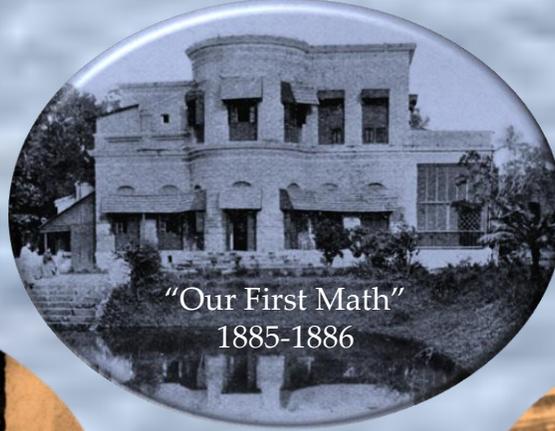


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God Founded an Organization to Serve Gods

"Yata mat tata path" ("As many faiths so many paths") is the unique teaching of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. He said this after realizing the same experience of divinity by following different paths.

Both the Dualist and the Non-dualist stopped their fighting, when they heard Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna pronounce, "God can be both Sakara (with form) and Nirakara (without form)." He gave the example of water, which can exist in a liquid, solid (ice) and invisible (gas) form.

The words of the Vedic Rishis—"God is one, sages call It by various names"—was realized and illustrated by Sri Ramakrishna with a simple example, "As water is called by different names in different languages, so different religions call God by different names, like Hari, Siva, Allah, Christ and many other names, but they all mean the same God."

If the God of every religion is the same, why, then, is that God propagated by different religions in different ways?

Solving this ancient problem, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna explained, "God is one, but His aspects are many. Like a person is a father to one, brother to another, and husband to a third, and is called by different names by those different people, so the One God is described and called various names according to the particular aspect in which He appears to a particular worshipper.

"Have you not seen in a potter's shop that there are different shapes and forms of vessels. Their names are also different—pots, jars, plates, etc.—but all are made of clay. So God is One but is worshipped in different ages and countries under different names and aspects."

Only this unique experience of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna can save the present day human society.

It seems that God took form as Sri Ramakrishna to guide humanity to peace and

prosperity by following the path of catholicity, which was practiced, realized, and propagated by him.

Sri Ramakrishna's ministerial life clearly indicated that he was testing and choosing some young, educated, and cultured boys and was giving them spiritual training so that they could realize the eternal truth themselves and spread the same knowledge to the whole of humanity.

If one can see God in meditation with closed eyes, why can't he see God with open eyes? Since God has become everything through His power (Maya Shakti), there cannot be anything but God.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna wanted to translate the Vedic knowledge into action. He chose a few young boys to become monks to do this great job and developed a group of householders to support them from the outside. He kept his power in human form, Ma Sarada Devi, as the core of the movement.

Spearheaded by Ma Sarada, the two great forces, monastics and householders, plunged into action. A unique order was formed, the Ramakrishna Order, which embraced all humanity, excluding none. The motto of this order is "For one's salvation and the good of all." The way to achieve this goal is called "Saman-naya Yoga"—the regular practice of all four of the yogas by an individual. The aim of the Ramakrishna Order is harmony of religions, all-round development of human faculties, social equality, and peace and progress for all humanity.

In the last sloka of the Gita, the 700th verse, the great Sanjaya said, "Where God's blessings and the effort of humans mingle together, there success is inevitable." In the formation of the Ramakrishna Order, we find these two qualities are present.

God's grace was propitiated through the prayer of Ma Sarada Devi, and the tremendous effort of Swami Vivekananda joined with that, and the twin

organization, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, was formed. This unique spiritual movement spread all over the world—without the help of kings and merchants.

The spiritual practices of the Ramakrishna Order are really peerless, because along with the traditional methods of puja, japa, meditation and other practices, they also worship the living gods and goddesses through schools, colleges, polytechnics, dispensaries, hospitals, orphanages and service to elderly people.

Sri Ramakrishna said that service was not just charity but the worship of Jiva as Shiva. Following the instructions of his guru, Swami Vivekananda coined the slogan, "Service of man is service to God" He said, "My mission is to make people aware of their divine nature and to help them to manifest it."

God, in the form of Sri Ramakrishna, founded this order through his beloved disciple, Swami

Vivekananda, to serve gods.

After the establishment of this order in accordance with the law of the land in India, Swami Vivekananda stated, "The aim of the Sangha is to preach those truths which Sri Ramakrishna has for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental, and spiritual advancement."

Swami Vivekananda also stated, "The duty of the (Ramakrishna) Mission is to conduct in the right spirit the activities of the movement inaugurated by Sri Ramakrishna for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms of the one underlying Eternal Religion."

The Ramakrishna Order is established by God to serve gods.

Swami Vivekananda



An witnessed description of what happened on the day when installation of Sri Ramakrishna on the Math grounds from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 7:

Swamiji said: "... this Math that we are building will harmonise all creeds, all standpoints. Just as Shri Ramakrishna held highly liberal views, this Math, too, will be a centre for propagating similar ideas. The blazing light of universal harmony that will emanate from here will flood the whole world."

While all this was going on, the party reached the Math premises. Swamiji took the casket down from his shoulder, placed it on the carpet spread on the ground, and bowed before it touching the ground with his forehead. Others too followed suit.

Then Swamiji again sat for worship. After going through Puja (worship), he lighted the sacrificial fire, made oblations to it, and himself cooking Payasa (milk-rice with sugar) with the help of his brother-disciples, offered it to Shri Ramakrishna. Probably also he initiated certain householders on the spot that day. All this ceremony being done, Swamiji cordially addressed the assembled gentlemen and said, "Pray today all of you, heart and soul, to the holy feet of Shri Ramakrishna, that the great Avatara of this cycle that he is, he may, "For the welfare of the many, and for the happiness of the many — ", reside in this holy spot from this day for a great length of time, and ever continue to make it the unique centre of harmony amongst all religions.

Sri Ramakrishna: the Embodiment of Bhakti

Revered Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj

Vice-President Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

This article is based on the talk delivered at the Kalputaru Day (2021) online retreat organized by the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

*OM sthapakaya cha dharmasya,
sarva dharmasvarupine;*

avatara-varisthaya, Ramakrishnaya te namah.

O Sri Ramakrishna the establisher of the eternal religion, the embodiment of all religions and the best of all the avatars to you we salute.

Sri Ramakrishna the embodiment of Bhakti is the topic which we are going to discuss. What does this embodiment of Bhakti mean? It means the master of all aspects of Bhakti. All the students of Bhakti Yoga know that Bhakti has different aspects. Some Bhakti teachers, the Acharays, say there are eleven aspects of Bhakti. Some other teachers say there are nine aspects of Bhakti. We see in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, the Acharyas (teachers) that came to him taught him five aspects of Bhakti, encompassing the other nine and eleven aspects. These five aspects that he practiced were called the Shanta (calm) mood of the Munis. The Munis always kept themselves very calm, and their attitude of Bhakti was called Shanta Bhava. Then the next one is Dasya mood, servant-master relationship. The devotion of the servant to the master is taken as the ideal. The aspirant thinks of himself as the servant and the master as the supreme Lord. Then comes the Sakhya Bhakti; Sakhi means friend. Through the relationship of friendship, Bhakti can be cultivated and practiced with respect to the Supreme Soul, the Supreme God. In this aspect God becomes a friend to the aspirant. Then comes the Vatsalya mood, the relationship of the mother to the child and also the other way around, the relationship of the child to the mother. The latter is not commonly practiced, but in the case of Sri Ramakrishna we see that he practiced the love of a child toward his mother. Vatsalya then means the relationship of the mother

to its child. The mother is the aspirant and the child is God himself. Then the last and fifth one is Madhura Bhava. That means a sweetheart's love to his beloved like a woman's attitude towards her husband or lover. That is the relationship between the aspirant who is the woman and the Lord is the husband. This is extolled as the highest form of Bhakti.



In Sri Ramakrishna's life we see all the five aspects growing from one into the other. The first vision came to him through the Shanta, calm, aspect. As we all know he became a priest in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, erected by Rani Rasmani. As a priest he would begin the worship with rituals, followed by songs and hymns and then he would go into meditation. All these belong to Shanta bhava. With a heartfelt prayer he used to pray to Mother Kali, "O' Mother you are a living being; you are a living supreme soul. Should you not reveal yourself to me? Can you not reveal yourself to me as my own mother? Are you a statue or a living mother?" He used to just talk to her in this way. Day by day his attachment to the mother aspect of God became so wonderful that, at last, the Mother had to reveal herself to him. But that did not come to him so easily. When the pangs of separation from his Divine Mother became so intense, one day, he said "You see, I have left everything and I have come to you. You are the only source of solace and succor, shelter and protection, and everything to me. If you do not reveal yourself to me, what is the use of my life? To what shall I hold on in my life? So, it is better that I

end my life". He thought like that with a tremendous feeling of anguish, as mother did not reveal herself to him. He rushed toward the big sword that was kept in the Mother's temple, used for offering animals as sacrifice to her, and then took that sword in hand. In another one or two moments he would have cut his neck off before the mother, sacrificing himself. At that moment Mother appeared in a flash. What a tremendous vision it was! Sri Ramakrishna himself describes his staggering experience and he says that he saw the ocean of light, and then he saw this ocean of light was full of consciousness. It speaks, it feels and it touches you. You feel its presence. Such was the consciousness of that light. Billows of this light dashed against his body and he was lost in that ocean of light consciousness. When he came back (to ordinary consciousness) he said that he did not know how long he was there (in that state). "I was in that state, maybe, for two days." he said. He, after gaining normal consciousness, first uttered the name of the Mother. He assumed that Mother's form also was with consciousness and light. It was a staggering experience! That was his first vision. Though it was called the calm mood of spiritual practice, it was a staggering, dynamic, and an aggressive mood. He tried to kill himself. Then Mother gave him such a staggering experience, where the consciousness was there, the divine light was there, and her divine form was also there. This was his first experience of the calm mood of Bhakti. Before this vision, when he used to do ritual worship, he was very sincere and ardent, and full of zeal. He used to actually see whatever he would say through the mantras, and would bring the Deity into his presence. When he uttered the mantras, he would see that particular God or Goddess. When he sprinkled water around him saying, "May a ring of fire protect me from all the evils", real fire would be there and then it would protect him until he had finished the puja. With tremendous sincerity and longing he did puja and succeeded in it. He, then, started seeing Mother

occasionally. He then started weeping again, "Why just occasionally? A Mother should always be with her child. Reveal yourself to me always. Whenever I call you, you must be there". Soon he got accustomed to seeing her always with him. Whether he was inside or outside the temple he would always be with the Mother – talking, joking and full of joy. He would see Mother climbing up the stairs to the first floor of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, and standing there she would gaze at the Ganges on one side, and again at Calcutta (now Kolkata), the then capital of India, on the other side. We don't know the purpose of her gazing, but Sri Ramakrishna would see her all around him. He fed a cat with the offering of the Mother. He used to talk with the Mother, feed the Mother. Sometimes the Divine Mother would ask him to eat first and then offer Her. Saying "Oh! You want me to eat first", Sri Ramakrishna would eat first and then offer it to the Divine Mother. All these unusual, uncommon, and unexpected things used to happen in his devotional practice. That was how Shanta Bhava (a calm and peaceful devotional attitude or mood) came into his life. Then he reached the highest through different bhavas (attitudes) one after the other. It was not always the same spiritual mood for him. His life shows how the five bhavas come to a devotee. He mastered all those five different moods.

Next comes the Dasya Bhava, the attitude of a servant towards his master. The greatest servant-master spiritual relationship is seen in the Ramayana. Hanuman, the monkey god, was the servant of Sri Ramachandra, the God incarnate. Their relationship was wonderful. Hanuman was always ready at the feet of his Lord Ramachandra for carrying out any order, small or big, risking even his life. When Sri Ramachandra asked him to find Sita, he jumped across the sea and reached Sita Devi. That was Hanuman. Sri Ramakrishna assumed the attitude of Hanuman and went on praying to Sri Ramachandra. Sri Rama appeared to him. He also saw Sita. Sita came walking towards

him when he was sitting with open eyes. Sri Ramakrishna later said that it was the first vision he had with open eyes. He spoke about how clear this vision was to him. It wasn't something like a dream or an illusion. It was so clear that, later, he got bangles, similar to those worn by Sita Devi, made for the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, his consort. Those bangles had a pattern of diamonds cut into them. The people of Calcutta who knew the latest models of the time hadn't ever seen a pattern like that. When they asked Sri Ramakrishna from where he got that pattern, he said that he had seen those on the wrists of Sita Devi. The vision he had was so clear that he could vividly remember even the minute details of the ornaments. Thus, he mastered the Dasya Bhakti. He thought like that with a tremendous feeling of anguish, as mother did not reveal herself to him. He rushed toward the big sword that was kept in the Mother's temple, used for offering animals as sacrifice to her, and then took that sword in hand. In another one or two moments he would have cut his neck off before the mother, sacrificing himself. At that moment Mother appeared in a flash. What a tremendous vision it was! Sri Ramakrishna himself describes his staggering experience and he says that he saw the ocean of light, and then he saw this ocean of light was full of consciousness. It speaks, it feels and it touches you. You feel its presence. Such was the consciousness of that light. Billows of this light dashed against his body and he was lost in that ocean of light consciousness. When he came back (to ordinary consciousness) he said that he did not know how long he was there (in that state). "I was in that state, maybe, for two days" said he. He, after gaining normal consciousness, first uttered the name of the Mother. He assumed that Mother's form also was with consciousness and light. It was a staggering experience! That was his first vision. Though it was called the calm mood of spiritual practice, it was a staggering, dynamic, and an aggressive mood. He

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Then comes one lady, Bhairavi Brahmani, an adept at Tantras and other Bhakti Shastras (devotional scriptures). She taught him several methods of worshipping God. Sri Ramakrishna realized God through all those paths - Sixty-four Tantras and several other Bhakti paths. It is said he would take only three days to master one mood. He was so ardent and full of enthusiasm, and therefore he succeeded in all these paths.

Next comes Sakhya Bhava, the attitude of a friend. Sri Ramakrishna used to address God as his friend. He would sing songs addressing God as a friend. He used to say "O Jagannath, you are redeeming the whole world, and am I out of this world that you are not revealing yourself to me?". We see this attitude of friend in Arjuna, the aspirant, towards Sri Krishna, the Lord. Arjuna realized God through this attitude of a friend. So did Sri Ramakrishna.

Next comes Vatsalya Bhava, the love of a mother toward the child. It also means the attitude of a child toward the mother. When Bhairavi Brahmani, as I mentioned earlier, taught him different ways of worship, she assumed the attitude of a mother toward him. She helped him in many ways during his Sadhana and spiritual experiences, including during the highest spiritual mood of Madhura Bhava. She could understand all his troubles and would serve him like a mother in every way. He also had the feeling of a son towards her. He considered her and all the women as his mother. He said that after this Sadhana he permanently became a child of all women. He would address any woman, he would see, as Divine Mother, and consider himself a small child before them. This is Vatsalya Bhava. He also had the vision of Ramlala (baby Rama). There was a Ramaite Sadhu (a monk belonging to the tradition of worshippers of Sri Ramachandra), Jatadhari, who attained perfection by worshipping baby Rama day in and day out. He had a small image of Ramlala, through which he would see living Ramlala. He would give bath to Ramala, feed him, eat with him, put him to bed, talk with him, play with him, and enjoy conversations with him. By chance this Sadhu came to Dakshineswar. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna met this Sadhu, he could immediately understand the depth of the Sadhu's relationship with Ramlala. Sri Ramakrishna became a friend of the Sadhu and also a friend of Ramlala. That baby Rama, after sometime, started liking Sri Ramakrishna and started spending all

his time with Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna later said, "At that time I would spend the whole day with this baby Rama. He would follow me everywhere, even to bathe in the Ganges. I was an adult, but Ramlala was only two or two and half feet tall. How could he go? Ramlala would not listen to me and would insist on going with me to the Ganges. One day I became angry and slapped him, and so he started weeping". Telling this story Sri Ramakrishna started weeping. What an intimate relationship they had!

Sri Ramakrishna had succeeded in this mood of Mother-Child relationship. He was the Mother and Rama was the child. In the end Jatadhari himself gave that statue of Rama saying, "Rama likes to be with you. Now I do not require him anymore because I am seeing him everywhere, Rama everywhere. So when I got the universal version of Rama, I need not carry this one Rama with me. But he likes to be with you, so you please keep it with you." Sri Ramakrishna had that image until his mahasamadhi. Then it came down as a legacy to us. We had it in Belur Math and unfortunately, it was stolen away by someone. God alone must have stolen it away. He didn't want to remain in Belur Math with a few people. He wanted to be universal perhaps. So Sri Ramakrishna went through that Vatsalya attitude, the Mother-Child relationship and realized Rama.

Then Sri Ramakrishna comes to the last, the highest form of Bhakti, the Madhura Bhakti. The bhakti of a sweet nature, the lover's bhakti to his beloved, lover-lover relationship, lover-beloved relationship. Sri Ramakrishna considered himself as Radha and the Lord as Krishna. Radha loved Krishna so much that she would forget herself, her own body and consciousness of the external world. She would always be in ecstasy. With great difficulty she would come down. A small suggestion like seeing something blue like a peacock, would remind her of the blue color of Sri Krishna and she would go into ecstasy. If she saw the bluish Jamuna water, she would go into ecstasy. So, Radha is the ideal lover and beloved of

Sri Krishna. First Sri Ramakrishna started loving the Radha ideal. He considered himself as a maiden of Radha by considering himself as a woman. Then he would imitate women's conversations, women's way of walking and women's way of doing things. He completely transformed his whole attitude and he forgot he was a man. He felt he was a woman in every aspect. Then his love for Krishna started. Pangs of separation gave him much trouble and burning in his body. Bhairavi Brahmani came to the rescue. She found this sort of burning was common to all people who go through Madhura Bhava. Sri Ramakrishna had gone deep into that attitude. Therefore, he had a burning sensation on his body. She applied sandal paste to his body as that was how it was done in the case of Sri Chaitanya. He also had these pangs of separation and burning sensation on the body. He was also cured by applying sandal paste. Bhairavi Brahmani applied the same medicine to Sri Ramakrishna and he came out of the trouble.

Later on he started having visions of Mother in different forms like Dasha mahavidya, ten great forms of Mother God. He had the vision of Shodashi, one of the aspects of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna says of this vision, "the beauty, the divine beauty nobody could excel." After that he had seen so many Devis, Divine Goddesses but none could equal the beauty of Shodashi. He said that at the time he had also realized the awakening of the Kundalini. The spiritual power had been awakened and subsequently he felt as if he were a small boy in front of women. All women became mothers to him. So this Madhura Bhava concluded with the vision of the Divine Mother in every woman.

At the end of the whole sadhana period, Sri Ramakrishna said that he was in a state of Vijnana. "Vijnana," he says, "is to attain the highest level of Advaitic realization and come down and see the world full of God alone." When you meditate you see God and when you come out of the meditation, you see the same God as the whole of creation.

Sentient and insentient, everything is filled with the presence of God. He called this Vijnana. Sri Ramakrishna called Vijnana as the religion for the modern age. Vijnana does not deny this world unlike Jnana, the knowledge of the classical Advaita. The Advaitin, the non-dualist, sees God as the only truth and the world as illusory, as a dream. Whereas, Sri Ramakrishna saw that the world was also as true as God. God is true in Samadhi when you see him alone. When you come out to the manifested world, you see that it is the manifested form of the same God, as one without a second. This is the highest state of Bhakti. You must reach God in several aspects and see him as one with you, the Individual Soul and the Supreme Soul. Then come down and see God everywhere.

He taught us to see God everywhere, in everyone and serve God through the creatures, especially through man. This is the highest form of spiritual sadhana as well as the worship of God. To serve man is to worship God. Swami Vivekananda carried this universal message, this Universal Religion to the World. Everywhere there are people to be served, people are anxious to serve. So take the attitude that God is there in everyone. When you feed and clothe poor people or give any help to the needy, think of it as a Spiritual Worship and not as a Social Service.

Swami Vivekananda spread this universal love

of man as God. The body of man is a temple of God. Swami Vivekananda later instituted the Ramakrishna Math and Mission which he dedicated to the service of the poor, the needy, the weak and the backward. So when we serve, we always feel that we are worshipping God. Not that we are doing any social service, but we are worshipping God, which is a part and parcel of spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna has established the Ramakrishna Mission after this highest realization of Bhakti. His Bhakti has resulted in this universal monastic order of Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Also, he was instrumental in guiding Holy Mother in starting the Sarada Math and Sarada Sangha, just as the Ramakrishna Mission. It is a women's universal nunnery spread all over the world. That's how Sri Ramakrishna's Bhakti can be applied to our lives. Sri Ramakrishna lives now. He has not gone. He is there. He lives through all of us who realize the implication of his Sadhana and who see God in man, who serve man with the idea that it is the worship of God.

May we all be inspired by this Great Master, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and salute him on this day. I convey my heartiest blessings and good wishes to all of you on both the Kalpataru Day and New Year's day. May we salute Sri Ramakrishna. May he shower his blessings on all of us is my prayer to him. Om Shanti, Shanti, Shantih!



“The true Bhakta's love is this burning madness before which everything else vanishes for him. The whole universe is to him full of love and love alone; that is how it seems to the lover. So when a man has this love in him, he becomes eternally blessed, eternally happy. This blessed madness of divine love alone can cure for ever the disease of the world that is in us. With desire, selfishness has vanished. He has drawn near to God, he has thrown off all those vain desires of which he was full before.”

-- Swami Vivekananda, Bhakti Yoga



Vivekananda Guided us to Light

Swami Vimohananda

Vivekananda Vedanta Society of British Columbia

This article is based on a talk delivered during an online retreat organized by the Vedanta Society of Chicago in May 2021.

Swami Vivekananda was a gigantic personality, contributing in various ways to the enrichment of the world culture. His writing and speeches cover almost all aspects of life. But his fundamental message and teaching is, like other teachers, that we should regain our spiritual heritage, become aware of our true nature. He spent his whole life teaching this ultimate knowledge, by knowing which everything becomes known; by knowing which all problems are solved.

I will base this article upon the letter Swamiji wrote to Sister Nivedita on 7th June, 1896 from London.

Swamiji starts the letter with these words:

“My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

We are really divine! This itself is a tremendous statement, a tremendous declaration! Even very difficult to imagine for ordinary people like us.”

And this declaration had also startled one and all when Swamiji made it at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

I will quote from the reminiscences of one of the persons who had the good fortune to hear Swamiji on that occasion. He says: “But there was a passage toward the end, in which I can still hear the ring of his voice, and feel the silence of the crowd—almost as if shocked. The audience could be taken as one in assuming that there had been a “Fall of man” resulting in a state of “original sin”. But what is the speaker saying? I hear his emphatic rebuke: “Call men sinners?? It is a SIN to call men sinners!” ... Through the silence I felt something like a gasp running through the hall as the audience waited for the affirmation which must

follow this blow. What his following words were, I cannot recall with the same verbal clarity: they carried the message that in all men there is that divine essence, undivided and eternal: reality is One, and that One, which is Brahman, constitutes the central being of each one of us.”

If we can really imbibe this teaching of Swamiji, we will also gasp at its tremendous significance. We are not this limited psycho-physical being, not a part of “this hideous, chimerical existence where we are kicked about like a football by every wind that blows”, not susceptible to every little thing, not a slave to changing circumstances.

We, inhabiting this limited body, are subject to so physical and mental pain, are facing innumerable problems, and are completely lost in a labyrinth from which no escape seems possible. We are trying to experience the same petty pleasures over and over again, hoping to find satisfaction. As Swamiji says: “Every child is a born optimist; he dreams golden dreams. In youth he becomes still more optimistic. It is hard for a young man to believe that there is such a thing as death, such a thing as defeat or degradation. Old age comes, and life is a mass of ruins. Dreams have vanished into the air, and the man becomes a pessimist.” This is what happens and in the end in the lives of those who make the world their be all and end all: they face ruin at the end.

Who amongst us has not wondered, at some time, that: “What is the goal of life? Is this world the goal of life? Nothing more? Are we to be just what we are, nothing more? Is man to be a machine which runs smoothly without a hitch anywhere? Are all the sufferings he experiences today all he can have?, and doesn't he want anything more?”

So, sometimes, even knowing very well what is to be our inevitable fate, often we continue to lead our lives in the same manner, because we are not aware of any higher ideal. "What else is there?" we ask ourselves.

So, what is the way out? What is the solution?

Here it is! This tremendous declaration, that we are actually "children of immortal bliss". From this will arise in our hearts a new hope, new strength, a new assurance, much more certain that the world can ever give us if we but have faith in this eternal message of our saints.

I will again quote from the reminiscences of an American couple who had heard Swamiji lecture in the United States. The lady says that when they heard Swamiji, "we felt ourselves lifted up into an atmosphere so rarefied, so vital, so wonderful, that we sat spellbound and almost breathless, to the end of the lecture.

"When it was over, we went out with new courage, new hope, new strength, new faith, to meet life's daily vicissitudes. And for months afterwards we went to hear Swami Vivekananda explain the old religion and to gather from his wonderful mind jewels of truth and thoughts of helpfulness and strength. It was that terrible winter of financial disasters, when banks failed and stocks went down like broken balloons and businessmen walked through the dark valleys of despair and the whole world seemed topsy-turvy. Sometimes after sleepless nights of worry and anxiety, the man would go with me to hear the Swami lecture, and then he would come out into the winter gloom and walk down the street smiling and say: 'It is all right. There is nothing to worry over.' And I would go back to my own duties and pleasures with the same uplifted sense of soul and enlarged vision."

In the same vein writes Swami Shuddhananda, a disciple of Swamiji: "Whenever my heart gets filled with despondency, I seem to hear Swamiji, his face suffused with bliss, repeating in a sonorous voice the message of hope from the Upanishads: 'Hear, ye children of immortal bliss!

Even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One, who is beyond all darkness, all delusion; knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again!'"

This message is sufficient to change our whole life if we but have faith. It will create a revolution in the minds of those who are ready to hear it.

In the letter to Nivedita, Swamiji writes next:

"One idea that I see clear as daylight is that misery is caused by ignorance and nothing else."

The Patanjali Yoga Sutras mentions the five kinds of kleshas or the pain-bearing obstructions, which are: ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion and clinging to life.

Commenting on this, Swamiji says: "These are the five pains, the fivefold tie that binds us down, of which ignorance is the cause and the other four its effects. It is the only cause of all our misery. What else can make us miserable? The nature of the Soul is eternal bliss. What can make it sorrowful except ignorance, hallucination, delusion? All pain of the Soul is simply delusion."

So, if the question is raised that if we are divine, why can't we recognize our real nature? This is the answer. There is only one reason: ignorance.

Next Swamiji tells Nivedita the means of realizing our true nature. He says: "Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character."

We should remember that though we are divine, this divinity within us is in a potential form. It has to be made manifest by our sincere efforts. It is true that the whole tree exists in a seed, but it is there only in a potential form. It will manifest only under right conditions.

And if a person wishes to manifest his divinity, how should he create the right conditions for that? By making his character perfect.

Swamiji writes to Swami Brahmananda in one of his letters: "Neither money pays, nor name, nor fame, nor learning; it is character that can cleave through adamant walls of difficulties."

And what is the most essential characteristic of a perfect character? It is unselfishness. Explaining this Swamiji says: "All outgoing energy following a selfish motive is frittered away; it will not cause power to return to you; but if restrained, it will result in development of power. This self-control will tend to produce a mighty will, a character which makes a Christ or a Buddha." Also, "Love, truth, and unselfishness are not merely moral figures of speech, but they form our highest ideal, because in them lies such a manifestation of power."

Only an unattached person can be unselfish, and to gain this unattachment is a life's work.

After this Swamiji writes in the same letter to Nivedita: "Let us call and call till the sleeping gods awake, till the god within answers to the call. What more is in life? What greater work?"

Manifesting our divinity is no doubt difficult, but success is sure if we persevere. We have to "call and call". It is also a slow process, as we realize by the following words of Swamiji: "The will has to be strengthened by slow, continuous, and persevering drill."

"What more is in life?" says Swamiji. So, we have to keep at it, knowing that there is nothing greater, nothing else worth having.

There are only two sides: the world and God. Comparing them, Swamiji says: "For on this side it is nothing, it is gone, it is vanishing every day. The beautiful, hopeful, young person of today is the veteran of tomorrow. Hopes and joys and pleasures will die like blossoms with tomorrow's frost. That is one side; on the other, there are the great charms of conquest, victories over all the ills of life, victory over life itself, the conquest of the universe. On that side men can stand. Those who dare, therefore, to struggle for victory, for truth, for religion, are in the right way; and that is what the Vedas preach: Be not in despair, the way is very difficult, like walking on the edge of a razor; yet despair not, arise, awake, and find the ideal, the goal."

Let us pray that we may have the courage to struggle sincerely and bravely towards this supreme goal of human life, and that we may not stop until we made our lives blessed by fully realizing it.



"...work, says the Vedanta, putting God in everything, and knowing Him to be in everything. Work incessantly, holding life as something deified, as God Himself, and knowing that this is all we have to do, this is all we should ask for. God is in everything, where else shall we go to find Him? He is already in every work, in every thought, in every feeling. Thus knowing, we must work — this is the only way, there is no other. Thus the effects of work will not bind us. We have seen how false desires are the cause of all the misery and evil we suffer, but when they are thus deified, purified, through God, they bring no evil, they bring no misery."

-- Swami Vivekananda, Jnana Yoga

BHAGAVATA (6): *The Scion of the Mighty Pandavas*

Swami Ishatmananda

The great Bhisma, after giving a discourse on Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha, Merits of Charity, of Kings and various other matters to King Yudhisthira, said with great earnestness, "I do dedicate myself unto the feet of the Lord, ever merciful, the Prime Being, Sri Krishna."

Suta then described the great moment in the life of Bhisma saying, "Bhisma concentrated his mind, speech and sight upon Sri Krishna and thereby became merged in Him."

On seeing the great grandfather merging into the indescribable Brahman, all present there became silent.

In the 9th verse, chapter 4, of the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna, himself, said, "O Arjuna, he who understands the truth about Me — My divine embodiment and My deeds — after giving up his body will merge in Me — the Brahman."

With the death of Bhisma one period ended and a new era began.

Before leaving for Dwarka, Sri Krishna performed two works:

1. By protecting Parikshit in his mother's womb, he saved the clan of the Kurus from extinction.
2. He established Yudhisthira as the king to rule the kingdom.

Why did the Lord become happy? Because His mission was fulfilled! The divine promise to protect the righteous was completed. Yudhisthira was a just king. During his rule, his subjects were free from worries and diseases. They were also free from troubles caused by super-mundane force.

To the great joy of King Yudhisthira and his brothers, Uttra, the widow queen of Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, gave birth to a baby boy at an auspicious moment, when all the planets stood in favorable positions.

The learned Brahmanas who were present said, "O King, since the most powerful Vishnu out of

compassion gave this boy to you as a gift, therefore he will be known as Vishnuratha." That little boy Vishnuratha became as Parikshit.

Suta described the birth of Parikshit. While in the womb of his mother for ten months, scorched as he was by the fiery Brahmastra of Aswathama, the infant beheld a being of the dimension of a thumb. The infant could not forget that divine being. After being born, whenever the son of Abhimanyu saw a person, he would question within himself whether he was the same being that he had beheld when he was in the womb of his mother. He became known as Parikshit ("One who constantly examines").

While Parikshit was growing up many events happened. First, Vidura, a very close relative of the Pandavas came back from a long undisclosed pilgrimage. Vidura, a pious man, had learnt from Maitreya, a learned Rishi, the knowledge of the Atman. In the 1st skanda, 13th chapter, 15th verse, it states that Vidura was in reality Yama, the king of death. He was born as a human for 100 years due to the curse of sage Mandavya. Getting back his Self-knowledge, Vidura, observed that Yudhisthira and his brothers were living in great happiness and prosperity. They had also gotten a grandson who would continue their line. Many years thus passed.

But none, indeed, can overcome the sway of Time. One day Vidura addressed his brother, Dhritarastra, "O King! Bad times are ahead! Leave home and possessions...the Time-spirit is fast approaching."

But Vidura understood that Dhritarastra was very much attached to worldly pleasure. To cut his bond, Vidura slashed him with words, reminded him of his misdeeds and how shamelessly he was surviving, "Look at yourself. Father, brothers, sons and friends have all been killed. You have also

become very old.”

Then Vidura lamented, "O wonder of wonders! How strong is people's clinging to life." Vidura reminded Dhritarastra of his sinful acts, "You and your sons persecuted the Pandavas in every way — setting fire to their house, poisoning them, humiliating their wife, wrongfully snatching away their kingdom and wealth—and now you are living with their support. Why live like this?"

Vidura said, "He is the best among men who, having installed Hari in his heart, leaves all bondages, endowed with renunciation and self-control."

Realizing the folly of the mundane life, Dhritarastra entered into the jungle, followed by his queen, and spent the rest of his life in prayer and meditation.

When he heard the news of their passing away, Yudhisthira became very perturbed—Why did they have to die? He asked the learned sage Narada. Narada gave him a wonderful reply. "Creatures without arms (animals) are the food of creatures with arms. Feetless beings (vegetation) are the food of four-footed creatures (animals). Smaller creatures are the food of bigger ones. Nature has made ample arrangements for food for all — you need not be anxious about your relatives (1.13.46)."

Narada expressed the truth, "All this universe is the Lord's alone. He is the Soul of all souls — the Self-revealing spirit, which needs no other revealer (Svayam-prakash). He is what shines as the within and the without. He has become many by His mysterious power (Maya).

The Scion of the Mighty Pandavas (2): 6-10-18

Vidura and Narada explained to Yudhisthira why he should not feel sorry for King Dhritarastra and Queen Gandhari, who had left the hospitality of Yudhisthira and were living in the hermitages of the Rishis of the South of the Himalayan mountains.

By the process of yoga the blind king

understood the separateness of the soul from the body. The bondage of his actions was destroyed. The earthly body is made up of five elements and is subject to the influence of Time and Actions. When this body falls off, the components naturally get separated. One should not forget that man, beast and birds have no separate existence from God—God is One, not more than one.

In the meantime, Yudhisthira had sent Arjuna to Dwarka to learn all about the movements of Sri Krishna. "O Arjuna, how are our relatives and friends faring? Is Sri Krishna living happily in His own quarters?"

Arjuna subdued his grief with great effort and with choked voice he reported to King Yudhisthira, "O Great King! I have been betrayed by Hari, whom I took to be a friend. He has deprived me of my power, which was once the wonder of even the Devas. O King, I have met with defeat at the hands of only a few wretched herdsmen on the high road, while I was guarding the evacuation of Krishna's family from Dwarka (1.15.20). The same bow, the same arrows, the same chariot, the same horses and also I, Arjuna! But alas! Lacking the presence of the Lord behind these, all of them were reduced to utter futility."

When Arjuna was describing Krishna and the sad destruction of His clan, because of his deep thought about God, his mind became pure and developed detachment for the world.

King Yudhisthira also decided to leave the worldly life and go to heaven. As a final preparation for going to heaven, the king performed the coronation of his grandson, Parikshit, and made him the ruler of the whole land with Hastinapur as the capital (1.15.38).

Those who live their lives in the light of Truth and Righteousness realize that God is their only ultimate support. They withdraw their minds from the worldly objects.

As per the prediction of the Rishis, Parikshit (the son of Abhimanyu and the scion of the mighty Pandavas), who was a great devotee of the Lord,

ruled the kingdom, following the advice of his competent ministers (1/16/02).

He married Iravati, the daughter of King Uttara, and in due time became the father of four sons. The eldest one was Janamejaya (1/16/04).

Once King Parikshit in the course of his tour of victory came across the evil Kali, who dressed like a king but was behaving like a low-cultured person — torturing the people and destroying righteousness.

Parikshit heard from his ministers that Kali had entered the land of Kuru and Jangila — a state under his rule. He took up arms to confront Kali.

BHAGAVATA (7): *Chatuh-shloki Bhagavata*

There is a full chapter in the Bhagavata describing how King Parikshit, the grandson of mighty Arjuna, tried to suppress Kali (1.16.21).

What is Kali? A Person? A Demon?

For the sake of dramatic effect, the Bhagavata has depicted Kali as a demon and narrated the conversation between the king and Kali, but in reality Kali represents the bad qualities that degenerate human society.

In a conversation between and Earth, a list of 39 good qualities, beginning with Truthfulness, Purity, Compassion, Forgiveness... is given. Everyone, including gods, good people, wise men and of course all walks of people suffer when these good qualities dwindle.

People talk about the Satya Yuga, the Age of Righteousness. What is this Righteousness? The Bhagavata describes Dharma as a bull with four legs: Austerity, Purity, Compassion and Truthfulness.

Parikshit wanted to kill Kali, but hearing his lamentful prayer granted him four places to stay: Gambling, Drinking, Illegal Relations, Killing for Fun. Along with these the king gave Kali Gold— Wealth, which creates Falsehood, Disrespect, Desire, Ego and Enmity.

The king should have completely destroyed

Parikshit heard a conversation between a lady and a holy man (who were in the form of a cow = Earth and a one-legged bull = Dharma). "O Mother Earth (People), why are you grieving?" "Women are deprived of protection, children are neglected and tortured by cruel fathers, Brahmanas serve under characterless kings (1/16/22). People in general are interested solely in eating, drinking, mating and decorating themselves without any discrimination."

Seeing and hearing the deceitful activities of Kali, King Parikshit promised to punish the offenders.

Kali. Then he would not have been influenced by Kali. Suta described before the Rishis the tragic incident that happened in the life of the great king Parikshit (1.18.24-25).

One day King Parikshit went out alone on a hunting excursion. After chasing a herd of deer for a long time, the king became tired, hungry and thirsty. He suddenly found a hermitage inside the jungle and saw a Rishi meditating. The king expected some food and water from the Rishi, but the sage (Samika) was in deep meditation. At that moment the sage's son (Sringi) was playing with his friends outside the compound.

The king felt insulted when the sage did not respond. Because of hunger and thirst the king became angry. This had never happened before. Was it because of the influence of Kali? For whatever reason, misunderstanding the Rishi, the king placed a dead serpent around the neck of the sage and left.

When the sage's young son, Sringi, came to know about the insult to his father, he then and there pronounced, "O! The kings have become unrighteous. They think there is no one to punish them for their misdeeds. On the seventh day from now a venomous snake *Takshaka* will bite the king."

When the Rishi, Samika, came to know about

this curse, he became very sad. "O My son! You are an immature young boy. You do not know that spiritual people never react when insulted or humiliated by others even though they are powerful enough to react.

A great teaching of the Bhagavata for spiritual souls states, "Holy people do not feel any elation or depression in either happy or adverse experiences in life because they know that the Atman is unattached — only body and mind react."

Hearing about the curse of Sringeri, King Parikshit decided to give up his responsibilities as a king and meditate on God uninterruptedly.

The news spread like wild fire. What was going to happen this time? When Parikshit was in his mother's womb, he was protected from the Brahmarashtra by Lord Kriishna. Was the Lord going to protect him now from the curse of a pious Brahmana?

The great sages like Attri, Vasistha, Bhrigu, Subahu, Medhatithi, Debala, Bharatdvraja, Gautama, Pippalada, Maitreya — each one representing a Gotra or Sage Dynasty — gathered along with Narada and Sukadeva.

With the permission of the assembly of holy sages, King Parikshit made over the charge of the kingdom to his elder son, Janmejaya. Then King Parikshit, who was ready for death, asked a few very important and interesting questions to the great monk, Sukadeva.

Let us leave them here and go to Book 2 of this wonderful scripture—the Bhagavata.

In chapter 8 of the second book, Brahma asks Mahavishnu to give some instructions that would save him from attachment while Brahma engaged himself in the work of creation.

In only four verses Lord Vishnu gave him instructions, which became famous as Chatu-Sloki-Bhagavata—Bhagavata in only four verses. As we know, the Bhagavata contains about 18,000 verses divided into 12 books.

Brahma, the first born, after practicing a very long severe austerity, prayed to Lord Vishnu, "O Great Lord! who is really formless but also in

forms both gross and subtle, kindly tell me what is your real nature; real form; qualities and activities—Let me understand these through realization.

Lord Vishnu had created Brahma from His own person as a spider creates a web out of itself (2.9.27).

In reply the Great God said, "Before creation I alone was. There was none other than Me. After the creation, I alone exist. This universe is Myself.

Just as a reflection of light emanating from the sun or moon, is not real; similarly all these (seen, heard, felt, smelled, tasted) are the reflection of the Atman — Know that this happens due to My Divine Power, Maya.

The great basic elements of nature combine and constitute all objects, high and low, pure and impure. Though entering into the created things and beings, they also remain outside.

Similarly, I constitute beings as if entering into them, but yet I have not entered into them. My pristine essence is not affected.

A seeker of Truth should learn this from his Guru. The Supreme Spirit is the ultimate substance!

How To Face Death

In reply to the questions of Brahma, who was afraid that he might become egoistic while creating the universe, the Great God summarized the entire Bhagavata in four verses (Chatu-Sloki-Bhagavata).

Before creation I alone was—cause and effect are not different from Me. After dissolution I alone exist. This universe is also myself (II.9.32)

What is presented on the Atman appears due to My Divine Power, Maya (II.9.33)

The great basic elements of nature combine and constitute all objects even after creating millions of varieties, and yet remain outside those created things. Just like I create and enter into my creation but at the same time remain unaffected (II.9.34).

A seeker after truth should try to understand this—the Supreme Spirit is that Ultimate Substance (II.9.35).

Introduction to the Cover Page:

A Tribute to the Ramakrishna Order on its 125th Anniversary

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This year, 2021, marks 125 years since the foundation of the twin organizations Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Our cover story of this issue is to celebrate that dedication and love which gave birth of the Ramakrishna Order.

According to dictionary the word Order or sangha (सङ्घ) means *whole community or collective body or brotherhood of monks; close contact or combination; any collection or assemblage*. Sanga on the other hand means association or company and it is applied in the word सत्सङ्ग (Satsaṅga) association with the good (society or person). Both words have the same Proto-Indo-European root, which means "one; as one, together with." Sanskrit sam "together," samah "even, level, similar, identical;" Avestan hama "similar, the same;" Greek hama "together with, at the same time," homos "one and the same," homios "like, resembling," homalos "even;" Latin similis "like;" Old Irish samail "likeness;" Old Church Slavonic samu "himself." As indicated by the etymology "togetherness" is the foundation stone of Sangha. In the last few verses of the Rig Veda (Sangacchaddhwam samvadadvam 10.191.02-04) emphasized the unity of minds to create healthy powerful organizations for prosperity and happiness of all and to promote fellow-feeling and righteousness. One of the concluding words of the oldest of all the Vedas is word Sangacchadhvam – let us move together.

Ramakrishna Math was started with Sri Ramakrishna. Mission activities officially started in 1897. The foundation of the Ramakrishna Order combining the Math and Mission together took the Ramakrishna Movement to a different height. Since without the foundation of the Math, the Mission cannot exist, so the story started from 1886

with an emphasis on the changes that took place when the Math was in Alambazar. The two principal resources of this story are "The early history of the Ramakrishna Movement" by Swami Prabhananda and its Bengali version called "Ramakrishna Math-er Adikatha".

The seed of togetherness of the Ramakrishna Order was sowed in the Cossipore Garden House, when Sri Ramakrishna was brought to Calcutta for his treatment in December 1886. This time many of his young, unmarried disciples started to stay here to serve him in rotation. But did Sri Ramakrishna really need anyone's service?

Sri Sarada Devi once observed, *"The Master had the power to die at will. He could have easily given up the body in samadhi; but he would say, 'It will be nice if I unite all these youngsters together in a close bond of love.' Until then, merely a 'how-do-you-do' relationship existed between them. ... That is why the Master did not give up the body early, in spite of so much suffering."* Of course, Sarada Devi herself was there. Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) remembered those days in his talk "My life and Mission". He shared, *"Well, that lady, his [Sri Ramakrishna's] wife, was the only one who sympathized with the idea of those boys. ... A thousand times despondency came; but there was one thing always to keep us hopeful – the tremendous faithfulness to each other, the tremendous love between us. ... And that was there with us all throughout that hard time."*

The days at Cossipore were full of meditation, samadhi, practices of austerities and service. Swamiji wrote to Swami Brahmananda on July 13th 1897, *"All our associations center on that garden. In reality that is our first Math."* It is in this Math that Sri Ramakrishna started to prepare Swamiji to take up the responsibility. On February 11th 1886

Sri Ramakrishna wrote on a piece of paper: "Victory to Radha, Love personified. Naren will teach others when he will call out from within as well as outside the country." Again, love is the foundation of this movement.

After the mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna it was not possible to pay that high rent of the garden house. The direct disciples saved the relics of Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram Bose's home. Holy Mother left for pilgrimage and all the monastic brothers, for the time being scattered here and there.

However, within a few months with some financial support from Suren Mitra a dilapidated house in Baranagore was rented and they all moved there. There were immense financial hardships in those days but the lifestyle was truly full of bliss. Sometime they did not have individual plates to have food but a common pile of rice in the center and all would sit around it to have food with very, very hot pepper. But lack of materialistic needs did not bother them much. Some soaked themselves in reading scriptures; Brahmananda, Adbhutananda and Trigunatitananda would do japa day in and day out; some were absorbed in meditation some were deeply involved in composing and singing devotional songs or chanting hymns. Ramakrishnananda was from the very beginning in charge of the worship-room and was always taking care of Sri Ramakrishna. During this time some of them spent days as wandering monk also. Householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna would visit them time to time.

From this time slowly the concept of service was being manifested through the service to the guests. Mahendranath Dutta was one of them. From his writing we see on February 17th 1887 at dinner *chapatis* (hand made bread) were served. Swamiji noticed burnt *chapatis* were served to Gospel writer M. He himself quietly got up and replaced them. This touched M's heart. In a nutshell, all the basic values cherished by the

Order sprouted during the Baranagore phase.

Though Holy Mother was also mainly wandering around and heavily grief stricken due to the physical separation from the Master, still at all times her deep concern for the monks knew no bounds. She used to pray, "O Master, please see that they may keep true to their monastic vows. Please also see that wherever they may be – in hills, jungles, or wilderness – they may get something to eat." Her prayers and tears, her loving concern and guidance, and above all her spiritual power sustained them from the very beginning. That is why she is adored as the Mother of the Order – *Sangha Janani*.

As the Math was growing, a need for a bigger place showed up. The members found a haunted house in Alambazar for cheaper price and rented it.

There was utter poverty at the formation period. There was not enough food. Swami Akhandananda painted a heart touching picture in his book "From Holy wanderings to Service of God in Man". One day a gentleman sent some milk to offer to the Master at the Alambazar Math. For them it was like a windfall. Before they sat for food they were discussing about the milk prasad. However, each monk was served only with a spoonful milk and they jocosely asked one another, "Hallo, have you gained strength, have you?" In the Swamis own words, "That joyous shouting resounded in the whole Math House. Words fail to give a true picture of pure joyous life at that time."

It is good to have an idea about the monastic members of the Alambazar Math. Swamiji left as *parivrajaka*, a wandering monk from the Baranagar Math in July 1890 and returned to Alambazar Math on February 19th 1897. Though not continuously regular residents were: Swamis Brahmananda, Ramakrishnananda, Turiyananda, Shivananda, Premananda, Niranjanananda and Yogananda. Advaitananda and Subodhananda lived there for a very short period of time and Trigunatitananda from 1892 to 1894. Saradananda

was there until 1895 until he left for the West to help Swamiji. Swami Abhedananda left for the West in 1896 and returned after the inauguration of the Belur Math. Swami Akhandananda was also mainly a wandering monk during those years. Swami Vijanananda was a district Engineer until 1897 and joined the Math upon Swamiji's return. Several brahmacharis were also joined there, who later took the vow of Sannyasa from Swamiji. There were classes given to the Brahmacharis on the Upanishads though until Swamiji took over, the training of novices was informal in nature. Lay devotees like M, Girish Ghosh, Mahendranath Dutta (Swamiji's brother) and many others used to visit.

Besides meeting a large number of visitors coming from different levels of society, as well as devotees and friends, delivering lectures, and joining public celebrations Swamiji gave particular attention to the educated, unmarried young men who had been visiting him or living in the monastery. He wanted to infuse in their hearts some of his own fire. But the overall situation was far from encouraging as he wrote Mrs. Bull on May 5th, 1897. But his credo, in his own words, was *"the more opposition, the more is the demon in me aroused."* He went ahead, undaunted by adverse reactions from certain quarters, a lack of motivation among some of the monastics, and other such constraints.

As the Math was in poor financial condition, Swamiji at times sent some money to mitigate that stringent financial condition. Clearly it was not enough. Therefore he wanted to think of an effective solution and in the first half of 1894 he started inquiring of the Math residents, *"Who meets the cost of maintenance of Holy Mother?" "How do you defray the expenses of the Math? Who meets your pecuniary needs?"* For some reason or another, begging of alms got discontinued. Swamiji questioned, *"How is it that so large a number of people revere the Master, and a Math cannot be maintained?"* Actually lay devotees and the public started to take a casual interest in the Math affairs.

Alambazar Math had three phases. The phase 1 lasted from 1892 (February) to 1894 (April). It was pretty much the extension of the Baranagore Math. Here also the worship room was the center of the Math life. Though it was Ramakrishnananda who used to served as *pujari* yet all offered their service in rotation. When he was sick, Turiyananda did puja for some days. A few times Ramakrishnananda was on travel and a different monastic brother substituted him. All were involved with worship service to some extent. Once Adbhutananda did Shiva Ratri puja. Once Kali puja was replaced by the worship of Sri Ramakrishna. Premananda did a night-long puja and homa.

The worship room had a special appeal to the public also. Many strange and socially dejected persons found it as the nest of peace and joy. Centering the shrine the Math became a vital pulsating center for spiritual seekers.

It was in Alambazar Math where Ma Sarada's birthday was celebrated for the first time. But Swamiji tried to make it clear from the very beginning, *"Ceremonials are for householders; your work is the distribution and propagation of thought currents." ... "What I mean is this: let there be as little materialism as possible, with the maximum of spirituality."*

Sri Ramakrishna's birthday used to be celebrated in two phases. According to the lunar calendar on the exact date of Sri Ramakrishna's birth a worship of Sri Ramakrishna would take place at the Math and on the following Sunday both monastic and lay disciples would get together for a public celebration. This program was not organized for mere festivity purpose. Swamiji reminded us, *"Not only this mahotsava (great festival) will be his memorial, but the central union of an intense propagation of his doctrines."*

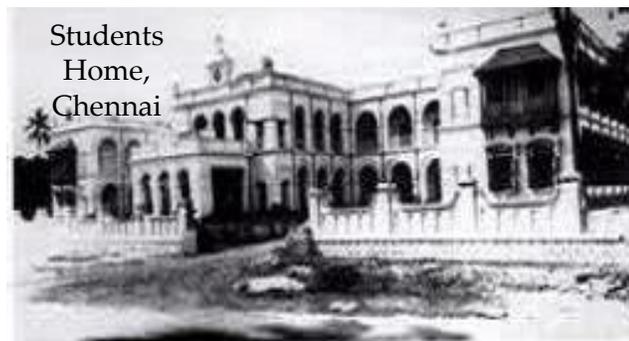
Therefore, the movement's endeavor was for the liberation of the individual self as well as for the good of the world. Evidently, it is still committed to society's total well being – especially to cater to man's spiritual needs as well.

An ambiguity driven turmoil – this was the main characteristic of this second phase, which lasted from 1894 (April) to 1897 (February). This time Swamiji was in the West and monastics were getting some information from here and there and Swamiji also told his fellow monastic brothers, *“You see, I have a mission”* but they did not have any clear idea about it. However, they had faith that it must be a noble one. He continued inspiring them by writing, *“Move the world to its foundations! Send one China, another to Japan! What will the poor householders do, with their little bits of life? It is for the sannyasins, Siva’s demons, to rend the sky with their shouts of “Hara! Hara! Shambho!” ... “To work with undaunted energy! What fear! Who is powerful enough to thwart you! ... We shall crush the stars to atoms, and unhinge the universe. Don’t you know who we are? We are the servants of Sri Ramakrishna. Fear! Whom to fear, forsooth?”* To some these letters brought excitement and at the same time puzzlement as well.

With Swamiji’s return from the West, the third phase of the Alambazar Math started. Swamiji returned with huge success, name and fame. Many who used to call him Narendra, started to address him as “Swamiji”. This arouse jealousy and enmity among other communities especially certain Christian missionaries. But Swamiji told his spiritual brothers boldly, *“So long as all of you stand united behind me, there will be nothing to fear even if the whole world stands against us.”* Therefore, in order to organize a public meeting for the felicitation of Swamiji, the monks had to engage in activities like collecting funds, contacting the press as well as influential people, corresponding with like-minded people, etc., thus experiencing situations previously unknown to them. Swamiji inspired Ramakrishnananda saying, *“You must pay special attention to study. Do you understand?”* Later Ramakrishnananda wrote, *“Then I felt an urge for studying.”* But they did not have money to buy books. A devotee from Bombay came forward and with that money they purchased books and shelves. And then only, worshipper Swami

Ramakrishnananda *“felt a little urge for activities.”*

If through this is the worship-room oriented life of monks was turning to one direction of service then another aspect was growing up in different way.



Swamiji wanted to practice austerities in the Himalayas, so in mid-July he left the monastery, taking Akhandananda as his companion. Before their departure, they went to Holy Mother for her blessing. She blessed them and told Akhandananda: *“My son, you know the way of life in the mountains. Please take care of Naren, so that he may not suffer from lack of food.”*

After wandering together for some time they travelled separately also. On May 15th 1897 Akhandananda happened to conduct the first famine-relief in Dadpur. By mid-November he started an orphanage in Sargachi.

It was in Mahula village. That night he took shelter at a local school building. In the afternoon, many Brahmin boys came to have lessons. After their class the teacher left, alerting the Swami not to venture around too much in the night. The Swami agreed and informed him that his plan was to leave for Berhampore early next morning.

Following his plan he woke up at daybreak and washing hands and face got ready to leave. Now, suddenly everything changed. Let us read it in his own words, *“Just as I attempted to proceed, I felt as if somebody whispered in my ears, “Where are you going? You have much to do here. It is a holy place on the Ganga, a place of many holy men and a flourishing locality. You must stay here.” Once, twice, thrice did I hear this voice. Again I made an attempt to stand up, I felt that somebody was pushing me down to sit, holding me by the waist. This was repeated three times.*

When the teacher came later in the day the Swami told him, *"I postponed going. I shall be in this locality for some time."* Hearing this the teacher invited him to have prasada of Mother Annapurna (giver of food to the world) at his uncle's place. This gladdened him much and he thought, *"Did Mother Annapurna detain me here that I might alleviate the distress of those miserable people in the grip of famine? I felt so in the inmost part of my heart, and within myself said to the Mother, "Now it is Thou with whom I shall have accounts to square."* Before he started his journey Sarada-Annapurna asked him to take care of Vivekananda-Shiva's food. By the end of the travel the Swami made place to serve God in human form. The cycle was complete. Other relief centers were opened by Trigunatita (Dinajpur), Virajananda (Deoghar), Prakashananda (Dakshineswar) etc..

To Swamiji, organization meant the division of labor among the members of a corporate body. According to Swamiji's vision the Math was to be a *"purity drilling machine"*. He repeatedly reminded the monastic members, *"Always remember that Sri Ramakrishna came for the good of the world, not for name or fame. Spread only what he came to teach. Never mind his name, it will spread of itself."* It is interesting to note that Swamiji appointed M, Alasinga and Mr. Sturdy to be his agents in Calcutta, Madras and London respectively. The greatness of the Math lay in the quality of the life of its members. And the Math was never meant only for male members. Swamiji wanted two plots of land in Calcutta in order to host two Maths – one for men and the other for women. He wrote to Ramakrishnananda, *"Hence it is my first endeavour is to start a Math for women ... Purchase the plot of land as soon as you receive the money and purchase it in my name for the time being. Then be on the lookout for a site for our Math. They should be close to each other, that is, see that the two sites are very near to each other. If it be at some distance from Calcutta, no harm. Wherever we shall build our Math, there we shall have a stir made."* In reality things turned out in a

different way.

The third phase of the Alambazar Math is the shortest and most significant one. During this time only Turiyananda heard Swamiji saying in Darjeeling, *"I shall revolutionize the monastic Order."*

Before he left for Darjeeling for the second time Swamiji went to see Ma Sarada. For all questions and comments of Swamiji, Mother was communicating with him via Golap-Ma. But at the end when Swamiji said, *"Mother, I want to spread the Master's message and establish a worthy and enduring organization for the purpose as early as possible. But I feel distressed that I cannot do things as speedily as I wish."* This time Mother spoke in her soft voice, *"Rest assured that Thakur will very soon fulfill your desire. You will before long find that your ideas are taking practical shape."*

Balaram Bose's house was Sri Ramakrishna's main meeting place with His devotees in Calcutta.



This time Swamiji started to frame a set of rules to guide the monks, particularly the novices. He was very clear from the beginning, *"... we are going to make rules, no doubt; ... But we must remember ... Our main object is to transcend all rules and regulations."* This rule book took final shape as *"Belur Math Rules"* after the Math moved to Nilambar Mukherjee's Garden House. Keeping in view Sri Ramakrishna as their ideal, the householders were not allowed to interfere in the affairs of the Math, though they could serve the monks.

Swamiji tirelessly kept inspiring the monastics, *"I want each of my children to be a hundred times greater than I ever could be. Every one of you must be a giant – must, that is my word."* Young monks were startled to hear their leader say, *"Remember, for the salvation of his own soul, and for the goodness and*

happiness of the many, the Sannyasi is born in the world." Gradually the *work and worship* started taking the form of *work as worship* through the step *work is worship*. Swamiji wrote to Ramakrishnananda, *"On the whole the working of the Math here is quite satisfactory these days."*

On May 1st, 1897 Swamiji called a meeting at Balam Bose's house in Calcutta and the proceedings of that meeting read, *"In view of the increasing interest and expansion of the movement to diffuse Paramahansa Deva's ideas, teachings and principles, it was thought desirable to form an Organization to carry on the work methodically. A local center in Calcutta was thought to be essential, where all could meet regularly to exchange their ideas, to adopt means for diffusing the knowledge of those principles and teachings to the masses and to keep themselves with other sister bodies in different parts of India, America and England by the interchange of views for the furtherance of the cause. ...*

... Let this association be named after him, in whose name, indeed, we have embraced the monastic life, with whom as your ideal in life you all toil on the field of work from your station in family life, within twenty years of whose passing away a wonderful diffusion of his holy name and extraordinary life has taken place both in the East and the West. We are the servants of the Lord. Be you all helpers in this cause." Therefore, this Mission Association or the Ramakrishna Order includes all monastic and lay devotees – whoever believes in this ideology. These sayings of Swamiji are the foundation from which sprung the different institutions called Math, Mission, Advaita Ashrama, Vedanta Society, etc. that have spread all

over India and abroad. Taking cognizance of this fact, Swami Gambhirananda has justifiably taken the word "Association" to mean "Sangha". Though it was influenced by both Buddhistic and Christian organizations, fundamentally it is a spiritual movement deeply rooted in Upanishadic culture. Swamiji dreamed the Ramakrishna Mission as *"a machine for elevating the Indian masses"*.

Considering his deteriorating health condition, Swamiji started to take necessary steps to keep the machine functioning smoothly. One such important step was to involve Swami Brahmananda more actively. As the work was increasing and the monks were inexperienced in handling public money, Swamiji wrote Brahmananda, *"Be very careful about money matters; keep detailed accounts, and regarding money know for certain that one cannot rely even on one's own father."*

Relief activities drew much attention of society and again Swamiji's words became true, the Ramakrishna Mission monks *"no longer had to argue to the people that "Ramakrishna is God."*

A few unavoidable reasons arose for which building a new Math in newly procured land became a necessity.

1. Increase in the number of members
2. English and American devotees had offered money for land and building costs for a central math on a permanent footing
3. Deterioration of Swamiji's health
4. The most important and the deciding reason was a terrible earthquake on June 12th, 1897 that damaged a part of the building.

The first preference was to purchase a plot of



land on the eastern side of Ganga but nothing was available. Therefore, on February 3rd, 1898 a plot of land was purchased at Belur village paying 1001/- rupees.

To develop the uneven land and to construct houses for the monastery, it became imperative to rent Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house close to the site. The Math moved there on February 13th, 1898. The Math stayed here for ten and a half months.

Before the Math moved here the garden house was sanctified by Sarada Devi. She performed a great austerity *panchatapa* with Yogin-Ma here. This place was very dear to Mother. When she stayed here for a year and half in 1888, Girish Ghosh bore all her expenses. Mother initiated a few people like M's wife, Kalikrishna (Virajananda), and others. After the Math moved here Mother visited a few times upon the earnest request of the monks. She came on March 28th 1898 for the first time and it was the very first day of Annapurna puja! Some Brahmachari received sannyasa from Swamiji and Nivedita received her Brahmacharya here. Mother visited this Math a few times. Here Math life was vibrant, vigorous and vivacious, kind of totally opposite to the quiet and secluded life of Baranagore Math. From this time Swamiji, Turiyananda, Premananda and others started to write "The Math, Belur" or "Math, Beloor P.O" though Belur Math was inaugurated on January 2nd 1899.

liberation -- Jaminiranjan, Haridas, Charuchandra (Swami Shubhananda), Kedarnath (Swami Achalananda), and others, seeing the helplessness and poverty of the people decided to serve the poor, the needy, the destitute, and the sick. They organized themselves into an association and named it "Home of Relief". Before the formation of this association this group was aware of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology and decided to live a life following it.

Soon they rented a small house for five rupees a month to meet the need for more spacious accommodation for patients, small out-patient homoeopathic dispensary, an office and the bedroom for two full-time workers — Charuchandra and Jaminiranjan.

According to the Belur Math website: *"In February 1902, when Swami Vivekananda visited Varanasi, he was highly pleased by the work done by the association. However, he advised them to change the name to 'Home of Service', for, as he said: 'Who are you to render relief? You can only serve. The pride of rendering relief leads to ruin... How arrogant it is on the part of a man to think another lower and humbler than himself? Service and not mercy should be your guiding principle — service to man, the image of God.'* He turned to Charuchandra and said: *'Regard every pice collected for the poor as your life-blood. Such noble work can be carried on properly and permanently only by those who have renounced everything.'* Swamiji wrote an appeal to the public on behalf of the Home of Service, which accompanied the first report of the Home in 1902.



Varanasi Home of Service (in 1930)

Around this time on June 13, 1900, in the holy city of Kashi — the mukti kshetra, place of



Kankhal

Swamiji also instructed Swami Brahmananda to keep a watch on the organization. With the latter's approval and by a resolution of the managing committee of the Home of Service, the association was affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission and came to be known by its present name, 'Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service', on 23 September 1903."

When Holy Mother visited Sevashrama she also blessed the service by donating ten ruprees. Swamiji knew from personal experience about the helpless condition of monks living at Haridwar and nearby places. An article in the Belur Math website records, it is Swamiji who told his disciple Swami Kalyanananda, "My boy, can you do something for the ailing monks at Haridwar and Rishikesh? There is none to look after them when they fall ill. Go and serve them." In June 1901 Kalyanananda began his work at Kankhal, a village near Haridwar. In two rooms he started a dispensary, a hospital, a bedroom, an office, and everything. The work of the service was totally free and was supported by donations. Living on alms, the Swami distributed medicines not only to those who came to him, but also to those who could not or would not come out of their huts to visit.

He (Kalyanananda) was soon joined by Nischayananda, another disciple of Swamiji. Ignoring physical hardship, the two monks opened a dispensary at Rishikesh, which was like a branch centre fifteen miles from Kankhal, to serve the needy walking all the way to and fro every day. Along with treating monks in their huts, they would also perform the last rites of those monks who had died in their huts and had no one to perform these rites. Gradually they extended the service to the untouchables and the so-called outcastes. As a result, they were castigated as untouchables by the majority of the orthodox monks of the towns of Rishikesh and Haridwar. Once Kalyanananda and Nischayananda were not invited at a sádhu-bhandara (a feast for monks). When Mandaleswar Dhanraj Giri, who was very respectable among the monks and the chief guest

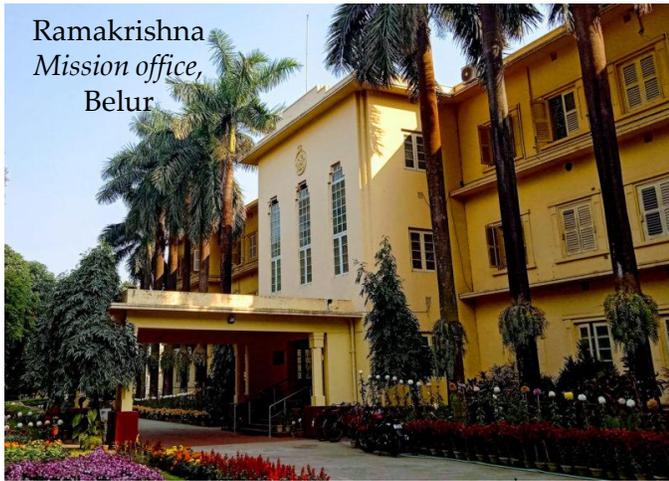
of the program, learnt of this, he rebuked the orthodox monks and said that those two monks were truly practicing the Vedantic tenets of 'all is Brahman', and unless they were invited and honored he would not accept hospitality. This opened the eyes of the orthodox monks, and their antagonism towards the two monks soon vanished.

Sri Ramakrishna warned, "Coming to the Kalighat temple, some, perhaps, spend their whole time in giving alms to the poor. They do not have time to see the Mother in the inner shrine." Swamiji therefore to harmonize these two aspects wrote to Kalyanananda, "One cannot be sure of spiritual progress through work only. Along with work one must worship, too."

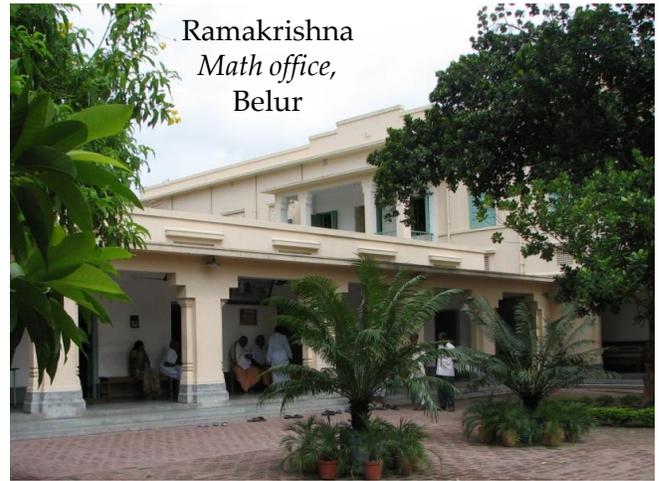
It worths mentioning here, that a plot of land was purchased in 1903 and the first building of two blocks, designed by Swami Vijnanananda, was constructed on it. The Sevashrama was shifted to its new premises in 1905.

The attitudes of the monks who dedicated their lives for Sevashramas were unique. For example being asked by M, Nischayananda said with folded hands, 'I am Swamiji's bond slave; I know no other spiritual practice than work, to which I have been commissioned by him. I have vowed to hold on to this path.' Another monk who was engaged in the work of growing vegetables in the fields of Varanasi Sevashrama, when asked why he was thus labouring in the scorching sun when as a monk he should have been reading the Gita or meditating, he replied unambiguously: 'Why, I am growing vegetables which will be eaten by the sick-Narayanas.' For these monks, work was worship, and the ideal -- 'for one's own liberation and for the good of the world' -- was ever bright before their eyes.

It is important to note that Sri Ramakrishna through his intense spiritual practices transformed the stone image to a living form of the Divine Mother Kali at the eastern side of Ganga, in Dakshineswar. On the western side Sri Ramakrishna's Shakti, Ma Sarada established a



Ramakrishna
Mission office,
Belur



Ramakrishna
Math office,
Belur

great spiritual center by her austerities. As mentioned, she did immense austerity at Nilambar babu's garden house; lived in another rented house in the Belur area and also for some time she stayed at Ghushuri, a village near Belur. During her stay in these area she was always in an indrawn state and remained immersed in worship and other spiritual practices. She said, *"Of the truth, it always seemed to me as though the Master lived on the land on the other side of the Ganga – in a cottage; just as present monastery and the plantain trees are there."* This is the reason for which Swami Prabhananda thinks, *"Swami Vivekananda, the tool in Sri Ramakrishna's hands, founded Sri Ramakrishna's Dharmakshetra (sacred land), a novel shrine of spirituality – Belur Math. ... It may be aptly said that if Dakshineswar were the Gomukha (the site of the Ganga's origin) of the Ramakrishna movement, Belur Math is its "Gangotri" (the place where the Ganga makes her majestic advent onto the plains).*

The new monk that came out of this Belur Math was not simply an ordinary individual. In the words of Swami Prabhananda, *"He (this monk) was part and parcel of a monastic organization, and an*

organization is but a functional unity whose parts cooperate for the good of the whole. This functional unity can be maintained only by the golden bond of love – love for one another as well as love for the organization, or Sangha.

On Tuesday, February 22nd 1898 Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was celebrated in the new Belur Math. The detailed description of the whole celebration is heart touching and inspirational. On this occasion Swamiji composed a beautiful song for the evening prayer: *Khandana bhavabandhana jagavandana vandi tomay" – Breaker of this world's chain, we adore thee, whom all men love!*

Upanishad proclaimed: *tat-ja-alan-iti*. This universe is born out of Brahman, *tat ja*; it exists in Brahman, *tat alan*; and it merges with that Brahman alone, *tat iti*. Sri Ramakrishna is the embodiment of love from whom this Order is born, Holy Mother herself is that Absolute love in whom this Order is sustained and Swamiji is that love personified who gave the finalized shape the Order uniting the whole of humanity through love alone.



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