

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

**SAYINGS OF  
SRI  
RAMAKRISHNA**





Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

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## **Preface**

This collection of 1120 parables, sayings and analogies from the teachings of Ramakrishna (Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna) first appeared in the journal *Brahmavadin*, the publication of which was initiated by Swami Vivekananda, and later in book form (2nd ed. 1905 and further editions). Presumably the introduction, whose author is not known, was added in one of the later editions. Swami Abhedananda published an abridged edition with 554 quotations under the same title in 1903.

Since this valuable book has since passed into the public domain and is difficult to obtain in the European-speaking world, I have decided to publish it.

I have omitted the index, but have included a glossary, which I have essentially taken from the glossary of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

The analogies and parables of Ramakrishna from everyday life convey the teaching of Ramakrishna in a very memorable and vivid way. I wish the reader a lot of inspiration while reading this book.

Gabriele Ebert

# Introduction

## I.

The sayings and parables of Sri Ramakrishna included in this volume speak for themselves as far as their spiritual value and philosophic depth are concerned. The stamp of genius they bear cannot escape the notice of even a casual reader. But wise maxims and admirable reflections on life have been given also by great intellectuals and first-rate literary men. The sayings embodied in this volume should, however, be distinguished from the productions of such men. For with all their artistic beauty and sublimity of thought, the writings of one who is merely an academic philosopher or a man of letters, lack authority in matters relating to God and spiritual life, since their author is only groping in the dark, just like any ordinary man, as far as these subjects of transcendental significance are concerned. The sayings of Sri Ramakrishna stand on quite a different footing in this respect, because Sri Ramakrishna possessed not only a great intellect and an artistic mind, but had the additional qualification that he had 'seen God face to face', 'talked with Him' and shared the Divine life. Hence his words on these transcendental themes come with a weight of authority derived from the Supreme Being Himself. Our excuse for writing the following brief lifesketch of his as an Introduction to this edition of his sayings is, that there may be among its readers persons who have had no occasion to study any detailed biography of his and to be acquainted with this unique aspect of his life and teachings.

## II.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in a poor Brahmin family of the village, called Kamarpukur in Bengal, on the 18th February, 1836. His father Khudiram Chatterjee was a man of great piety and uprightness of character. His adherence to truth was so great that he would not break this cherished principle of his life even when he found that its observance meant utter ruin to himself and his family. Once when bidden by the landlord of the village to bear false witness in his favour, Khudiram refused to do so, and in his wrath at the defiance of this virtuous Brahmin, the big man of the village despoiled him of all his earthly possessions. His mother Chandramani Devi too was a paragon of womanly virtues. And tradition has it that this pious couple had many Divine visions and experiences before the birth of Sri Ramakrishna, indicative of the divinity of their Gadadhar, as they called their son in his early days.

From his infancy Sri Ramakrishna showed signs of the great power of personality that became a distinguishing feature of his in later life. As a boy he could easily fascinate people, and become the darling of his elders and the beloved leader of his own playmates. He had the soul of an artist that revelled in Nature's beauties, and caught the subtle shades of difference in sounds and images as well as in the formation of the faces and muscles of men. The favourite pastimes of his boyhood therefore consisted in mimicry, portraiture, clay-modelling, dramatic performances, devotional music and contemplation of epic heroes and heroines. And it was perhaps the artist in him that led him to revolt against the dull routine of the school and its curriculum of stereotyped studies, and to show a special dislike for exact sciences like mathematics. But his keen intellectual powers and prodigious memory more than compensated for this dislike of academic study. He educated himself in a higher sense by mastering the Hindu epics embodying the great spiritual ideals of India through

listening to their recital and exposition by scholars, and above all by going direct to Nature to study men and things through observation.

Among the boys of his age he was noted for his courage and stubborn spirit of independence. Even from infancy he knew no shyness or timidity. Full of health and vigour, he would never allow himself to be bullied or put down by elders when he considered himself to be in the right. In the face of some of the influential elders of the village he defied the rules of Purdah (the system of secluding women) which he considered in themselves to be of no use in educating women in high ideals of character. He must have been considered a revolutionary by many in that conservative village when, on the occasion of his *Upanayana* ceremony (investiture with sacred thread), he insisted, in the face of much opposition, on receiving his first Bhiksha or alms from a blacksmith woman, according to the promise he had made to her previously.

But the young rebel was not without the quality of reverence. For love of God was ingrained in him from childhood, and both in the worship of the Deity in his own house and in the religious activities of the village in general, he took a leading part. From early life he had a fancy for wandering ascetics, and he mixed and conversed with them freely whenever he got an opportunity.

With the advance of years his devotional inclinations took a more definite form. Enwrapped in Divine contemplation, he was often seen to pass into high spiritual moods that culminated in ecstasy. The most noteworthy occasions of such occurrences in his early days were mainly three - once while observing a flight of snow-white cranes against a dark sky overcast with sombre thunderclouds, next in the course of enacting the part of *Siva* in a village drama, and again



while singing songs in praise of the Deity during a pilgrimage. And it was this devotional strain that ultimately dominated over the leader, the artist and the rebel in him, and organised the diverse qualities of his personality in the service of the supreme spiritual ideal, the achievement of which made him one of the noted figures in modern times.

### III.

The proper environment for the full development of Sri Ramakrishna's personality was provided by the *Kali* temple of Dakshineswar in Calcutta, founded by the Rani Rasmani in 1855. The daily round of pious duties as the chief priest in the Divine Mother's temple fanned the fire of devotion in him. He was observed to spend hours in deep meditation and in singing devotional songs. It was also found that he was spending a large part of his nights in contemplation in the jungly regions of the garden, discarding of all clothing and even the sacred thread. In his method of worship the rigid observance of rituals was noticed to give place gradually to an informality of procedure born of a sense of intimacy with the object of worship.

All this was only the sign of the storm that was raging in his soul - the passionate longing to know whether the Mother whom he worshipped was real or not. As days passed, this longing became so great that one day he was about to put an end to his own life in despair. Suddenly the screens that hid the Truth from his soul's eyes disappeared, and passing into a state of ecstasy, he had a vision of the Divinity as 'a boundless, effulgent Ocean of Intelligence'. The solace and the sense of Divine presence accompanying this experience did not, however, last for many days. He found that it gave him only a glimpse of the higher life, but did not enrich his consciousness with a perpetual experience of the Divinity. Hence this first flight of the soul only went to whet his

appetite for the Divine, and in the period of dryness that soon followed, he was filled with a longing, even more powerful than the previous one, to feel the presence of God everywhere and at all times. The intensity of the urge was so great that he practically lost all sense of reality for the external world. Without any thought of even food or sleep, he began to spend his whole time in praying to the Divine Mother in the agony of his soul. It became impossible for him to perform the daily worship of the Deity in the temple any longer. Therefore Mathuranath, the Manager of the temple and son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, who had by this time developed great affection and respect for Sri Ramakrishna, relieved him of his duties in the temple, and gave him every facility to pursue his spiritual inclinations. And Sri Ramakrishna utilised this opportunity to plunge himself into prayer, meditation and ascetic practices with an intensity of spiritual aspiration that has seldom been witnessed in the world. Often, seized with a desperate longing, he was seen to rub his face on the ground until it bled.

Describing this insatiable longing of his soul for God, he said to his disciples in later days that it was something like the intense craving that a man thrust under water felt for a breath of air. Again he used to say that one could have a hazy idea of that craving for God if one could imagine a concentration of these three types of attachments - a miser's fondness for his hoarded wealth, a noble lady's love for her husband, and a mother's affection for her only child.

About this time he went on a visit to his village, Kamarpukur. His mother thought that if he married, his madness for God and supreme unconcern for the world would be checked, and that he would naturally come back to normal ways of living in course of time. Accordingly in 1859 he was wedded to Saradamani Devi, a little girl of five,

daughter of Ramchandra Mukhopadhyaya of a neighbouring village. Though this marriage was destined to have important consequences in his later days, it did not have the intended effect of abating his zeal for God. For, immediately after his return to Dakshineswar in 1860, his soul was again caught in the same cyclonic passion for God-love.

Till now his spiritual strivings may be described as a solitary and unaided quest. From this time onwards many great spiritual teachers went to him, as if sent by Divine Providence, to help him in his search after God, and with their guidance he began to practice various spiritual disciplines as enjoined in the scriptures.

There are two outstanding features that distinguish Sri Ramakrishna from other spiritual aspirants in this aspect of his life. One is the rapidity with which he attained success in each *Sadhana* (spiritual practice), which may be explained as due to the intensity of his quest. The other is the variety of *Sadhanas* he underwent, which is unprecedented in the spiritual history of mankind.

The first of his teachers to arrive was the *Bhairavi* Brahmani, who met Sri Ramakrishna in 1861. She was a middle-aged Brahmin woman of great learning and high spiritual attainments; and under her guidance he successfully underwent all the principal spiritual practices mentioned in the sixty-four *Tantras* of the *Sakta* cult. All these practices relate to the worship of the Deity as the Divine Mother of the universe, and several of them are so difficult to follow that none but those who are perfect masters of the senses, and are capable of seeing the Divinity in everything, can practice them with advantage or safety. His successful pursuit of them gives one a fair idea of the great purity of his mind and his innate spiritual genius. Besides bestowing on him the realisation of the Divine Mother in Her diverse

aspects, this discipline of Mother-worship established him in the conviction that every woman is a manifestation and a symbol of the Divine Mother in a special sense.

The Vaishnava form of *Sadhana* was another type of spiritual discipline that Sri Ramakrishna practised. The Vaishnavas worship the Deity by cultivating various forms of personal relationship with Him, known as *Bhavas* or attitudes, as those of the servant towards the master (*Dasya*), of the friend towards a friend (*Sakhya*), of the parent towards the child (*Vatsalya*), and of the beloved towards her sweet-heart (*Madhura*). Sri Ramakrishna adopted all these attitudes one after another, and while doing so, he used to identify himself with the classical personalities with whom a particular attitude has been traditionally associated - with *Mahavir* for *Dasya-bhava*, with *Radha* for *Madhura-bhava*, and so on. During such periods of identification, he used to live like those very personalities and express in himself their consciousness and behaviour. Thus for many months he lived like a woman, in the company of women, while practicing the *Sakhya* and *Madhura* forms of *Sadhana*; and neither he nor the ladies in whose company he lived felt any sense of strangeness or artificiality in this. So radical was the transformation he could effect at will on his consciousness and even on his physical life.

Next in 1864 he came into contact with a great *Vedantin* of the non-dualistic school, an itinerant monk named Totapuri. Sri Ramakrishna was initiated by him into the life of *Sannyasa*. Till now he was worshipping the Deity as the Divine Personality endowed with attributes. From Totapuri he learnt the method of contemplating on Him in His attributeless and impersonal aspect, So ripe was his mind for this highest form of spiritual discipline that within a period of three days after his initiation, he attained the

*Nirvikalpa-samadhi* or the state of unconditioned consciousness, which the *Advaita* scriptures speak of as the goal of all the spiritual endeavours of man. And after Totapuri had left Dakshineswar at the close of nearly a year's stay in the temple, Sri Ramakrishna remained in the non-dual state of *Nirvikalpasamadhi* continuously for six months.

In 1866 he received initiation in Islamic spiritual practices from a Sufi ascetic named Govinda, and discovered that that path also ultimately led to the same spiritual realisation which the Hindu systems of spiritual discipline had given him. Some time later he meditated on Christ and his ideals, and found the goal of that path also to be identical with that of the other religions.

The long period of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices came to a close in 1872 with the inspiring rite known as the Shodasi Pooja when he worshipped his own wedded wife as the symbol of the Deity. His girl-wife, Saradamani Devi, had by this time grown up into a young woman. During these years she had seen her husband only on two or three occasions. In 1872 she went to Dakshineswar, anxious as she was to serve her husband whom the village gossip described as mad. Quite unlike an ordinary ascetic, Sri Ramakrishna received her kindly, and did everything to educate her in secular and spiritual matters. Her presence at Dakshineswar also helped him to test his own realisation and sense-control, but in every form of crucial test, he found that he was above all bodily cravings, and that he could view every woman, including his own wife, as a manifestation of the Divine Mother. In token of this attainment, he placed his own wife before him as the Deity, offered her worship with all the proper rituals, surrendered all the fruits of his spiritual practices at the feet of the Deity

manifest as the pure virgin, and at the close of the worship entered into deep *Samadhi*.

#### IV.

The Shodasi Pooja is supposed to mark the close of Sri Ramakrishna's life as an aspirant (*Sadhakabhava*), and herald the period of his spiritual ministrations as the world-teacher (*Gurubhava*). After this time his insatiable craving for practising spiritual disciplines abated. In place of it he felt the unshakable conviction of truth within himself. What was more, he began to have a vivid consciousness of the mighty spiritual power and wisdom that the Divine Mother was manifesting through his body and mind, and he felt an intense longing to minister unto the spiritual needs of men.

Indeed, a detailed study of his life-incidents would show that from his boyhood onwards there was present in him the inborn quality of a teacher, and that gleams of spiritual wisdom emanating from him used to enlighten the hearts of men every now and then. This became more and more prominent in the course of his spiritual practices. His attitude towards Rani Rasmani and Mathuranath, the proprietors of the Dakshineswar temple, was not that of an employee, but that of an intimate friend at ordinary times, and that of their lord and saviour in his exalted spiritual moods. Persons who came to teach him often learned from him more than what they taught him. By his contact the *Bhairavi* Brahmani, had the defects of her character rectified and came to be endowed with supreme renunciation. From him, Totapuri, his spiritual preceptor in the path of *Advaita*, learned the secret of the love of the Personal God, to which he was a stranger before. Besides, when he went on pilgrimage with Mathuranath in 1870, many an aspirant in the holy places he visited drew inspiration from his company. And what was more, from time to time

innumerable ascetics of various orders were flocking to Dakshineswar, and most of the sincere aspirants among them received spiritual help from him. Among these aspirants were also some of the scholarly *Pandits* of those days like Vaishnavacharan, Padmalochan, Gauri and Narayan Sastri, who were so filled with inspiration in his company that they looked upon him as an Incarnation of Godhead.

Thus from his early days the mood of the teacher was present in him. But it was, however, occasional; the dominant attitude of his till now being that of a *Sadhaka* or spiritual aspirant. But after the Shodasi Pooja the ardour of the spiritual aspirant got transformed into the intensity of the redeeming love of the world-teacher.

Sri Ramakrishna was now a Divya, a divine man. His awareness of God had become perpetual, and did not depend on any particular state of mind like ecstasy, although the phenomenon of ecstasy continued to be a frequent occurrence with him till the last. The state of mind that he had gained may be described in terms of Christian mysticism as theopathic, or in his own words as *Bhavamukha* - a state in which the mind could ever dwell in the Divine both in His absolute and relative aspects, and yet, without the least distraction to this union, apply itself actively to everyday concerns of life. That his experience of God was not an imaginary state or a degenerate subnormal condition, we know from its effect on his character, which, in its power and purity, stands in striking contrast with that of the so-called great and mighty men of the world. Unlike even the best and the greatest of them, he was established in a state of peace, poise and radiant joy, which could not in the least be affected by any change of worldly fortune. He was absolutely free from carnality, and in all women, whether noble or fallen, he saw the expression of the Divine

Mother. Nor had he any selfish attachment to possessions, – a trait of character which he expressed by developing in himself a spontaneous inability to possess anything or even to touch any metal. For in the period of *Sadhana* he used to take mud and precious metal in hand and throw them both into the Ganges, discriminating within himself that, though their value differed in point of purchasing worldly goods, they were both alike, and to an equal degree worthless, in gaining for oneself the realisation of God. This idea went so deep into him that in course of time he began to feel even physical pain at the touch of any metal, and a violent shock in body and mind when anybody offered him money or property. He was also devoid of all worldly snobbery and discrimination against men placed in low positions of life, and this he symbolised by cleaning the dirty places in the huts of scavengers with his own long matted hair. His adherence to truth was something phenomenal. His habit of truthfulness extended not only to the major issues of life, but even to petty matters like an agreement to visit a place on a particular day, or to take a medicine from a particular person and not another. Even if his conscious mind happened to forget a promise or an agreement, his body reminded him of it by refusing to act in any way that would be contrary to his words. Indeed, he said that when he surrendered everything to the Divine Mother, he could not surrender the virtue of truthfulness: for, if that was done, the very truth of his self-surrender would be falsified. And withal, he possessed many wonderful powers of personality, of which we shall say more in the succeeding sections.

## V.

Although this phase of his life as the world-teacher might be said to have begun from 1872, his spiritual ministry reached its climax only after 1875 when he got acquainted with the great Brahma leader Keshub Chandra Sen. Keshub's public



utterances and writings about him attracted the notice of the educated men of Calcutta to him, and a constant stream of them, both young and old, began to visit him, attracted by the power of his love and holiness. Among those who met him and held him in great respect may be mentioned the names of many of India's best thinkers, writers and leaders of those days, like Keshub Chandra Sen, Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, Sivanath Sastri, Vijay Krishna Goswamy, Devendra Nath Tagore, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Aswini Kumar Dutt and Girish Chandra Ghosh.

From among the many earnest souls who went to him, a good many became very intimate with him, and formed the group of his devotees through whom his message was destined to be transmitted to the world at large in later days. This group was formed of two sets of people - one, of elderly, married gentlemen settled down in life, and the other, of young school and college boys who had not yet taken upon themselves the responsibilities of life. It was this second group that took to the life of *Sannyasa* afterwards, and formed the Ramakrishna Order of monks under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda, then known as Narendranath Datta. The Swami was the special object of Sri Ramakrishna's love and grace, and in later life spread his Master's message far and wide, and made a lasting impression on the consciousness of his countrymen as the great patriot-saint of modern India.

The rest of Sri Ramakrishna's life was spent in teaching these devotees and in moulding their lives in the light of the highest spiritual ideal. The manner and method of his teaching, as well as his relationship with his disciples, were in many respects unique. He never undertook the work of teaching in an egoistic sense. He was the humblest of men,

without any sense of ego in him, and he attributed all that he achieved to the Divine Mother of the universe. And it was because of this very fact of his having surrendered his ego completely to the Divine that the Guru *Sakti* (the redeeming power of the Lord) manifested itself through his body and mind in so remarkable a degree, sanctifying and enlightening all that came within their influence.

Before he accepted people as disciples, he subjected them to very minute tests and got a thorough understanding of their character. He would study their nature by observing their physical features - an art in which he was a past master. He would watch carefully the little actions of their daily life at unguarded moments, and, besides, gauge their worth by putting them questions and observing their reactions towards his teachings and ideals. In addition to these methods he would also sometimes use his Yogic powers to see into the hearts of men, or to put them in a sort of trance in which they revealed the innermost contents of their minds.

As for those whom he accepted as disciples, he made them his own by the power of his love, the like of which they never received even from their parents. He spared no pains in instructing them, and in seeing that they carried out his instructions into practice. Often by a touch or an act of will, he would obliterate any undesirable tendency he found in them, and bestow on them the highest experiences of spiritual life. The very contact with his dynamic personality, radiant with the flame of holiness and Divine love, imparted strength and steadiness to their aspiration for the Divine life. He never entered into arguments with people or delivered academic discourses to them, but just stated his settled convictions on spiritual matters in all humility, and left each person to understand and accept according to his capacity. He never forced his views on any one. Those of his

disciples who were critically-minded were free to criticise his teachings, and also to test him just as he himself tested them. Such conduct on their part only brought his praise, never his displeasure.

He had the strange capacity to make himself interesting and intelligible to people of diverse temperaments and stages of intellectual development. He could astound learned *Pandits* like Sasadhar and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar by the profundity of his wisdom, and he could also bring himself to the intellectual level of the ignorant village woman who went to him to get the wounds of her heart healed, or to have her simple doubts cleared. Himself an orthodox Hindu in his life and thought, and quite innocent of modern scientific and social ideas, he could yet have appreciation and sympathy for the ideals and aspirations of champions of reform and rationalism. In his room could therefore meet on friendly terms a Viswanath Upadhaya and a Keshub Chandra, a Narendranath and a Nag Mahashay, a Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar and a Girish Chandra Ghosh. As in the practice of diverse religions with mutually conflicting traditions, here too the unparalleled catholicity of his mind and heart could alone account for this wide range of his sympathy and his appeal as a teacher to men of diverse temperaments and outlooks. Truly he was the most universal yet most individual of men.

There was with him none of the formal features usually characteristic of the relationship between Guru and disciple, nor did he demand any cringing reverence or any attitude of awful expectancy from those whom he taught. His disciples were more intimate with him than the members of a loving family, and he was to them dearer than their earthly parents. He preached no particular dogma, creed or philosophy. What he did was to convey to people a spirit that transformed their outlook on life and gave them an

insight into the ultimate nature of the world and of human personality. In doing this, he relied not on formal sermons and discourses, but on loving contacts, illustrations drawn from Nature, a life of purity and self-control, and above all the practice of silent *Japa* and meditation. He never failed to impress on his disciples that the scrupulous observance of truth and absolute continence was the indispensable condition for the realisation of spiritual ideals.

Another remarkable feature of his method was its unconventionality, and its intermingling of the serious and the funny, the sublime and the ordinary. Almost every day, centering on him, were enacted in his room scenes that by turn inspired, entertained, instructed and consoled those who were present. He would sing devotional songs with an ecstatic abandon, and dance with the joy of the Mother's name. This might be followed by simple and luminous exposition of abstruse metaphysical and ethical problems like the relation between the Impersonal and the Personal God, or the compatibility of God's goodness with the existence of evil in the world. From these thoughts on transcendental wisdom, he could, with the utmost ease, come to sound practical instruction on conduct in the world. He taught the simple-minded Yogen about the ways of bargaining in the market; checked the impetuous Niranjan in his rash actions; taught Hari, the disciple who hated women, to be considerate towards the fair sex; consoled old Mani Mallick in the bereavement of his only son; and reprimanded the brother of S. for neglecting his duty towards wife and children. His instructions, whether on philosophy, devotion or conduct, would take the form of witty sayings, striking analogies and illuminating parables couched in his rustic conversational Bengali of a highly expressive type, and delivered in his sonorous voice with a 'slight though delightful stammer' in it. Often these talks were punctuated with humorous remarks that created side-splitting laughter

among his hearers and with masterly caricatures of men and things – of the Kirtaniya (professional singer of religious songs) receiving rich visitors, of the idle talks of pilgrims going for bath in the Ganges, of hypocritical devotees bargaining with fish-mongers, of domineering widows asserting authority in their brothers' houses, of henpecked husbands submissive only to their wives and of several other features of daily life which revealed great powers of observation and of healthy criticism. In the midst of all this fun and frolic, a slight suggestion would raise his mind to a high spiritual pitch, and he would lose himself in devotional fervour, or in deep *Samadhi*, radiating the influence of his powerful thought on all who were around.

But with all his ecstasy and Divine intoxication, few men could excel him in attention to the minute details of life. He was very particular about personal cleanliness and about the orderliness of the things kept in his room. He disliked to see people going about with torn clothes and shoes, or keeping their houses insufficiently lighted. Whenever he went anywhere on a visit, he always carried the few things required for his personal use, and he advised his disciples never to go to a place at a time or in a manner that might cause inconvenience to their host. It is also remarkable that never in his life did he come away from a place leaving behind any of his things in forgetfulness, be it shoes, umbrella or cloth. And in spite of all his *Samadhi* and self-forgetfulness in the thought of God, the powers of his senses were so very keen that when he entered a room, his eagle eyes would at a glance observe all objects present there, and he could, even long after, give exact descriptions of the shape and position of even such of those things as were hardly noticed by others accompanying him.

Thus this great teacher of men spent his life, holding forth before the world the ideal of a perfect man; and actively

ministering to the spiritual needs of those who flocked to him, until his delicate frame broke down under the strain of constant teaching. In 1885 he had an attack of cancer of the throat. So a few months later, his devotees took him to Calcutta and put him under the treatment of the famous doctor Mahendra Lal Sarkar. With the passing of days, the disease got only aggravated in spite of the best medical aid. But even the prolonged tortures of this excruciating disease could not in the least affect the joy and serenity of his mind, or disturb his perpetual consciousness of the Divine Presence everywhere.

Moreover, this period of physical suffering formed also the most active part of his ministry. For, the Divine Power that was working through his body and mind found its fullest expression during this period. By 1884 his name had already become widely known in Calcutta, and therefore his presence in the city for treatment attracted large crowds to him. Though he was prohibited by doctors from speaking, his great love for men made him go against medical restrictions and give himself up entirely to the service of his visitors, quite regardless of its fatal effect on his own health.

The period of his illness was also the occasion for the spiritual advancement of his intimate devotees, and for the formation of a spirit of brotherhood among them, which later on fructified into the Ramakrishna Order of monks. For, while the expenses of his stay and treatment were defrayed by the householder devotees, his young disciples under the leadership of Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda), undertook to stay with him and nurse him in his illness. Thus at the bedside of their sick Master the disciples formed themselves into a community, unified by their common devotion to him and their earnestness to realise the spiritual ideal.

In spite of his physical illness, Sri Ramakrishna was like a living spiritual dynamo during this period. He blessed many of his devotees with higher experiences. Especially on the 1st of January 1886, he was in a highly exalted mood, and by an act of will he roused the latent spiritual powers of all the devotees who went to him for blessings. A few days after, he imparted the experience of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* to Swami Vivekananda.

After a period of nearly one year's illness, he gave up the body in the early hours of Monday, the 16th of August, 1886, leaving behind him a new spirit to be broadcast in this world by his disciples, especially by the young men who took to the life of renunciation, following in his footsteps.

## VI.

What did Sri Ramakrishna teach? Evidently he taught more by his life than by words. He never wrote or lectured, but imparted all his teachings in the shape of informal conversations, some of which have been faithfully recorded by his disciples. By their very nature, even these original sources of information cannot claim to exhaust his teachings. Whatever he taught by words, and whatever of it has been recorded by his direct disciples - of that the present book is a faithful and fairly comprehensive summary, consisting, as it does, of all the precious instructions lying scattered in a voluminous literature. Being a collection of extracts from various contexts, the subjectmatter of the present book is bound to appear fragmentary in spite of all attempts to give it a logical sequence by devices of arrangements. While no effort has been spared to arrange the sayings logically, we trust the general reader would find it easier to follow their trend of thought if we give below a summary of the fundamental principles embodied in them. The following brief summary

should not, however, be taken as the statement of a creed – for the Master taught no special creed or dogma – or as an exhaustive exposition of his teachings, but only as a guide to their detailed study.

Reality is in essence a principle of Intelligence. It is this one Intelligent Principle that is variously known as God, Allah, Buddha, *Siva*, *Vishnu*, *Brahman* etc., in the different religions of the world. It is both personal and impersonal, with attributes and without attributes. Impersonal does not mean less than personal, but without the limitations of personality.

While Reality transcends every form of relation in its absolute nature, it is, in its cosmic aspect, intimately related to the world of living and non-living beings as their cause, support and substratum. In this aspect the Intelligent Principle is spoken of as He or She, as Father or Mother of the universe. Both the *Jivas* (living beings) and the *Jagat* (non-living beings) are the manifestations of this Father-Mother Divinity. He is the source alike of what is pleasing and terrific in Nature.

For the devotee, however, He is the God of Love, the pains and terrors of life being only the devices He employs to draw His careless and forgetful children to His feet. He is present in every being, but is very near to a devoted heart in a special sense. He hears the sincere prayers that well up from the heart of man, and responds to them in His infinite mercy.

As the Impersonal, He can be approached through Knowledge, and as the Personal, through Love. But the path of Love and self-surrender is easier and more natural, and on one who treads this path He confers also the fruit of Knowledge – the sense of identity with the Absolute. In the



path of Love He may be looked upon as Father, Mother, Friend, Child, Lover or in any other intimate form of human relationship. According to the devotee's attitude He manifests Himself in various forms of beauty and holiness to his purified vision.

A special form of Divine mercy is the Incarnation. From time to time He embodies Himself as a human being of great holiness and spiritual power in order to show mankind the way of holy and righteous living. The founders of all the great religions, who have opened new paths of spiritual life to men of different ages and climes, are either such special Divine manifestations, or are souls specially commissioned by Him. To worship them and to meditate on their lives and doings form one of the most effective forms of spiritual upliftment.

The human personality is intimately related to the Cosmic Intelligence; for it is a manifestation of that Intelligence through the limitations of matter. Every soul is therefore potentially Divine, and the goal of life is to manifest this indwelling Divinity by controlling Nature within and without. All forms of righteous activity in life can aid this process, provided the proper attitude of mind is brought to bear on it. Religion embodies the methods evolved by mankind for the attainment of life's goal, and does not consist in mere intellectual assent to dogmas or creeds, or performance of rituals. Religion, in a vital sense, means the realisation or the actualisation of the great spiritual truths in our consciousness and daily activities. We shall have to do this through work, worship, psychic control, or philosophy - through one or all of these.

Strength is one of the most essential requirements of spiritual life. For strength is virtue and weakness is sin. Faith is the source of all strength - faith in God and faith in

oneself. Self-depreciation, or morbidly dwelling upon one's essential sinfulness, is no part of true religion, and should, by all means, be avoided; for sin is not overcome by dwelling on thoughts of sin but by contemplating the inherent Divinity of the soul. Man is no sinner but a child of God. An abiding consciousness of this is the true faith, the source of all strength and therefore of all virtue.

Spiritual life is impossible without a sound moral basis. The underlying principle of all morality is unselfishness. A man cannot be unselfish unless he is imbued with the spirit of renunciation. Renunciation means the giving up of *Kama* and *Kanchana*, i.e., lust and greed. The spirit of renunciation manifests in life as purity of character, as devoted service to fellow-beings, and as a strong and steady aspiration for the Divine. The vision of God dawns in a heart in which the spirit of renunciation and the intensity of aspiration have reached their maturity. If a man does not reach this goal, or at least make some progress towards its realisation, his life on earth, as a man, has surely been in vain.

## **Book I: Man and the World**

An eternal portion of Myself, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the mind and the five senses that rest in Nature.

Three are the gates of this hell leading to the ruin of the soul - lust, wrath and greed. Therefore let man renounce these three.

The man who has escaped these three gates of darkness, O *Arjuna*, works out his own good and reaches the highest state.

Bhagavadgita

# Chapter I: Man

The destiny of man – Real nature of man – Man in bondage – Death and reincarnation

## The Destiny of Man

1. You see many stars in the sky at night, but not when the sun rises. Can you therefore say that there are no stars in the heavens during the day? O man, because you cannot find God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God.

2. He is born in vain, who having attained the human birth, so difficult to get, does not attempt to realise God in this very life.

3. A man is rewarded according to his thoughts and motives. The Lord is like *Kalpataru*, the wish-yielding tree of heaven. Everyone gets from Him whatever he seeks. A poor man's son, having received education and become a judge of the High Court by hard work, is apt to think, "Now I am happy. I have reached the highest rung of the ladder. It is all right now." To him the Lord says, "Do thou remain so." But when the judge of the High Court retires on pension and reviews his past, he understands that he has wasted his life, and exclaims, "Alas, what real work have I done in this life!" To him the Lord also says, "Alas! What hast thou done!"

4. Man is born in this world with two tendencies – *Vidya*, the tendency to pursue the path of liberation, and *Avidya*, the leaning towards worldliness and bondage. At his birth, both

these tendencies are, as it were, in equilibrium like the two scales of a balance. The world soon places its enjoyments and pleasures in one scale, and the Spirit its attractions in the other. If the mind chooses the world, the scale of *Avidya* becomes heavy, and man gravitates towards the earth; but if it chooses the Spirit, the scale of *Vidya* becomes heavier and pulls him towards God.

5. Know the One, and you will know the all. Ciphers placed after the figure 1 get the value of hundreds and of thousands, but they become valueless if you wipe out that figure. The many ciphers have value only because of the One. First the One and then the many. First God, and then the *Jivas* and the *Jagat* (creatures and the world).

6. First gain God, and then gain wealth; but do not try to do the contrary. If, after acquiring spirituality, you lead a worldly life, you will never lose your peace of mind.

7. Do you talk of social reform? Well, you may do so after realising God. Remember, the *Rishis* of old gave up the world in order to attain God. This is the one thing needful. All other things shall be added to you, if indeed you care to have them. First see God, and then talk of lectures and social reforms.

8. A new-comer to a city should first secure a comfortable room for his rest at night, and after keeping his luggage there, he may freely go about the city for sight-seeing. Otherwise he may have to suffer much in the darkness of night to get a place for rest. Similarly, after securing his eternal resting place in God, a new-comer to this world can fearlessly move about doing his daily work. Otherwise, when the dark and dreadful night of death comes over him, he will have to encounter great difficulties and sufferings.

9. At the doors of large granaries are placed traps containing fried rice (Moori) to catch mice. The mice, attracted by the flavour of the fried rice, forget the more solid pleasures of tasting the rice inside the granary, and fall into the trap. They are caught therein and killed. Just so is the case with the soul. It stands on the threshold of Divine bliss, which is like millions of the highest worldly pleasures solidified into one; but instead of striving for that bliss, it allows itself to be enticed by the petty pleasures of the world and falls into the trap of *Maya*, the great illusion, and dies therein.

10. A *Pandit*: The Theosophists say that there are '*Mahatmas*'. They also say that there are different planes and spheres like astral plane, Devayanic plane, solar sphere, lunar sphere etc., and that man's subtle body can go to all these places. They say many other such things. Sir, what is your opinion on Theosophy?

The Master: *Bhakti* alone is supreme - *Bhakti* or devotion to God. Do they care for *Bhakti*? If they do, that is well. It is well if they have God-realisation for their aim and goal. But remember, to be engrossed in such trivial things as solar sphere, lunar sphere, astral sphere etc., is not genuine search after God. One has to do *Sadhanas* (spiritual practices) in order to get devotion to His lotus feet; one has to weep for Him with the intense longing of the heart. The mind should be gathered up from the different objects and concentrated exclusively on Him. He is not in the *Vedas* or *Vedanta* or in any scripture. Nothing will be achieved unless one's heart yearns for Him. One has to pray to Him with intense devotion, and practise *Sadhanas*. God cannot be realised so easily. *Sadhanas* are necessary.

11. Will all men see God? No man will have to fast for the whole day; some get their food at 9 a.m., some at noon,