcome all disinclination for work if you consider it as dedicated to God.

It is when you forget this secret you become disturbed in mind. With a disturbed mind, you won't succeed either in your spiritual life or in secular work.

Certainly, it is easier to do a noble deed for the sake of name and fame. By such deeds, you cannot measure a man's real value.

To know the real man, you have to examine his daily actions ; for it is his everyday actions which reveal his true character. A true Karma-yogin (selfless worker) will lose himself heart and soul in any undertaking, even though it is of a most inferior kind. He is never motivated by the least desire for popular applause.

If you work and forget God egotism and pride will overpower you. Therefore I tell you : never forget God, no matter whether you are working or sitting idle. To maintain this attitude, you must keep up your spiritual practices as well, no matter whatever happens.

XXVII

KEEP YOURSELF PURE

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, I have tried in various ways to control my senses but I haven't succeeded. How can I do so ?

MAHARAJ

“ I will conquer lust, I will conquer anger and greed.” If that is your way of approach, you can never conquer them ; but if you can fix your mind on God, the passions will leave you of themselves. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “ The more you move eastward, the further you are from the west.” Call on God, and pray to Him. Then the sense-objects will no longer attract you.

Your way of practising japam and meditation is very superficial.

If you practise casually, devoting only one or two hours a day to meditation, God cannot be found. Lose yourself day and night in His contemplation, in singing His praises and glory ;

only then will you be blessed with His vision. Dive deep, my children, dive deep. Don't waste your time.

In the primary stage, the aspirant should increase his hours of meditation slowly but steadily. If, because of a momentary enthusiasm, he suddenly tries to increase his hours of meditation, he will find the reaction difficult to bear. Depression will be the result. He will then lose the power to meditate. It is a difficult task to lift a depressed mind and turn it back to spiritual practices.

God's grace is paramount. Without it nothing is achieved. Pray to Him unceasingly for His grace. Prayer is efficacious. He lovingly hears your prayers.

Hold on for a little while. Don't give your mind up to objects of desire. You must exercise great self-control in everything. Objects of desire! They will follow you like your slaves. Then, through His grace, you'll find you have no desire for them—nor will you feel any attachment to them.

You have embraced the monastic life, renouncing everything. It is not worthy of you to try to exercise authority over others. That brings great bondage. Whatever you do, know that it is the Lord's work you are doing.

Look upon everything and everybody as belonging to Sri Ramakrishna. "Being deluded by egotism, man thinks himself the doer."

To tell a lie is the greatest sin. Even a drunkard or a man who frequents houses of ill-fame might be trusted, but never a liar ! It is the blackest of all sins.

Never find fault or criticise others. Such a habit is harmful to yourself. By thinking continually of the evil in others, the evil will impress itself upon your mind and the good that is in you will be overshadowed.

Play with God, sing His Glory, enjoy the fun ! Why should you criticise others ? Associate with everybody freely. Be happy with them. Don't indulge in gossip. Only a wicked-hearted man busies himself in finding fault with others.

Keep yourself pure and go forward, following your own ideal.

Learn to see the good in others. If a man has some goodness exaggerate his goodness in your mind. Give honour to all, praise all.

Do this and sympathy for others will grow. He who honours all beings finds honour for himself.

Never run down a fellow-man or slight him. Everyone sees the fault in others. Give him

your love, make him your own and help him overcome his weaknesses. A man is composed of both good and evil. It is easy to see the evil in others but a holy man is he who can overlook their evil qualities and help them to become pure and holy.

Remember, my children, you are holy men. You must always be calm, gentle, modest and kindly of speech. Goodness and purity must flow out through every word you utter, every action you perform, through all your behaviour and movements.

I bless you, my children, that whosoever associates with you will find peace of heart. The sleeping God will awaken within them.

What is chastity? Be truthful always. Be self-controlled. Watch your speech. Envy no one. Hate no one. Be jealous of no one. If one practises chastity for twelve years, he attains the highest. You must practise continence.

Occasionally it is wise to go to places of pilgrimage and live there for some time. The holy atmosphere and change of scenery are aids to the health of the body and mind. These places are also conducive to meditation.

The heart must be purified. This world is full of pitfalls. Struggle must be your motto

if you want to grow spiritually. Keep watch over every small desire which arises and control it. Strengthen the will and everything else will be simple.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, some days when I sit down to meditate my mind naturally becomes tranquil. Again on other days it becomes so restless that I cannot calm it, however much I try.

MAHARAJ

That is the play of the gunas. The mind is subject to all three gunas. Through practice, when the sattva becomes established, the mind will always remain tranquil. You see, there is an ebb and flow in the tide of the Ganges. In the same way there are ups and downs in everything. Meditation also has its ebb and flow. This is only in the primary stage, however. Don't worry about it. Stick to your practices. When you have practised regularly for some time there will no longer be any ebb and flow in the mind. There will be a smooth unobstructed current flowing towards God.

Whenever you feel that there is a predominance of sattva and the mind is naturally

tranquil, leave aside all work and engage in the practice of japam and meditation.

Each place of pilgrimage has a special time when the spiritual current flows. If at those times, an aspirant meditates, his mind becomes easily absorbed and he finds increased joy in his meditation.

DISCIPLE

But Maharaj, how does one know that time ?

MAHARAJ

It isn't difficult. A man who practises meditation can very easily recognize it. Benares ! Seems to be apart from the world. It is a place of mighty spiritual consciousness. If a man lives there and practises spiritual disciplines, he quickly gets results. The mantram, the seed-word, unfolds here with little effort on the part of the aspirant. Here Viswanath, (the Lord of the Universe), gives liberation to everyone, whether he be saint or sinner, rich or poor, great or insignificant.

XXVIII

DEVOTE YOURSELF TO GOD

Maharaj gave a few preliminary instructions to a new disciple and then continued.

MAHARAJ

Begin today, this very evening. Once in the morning and once in the evening practise japam and meditation. Practise for at least two years. You will find great joy ; spiritual emotions will arise ; a new vision will open up. I will tell you later what else to do.

Buy yourself a seat and keep it only for use during meditation. You are sure to find some result in two years. Some may even succeed in a year. Stick to it ! After a while you will find such joy that you will have no inclination to leave your meditation. Sit straight, keep the right hand over the left, with the palms up. Hold your hands near the centre of your body in the region of the heart.

Read sacred scriptures. When you sit down to meditate, don't begin the practice at once. First, for a few minutes, banish all alien thoughts and make the mind blank. Then start your meditation. For the first two years, the struggle is greater ; afterwards it becomes easier.

If there comes a day when you have a lot of work to do, you may meditate only once, or you may finish in ten or fifteen minutes. If the pressure of work is very great, fix your mind on God for a moment, then bow down to Him and close your meditation. You can do this in exceptional cases, but not always.

Before meditation wash your hands and face. Observe the two following rules of moral conduct : speak the truth and look upon all women as incarnations of Divine Mother. If you do these two things, you will find all other moral rules easy to follow.

Devote yourself to God. *God is.* Do not doubt His existence. I am telling you, my child, *God is.* Know for certain that *He is.*

XXIX

HOW TO REMOVE THE OBSTACLES TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, some meditate in the shrine of the heart, others meditate on the thousand-petalled lotus in the brain. But I like to meditate externally. I try to see my Chosen Ideal just as I am looking at you. Which is the proper way ?

MAHARAJ

Meditation differs according to the individual temperament of the aspirant. As a general rule, the best way is to meditate in the shrine of the heart. Consider the body as the temple and the Lord installed therein. However, when the mind becomes steady through meditation, then an aspirant can think of Him anywhere. He can then meditate on the Lord at his side or behind him or in his heart or anywhere else. When the mind becomes absorbed, a shining

light is first experienced in the mystic vision. Together with this vision, a kind of higher and nobler joy is felt and the mind is reluctant to give up this joy and move onward. But if the aspirant goes further, the vision of the light will be concentrated into the form of the Chosen Ideal. The mind is then merged in His consciousness.

Sometimes again the aspirant may hear in his mystic experience the long-drawn-out, sacred word Om, and the mind becomes absorbed in it. There is no end to mystic visions and experiences. The more you advance, the more you realize that this realm of spiritual experiences is unbounded, infinite.

There are some who think that they have attained God if they see the radiant light. Do not be deluded in this way. You must attain nirvikalpa samadhi, where all consciousness of duality is obliterated. Some say that that state is the end of spiritual experience, but I believe it is the beginning.

DISCIPLE

It generally happens that the mind, after making some progress, cannot advance further. Why is this so ?

MAHARAJ

That is the weakness of the mind. The mind is limited by its capacity. All do not have the same mental power but it can be developed. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the power of the mind becomes strengthened by the practice of continence. Such a mind is not overcome by lust and anger. Passions seem trivial to it.

In the path of spiritual progress many obstacles may arise. Bad influences may hinder your growth. Hence the Mudra (position of fingers) and Bhuta Shuddhi (the purification of the elementals) and similar practices are prescribed in the ritualistic worship.

DISCIPLE

You call each one of us to you and inquire about our spiritual progress and our difficulties. You always give us new courage and enthusiasm, Maharaj.

MAHARAJ

But you see, I am not in the same mood always. Sometimes I feel like entreating and imploring you to go on with your spiritual practices. Again, at other times, I see that the Lord is everything, the Lord is the cause, the Lord is the doer, the Lord is the instru-

ment and the Lord is the deed. He is all and everything. I see the Lord playing in so many forms. Then who am I to instruct whom? Why should people accept my words? But do you know, my child, when the inspiration comes from the Lord, they do accept them and follow them.

DISCIPLE

Is grace conditional?

MAHARAJ

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the breeze of grace is always blowing; you have only to unfurl your sails. He would also say: "One needs a fan when it is hot but the moment a cool breeze sets in, you stop fanning.

DISCIPLE

How does one know whether a man is having true mystic experiences or hallucinations?

MAHARAJ

The true spiritual vision brings a lasting bliss, and the mind is aware of the truth of the vision.

DISCIPLE

What is the real function of Mudra and other rituals in formal worship?

MAHARAJ

They are great aids in the primary stage of spiritual life. They help to remove many bad external influences which hinder an aspirant's progress. You will notice sometimes that as you go to meditate your mind is tranquil. Within a few minutes, however, the mind is made restless by evil thoughts. I had to suffer at one time from such influences. Sri Ramakrishna watched me from a distance and knew my condition. He approached me and said, "I see that something is disturbing you." He wrote something on my tongue and uttered some words inaudibly. I was immediately free from the disturbing state. If, however, the aspirant has advanced, these influences cannot touch him.

XXX

WHAT IS AUSTERITY ?

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, what is austerity ?

MAHARAJ

Austerities are of many types. Once I saw a man who took a vow not to sit or lie down for twelve years. When I met him, he had nearly finished his period. Only five or six months remained. Standing continuously for so many years had made his legs grow fat as they do in elephantiasis. While sleeping he held himself up by a rope.

Some practise the austerity of standing all night in neck-deep water in the winter and at the same time making japam. Again there is the austerity of sitting in the blazing summer sun in the centre of four fires.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, is that what austerity means ?

MAHARAJ

Heavens, no !

DISCIPLE

Then what is real austerity ?

MAHARAJ

Those are not real austerities. Any one can perform them. The body is easily controlled. But it is another matter to control the mind. It is very difficult to renounce lust and gold, to give up the desire for name and fame.

Real austerity is based upon these three principles : first, you must take refuge in the Truth. Truth is the pillar to which you must always hold, while performing any action. Second, you must conquer lust. Third, renounce all cravings. Observe these three principles. That's real austerity. To conquer lust is the most important of them all. It has been declared in our scriptures that he who practises continence for twelve years can easily attain God. This is the most difficult task. I can tell you from my own experience that it isn't possible to meditate properly unless you keep continent. The craving of lust is very subtle, and extremely difficult to control. That's why a spiritual aspirant must always be

careful in associating with the opposite sex. Through continence a special power is stored up in the brain. If a man becomes established in continence, he will begin to see the expression of God everywhere.

But remember, it is not possible to practise continence without devoting yourself to the performance of japam.

XXXI

KNOW GOD FIRST

MAHARAJ

Many nowadays feel that they should devote their lives to the service of their country and mankind. I believe this idea has taken hold of the minds of our people because of the influence of modern education. It is impossible to do any good to others unless a man has already built up his own character. Those who have taken refuge in God and have received His grace can never make a false step. Their very lives do good to mankind. Every action, every word, the very way they behave becomes a source of good to all. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "First hold the pillar!" That is, first realize God, Who is the goal of human life. Know him first. Have intense faith in Him, then go and serve others. When a man realizes Him, and becomes His instrument, he finds peace in himself and gives peace to others.

My Master used to say, "God is manifest in the heart of His devotees, His children." Therefore we must be pure in heart ; His home is in the heart of the pure. He stays far away from an impure heart. When our hearts become pure and transparent as glass, when all impressions of the past have been wiped out, then only will He seat Himself in our hearts, then only will He become manifest there.

The pure mind receives a clear reflection of God. If the mirror is covered with dirt it does not reflect. This reflection does not fall upon an unclean mind. You are all young now. Your minds are free from this dirt. Keep the shrine ready for Him within your heart. Take care that nothing else finds room there. Be pure and tranquil. Realize Him in this very life.

Do not waste your time in reading, other than the sacred books. Those books which do not evoke love and faith in God are useless. They only make a man vain of his learning. My child, if you wish to make your human life blessed, if you desire your own good, then dive deep into meditation with His name. Do not float on the surface but repeat the name of the Lord and dive deep.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in this age to teach that dispassion is the ideal of human life. Man runs after objects of enjoyment and degrades himself to the level of a brute. If you want to make human life worth living, then take refuge in God. Give up false happiness, seek and inherit eternal happiness.

Renounce. Give up this world. Give up everything for Him. Make Him your own. "You are our Father, You are our Mother, You are our Friend, You are everything."

When we give up worldly enjoyments and pass our days thinking of Him and contemplating Him, then only shall we make our human lives blessed and inherit true happiness.

Three conditions are essential for the realization of God : human birth, longing for liberation and the discipleship of an enlightened man. Through the grace of God you have been blessed with all the three. Make the best use of them and build your life in such a way that it is not spent in vain. Don't seek temporary pleasures ; find eternal happiness. Remember this one thing, that in another human birth you may have the longing for liberation but you will not find the society of such enlightened souls as you now enjoy. It is a rare privilege, and only to be had as a result

of great merit accumulated through many births. Through rare good fortune you have come within the orbit of Sri Ramakrishna. See that you do not waste your life in vain activities.

Faith ! Have intense faith in the words of the Guru and you will achieve everything. Without faith in the words of the Guru, spiritual life is fruitless. Give yourself up to him as a kitten does to its mother. Then he will look after you, help you and guide you.

How far can your intellect go ? Take refuge in the Guru. He, with his greater enlightenment, and sense of responsibility understands more than you and will protect you from all pitfalls. No harm can befall a disciple who is under the protecting wings of a Guru. Man may make many mistakes in life, until he finds God. But if he takes refuge in his Guru there is less chance of mistakes. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that if the father takes hold of the son's hand, there is no fear of the child's falling. Even if you make mistakes, the Guru, in whom you have taken refuge, will wipe out all your mistakes.

Without renunciation no peace can be had. Be dispassionate. Give up everything for God's sake—in order to find goodness and attain

peace. The heart is subject to its impulses but man must control it. If he has the will, he can be dispassionate and realize God.

Renunciation has nothing to do with the clothes you wear. It is not for show. He alone is a real monk who has given himself up completely to God, keeping nothing for himself. "This body, this mind, this understanding, — I offer everything to You. They are Yours. Make them Your instruments." Pray to Him unceasingly : "Lord, I do not know what is good or what is bad ; I am Yours, do with me as You please." Pray ! Pray unceasingly. Let Him be your only refuge.

Another thing I want you to remember : through the grace of the Lord you have come to understand that the goal of human life is to realize God. It doesn't matter if people praise or blame you, if they honour or insult you, if you find any place in the world or not, if your body stands or falls,—never move an inch from your principles or from your ideals. Say to yourself, "I must realize God in this life at all costs." If you can mould your life in this way, then I shall know that you are a worthy child of Sri Ramakrishna. Then I shall know that you have made your life blessed by coming in contact with holy men.

One other point I wish to make clear in this connection. Who is the real Guru? He must be an enlightened man. If a man doesn't know the path himself, how can he possibly show it to others? Mantrams, of course, are always potent; but when they are received from so-called Gurus who trade in religion and are themselves blind, they do not bring real peace or illumination. You have come to the children of Sri Ramakrishna; you are blessed indeed! He who is honest, faithful and devoted will have to come into the orbit of Sri Ramakrishna where alone in this age real peace is to be found. He who follows the ideal which Sri Ramakrishna embodies in this age, will become heir to eternal happiness. The disciples of Sri Ramakrishna know all the various paths which lead to God. Proceed along the path into which it has been your good fortune to be led, and pray to your Guru with a sincere heart. He will guide you, whether he is in the physical body or not. The true Guru lives in the invisible realm, after passing away from his body, and helps and guides his disciples until they also attain illumination.

Struggle ! Struggle, my boy. Shake off all doubts. Plunge into your spiritual practices as taught by your Guru. Never make a show of your spirituality but always practise in secret. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "When you meditate, retire into a solitary corner, or a forest, and meditate within the secret chamber of your heart." Make a little effort for a time, and you will discover what fun it is to live a contemplative life. You will be transformed. You have the protection of an enlightened soul. There is nothing to worry about. You are sure to succeed.

XXXII

STRIVE AND YOUR EYES WILL OPEN TO HIS GRACE

DISCIPLE

How many hours should one who is living a purely contemplative life pass in study, worship and meditation ?

MAHARAJ

Devote as much time as possible. Those who lead purely meditative life should spend at least sixteen hours every day in japam and meditation. With practice you will be able to prolong this period. The more the mind is absorbed within, the greater will be the joy of meditation ; and once you taste joy in your spiritual practices, the desire to continue them will grow. Then you won't have to ask how long to meditate. Your own mind will tell you.

Before you reach this stage you must see that you spend two-thirds of your day in the practice of japam and meditation. Spend the

rest of the time in the study of sacred books and in self-analysis. The more intensely you analyze yourself the more you will understand the condition of your own mind, and you will be able to eliminate the subtler cravings. When you are able to free yourself from these deep-seated, subtle desires, and the mind becomes tranquil, then only can you become deeply absorbed in real meditation. The practice of japam and meditation brings the aspirant to this stage. The spiritual disciplines are practised to make the mind pure and tranquil. If you practise japam and meditation and the mind still does not become tranquil or you do not taste joy in God, then you may know you are not practising rightly.

DISCIPLE

Sometimes the mind does not like to practise meditation. What should I do then ? Should I occupy myself in the study of sacred books, or should I force myself to meditate ?

MAHARAJ

The mind rebels against struggling. It always seeks ease and comfort. But if you wish to attain anything you must force it to struggle. That is the only way to make your mind steady. If you find it difficult to sit for long hours,

lie down on your bed and practise japam. If you feel sleepy, walk and make japam. Only thus can you steady your mind and make meditation your second nature. Should you give up meditation because the mind does not like it? If you go on in that way you can never learn to meditate. Regular war must be waged against the mind. To force the mind to obey you is the ideal of spiritual discipline.

DISCIPLE

Should one observe the vow of silence during this period of intense contemplation?

MAHARAJ

Both forced silence and wild indulgence in talk are equally harmful. What's the use of simply checking your speech? Check the wanderings of the mind: that's what matters. Avoid unnecessary talk and keep your mind on Him who is Silence. That's the real meaning of the vow of silence. Forcibly restraining your speech brings evil effects.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, I cannot do anything by myself. Bless me, that I may have faith in you and

in the Lord. Bless me, that I may understand your grace and have it always.

MAHARAJ

Never lose faith in yourself. The Lord will do everything for you. Have faith in Him. Repeat His name. He will reveal the truth to you. Don't be restless. Have patience, and go on struggling. Struggle and you will surely reach Reality. Don't waste your precious time in unnecessary thoughts or metaphysical speculations. Pray to the Lord that cravings may never arise in you. Lord's grace shines upon all. Strive a little and your eyes will open to His grace.



APPENDIX

JAPAM

When a disciple is initiated by his Guru, the Guru gives him a special mantram for his own use in prayer and meditation. A mantram is a Holy Name of God. The practice of repeating one's mantram is called japam.

The Hindu devotee recognizes that all the names of God have an equal power. Calling God by many names may seem to divide Him, but God is present in each. Through each name, His power can reach His devotees.

"Truth is one, sages call It by various names." The One Infinite Being, Who is Infinite Wisdom, Infinite Love, can never be divided. He is One without a second. Yet He has many aspects and many modes of expression. Each of these aspects symbolizes the Infinite God. Each aspect has its own sound-symbol, its name. These sound-symbols have been evolved out of the deepest spiritual perceptions of the seers and sages. The Hindus believe that when such a sound-symbol, a

mantram, is received from a Guru, it is charged with the living power of God. The latent divinity which is within each human soul becomes awakened by repetition of the mantram and meditation on the aspect of Godhead which it represents. The aspect of Godhead which is worshipped by an aspirant is called his "Chosen Ideal".

To quote Swami Vivekananda : "Every sect of every religion presents only one ideal of its own mankind, but the eternal Vedantic religion opens to mankind an infinite number of doors for ingress into the inner shrine of Divinity, and places before humanity an almost inexhaustible array of ideals, there being in each of them a manifestation of Eternal One. With the kindest solicitude, the Vedanta points out to aspiring men and women the numerous roads, hewn out of the solid rock of the realities of human life, by the glorious sons or human manifestations of God, in the past and in the present, and stands with outstretched arms to welcome all—to welcome even those that are yet to be—to that Home of Truth and that Ocean of Bliss, wherein the human soul, liberated from the net of maya, may transport itself with perfect freedom and with eternal joy."

This does not mean, however, that an aspirant can worship God in one aspect today and another aspect tomorrow. It is imperative that he should hold to his Chosen Ideal. The young plant must be hedged round and protected until it has grown into a tree. The plant of spirituality will die, if it is exposed too early to change of ideas and ideals. Devotion to one Ideal is absolutely necessary for the beginner, in his practice of religious discipline. While meditating on the Chosen Ideal, one must repeat the mantram.

Japam may appear monotonous and mechanical when not accompanied by meditation. Nevertheless, it has a good effect. If one persists, the monotony will break, and the presence of God will be felt. Through japam, an inner joy and sweetness will arise which will help the aspirant to devote himself more and more to the practice of the Presence of God.

In his teachings, Maharaj lays great stress on the value of japam. These teachings were given to initiated disciples, who had received mantrams from their Gurus. Those who have not yet received a mantram from a Guru may repeat the sacred word Om, or any Holy Name of God which appeals to them.

Purascharan is the vow to perform japam a certain number of times every day, methodically increasing and decreasing the number. For instance, the aspirant may begin on the first day after the new moon by repeating the mantram one thousand times. Next day, he repeats it two thousand times, next day three thousand ; thus increasing the number every day until the day of the full moon, when he reaches fifteen thousand. Next day, the japam is reduced to fourteen thousand, and so on, coming down to one thousand at the next new moon. This practice may be continued over a period of one, two or three years, as the aspirant chooses or the Guru directs. In connection with the Purascharan, additional number of japam are sometimes substituted for other religious duties, such as almsgiving, or the performance of sacrificial rites. In order to facilitate counting the required number of japam, the Hindu devotee, like the Buddhist and the Catholic, often uses a rosary or string of beads.

