

# THE VISIONS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

COMPILED BY  
SWAMI YOGESHANANDA



SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH  
16, RAMAKRISHNA MATH ROAD  
MADRAS—600-004, INDIA

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## PREFACE

*THE Visions of Sri Ramakrishna* is a collection of a number of super-sensuous experiences of the Great Master, more or less in the order of their occurrence in his life. We have at present several collections of the Master's Teachings gathered from the extensive literature on him. The present work on his Visions is a similar attempt to bring together in a single volume many of the sublime experiences that made him the great Teacher that he was. Such a book is bound to be of immense help both to spiritual aspirants and to students of comparative mysticism.

The subject matter of the present work is mainly drawn from Swami Saradananda's *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* and Mahendra Nath Gupta's *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Besides being eminent scholars, both these authors had the advantage of intimate association with Sri Ramakrishna and are accepted as the best authorities on the life and teachings of the great Master. The book now published may therefore be considered authentic.

*The Visions of Sri Ramakrishna* had appeared as a serial in our English monthly, *The Vedanta Kesari*, during 1967-69. Brahmachari Buddha Chaitanya, under whose name it was published, has now become a Sannyasin with the monastic name of Swami Yogeshananda, and it is under this new name of the compiler that the present book is published.

We trust that the *Visions* will bring new hope and enlightenment to many seekers who are passing through depression and darkness in their spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna Math,  
Madras—600-004

*Publisher*

## FOREWORD

As short a time ago as twenty-five years a serious and reverential approach to the subject of supersensory visions would have been received skeptically and with no little embarrassment by most people of the Western world. But today many of us are not quite so sure about what is real and what is not real ; reality no longer seems so simple a thing that we can perceive the whole of it with our five senses and grasp it with our reason. Many of us are beginning to admit that beyond our ordinary perception and understanding there may be layers and layers of supersensual reality.

Students of Sri Ramakrishna's life, his devotees, have no doubt that this is so. To them, this book will be a highly welcome treasure chest of jewels already cherished. But it should be welcome and rewarding to the openminded, truly modern newcomer as well ; for never before in recorded time has there been a life so abounding in supersensory vision as Sri Ramakrishna's. Indeed, the whole of his mind seems to have been always immersed in an ocean of transcendental reality. And, his face beaming, they tell us, with indescribable joy, he splashed water from that ocean continually, without the slightest hesitation or withholding. He told everything that words could tell.

Swami Yogeshananda has carefully, conscientiously, collected the records of Sri Ramakrishna's transcendental experiences that have heretofore lain scattered throughout the histories of his life, and has presented all that are available — from the most profound to the seemingly slight. The result is a glowing, indeed dazzling, display. The

Swami tells us that he has made this compilation for our convenience of reference, and with his unobtrusive and helpful commentary it well serves this purpose. Further, he gives as many details as the most exacting student of the psychology of spiritual visions could ask for. But over and above these unquestioned values, this collection has an impact all its own.

Dwelling upon Sri Ramakrishna's visions distilled from the larger histories of his life, one is thunderstruck by their immense variety and richness. And by their number ! We have here only a small fraction of the actual whole, for, as Swami Saradananda, a close monastic disciple, wrote in his book *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, " . . . there were so many extraordinary visions and experiences in the Master's life day after day, that it is beyond the power of man to mention all of them." But the ecstasies and Samādhi here recorded, those huge splashes from the *Ocean of Satchidānanda*, are more than enough to fill us with reverential awe. Are we not here witnessing Religion at its very source ?

"In all organised religions," Swami Vivekananda once said, "their founders, prophets and messengers are declared to have gone into states of mind that were neither waking nor sleeping, in which they came face to face with a new series of facts relating to what is called the spiritual kingdom. They realised things there much more intensely than we realise facts around us in our waking state. . . . These facts are the basis of all the religions of the world."<sup>1</sup> And these facts, the Lord Himself tells us, are revealed again and again throughout history in response to the world's need : "Whenever there is a decline of *dharma*,"

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<sup>1</sup> *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, I:60.

said Sri Krishna, "and a rise of *adharma*, I incarnate Myself."<sup>2</sup>

All of us are only too well aware that *dharma* (generally translated as "righteousness") has declined in the present age, that it has, in fact, reached rock bottom. It would be tedious here to attempt to trace the causes of our *adharmic* state; yet one may wonder if it is not rooted in a worldview that is stone-blind to transcendental facts — those facts of which Swami Vivekananda speaks and which constitute, as all great sages have told us, the very essence of our being. Until very recently, the dominant trends of modern Western culture have totally ignored man's fundamental need for a glimpse of, or at least a belief in, transcendental reality. But without such glimpse or such belief his ideals die, and with their death his culture rots. *Dharma* indeed declines.

As though in response to what appears to be an unprecedentedly dense and critical darkness, an unprecedentedly brilliant and far-spreading light has come flooding out through the visions of Sri Ramakrishna, those vivid and abundant revelations of transcendental facts. Never before has so much been given to the world. "Your experiences," learned pundits said to him, "go far beyond anything found in the Puranas, the Vedas or the Vedanta."<sup>3</sup> Is this not a cosmic response to a human cry — Religion at its very source?

But even if we do not think of Sri Ramakrishna as a Divine Incarnation, we still can pore with delight and reverence over the tremendous experiences that have been gathered for us in this book — experiences attained, if

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<sup>2</sup> *The Bhagavad Gita*, IV:7.

<sup>3</sup> *L.P.*, 244, 305.

one will, by a perfected man. We can dwell on them, we can find deeper and deeper meaning in them, and, above all, we can feel ignited by them, as though our own vision were becoming clarified and whole.

I began this brief foreword by saying that today we accept the value of supersensory experience more readily than in years past. Perhaps this is a sign that the walls we have built around ourselves, shutting out any gleam of transcendental light, are crumbling. Indeed, the very publication of this book, which presents without apology or defense the visions of Sri Ramakrishna, is perhaps clear evidence that that light is breaking through.

M. L. B.

MARIE LOUIS BURKE,  
San Francisco,  
California.  
January, 1973.



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It is the latter view which has been adopted in approaching the present material.

In the accounts of the life of Gotama Buddha we hear of his night-long temptation by Māra, with its seductive and fantastic visions. Later there are descriptions of his entering into the four *dhyānas*, stages of ecstasy; and some assert that he 'ascended into heaven' to preach the Doctrine to his mother. Let us take the case of Jesus Christ. In addition to the descending dove and the voice of the Heavenly Father at his baptism, we have as glimpses of his inner life only the temptation in the wilderness by Satan, where it is also said that angels ministered unto him, and his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane as recorded in the Gospel of John. It is true that he prophesied and made claims about his own nature: but very little of the inner content of his divine communion is left to us in the canonical scripture. Again, who knows whether these accounts now represent what was told to the disciples by these great teachers? In the case of Sri Ramakrishna most fortunately we are in a very different historical position, and this fact carries interesting implications for validating accounts of the experiences of the earlier personalities.

The following record concerns itself primarily with what came from 'the other side' in the superconscious experiences of Sri Ramakrishna. We have tried to present accurately the *content* of these experiences in so far as it was reported by Ramakrishna himself to his companions, devotees, and disciples. The various occasions on which the same incident was told have been carefully sought out and compared, and variations noted. Incidents of this type known to have been reported have thus been brought together from the sources into a presumed chronological order. Sri Ramakrishna kept no diary. We have to rely

on the memory of Mahendranath Gupta, or "M.", the cherished writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and on the authenticity of the material gathered by Ramakrishna's disciple and biographer, Swami Saradananda, in his brilliant work, *Śrī Śrī Ramakrishna Līlāprasanga*, the English title of which is *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*. These are the two principal sources. The chronology of much of the material is therefore well established, but one cannot hope that a perfectly accurate order of events has been reconstructed.

Instances exist where some of the content of the superconscious revelation can be inferred. For example, in the state called *bhāva-samādhi* Ramakrishna foretold how long he would live at Dakshineswar and when Mathur Babu protested, he promised to extend the time.<sup>1</sup> When the statue of Sri Krishna was broken Ramakrishna, in a state of ecstasy, prescribed the remedy.<sup>2</sup> Again, M. and other disciples have recorded for us many occasions on which the Master was heard to utter various prayers to the Lord. These are Sri Ramakrishna's own words, and we can infer that he was in communion with God at those times, but as we are concerned primarily with the 'divine dialogue', with what comes (or seems to come) directly from beyond the conscious level, most such incidents have not been included. Some incidents, however, will be found here which while not rich in content nevertheless reveal how Ramakrishna's mind behaved in trance.

Although the word 'visions' has been used throughout, this term must be understood in its wider sense. As we shall find in studying these events the imagery involved

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<sup>1</sup> LP 282.

<sup>2</sup> LP 131.

is not only visual but often auditory, sometimes tactile, or that of smell or taste, as well as locomotor sensations.

When a saint or seer has a vision, is it a projection from his own subconscious mind? Or is there an objective realm of spiritual entity 'outside', which can make intrusions into the circumscribed mind of the individual? The question is an ancient and thorny one. It baffled the great Swami Vivekananda for some time. Only gradually was he able to discern the answer in the life, the teaching, and experience of his Master. We shall see below what Swami Saradananda says about it. The material of this book, if it does not provide each reader with a convincing answer, may perhaps throw some light upon the problem.

A familiarity on the part of the reader with the life of Sri Ramakrishna is assumed. He will surely know that there were innumerable times when the Master had *samādhi* of various degrees, the contents of which were revealed to no one. This happened daily. Why daily? It happened many times a day. In 1865-66 he remained in the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* most of the time for six months. And as late as 1874, or thereabouts, 'Captain' Upādhyāya, one of his early devotees, saw him absorbed in ecstasy continuously for three days and three nights, reflecting a mood which later abated.<sup>3</sup> What the Master saw, heard, or felt in these protracted absences from the common consciousness we shall never know. For him to reveal his innermost experiences was the exception rather than the rule.

'When we study the Master's visions born of his spiritual moods,' says Swami Saradananda, 'we find a distinction: some are knowable to himself alone and some to others also. Some of those visions of the Master were thoughts of his

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<sup>3</sup> LP 360.

mind confined within his own body, solidified and embodied, so to speak, by steadfast and constant practice and manifested to him in those forms and it was only he who could see them then. Some others were seen by him as he passed through higher and higher planes and was on the verge of the *nirvikalpa* plane, or when he was abiding in *bhāvamukha* (a state of awareness between the Relative and the Absolute). The contents of the visions of the latter kind, although unknown to others at that time, were for him quite objectively existent and he would predict their coming true in the course of time, and all actually did see them later as facts and events. In order to realize the truth of the former class of visions one had to be endowed, like him, with faith, reverence, steadfastness, etc.; or one had to ascend to that plane in which the Master had those visions. But in order to realize the latter class as true one required no faith, no *sādhana* — one had to believe them as the results compelled one to.<sup>4</sup>

It is hoped that nearly all of the recorded visions of Sri Ramakrishna have been delineated here, but we have not forgotten another remark of Swami Saradananda, that 'From the time of his Tāntrika *sādhana* there were so many extraordinary visions and experiences in the Master's life day after day, that it is beyond the power of man to mention all of them.'<sup>5</sup> Another word of caution: the experiences compiled here cannot be a profile, nor even a cross-section, of his supersensory life, overweighted as they are, on the side of the Relative. After all, the deepest *samādhi* is a content-less consciousness, so to say, not lending itself to description. Sri Ramakrishna's long and frequent absorp-

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<sup>4</sup> LP 598.

<sup>5</sup> LP 202.

tions in the non-dual, indivisible Absolute must be borne in mind to balance the picture. It may also be said that after the Master's *sādhana* came to an end he lived continuously in a state of spiritual experience of one kind or another.

If this were merely a collection of the day-dreams of a religious enthusiast, there would have been little meaning or value in compiling it. The spirit of the book is devotional, as it is written by a devotee for devotees. Any interpretations the reader may encounter are based on a faith in the divinity of Sri Ramakrishna and the resulting spiritual significance of the drama which was his life. It is felt, however, that even the sceptical rationalist who goes through the book may well find some fascination in the great variety of symbols through which this unusual mind gave expression to the profoundest truths.

No real attempt has been made to classify the spiritual states from which these experiences emerge, relative to one another, that undertaking being left to some hardier soul than the present writer. Numbers in the text will be found to refer to footnotes on the page itself giving the sources for the incident. For simplicity we have used an abbreviation of the Bengali title of Swami Saradananda's book, "LP", which designates *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, 2nd edition, published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, India; the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 1st edition, published 1942 by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York, translated by Swami Nikhilananda, is designated as "G"; and the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 1925 edition, published by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Almora, India, simply as 'Life'.

I am indebted to a monastic brother for proof-reading, corrections, and valuable additions to the material.

Marie Louise Burke in her Foreword and Swami Tadatmananda in his cover design have helped me with contributions worthy of the subject-matter of the book.

‘My experiences,’ said Sri Ramakrishna himself, ‘are for others to refer to.’ The purpose of the book is to try to make it easier to do just that.

YOGESHANANDA

## CHAPTER I

### TO THE END OF FORMAL WORSHIP

A VERY young boy, Gadādhara Chatterji, was walking on the high bank of a rice field near his village home in Bengal. Little did he know that he was about to experience *samādhi*, God-consciousness, the state which was to become his natural habitat in maturity. The boy's exact age is difficult to know, for Sri Ramakrishna, as he was later known, once said that he was six or seven years old, whereas it is recorded in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* that he was 'ten or eleven'. It was on the morning of a day in June or July, before the monsoon season. As was the custom in villages like Kāmārpukur, the boy had taken with him for refreshment parched rice in a small basket, from which he had begun to eat. A large black rain cloud began to roll and gather until it had filled the entire horizon. Across this black cloud suddenly flew a flock of white cranes.<sup>1</sup> The beauty of this contrast was over-powering to the sensitive nature of the boy,<sup>2</sup> and down he fell, 'absorbed in an extraordinary mood', scattering his rice grains to the ground.<sup>3</sup> Later he came to know from others that he had been 'unconscious', and his body motionless. 'There are certain characteristics of God-vision,' he once said about it. 'One sees light,

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<sup>1</sup> Various accounts have given this as swans or geese or herons ; but the Bengali word means cranes.

<sup>2</sup> Sister Devamātā, in her book *Sri Ramakrishna*, says that it reminded him of Sri Krishna with a garland of flowers around His neck.

<sup>3</sup> LP 103.



feels joy, and experiences the upsurge of a great current in one's chest, like the bursting of a rocket.' Near the end of his life the Master told those around him : ' Since that day I have been an altogether different man. I began to see another person within me.' <sup>4</sup>

This first ecstasy brings to our mind the interesting question of the relation between aesthetic experiences and mystical ones. While on the one hand it indicates the power of man's emotional nature to stimulate and participate in divine beatitude, on the other hand in its quality and its depth it is an eye-opener to shallow romanticism which may be prone to see immortality in every passing tear shed in the name of Beauty.

About two miles to the north of Kāmārpukur lies the village of Anur. Here in a field the Goddess Viśālākshī is said to dwell, unsheltered and wearing no human form. Her living presence is felt, however, in a simple mound of earth, about two feet wide and four feet long, painted red at one end. The story told of this unusual Goddess is this : She gives away to the cowherd boys of the village the coin offerings left by pilgrims ; the boys are thus able to entertain themselves with sweets. For this reason every attempt which has been made to enclose the Goddess in a structure and formalize Her worship has been mysteriously frustrated. When he was about eight years old <sup>5</sup> — or by one account ten or eleven <sup>6</sup> — the young Ramakrishna accompanied a party of women of Kāmārpukur on a morning pilgrimage to Anur to visit Viśālākshī. Gadādhara was helping to pass the time en route by singing the many songs he knew. Suddenly the sweet voice was silent ; his body

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<sup>4</sup> G 891.

<sup>5</sup> LP 104.

<sup>6</sup> G 33.

and limbs grew stiff, and there was a constant flow of tears from his eyes. The ladies of the party did not understand it. They thought him overcome by the heat. But all their cries and splashing of water were fruitless in restoring his external consciousness. Only when Prasannā, a woman wiser than the rest, thought to call into his ear the name of the Goddess on whom his mind had been intent, did the boy slowly regain his normal awareness and behaviour. Much later, about this he said: 'What a vision! I became completely unconscious of the outer world.' Unfortunately this is the only sentence we now have from the Master himself. Perhaps this was his very first vision of the Divine Mother. Did he see Her form? We do not know.

About the oft-told incident in which Gadādhara was borrowed by the manager of an acting troupe to be a stand-in for the part of Lord Śiva, we know all the external circumstances. It was the first watch of the long night devoted to the worship of Śiva, and a drama arranged to help the villagers keep vigil was endangered by the illness of an actor. Young Gadai was meditating on the Great Lord, when friends arrived and persuaded him to assume the role. With slow steps he appeared before the eager audience. But at some point he had already gone into ecstasy. The radiance of his face shone through a flood of tears, the only sign of life in a body which was rigid as a statue. In the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*<sup>7</sup> there is this passage: 'The boy had completely lost himself in the divine glory of Śiva; his mind in its transcendental flight transported him into a region of calmness and serenity as immutable as the Lord Śiva Himself. The different phases of the great glory of

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<sup>7</sup> p. 45.

Mahādeva, the God of gods, appeared before his mind's eye. Calm, sweet, self-forgetful and oblivious of the pains and pleasures of the world, the great God appeared before him as the ideal of serene contemplativeness immersed in *samādhi* for the sake of the world's welfare.' But whether the Master ever gave such a description is in doubt. The effect on the audience was galvanizing, causing shouts of 'Bravo!' which never reached their destination: Sri Ramakrishna remained unconscious throughout the night. After this event such trances became more frequent. Swami Saradananda tells us that after the boy received his sacred thread (given usually at the age of eight) he had occasional visions and *samādhi* during worship. Rehearsing other dramas later, he often experienced ecstasy.

Gadādhara at the age of sixteen left his village home to come to Calcutta, where he was to study under his elder brother Rāmkumār and assist him in performing worship in the pious homes of the city. Other than the fact that he resented and neglected the education for a life in the world, Sri Ramakrishna has left little record of his inner life of these three years. We must therefore shift our scene to the Dakshineswar temple garden, built by Rani Rasmani on the bank of the Ganges about four miles north of the heart of the city. It was in the Kālī temple of this compound that Rāmkumār had accepted a permanent appointment, and in the middle of 1855 Ramakrishna accepted, after much persuasion, the office of assistant in the priestly duties; he came to be known in the temple precincts as 'the Junior Bhattachārya'.

His actual performance of worship began not in the temple of Kālī, but in that of Rādhākānta (Sri Krishna), which makes it seem likely that it was here that the actual letters of the mantras which as priest he had to repeat,

appeared to Sri Ramakrishna in bright colours, set in his body at different points, as we find them in Tantric diagrams. At one point in the worship, when the worshipper must sprinkle water in a circle around him, with the mantra 'rang', symbolizing a protecting wall of fire, the Master saw hundreds of tongues of fire from this wall around the worship seat. He said that he actually saw the *Kuṇḍalinī* going up in the form of a snake through the *suṣumnā* to the *sahasrāra* at the top of the head. He felt that the parts of his body left behind by that Power, in its upward movement, became still, insensitive, and dead, as it were.<sup>8</sup> It must have been an arresting sight to see him performing worship. Hriday, his nephew and companion, described him as becoming so absorbed that he would not know if anyone came near or spoke to him.

The 'Junior Bhattachārya' soon exchanged places with his brother, and was appointed priest of the Kālī Temple. The whole current of his mind now began to flow toward God as the Divine Mother. The madness to certify for himself the reality of God had begun. Once, in the agony of his restlessness, he vowed to the Divine Mother that he would kill himself if he did not see God. But the Mother did not yet reply to his call; and what Sri Ramakrishna vowed in word he did not fail to make good in deed. At the peak of his longing he felt, he said, 'as if someone had hold of my heart and mind, and was wringing them like a wet towel. Afflicted with the thought that I might never have Mother's vision, I thought there was, then, no use in living this life. My eyes fell on the sword on the wall of the Mother's temple. I made up my mind to end my life that very moment. Like one mad I ran and caught

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<sup>8</sup> LP 135.

hold of it, when suddenly I had the wonderful vision of the Mother and fell down unconscious. I did not know what happened then in the external world—how that day and the next slipped away. But in my heart of hearts there was flowing a current of intense bliss, never experienced before, and I had the immediate knowledge of the light that was Mother.’<sup>9</sup> Whether he saw one of the anthropomorphic forms of the Mother on this occasion is not certain. Swami Saradananda suspects that he did, because the plaintive cry ‘Mother’ was coming from his lips as he regained consciousness. However in the foregoing quotation there is no mention of it, nor in the following detailed account of this vision which the Master has left us : ‘It was as if houses, doors, temples, and everything else vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever. However far and in whatever direction I looked I saw a continuous succession of effulgent waves madly rushing at me from all sides, with great speed. I was caught in the rush, and panting for breath I collapsed, unconscious.’

This vision, dramatic as it was, did not satiate him ; on the contrary it sharpened his longing for the constant vision of the Mother’s spiritual form. He became unfit for any work for some days. Sometimes he would fall to the ground in agony, beseeching the Mother with pitiful cries to grant him Her grace. When the curious or the sympathetic would gather round, ‘they appeared unreal,’ he said, ‘like shadows or pictures painted on canvas, hence the mind felt not the slightest touch of shame or hesitation. But as soon as I lost consciousness on account of unbearable anguish, I saw that form of the Mother consisting of Consciousness with hands that give boons and freedom

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<sup>9</sup>LP 143.

from fear — the form that smiled, spoke, and consoled and taught me in endless ways.’<sup>10</sup> In his later life, when devotees and disciples came to him, he liked to tell them the story of another aspirant whose teacher forced him under water until he was dying for a breath, to illustrate this kind of longing for the vision of God. An example of the way the Mother responded by giving him instruction is to be seen on the occasion when he said to Her, ‘O Mother, I am a fool. Please teach me what is contained in the Vedas, the Purāṇas, the Tantras, and the other scriptures.’ The Mother said to him, ‘The essence of the Vedānta is that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory.’<sup>11</sup>

His heart was stirred to a profound and now-famous prayer. ‘After my vision of the Divine Mother,’ he relates, ‘I prayed to Her, taking a flower in my hands: “Mother, here is Thy knowledge and here is Thine ignorance. Take them both, and give me only pure love. Here is Thy holiness and here is Thine unholiness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy good and here is Thine evil. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy righteousness and here is Thine unrighteousness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love.” I mentioned all these, but I could not say: “Mother, here is Thy truth and here is Thy falsehood. Take them both.” I gave up everything at Her feet but could not bring myself to give up truth.’

What he would dictate to his mind the mind would obey from its very depths. At this period when he sat for meditation, having told the mind with firmness to meditate,

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<sup>10</sup> LP 144.

<sup>11</sup> G 544.

he would hear a clicking sound in the joints of his body, starting in the legs and going up to the head. It was as if an unseen power were turning the keys of locks, to fix him in his posture. Only when he felt that unlocking again in the reverse order, could he move from his position and leave his seat.<sup>12</sup> Now the experiences described in the texts on yoga began to show themselves. Sometimes he saw the universe filled with sparks of fire, like fire-flies. Sometimes all the quarters glittered with light as if the world were a lake of mercury, or a lake of liquid silver. Again he would see the world lit up as if with the light of Roman candles. 'It was revealed to me further,' he said, 'that God Himself has become the universe and all its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles.'<sup>13</sup> It is like the process of evolution and involution. I saw these things sometimes with my eyes shut and sometimes open. I did not understand what I saw nor did I know whether it was good or bad to have such visions. I therefore prayed to Mother with a troubled heart, "I don't understand, Mother, what is happening to me. Mother, if You do not teach me, who else will? I have no other refuge." Oh, what a state God kept me in at that time! One experience would hardly be over before another overcame me. It was like the movement of the husking machine: no sooner is one end down than the other goes up. I would see God in meditation, in the state of *samādhi*, and I would see the same God when my mind came back to the outer world. When looking at this side of the mirror I would see Him alone, and when looking on the reverse side I saw the same God.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> LP 145.

<sup>13</sup> Elements of the cosmology of the Sāṃkhya philosophy.

<sup>14</sup> LP 145; G 544.

When the Master was again able to perform the rituals of worship these began to take a most unorthodox form. Sometimes when he intended to offer the Mother a flower, he found his hand coming toward his own head and placing the flower there. One day the temple employees were in a ferment. The Junior Bhattachārya had been seen to feed a cat with the food offering for the Divine Mother! Mathur Babu, the temple proprietor, must be notified at once. Meanwhile in the Kālī Temple the Master was seeing everything full of Consciousness, as the embodiment of Spirit. The image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the worship utensils were Consciousness, the door-sill, the marble floor, he himself — all Consciousness. 'I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss — the Bliss of Satchidānanda. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kālī Temple; but in him also I saw the power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother, saying, "Wilt Thou take it, Mother?" I clearly perceived that the Divine Mother Herself had become everything — even the cat.'<sup>15</sup>

It was an experience of great significance in the spiritual life of Sri Ramakrishna, for so far as we know it is the first occasion on which he was totally possessed by the 'God-without' as well as the 'God-within'. As we have seen, the Master had often been wrapt in ecstatic contemplation, absorbed in that aspect of the Divine Mother which is seen within, in vision, removed from all waking consciousness. But from this point begins that other thread, which, as will be seen, weaves across the first to make up the fabric of his spiritual life. That is the God

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<sup>15</sup> G 345, 521; LP 148.



immanent in the universe, visible all around to the sight which is purified. Here was the Divine Mother instinct in every visible form, in man, beast, temple, image. This all-encompassing revelation, it may be said, establishes him firmly as the modern receptacle and reflector of India's *sanātana dharma*, the eternal monistic gospel of the Upanishads that 'all this is verily Brahman.'

Now his relationship with the Mother began to deepen. The changes which took place could be likened to those we see when a great artist's sketched cartoon is converted to the colourful, delineated painting. Where previously in vision he would see a hand or a foot or the face of the Divine Mother, now he saw Her full figure, smiling, talking. Where he used to see a beam of light from Her eyes, touching upon the food offering, now he saw Her actually eat the food. Where he had been seeing the living Presence *in* the image, now he saw no image : he saw the Divine Mother Herself, all Consciousness. 'I put the palm of my hand near Her nostrils and felt that Mother was actually breathing. I observed very closely but could never see the shadow of the Mother's divine person on the temple wall in the light of the lamp at night. I heard from my room that Mother, merry like a little girl, was going upstairs, Her anklets making jingling sounds. I came up to test it and found that She, with hair dishevelled, was actually standing on the verandah of the upper floor of the temple, looking now at Calcutta, now at the Gangā.'<sup>16</sup> The Master tells us that he would go into *samādhi* uttering the word 'Mā', touching heaven and hell with his jaws, as it were ; that this utterance drew the Mother of the Universe to him like fishermen drawing in the catch with their nets.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> LP 146.

<sup>17</sup> G 382, 564.

Even the most exalted soul taking human birth must undergo the limitations of a human body. Sri Ramakrishna was no exception to this, although the capacity of his pure physique to withstand the tempests of divine emotion was far greater than that of ordinary aspirants. His physical condition began to deteriorate from this time, and various disturbing symptoms to manifest themselves. One of these was a burning sensation all over the body, which he had from the beginning of his *sādhana*, and which recurred several times in his life. This first torment lasted for six months, the sensation becoming unbearable until it culminated in another vision. This time it was the realization of the truth embodied in another of the functions of the daily worship. The worshipper visualizes the *pāpa-puruṣa*, the 'embodiment of sin', as a kind of demon with dark skin and red eyes, existing in his own heart. He proceeds to rout him from his heart as an act of self-purification, and to strike him dead. Hundreds of thousands of worshippers have gone through this step of the ritual since its origin, long centuries ago. But Sri Ramakrishna, sitting in the Panchavati, the grove of trees of the temple garden, during worship actually saw the *pāpa-puruṣa* come reeling drunkenly out of his body and walk before him. At once another figure dressed in *gerruā* robe (perhaps the young sannyāsin of many later visions), of tranquil face and holding a trident, came out and put an end to that hideous figure. We do not know if this scene took place before the Master's open eyes, or in vision with eyes closed, either being quite possible in his case; but the burning pain was lessened for some time thereafter.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> LP 152.

It was now 1858. One morning the young priest, by now considered inspired, crazy, or eccentric, according to one's point of view, went about the worship of Kālī in his usual — or rather, unusual — way. But today everything was extraordinary. Let us hear his own words : 'Formal worship drops away after the vision of God. It was thus that my worship in the temple came to an end. I used to worship the Deity in the Kālī Temple. It was suddenly revealed to me that everything is Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, the altar, the door frame — all Pure Spirit. Men, animals, and other living beings — all Pure Spirit. Then like a mad man I began to shower flowers in all directions. Whatever I saw I worshipped.' Another day : 'While worshipping Śiva (in one of the Śiva temples of the garden) I was about to offer a bel-leaf on the head of the image, when it was revealed to me that this Virāt, this Universe itself is Śiva. After that my worship of Śiva through the image came to an end. Another day I had been plucking flowers, when it was revealed to me that the flowering plants were so many bouquets.'<sup>19</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna now informed Mathur Babu that the Mother had said She would accept Hriday's worship in the same manner as She had accepted his own.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> G 396.

<sup>20</sup> LP 154.

## CHAPTER II

### FROM DAKSHINESWAR TO KĀMĀRPUKUR AND BACK

THE year 1858 was full of events, both outward and inward, in the Master's life. We see now a veritable parade of divine figures, entering the mental life of Sri Ramakrishna and merging with his spirit. Sītā, that most glorious personage of Indian religious history, was the next to appear. Ramakrishna had been practising the *dāśya-bhāva* (servant attitude) out of devotion to Raghuvīr or Rāma, his family deity. In taking up this practice one emulates the dedication to Rāma of Hanumān, his faithful messenger. In the case of the Master, so complete had become his identification with Hanumān that he had acquired even a physical resemblance to that great devotee. One day in the Panchavati he was just sitting with open eyes, not meditating, when a remarkable shining figure of a woman appeared before him, lighting everything around him. The external world did not disappear on this occasion, but remained as background to this scene. The Master made much of this, describing this as the first vision of its kind, coming without previous suggestion. Another interesting feature is that he recognized the form as that of a human being; Sītā did not appear as a Goddess, with three eyes and other accepted signs of divine form.<sup>1</sup> And yet, he remarked, the qualities of compassion, sorrow, endurance, solemnity, etc. were manifest in her face to a degree seldom seen even in divine

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<sup>1</sup> Such as, not casting a shadow, feet elevated from the ground, etc.

figures. Looking graciously at the Master, she was approaching him from the north with a slow, grave gait. Not yet knowing who she was, he watched wonderingly. 'A black-faced monkey came suddenly,' he relates, 'nobody knew whence, and sat at her feet, and someone within my mind exclaimed, 'Sita, Sita who was all sorrow, all her life, Sita the daughter of King Janaka, Sita to whom Rama was her very life!' Saying 'Mother' repeatedly I was about to fling myself at her feet when she quickly came and entered this (his body). Overwhelmed with joy and wonder, I lost all consciousness and fell down. I have been suffering like her all my life perhaps because I saw first of all Sita, who was miserable from her birth.' But on disappearing in the Master's person Sītā left a trace behind : it is said that she bequeathed to him her smile — a smile, which, as we know from his photograph, belies the slightest awareness of misery.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Rāmakrishna on another occasion mentioned the vision of Sītā when he said, 'I saw Sita in a vision. I found that her entire mind was concentrated on Rama. She was totally indifferent to everything — her hands, her feet, her clothes, her jewels. It seemed that Rama had filled every bit of her life and she could not remain alive without Rama.'<sup>3</sup> We cannot say if this refers to the above vision, but probably it does not; the previous phrase, 'looking graciously', implies a different kind of appearance. With regard to the former experience and others like it, it is perhaps worth noting that the Master sometimes said to his disciples that within 'this' (his body) were two persons : one, the devotee, and the other his Lord. Could we say, about the vision of Sītā, that when the devotee in Sri Rama-

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<sup>2</sup> LP 161.

<sup>3</sup> G 346.

krishna was about to prostrate himself before this form which he recognized as the Mother, that very figure seems to have recognized, so to say, in Sri Ramakrishna the Lord, Source, and Goal of her own existence, and lost herself therein ?

About this time he was sitting one day in the Kālī Temple when he heard the Divine Mother ask him, 'Do you want to be *akshara*?' Not knowing the meaning of this word, he asked his cousin Haladhari, also a priest, and a man versed in the scriptures, what the Divine Mother was referring to. '*Kshara*', he replied, 'means *jīva*, living being; *akshara* means *Paramātmā*, the Supreme Soul.'<sup>4</sup> A frequent translation of these words is 'perishable' and 'imperishable'. Just what the Mother meant in asking him this question is not very clear.

Some of the incidents in which Haladhari is known to have played a part verge on the tragic. Others are rather comical. He held a grudge against the Goddess Kālī, and once told the Master that She was a 'Tāmasic deity', unworthy of his worship. Pained in the extreme, Ramakrishna could make no answer, but went to the Mother's temple and asked Her with tears in his eyes, 'Mother, Haladhari, a scholar, says you are made of *tamoguna*; are you, in truth?' She must have answered the question to his full satisfaction, for he ran from the temple in great joy, and jumping on the back of his cousin, berated him: 'You say Mother is Tāmasic. Is that so! Mother is all—She has become the three *gunas* and again She is pure *sattvaguna*.'<sup>5</sup> The priest had a sharp tongue and a pseudo-sophistication in religious matters. Once he 'proved' to Sri Ramakrishna that visions and the like, seen in ecstasy,

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<sup>4</sup> G 933.

<sup>5</sup> LP 166.

were really untrue. The Master, like a child, was non-plussed by this idea. He later said: 'I thought all the divine forms I saw and words I heard in *bhāvasamādhi* were a delusion. Mother had deceived me. Extremely anxious, I cried with the feeling of wounded love and said to Mother, "Should you deceive me so, just because I am unlettered and ignorant?" That cry and agony would not stop.' He sat in the large house called the Kuthi, residence of the temple garden proprietors, which is located outside the courtyard, and he shed continuous tears. 'What I saw some time afterwards was a fog-like mist rising suddenly from the floor and filling some of the space in front of me. Then I saw in that mist a beautiful living face of golden complexion, with beard reaching to the breast. The figure looked steadfastly at me and said with a profound voice, "My child, remain in *bhāvamukha*."'<sup>6</sup> He repeated those words thrice and dissolved in the mist, and the mist too vanished into the void.'<sup>7</sup> The figure of this vision was never identified, but perhaps it does not need to be. Who knows why God should appear in particular forms and not others? Perhaps if the familiar form of the Mother had come at this point, he would have felt doubt about it also.

This divine command was heard soon again. Sri Ramakrishna had gone into the Kālī Temple to perform worship, whether as a substitute for the priest or through an inspiration of his own, is not known. While seated there he was again depressed by the pontifical pronounce-

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<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of this term see LP, Part III, Chap. 1. Bhavamukha is the term Śwami Saradananda uses; in the Gospel the Master uses the shorter word, bhava. Here we may simply say that whatever the truth of Haladhari's words from the standpoint of the Absolute, God evidently wished the Master to continue to experience the reality of the *saguna* and *sākāra* Brahman.

<sup>7</sup> LP 167.

ments of his cousin. 'God is beyond both Being and Non-Being,' Haladhari had said, 'How could the divine form be real?' Now Sri Ramakrishna asked the Mother again, 'Is it then an illusion, Mother?' The Mother Herself appeared to him this time near the worship-jar in the form of a woman named Rati Mā, and said, 'Do thou remain in *bhāva*.' The Gospel makes mention of a Rati Mā who was the favourite confidante of a wealthy Calcutta lady, and a follower of the teacher, Vaishnavacharan. She was much devoted to the Master also and served him with a devotion which he called unmatched. Unfortunately she was a fanatical Vaishnavite, and after seeing Sri Ramakrishna eating the goddess Kālī's *prasād*, she left him outright. This person may be the Rati Mā of the vision, but she would seem to belong to a later period of his life. In any case, it is one of several recorded instances where God appeared to Ramakrishna in the form of some human being well-known to him.<sup>8</sup>

'I repeated Mother's command,' said the Master, 'to Haladhari. Now and then I forget Her command and suffer. Once I broke my teeth because I didn't remain in *bhāva*. So I shall remain in *bhāva* unless I receive a revelation from heaven or have a direct experience to the contrary. I shall follow the path of love.'<sup>9</sup> In 1884 the Master had an accidental fall, spraining his arm, and about similar explanations of this we shall have something to say later. This same divine command he heard for a third and last time, as we shall discover.

We turn now to a figure which played an important part in the visions of Sri Ramakrishna, partly because it appeared so often. A young man, a *sannyāsin* who

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<sup>8</sup> G 348 ; 490.

<sup>9</sup> LP 167 ; G 175.



resembled Ramakrishna, would come out from within him, in season and out of season, as the Master put it, to instruct him on all matters. Sometimes with open eyes, sometimes with eyes closed in vision he would see this figure, whose significance he explained to his disciples in this way : 'When he emerged, sometimes, I had a little consciousness and, at other times, lost it altogether and lay inert, seeing and hearing only his actions and words ; then when he re-entered this gross body, I regained full consciousness. The Brāhmanī, Totāpuri, and others came and taught me what I had already known (from him). From this it seems that they came as Gurus in my life in order that the authority of the scriptures, such as the Vedas, might be maintained by my honouring their injunctions. No other reason can be found for accepting the "naked one" and others as Gurus.' <sup>10</sup> This is, of course, a powerful statement with much bearing on Sri Ramakrishna's position in religious history, and we can be very thankful that we have it in his own words.

One of the illustrations he used so tellingly when his disciples came was that of the small balance scale, which has a large needle above a smaller one — the two come together when a balance is struck. The mind — the lower needle — he said, must not move away from God — the higher needle. This *sannyāsin* would sometimes appear sitting near him with a trident in hand, warning the Master that if the lower needle moved away from the upper, that weapon would pierce his breast.<sup>11</sup>

There is in the Gospel a very touching, very moving account of how God revealed Himself to Sri Ramakrishna

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<sup>10</sup> LP 171.

<sup>11</sup> G 378, 743.

on another occasion. It is not mentioned here that this was the *sannyāsin*-figure ;<sup>12</sup> but because he does say that he was taught at this time the content of the scriptures, it is either one of the occasions covered above, or one closely related to it. Here the oral element of the experience is stressed : 'God talked to me. It was not merely His vision. Yes, He talked to me. Under the banyan-tree I saw Him coming from the Ganges. Then we laughed so much ! By way of playing with me He cracked my fingers. Then He talked. Yes, He talked to me. For three days I wept continuously. And He revealed to me what is in the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and other scriptures.'<sup>13</sup>

About this time he had a vision of a small light inside a room. The light began to grow and grow until at last it enveloped the whole universe. Sri Ramakrishna understood this to symbolize the '*māyā* of Mahāmāyā'.<sup>14</sup>

Now twenty-two years old, the young Gadadhar had been away from his mother and his native village for six years continuously. It was late in the year when he decided, or acquiesced in the decision, that he should return to Kāmārpukur for a visit. It was a jolly occasion. To his family he appeared the same old Gadai. But the call and touch of another world was never far away. He went one morning in a palanquin to Hriday's house in Sihore, a village about six miles west of Kāmārpukur. Passing happily along the path through fields of rice, he suddenly saw with open eyes two beautiful young boys, emerging from his body. They went from the palanquin into the

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<sup>12</sup> There is no implication of gender in the original Bengali account of this vision ; English translation requires the use of a pronoun.

<sup>13</sup> G 830.

<sup>14</sup> G 831.

fields. Sometimes running playfully here and there, they went far away in search of wild flowers; again with slow step they would follow beside the palanquin, talking and joking happily. This continued for a long time, until at last the boys re-entered Sri Ramakrishna's body. Later, when the spiritually learned teacher of the Master, the Bhairavī Brāhmanī, had come to Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna told her of this vision. Her comment was prompt and without surprise: 'My child, what you have seen is all true; Chaitanya is manifest this time in Nityānanda's body — Sri Nityānanda and Sri Chaitanya, both have come together this time and are residing in you.' Sri Chaitanya (also called Gaurāṅga, or Gorā), a 15th century saint of Bengal, is widely regarded as an Incarnation of God; Nityānanda was his intimate companion. The Brāhmanī supported her thesis with scriptural verses: 'Gorā acts his play even today. It is the rarest of lucky persons who are privileged to witness it.' <sup>15</sup>

But the Master himself seemed not to be so sure of the meaning of this vision. Swami Saradananda felt that it marked the onset of Sri Ramakrishna's later conviction that 'He who was Rama and He who was Krishna dwells now in this body.' Perhaps the Master had other revelations, however, which confirmed the Brāhmanī's opinion, for according to Swami Vivekananda, he had told the latter many times, 'In me alone are embodied Advaita (another intimate of Gaurāṅga), Chaitanya, and Nityānanda. I am all these three.' <sup>16</sup>

Miracles relating to physical objects are rare indeed in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Saradananda used to

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<sup>15</sup> LP 171.

<sup>16</sup> G 983.

say that the Master had told him that he saw a stone jump from one place to another. Something of the kind happened on this visit to Kāmārpukur, when alone at night Ramakrishna would go to the village burning-ghāts, Bhutirkhal and Budhuimoral. Like the generations of pious Hindus before him, he observed the ritual of daily offering of food to various beings, such as the demigods and the jackals of the cremation grounds, especially when in his native village. But the choice of the awesome place and time seems to have been his own. We are told that the pot which he was carrying, filled with food offerings, would rise into the air and vanish into the void ; apparently with open eyes he would sometimes see the demi-gods. When the hour became late and his brother Rāmeśwar anxious, the boy would cleverly keep him at a distance : 'Yes, brother, I am coming. Don't come any closer, lest the demigods become angry.' <sup>17</sup>

It was probably during this visit that Sri Ramakrishna was obliged to go to Vishnupur in connection with the lawsuit of a relative. Vishnupur was then a large and prosperous town, about 20 miles west of Kāmārpukur, and a kind of county seat for the Bankura district. It was here that he had one of his most significant and provocative visions. To appreciate it properly we need to look into its setting in detail.

Vishnupur took pride in its many temples and the presence of several very large ponds, or tanks, as they are called. The Rajas of the place had been great patrons of learning and culture, and formerly, very religious too. They had been Vaishnavas from many generations back. Nevertheless everyone seemed to recognize that the living presence

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<sup>17</sup> LP 178.

of the Divine Mother was much manifest in a certain very ancient image, called Mrinmayī, 'made of earth', who was therefore considered an 'awakened' deity. Sri Ramakrishna, when he went to Vishnupur, visited all the other temples first, as he often did, before he sought the Devi. But near the lake on his way to the Mother's shrine he fell into *bhāvasamādhi* and had a vision of the upper portion of a form which he understood to be Mrinmayī. The Master, according to the Gospel account, saw the divine form rising from the water. When he arrived at the temple he found the appearance of the image quite different from that in his vision.

Upon inquiry the story came out that a mad woman of the princely families had broken the original image, presumably in rage at the fallen fortunes of the family. A potter with a self-supposed flair for originality had made a new image which turned out to be rather different from the old. A Brahmin of the place had carefully kept in his own house the broken head of the old image. Later he had had a new figure made to bear the head and installed it in a lovely setting near the large tank named Lālbandh, where he performed the Mother's daily worship.<sup>18</sup> The Master noticed in the water of the tank the fragrance of the ointments women use on their hair. 'How do you explain that?' said he, to his devotees later. 'I didn't know at that time that the women devotees offer ointments to the Goddess Mrinmayī, while visiting Her temple.'<sup>19</sup> Sceptics might easily say that the offerings found their way into the water of the lake by normal means; but we think the Master was implying here that the living Deity, accepting those

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<sup>18</sup> LP 596.

<sup>19</sup> G 275.

ointments, found them useful in Her own ablutions. This supposition is given depth by another legend of Mrinmayī, which can be found in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 797.

Why did Sri Ramakrishna expect the physical image to look just like the form in his vision, as it appears he did? We raise the question because it is not that every mystic has had this expectation. Some have been content to recognize in a superconscious experience, — granted to them, as they would say, by the grace of God — simply a *content* unmistakably divine; they would think it only reasonable and in the nature of things if physical details of the vision differed from those of the present environment, or of history, or scriptural description. This is often the case with our dreams. We manage to identify dream-figures very positively sometimes, even when their forms are much distorted. But with Sri Ramakrishna the case was different. Of course one may say that in this instance, since he was just then on his way to see the goddess Mrinmayi, he had some right to expect that a vision occurring at that moment would be a preview of the statue's form. We think it is more than this. We think that the Master's passion for truth — every kind of truth — led him habitually to expect this kind of correspondence. How often from his lips we hear, 'let there be no robbery in the house of the mind,' and 'whatever comes up in the pure mind is the voice of God'! If our supposition is correct it would imply that whenever in his life he had a prevision of the Deity in the form of some particular image, he should always have seen it in exactly that form. It would be interesting to test this. We do know with respect to his vision of Christ that once when a devotee was reading aloud an account (long regarded as apocryphal) of the

physical appearance of Jesus, in which his nose is described as faultless, Sri Ramakrishna remarked, 'But I saw him with a slightly flat nose !' Unfortunately in the Mrinmayī episode we are not told whether he later saw the older image's head and found it corresponding with the one in his vision.

## CHAPTER III

### SADHANA UNDER THE BRAHMANI

RETURNING to the temple garden at Dakshineswar in 1861, Sri Ramakrishna attempted once more to take on the priestly duties of Kālī's worship. In no time the madness for the Mother seized him again, and now shook him until the very roots of his life were imperilled. One day, seated for that worship before Bhavatāriṇī, as the Mother is called in that temple, he had a vision of Her as existing within himself; he performed the worship to his own bodily form instead of to the image. The petty officers of the temple were scandalized.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, when he would see the divinity peeping through certain persons of his acquaintance, he would invite one of them to the temple precincts and there perform worship before him or her, regarding that form as a particular aspect of the deity. 'Oh what an ecstatic state this was!' says the Master. 'I worshipped the "Beautiful" in a girl fourteen years old. I saw that she was the personification of the Divine Mother.'<sup>2</sup> At least one person is known to have gone right into samādhi as a result of this sort of action on the part of the Master.

As before, Mother played Her game of hide and seek with him. Sometimes he could not even visualize Her. 'One day I was sitting and meditating on Her in the Kālī Temple. I could by no means bring the Mother's form to my mind. Do you know what I saw then? She appeared as the prostitute Ramanī, who used to bathe at the

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<sup>1</sup> LP 435.

<sup>2</sup> G 231.



temple ghat. She peeped at me, hiding as it were, behind the worship jar. I saw it and laughing said, "Thou hast the desire, O Mother, of becoming Ramanī today. Very good. Accept the worship today in this form." As She did so She seemed to be saying: 'a prostitute is also Myself; there is nothing except Myself.'<sup>3</sup> One day a woman dressed in blue (considered seductive, in India) was standing near the vakul-tree of the temple garden. But the sight of her instantly kindled in Sri Ramakrishna the vision of Sītā. The woman, the prostitute, was all forgotten: he saw that it was Sītā herself on her way to meet Rāma after her rescue from Rāvaṇa in Ceylon. For a long time, he tells us, he remained in samādhi as a result of this vision, unconscious of the outer world.<sup>4</sup> This experience of the Master's seems to have a dimension not easily caught in the surface view. It was no uncommon event for Ramakrishna to see divinity in fallen human beings; here, by that amazing alchemy which seems to have been his peculiar possession, the woman's very emotion, motivated lust, is transformed almost beyond recognition into the love-expectation of Sītā for Rāma — an attitude regarded always as the purest, most selfless ever seen in a faithful wife, through a relationship celebrated for its freedom from sensuality.

Perhaps it was at this time, or it may have been later, that Sri Ramakrishna was taken to the Maidān (park) in Calcutta, for 'fresh air' or to see balloon ascension — he gives both reasons. There was a great crowd. 'Suddenly,' he tells us, 'I saw an English boy leaning against a tree. As he stood there his body was bent in three places. The vision of Krishna came before me in a flash. I went

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<sup>3</sup> LP 590.

<sup>4</sup> G 231.

into samādhi.’<sup>5</sup> We are not told, but probably he never saw the rise of the balloon. His own mind had risen, and who could care for such things in the midst of a vision of Sri Krishna? The three places are, of course, the neck, waist and knees, which are bent in the famous *tribhaṅga* posture, in which the Lord stands playing on His flute.

The Divine Mother had seized Her Gadādhara by the hair, as it were, and was carrying him off to the high mountain peak of spiritual revelation. Day and night he was occupied with some vision or other. We can therefore well understand that those of which he has spoken to someone are merely samples. He told his disciples that an ordinary mortal, going through one-fourth of the changes which overcame his body and mind at this time would not survive. He himself was saved, he said, by this continual absorption in visions. For six years the eyes would not close for sleep, nor even for winking. When he would notice the body’s outlandish condition he would sometimes weep with worry; but always the Mother consoled him and returned his mind to ecstasy.

Sometimes the visions were of the young sannyāsin resembling himself. When he wished to see some deity of a distant place, or hear the singing of God’s glories here or there, the sannyāsin would come out of the Master’s body in a shining form and travel to those places along a luminous path. By that way he would come again and re-enter the body.<sup>6</sup> All sense of time left the Master, and he scarcely knew day from night. He lost his sacred thread, and much of the time could not even keep a cloth about his loins. ‘At one time,’ he said, ‘I would roam in the

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<sup>5</sup> G 231 ; 546.

<sup>6</sup> LP 171.

temple premises with a bamboo pole on my shoulder ; again I would sit upon a dog, feed it with good thing, and take the remainder myself. I could not think about caste. People thought me mad... Sitting perfectly still in the Panchavati I would lose all consciousness of the outside world. For want of proper care my hair was matted, and birds would perch thereon to peck the grains of rice left there after worship. Snakes sometimes crawled over me and neither I nor the snake would be aware of the other.' Telling of his experiences one day to the disciple M. and others in the house of Adhar Sen, Sri Rāmakrishna said, 'Let me tell you a very secret experience : Once I had entered the wood near the pine-grove, and was sitting there, when I had the vision of something like the hidden door of a chamber. I tried to bore a hole in the door with a nail-knife, but did not succeed. As I bored, the earth fell back in the hole and filled it. Then suddenly I made a very big hole.'<sup>7</sup> We do not know what was the effect of this vision upon the Master, nor just which break-through in the veil of maya it symbolized. But we do know that when he told of this vision he fell silent. Then to his listeners he made that remark which has now become familiar to readers of his conversations : 'These are very profound words. I feel as if someone were pressing my mouth...' Later he said, 'You will feel restless for God when your heart becomes pure and your mind free from attachment to the things of the world. Then alone will your prayer reach God. A telegraph wire cannot carry messages if it has a break or some other defect. I used to cry for God all alone, with a longing heart. I used to weep, "O God, where art Thou ?" Weeping thus, I would

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<sup>7</sup> G 260.

lose all consciousness of the world. My mind would merge in the *Mahāvāyu*.’<sup>8</sup>

Near the end of this particular period Sri Ramakrishna experienced a great ecstasy in the Śiva temple. Overcome by emotion in reciting a verse of the *Śiva-mahimna-stotra* (Hymn to the Greatness of Śiva) with joy he cried out loudly, drawing a crowd of temple employees, and the floor was wet with the flow of his tears. Possibly he had been moving down the line of the twelve small Śiva temples for offering worship in each. Probably it is not now known in which of the shrines this dramatic event occurred. How one could wish to point to the spot! However, we do know the celebrated verse which ignited the tinder of his fervour, and set the mind aflame with exaltation. ‘O Lord, if the Blue Mountain were the ink, the ocean the inkstand, the largest branch of the Heavenly Tree the pen, the whole earth the writing-leaf, and if by taking these the Goddess of Learning were to write for eternity, still the end of Thy glories could not be told.’ His mind must have been swept to a great height indeed, but the Master himself has revealed to our knowledge nothing of that moment’s inner content. The events surrounding the incident may be found in *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*.<sup>9</sup> When consciousness was regained he asked his faithful protector, Mathur Babu, with characteristic simplicity, ‘Did I do anything wrong?’

Except for a nominal formal initiation, Sri Ramakrishna had been travelling the thorny trail of spiritual practice and experience with the help of no external teacher. Now there entered into the life of the saint of Dakshineswar his first *guru*, properly speaking. She was a Brāhmin

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<sup>8</sup> G 375.

<sup>9</sup> p. 435.

woman of remarkable education in the scriptures, and experienced in their truths, Yogeswarī by name, and referred to by him as the Bhairavi Brāhmaṇī. Older than Ramakrishna, and perceiving his childlike attitude toward all women, she quickly adopted the double role of mother and mentor to the young *sādhaka*, he in turn eagerly putting himself under her tutelage.

The incident which we have to recount concerning the beginning of their relationship is touching, and is productive of faith in those who seek some correspondence between inner vision and outer event. The Bhairavi Brāhmaṇī had taken a place under the shelter of the Panchavati trees to cook food for her customary morning offering to the Lord. It was her habit to carry round her neck a stone image of Raghuvir (Rāma), which she placed before her as the symbol of God at the time of worship. On this first day at Dakshineswar she was offering the cooked food to her Chosen Ideal when she sank into deep meditation, had a vision, and entered into samādhi. At this same moment Sri Ramakrishna was feeling an irresistible desire to come to the Panchavati. He did so in a state of *bhāvasamādhi*, and suddenly sitting down began to eat of the Brāhmaṇī's food offering. Shortly he lost his external consciousness. When the Brāhmaṇī regained hers, she opened her eyes to some correspondence with her inner vision. Perhaps she saw it was Rāma Himself who sat before the offering. Coming to the sense-plane Sri Ramakrishna saw what he had done and apologized. 'Who knows, Mother, why I lose control of my actions and do things like this?' 'You have done well, my child,' the Brāhmaṇī replied, 'it is not you who have done this but the One who is within you. I saw in my meditation Who had done it, and I feel I need not perform ceremonial

worship any more, for the fruit of my worship is realized.' Moreover, she took as *prasāda* the remains of the food offering. This is one of the many instances in which the mind of the Master, hovering somewhere between the consciousness of the world and total immersion in God, directed him to certain actions of great spiritual significance, but which his conscious personality would find indecorous.<sup>10</sup>

Tāntric sādhana began, under the Bhairavi Brāhmaṇī's guidance. It was about the year 1862. 'In the daytime,' said the Master, 'the Brāhmaṇī went to various places far away from the temple garden and collected various rare articles prescribed by the Tantras. Placing them under the vilva-tree or under the Panchavati at night, she called me, taught me the application of those things, and helped me to perform the Divine Mother's *japa* and meditation. I acted accordingly. But I had to perform almost no *japa*; hardly did I turn the rosary once when I merged completely in samādhi and realized the results proper to those rites. There was no limit to my visions and experiences, all very extraordinary.' One night she brought a beautiful young woman, and asked him to perform *japa* sitting on her lap. He was filled with dread. Weeping to the Mother he prayed, 'O Mother of the universe, what is this command Thou givest to one who has taken absolute refuge in Thee? Has this weak child of Thine the power to be so impudently daring?' Some unknown power possessed him, and filled him with strength. 'Uttering the *mantras*,' he continues, 'I had no sooner sat on the woman's lap than I merged completely in samādhi. When I regained consciousness the Brāhmaṇī congratulated me,

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<sup>10</sup> LP 190.

saying that others experience great difficulty and finish the rite with nominal *japa* for a trifling time only. Reassured, I saluted the Divine Mother again and again with a grateful heart.' <sup>11</sup>

'I do not now remember,' Sri Ramakrishna told his disciples, in a very intimate memoir, 'all the Tantric rites the Brāhmaṇī made me perform. But I remember the day when I was able by Mother's grace to view the supreme pleasure of a pair of lovers with perfect equanimity, seeing nothing in it but the blissful sport of the divine. The mind instead of descending even to the neighbourhood of ordinary human feelings, soared higher and higher, merging at last in a deep samādhi. The Brāhmaṇī told me, when I came down, that I had reached the goal of a very difficult Tāntric Sādhana and become established in the "divine mood".' <sup>12</sup>

We must turn to the language of the *Kuṇḍalinī Śakti*, the spiritual 'current' felt by the aspirant awakening to yoga, to describe what the Master was then experiencing. The sensations which he felt were confirmed for him in the words of a *sādhū* from Hrishikesh. The power known as Kuṇḍalinī, rising from its storehouse in the *Mūlādhāra*, lowest centre of the spinal column, was sometimes like the creeping of an ant. Again, it might feel like a fish, swimming joyfully in the ocean of divine ecstasy. When he lay on his side the current would sometimes push him like a monkey, and with one leap reach the *Sahasrāra*, highest centre in the brain. Or more gently, he felt it as the hopping of a bird from one branch to another. The place where it rests, he said, feels like fire. Or it went up like a snake, with a zigzag motion, ending in samādhi.

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<sup>11</sup> LP 198.

<sup>12</sup> LP 199.

Sri Ramakrishna used to describe these as the five kinds of samādhi. One day, near the end of his life, the Master said to a devotee, 'Just before my attaining this state of mind, it had been revealed to me how the Kuṇḍalinī is aroused, how the lotuses of the different centres blossom forth, and how all this culminates in samādhi. This is a very secret experience. I saw a boy twenty-two or twenty-three years old, exactly resembling me<sup>13</sup>, enter the *suṣumna* nerve and commune with the lotuses, touching them with his tongue. He began with the centre at the anus and passed through the centres at the sexual organ, navel, and so on. The different lotuses of those centres — four-petalled, six-petalled, ten-petalled and so forth — had been drooping. At his touch they stood erect. When he reached the heart — I distinctly remember it — and communed with the lotus there, touching it with his tongue, the twelve-petalled lotus, which was hanging head down, stood erect and opened its petals. Then he came to the sixteen-petalled lotus in the throat and the two-petalled lotus in the forehead. And last of all, the thousand-petalled lotus in the head blossomed. Since then I have been in this state.'<sup>14</sup> This would appear to be the young sannyāsin-figure familiar to us as the *alter ego* of many of the Master's visions. Another time, he referred to this experience as the 'communion of Ātman'.<sup>15</sup> Swami Saradananda tells us that from this time Sri Ramakrishna himself became very like a boy, merry and playful, and so little body-consciousness did he have that the sacred thread, the cloth, or whatever he might put on, would scarcely stay in place.

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<sup>13</sup> If we take this to mean that Ramakrishna also was 22 or 23, we would have to place this experience four or five years earlier.

<sup>14</sup> G 237 ; 830 ; LP 205.

<sup>15</sup> G 744.



To conclude this chapter a few more visions of this period remain to be recorded. One of the many men of note who came to the temple garden in those days was a Tāntric scholar from Indes, named Pandit Gauri, a remarkable person whose interest in spirituality was more than panditry. Gauri's arrival was heralded by the loud shouting by him of some mystic syllables, calculated to steal away the forensic power of opponents. In a very funny scene, Sri Ramakrishna overcame that power with his own, suddenly being able to shout the same syllables louder than Gauri. The Divine Mother afterwards told him (we do not know when or in which form) that this power of Gauri's was thus exposed and lost to him for ever. 'Mother attracted that power here (to himself) for his good.'<sup>16</sup> The vision of the *Brahmayoni*, the womb of Brahman, came to the Master when he was engaged in *sādhana* under the vilva-tree of the temple garden. What he saw was a large shining triangle of living light. This was seen also by Swami Vivekananda, much later, who reported it to his guru. 'Very good,' said the latter, 'you have seen the *Brahmayoni*; I also saw it, but further, I observed its giving birth to innumerable worlds every moment.' His ears, too, were bringing him nothing but Brahman in those days. Om, the *praṇava* — the 'unstruck sound' — he heard going on continuously everywhere in the universe.<sup>17</sup>

In response to a desire his mind was cherishing, Sri Ramakrishna one day received from the Divine Mother a profound revelation of the nature of Her world-bewitching *māyā*. In a vision he saw a female figure of great beauty arise from the Ganga and approach the Panchavati with

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<sup>16</sup> LP 518.

<sup>17</sup> LP 204.

dignified gait. She was far advanced in pregnancy, and soon gave birth to a beautiful baby, which she nursed with great affection. But the next moment he saw that the woman had assumed a very cruel and terrible appearance, and was actually devouring the baby; she then re-entered the waters of the river.<sup>18</sup> The relation of Sri Ramakrishna's mystic experience to his message is of course an organic one, impossible to dissect. Many of his visions directly influenced the world-view he taught, and are reflected therein. This particular vision was especially significant in this respect. As says the Upanishad, 'That from which all beings are born, by which, being born, they live, and into which on departing they enter — try to know That; That is Brahman.' Ramakrishna used to compare it to the magic show of a magician, who by the spell of his conjuring deludes the audience. 'The magician alone is real; the show he produces is unreal.' Put in his own homely way, this is nonetheless a firm statement of the philosophical position of Advaita Vedanta. The vision is also quite in consonance with his prayer, mentioned earlier, in which he offered at the feet of the Mother, all good and evil and other pairs of opposites. Near the end, living in the Śyāmpukur house, the Master had, as we shall see, almost a repetition of this vision.

Customarily one thinks of a vision of a spiritual truth as being a thing of beauty, or at least a pleasant thing. Sri Ramakrishna's experience shows us that it is not always so. His nephew, Hriday, had an inkling of his uncle's special spiritual status. Not that he was continuously aware of this, but at least he knew that Ramakrishna was a recipient of the Divine Mother's special favour. 'Uncle,' he

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<sup>18</sup> LP 204.

one day suggested, 'why not ask the Mother for some occult powers?' Perhaps he hoped to enjoy vicariously what he knew could never be his own. As a matter of fact, Sri Ramakrishna had felt within himself some of those powers and was wondering about the propriety of them. So he, who often might accept the suggestions of others without analysis, mentioned it to the Mother, while practising *japa* in Her temple. At once he had the hideous vision of a middle-aged prostitute, seated with her back to him, from whose large hips issued a mound of filth. The Divine Mother indicated that occult powers were as abominable as that filth. The Master was shaken, and went to Hriday. Scolding him he said, 'Why did you teach me such a prayer? It is because of you that I had such an experience.'<sup>19</sup> We may remember that St. Teresa and various other mystics also have had visions of a very unpleasant nature. In their case such occurrences were referred to the workings of the Devil. To Ramakrishna, however, every truth discovered came from God, because Mother was the only source of truth. Again, meditating under the vilva-tree, he saw in front of him one day a shawl, a heap of rupees, a tray of *sandesh* (sweets), and two women with rings in their noses (worn as jewelry). "Mind," I asked the mind, "do you want any of these?" "No," replied the mind, "I don't want any of them. I don't want anything but the Lotus Feet of God." I saw the inside and outside of the women, as one sees from outside the articles in a glass room. I saw what was in them: entrails, blood, filth, worms, phlegm, and so on.'<sup>20</sup>

However, most of his visions, especially of the Mother,

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<sup>19</sup> G 745 ; LP 204.

<sup>20</sup> G 378 ; 745.

were of great beauty. Swami Saradananda tells us that Sri Ramakrishna saw at this time limitless forms of the Devi, from the two-armed to the ten-armed. The Master himself speaks of meditating under the tree when 'Sin' appeared before him and tempted him in various ways. It came in the form of an English soldier (pointed symbolism!) wanting to give wealth, honour, sex pleasure, occult powers, etc. 'I began to pray to the Divine Mother. Now I am telling you something very secret. The Mother appeared. I said to Her, "Kill him, Mother!" I still remember that form of the Mother, Her world-bewitching beauty. She came to me taking the form of Krishnamayī,<sup>21</sup> but it was as if Her glance moved the world.'<sup>22</sup> The most beautiful of all these visions, he said, was that of Rājārājeśvarī, 'Queen of queens,' one of the traditional ten forms of the Divine Mother, who is also known as Śoḍaśī. 'It looked,' he said, trying to put this into language, 'as if the beauty of the person of Śoḍaśī had got melted, spread all around, and was illumining the universe in all directions.'<sup>23</sup> We know that in 1884 Sri Ramakrishna was keeping a picture of Rājārājeśvarī on the wall of his room. Did it hang there from long before, or did he acquire it after seeing this vision?

In this period, the close of Tāntric sādhana, the

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<sup>21</sup> We have quoted from the *Gospel*, p. 746, in which a footnote tells us that this refers to the young daughter of Balaram Bose. The writer has been told that this footnote occurs in M.'s *Kathamrita*, but that the word *rupa* in the Bengali text can as well be interpreted 'having a beauty like Krishnamayī's', and not necessarily implying that he saw the form of this girl long before she was born.

<sup>22</sup> G 746.

<sup>23</sup> LP 205.

Master had visions also of various male figures such as Bhairava, companion of Siva ; under the vilva-tree where most of these practices were undertaken, he had many 'flaming vision' and other mystical experiences the contents of which he was not able to reveal.<sup>24</sup>

'There were then so many extraordinary visions and experiences in the Master's life day after day,' says Swami Saradananda, 'that it is beyond the power of man to mention all of them.'

Before taking leave of that period of Sri Ramakrishna's life in which the Bhairavi Brāhmaṇī's influence was paramount, we may note a peculiar incident which occurred in connection with another disciple of hers, a man named Chandra. Chandra, who came from another part of the country, had been invited to the place where the Brāhmaṇī was staying at Ariadaha, and on the same day, Ramakrishna, not knowing the man, nor of his presence there, had also been asked to go there. When he arrived the Master fell into a trance in which he came to know all about this person. He said, 'Ah, here is Chandra ! Well, is it not Chandra ?' Then he became motionless. At this point Chandra took hold of the Master's hands and loudly called him by his name several times. Sri Ramakrishna returned to normal consciousness. 'You seem to know me,' said Chandra, 'then why did you forget me so long ?' 'It was the Lord's will,' said the other. In this way they entered upon one of those strange conversations between advanced souls which might be described by ordinary onlookers as being in another language. Ramakrishna said later that the reason Chandra could easily bring him back from samādhi was that he (Chandra) was endowed with some

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<sup>24</sup> G 814.

of the power of Viṣṇu. This fact may not seem remarkable, unless we remember how difficult it was, even for his attendants, to bring down the Master's mind from samādhi.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Life, 205.

## CHAPTER IV

### FORMS, THE FORMLESS, AND FORMS AGAIN

APPARENTLY it was in 1864 that the story of Rāmlāla began. Is there another like it in the annals of the history of religion? How an image of the child Rāma came to life through the devotion of a saint, and transferred itself to a greater saint, thereby blessing and fulfilling the former, is a story unapproached in the records of spiritual vision anywhere, so far as we know — unless it be by the story of Gopāla's Mother.<sup>1</sup> Among the many itinerant holy men who visited Dakṣhineswar in those days there was a Vaiṣṇava sādhu, Jaṭādhāri by name, known also as the Rāma-wat Bābāji, or 'father devoted to Rāma', whose whole-soul had gone out in adoration to the image of the boy Rāma, a small metal likeness, the object of his daily worship. Rāmlāla had for him become a living companion, visible almost constantly to his open eyes, and, marvellous to say, visible to Sri Ramakrishna as well. We are most fortunate to have the Master's own account of the whole story, and shall relate it here.

'The Bābāji actually saw that Rāmlāla ate or wished to eat something, or wanted to go for a walk or insisted on the satisfying of some fancy or other. In the company of the image he was beside himself with bliss and always remained "inebriated". I also saw Rāmlāla doing all that. I sat all the twenty-four hours of the day with the Bābāji and kept gazing on Rāmlāla. As days passed, Rāmlāla's

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<sup>1</sup> The disciple of Ramakrishna whose mystical experience shows some similarities.

love for me increased. As long as I remained with the Bābāji, Rāmlāla felt happy in his play, but as soon as I came away to my room, he followed me there at once in spite of my protests. At first I thought it was a fancy of my brain. Otherwise how could the boy, whom the sādhu had loved and served so long, love me more than him? Such thoughts were useless; I actually saw, as I see you before me now, Rāmlāla dancing along, sometimes in front of me, sometimes behind. Sometimes he would insist on being carried in my arms. Again, if I took him up he would not stay there, but jumped down to run here and there collecting flowers in thorny jungles, or would go to the Ganga to swim and splash. I said to him again and again, "My child, don't do that. You will get blisters on your feet if you run in the sun; if you stay so long in the water you will catch cold." But he would not listen to me, and went on with his pranks as if I were talking to someone else. He would sometimes simper and look at me with his two eyes, beautiful as two petals of a lotus, or pout his lips and make faces at me. Then I would really get angry and scold him, saying, "Just wait, you rascal, I will give you a sound thrashing today and pound your bones to powder." Thus I would pull him from the sun or the water and then cajole him by giving him some thing or other and ask him to play inside the room. When it was impossible to cool down his naughtiness I would sometimes give him a slap or two. Then he would pout his beautiful lips and sob, and look at me with tears in his eyes, till I myself felt pained. So I would take him affectionately on my lap and soothe him. I actually saw and did these things.

'One day I was going to bathe, when he took a fancy obstinately to go with me. What could I do? I took him



with me. Then he would not come out of the water. He turned a deaf ear to all my pleadings. At last I became angry, immersed him in water and said, "Now be in water as long as you like"; and I actually saw that he panted and winced under water. Seeing him suffer thus and thinking to myself, "What have I done?", I took him out of the water and put him on my lap. It cannot be described how on another occasion I felt pained for him and how much I wept. That day Rāmlāla was obstinately demanding something to eat, and I gave him some parched paddy (rice) not properly husked, to pacify him. Then I found that his soft and delicate tongue was pricked by the husk of the paddy. Dear me! What a great pain I felt then! I took him on my lap, wept loudly and taking hold of his chin, sobbed out the words, "I am so rash and foolish that I did not hesitate to put such worthless food into that mouth which Mother Kausalya used to feed hesitatingly with such soft delicacies as butter and thickened milk, lest they should hurt him." The Master's grief burst forth anew in telling the story and he wept so bitterly that he moved his listeners to tears.<sup>2</sup>

'On some days the holy father would cook food to offer it to Rāmlāla but could not find him. Wounded at heart he then would run up here to my room and find Rāmlāla playing in the room. His feeling of love wounded, he would scold the boy, saying, "After all the trouble I took, cooking food for you and looking for you here and there, here you are, careless of everything. That was always your way! You do as you fancy! you have no kindness or affection; you left your father behind and went to the forest; your poor father died of weeping, but still

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<sup>2</sup> LP 530.

you did not return." With these and similar words the Bābāji used to drag Rāmlāla to his place and feed him. The sādhu was here for a long time, because Rāmlāla did not want to leave me and go away, and he also could not bear to leave Rāmlāla behind. Then one day, dissolved in tears, the Bābāji came and said, "Rāmlāla has shown himself to me in the way I wanted to have his vision, and has thus quenched the thirst of my life. Moreover, he has said that he will not leave here. My mind is now free from pain and grief. He is living and playing happily with you, and I am beside myself with bliss to see it. Now I feel happy at his happiness. Therefore I can now leave him with you and go elsewhere. I will be happy thinking he is happy with you." Saying this and giving the boy over to me, he bade good-bye. Rāmlāla has been here since then.<sup>3</sup>

There is much to ponder upon in this triune relationship and its close. For it is not that the holy Rāmawāt sādhu 'outgrew' his vision, in any sense which would satisfy a scoffer; nor did he suddenly acquire a Western education and come to 'realize' that Rāmlāla was his own 'hallucination'. No such thing. Jaṭādhārī's devotion and adoration simply grew so abundant, so universal in its scope, that it lost all tinge of selfishness; he felt, as Swami Saradananda tells us, that the life of his beloved Rāmlāla was in the life of all around him. Spiritual attainment is, after all, embodied in just that. As for Sri Ramakrishna, it may be that here again he absorbed the sādhu's vision into himself for the latter's own good.

During the sādhana of this period Sri Ramakrishna's mind was beating a path, so to speak, between what he

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<sup>3</sup> LP 535.

called the Līla, or play of the Personal God, and the Nitya, or Absolute. When descending to the former he would meditate day and night on Rāma, the hero, and his wife Sītā. 'At those times,' he says, 'I would constantly behold the forms of Sītā and Rāma.'<sup>4</sup> Again it would be Rādhā and Krishna, or Śrī Caitanya whom he would see, and in whom he would become absorbed. No one has made clear the position of the Bhairavi Brāhmaṇī during the Rāmlāla episode. Since Swami Saradananda says that she may have given the Master some help with his practice of the *Vātsalya* and *Madhura* bhāvas (looking on God as child and beloved, respectively), we can perhaps presume that she looked on with full approval, and encouraged him.

Completing the disciplines of the Śakti Tantras, he now commenced those of the Vaiṣṇava Tantras, having as their object union with Rāma, Rādhā, Krishna, or Gau-rāṅga. Śrī Rādhā, these scriptures say, is the supreme example of *prema*, divine love of the greatest intensity. Rādhā, whose whole soul was in Śrī Krishna, manifested in her body all the nineteen forms of Mahābhāva, ecstatic emotions and their physical effects. After her, Śrī Gau-rāṅga, who is considered an embodiment of Rādhā and Krishna together, is cited as the other historical example. Śrī Ramakrishna became the third of this illustrious group, paragons of the bhakti-ideal. First, as the doctrine prescribes, he sought the grace of Rādhā for obtaining the vision of Śrī Krishna, and constantly offered to her all the ardent emotions of his heart. Fulfilment soon came. In the vision of Sītā, already recorded, we knew the circumstances — how she came to him unsought, walking in the Panchavati before his open eyes. Here we do not know

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<sup>4</sup> G 743.

the place or time. We are told that the form of Rādhā shone with a bright yellow splendour, like the stamens of the Nagakesara flower. And yet, he said, it was impossible to describe the glory and sweetness of that countenance. Rādhā, too, disappeared into the Master's own body.<sup>5</sup> So did the form of Śrī Krishna, which was next to appear. As the natural culmination of Sri Ramakrishna's practice of the sweetheart relationship, in which he identified himself with Rādhā, Krishna, her Beloved, came and possessed his soul. Losing himself altogether in the thought of Mādhava for two or three months, he sometimes thought of himself as one with Him, sometimes looked on all beings as forms of Him.<sup>6</sup> In this connection we know of one vision, which came to him when he was seated in front of the Rādhakanta Temple of the temple garden. Ramakrishna was listening to a reading of the *Bhāgavata* when he went into *bhāvasamādhi* and saw a shining figure of Śrī Krishna. Then a ray of light from the feet of that figure touched the scripture being read, and from there touched the Master's own heart, remaining in contact with all three for some time. The result of this vision is known to all readers of the *Gospel*: his firm, life-long conviction of the unity of the scripture, the devotee, and the Lord. 'Bhāgavata, Bhakta, Bhagavān,' he used to say, 'three in One and One in three.'<sup>7</sup>

Many details of the physical effects of *mahābhāva*, resulting from the Master's plunging into the *madhura* mood are related in *The Great Master*. Pursuing our chief interest we give here only a few words of his own about that condition. The burning pain that one feels when

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<sup>5</sup> LP 241.

<sup>6</sup> LP 243.

<sup>7</sup> LP 243.

one is separated from God is not an ordinary feeling. I was unconscious three days in that state. I couldn't move. I lay in one place. When I regained consciousness, the Brāhmaṇī took me out for a bath. But my skin couldn't bear the touch of her hand ; so my body had to be covered with a heavy sheet. Only then could she hold me and lead me. The earth that had stuck to my body while I was lying on the ground had become baked. In that state I felt as if a ploughshare were passing through my backbone. I cried out "Oh I am dying! I am dying!" But afterwards I was filled with great joy.'<sup>8</sup>

Now, it seems, an abrupt change came over the mind of Sri Ramakrishna. Tiring of the coming and going of the divine forms, and keenly feeling the need of a condition beyond the separations characteristic of relative life — the *Līlā* — he actually prayed to the Mother, "Give me a state where there is no separation." For some time his mind was absorbed in what he sometimes calls the "Nitya", sometimes the "Indivisible Satchidānanda". He even removed from his room the pictures of gods and goddesses which hung there. In relating this the Master uses some extraordinary language. He says, "I began to meditate on the Primal Puruṣa, the Indivisible Satchidānanda, regarding myself as His handmaid." We might puzzle over how it is possible to regard oneself as the handmaid of the Formless! But then, in a sense, He Who can be meditated upon can also be served ; it was not at all uncommon for Ramakrishna to use terms like these for the Personal God without form. He lost the distinction, ultimately, between sacred and secular, and began more and more to perceive God in all beings. One morning

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<sup>8</sup> G 747.

while picking a leaf from the vilva-tree, as is done in preparing the worship, he loosened a bit of the bark. The tree appeared to him as full of Consciousness. Feeling that he had hurt the tree he was repentant. This mood came over Sri Ramakrishna frequently during the remainder of his life. Sometimes he could not pluck the sacred grass; or only with great difficulty could he cut a lemon, for example. "One day," he told a group of devotees, "I was about to gather some flowers. They were everywhere on the trees. At once I had a vision of Virāṭ (God, seen through the vestment of the entire gross universe); it appeared that His worship was just over. The flowers looked like a bouquet placed on the head of the Deity. I could not pick them."<sup>9</sup>

As this mood evidently came upon him shortly before the arrival of Totāpuri, it might be called a preparation for that event. In the ensuing period Sri Ramakrishna's consciousness was to soar ever higher, into the Absolute Itself.

The austere and orthodox monk Totāpuri arrived by boat one day in 1865, and when he saw this person of unusual appearance sitting unassumingly in the *cāndnī*, the portico of the ghat, he marvelled and approached him with the words, 'You seem to be well-qualified. Would you like to practise Vedāntic sādhanā?' Sri Ramakrishna, of course, replied that he did not make decisions in such matters; his Divine Mother alone could say. He would ask Her. Having gone to the Mother in Her temple, he fell into *bhāvasamādhi*. Mother spoke. 'Go and learn; it is in order to teach you that the sannyāsin has come here.' Ramakrishna, still semi-conscious with ecstasy, returned

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<sup>9</sup> G 687, 743.

with beaming face to Totāpuri and reported the instruction.<sup>10</sup>

The Master's next revelation of his inner experience is the dramatic and historic account of the first attainment of *nirvikalpa samādhi*.<sup>11</sup> Sacred thread and hair-tuft, hallmarks of the Brāhmin, were gone. In the little hut in the Panchavati, Śrī Totāpuri had initiated him into *sannyāsa*, thus making the God-intoxicated child of the Mother a monk of one of the austere and venerable Orders founded by Śankarācārya. But this new dimension was not added to the picture without a struggle. Having taught Ramakrishna the doctrines of the Advaita Vedānta, Totāpuri was eager to see his disciple attain the immediate experience of their import. His mind should be merged, now, in the non-dual Self. 'After initiating me,' the Master related, 'Nāṅta (the "naked one") taught me many aphorisms conveying the conclusions of the Vedānta, and asked me to make my mind free of function in all respects, and merge in the meditation on the Self. But it so happened with me that when I sat for meditation I could by no means make my mind go beyond name and form and cease to function. The mind withdrew itself easily from all other forms, but then the familiar form of the Universal Mother consisting of the effulgence of pure consciousness, appeared before it as living and moving and made me forget my resolve to banish name and form. When I listened to the aphorisms and sat for meditation, this happened over and over again. Almost despairing of the attainment of the *nirvikalpa samādhi*, I then opened

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<sup>10</sup> LP 251.

<sup>11</sup> All the accounts lead one to assume this was his first attainment of it; there is a view, however, that he must have experienced it for himself, even earlier.

my eyes and said to the "naked one", "No, it cannot be done; I cannot make the mind free from functioning and force it to dive into the Self." Scolding me severely he said very excitedly, "What, you cannot do it? What utter defiance!" Looking about in the hut and finding a piece of broken glass, *Naṅga* thrust its sharp-pointed end against my forehead between the eye-brows and said, "Collect the mind here to this point." With firm determination I sat for meditation again and as soon as the holy form of the Divine Mother appeared before the mind, I looked upon Knowledge as a sword and cut the form mentally in two with that sword. There remained then no function in the mind, which quickly transcended the realm of names and forms, making me merge in samādhi.<sup>12</sup> And there he stayed, in that very posture, with no visible indication of the working of the vital forces of the body, his face calm and radiant. The teacher waited outside the hut for the samādhi to end, until the long night became three days. Then Totāpuri marvelling at the magnitude of the disciple, entered the hut and called on that great soul to return to awareness of the world.

Two of the visions which came to Sri Ramakrishna during the remainder of that year, while Totāpuri stayed at Dakshineswar, are reported to us. The itinerant monk liked to read and discuss scriptures with the Master's cousin, Haladhāri. One day these two were seated in the Kālī Temple, reading the book *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>13</sup> Suddenly to Sri Ramakrishna, who was listening, the words became a living reality. He had a vision of a river with forest on both sides, green with spring growth. Rāma and

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<sup>12</sup> LP 255.

<sup>13</sup> LP 249.



his younger brother Lakshmaṇa were walking there in shorts.<sup>14</sup> Another day, when in front of Mathur's mansion, he saw Arjuna's chariot, with Sri Krishna seated in it as the charioteer.<sup>15</sup>

After Totāpuri left Dakshineswar the Master determined to return to the *nirvikalpa* plane. He did so, and as a matter of fact, remained in that state, more or less, for six months. It is a puzzling period of his life, in one sense, since he was cared for not by Hriday or other relatives, nor by Mathur, nor the Brāhmaṇī (all of whom were, apparently, still at Dakshineswar), but by an unknown wandering sādhu, a sojourner at the temple garden. This monk somehow knew that this body, with its matted hair, flies entering mouth and nose, looking more dead than alive, needed to be preserved for the world. Sometimes he would beat that body with a short stick, when, finding a little external consciousness, he would force food into the Master's mouth. 'I was,' says Ramakrishna, 'in that state from which ordinary mortals never return. There was no consciousness at all of the coming of day and night. Calls of nature were perhaps answered unconsciously. Then after six months I heard the Mother's command, "Remain in *bhāvamukha* for the spiritual enlightenment of men."<sup>16</sup> Twice before, he had heard this command (see Chap. II). Swami Saradananda devotes many pages to the explanation of this term. As we have said, it is a name for the general condition of a mystic's mind which enables him on the one hand to experience the visions and ecstasies of the personal forms of God; and on the other,

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<sup>14</sup> G 813.

<sup>15</sup> G 813.

<sup>16</sup> LP 363.

to leave the relative behind and plunge into the Absolute. This was to be Sri Ramakrishna's condition for many years following. As already mentioned (in the Introduction) a devotee who saw him in 1874 testifies to his absorption in samādhi continuously for three days and nights. The Master said on many occasions, 'The natural tendency of the mind is upwards, towards the *nirvikalpa* plane. Once in samādhi it does not feel inclined to come down. For your sake it has to be forced down. Even this is not motive enough, so I catch hold of trifling desires, and saying "I will have a smoke", or "I will drink water", or "I will eat this or that", I thus force the mind gradually down to body-consciousness.'

Sri Ramakrishna suffered terribly from illness after his six months in the highest consciousness; another six months of intestinal upset and wringing pain ensued. But divine visions attended it all. Hriday said at the time that never before had he seen such ecstasy for God and never before had he seen such illness. And the Master said, 'I was then seriously ill with stubborn diarrhoea. It was as if millions of ants were gnawing at my brain. But all the same, spiritual talk went on day and night. The doctor came and found me discussing spiritual truth. "What a mad-man!" he said. "Nothing is left of him but a few bones, and still he is reasoning like that!" I can't describe to you all the divine forms I saw at that time. I was suffering then from indigestion, which would become worse when I saw visions; so I would try to shun these divine forms and would spit on the ground when I saw them. But they would follow me and obsess me like ghosts. I was always overwhelmed with divine ecstasy and couldn't tell day from night. On the day after such a vision I would have a severe attack of diarrhoea, and all these

ecstasies would pass out through my bowels.' <sup>17</sup> In another statement he summarized this period: 'Ah, what a state of mind I passed through! My mind would lose itself in the Indivisible Absolute. I could not feel the form of my own head. I was about to die. I thought of keeping Rāmlāl's aunt (Śārada Devī) near me. I ordered the removal of all pictures and portraits from my room. When I regained outer consciousness, when the mind climbed down to the ordinary level, I felt as if I were being suffocated like a drowning person. At last I said to myself, "If I can't bear people, then how shall I live?" Then my mind was again directed to *bhakti* and *bhakta*. "What has happened to me?" I kept asking people. Bholānāth (a temple clerk) said to me, "This state of mind has been described in the *Mahābhārata*. How can a man live on coming down from samādhi, without *bhakti* and the company of devotees?"' <sup>18</sup> We think that the foregoing description simply telescopes a period of many months; for example, the pictures probably had been removed even before Totāpuri arrived.

Sri Ramakrishna did indeed welcome the company of sādhus now, and also some devout pandits. We have mentioned Pandit Gauri, who on a return visit to the Master, was broadened in mind, and mellowed; and there were others. He welcomed the visits of the pandits because his mind now craved to hear only about God, and spiritual topics. He would search for places where the sacred books such as the *Bhāgavata*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Adhy-ātma Rāmāyaṇa* were being recited or explained.

The pain of this period was not yet over. Ramakrishna had to go through a condition in which he felt a

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<sup>17</sup> G 323 ; 813.

<sup>18</sup> G 767.

complete identity with certain physical objects. He called this a particular state of *bhāvasamādhi* which is very painful, and said that although he was in it for six hours only, it became quite unbearable. One of these objects was a plot of fresh *Durva* grass in the temple garden. While he was looking at its intense green colour his consciousness rose; at that moment a man walked across the plot, and Ramakrishna felt as if his own chest were being trampled on. Another was a boatman on the Ganga. While looking at the river from the *cāndnī* he witnessed the quarrel of two boatmen. A blow struck by one on the back of the other made the Master cry out in pain. This was actually registered on his back as a red swollen mark, and Hriday, observing it, demanded to know who had struck him.<sup>19</sup> Such phenomena have occurred in the lives of a number of saints of various religions.

As we know, the practice of one religion was not sufficient for Sri Ramakrishna, and he now took initiation from a new visitor to Dakshineswar, one Govinda Roy, probably a Sufi. Repeating the Allah *mantra*, and eschewing Hinduism's gods and goddesses and ways of thought, the Master ventured into Islam. As usual, in three days his mind, like a honed razor, cut through to the goal. First he had the vision of a dignified and radiant person with a long beard and then came the realization of God with attributes (probably without form), and lastly he merged in the attributeless Godhead. This experience occurred perhaps in Mathur's mansion, for he had moved outside the temple precincts for his practice of Islam. Joining two very different streams of culture in a spiritual adventure of great catholicity, the experience had a pro-

found effect on Sri Ramakrishna's own mind, and is surely full of significance for the world of today.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting in this connection that he later had a vision of the Divine Mother as a Muslim girl, six or seven years old. She came wearing a *tilak* (mark of one's religion) on her forehead and was naked. She walked with the Master, frisking and joking like a child.<sup>21</sup>

Ramakrishna revisited his native Kāmārpukur in 1867, after an absence of six years. Again relatives and neighbours rejoiced, and he too was very happy to see them. One afternoon, when a number of ladies of the neighbourhood gathered around him in spiritual conversation, he suddenly went into samādhi. He felt that he was a fish, joyfully swimming and sporting in various ways, sometimes at the surface, sometimes diving deep — all in the ocean of Satchidananda. The ladies were accustomed to his 'absent-mindedness' and did not mind, but began noisily to pass judgment on his present absorption. One of them, however, silenced the rest: 'He has now become a fish and is swimming in the sea of Satchidānanda. If you make a noise his bliss will be disturbed.' After regaining external awareness the Master was asked about it, and replied that it had been just like that. 'How strange!' he said, 'How could she know it?'<sup>22</sup> Another day, listening to a village *kīrtan* party, he saw Gauranga before him — in vision presumably.<sup>23</sup>

In order to return from Kāmārpukur to Calcutta by rail in those days apparently one had to go by bullock-cart to the town of Burdwan, which is about thirty miles

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<sup>20</sup> LP 264.

<sup>21</sup> G 175.

<sup>22</sup> LP 269.

<sup>23</sup> G 813.

distant to the northeast over country terrain. By this route Sri Ramakrishna, much restored in health, came with Hriday. The latter has given us a memoir of that trip, in which his uncle, spying in a rice field, a species of tiny plant cherished by Lord Śiva was overcome with a desire to worship Him on the spot; although not ceremonially purified for such worship, he sat for meditation in the field, putting some of the flowers and leaves on his own head, and plunged into a deep trance. Hriday had to carry him to the train, which they almost missed.<sup>24</sup> One wonders if the following reminiscence by the Master in the *Gospel* could be his view of the same incident: 'I sometimes find that living beings are like so many pills made of Indivisible Conscience. Once I was on my way to Burdwan from Kāmārpukur. At one place I ran to the meadow to see how living beings are sustained. I saw ants crawling there. It appeared to me that every place was filled with Conscience.' Relating this incident also affected him: 'Again,' he said, 'I perceive that living beings are like flowers with various layers of petals. They are also revealed to me as bubbles, some big, some small'; while describing in this way the vision of different divine forms, the Master went into an ecstatic state and said, 'I have become! I am here!' Uttering these words he went into samādhi.<sup>25</sup> He once told M., 'I go into an ecstatic mood when I stand in a big meadow. I feel like a fish released from a bowl into a lake.'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Life, 292.

<sup>25</sup> G 357.

<sup>26</sup> G 238.

## CHAPTER V

### FROM THE PILGRIMAGE TO THE VISION OF CHRIST

NEARLY all of his life Sri Ramakrishna spent in one small section of Bengal. But he joined a pilgrimage in 1868 to holy places of North India which was organized by his wealthy patron, Mathur Babu, and on which travelled a party of about 125 persons. They left on special railway cars in January and were away until June. Wherever he went the Master showed the same response to the stimulus of spiritual ideas which he had at home. The visions recorded are again, no doubt, only a few of those he experienced on what was in those days a fast-moving pilgrimage.

The party entered Banaras by boat, and as the city came into sight Sri Ramakrishna saw that the traditional 'golden Kāśī', city of Śiva, was actually made of gold.<sup>1</sup> So evident was this to him that he could not bear to answer the calls of nature within the city, and Mathur had to arrange transportation for this to land outside. Fortunately for his convenience the Master got over this particular mood.<sup>2</sup> Since much of the city is tightly packed along the Ganges bank, one sees the sights more easily by means of boat tours. On one such tour, with Mathur and Hriday, Ramakrishna came to a point opposite the Maṇikarṇikā Ghat. Here, before the great cremation

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<sup>1</sup> Swami Saradananda explains this at some length as the golden mass of spiritual emotions of centuries of devotees.

<sup>2</sup> LP 567.

ground on which for untold centuries had been set aflame the shells abandoned by millions of souls certain of their liberation, he had that experience which has become well-known as a kind of validating stamp upon the faith of every devotee of Banaras. Overcome with emotion, his body hairs standing on end, he walked out of the cabin of the boat, to its very edge. Beholding Śiva in a vision he went into samādhi. The boatman cried to Hriday to catch hold of him, but Ramakrishna was seeing only the Lord Śiva, standing on that ghat, 'embodying in himself,' he later said, 'all the seriousness of the world. I saw a tall white person with tawny matted hair walking with solemn steps to each pyre in the burning ghat, raising carefully each jīva and imparting into his ear the *mantra* of supreme Brahman; while, sitting on the pyre on the other side of the body was the all-powerful universal Mother, Mahākālī, untying all knots of the bondage of *karma*, sending him to the indivisible sphere by opening with Her own hands the door to liberation. Thus did Śiva grant to the soul that which ordinarily results only from the practice of *yoga* and *tapas* for many lives.' Finally, the figure of Śiva approached the Master and merged in him. It is said that pandits who heard him describe the vision remarked that although certain scriptures declare that one who dies in Banaras is liberated, they fail to delineate the exact method. Again his experiences had gone beyond the scriptures.<sup>3</sup> Years later a devotee asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Why does a man dying in Banaras become liberated?' His answer tells us more how than why: 'He sees the vision of Śiva. Śiva says to him, "This is My aspect with form, My embodiment in māyā.

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<sup>3</sup> LP 568; G 803.



I assume this form for the sake of devotees. Now look. I am merging in the indivisible Satchidānanda!" Uttering these words, Śiva withdraws His form and enables the dying person to see Brahman.'<sup>4</sup>

In the principal temple dedicated to the Divine Mother in Banaras, the image is called Annapūrṇā, and is made of gold. One day, while in an ecstatic mood, Sri Rama-krishna had a vision of a sannyāsin who led him by the hand. They entered a temple and there he saw Annapūrṇā, made all of gold.<sup>5</sup> Again we do not know whether the form in vision was the same as the physical form, which he surely must have visited.

Moving on now, from the ideals and figures of Śiva and Śaktī to holy Vraja,<sup>6</sup> the land of Sri Krishna the cowherd, with all its associations stemming from the Purāṇas, the party entered first the town of Mathurā. This railway junction is the site of the Dhruvā Ghat on the river Jamunā. At this bathing-place Vasudeva, father of Krishna, miraculously escaping from prison, in the midst of a storm forded the Jamuna to bring the new-born babe to Nanda and Yaśodā, who would raise him as their own. 'The moment I came to the Dhruvā Ghat at Mathurā,' Sri Rama-krishna relates, 'in a flash I saw Vasudeva crossing the Jamunā with Krishna in his arms.'<sup>7</sup> The Master tells of a dream which he had while staying in the town, and it is one of the two dreams of Sri Ramakrishna of which we have any record. Of this dream in Mathurā he tells us simply this much, that he dreamt of Krishna as the cowherd

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<sup>4</sup> G 584.

<sup>5</sup> G 803.

<sup>6</sup> An area about 80 miles in circumference which includes Brindavan and the other places of Sri Krishna's early life.

<sup>7</sup> G 361.

boy, and that Mathur Babu and Hriday, his companions, had the same dream — a remarkable event in itself.<sup>8</sup>

In the town of Brindāvan there are many temples, their images representing Sri Krishna in various aspects and incidents of His life. Some of these attracted the Master and others did not. We know that he went into samādhi at the sight of the image known as Bankuvihāri, which, he tells us, he felt like embracing.<sup>9</sup> When evening came he took a stroll on the bank of the Jamunā. 'There were small thatched huts on the beach and big jujube trees. It was the 'cow-dust' hour. The cows were returning from the pasture, raising dust with their hoofs. I saw them fording the river. Then came some cowherd boys crossing the river with their cows. No sooner did I behold this scene than I cried out, "O Krishna, where are You?" and became unconscious.'<sup>10</sup> Swami Saradananda's account of it says that the Master had the vision of Krishna, dark blue like a newly-formed cloud and wearing peacock feathers on His head.<sup>11</sup> On another occasion the Master himself tells the devotees that this experience turned his body red (i.e., flushed). At Brindāvan's Kāliya Daman Ghat (which means 'the ghat where the serpent named Kaliya was conquered') Sri Ramakrishna would be overwhelmed with ecstasy, and becoming helpless would have to be bathed by Hriday like a child.<sup>12</sup>

Some miles out from Mathurā and Brindāvan, to the south, lies the hill Goyardhan, which Lord Krishna is said to have lifted and held over the heads of his country-

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<sup>8</sup> G 362.

<sup>9</sup> LP 570 ; G 362.

<sup>10</sup> G 361 ; 129.

<sup>11</sup> LP 570.

<sup>12</sup> G 129.

men to shelter them from torrential rains, and about the same distance beyond this again, are the two pools, called Śyāmākuṇḍa and Rādhākuṇḍa, associated with the youthful sports of Sri Krishna. One visited these places in those days by taking an additional pilgrimage on foot or in a palanquin — a sort of box-on-poles which is carried by bearers. Mathur Babu, at Ramakrishna's request arranged the trip by palanquin, and provided not only food for the journey, but also some stacks of coins which his beloved 'Bābāji' might distribute as largesse to the poor folk of those hallowed spots. We are told however, that the Master became so filled with spiritual love that his body became almost immobile, and he finally had to pull the cloth from under the coins, tumbling them all at once. When they reached Govardhan the palanquin was stopped. 'At the very sight of the mount,' says the Master, 'I was overpowered with divine emotion and ran to the top. I lost all consciousness of the world around me. The residents of the place helped me to come down. On my way to the sacred pools of Śyāmākuṇḍa and Rādhākuṇḍa, when I saw the meadows, the trees, the shrubs, the birds and the deer, I was overwhelmed with ecstasy. My clothes became wet with tears. I said: "O Krishna! Everything here is as it was in the olden days. This is the very meadow where You tended the cows. You alone are absent!" Seated inside the palanquin I lost all power of speech. I couldn't ask the bearers to stop it.' <sup>13</sup>

All his life Sri Ramakrishna was a devotee of music. He sang in a manner which has been called indescribably sweet, from childhood until the illness in his throat forced him to speak the words of the songs instead of singing

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<sup>13</sup> G 129 ; 362.

them. Although he played no instrument he was familiar with the ways of many; and thoroughly conversant with the music of his time and local culture. Extremely particular about the keeping of *tāla* (rhythm) and accuracy of pitch and interpretation, he is known to have cried out in pain — even when in *bhāvasamādhi* — if these strictures were violated by a performer. In his later life his disciples found that they could bring him down from *samādhi* more easily by singing the name of the Lord. We can understand, then, how he appreciated the performance of Maheschandra Sarkar, an expert on the *vīṇā*, to whose house Sri Ramakrishna was taken when the pilgrims returned to Banaras on the homeward journey. At the sound of the *vīṇā* he began to go into ecstasy whereupon he prayed to the Mother to give him external consciousness. ‘I want to listen attentively to the *vīṇā*,’ he told Her, and She acquiesced; for he was able to listen for three hours that evening, and even to sing to its accompaniment.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps it was some years after this concert that he had the vision which he related to Swamiji. In the *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*,<sup>15</sup> Sister Niveditā tells about it: ‘Ramakrishna used to see a long white thread proceeding out of himself. At the end would be a mass of light. This mass would open, and within it he would see the Mother with a *vīṇā*. Then She would begin to play; and as She played, he would see the music turning into birds and animals and worlds and arrange themselves. Then She would stop playing and they would all disappear. The light would grow less and less distinct till it was just a luminous mass, the string would grow shorter and

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<sup>14</sup> LP 276.

<sup>15</sup> p. 282.

shorter, and the whole would be absorbed into himself again. And as Swami (Vivekananda) told this, he said, "Oh, what weird scenes things bring before me, the weirdest scenes of my whole life ! Perfect silence, broken only by the cries of the jackals, in the darkness under the great tree at Dakshineswar. Night after night we sat there, the whole night through, and he talked to me, when I was a boy." Indians might conjecture that Sri Ramakrishna saw the Mother here in the form of Saraswatī, who traditionally holds a *vīṇā*.

The pilgrim party returned home in June. When the autumn of that year arrived, Sri Ramakrishna was earnestly requested by Hriday to attend the worship of the Divine Mother Durga held in the latter's own home. Mathur Babu had made the same request, and it was to his house that the Master had promised himself. However, after giving Hriday special instructions about how the worship in his home was to be carried out, he consoled him by saying, 'In my subtle body I shall go every day to see your worship ; nobody, except you, will see me.' Hriday says that it happened as he promised : each day he saw the Master in a luminous body, standing in *bhāvāsamādhi* beside the image of the Devi at the time of the waving of lights, and also at the time of the special worship which is performed during the junction of the eighth and ninth days of the moon's bright fortnight. 'At those very times,' Sri Ramakrishna told him, when both had returned to the temple garden, 'I was feeling a great yearning to see your worship ; I went into *bhāvāsamādhi* and felt that I was going along a path of light and was present in your worship hall in a luminous body.'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> LP 280.

Now the Master was losing his close relatives through death. One who was particularly dear to his heart was the nephew Akshay. Ramakrishna had predicted the death. When chided for his pessimism his reply was, 'I say only what Mother makes me know and say.' But the fatal day did come, and standing by the bed, in the proprietor's mansion where Akshay lay, he told the boy what *mantra* to repeat, and with Hriday witnessed the death. According to Hriday, the more he himself wept, the more the Master laughed, being in *bhāvasamādhi*. But was he in *samādhi*? Let us hear his own account of it: 'Akshay died before my very eyes. But it did not affect me in the least. I stood by and watched how a man died. It was like a sword taken out from its scabbard. The sword remained as it was, only the scabbard was left behind. I enjoyed the scene, and laughed and sang and danced over it. They removed the body and cremated it. But the next day as I stood there (pointing to the south-eastern verandah of his room), I felt a racking pain for the loss of Akshay, as if somebody were squeezing my heart like a wet towel! I wondered and thought that Mother was teaching me a lesson. I was not much concerned with this body even — much less with a nephew. But if such was my pain at his loss, how much more must be the grief of householders at the loss of their near and dear ones!' <sup>17</sup> At the moment of the passing, he was intently aware of a higher truth, no doubt; but *bhāva-samādhi* seems perhaps too strong a term to use where there was as much external consciousness as is indicated here.

In Chapter Three mention was made of the two young

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<sup>17</sup> Life, 319; LP 344.

boys who appeared to Sri Ramakrishna when he was on the way to the village of Sihore, and of how they were identified by the Bhairavi Brāhmaṇī as Chaitanya and Nityananda. Who knows how many times these two may have sported with him in ecstasy? In any case, we have now another such vision to relate. The Master had gone with Mathur on a much shorter pilgrimage, to Navadvīp, which is thirty or forty miles up the Hooghly River from Dakshineswar. It is the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya. But strangely Ramakrishna was somewhat sceptical about the Chaitanya incarnation. This is surprising in view of the generally affirmative tenor of his mind, but also revealing of the depth and breadth of his inner nature. Once he was described by Swami Vivekananda as 'outwardly a *bhakta*, inwardly a *jñāni*'. However, in this case even his doubt displays his faith; the Master thought, 'As there is not the slightest mention of it in the *Bhāgavata* and other Purāṇas, how could Chaitanya be an incarnation? The shaven-headed Vaisnavas have set him up to be an incarnation.' Off to Navadvīp he went, thinking to test this idea for himself. If God had lived on earth as Sri Chaitanya, some manifestation of this should be still discernible. He went from temple to temple, seeing the various wooden images of Chaitanya, and visited the houses of the Goswāmīs (direct descendants of Gauranga's disciples and leaders of the religious community), but his usually sensitive nature felt nothing, and he became dejected. 'I regretted my coming there,' he tells us, 'but as I was about to step into the boat for the return trip I saw a wonderful vision: two beautiful boys of tender age — I never saw such beauty; they had the complexion of molten gold — each having a circle of light around his head, raising their hands and looking at me, were running toward

Now the Master was losing his close relatives through death. One who was particularly dear to his heart was the nephew Akshay. Ramakrishna had predicted the death. When chided for his pessimism his reply was, 'I say only what Mother makes me know and say.' But the fatal day did come, and standing by the bed, in the proprietor's mansion where Akshay lay, he told the boy what *mantra* to repeat, and with Hriday witnessed the death. According to Hriday, the more he himself wept, the more the Master laughed, being in *bhāvasamādhi*. But was he in *samādhi*? Let us hear his own account of it: 'Akshay died before my very eyes. But it did not affect me in the least. I stood by and watched how a man died. It was like a sword taken out from its scabbard. The sword remained as it was, only the scabbard was left behind. I enjoyed the scene, and laughed and sang and danced over it. They removed the body and cremated it. But the next day as I stood there (pointing to the south-eastern verandah of his room), I felt a racking pain for the loss of Akshay, as if somebody were squeezing my heart like a wet towel! I wondered and thought that Mother was teaching me a lesson. I was not much concerned with this body even — much less with a nephew. But if such was my pain at his loss, how much more must be the grief of householders at the loss of their near and dear ones!' <sup>17</sup> At the moment of the passing, he was intently aware of a higher truth, no doubt; but *bhāva-samādhi* seems perhaps too strong a term to use where there was as much external consciousness as is indicated here.

In Chapter Three mention was made of the two young

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<sup>17</sup> Life, 319; LP 344.



boys who appeared to Sri Ramakrishna when he was on the way to the village of Sihore, and of how they were identified by the Bhairavi Brāhmaṇī as Chaitanya and Nityananda. Who knows how many times these two may have sported with him in ecstasy? In any case, we have now another such vision to relate. The Master had gone with Mathur on a much shorter pilgrimage, to Navadvīp, which is thirty or forty miles up the Hooghly River from Dakshineswar. It is the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya. But strangely Ramakrishna was somewhat sceptical about the Chaitanya incarnation. This is surprising in view of the generally affirmative tenor of his mind, but also revealing of the depth and breadth of his inner nature. Once he was described by Swami Vivekananda as 'outwardly a *bhakta*, inwardly a *jñāni*'. However, in this case even his doubt displays his faith: the Master thought, 'As there is not the slightest mention of it in the *Bhāgavata* and other Purāṇas, how could Chaitanya be an incarnation? The shaven-headed Vaisnavas have set him up to be an incarnation.' Off to Navadvīp he went, thinking to test this idea for himself. If God had lived on earth as Sri Chaitanya, some manifestation of this should be still discernible. He went from temple to temple, seeing the various wooden images of Chaitanya, and visited the houses of the Goswāmīs (direct descendants of Gauranga's disciples and leaders of the religious community), but his usually sensitive nature felt nothing, and he became dejected. 'I regretted my coming there,' he tells us, 'but as I was about to step into the boat for the return trip I saw a wonderful vision: two beautiful boys of tender age — I never saw such beauty; they had the complexion of molten gold — each having a circle of light around his head, raising their hands and looking at me, were running toward

me through the sky. And I cried out immediately, "There they come, there they come". Scarcely had I uttered these words before they came and entered here (his body). I lost external consciousness and fell down. I would have fallen into the water, but for Hriday who caught hold of me. I was shown many things convincing me of their really being Incarnations, the manifestations of the Divine Power.' <sup>18</sup> 'They' here refers, of course, to Chaitanya and his companion Nityananda. It is said that Mathur Babu was sufficiently surprised at this reversal in Sri Ramakrishna's reactions, that he asked him for an explanation. The old Navadvīp, the actual birthplace of Chaitanya, the Master told him, had been swallowed up by the river, and the sand-bank where this exalted experience came upon him was the site of the old town.<sup>19</sup> Whether this information came to him through samādhi, or some other intuition is not known to us, nor whether the historical events have been authenticated.

It was now 1871, and Sri Ramakrishna was thirty-five years old. The faithful Mathur, who for the past fifteen years had been friend, sponsor, and support to the Master, and who had moved like a shadow in the background of this drama, was now to make his exit. His had been a divine appointment, as Sri Ramakrishna later mentioned to his devotees. The Divine Mother showed him in a vision the five suppliers of his needs. Mathur Babu was the first, and the second, Sambhu Mallick, as yet unknown to him at that time. 'I had a vision of a fair-skinned man with a cap on his head. Many days later when I first met Sambhu, I recalled that vision; I realized it was he whom I had seen in that ecstatic state.' We do

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<sup>18</sup> LP 578.

<sup>19</sup> Life, 326.

not know if the Master ever fully identified the other suppliers ; he said they were all fair-skinned, and that Surendra (Suresh Mitra) looked like one of them.<sup>20</sup> Succumbing to typhoid fever, Mathur was taken on the last day to Kālīghāt in Calcutta. Surprisingly, at no time in this illness had the Master visited him. But Sri Ramakrishna went into a deep *bhāvasamādhi* which lasted for two or three hours that afternoon. He felt that he went in a celestial body to Mathur Babu, along a path of light. After 5 p.m. when the Master regained external consciousness he told Hriday that Mathur had entered into a celestial chariot, assisted by friends of the Divine Mother, and had ascended to the Devīloka. Mathur's death was later reported as having occurred at 5 p.m.<sup>21</sup>

Srī Śārādā Devī, Sri Ramakrishna's young wife, whose childhood was spent in the village of Jayrāmbāṭī, now came to the Dakshineswar temple garden. He had last visited her in 1867. Now it was 1872, and Śārādā was a young woman of eighteen. Her eagerness to be with and serve her 'mad' husband, and how she accomplished it, is a story in itself. We are concerned just now with Sri Ramakrishna's reaction to her presence. She slept in his room, even in his own bed, at the beginning. Then, in a few months, when the Master discovered that she got very little sleep because of his long and frequent absorptions, and the worry which these caused her, he asked her to sleep in the *nahabat*, the music tower. One of these nights, seeing Śārādā Devī asleep by his side, the Master addressed his own mind thus : 'O mind, this is a female body ; people look upon it as an object of great enjoyment, a thing highly prized, and even die for enjoying it. But if one accepts

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<sup>20</sup> G 934.

<sup>21</sup> LP 287.

that enjoyment he has to remain confined in the body and cannot realize God, Who is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. Do not, O my mind, harbour one thought within and its opposite without ; decide whether you want this or God. If you want this, here it is.' Scarcely had the thought of touching Śārādā Devī's body come to him when his mind shrank from it and lost itself so deeply in samādhi that during the entire night it did not return. Very carefully he had to be brought to external awareness the next day. Even his sense organs would retract in cases of this kind.<sup>22</sup>

It is unfortunate that we know nothing of the subjective side of that most auspicious and symbolic samādhi which was shared, as it were, by Ramakrishna and Śrī Śārādā Devī at the time of the Sodasī pūja which he performed before her person. It must remain as highly personal an experience as it was at the time. But it is perhaps worth noting in passing that the offering which he made at the feet of the Holy Mother ending the ceremony marks practically the end of the Master's *sādhana* ; and during the next five months he would sometimes merge in *nirvikalpa samādhi* with evidence of signs of death.<sup>23</sup>

Only Sri Ramakrishna's Christian *sādhana* remained to be accomplished, if *sādhana* it can be called, when the mind has become so responsive and so unimpeded as his now was. It had become proverbial with him that any particular practice he undertook became fruitful in three days or less. His venture into the Christian religion was no exception. It is not surprising that Ramakrishna had no close contact with Christianity prior to 1874, orthodox Hindu that he was, in many respects, and living in a place

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<sup>22</sup> LP 294.

<sup>23</sup> LP 297.

which was doubtless sheltered as much as possible from the reach of British imperial influences. What is remarkable is the alacrity with which he poured his mind into the Christ-mould as soon as he heard about Jesus Christ. Once again his teacher was his student as well. Sambhu Mallick, who taught him about Jesus, is considered one of the Master's early disciples. In fact, as we saw above, he foreshadows the next phase of Ramakrishna's life in that he is one of those seen in vision before their arrival. (But probably not the first; to Holy Mother goes this honour, because undoubtedly it was from the superconscious plane that Gadādhara knew and spoke of the little girl in Jayrāmbāī who had been marked for him.)

Sambhu Babu was one of those wealthy Calcutta men who had a 'garden house' in the suburbs. His was close to Dakshineswar, and it was he who for the next six years became the confidant and benefactor of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. He had been much influenced in his religious life by the Brahmo Samāj, an eclectic religious sect which honoured a Unitarian type of Christianity, and he knew his Bible well. It seems that he would read from it to the Master, and no doubt he would also expound what he had heard of Christian doctrine. But Sri Ramakrishna went right to the heart of the matter. It was the inspiring life and words of Christ which penetrated, and with which his mind now became occupied.

To set the scene of this experience we must consider another Mallick, one Jadunāth by name, a pious but worldly gentleman who also had a garden house, south of the temple garden. Here the Master would sometimes come while on a walk, and, sitting in the parlour, which was always opened to him, would rest before returning to the temples. It was the fashion in those days for those who had the money

and some British education to acquire and hang on their walls portraits and other paintings in Western style in the huge gilt frames of the 19th century. Such a painting of the Madonna and Child, artist now unknown, hung in Jadu Mallick's parlour. One day Sri Ramakrishna sat in that parlour looking intently at this picture and thinking about the extraordinary life of Jesus, when he suddenly felt that the picture became living. Rays of light coming from the Mother and Child entered his heart and began to change radically the ideas stored there. Hindu conceptions were being chased into hiding and new thoughts were displacing them. In vain he struggled within himself, and prayed, 'Mother, what strange changes are you bringing in me?' His devotion to the gods and goddesses was eclipsed for the time being, and replaced by a great love for the Christ, while pictures of Christian priests and devotees performing worship filled his mind. Although Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room at Dakshineswar, he remained absorbed in the new mood which had swept over him. He did not visit the Kālī Temple on the morrow, nor the next day nor the next: the Divine Mother was forgotten. Near the end of the third day, as he was walking in the Panchavati he saw — evidently with open eyes — a Godman of fair complexion coming toward him with a steadfast look. Recognizing him as a foreigner, he saw that his eyes and face were beautiful; his nose was a little flat, but this appeared to be no blemish in that divine countenance. Sri Ramakrishna wondered who this was. The answer came from his heart, but in words loud enough that he described them as 'ringing': 'Lord Jesus the Christ, the Master-Yogi, eternally one with God, who shed his heart's blood for the deliverance of men! It is He!' The figure embraced the Master and disappeared into his body, leaving the latter

in *bhāvasamādhi*, 'at one with Saṅga Brahman for some time,' says Swami Saradananda.<sup>24</sup>

We have already referred to a conversation which the Master had with his young devotees in which he had asked them what Jesus looked like, and was told that although not described in the Bible, Jesus must have had an aquiline nose. 'But I saw that the tip of his nose was little flat,' came the reply.

The effect of the experience was to leave with Ramakrishna a lifelong conviction of the divinity of Christ. In M.'s diary for July 28, 1885, there is the following interesting conversation :

Master : "Tell me what I talked about (on another day)."

M. : "You told us about Jesus."

Master : "What did I say ?"

M. : "You went into samādhi at the sight of Jesus Christ's picture in Jadu Mallick's garden house. You saw Jesus come down from the picture and merge in your body."

Sri Ramakrishna was silent a few moments. Then he said to M. 'Perhaps there is a meaning in what has happened to my throat. This has happened lest I should make myself light before all ; lest I should go to all sorts of places and sing and dance.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> LP 299.

<sup>25</sup> G 826.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE COMING OF DISCIPLES — IN VISION AND IN THE FLESH

'I HAD seen Keshab before I actually met him — I had seen him and his party in my samādhi. In front of me sat a roomful of men. Keshab looked like a peacock sitting with its tail spread out. The tail meant his followers. I saw a red gem on Keshab's head. That indicated his *rajas*. He said to his disciples, "Please listen to what he<sup>1</sup> is saying". I said to the Divine Mother: "Mother, these people hold the views of 'Englishmen'. Why should I talk to them?" Then the Mother explained to me that it would be like this in the Kaliyuga.'<sup>2</sup> It certainly was to be like that, as the last eleven years of Sri Ramakrishna's life demonstrate. No longer was the spiritual light of Dakshineswar to be shaded by the provincial proprieties of language, caste, culture, or personal convenience. The meeting of the Master with Keshab Chandra Sen, who had recently succeeded Devendranath Tagore as *de facto* leader of the Brahmo Samaj, introduces the 'open door' phase of Ramakrishna's life, wherein teaching, visiting, and the attentions of the public, became daily affairs. One account says that the Master had seen Keshab long before, from a distance, at a religious meeting where the latter was meditating, and had remarked that he was the only boy there whose meditation was successful. Keshab did not, however, become a disciple in the technical sense of the word. The relation-

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning the Master.

<sup>2</sup> G 831.



ship between him and Sri Ramakrishna is difficult to define and makes an interesting study. We may remark only that much has been written about Ramakrishna's influence on the Brahmo Samaj and its leaders ; but the contact also had its effect in the other direction. These 'modern Brahmajñānīs' as the Master called them, would come to him with their questions about knowledge of Brahman and their predilection for the formless aspect of God, and, in a way, it affected him. He sums it up thus : 'Formerly believers in God with form used to visit me a great deal. Then the modern Brahmajñānīs began to arrive. During that period (1874 to about 1880) I used to remain unconscious in samādhi most of the time. Whenever I regained consciousness, I would say to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, please don't give me Brahmajñāna."'<sup>3</sup>

We should mention that it was rare for Sri Ramakrishna to give interpretations of the symbols in his vision, as he does in the above quotation : the gem is Keshab's *rajas*, the tail his followers.

Apparently M. (Mahendranāth Gupta) and Balaram Bose were the devotees of whom the Master next had prevision. They appeared in the remarkable vision of Sri Chaitanya's kīrtan, which came to him as he stood outside his room, probably on the north verandah. He saw, in the direction of the Panchavati a crowd of people moving in waves, as it were, with spiritual fervour. Leading the party, and absorbed in the love of God, was Sri Chaitanya, moving ahead with slow step accompanied by Nityananda and Advaita on either side. Some of the devotees were in a mood of spiritual inebriation, some expressing themselves in ecstatic dance. This crowd, which was so great that

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<sup>3</sup> G 481.

there seemed no end to it, flowed forward and disappeared behind the trees.<sup>4</sup> Some of the faces seen in that crowd he remembered. He said to Mahendranath, who met him first in 1882, 'He who dwells in me tells me beforehand what particular class of devotees will come to me. When I have a vision of Gauranga I know that devotees of Gauranga are coming; when I have a vision of Kālī the Śāktas come. Once I saw Chaitanya's party singing and dancing near the Panchavati, between the banyan-tree and the vakul-tree. I think I saw Balaram there, and you too.'<sup>5</sup> On another occasion he told the devotees that he saw the companions of Chaitanya 'not in a trance but with these very eyes'. 'Formerly I was in such an exalted state of mind,' he said, 'that I could see all these things with my naked eyes, but now I see them in samādhi.'<sup>6</sup> He had said this to M. once before, on the first day of 1883, and it is one of the most significant remarks we have from the Master's lips, because in the first place it carries the clear implication that visions which occur in the waking state with full external consciousness — or, put another way, visions in which the figures live and move in the 'public' world, — indicate a more 'exalted' spiritual condition than those experienced in trance; and in the second place, it seems to say that the Master felt at the time of the remark that his mind had in some sense descended to a lower plane. But as we shall see, the assessment of his own condition was to fluctuate frequently in the next three years.

In this connection we should note that it is difficult sometimes to decide whether an experience recounted by Sri Ramakrishna should be called a 'vision'. Take the

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<sup>4</sup> LP 319.

<sup>5</sup> G 359; 831, 832.

<sup>6</sup> G 332.

following example : ‘Once at Sihore, I fed the cowherd boys. I put sweets into their hands. I saw that these boys were actually the cowherd boys of Brindavan, and I partook of the sweets from their hands.’<sup>7</sup> Now this is not what is usually called a vision with open eyes. Yet the Master sees the boys as completely *identical* with the cowherds of Brindavan. The spiritual significance of such experiences must not be ignored; and since these were increasingly common in his last years, we have taken many of them into account in the pages to follow.

It was to Sihore, Hriday’s village, that Ramakrishna had gone in 1875, in his last visit to Kāmārpukur. Staying at Sihore he heard of the fervour of the kīrtan performed by Vaishnavas living in the nearby villages of Belte and Śyāmbazār and became eager to witness the kirtan, and to join it. The effect of his participation was spectacular and his fame as an ecstatic drew kīrtan parties from miles around. The area became filled with ecstatic dance day and night. As Sri Ramakrishna entered the village of Śyāmbazār he had a vision of Sri Chaitanya<sup>8</sup> from which he understood, he said, that those villagers were Gauranga’s devotees.<sup>9</sup> During this period with the kīrtan parties, especially for three days and nights he experienced a storm of divine bliss in kīrtan, and the rumour spread that a man had died seven times and come back to life as often.

At one party, in the house of his host, Natabar Goswami of Belte, the Master had a vision of Krishna and

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<sup>7</sup> G 232.

<sup>8</sup> He once said that at Hriday’s house he had a vision of Gauranga, who wore a black-bordered cloth. G. 175.

<sup>9</sup> Life, 384 ; G 536.

the gopis. He felt that his subtle body was walking at Krishna's heels.<sup>10</sup>

It was one of the Master's visions which gave rise to that heart-rending cry, so poignant and so candid, which he uttered from the roof-top, for devotees of his own. 'One day it was revealed to me that I had devotees — my intimate companions, my very own. I then felt an indescribable yearning to see you all. I felt like weeping, but could not, lest I should create a scene. Thereafter I would climb to the roof of the *kuṭhī* (proprietor's mansion) as soon as the bells and conch shells of the evening service sounded in the temples, and thinking "one more day has gone and you have not come," I would cry out with a longing heart: "Oh, where are you all? Come here! I am dying to see you." I used to pray to the Mother, crying: "Mother, if I do not find the devotees I'll surely die. Please bring them to me immediately."'<sup>11</sup> While meditating in the Kālī Temple he once saw a *bhairava*, a Companion of Siva, and said to him, 'Why have you come?' 'To do your work,' the other replied. Long after, when Girish Chandra Ghosh had become intimate with Sri Ramakrishna, the latter identified him as that *bhairava*.<sup>12</sup>

Who knows if the Master's vision of the Seven Sages was the very first intimation he received of Narendra's advent? We may imagine that some hint of the existence of such a disciple, and their future confrontation, may have entered the Master's awareness before this vision took place. But we have no record of such, only his own

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<sup>10</sup> G 348.

<sup>11</sup> G 282. 332; LP 611.

<sup>12</sup> *Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 400.

account of this vision, and indeed it is one of the most, if not the most, elaborately delineated of his superconscious experiences : ' One day in samādhi I saw that my mind, going up by a luminous path, went beyond the gross world studded with the sun, moon, and stars ; it entered first into the subtle world of ideas. The more it ascended to higher and higher strata of that realm, the more did I see beautiful ideal forms of gods and goddesses existing on both sides of the path. It came gradually to the end of that region. I saw that a fence made of light separated the realm of the divisible from that of the indivisible. Leaping over that fence, the mind entered by degrees the realm of the indivisible. No person or thing having a form existed there. As if afraid to enter there, even the *devas* and *devīs* possessing heavenly bodies exercised their authority over realms far below. But the very next moment I saw seven Rishis having bodies consisting of divine light only, seated there in samādhi. I felt that in virtue and knowledge, love and renunciation, they had excelled the gods and goddesses, not to speak of human beings. Astonished, I was pondering over their greatness when I saw before me that a part of the homogeneous mass of Light in this abode of the Indivisible, devoid of the slightest tinge of difference, became solidified and converted into the form of a divine Child. Coming to one of those Sages, and throwing its soft delicate arms around his neck, It embraced him, and then calling him with a voice sweeter than the music of the *vīṇā*, made great efforts to wake him from samādhi. The sage did wake up, and with half-shut eyes beheld the Child. I, seeing his bright expression full of delight, thought that the Child must be the treasure of his heart — that their familiarity was of eternity. The extraordinary

divine Child then expressed great joy and said to the sage, "I am going; you must come with me." The sage did not reply, but his loving eyes expressed his assent. Looking on the Child with eyes of love for some time, he entered again into samādhi. I was astonished to see that a part of the mind and body of that Rishi, converted into the form of a bright light, came down to earth along the luminous path. Hardly had I seen Narendra when I knew that he was that Rishi.'<sup>13</sup>

As many readers will know, Sri Ramakrishna later identified the divine Child as himself. With regard to the 'fear' of the gods to enter the realm of the formless and indivisible, this seems to be a characteristic reaction. We meet it again in another experience of the Master's, to be related next, where devotees belonging to one realm peep over a wall at the Formless and run away in fear. Note that in the above vision the mind of Ramakrishna himself leapt over the fence without ado; and this was his life-long characteristic. The vision of the Seven Sages offers numerous puzzles for those who like to ponder such things. How could the forms of the sages be seen in that formless realm? And how does a 'part' of the mind and body of a sage come down to earth? No doubt such questions will always baffle reason. The intuitive faculty seems a better one with which to dwell on divine visions; and we suspect that this particular vision will offer material for contemplation for many years to come.

The other vision of Narendra's advent of which we have record also has its own fascination. The Master first saw the Indivisible Satchidānanda. 'Inside It,' he says, 'I saw two groups with a fence between them. On

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<sup>13</sup> LP 740.

one side were Kedar, Chuni, and other devotees who believe in the Personal God. On the other side was a luminous space like a heap of red brick-dust. Inside it was seated Narendra, immersed in samādhi. Seeing him absorbed in meditation, I called aloud, "Oh, Narendra!" He opened his eyes a little. I came to realize that he had been born, in another form, in Simla in a *kāyastha*<sup>14</sup> family. At once I said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, entangle him in *māyā*; otherwise he will give up his body in samādhi." Kedar, a believer in the Personal God, peeped in and ran away with a shudder.<sup>15</sup> Here we have a truly odd situation: Sri Ramakrishna sees his future disciple in a form different from that which he took, yet in the vision he is able to call the boy by his given name.

The year 1881 arrived,<sup>16</sup> and with it the Master's beloved disciple Rakhal, who was to become his most intimate companion. In his vision of the advent of Narendranath, Sri Ramakrishna had assumed the form of a child. This time the child came to him. First he saw in vision a boy standing under the banyan tree in the temple grounds. A little later, in another vision, the Divine Mother appeared and placed upon his lap a little boy, saying, 'He is your son.' 'I started in terror to hear this,' Ramakrishna tells us, 'and said, "How is that? How can I have a son?"' The Mother smiled and explained, "He is not your son in the ordinary physical sense, but in a spiritual sense. He will be your all-renouncing son." I was consoled. Very soon Rakhal came, and I recognized him at once as that boy.'<sup>17</sup> The Master told M. that he

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<sup>14</sup> A caste of the Kshatriya group.

<sup>15</sup> G 831.

<sup>16</sup> According to some it was 1880.

<sup>17</sup> LP 715; *The Eternal Companion*, p. 11.

had once said to the Divine Mother, 'Certainly I shall not have any children, Mother. But it is my desire that a boy with sincere love for God should always remain with me. Give me such a boy'; that was why Rakhal had come. Again, moments before Rakhal Chandra was brought to Sri Ramakrishna by his relatives (who were devotees), the Master suddenly saw a lotus blooming with a hundred petals, on the bosom of the Ganges. 'Each of its petals shone with exquisite loveliness. On the lotus were two boys, dancing with anklets on their feet. One was Sri Krishna, the other this boy of the previous visions. Their dance was indescribably beautiful. Every movement they made seemed to splash foam, as it were, from an ocean of sweetness. Sri Ramakrishna was lost in ecstasy.'<sup>18</sup> Those familiar with the subsequent life of Swami Brahmānanda will remember that such a scene returned as a wonderful vision of his own, at the very close of his life, to remind him of the realm whence he came. It is to him that we owe the report of another of the Master's experiences. In *The Eternal Companion*<sup>19</sup> the Swami says that Sri Ramakrishna once told him, 'Once, while I was meditating in the temple, screen after screen of Māyā 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 into the Formless.'

Then came Narendra, and the familiar story of his first visit to the Master's room, where from his stock of two or three songs he sang at the latter's request, 'O mind,

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted from *The Eternal Companion*, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> 1944 edition, *Vedanta Society of So, Calif.*, p. 107.



let us go back to our own abode.' Sri Ramakrishna, seated probably on the small cot, was overwhelmed to hear him. 'He sang,' he says, 'as if in meditation, with the whole of his mind and heart. I could not control myself and was in *bhāvasamādhī*.' And for six months thereafter the Master was in that peculiar condition of anguish at separation from the beloved which only rare souls experience; 'as if wrung like a wet towel' is the way he described his heart when Narendra did not come to see him. Then again, like the child he was in spirit, he sometimes got angry at his beloved Naren's scepticism. One day in Jadu Mallick's garden house the boy said to him, 'The forms of God that you see are the fiction of your mind.' 'I was amazed,' Sri Ramakrishna says in telling the story, 'and I said to him, "But they speak, too!" Narendra answered, "Yes, one may think so." I went to the temple and wept before the Mother. "O Mother," I said, "What is this? Then is this all false? How could Narendra say that?" Instantly I had a revelation. I saw Consciousness — Indivisible Consciousness — and a divine being formed of that Consciousness. The divine Form said to me, "If your words are untrue, how is it that they tally with the facts?" Thereupon I said to Narendra, "You rogue! You created unbelief in my mind. Don't come here any more."'<sup>20</sup> Narendra was present in the room when Ramakrishna told this incident. It is one of the few visions in which the divine form is not identified.

Sometimes Naren would be embarrassed by Sri Ramakrishna's unsparing attention to him and his welfare, and would become worried about the effect of this on the Master himself. One day he reminded him, rather harshly,

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<sup>20</sup> G 772.

of King Bharata who became a deer in his next life by thinking so much of his pet deer, and warned the Master to be on his guard. This disturbed the Master's mind and he replied that if Naren was right, it was indeed a sorry matter, for he could not do without seeing him. In his worry he went again to the Mother, no doubt in the Kālī Temple, and shortly returned, beaming with delight. 'Get away, you rascal! I'll never listen to you again. Mother said to me, "You regard him as Nārāyana Himself (the Lord); this is why you love him. The day you do not see Nārāyana in him, you will not cast even a glance at him."' <sup>21</sup> We have this incident from Swami Vivekananda himself, who added that in this way the Master refuted all his objections against his extraordinary love.

There is a report by Swami Vivekananda of his conversation with Sri Ramakrishna during an early visit to the latter. The Master told him that he, Narendra, had come to him at night, wakened him and said, 'Here I am!' 'But,' said the Swami, 'I knew nothing of this; I was sound asleep in my Calcutta house.' <sup>22</sup>

In whatever way we may interpret the visions of Sri Ramakrishna, there was one who took them very seriously, and that one was Balaram Bose. From the conversations of the Holy Mother we learn that the Master saw this disciple in a vision wearing a turban on his head and with his hands folded, standing by the image of Kālī. When Balaram heard of it he never saluted the Master thereafter in any other way, such as by touching his feet. The guru understood the disciple's mind, and teasing him or testing him, once said to him, 'Balaram, my foot is

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<sup>21</sup> LP 761.

<sup>22</sup> G 985.

itching ; please massage it gently.' Balaram sent for one of the Master's attendants.<sup>23</sup> Sri Ramakrishna once saw Surendra in a vision as the child of the Divine Mother.<sup>24</sup> He probably had a number of other visions previewing his intimate disciples. He spoke of various of them as having come with the Lord before in His previous incarnations as Rama, Krishna, Jesus Christ ; but we have no definite details of these to enable us to add them to the record.

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<sup>23</sup> *Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 419.

<sup>24</sup> G 362.

## CHAPTER VII

### THROUGH THE INJURY TO HIS ARM

It was on February 26, 1882 that Mahendra Nath Gupta, or "M.", as he is affectionately known, first met Sri Ramakrishna when he came to the temple garden with a friend, both drawn by a fondness for gardens. It is, of course, to this "Boswell", as Aldous Huxley aptly calls him, with his daily notes of the fascinating conversations at Dakshineswar, that we owe the incomparable record which in English is called the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. On nearly every page of that book one can find descriptions of how the ecstasy and samādhi of Sri Ramakrishna appeared to others; and the reader is recommended to see such descriptions for comparison and the rounding out of that side of the picture. Our account of the subjective side of the visions recorded from this period begins with a simple remark of the Master's which shows us how he felt when an ecstatic mood was coming upon him.

He and M. are travelling in a carriage to pay a visit to Vidyāsāgar, the Calcutta scholar and philanthropist. M. points out to Ramakrishna the garden house where Rājā Rāmmohan Roy, founder of the Brahmo Samaj, had lived. With impatience the Master replies, "I don't care about such things now," and he goes into ecstasy. Sight-seeing was evidently no match for the call of the mind inward.

Probably it was about this time, when Sarada Devi was making her first extended stay at the temple garden, that Sri Ramakrishna had an experience which is most

attractive and full of significance for Western devotees. We quote from *Holy Mother*, the biography by Swami Nikhilananda : " One day at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna was absorbed in deep meditation when Sarada Devi entered the room. A slight noise made by her brought his mind down abruptly to the physical plane. The Master told her that a sudden disturbance of meditation might be injurious to him. Sarada Devi was distressed. In order to console her he said, 'Do you know what I was seeing when you came in? I felt I was in a far-off country where people were of fair complexion. They were different from us and spoke a language I could not understand. As I was wondering about the vision, the Divine Mother revealed to me that they would follow my teachings. How sincere their devotion was' ! " <sup>1</sup>

Ramakrishna's remark about the language of the fair people has some importance, for it sets the experience clearly apart from so many dreams and psychic experiences of various sorts in which the natural barriers of language often seem to be surmounted with phenomenal ease. This reminds us of another vision, the date of which is unknown, recorded in *Spiritual Talks*,<sup>2</sup> in the conversations of Swami Premananda. Ramlal enters the Math, and in the course of the conversation says, " One day he (Sri Ramakrishna) said to me ; ' Once I had a vision, in which I saw many dancing round the Divine Mother, clapping their hands and

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<sup>1</sup> p. 280. In her book *Days in an Indian Monastery* Sister Devamata relates this incident as she heard it from Lakshmi Devi, the Master's niece, who said she was also present on the occasion (if it was the same occasion). According to her version the Master had been in such deep samadhi that he looked lifeless and his feet were rubbed to bring him out. Also he had remarked, " It is a very beautiful country ; I think I shall go there." (p. 235).

<sup>2</sup> 1944 edition, Advaita Ashrama.

crying "Victory to Kālī", "Victory to Kālī!" and Rani Rasmani standing in the southwest corner of the room.<sup>3</sup> Among those dancing were Mathur, Sambhu, Balaram, Jaygopal Sen and others, also some white men and women whom I do not know yet."

On the last day of 1882, a Sunday, the Divine Mother appeared to the Master in a seamless ochre robe, and She also talked to him. But he does not tell us what She said.<sup>4</sup> It would be interesting to know in how many religious traditions the seamless robe is a feature in visions of God; there is of course the instance of Christ's appearing in a white seamless robe.

Visiting Sri Ramakrishna one day, the Brahmo devotee Amrita asked, "Sir, how do you feel in samādhi?" "I feel," he replied, "like a fish released from a pot into the water of the Ganga." "Don't you feel at that time even a trace of ego?" Amrita asked. "Yes, generally a little of it remains. However hard you may rub a grain of gold against a grind-stone, still a bit of it always remains. Or again, take the case of a big fire; the ego is like one of its sparks. In samādhi I lose outer consciousness completely, but God generally keeps a little trace of ego in me for the enjoyment of divine communion. Enjoyment is possible only when 'I' and 'you' remain. Again, sometimes God effaces even that trace of 'I'. Then one experiences *jaḍa* samādhi or *nirvikalpa* samādhi. But what remains when God completely effaces the ego cannot be described in words. I get into even that state now and then. A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean, but before it had gone far into the water it dissolved. It became

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<sup>3</sup> Probably his own.

<sup>4</sup> G 175.

entirely one with the water of the ocean. Then who was to come back and tell the ocean's depth?"<sup>5</sup> We do know that one day the Divine Mother showed him in vision an ocean. The Master, taking the form of a salt doll, was about to measure its depth. But, "While doing this," he says, "through the grace of the guru I was turned to stone. Then I saw a ship and at once got into it. The helmsman was the guru."<sup>6</sup> What we do not know is whether the vision came first and furnished the illustration of the salt doll which he used again and again; or he heard or invented the illustration and through dwelling on it, received the vision. This would be interesting to know. And how fascinating it is that the guru in this vision rescued him, so to speak, from dissolving in the Absolute! Which guru did he see? Was it Totāpuri? The Brāhmaṇī? Perhaps it was no historical personage, for Ramakrishna goes on to say to M.: "I hope you pray every day to Satchidānanda who is the Guru." Perhaps, as happens often in dreams, he saw a generalized figure whom he understood to be "the Guru" without specific identification. But the vision is not yet finished: "Then I say that 'I' and 'you' were two different things. Again I jumped into the ocean, and was changed into a fish. I found myself swimming joyfully in the Ocean of Satchidānanda . . . These are all deep mysteries," the Master concludes.

Another Sunday, which was naturally a favourite day for visitors, this time in April of 1883, Sri Ramakrishna had gone into deep samādhi when his nephew Ramlal had sung for him a song of the gopis of Brindavan, celebrating their beloved Krishna. Tears of joy flowed from the eyes of

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<sup>5</sup> G 196, 346, 197.

<sup>6</sup> G 376.

the Master's motionless face, and fell upon the folded hands. After a long time, when his mind came down he began to mumble something, words which were scarcely audible to his visitors ; something like : " Thou art I, and I am Thou — Thou eatest — I eat ! . . . . What is this confusion Thou hast created ? " Aloud he said, " I see everything like a man with jaundiced eyes ! I see Thee alone everywhere. O Krishna, Friend of the lowly ! O Eternal Consort of my soul ! O Govinda ! " At these words he again went into samādhi, plunging the room into silence.<sup>7</sup>

We have seen that when Sri Ramakrishna was warned by Narendra that his head might be turned by thinking of him too much, the Master went to the Divine Mother and returned with a devastating reply. There was one Pratāp Hazra living at that time in the temple compound, a kind of hanger-on who bulged with half-digested spiritual ideas and practices. He too used to taunt Ramakrishna with this thought, that in dwelling on the youngsters he might forget God. One day, while riding to Balaram's house in a carriage, the Master became much worried and agitated about it. Immediately the Divine Mother revealed to him in a flash that it is She Herself who has become man. But, She reminded him, She manifests Herself most clearly through pure souls, such as these youngsters were. At this he went into samādhi. Afterwards, feeling angry with Hazra for the misery he had experienced, he thought to himself, " Why should I blame the poor man ? How is he to know ? " <sup>8</sup>

He said in many ways on many occasions that it is God Himself who has become this universe with all its

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<sup>7</sup> G 207.

<sup>8</sup> G 230.



beings, animate and inanimate, and as we shall see it became month by month a more and more patent fact to his ordinary consciousness that it is in man that the Mother is displaying Her most splendid sport. This is particularly well illustrated by his visions of "Consciousness". Some of these have already been told, such as the vision on the meadow near Burdwan, where he found everything — even the ants — filled with Consciousness, and the day when he injured the bark of a tree and found the tree full of Consciousness ; and of course the reader will remember the Master's early vision of Divine Mother in which he was overcome by "an Ocean of Consciousness". There were many others. One day under the banyan-tree he had a vision of non-dual, indivisible Consciousness, and of this substance he saw that innumerable men, animals, and other creatures had been made, and among them aristocrats, the English, the Muslims, himself, scavengers, and dogs. An odd assortment indeed ! Then he saw one Mussalman with a long beard who came to him with rice on an earthen plate. After feeding some other Muslims he gave Sri Ramakrishna a few grains too. It is interesting that in vision the Master would take food first offered to others — and non-Hindus, at that — a thing he almost never did in the sense-plane. He said that the Divine Mother was here showing him that there exists only One, and not two ; that it is Satchidānanda alone that has become the world and its living beings, and food as well.<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, he once saw rice, vegetables and other foods, filth, and dirt lying around him. Suddenly "the soul" came out of his body and, like a flame, touched everything. "It was like a protruding tongue of fire and tasted everything once,

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<sup>9</sup> G 282 ; 746.

even the excreta. It was revealed to me," said the Master, "that all these are one Substance, the non-dual and indivisible Consciousness."<sup>10</sup> He once told the book-learned Mahima Chakravorthy : "It has been revealed to me that there exists an Ocean of Consciousness without limit. From It come all things of the relative plane, and in It they merge again. Millions of Brahmāṇḍas (lit., eggs of Brahmā, the Creator) rise in that Chidākāśa and merge in it again. All this has been revealed to me ; I don't know much about what your books say."<sup>11</sup> (Some see in this a reference to the appearance and disappearance of the distant galaxies of astronomical observation.)

There were other revelations. To the usual explanation of AUM he added the sound of a gong — t-o-m, and said it was the merging of the Līlā in the Nitya, the gross, the subtle, and the causal merging in the Great Cause ; waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, in Turiya. The striking of the gong, he said, is like the falling of a heavy weight into a big ocean. Waves begin to rise : the Relative rises from the Absolute ; the causal, subtle, and gross bodies appear out of the Great Cause ; from Turiya emerge the states of deep sleep, dream and waking. These waves arising from the Great Ocean merge again in It. From the Absolute to the Relative, and vice versa. "I have clearly perceived all these things," said he. That day he told the devotees about his visit to the venerable Devendranath Tagore. Their relationship had been amusing, but also profitable. When asked to say something about God, Tagore had said, "This universe is like a chandelier and each living being is a light in it." Sri Ramakrishna confides to the devotees :

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<sup>10</sup> G 282.

<sup>11</sup> G 653.

"Once, meditating in the Panchavati, I too had a vision like that. I found his words agreed with my vision, and I thought he must be a very great man." <sup>12</sup>

Some of the Master's depictions of how God is seen as Consciousness are very graphic. "The universe is conscious," he told M., "on account of the Consciousness of God. Sometimes I find that this Consciousness wriggles about, as it were, even in small fish. Sometimes I find that the universe is saturated with It, as the earth is soaked with water in the rainy season." <sup>13</sup> "One day I was about to gather some flowers. They were everywhere on the trees. At once I had a vision of Virāṭ <sup>14</sup>; it appeared that His worship was just over. The flowers looked like a bouquet placed on the head of the Deity. I could not pick them. God sports through man as well. I see man as the embodiment of Narayana." And some of his observations are downright earthy: "I have seen with my own eyes that God dwells even in the sexual organ. I saw Him once in the sexual intercourse of a dog and a bitch." <sup>15</sup> Another day he said that the Divine Mother had showed him Siva and Śaktī in communion: "Everywhere I saw the communion of Śiva and Śaktī, in all living things,—men, animals, trees, plants. I saw Them in the communion of all male and female elements. Another day I was shown a heap of heads, <sup>16</sup> mountain-high. Nothing else existed, and I was seated alone in their midst." <sup>17</sup>

In other words, to Sri Ramakrishna in his maturity there was no place where God was not. Once, while coming from

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<sup>12</sup> G 650.

<sup>13</sup> G 260.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter IV, where this vision has already been discussed.

<sup>15</sup> G 260.

<sup>16</sup> Did he mean skulls? This vision's meaning is not elucidated.

<sup>17</sup> G 376.

the pine-grove to the Panchavati he was followed by a dog (dogs being regarded by the Hindus as most unclean). He stood still for a while ; the thought had come to his mind that the Divine Mother might say something to him through that dog. During his Tantric *sādhana* he sometimes rode on a dog and fed it, taking part of the food himself. In this way, he said, he realized that the whole world was filled with God alone.

To resume our narrative, the Master on November 28, 1883, paid a final visit to Keshab Sen, at the Lily Cottage in Calcutta where the latter was living out his last days under a racking illness. This scene and its dialogue form one of the most intense and memorable chapters of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The Master was in a highly ecstatic and abstracted mood, and no sooner had he seated himself on the stuffed couch in the aristocratically appointed drawing-room, than he lost external consciousness and spoke to someone unseen : “ Hello, Mother ! I see that You too have come. How You are showing off in Your Banaras sārī ! Don’t bother me now, please. Sit down and be quiet.”<sup>18</sup> A madman indeed ! Who but Mother’s own child could talk to Her like this ? A Banaras sārī is one of the finest of the clothes of Indian ladies ; possibly his symbol-loving mind was making an oblique reference to the sumptuous finery of the drawing-room.

A couple of weeks later he said to M. that he had a vision, while listening, to the kīrtan, of Rakhal in the midst of Sri Krishna’s companions in Brindavan.<sup>19</sup> This appears to be an additional vision to those already recorded about Rakhal, and we can presume that the kīrtan to which

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<sup>18</sup> G 319.

<sup>19</sup> G 331.

he refers was sung shortly before he makes mention of it. Within a year Rakhal went off to Brindavan for a visit, and lived there for some days.

Late in January of 1884 there occurred an event in Sri Ramakrishna's life which caused him great pain, physically, and also set him to speculating about its cause and his own spiritual condition. He had been walking toward the pine-grove, alone. Overwhelmed suddenly with ecstasy he went from the path up to the railing which overlooked the Ganges bulk-head and there he fell down, dislocating a bone in his left arm. Splints and bandage were required, and it entailed considerable pain for him, when he was not lost in samādhi or otherwise oblivious of the body. Details about what the Master was seeing at the time of the accident are scarce indeed. Evidently he saw Sri Krishna as his Beloved, standing near the railing. Later he confided to M. : "I want to tell you something very secret. Why do I love boys like Purna and Narendra so much? Once, in a spiritual mood, I felt intense love for Jagannāth (Sri Krishna), love such as a woman feels for her sweetheart. In that mood I was about to embrace Him, when I broke my arm. It was then revealed to me : 'You have assumed this human body. Therefore establish with human beings the relationship of friend, father, mother, or son.'"<sup>20</sup> Shortly after this injury he said petulantly to the Divine Mother, "Mother, it hurts me very much." She then gave him the vision of a carriage and its driver. Here and there a few of the carriage's screws were loose. It moved as the driver directed it. It had no power of its own.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> G 810.

<sup>21</sup> G 397.

The above admonition about his spiritual relationships is not the only lesson Sri Ramakrishna felt he had learned from the accident. We shall want to look at some of his other observations about it. At the end of February he said to M. : "Since my arm was injured a deep change has come over me. I now delight only in the *Naralīlā*, the human manifestation of God. *Nitya* and *Līlā*. The *Nitya* is the Indivisible *Satchidānanda*, and the *Līlā*, or Sport, takes various forms, for example the *Līlā* as God, the *Līlā* as the deities, as man, and as the universe." In March he told the devotees again that his nature was changing on account of the arm injury. "It is being revealed to me that there is a greater manifestation of God in man than in other created beings. God is telling me, as it were, 'I dwell in men. Be merry with men.' Among men God manifests Himself in a still greater degree in pure-souled devotees. That is why I feel great longing for Narendra, Rakhal, and other such youngsters." And again the following month : "I find a change coming over me. Years ago *Vaishnavacharan* (one of the *pandit sādhakas* with whom he had a warm relationship) said to me, 'One attains Perfect Knowledge when one sees God in man.' I wouldn't admit it then. Now I see that it is God alone who is moving about in various forms : as a holy man, as a cheat, as a villain." A month later, in May, he made similar remarks and in a mood of confidence told Adhar, M., and others that now-a-days he was not seeing the Spirit-form of God ; that although it was his nature to see God's form, to touch and embrace Him, God was revealing Himself now through man.

But we must not take these statements too literally. Sri Ramakrishna had long ago seen God in man, had many times discovered the presence of the Divine Mother in

everything in the universe. This experience was not something just born in the forty-eighth year of his life. Nor does it mean that vision and *bhāvasamādhi* were over; many visions were yet to come, right up to the last day of his life. The Master often taught that "once a devotee, always a devotee"; and this rule, at least, applied to him as well. The form of the Mother was not about to leave this child. Nor does it mean that he was no longer inclined to plunge into the Absolute, the Nitya, as he liked to call it, or the Akhaṇḍa Satchidānanda. The impulsion to the *nirvikalpa* plane too, was with him always, and as readers of his life know, this tendency was even more prevalent toward the end.

Sri Ramakrishna gave another explanation of the injury to his arm, some months after the event. "Please tell me one thing," he said to M., "What is the significance of my having hurt my arm? Once my teeth were broken while I was in a state of ecstasy. It is the arm this time." M. remained silent, as he often did on such occasions, waiting for the Master to speak again. The answer was provided. "My arm was broken in order to destroy my ego to its very root. Now I cannot find my ego within myself any more. When I search for it I see God alone." Yet, so long as life remained, and when the arm had healed, those features of his make-up which he used to call "ego" still manifested themselves to others and kept him in the human framework. But even this was none of his own doing, as the following conversation of August of that year clearly shows. The Master had been talking about what it means to be *sahaja*, "simple". As if to illustrate it perfectly he asks M., "Have I any ego?" "Yes, sir, a little," says M. "You have kept it to preserve your body, and to enjoy divine love in the company of the devotees

and impart spiritual knowledge to them. Further, you have kept this trace of ego by praying to the Divine Mother for it." "No," Sri Ramakrishna at once corrects him, "I have not kept it. It is God Himself who has left it in me. It is God who does all these things. I do not know anything."

So we see that in the Master's last years three kinds of changes are spoken of and are manifested : the increasing prevalence of *samādhis* of the *nirvikalpa* type ; his tendency to see the Divine more in the human plane than in the visionary, more in the gross than in the subtle ; and, the attenuation of his ego. Are these three separate processes, concurrent but unrelated ? Or are they aspects of the same general trend ? Is there any unifying principle under which we can more easily understand what was taking place ? A clue may perhaps be found in another of Sri Ramakrishna's favourite teachings. He was fond of calling himself a *vijñāni*. That is to say, a *bhakta* is one who worships a Personal God, usually with form ; a *jñāni* seeks the knowledge of Truth — Formless and Impersonal, and often considers himself the more advanced aspirant. But he, the Master used to say, was a *vijñāni*, one who had gone beyond ignorance and knowledge — even the experiential knowledge that God exists — to an intimate acquaintance with Him. It was like the difference between seeing milk and actually drinking and assimilating it. He told his devotees that his "final and most mature opinion" was that a man should reach the Absolute by following the trail of the Relative, like reaching the roof by the stairs. After realizing the Absolute, he should climb down to the Relative, and realizing that the stairs are made of the same material as the roof, should live on that plane in the company of devotees, charging his mind with the love of God. He further said that for a man in this condition



whatever ego remains is a "ripe ego", an ego of knowledge or devotion, but not of ignorance.

Does Sri Ramakrishna fit his own illustration? Can one say that these tendencies of the Master's latter days exemplify a kind of descent down the stairs, to an increasing awareness of the all-pervading Brahman? Our conclusion is that the attempts of language and illustration to sort and classify are baffled in the case of so complex a nature as Sri Ramakrishna's; that if on the one hand his mind seemed to be soaring toward the Formless, it was also in another sense drawn increasingly to the world of forms; if his "ego" (by which we recognize his endearing human traits) seemed to be with him to the end, it was also, by his own testimony, being obliterated, (or "ripened", if we like). M. once gave expression to this idea in a beautiful way. He told Ramakrishna, "God made other men by machine, as it were; you He has made with His own hands." The Master laughed.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FAREWELL TO DAKSHINESWAR

WE are discussing the period of his life when Sri Ramakrishna did his active teaching. Some of his visions appear to have come to him at moments when he found it desirable to illustrate for someone a teaching he wished to put across. For example, he said that once when he was explaining God's actions to someone, God suddenly showed him the lake at Kāmārpukur, which is called Hāldārpukur. A low-caste villager was removing the green sedge and drawing the water. Now and then the man took up the water in his palm and examined it. It was clear as crystal. In that vision, he said, it was revealed to him that the water of Satchidānanda is covered with the sedge of māyā, and cannot be seen without pushing aside the sedge. So one cannot develop love of God nor obtain His vision without work. Work meant meditation, Japa, charity, sacrifice, etc.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vision, the wind was pushing aside the sedge.<sup>2</sup> Then there was the question posed by the Sikh soldiers. Some of these soldiers who guarded the Government powder magazine north of the temple garden were fond of the Master and liked to visit with him. One day they asked, 'How should a man live in the world if he wants to realize God?' 'What I immediately saw before my eyes,' he tells us, 'was a picture of a husking machine. Paddy (rice in the hull) was being husked and

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<sup>1</sup> G 260; 645.

<sup>2</sup> G 831.

one person was very carefully pushing it into the hole where the husking pedal was falling. As soon as I saw it I knew that Mother was explaining to me that one should live in the world as cautiously as that. Just as the person who sits near the hole is always careful that the pedal does not fall on his hand, so a man engaged in worldly activities should always beware that he does not get entangled in them, conscious that the worldly affairs are not his. Only then can he escape bondage without being hurt and destroyed. As soon as I saw the picture of the husking machine, Mother produced this idea in my mind, and that is what I told them. They were pleased to hear it. Such pictures come before me when I talk to people.’<sup>3</sup> Now some may feel that such ‘pictures’ are not different from the images or ideas which come to anyone’s mind, and scarcely deserve to be called visions. Perhaps the chief difference is that in our case we first get an idea and then grope for an illustration; whereas to Ramakrishna the illustration was immediately supplied, and then its application became apparent.

He posted no sign. Those who knew the holy man who lived at the temple garden brought their friends and relatives, and thus the circle of the Master’s disciples was gradually filled in. He came to distinguish an outer circle of those who would profit by his teaching and association, and an inner circle of those whom he recognized as his very own. Sometimes he would give a start at the sight of someone who had arrived, knowing him to be an intimate of his inner circle. One day in February of 1884, telling a devotee that it was God Himself who was sporting in the form of man, he said : ‘Now and then man catches

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<sup>3</sup> LP 707.

a glimpse of his real Self and becomes speechless with wonder. At such times he swims in an ocean of joy. It is like suddenly meeting a dear relative. The other day I was coming here in a carriage. I felt like that at the sight of Bāburām.' These were the days of young Bāburām's initiation into the charmed circle. The following June the Master had a revelation of the exact nature of this disciple, who became Swami Premānanda. He saw Bāburām as a goddess with a necklace around her neck, surrounded by women companions; some days later Divine Mother told him that the boy would have the highest knowledge rather than visions.<sup>4</sup> About the disciples Sarat and Śashi we know that he saw in a vision that they had been among the followers of Christ.<sup>5</sup> No further details are known.

The handsome and stalwart Niranjana had accepted an office job in order to support his mother. Ordinarily Sri Ramakrishna could not bear to know that one of his free and happy youngsters had taken a job in the world. But in this case he came to know in an ecstatic mood that Niranjana 'would not be stained' (his name means 'stainless') by having done so. The Master also saw him 'seated on a light'.<sup>6</sup>

Mention has been made of Ramakrishna's vision of the suppliers of his needs, and it was noted that not all of these had been identified. Many think that Balarām Bose must have been one of these, and some weight may be added to this opinion by the fact that the Master one evening said that in a vision he had seen that the houses of Adhar, Balaram, and Surendra were places for the for-

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<sup>4</sup> G 393 ; 458 ; 488.

<sup>5</sup> G 934.

<sup>6</sup> G 458 ; 810.

gathering of the spiritual clan now forming.<sup>7</sup> Most fortunate were those devotees in whose homes Sri Ramakrishna visited ; they could not have numbered a dozen, even before his serious illness, when he was fairly able to move about. Often he would take special pains to make a separate, short visit with the ladies of the household, who might otherwise be deprived of his conversation. In only two or three of these homes did he ever spend the night, perhaps less. In telling of his exhausting illnesses the Master said that he had prayed to the Divine Mother to keep his body together a little, like a mounted skeleton, so that he might sing the glories of God and enjoy the company of the devotees. ' But She did not give me the power to walk,' he added.

In view of this it is rather remarkable that we find him going about as much as he did—to the festival at Pāṇihāṭī, different parts of Calcutta, the Star Theatre — going most of the way in a conveyance, to be sure. He could see divinity where others would least expect it. Riding in a carriage he might suddenly give his companion heart failure by leaning off the running-board to salute a drunkard in the tavern. All joy, too, came from Mother ; whatever form that joy might take, he saw its Source, and Her alone. Some time during the Calcutta years he visited the house of one of the branches of the Mallick family, whose cherished deity was *Simhavāhinī*, a form of Durga. Owing to the poverty of this family the house was in a very dilapidated condition, with crumbling walls and floors spotted with moss. Perhaps even the shrine was not very clean. ' Nevertheless,' said Ramakrishna, ' in that dilapidated house I saw the face of the Goddess radiating a divine light. One must believe in

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<sup>7</sup> G 460.

the Divine Presence in the image.’<sup>8</sup> Again, somebody once said to him, referring to a certain place, ‘Nobody sings the name of God there. It has no holy atmosphere.’ No sooner had this person so spoken than Sri Ramakrishna perceived directly that it was God alone who had become all living beings. They appeared, he said, as countless bubbles or reflections in the Ocean of Satchidānanda.<sup>9</sup>

During the period under review the Master one day made some revealing remarks about his own methods of meditation. He was talking to Vijay Goswami, a Brahmo leader, while on a visit to a Brahmo Samaj temple. ‘There was a time,’ he said, ‘when I too would meditate on God with my eyes closed (as the Brahmos did). Then I said to myself : “Does God exist only when I think of Him with my eyes closed? Doesn’t He exist when I look around with my eyes open?” Now when I look around with open eyes I see that God dwells in all beings. He is the Indwelling Spirit of all — men, animals, and other living beings, trees, plants, sun and moon, land and water.’<sup>10</sup> And let us hear a further confession : ‘One day as I was meditating, my mind wandered away to Rāshke’s house. He is a scavenger. I said to my mind, “Stay there, you rogue!” The Divine Mother revealed to me that the men and women in this house were mere masks ; inside them was the same Divine Power, Kuṇḍalinī, that rises up through the six spiritual centres of the body.’<sup>11</sup>

In September of 1884 Sri Ramakrishna was much occupied with the spiritual welfare of the devotees. In the

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<sup>8</sup> G 275.

<sup>9</sup> G 357.

<sup>10</sup> G 561.

<sup>11</sup> G 291.

previous month Rakhal had gone to Brindavan with Balaram. This change, induced by Rakhal's poor health at the moment, was foreseen by the Master in vision. He did not give its details but indicated that the Divine Mother had hinted She might remove the boy. He prayed : 'Mother, he is a mere boy, what does he know ? ; that is why he sometimes feels piqued. If for the sake of Thy work, Thou removest him from here for a while, please keep him in a good place and in a blissful mood.' Kālī Pūjā fell that year on the balmy evening of October 18th. The scene in the Master's room was bewitching indeed. Midnight approached. The worship was about to begin. Sri Ramakrishna was standing in the middle of his room with Bāburām at his side. Happening to touch the disciple's body he suddenly went into samādhi. His arm was resting on Bāburām's neck. When the ecstasy passed, still standing, he appeared to be brooding on something. Then smilingly he announced to the assembled devotees the content of what he had just experienced, a thing he rarely did.

'I saw everything,' he said, '— how far the devotees had advanced. I saw Rakhal, him (pointing to M.), Surendra, Bāburām, and many others.'

Hazra : 'Me ?'

Master : 'Yes.'

Hazra : 'Many more obstacles ?'

Master : 'No.'

Hazra : 'What about Narendra ?'

Master : 'I didn't see him. But I can tell about him. He is a little entangled. But I saw that everyone will succeed. I saw that all are in hiding.....But I got into that mood by touching Bāburām.'<sup>12</sup>

Narendra may not have figured in this vision, but he was very much on Sri Ramakrishna's mind. His father had died suddenly, and because of legal difficulties his mother, brothers, and sisters were now much dependent on him for their subsistence. So anxious was the Master for Naren's welfare and peace of mind that he somehow actually persuaded himself to pray to the Divine Mother to give Narendra some money. The time, place, and other content we do not know, for Narendra himself reports only what Ramakrishna had told him of the Mother's answer: 'He will get simple food and clothing. He will eat rice and dal.'<sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> Moreover, although Naren might be 'in hiding' just now, the Master knew what to expect of him. Several years earlier, when seated in his room with Keshab Sen, Vijay Goswami, and other Brahmo leaders, Narendra also being present, he had had a glimpse of the latter's future greatness. After the meeting he had told some of the devotees, 'Well, if Keshab is possessed of one mark of greatness which has made him famous, Naren has eighteen such marks. In Keshab and Vijay I saw the light of knowledge burning like a candle-flame, but in Narendra it was like a blazing sun, dispelling the last vestige of ignorance and delusion.'<sup>15</sup>

'I see Rama in everything,' the Master said one Sunday afternoon to many devotees who were gathered around him, seated on the floor, watching this happy child of God. He was standing in their midst, with face radiant but pensive. 'You are all sitting here, but I see only Rama in every one of you.' This was the 'eyes open'

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<sup>13</sup> A thick soup made of legumes, used as a gravy.

<sup>14</sup> G 987.

<sup>15</sup> *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 6th ed., p. 58.



mood. In a different mood, mind utterly withdrawn, he continued to see the eternal forms of God, and occasionally these erupted into the plane of sense-consciousness. Such an event occurred in February or March of 1885. Apparently with normal consciousness he saw 'Satchidānanda' come out of his own body and heard It say, 'I incarnate Myself in every age.' 'I thought that I myself was saying these words out of mere fancy,' he confided to M. 'I kept quiet and watched. Again Satchidānanda Itself spoke, saying, "Caitanya too, worshipped Śakti."'<sup>16</sup> This is certainly peculiar language to us ; it is an experience well worth our study. What form, exactly, does Satchidānanda take, when one sees It externally ? How interesting is the fact that as this vision came upon him Sri Ramakrishna himself thought it a kind of day-dream ; then the experience asserted its true nature ! Further, there is new information. So far as we know, this particular assertion about Sri Caitanya has not been made before.

Another instance : a devotee whom he called 'Tārak of Belghāriā' was taking leave of him at Dakshineswar to return home. Ramakrishna noticed a 'flame-like thing' come out of his own body and follow the disciple. A few days later when Tārak returned, the Master went into samādhi. Then, in his own words, 'He who dwells in this body placed His foot on Tārak's chest.'<sup>17</sup> (Sometimes when in *bhāvasamādhi* the Master would touch with his foot the body of certain persons who were present. Coming to know of it afterward he would sometimes apologize, while the person himself might feel quite blessed. He used

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<sup>16</sup> G 720.

<sup>17</sup> G 798.

to say that such persons must be quite pure, to have elicited this phenomenon.)

Sri Ramakrishna often said that with the coming in 1885 of the boy Pūrṇa (whose name means 'full' or 'complete') the inner circle of his disciples was complete. Swami Saradananda heard him say that this was not a personal judgment: Divine Mother had said, 'Now those of whom you have had vision have arrived. No more will anyone of this class come.' To a group of these disciples he said, 'Mother showed you all to me and said, "All these are your devotees of the inner circle." Wonderful is the vision and wonderful is its fulfilment.'<sup>18</sup> The Master was extremely fond of this youngest child and told M. that in Pūrṇa he had 'reached the post'.

He had been hoping and praying for a long time that his beloved Naren would come to believe in the reality and saving power of his own Ideal, his beloved Divine Mother Kālī. At last this too came about. Narendra's mind turned a corner. Battered more by family circumstances and the falseness of 'friends', than by any argument, he had reached a crisis and was ready to open his heart to the more intimate influence which the Master was able to invoke. There followed the dramatic scene in the Kālī Temple wherein Narendra, in his prayer for highest knowledge and devotion, acknowledged the super-eminent authority of Kālī, God's Power, over his life. Our concern is with the event of the following day, in June or July of that year, in which Sri Ramakrishna dramatically expressed his reaction to the new situation. Fortunately we have the account of an eye-witness. The Master had been taking an afternoon nap, and awoke at about 4 p.m.

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<sup>18</sup> LP 611.

to find Narendra sitting before him. The latter apparently had the idea of saluting him and returning to Calcutta. But the Master went into *bhāvasamādhi* as soon as he saw the boy, and sitting almost on his lap, said, 'What I see is that this (his own body) am I, and this (Narendra's body) too am I. Truly, I see no difference. Just as the water of the Ganga seems to be divided when a stick is placed upon it, but actually there is no division ; it is one mass of water. So it is here. Do you understand ? What else exists but Mother ? What do you say ?' Then suddenly he said, 'I will have a smoke.' A smoke was hurriedly prepared, and the hookah given to him. After a puff or two he abandoned the hookah, and said, 'I will smoke with the bowl directly,' and taking it in his hands began smoking. (In this case one draws through the cupped hands). Smoking three or four puffs he held it near Narendra's mouth and said, 'Just have a puff, a puff through my hands.' Narendra shrank from this, at which the Master said, 'What ignorance ! Are you and I different ? This am I, that also am I.' So saying, he held both his hands again in front of Narendra's mouth with a view to make him smoke. Thus compelled Narendra smoked two or three puffs through the Master's hands and then stopped. Seeing this, the Master himself was about to smoke again. Narendra said hurriedly, 'Sir, wash your hands and then smoke.'<sup>19</sup> But the Master paid no heed. He said, 'You rascal, you are awfully conscious of differences,' and smoked with his hands which had been touched by Narendra's lips, and

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<sup>19</sup> In India the defilement of a thing by touching it to the lips is taken very seriously. Ramakrishna in his normal mood was especially particular about it.

spoke many more things in that mood — unrecorded, alas ! <sup>20</sup>

Just a few days later Sri Ramakrishna told M. some things about his own condition which are not only important for our record, but which also illustrate once again the degree of autonomy to be found in the visions of a mystic. No disciple of the Master's could be compared with him as a recipient of the grace of divine visions, unless it was the Brahmin widow, Gopaler Ma, to whom he here refers : 'God reveals Himself in many ways : sometimes as man, sometimes in other divine forms made of Spirit. One must believe in divine forms. The Brāhmaṇī of Kāmārhāti sees many visions. She lives all by herself in a lonely room in a garden on the bank of the Gangā. She spends her time in *japa*. Gopāla (Baby Krishna) sleeps with her.' (The Master gives a start.) 'It is not imagination, but fact ! She saw that Gopala's palms were red. He walks with her. She suckles Him at her breast. They talk to each other. When Narendra heard the story he wept. Formerly I too used to see many visions, but now in my ecstatic state I don't see so many. I am gradually getting over my feminine nature ; I feel nowadays more like a man. Therefore I control my emotion ; I don't manifest it outwardly so much.' <sup>21</sup>

The very next day, however, he did have a vision, in the house of Balarām Bose, where he was staying for the celebration of the Car Festival. Describing the vision of God for the devotees, Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi, in which he remained for a long time. Regaining outer consciousness, he said to M., 'What do you think I saw ?

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<sup>20</sup> LP 814.

<sup>21</sup> G 798.

I saw the whole universe as a *śālagrām*,<sup>22</sup> and in it I saw your two eyes.' In silent wonder, M. says, they listened to these words.<sup>23</sup>

It is not known on just which day Sri Ramakrishna felt the first invasion of the pain in his throat. It was already inflamed when M. noted in his diary of June 13, 1885, that he had arrived at Dakshineswar to find the Master suffering from this and from the extreme heat. The course of this disease, later diagnosed as cancer, and proving fatal, is well-known to readers of Ramakrishna's life. Most of the notable doctors were called in at one time or another, and some treatments seemed to benefit, most did not. Things went on in this way for about three months. One day in August the Holy Mother wept to find him observing silence from eight o'clock in the morning. Devotees who arrived also began weeping, thinking he might never speak again. When he did, in the afternoon, there was great relief on all sides. Sri Ramakrishna had not been preoccupied with his own illness; he told the devotees what had been revealed to him during his silence: the Divine Mother had shown him the eternal truth that She alone is real and all else is the splendour of Her Māyā. And she had told him again how far the various devotees had progressed, particularly Nityagopāl, Rakhal Nārāyan, Pūrṇa, and Mahima Chakravarty.<sup>24</sup>

Now the devotees' loving concern made them consider alternative arrangements for the Master's care, the need for which was increasing daily. This was particularly

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<sup>22</sup> A small round flat stone with a hole in it, a natural formation in some river beds. It is widely used by Hindus as a symbol of the Deity.

<sup>23</sup> G 803.

<sup>24</sup> G 834.

difficult to manage at Dakshineswar, four miles from Calcutta, where too, the proprietorship of the temple garden had passed into hands which, while respectful, were not actively solicitous of his welfare. Only the Holy Mother, living in the *nahabat*, had constant watch over him, his diet and his medicine, and even she was often prevented from this by circumstances. So it was decided that by pooling their resources some of the older devotees should rent a Calcutta house for the treatment and nursing of the Master, his daily care to be shared by turns among the young men. Without the importunity of these circumstances it is doubtful that Ramakrishna could have been persuaded to leave the Kālībārī, the temple compound which his own *sādhana* had made so vibrant. But this he did at the end of September.

## CHAPTER IX

### FROM SYAMPUKUR TO THE CLOSE

THE home of Balaram Bose sheltered Sri Ramakrishna in Calcutta until a suitable house was found for rent. Balaram's home and family were blessed by the association and that of the Master's great disciples in succeeding years, and have served the Ramakrishna Math and Mission even to this day. Soon the devotees found a spacious house on the north side of Syampukur Street in northern Calcutta. To a large room upstairs in this house Sri Ramakrishna was now moved, and it is here that he experienced the visions we have next to relate.

The time of the autumn festival of the Divine Mother had arrived, the Durgā Pūjā, celebrated with great joy especially in Bengal. At the house of Surendranath Mitra, a disciple of the Master much devoted to the Devī, the three-day worship had been arranged with great care and loving anticipation. Alas, the beloved guru was ill and could not attend the worship in person. However, in the latter's room on the third evening of the worship another kind of festivity was going on. Many people had gathered there, among them Dr. Mahendra Sarkar who now had charge of the treatment of Sri Ramakrishna's throat. Songs sung by Narendra had created a holy atmosphere felt by all, and Sri Ramakrishna was repeatedly experiencing *bhāva-samādhi*. At about 7-30 p.m. he stood up to bid goodbye to the doctor, who was leaving, when he fell into deep *samādhi*. Some whispered that this was due to the auspiciousness of the hour, a point in the Durgā Pūja

which was especially sacred. Dr. Sarkar sat down again to witness the scene. After about half an hour had passed Sri Ramakrishna returned to the sense plane and revealed the fact that he had in vision visited the worship at Surendra's house. "I saw a luminous path connecting this place and Surendra's house. I found that through Surendra's devotion the Mother was manifest in the image — Her third eye shooting forth a divine light. The usual series of lamps was burning in front. And Surendra, sitting in the courtyard, was weeping bitterly before the Mother." The Master added: "You had better go there. He will be comforted to see you." Narendra, ever the rationalist and sceptic, then went with other devotees to Surendra's house, and found the details to be as described.<sup>1</sup>

M., in his Gospel, notes the events of the following day, which is called Vijayā Day, on which the image of the Divine Mother is immersed in the river. Surendra, who had been taking very much to heart the melancholy of the Mother's departure, arrived at the Syampukur house for consolation. "Yesterday evening at seven or seven-thirty," Sri Ramakrishna informed him, "I saw your worship hall in a vision. I saw the divine image full of effulgence. This place and your hall were joined by a stream of light flowing between them." Surendra replied: "At that time I was crying to the Mother in the worship hall. My elder brothers had gone upstairs. I thought the Mother said, 'I will come again.'" No more about the incident is reported here. In Sister Devamata's book, *Sri Ramakrishna*, Swami Ramakrishnānanda's version is given in which it is said that Surendra distinctly saw the Master there at that time.<sup>2</sup> If so, he apparently did not

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<sup>1</sup> Life, 709.

<sup>2</sup> p. 129.



mention it in the above conversation where we might expect it.

A few days later, at three o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his bed, a few devotees nearby, when a peculiar mood of maternal affection struck him. Putting his pillow on his lap, he began to caress it and hold it to his breast as if it were his child. Yet his face was lighted with a childlike smile. He changed the arrangement of his wearing-cloth. The devotees watched him amazed. Evidently he went into *bhāvasamādhi*, and shortly after sense-consciousness returned he confided to M. his experience : "There was a meadow covering an area of seven or eight miles, through which lay the road to Sihore. I was alone in that meadow. I saw a sixteen-year old *paramahansa* boy exactly like the one I had seen in the Panchavati. A mist of bliss lay all around. Out of it emerged a boy, thirteen or fourteen years old. I saw his face. He looked like Pūrṇa. Both of us were naked. Then we began to run around joyfully in the meadow. Pūrṇa felt thirsty. He drank some water from a tumbler and offered me what was left. I said to him, 'Brother, I cannot take your leavings.' Thereupon he laughed, washed the glass and brought me fresh water."<sup>3</sup> We have given the Master's own words, but one cannot help wishing that he had said something more about this vision. Apparently the *paramahansa* boy seen in the Panchavati refers to the young sannyāsin who symbolized his own person, since after the beginning of this vision there are only two figures in it. Some may feel that there is a relation between this vision and the Master's next remark. He first returns to *samādhi*, and coming out of it tells M., "My mind is

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<sup>3</sup> G 369.

undergoing a change. I cannot take prasād any more. The Real and the Appearance are becoming one to me." Does he mean that the Pūrṇa-like boy in the vision represents the Lord, and that he, Sri Ramakrishna, can no longer accept the leavings even of the Lord, because he is now feeling the identity of the Real, (i.e., God) and the Appearance (i.e., the whole relative world including his own body and mind) ?

Meanwhile, another vision had intervened, during his return to samādhi. "Do you know what I saw just now ?" he went on to say, "The Divine Mother appeared with a child in Her womb, to which She soon gave birth. The next moment She began to devour it ; and as much of the child as went into Her mouth became void. It was revealed to me that everything is void." This the reader will perhaps recognize as a repetition or variant of the vision Sri Ramakrishna had had more than twenty years earlier, which has been cited in Chapter III.

On the evening of this day (October 23, 1885) many devotees gathered as usual around his bed. Among them this evening was Girish Ghosh, the actor, manager, and playwright who had recently come into the Master's coterie. To entertain Sri Ramakrishna he had brought from the Star Theatre the actor and singer Rāmtaran. Presently Rāmtaran sang two songs from the play *Life of Buddha* which Ramakrishna had seen when he attended its performance at the Theatre. Both the play and its songs were written by Girish, based on some passages from Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*. The second song concluded with the following words, which seem to be a prayer addressed to Lord Buddha :

"Burst Thou our slumber's bars, O Thou that art  
~~awake~~ !

How long must we remain enmeshed in fruitless dreams ?

Are you <sup>4</sup> indeed awake ? Then do not longer sleep !  
Thick on you lies the gloom fraught with a million woes.

Rise, dreamer, from your dream, and slumber not again !

Shine forth, O Shining One, and with Thy shafts of light

Slay Thou the blinding dark ! Our only Saviour  
Thou !

We seek deliverance at Thy feet."

The moment the singer came to the words "Shine forth, O Shining One, and with Thy shafts of light slay Thou the blinding dark," Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi, beholding a vision of the Sun. "As He arose," the Master told the company, "the darkness vanished, and all men took refuge at His feet."<sup>5</sup> We are here reminded of a vision which was brought to our notice too late to be included in its chronological place. Sometime after the Master's first acquaintance with Trailokyanāth Sannyāl, singer and composer of the Brahmo Samaj, the latter sang for him his own song which begins with the line, "In Wisdom's firmament the moon of Love is rising full." Sri Ramakrishna saw a living, large full moon ; whenever the song was sung thereafter it would throw him into ecstasy.<sup>6</sup>

Some days later the Master was informed in vision about two men who were to have spiritual awakening. It

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<sup>4</sup> The listener.

<sup>5</sup> G 872.

<sup>6</sup> LP 710.

was dusk, at which time it was Ramakrishna's custom to sit upon his bed chanting the name of God or otherwise absorbed in contemplation of Him. This day he was able to forget all about the pain in his throat, so deeply was he immured in the inner world. Regaining consciousness after a long time, he whispered to M. that he had completely merged in the Indivisible Brahman. After that, he had seen many things. Dr. Sarkar was to have much knowledge — "dry knowledge"; but he would soften in time. He had seen another man; and, said the Master, "My mind said to me, 'attract him too.' I shall tell you about him later."<sup>7</sup> The latter proved to be a cousin of Balaram Bose, Hariballav by name, whom he had recently met for the first time and to whom he had shown affection. Both of these men, Dr. Sarkar and Hariballav, scoffers at first, soon learned to revere. The doctor was a good man, who often deplored the display of emotion sometimes taking place in the Master's company. But one day, seeing the doctor so joyful after hearing one of Narendra's songs, Sri Ramakrishna told him the story of the son who had taken to wine. The boy had said in reply to his remonstrating father, "You please taste a little wine, and after that, if you ask me to give up drinking, I shall do so." After drinking some wine the father said, "Son, you may give it up. I have no objection. But I certainly am not going to give it up!"

Swami Saradananda tells us that one day at Syampukur Sri Ramakrishna was teaching a young visitor the proper postures for the various types of meditation on God. Sitting in the lotus posture and placing the back of his right hand on the palm of his left, he drew the hands up

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<sup>7</sup> G 911; 924.

to his breast, and shut his eyes. "This is the best posture for all kinds of meditation on God with form," he said. Then, still in *padmāsana* he placed his right and left hands on his right and left knees respectively, touching tips of thumb and forefinger in each hand. The other fingers were straight, and his gaze was fixed between the eyebrows. "And this is the best posture for meditation on God without form" said the Master, and at once plunged into *samādhi*. Before long he seemed to be forcing the mind back to the normal plane. "I couldn't show you any more," he said. "As soon as I sit in that posture the mind becomes absorbed and merges in *samādhi*; the *prāṇas* go upward and the sore in my throat is aggravated; hence the doctor has forbidden *samādhi*." The young man was very sorry. He said, "Sir, you shouldn't have shown me these things; I did not ask for them." "True," Sri Ramakrishna replied, "but I could not help giving you a little practical training."<sup>8</sup> It reminds one of a previous occasion which similarly indicates how his mind behaved in entering *samādhi*. "Today," he had said on that occasion, "I shall tell you everything and not keep anything secret." He clearly described the yogic centres of the body and their corresponding experiences up to the throat. Then pointing to the spot between the eyebrows he said, "When the mind reaches this point one catches a vision of the Paramātmān, the Supreme Self, and falls into *samādhi*. There only a thin, transparent veil separates the Supreme Self and the individual self. Next, one —" and into *samādhi* he passed. Coming down a little he tried again to describe it, and was again in *samādhi*. Finally with tears in his eyes the Master said, "Well, I sincerely wish to convey

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<sup>8</sup> LP 867.

everything to you, holding nothing back, but Mother will not allow me to speak ; She was pressing my mouth."

"You see," he said, "something rises with a tingling sensation from the feet to the head. So long as it does not reach the head I remain conscious, but the moment it does so, I am dead to the outside world. There is no seeing or hearing any more, not to mention speaking. Who could speak ? The very idea of 'I' and 'you' vanishes. While that power is going up I feel like telling you everything — my visions and all. Until it comes here (the heart) or at most here (the throat), speaking is possible and I do speak ; but when it goes beyond the throat, someone stops my mouth, as it were. As I think over what I will say, up goes the mind at a bound, and there is an end to the matter !"<sup>9</sup> As a typical illustration of this we shall take a scene at Dakshineswar in April of 1885. The Master is saying to Girish, M., and others : "While I am speaking to you, my inner spirit is being awakened." As he utters these words, Sri Ramakrishna is on the point of entering samādhi. With the utmost difficulty he tries to control himself. "I still see you," he says, "but I feel as if you had been sitting here forever. I don't recall when you came or where you are." For a few minutes he is silent. Regaining partial consciousness he says, "I shall have a drink of water." Girish, a newcomer at the time, not knowing that this was one of the things Ramakrishna would say to bring his mind down from samādhi, starts after some water. "No, my dear sir," the Master explains, "I cannot really drink now."<sup>10</sup> About his coming down from samādhi he also once said that at such times he could

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<sup>9</sup> LP 368 ; Life, 198.

<sup>10</sup> G 746.

not count correctly. The numbers came out, "one, seven, eight," or something like that.

M. was present on the day of October of 1885 when Sri Ramakrishna received a visit from an Indian Christian named Miśra, who belonged to the Society of Friends. It would be interesting to know how this man came to be a Quaker. We know little about him, but even that little is sufficient to stimulate curiosity. He had renounced the world when he saw his two brothers killed by the falling of a canopy erected for the wedding ceremony of one of them. Under western clothes he wore a sannyāsin's ochre loin-cloth. The Master greeted him very warmly, and Misra's attitude toward him was that of a devotee. Among other things he told the assembled devotees that he recognized Sri Ramakrishna as God Himself, just like Jesus Christ, and that they should do likewise; further he said that he had seen the Master in a vision as sitting on a raised seat in a garden, with another person, less spiritually advanced, sitting on the ground. The Panchavati at Dakshineswar does, of course, afford just such a scene. In answer to a question put by Ramakrishna, Misra admitted he had a vision of Jesus, compared to the beauty of which a woman's was insignificant. The Master soon went out on to the porch of his room. When he returned he said to the devotees, "I saw him (Misra) standing in a heroic posture." At these words he went into samādhi. When he came out of it he seized Misra's hands and told him, "You will get what you are seeking."<sup>11</sup>

It is said that while living in this house Sri Ramakrishna was one day walking to and fro in his room when he saw his subtle body emerge from the gross one. The

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<sup>11</sup> G 922.

back of this figure was covered with sores, especially at the neck. Wondering at the cause of these he was informed by the Divine Mother that these sores were the results of the evil deeds of other persons who had touched him, themselves becoming purified thereby. Quite candidly he told of this vision to the devotees, it seems; in his mind there was no trace of importance or apology. Long ago at Dakshineswar he had said that he was not afraid to be born thousands of times to do good to living beings. This was Sri Ramakrishna's form of *karma yoga*. But hearing this, many devotees sought to protect him from the touch of newcomers, and also refrained from touching him themselves.<sup>12</sup>

The scene now shifts to the Cossipore garden house, to which Sri Ramakrishna was moved on December 11th. The chief reason for this change apparently was the opinion of Dr. Sarkar that the Master needed the fresher, purer air of the suburbs. Thus for the last eight months of his life he was able to enjoy the open garden and scenic neighbourhood of this large house, situated on the eastern side of the road which led from the Bāghbāzār quarter of Calcutta to Baranāgore, three miles north of the city. The place is hallowed now by the final events which occurred there — especially the bonding of hearts which later led to the formation of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. (The property has been acquired by that organization and the historic house restored.)

His suffering was now becoming intense. His diet was virtually liquid. The disease, although declared incurable cancer by doctors, could be cured, thought some of the devotees, if the Master would only pray to

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<sup>12</sup> LP 871.



the Mother a little for having it cured. His reply was classic : 'What ? Shall this mind which has been given over totally to God now be diverted to a worthless shell of a body ?' The following conversation took place :

The devotees : 'You must cure your illness, for our sake at least.'

Master : 'Do you think I want to suffer like this ? I want to get well. But how is that possible ? It depends upon the Mother.'

Narendra : 'Then please pray to Her for recovery. She cannot but listen to you.'

Master : 'It is easy for you to say that. But I can never utter such words.'

Narendra : 'Sir, that won't do. You must tell the Mother about it, at least for our sake.'

Master : 'All right. I shall try to do so, if possible.'

After a few hours Narendra brought up the subject.

Master : 'I said to Her, "I cannot eat anything because of this pain. Please arrange it so I may eat a little." She showed me all of you and said, — "Why, you are eating through so many mouths !" I was ashamed and could not utter another word.'<sup>13</sup> One is struck with awe, really, at this turn of the event ; and we can hardly help feeling that it was indeed clever of the Divine Mother to give such a reply !

The Master's room was a large one upstairs in the Cossipore house. On the ground floor was a small room where Holy Mother lived, a great improvement over her cramped quarters at Syampukur. Yet she was busy day and night with so many meals to prepare and persons to think about. She keenly sensed the impending loss of the

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<sup>13</sup> Life, 730.

Master, and had even undergone a fast and vigil at a famous temple in order to secure a divine remedy with which she hoped to cure his throat. Sarada Devi got her vision, but it turned out quite differently from what she had expected, and brought her no prescription. Then Sri Ramakrishna told her of a dream he had had, this being the second of the two dreams we have for the record. He saw that an elephant had gone out to bring medicine for him, and was digging in the earth for it. Suddenly Gopāla (the child Krishna) woke him up. He inquired of Holy Mother, 'Did you see any such dream?' She replied, 'I saw Mother Kālī with Her neck tilted on one side. I asked Her why She stood that way. Her answer was : 'Because of his having that trouble, I too am ill.' The Holy Mother wept when the Master told her that his mind was constantly remaining absorbed in Brahman.<sup>14</sup> One day while she was feeding him with thin pudding he himself burst into tears, and exclaimed, 'Is this my "living on pudding near the end," and so painfully?' Sometime before he had a vision that this would be his food during his last days.<sup>15</sup>

Underlining his above statement to Holy Mother is the confidence which he one evening imparted to M. in a low voice : 'You see, nowadays it is not necessary for me to meditate much. All at once I become aware of the Indivisible Brahman. Nowadays the vision of the Absolute is continuous with me.' On December 23 the Master informed M. that his teaching of others was coming to an end ; he was unable to give any more instruction. Since he saw everything as Rāma, whom should he teach? Presently he went into samādhi. After returning he said, 'I saw

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<sup>14</sup> *Holy Mother*, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> G 934.

everything passing from form to formlessness. I want to tell you all the things I saw, but I cannot. Well, this tendency of mine towards the formless is only a sign of my nearing dissolution. Isn't it? . . . Even now I am seeing the Formless Indivisible Satchidānanda — just like that . . . But I have suppressed my feelings with great difficulty.' <sup>16</sup>

Yet in March of the last year, when his suffering was so acute that the devotees could hardly bear to watch him, he said to Girish, 'I am seeing many forms of God. Among them I find this one also (meaning his own).' <sup>17</sup> (Later, of course, just before the end, he told the still-doubting Narendra, 'Yes, He who was Rāma and Krishna is now, in this body, Ramakrishna — but not in your Vedantic sense'). On the 15th, the next day, he was feeling a little better. Sometimes he talked to the devotees in whispers, sometimes by signs. Most of the conversation of that early morning is pertinent to this record, and we include it here :

Master : 'Do you know what I see right now? I see that it is God Himself who has become all this. It seems to me that men and other beings are made of leather, and that it is God Himself who, dwelling inside these leather cases, moves the hands, the feet, the heads. I had a similar vision once before, when I saw houses, gardens, roads, men, cattle — all made of One substance ; it was as if they were all made of wax. I see that it is God Himself who has become the block, the executioner and the victim for the sacrifice.' As he describes this staggering experience he is overwhelmed with emotion and exclaims,

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<sup>16</sup> G 933.

<sup>17</sup> G 941.

‘Ah ! What a vision !’ Immediately Sri Ramakrishna goes into samādhi. He completely forgets his body and the outer world and says, ‘Now I have no pain at all. I am my old self again.’ The devotees are amazed to see this state, beyond pleasure and pain. The Master casts his glance at Latu and says, “There is Loto. He bends his head resting it on the palm of his hand. I see that it is God Himself who rests His head on his hand.’ Sri Ramakrishna looks at the devotees and his love for them wells up in a thousand streams. Like a mother showing her tenderness to her children he touches the faces and chins of Rakhal and Narendra.

A few minutes later he says to M., ‘If the body were to be preserved a few days more, many people would have their spirituality awakened.’ He pauses a few minutes. ‘But this is not to be. This time the body will not be preserved. Such is not the will of God. This time the body will not be preserved, lest, finding me guileless and foolish, people should take advantage of me, and lest I, guileless and foolish as I am, should give away everything to everybody. In this Kaliyuga, you see, people are averse to meditation and japa.’

Rakhal (tenderly) : ‘Please speak to God that He may preserve your body some time more.’

Master : ‘That depends on God’s will.’

Narendra : ‘Your will and God’s will have become one.’

Sri Ramakrishna remains silent. He appears to be thinking about something.

Master (to Narendra, Rakhal, and the others) : ‘And nothing will happen if I speak to God. Now I see that I and the Mother have become one. For fear of her sister-in-law, Rādhā said to Krishna, “Please dwell in my

heart." But when, later on, she became very eager for a vision of Krishna — so eager that her heart pined and panted for her Beloved — He would not come out.'

The devotees sit silently in the room. Sri Ramakrishna looks at them tenderly. Then he places his hand on his heart. He is about to speak.

Master : 'There are two persons in this : One, the Divine Mother —' He pauses. The devotees eagerly look at him to hear what he will say next.

Master : 'Yes, one is She. And the other is Her devotee. It is the devotee who broke his arm, and it is the devotee who is now ill. Do you understand ?'

The devotees sit without uttering a word.

Master : 'Alas ! To whom shall I say all this ? Who will understand me ?'

Pausing a few moments, he says :

'God becomes man, an Avātār, and comes to earth with His devotees. And the devotees leave the world with Him.'

Rakhal : 'Therefore we pray that you may not go away and leave us behind.'

Sri Ramakrishna smiles and says :

'A band of minstrels suddenly appears, dances, and sings, and it departs in the same sudden manner. They come and they return, but none recognizes them.'<sup>18</sup>

In April he had a visit from a young man very dear to him, named Hīrānanda, who had come all the way from his home in the province of Sindh to see him. In the course of their talk Sri Ramakrishna said to M., 'I don't remember when the current went up. Now I am in the mood of a child. That is why I am playing with the flowers

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<sup>18</sup> G 941-943.

this way. Do you know what I see now ?—I see my body as a frame made of bamboo strips and covered with a cloth. The frame moves. And it moves because someone dwells within it. Again, I see the body to be like a pumpkin with the seeds scooped out. Inside this body there is no trace of passion or worldly attachment. It is all very clean inside, and —’ It became very painful for Sri Ramakrishna to talk further. He felt very weak. M. quickly guessed what the Master wanted to tell the devotees, and said, ‘And you are seeing God inside yourself.’

Master : ‘Both inside and outside. The Indivisible Satchidānanda — I see It both inside and outside. It has merely assumed this sheath (his body) for a support and exists both inside and outside. I clearly perceive this.’

M. and Hirānanda listened intently to these words about his exalted state of God-consciousness. A few moments later Sri Ramakrishna looked at them and resumed the conversation.

Master : ‘You all seem to be my kinsmen. I do not look on any of you as a stranger. I see you all as so many sheaths, and the heads are moving. I notice that when my mind is united with God the suffering of the body is left aside.

‘Now I perceive only this : the Indivisible Satchidānanda is covered with skin, and this sore in the throat is on one side of it.’

Even the *Gospel* is silent from May until the day of the Master’s death on the 15th of August, 1886 ; or by western reckoning, the 16th, for at 1:02 A.M. Sri Ramakrishna gave up the experience of this fragile world, and entering *mahāsmādhi*, returned to the Eternal Mother from Whom he came. His play was done. ‘I have practised,’ Sri Ramakrishna had said, ‘all kinds of *sādhana* :

*jñāna-yoga*, *karma-yoga*, and *bhakti-yoga*. I have even gone through the exercises of *hatha-yoga*. Many views, many paths — and I have seen them all. But I don't enjoy them any more ; they all quarrel. . . . I have come to the final realization that God is the Whole and I am a part of Him, that God is the Master and I am His servant. Furthermore, sometimes I feel that He is I and I am He.'

## EPILOGUE

When the compilation of Sri Ramakrishna's visions was begun, it was expected that the approach would be an analytic one, somewhat in the manner of the psychologist. If the reader will look back he may note that in each case where it is known we have mentioned the exact place where Sri Ramakrishna was at the time of his vision ; the position which he was assuming — whether seated, standing, walking, etc. ; whether his eyes were closed or open ; how long approximately he was absorbed in the experience ; the time of day ; and the particular aspect of Divine Being with which the vision was concerned. The kind of imagery occurring, and the effect upon the Master, where known, were also taken into account. One reason for this approach was the expectation that from all this a kind of pattern might be visible, some correlation between 'external' circumstances and 'internal' content, or some indication of the particular conditions which may have created in Sri Ramakrishna a predisposition to have a certain type of superconscious experience.

Now that all the evidence available is in one place, we think it can justly be said that no such pattern or correlation is discernible. It is true that most of his reported visions occurred in the daytime, rather than at night, but this can be explained at least in part by the fact that in the daytime there were people around to report them to. Furthermore, he said one day to Swami Saradananda, 'When, alone during the last hours of the night, I am engaged in thinking of your good, Mother reveals everything about you to me — how far each one of you has



progressed, what blocks the further progress of anyone to spirituality, and so on.' <sup>19</sup> Also we do not find much evidence of his having visions while in a reclining posture. On the other hand M. very often tells us in his book that the Master suddenly stood up and went into samādhi. Apart from this, it seems as clear as ever that superconscious experience could possess Sri Ramakrishna at any place, at any time, whether he was meditating on Mother Kālī in the temple, or watching a lion at the zoo, or riding in a carriage, or walking to the pine-grove to answer the call of nature. Every kind of imagery is involved in the content of his visions, although, as we should expect, visual and auditory predominate. In the content of those reported he is seen to be in contact with virtually every prominent aspect of the Indian pantheon, and the forms of other religions also. Who knows how many he may have seen of which he said nothing? His samādhi might last anywhere from a few moments to days and weeks. The slightest suggestion, sacred — or, to us, secular — could throw him into that mood, whereas once within it, his mind could be disengaged again more easily by some methods than by others.

This astounding buoyancy of Sri Ramakrishna's mind, rising at once to these heights in response to the slight touch of the most varied religious stimuli, was characteristic of it from his very childhood. Maturity brought little more than the constant difficulty of holding it down. A chronological account, therefore, of the psychic life of Sri Ramakrishna does not appear to show the features of "evolutionary" development which might be expected from our knowledge of the lives of other saints and sages. St. John

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<sup>19</sup> LP 769.

of the Cross has his 'dark night'; St. Teresa feels the water of spiritual consciousness rising, at one point, to the level of her neck; contemplatives plow deeper and deeper into the soil of the realm of the spirit. There is a history in the mental and spiritual life of the Master, but so many of the things which make up the history of a saint happened so early in his life, or were unnecessary entirely, that what development we can trace is of a subtle and extraordinary sort. It almost defies analysis. One gets the feeling of a drama whose performance came first, dress-rehearsal afterwards, with its prompters, props, and a few onlookers.

Sri Ramakrishna's personality had a quality of simplicity about it which is, in a sense, deceptive. Probably this compilation shows as clearly as anything can, the complex and singular nature with which we are dealing. No doubt, throughout history it will be argued whether at Dakshineswar there lived a hysteric, a seer, a mystic, a saint, an Incarnation, or God Himself. All these are words, and as the perceptive poet reminds us,

' Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still.'

It will not greatly matter. The phenomenon is here before us, and we cannot but stand in awe of it.

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