

A portrait of Sri Ramakrishna, a bearded man with a serene expression, set against a textured, golden-brown background with faint floral patterns. The portrait is rendered in a style that blends with the background, giving it a spiritual and aged appearance.

THE GOSPEL OF RAMAKRISHNA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

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The Gospel of Ramakrishna

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Table of Contents

Preface

Introduction

Chapter I. Srî Râmakrishna at the Temple of Dakshineswara

Chapter II. Srî Râmakrishna with His Disciples at the Temple

Chapter III. The Bhagavân with Certain of His Householder Disciples

Chapter IV. Visit to the Pandit Vidyâsâgara

Chapter V. Day on the River with Keshab Chunder Sen

Chapter VI. Sunday at the Temple

Chapter VII. Some Incidents in the Life of Srî Râmakrishna (As Told by Himself)

Chapter VIII. Feast at the Garden-house of Surendra

Chapter IX. Visit to a Hindu Pandit and Preacher

Chapter X. Gathering of Disciples at the Temple

Chapter XI. Srî Râmakrishna at the Sinti Brâhmo-samâj

Chapter XII. At the House of Balarâm a Disciple

Chapter XIII. A Day at Shâmpukur

Chapter XIV. Cossipur Garden-house

Notes

PREFACE

[Table of Contents](#)

This is the authorized English edition of the "Gospel of Râmakrishna." For the first time in the history of the world's Great Saviours, the exact words of the Master were recorded *verbatim* by one of His devoted disciples. These words were originally spoken in the Bengali language of India. They were taken down in the form of diary notes by a householder disciple, "M." At the request of Srî Râmakrishna's Sannyâsin disciples, however, these notes were published at Calcutta during 1902-1903 A.D., in Bengali, in two volumes, entitled "*Râmakrishna Kathâmrta*."

At that time "M" wrote to me letters authorizing me to edit and publish the English translation of his notes, and sent me the manuscript in English which he himself translated, together with a true copy of a personal letter¹ which Swâmi Vivekânanda wrote to him.

At the request of "M" I have edited and remodelled the larger portion of his English manuscript; while the remaining portions I have translated directly from the Bengali edition of his notes. The marginal headings, foot-notes, and index, as well as the division of the Gospel into fourteen chapters, were added by me. I have endeavored to make every word of this edition as literal, simple, and colloquial as possible.

Some repetitions are purposely kept to show how the Master used the same illustrations on different occasions during the course of His eloquent conversations.

The completed work is now offered to the Western World with the sincere hope that the sublime teachings of Srî Râmakrishna may open the spiritual sight of seekers after

Truth, and bring peace and freedom to all souls struggling
for realization.

Swâmi Abhedânanda.

New York,
December 15, 1907.

INTRODUCTION

[Table of Contents](#)

The Lord declares:—

"Whenever true religion declines and irreligion prevails, I manifest myself and in every age I incarnate to establish spiritual law and to destroy evil."—*Bhagavad Gitâ*.

Saviours.

India has produced many great spiritual leaders who are recognized and worshipped as Saviours of mankind. The life and character of each of these were as wonderful, superhuman, and divine as were those of the illustrious Son of Man. Each has been like the embodiment of all Divine attributes; each has been the giver of new life to the old spiritual truths, and the generator of that tidal wave of spirituality which has again and again inundated the religious world, surmounting the barriers of superstition and prejudice and carrying the stream of individual souls toward the ocean of Divinity.

The present upheaval of the spiritual tide, the waves of which, traversing nearly half the world, have touched the shores of America, was produced by the Christlike character and Divine personality of Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna—revered and worshipped in India to-day as an ideal manifestation of the Divine glory. His life was so extraordinary and unparalleled that within ten years after His departure from earth it aroused the admiration, wonder and reverence not only of all classes of people in His own

country, but of many distinguished English and German scholars of the nineteenth century.

Life of Srî Râmakrishna by European Scholars.

A short account of the life of Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna appeared for the first time in the January number of the "Imperial and Quarterly Review" of 1896 under the title of "A Modern Hindu Saint." It was an able article penned by Prof. C. H. Tawney, who was for many years the professor of Sanskrit in Calcutta University and the distinguished Librarian of India House in London. This article excited the interest of many European scholars, among whom Professor Max Muller showed his appreciation by publishing in the August number of the "Nineteenth Century" of 1896 a short sketch of this Hindu Saint's life entitled "A Real Mahâtman." In this celebrated article, which was for some time the subject of most severe criticism both in England and India among many of the Christian missionaries and the Theosophists, the noted Professor showed the difference between the imaginary Mahâtmas of the Theosophists and the Real Mahâtman or the Great Soul of India who had reached God-consciousness and had manifested Divinity in all the actions of His daily life. He gave a brief account of the extraordinary life of Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna, paying Him the highest tribute of honor and respect that a Christian scholar could give to a Divine manifestation in the so-called heathen land. Later, in 1898, he compiled and published "Râmakrishna, His Life and Sayings," collecting more facts of His life and the sayings of this exemplary character perfumed with Divine personality.

Râmakrishna a real Mahâtman

Professor Max Muller was deeply impressed by the originality of this great Saint and real Mahâtman, who was not brought up within the precincts of any university and who drew the water of His wisdom neither from any book nor Scripture nor from any ancient prophet but directly from the eternal Fountainhead of all Knowledge and Wisdom. He was also struck by the broad, liberal and absolutely unsectarian spirit which pervades the utterings of Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna. Indeed the life and sayings of the Bhagavân have given a death-blow to the sectarian bigotry and fanaticism of the so-called religious world. Whosoever has read His Sayings is impressed with the universality of His spiritual ideals which embraced the ideals of all mankind.

From His childhood Srî Râmakrishna fought against all sectarian doctrines and dogmas, but yet at the same time He showed that all sects and creeds were but the paths which lead sincere and earnest souls to the one universal goal of all religions. Having realized the highest ideal of every religion by following the methods and practices of the various sects and creeds of the world, Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna gave to humanity whatever spiritual experience and realization He had acquired. Every idea which He gave was fresh from above and unadulterated by the product of human intellect, culture or scholastic education. Each step of His life from babyhood to the last moment was extraordinary. Every stage was like the unfoldment of a chapter of a new scripture especially written out by the Unseen Hand to fit the minds of the East and the West and to fulfil the spiritual needs of the twentieth century.

Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna is not only the greatest saint of modern India but He is the "Real Mahâtman." A real

Mahâtman as described in the Bhagavad Gitâ (Chapter VII, verse 19) is one who, having realized the Absolute, perceives the Divine Being in all animate and inanimate objects of the universe. His heart and soul never turn away from God. He lives in God-consciousness, and Divine qualities constantly flow through his soul. He cares neither for fame nor power nor worldly prosperity. A true Mahâtman has no attachment to His body or to sense-pleasures; He is a living God; He is absolutely free and His inner nature is illumined by the self-effulgent light of Divine wisdom and His heart is overflowing with Divine Love. His soul becomes the playground of the Almighty, His body and mind become the instrument of the Divine will. And Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna was such a real Mahâtman.

Even in this age when the vast majority of educated people do not believe in the existence of God and of the human soul, when scientific knowledge has turned the minds of students away from the path of spirituality, when sense pleasures and the luxuries of life have become the ideals of earthly existence and human beings have degenerated into money-making machines, we have witnessed with our eyes a Great Soul who is recognized as a Real Mahâtman by hundreds and thousands of thoughtful men and women of India, Europe and America. This Great Soul manifested His Divine qualities and lived in God-consciousness at every moment of His earthly career, and to-day thousands of people prostrate before His picture and, worship Him as the latest manifestation of Divinity. Whosoever has heard of His most wonderful life has felt in his soul that Râmakrishna was the perfect Ideal of mankind.

Râmakrishna's influence upon the mind of Scholars

He made His appearance in an obscure part of Bengal where He passed His early boyhood, but His youth and maturity were spent near Calcutta, the capital of British India, as cosmopolitan a city as London, New York, or any other large city of the civilized world and the seat of education, refinement and scientific knowledge. He allowed the sceptical minds of the students and professors of colleges and universities as well as of educated men and women of the world to come in direct touch with the self-effulgent light of Divine wisdom which was shining in its full glory through His childlike, soft, and tender form. Scholars and intelligent people of all classes poured from every quarter to that spot which was sanctified by the presence of the Bhagavân. He was the living example of the spiritual greatness and Divinity which had been manifested by the great Incarnations like Christ, Buddha, Krishna, Râma, Chaitanya² and other Saviours of the world.

We know a number of sceptics and agnostics who had never believed in Christ or Buddha or Krishna as Divine Incarnations, who had never accepted the authority of the Scriptures, but on the contrary had maintained that the lives of Christ and of other Saviours were but exaggerated accounts based upon the imagination of their disciples, anxious to deify their human masters—such sceptics and unbelievers when they met Râmakrishna and watched His superhuman life, were convinced that the lives of Christ, Buddha, Krishna, and other Avatâras must have been true and real. The same sceptics, when they beheld His Divine powers, were so deeply impressed with His personality that they prostrated before Him, kissed the dust of His holy feet and realized that He was the Personification of the Sermon on the Mount, the Incarnation of Divinity on earth, and the remanifestation of Christ, Buddha, Krishna, and Chaitanya in

one form. All the special qualities and Divine powers that had adorned the wonderful character of each of these great personages were witnessed by them in this uncommon Divine manifestation of the nineteenth century.

Râmakrishna as the Divine Ideal of all Sects

Have we not watched with admiration when the followers of all the great religions of the world recognized in Srî Râmakrishna their Divine Ideals? Have we not seen how Quakers and orthodox Christians knelt and prayed before Him and worshipped Him as the Christ when the Bhagavân went into superconscious communion with the Heavenly Father after hearing the holy name of Jesus of Nazareth? The Mahometan saints who came to see Him, prostrated at His holy feet and recognized in Him the highest Ideal of Islam. The Buddhists regarded Him as Sambuddha, the Enlightened. The followers of Chaitanya, like Vaishnava Charan,³ and others, worshipped Him as the second Prophet of Nuddea when Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna occupied the altar which was reverentially dedicated to Srî Chaitanya by hundreds of devoted Vaishnavas, who always prostrated before that altar and prayed to their Lord Guarânga. The worshippers of Krishna called Him the Incarnation of Krishna. The devotees of the Divine Mother realized that the Mother of the universe was playing through Him; the followers of Shiva declared that Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna was their living Deity; while the Sikhs, the faithful votaries of Guru Nânaka,⁴ regarded Him as their Holy Master. His followers, seeing all these powers, marvelled at His greatness and believed that His many-sided personality was the living example and the consummation of all the previous Avatâras and Divine manifestations. And the truth of this was again and again verified and confirmed by His acts as

well as by His own words: "He who was Krishna, Râma, Christ, Buddha, Chaitanya has *now* become Râmakrishna." Bhagavân was always conscious of this truth and spoke of it before the world as well as before His dearest disciples.

His mission.

As His Divine personality was many-sided yet one, so was His great mission. It was to show the underlying unity in the variety of religions and to establish that universal religion of which sectarian religions are each but partial expressions. Like all other Saviours the life of the Bhagavân exemplified His mission. He spent the best part of His life in practising in full the different methods of Yoga. He went through every minute detail of the devotional exercises and different forms of worship ordained by the Scriptures of different nations and practised by the followers of the various sects and creeds of the world. His object in devoting so much time to these practices was to find out whether they had any real value in the path which leads to perfection.

Râmakrishna's mind was always open to Truth. He would not accept anything on second-hand authority. He would not believe in anything because it was written in a book or because it was declared by some great personage. He must know the Truth first hand. Before accepting any statement, He must realize it in His own life and then He would speak of His personal experience to others in order that they might gain benefit from it. For nearly twelve years before He appeared in public or made any disciples Srî Râmakrishna, like a scientific investigator, inquired into the beliefs of the various sects of every religion, followed their methods and performed their rituals and ceremonies with perfect faith and earnest devotion that He might realize the goal which could be reached by each of them. To His great surprise,

however, He discovered that He arrived at God-consciousness through each sectarian method. Whenever, furthermore, He desired to follow any particular path, there came to Him a perfected soul of each sect who had realized the Ideal, to direct Him in that path. Everyone of these great saints recognized in Srî Râmakrishna the manifestation of Divine powers, when in a short time He attained to that which they had not been able to acquire during years of austerity, worship and extreme devotion.

Having finished His investigations, He was ready to proclaim His message and give to the world the fruits of His own experience and realization. But unlike other spiritual teachers, He did not go out in search after His disciples and followers. As a fragrant flower does not hunt for bees but waits patiently for the bees to come, so the full-blown flower of spirituality in the form of Srî Râmakrishna waited for His disciples to come to Him in the Temple garden at Dakshineswara on the bank of the Ganges.

When Râmakrishna had attained to the highest ideal of each Yoga and had realized the spiritual oneness with the Absolute Brahman and the Mother of the universe, rumor spread from mouth to mouth that Râmakrishna had reached perfection in this life. People from all quarters began to crowd around Him. Pandits and scholars of every nationality as well as hundreds of devout men and women of all sects came to see Him and listen to His original and wonderful teachings. This was the beginning of His public life as spiritual leader and guide, which continued for nearly sixteen years. During this period He did nothing but help mankind by freely distributing the priceless jewels of spiritual truths which he had earned through such struggle, hardship and austerities.

His spiritual insight.

Râmakrishna had a marvellous intellect and keen insight into the true nature of things and events, and using the commonest occurrences of every-day life as illustrations, He succeeded in making the dull minds of worldly people grasp the spiritual depth, beauty and grandeur of His sublime ideals. He poured new life into every word that He uttered so as to touch the soul of His hearers. People listened with wonder and admiration to His original discourses on the most difficult problems concerning life and death, the nature and origin of the soul, the origin of the universe and our relation to God.

Realization of God

In this age of scientific rationalism Bhagavân Sî Râmakrishna has shown to the world how the Lord of the universe can be realized and attained in this life, and no one except Him has ventured to go through all the tests of sceptics and agnostics to prove that He had attained to God-consciousness. Those who have seen Him, lived with Him for years and watched Him by day and by night, have proclaimed before the world that He was the embodiment of the highest spiritual ideals of all nations, and that whoever worships Him with faith and reverence worships the latest manifestation of Divinity.

The Bhagavân proved by His example that wherever there is extreme longing to see God, there is the nearness of the realization of the absolute Truth. His life has given to the world a grand demonstration that even in this age Divinity can be reached and Divine perfection can be acquired by one who is pure, chaste, simple and whose devotion is whole-hearted and whole-souled. We have neither seen nor heard of a character purer, simpler, more chaste, more

truthful and more godly than that of this ideal Mahâtman. He was like the personification of purity and chastity and the embodiment of truthfulness.

His life was the life of absolute renunciation. Earthly pleasures and comforts meant nothing to Him. The only pleasure, comfort or happiness which He cared for was the blissful state of Samâdhi or God-consciousness, when His soul, liberated from the bondage of body and mind, soared high in the infinite space of the Absolute. This Samâdhi was a natural state with Râmakrishna. He never had to make a special effort to attain it. We often heard Him say that when He was four years old He went into Samâdhi at the sight of the beautiful coloring of a tropical cloud. This realization He always remembered and often described in His conversation. And as He grew older His Samâdhi or ecstasy became stronger and deeper.

His Samâdhi.

In His Samâdhi His body would become absolutely motionless, His pulse and heart-beat imperceptible, His eyes would be half open and if anyone pressed His eyeball with the finger, His body would not move or show the least sign of sensation. He would remain in this state sometimes for a few minutes, sometimes for half an hour or an hour, and on one occasion He continued in it for three days and nights. Then He would come down on the plane of sense-consciousness and relate His experiences. He had the power to separate Himself from the cage of the physical organism and to go into this state of Divine communion at His will and stay there as long as He wished. Frequently He told us that He reached such a height in Samâdhi that if He had been like an ordinary mortal He could never have returned to His body; that no mortal had ever come back from that kind of

Samâdhi; and that the Divine Mother gave Him this power to return to this plane simply to help mankind and to establish His mission.

His renunciation.

To Him God was father, mother, brother, sister, and everything. He recognized no earthly relations. He never coveted wealth, nor had He any earthly possession. He realized that gold had no more value than earth and became absolutely unattached to riches, understanding the transitoriness of the objects which can be acquired by wealth. He often said that immortality could not be purchased by money, and emphasized by His example the true meaning of the Vedic passage: "Neither by meritorious deed, nor by progeny, nor by wealth, but by renunciation alone the Immortal Truth can be acquired." Renunciation of the attachment to worldly things is the gate to God-consciousness. Christ, Buddha, Chaitanya, Sankarâchârya and all other Saviours and spiritual leaders of the world exemplified this by living the life of absolute renunciation. It is very rare to find in this age a perfect ideal of the renunciation of lust and of worldly attachment. Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna practised the ideal of the renunciation of riches to such an extent that He was able to make His body respond involuntarily to the touch of coin by shrinking from it even in sound sleep. We have often seen Him suffer pain when he was obliged to touch a coin of any metal. Who could be a more perfect ideal of renunciation in this age of materialism!

He uplifted womanhood.

Srî Râmakrishna taught that every woman, old or young, was the representative of the Divine Mother. He worshipped

God as the Mother of the universe and frequently declared that His Divine Mother had shown Him that all women represent Divine Motherhood on earth. For the first time in the religious history of the world was this ideal preached by any Divine Incarnation. And upon this depends the salvation of men and especially of women of all countries from immorality, corruption and such other vices as prevail in a civilized community.

By His living example the Bhagavân established the truth of spiritual marriage on the soul plane even in this age of sensuality. He had a wife whom He always treated with reverence and whom He regarded as the manifestation of His Divine Mother. He never had any sex relation with her or with any woman on the physical plane. His wife, the Blessed Virgin Sâradâ Devi, is still living like an embodiment of Holy Motherhood with innumerable spiritual children around Her. She in turn has always regarded the Bhagavân as Her Blessed Mother Divine in a human form. Up to the last moment of His earthly career the Bhagavân was absolutely pure, chaste, and a perfect child of His Divine Mother of the universe. Furthermore, Râmakrishna uplifted the ideal of womanhood on the spiritual plane by accepting His first Guru or spiritual instructor in a woman form. No other Saviour or spiritual leader has ever given such an honor to womanhood in the annals of religious history.

His mission.

The mission of Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna was to show by His living example how a truly spiritual man, being dead to the world of senses, can live on the spiritual plane of God-consciousness; it was to prove that each individual soul is immortal and potentially Divine. His mission was to establish harmony between religious sects and creeds. For

the first time it was absolutely demonstrated by Râmakrishna that all religions are like so many paths leading to the same Goal, that the realization of the same Almighty Being is the highest Ideal of Christianity, Mahometanism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, as well as of all other smaller religions of the world. Srî Râmakrishna's mission was to proclaim the eternal Truth that God is one but has many aspects, and that the same one is worshipped by different nations under various names and forms; that He is personal, impersonal and beyond both; that He is with name and form and yet nameless and formless. His mission was to establish the worship of the Divine Mother and thus to elevate the ideal of womanhood into Divine Motherhood. His mission was to show by His own example that true spirituality can be transmitted and that salvation can be obtained through the grace of a Divine Incarnation. His mission was to declare before the world that psychic powers and the power of healing are obstacles in the path of the attainment of God-consciousness.

His Divine powers.

Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna possessed all the Yoga powers but He seldom exercised those powers, especially the power of healing diseases. Moreover, He always prevented His disciples from either seeking or exercising those powers. But one power which we have seen Him frequently exercise was the Divine power to transform the character of a sinner and to lift a worldly soul to the plane of superconsciousness by a single touch. He would take the sins of others upon His own shoulders and would purify them by transmitting His own spirituality and opening the spiritual eyes of His trite followers.

The days of prophecy have passed before our eyes. The manifestations of the Divine powers of One who is worshipped to-day by thousands as the latest Incarnation of Divinity, we have witnessed with our eyes. Blessed are they who have seen Him and touched His holy feet. May the glory of Srî Râmakrishna be felt by all nations of the earth; may His Divine power be manifested in the earnest and sincere souls of His devotees of all countries in all ages to come, is the prayer of His child and servant,

ABHEDÂNANDA.

CHAPTER I.

SRÎ RÂMAKRISHNA AT THE TEMPLE OF DAKSHINESWARA

[Table of Contents](#)

Where Râmakrishna lived.

Bhagavân⁵ Srî Râmakrishna lived for many years in Râni Râshmoni's celebrated Temple garden on the eastern bank of the Ganges in the village of Dakshineswara about four miles north of Calcutta. This Temple with the garden attached was dedicated by its foundress (Râni Râshmoni) to the Divine Mother (Kâli). In the northwest corner of the spacious Temple-compound is a small room which faces on the west the waters of the sacred river Ganges. This room with its holy surroundings was consecrated as the dwelling-place for many years of Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna, whose Divine Presence made the spot holier and more sacred. It was from this retired corner that the rays of His Divine glory, emanating from His God-intoxicated soul, dazzled the eyes of the seekers after Truth and attracted them to Him as a blazing fire attracts moths from all quarters. Hundreds of educated men and women were drawn towards this superhuman personality to listen with the deepest reverence to the words of wisdom uttered by One who had realized God and who lived in constant communion with the Divine Mother of the universe.

Mahendra's visit to the Temple.

One Sunday in the month of March, 1882, Mahendra, hearing from a friend about this Divine Man, was so deeply

impressed that he came to the Temple garden to pay Him a respectful visit. It was the day of a special religious festival and people had gathered in great numbers in Srî Râmakrishna's room and on the veranda. The Bhagavân was seated on a raised platform, and on the floor around Him were Kedâr, Suresh, Râm, Manmohan, Bijoy, and many other devotees. They gazed up into His radiant face and drank the nectar of the living words of Divine wisdom that fell from His hallowed lips. With a smiling face Srî Râmakrishna was speaking to them of the power of the Lord's Holy Name and true Bhakti as the means of attaining God-vision. Addressing Bijoy,⁶ He asked: What do you say is the means of attaining to God?

Power of the Lord's Holy Name.

Bijoy: Bhagavan, by the repetition of His Holy Name. In this age the Holy Name of the Lord has saving powers. Bhagavân: Yes, the Holy Name has saving powers, but there must be earnest longing with it. Without earnest longing of the heart no one can see God by mere repetition of His Name. One may repeat His Name, but if one's mind be attached to lust and wealth, that will not help much. When a man is bitten by a scorpion or a tarantula, mere repetition of a *mantram* will not do; a special remedy is necessary.

Bijoy: If that be the case, Bhagavan, then how did Ajâmila,⁷ who was the greatest of sinners and committed all sorts of crimes, obtain salvation by repeating the Name of the Lord at the time of his death?

Râmakrishna: Perhaps in his previous incarnations Ajâmila was righteous and performed a great many good deeds. Besides, it is said that he practised asceticism later in this life. It may also be said that at the last moment of his life the repetition of the Holy Name purified his heart and

therefore he attained salvation. When an elephant is washed, immediately he throws dust and dirt over himself; but if he is kept in a clean stall after his bath, then he cannot cover himself with dirt. By the power of the Holy Name a man may be purified, but he may once more commit sinful acts because his mind is weak. He cannot promise that he will never sin again. The water of the Ganges may wash away past sins, but there is a saying that sins perch on the top of trees. When a man comes out of the Ganges and stands under a tree, the sins drop over his shoulders and seize upon him; these old sins ride him, as it were. Therefore, repeat the Holy Name of the Lord, but at the same time pray to Him that you may have true love and devotion for Him, and that your love for wealth, fame and the pleasures of the body may decrease because they are transitory, they last only until to-morrow.

All religions lead to God.

When there is true devotion and love, one can reach God by any of the sectarian religions. The Vaishnavas, the worshippers of Krishna, will attain God in the same way as the Sâktas, the worshippers of the Divine Mother or the followers of Vedânta. Those who belong to the Brâhmo-Samâj,⁸ the Mahometans and Christians, will also realize God through their respective religions. If you follow any of these paths with intense devotion, you will reach Him. If there be any mistake in the path chosen, He will correct the mistake in the long run. The man who wishes to see Jagannâth⁹ may go towards the South instead of towards the North, but some one will sooner or later direct him in the right way and he will surely visit Jagannâth in the end. The one thing necessary for realization is whole-hearted and whole-souled devotion to God.

Many names of one God.

Vaishnavas, Mahometans, Christians and Hindus are all longing for the same God; but they do not know that He who is Krishna is also Shiva, Divine Mother, Christ and Allah. God is one, but He has many names. The Substance is one, but is worshipped under different names according to the time, place and nationality of His worshippers. All the different Scriptures of the world speak of the same God. He who is described in the Vedas as Absolute Existence-Intelligence-Bliss or Brahman, is also described in the Tantras¹⁰ as Shiva, in the Purânas¹¹ as Krishna, in the Koran as Allah, and in the Bible as Christ.

Bigotry is not right.

Yet the various sects quarrel with one another. The worshippers of Krishna, for instance, say that nothing can be achieved without worshipping Krishna; those who are devoted to the Divine Mother think that the worship of the Divine Mother is the only way to salvation; similarly, the Christians say that no one can reach heaven except through Christ; He is the only way and Christianity is the only religion, all other religions are false. This is narrow-mindedness. "My religion is true while that of others is false,"—this kind of belief is not right. It is not our business to correct the errors of other religions. He who has created the world will correct them in time. Our duty is in some way or other to realize Him. God can be reached through many paths; each of these sectarian religions points out a path which ultimately leads to Divinity. Yes; all religions, are paths, but the paths are not God. I have seen all sects and all paths. I do not care for them any more. People belonging to these sects quarrel so much! After trying all religions, I have realized that God is the Whole and I am His part; that

He is the Lord and I am His servant; again I realize, He is I; I am He.

God Personal and Impersonal.

People dispute among themselves, saying: "God is personal, with form. He cannot be impersonal and formless,"—like the Vaishnavas who find fault with those who worship the Impersonal Brahman. When realization comes, then all these questions are settled. He who has seen God can tell exactly what He is like. As Kavira¹² said: "God with form is my Mother, God without form is my Father. Whom shall I blame, whom shall I praise? The balance is even." He is with form, yet He is formless. He is personal, yet He is impersonal, and who can say what other aspects He may have!

Parable of the elephant and the blind men.

Four blind men went to see an elephant. One touched a leg of the elephant and said: "The elephant is like a pillar." The second touched the trunk and said: "The elephant is like a thick club." The third touched the belly and said: "The elephant is like a huge jar." The fourth touched the ears and said: "The elephant is like a big winnowing-basket." Then they began to dispute among themselves as to the figure of the elephant. A passer-by, seeing them thus quarrelling, asked them what it was about. They told him everything and begged him to settle the dispute. The man replied: "None of you has seen the elephant. The elephant is not like a pillar, its legs are like pillars. It is not like a big water-jar, its belly is like a water-jar. It is not like a winnowing-basket, its ears are like winnowing-baskets. It is not like a stout club, its trunk is like a club. The elephant is like the combination of all these." In the same manner do those sectarians quarrel who

have seen only one aspect of the Deity. He alone who has seen God in all His aspects can settle all disputes.

Parable of the chameleon.

Again: Two persons were hotly disputing as to the color of a chameleon. One said: "The chameleon on that palm-tree is of a red color." The other, contradicting him, replied: "You are mistaken, the chameleon is not red but blue." Not being able to settle the matter by argument, both went to the person who always lived under that tree and had watched the chameleon in all its phases of color. One of them asked him: "Sir, is not the chameleon on that tree red?" The person replied: "Yes, sir." The other disputant said: "What do you say? It is not red, it is blue." The person again humbly replied: "Yes, sir." The person knew that the chameleon is an animal which constantly changes color; thus it was that he said "yes" to both these conflicting statements. The Sat-chit-ânanda (the Absolute Existence-Intelligence-Bliss) likewise has many forms. The devotee who has seen God in one aspect only, knows Him in that aspect alone. But he who has seen Him in manifold aspects is alone in a position to say with authority: "All these forms are of one God and God is multiform." He is formless and with form, and many are His forms which no one knows.

Different aspects of Divinity.

God is not only personal and with form but He can take the form of Krishna, Christ or any other Incarnation. It is true that He manifests Himself in infinite forms to fulfil the desires of His devotees. It is also true that He is formless Indivisible Existence-Intelligence-Bliss Absolute.

Relation between God Personal and Impersonal.

The Vedas have described Him to be both personal, with form and attributes, and impersonal, beyond all form and attributes. Do you know how this is? He is like the infinite ocean of Absolute Existence-Intelligence-Bliss. As in the ocean intense cold will freeze a portion of the water into ice which may float in various forms on the water, similarly intense devotion (Bhakti) may condense a portion of Divinity and make it appear in different forms. The Personal God with form exists for the sake of His Bhaktas (dualistic devotees). When the sun of wisdom rises, the block of ice melts and becomes water once more; above, below, and on every side the Infinite Being pervades. Therefore there is a prayer in the Scriptures: "O Lord, Thou art personal with form. Thou art also impersonal and formless. Thou hast manifested Thyself in a human form and hast lived in our midst, but in the Vedas Thou art described as beyond speech and mind, Unspeakable, Imperceptible and Unthinkable." But it can be said that for a certain class of Bhaktas He is eternally personal and always with form. There are places where the ice never melts, it becomes crystallized.

Kedâr:¹³ Bhagavan, it is also said in the Scriptures: "O Lord, Thou art beyond speech and mind, but I have described Thy Personal form only, do Thou forgive me for this offense."

Bhagavân: Yes, God is with form and also formless. No one can say positively that He is so much and no more. To a devotee (Bhakta, or lover of God) the Lord appears as a Personal Being with form, but to one who has attained to the state of selfless Samâdhi through the path of discrimination and knowledge He is the formless, Impersonal and Absolute Brahman.

Evening at the Temple.

Night had fallen and the priests were moving the lights before the shrines to the accompaniment of bells, cymbals, and drums. From the southern end of the garden was wafted the sweet music played by the Temple musicians upon flutes and other instruments—the music being carried far over the Ganges until it was lost. The breeze blowing from the south was gentle and fragrant with the sweet odor of many flowers. The moon was rising and the garden was soon bathed in its soft silvery light. It seemed as if nature as well as man was rejoicing and holding herself in readiness for the sacred ceremony of the Ârati (evening service).

One by one the disciples began to take their leave. Mahendra¹⁴ and his friend, who had been visiting the different temples, now wended their way back through the grand quadrangle to Srî Râmakrishna's chamber. Coming up to the door of the room, they noticed that it was closed. Near the door stood a maid-servant named Brindâ. Mahendra spoke to her, saying: Well, my good woman, is the Holy Man in?

Brindâ: Yes, He is in His room.

Mahendra: I suppose He has many books to read and study?

Brindâ: Oh dear no; not a single one. Everything, even the highest truths, is spoken by His tongue. His words are all inspired.

Mahendra: Indeed! Is He now going through the evening service? May we go in? Will you kindly tell Him of our anxiety to see Him?

Brindâ: Why, you may go in, my children. Go in and take your seats before Him.

Thereupon they entered the room. No other people were there. Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna was alone, seated as in

the afternoon on the platform beside His bed. Incense was burning and the doors were closed. Mahendra saluted the Bhagavân with folded hands. A mat was pointed out on the floor. At His word Mahendra and his friend took their seats upon it. The Bhagavân asked him: What is your name? Where do you live? What are you? What has brought you to Barâhanagore?¹⁵

Mahendra answered each of these questions, but he noticed that in the course of the conversation Srî Râmakrishna's mind was fixed upon some other object, on which He was meditating. He was only half-conscious of the physical plane and His attitude resembled that of a man quietly seated rod in hand, intent on catching fish. When the float trembles and the fish bites, the man eagerly looks at the float, grasping the rod with all his strength. He does not talk to anyone, but his whole mind is fixed upon the float. Such was the Bhagavân's concentration at this moment. Mahendra learned afterwards that this was the state of Samâdhi or God-consciousness which invariably came over Him every day during the evening service. Very often in this state He would become absolutely unconscious of the external world. Mahendra, observing His abstraction, said to Srî Râmakrishna: I am afraid, Bhagavan, that Thou wouldst prefer to go through the evening service (Sandhyâ) alone. In that case we will not disturb Thee any more, but will call some other time.

Srî Râmakrishna replied: Oh no, you need not be in a hurry.

But He was silent again for a time. He then opened His lips and said: Sandhyâ? Evening service? It is not that.

A short while after, Mahendra saluted the Bhagavân, who in turn bade him good-bye, saying, "Come again."

CHAPTER II.

SRÎ RÂMAKRISHNA WITH HIS DISCIPLES AT THE TEMPLE

[Table of Contents](#)

The Bhagavân was in His room seated in His usual place on the small platform beside His bed. It was Sunday and the room was filled with a large number of devotees. Among them was a young college student only nineteen years of age named Narendra, who afterwards became the world-renowned Swâmi Vivekânanda. Everyone noticed even at that time that he was a sincere and earnest seeker after Truth and that his mind was above all worldly concerns. His eyes were shining with spiritual light, his face was aglow with innocence and simplicity, and his words were full of spiritual power. The Bhagavân was discoursing on worldly people who ridicule the worshippers of God. Especially addressing Narendra, He asked: What do you say, Narendra? Worldly men will speak all manner of things against godly people, but they should act like the elephant. When an elephant passes through a public road, dogs run after him and bark at him; but the elephant turns a deaf ear to their barking and goes on his own way. Suppose, my boy, people should speak ill of you behind your back, what would you think of them?

Narendra: I would look upon them as a lot of barking dogs.

God dwells in all.