SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

One day Shri Ramakrishna saw a vision which threw his whole body into a shiver. He saw that the Divine Mother pointed out to him a boy as being his son. How could he have a son? The very idea was death to him! Then the Divine Mother consoled Her disconsolate child and said that the boy was his spiritual son and not a son in the worldly sense. Shri Ramakrishna breathed a sigh of relief. Afterwards when the same boy came to him as a disciple Ramakrishna at once recognised him to be the one he had seen in his vision. He was later known as Swami Brahmananda.

The early name of Swami Brahmananda was Rakhal Chandra Ghosh. He came of an aristocratic family in Basirhat in the district of twenty-four Parganas. His father Ananda Mohan Ghosh was a zemindar. His mother was a pious lady and a devotee of Shri Krishna. Perhaps it was she who gave her son the name Rakhal (meaning the boy-companion of Shri Krishna) when the latter was born on 21st January 1863. Unfortunately the mother died when Rakhal was only five years old. Soon after, his father married a second wife who brought up Rakhal.

Rakhal grew up a very healthy and fine-looking boy. There was something in his very appearance which endeared him to one and all. His education began in the village school which was started by Ananda Mohan chiefly for the sake of his son. During those days the village schoolmasters were famous for using their rods. Rakhal would feel pained if any of his class-mates had
to undergo corporal punishment. This attracted the notice of the teacher, who afterwards gave up the practice of caning altogether. As a student Rakhal was remarkable for his intelligence. But even as a boy he had varied interests in life. Physically he was much stronger than the average boy of his age. His companions found it hard to cope with him in wrestling or at play. He would take part in many village games and show unsurpassed skill in them. But play and games did not absorb the whole of his attention. Near by was a temple dedicated to the Goddess Kali. Often enough Rakhal would be found in the precincts of the temple. Sometimes he would play at Mother-worship along with his companions. Sometimes he would himself form a beautiful clay image of the Mother and remain absorbed in worship. Even at an early age Rakhal had great devotion to gods and goddesses. During the time of Durga Puja in the family, he would be found seated still and calm witnessing the ceremony, or at the hour of darkness, when the evening service was being performed, Rakhal would be seen standing before the Deity in great devotion.

Rakhal, from his boyhood, had instinctive love for devotional music. When begging friars sang songs in praise of Krishna the Flute-player of Vrindaban, or when anyone sang songs about the Divine Mother, he would become lost to himself. Sometimes he would repair with his companions to a secluded spot in the midst of the field close to the village, and they would sing devotional songs in chorus. In the course of singing, he would occasionally lose almost all outward consciousness, his mind soaring up to a higher region. After he had finished the primary education, Rakhal
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was sent to Calcutta in 1875 and admitted into an
English High School. In Calcutta he came in contact
with Narendra Nath, afterwards known as Swami
Vivekananda, who was then leader of the boys of the
locality. Narendra, with his dynamic spirit and born
leadership, cast his influence over others and carried
them along the path he thought right. Rakhal, meek,
quiet and soft-natured as he was, easily came under his
spell, and there grew a close friendship between the
two which culminated in a common discipleship at
Dakshineswar and bore far-reaching results.

Rakhal and Narendra practised physical exercise in
a common gymnasium along with their other compan-
ions. And it was Narendra who took Rakhal to the
Brahmo Samaj, where they promised not to worship
any image. Rakhal’s inborn religious tendencies began
to unfold themselves more definitely at this stage. He
would be found brooding over the mysteries of life and
death, and his mind longed for the realisation of the
Eternal Verity. He was intelligent and sharp, but he
now lost all interest in his school work. His guardians
became alarmed at his indifference to studies. At first
they tried to change his attitude through loving
persuasion. When that failed, they became stern and
strict. But as all measures proved abortive, Rakhal’s
father got him married, thinking that thereby his
interest would turn towards worldly things. Such,
however, was the irony of fate that this marriage itself
brought Rakhal into contact with the one who afterwards changed the whole course of his life.

Rakhal married the sister of one Manomohan Mitra
of Konnagar, an important village up the Ganga on
the right bank, a few miles from Dakshineswar. Both
Manomohan and his mother were great devotees of Shri Ramakrishna. After this marriage, Manomohan one day, in the middle of 1881, took him to Dakshineswar to meet the Master. When Rakhal bowed before the Master, the vision the latter had seen came before his mind, and he was swept by a wave of joy, but he did not give vent to his feelings except by the fact that he treated Rakhal with utmost kindness. Rakhal was charmed with the wonderful love of the Master and thought that he had never received such affection from anybody before. Naturally, the thought of the Master haunted his mind even after he had returned home. As a result, some time afterwards, Rakhal one day went to Dakshineswar alone. The Master was in ecstasy at the sight of Rakhal, and the latter stood dumbfounded.

Rakhal now frequented Dakshineswar as often as he could. He began also sometimes to stay there. Though a young man of eighteen or nineteen, in the presence of the Master he felt like a child of four, or five, and he actually behaved that way. In the Master, Rakhal found the deep affection of his long-lost mother and the tender care of his father, only in a degree infinitely more intense. The Master also treated him exactly as his child. He would feel concerned for him as for a helpless infant. Whereas other disciples attended to the comforts of the Master, the latter himself would often take care of Rakhal. And there was such a spontaneity and naturalness in this strange relationship between the two, that a bystander would rather enjoy it than feel astonished at it. Whereas other disciples would consider it a great favour and privilege if they were allowed to do the least service for the Master, Rakhal would sometimes refuse point-blank to perform
work which he was called upon to do by the Master. Instead of being annoyed, Shri Ramakrishna was rather amused at such behaviour; for it indicated the intimacy which had developed between them. But Rakhal would usually be eager to attend to all the comforts of the Master. He was more than a personal attendant to him. A son does not serve his father with so much loving devotion as Rakhal served the Master. And in addition to such services, he would carefully guard the body of the Master when the latter’s mind was lost in Samadhi. At times, when the Master would walk about in his ecstatic moods, Rakhal would guide his footsteps by holding his body and giving loud directions about the things to be guarded against.

When Rakhal’s visit to Dakshineswar became frequent, and sometimes he began to stay there to the detriment of his studies, his father was annoyed and afterwards alarmed. He tried his best to persuade Rakhal to be mindful of his future worldly career, but it was impossible for Rakhal to think of his future in terms of material happiness. Persuasion having failed, Ananda Mohan kept Rakhal under surveillance, but Rakhal managed to escape and run to Dakshineswar. When all measures failed, Ananda Mohan gave up the case of Rakhal as hopeless. Rakhal now felt relieved that he could stay with the Master without any interference from home.

Rakhal received from the Master not only the tender affection of a parent, but also the guidance of a spiritual Guru. It was the unsurpassed love of the Master which at first drew Rakhal to him, but the latter soon found that behind that human affection there was a spiritual power which could transform lives by a mere
wish or thought. Through the Master's incomparable love, Rakhal began to undergo a great spiritual transformation.

The Master was very keen in regard to the spiritual training of his beloved son. If need be, he did not hesitate to scold Rakhal for the least failing noticed in him. One day when Rakhal came before the Master, the latter asked him why there was a shadow of darkness over his face. Was it the result of any wrong he had committed? Rakhal gaped in wonder. He could not remember to have done anything wrong. But after long cogitation he recollected that he had told a fib in fun. Then the Master cautioned him not to tell a lie even in joke.

One day the Master with Rakhal went on invitation to attend a religious festival. But the organisers of the festival were busy with rich and influential people and showed scant courtesy to the Master. This was certainly more than young Rakhal could bear. Like a petulant boy he asked the Master to leave the place at once. But the Master would not listen to his counsel, and put up with any amount of indignity. Afterwards he told Rakhal that if they had left the place in resentment that would have caused harm to the master of the house. Rakhal saw the depth of meaning even behind the trifling acts of the Master, and himself got a lesson in humility and self-effacement.

Sometimes in a spiritual mood Shri Ramakrishna would quite unexpectedly bestow the highest gifts on his chosen disciples. Once Rakhal was in meditation in front of the Kali temple when the Master arrived on the spot. Finding him seated in meditation, the Master accosted him and said, "This is your sacred Word and
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this is your Chosen Ideal.” Rakhal looked up and was vouchsafed the vision of his Chosen Deity. He was beside himself with joy at this unexpected stroke of favour.

As he continued his stay with the Master at Dakshineswar Rakhal’s spiritual life began to progress rapidly. There were many occasions when he would be so much absorbed in meditation that he would lose all consciousness of the sense-world, and the Master had to come to his aid to bring his thought down to the plane of ordinary consciousness. The Master was so much pleased with the spiritual progress Rakhal was making that he would sometimes publicly praise him. In those days Rakhal would be constantly in communion with God. He would day and night repeat the Holy Name, and his moving lips would betray what was going on inside. The very sight of this would now and then throw the Master into ecstasy. Out of the fullness of joy at having such a worthy disciple Shri Ramakrishna began to teach Rakhal the intricacies of Yoga and various forms of spiritual practice. But Rakhal hated any publicity in these things. He would undertake his spiritual practices as secretly as possible. But his appearance, modes of thought and conduct, and, above all, the radiating sweetness of his nature would indicate the inner transformation he was undergoing.

Spiritual life is not, however, all smooth-sailing. There are ups and downs even there. Rakhal also had to pass through difficulties. One day Rakhal sat for meditation in the music hall of the Kali temple, but however much he tried, his mind wandered about till he got exasperated. He was filled with remorse and self-disparagement. He had received the blessings of a
saint like the Master and everything in the atmosphere was favourable to spiritual progress, and yet such was the condition of his mind! Perhaps he was not fit for spiritual life. Such stormy thoughts assailed him, and in sheer disgust and agony he left the seat of meditation. By a strange coincidence Shri Ramakrishna was just then passing that way. Looking at Rakhal he inquired why he got up from his seat after such a short time. Rakhal in all frankness narrated what was passing through his mind. The Master looked grave and pensive for a while and then asked Rakhal to open his mouth. While muttering some indistinct words, the Master wrote something on his tongue. It had the instantaneous effect of unloading the burden of Rakhal’s mind. He felt relieved, and an inner current of joy flowed through his mind. The Master smiled and asked him to try to meditate again.

Rakhal was having a blissful time with the Master at Dakshineswar. But trouble came. He began to have repeated attacks of fever, which made the Master very anxious. At that time the great devotee Balaram Bose was about to go to Vrindaban. With him Rakhal was also sent for a change of climate. There again Rakhal fell ill. That made the Master all the more anxious, for he had known in a vision that Rakhal was a companion of Shri Krishna in a previous incarnation, so that he was apprehensive of Rakhal’s giving up his body if the recollection of the past came to his mind. Hence he prayed piteously to the Divine Mother for his spiritual son, and was not relieved till he got an assurance from Her. After three months Rakhal returned to Dakshineswar much improved in health, and the Master was glad beyond measure to receive him.
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The number of devotees and young disciples who were attracted by the personality of the Master was steadily on the increase. Some of the young disciples were Rakhal's old friends and acquaintances; so he was happy to have a tie of common discipleship with them. But they were not to enjoy the holy company of the Master long. For he fell ill of throat trouble which developed into cancer. He was removed to Shyampukur, Calcutta, and then to Cossipore for facilities of better treatment. Under the leadership of Narendra Nath, Rakhal and others threw themselves heart and soul into the work of nursing the Master. These were days of service to the Guru as well as of strenuous spiritual discipline. Rakhal was by nature introspective, but now he grew more and more serious and indrawn. One day the Master said, "Rakhal has the wisdom and capacity to administer a vast kingdom." Narendra understood what it meant. The young disciples held Rakhal in great esteem, because he was so much loved and admired by the Master. One day Narendra suggested to his brother-disciples, "Henceforward let us address Rakhal as 'Raja' (meaning king)." Everyone gave a spontaneous assent to the proposal. When the news reached the ears of the Master, he was glad and remarked, "Indeed it is an appropriate name for Rakhal."

The disciples were hoping against hope that the Master would recover. But his health was gradually turning from bad to worse. One day Rakhal in agony asked the Master to pray to the Divine Mother for recovery. But it was impossible for the Master to pray for any particular thing against the will of God, much less for his health. He simply replied, "That rests with
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God.” Yes, God’s will prevailed against all human efforts. In spite of the best medical care and treatment, the Master began to sink and passed away on August 16, 1886.

After the passing of the Master, Rakhal joined the monastery at Baranagore along with the other young disciples. Subsequently they took Sannyasa ceremonially and changed their family names. Thus Rakhal became Swami Brahmananda. But his brother-disciples preferred to address him as “Raja”, as a mark of deep love and respect, and in subsequent years, he was known in the order as Raja Maharaj or simply Maharaj.

If the period of stay in the company of the Master was one of supreme bliss, the days at Baranagore were of hard Tapasya. The young disciples were ready to lay down their lives, as it were, in search of the great Unknown. They did not care about physical comforts, they did not care about food and drink; the one supreme thought of their lives was how to realise the Self or rather how to make the realisations they had in the presence of the Master a permanent factor in their lives.

After some time even the life at Baranagore seemed to them too secure for their spiritual growth. They wanted to be lost in the wide unknown world with no help and guide excepting God. Some of them began to go to places of pilgrimage to practise Tapasya in seclusion. Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), spurred by such a spirit of renunciation, went to Puri. He stayed there for some time begging his food here and there and passing his days in the thought of the Lord. The devotees and disciples of the Master could never bear the idea that Maharaj should suffer any hardship, for was he not the special care of the Master? So when
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Balaram Bose, who had a big estate in Orissa and a rich establishment at Puri, heard that Maharaj was undergoing great austerities, he began to press the latter to stay with him in more comfort. Maharaj, finding thus that at Puri he could not follow his own way of life, returned to Baranagore. But he was seized with intense longing to make harder efforts to realise the goal of life. He expressed his desire to go to North India and to practise Tapasya somewhere there. The leader, Narendra Nath, reluctantly agreed to allow his beloved brother-disciple to embrace the wandering life. But he directed another brother-disciple, Swami Subodhananda, to accompany him, so that “Raja” would not have to suffer much inconvenience. Swami Brahmamananda went to Varanasi via Deoghar and stayed there for some time. From Varanasi he went to Omkarnath on the bank of the Narmada. It is said that while practising Tapasya on the bank of that holy river, he was once, for six days at a stretch, in an ecstatic mood, almost oblivious of the outward world. After Omkarnath he with his brother-disciple and a devotee visited other places of pilgrimage like Panchavati, holy with the association of Ramachandra and Sita, Dwarka, where there is the famous temple of Shri Krishna, Porbandar, Girnar, Ajmer, etc., and afterwards returned to Vrindaban. For a soul like Swami Brahmananda, visiting these holy places did not simply mean the satisfaction of the idle curiosity of a sight-seer, but at every place he would identify himself with the deeper spirit of the environment. As a result he was constantly absorbed within himself, and though his lips were closed, his face indicated the spiritual fire within. Many were the persons who were attracted to him merely by his
placid countenance and indrawn look. They would feel it a privilege to be of some service to him, and pressed Maharaj to receive it, but one whose mind was soaring high was altogether indifferent to any material comfort. It was difficult, if not impossible to persuade Maharaj to accept any gift. If extremely pressed, Maharaj would agree to accept something, but that would be so little and of such a trifling nature that it would cause more astonishment than pleasure to the giver.

It was for the second time that the Swami came to Vrindaban. Here he passed the days in severe spiritual practices. He was burning with a desire to reach the ultimate goal of life, and in the attempt to realise this desire any price was not too great for him to pay. Throughout the day he would be engaged in one or another form of spiritual practice. Swami Subodhananda was there with him. But they hardly talked. Swami Subodhananda would fetch food for him; but sometimes he would eat it and sometimes be oblivious of it. The great saint Vijay Krishna Goswami, who had seen Rakhal at Dakshineswar and knew how he had been loved by Shri Ramakrishna, was at this time staying at Vrindaban. When he saw the severe austerities Maharaj was undergoing, he asked him: "What necessity have you for so much austerity? Has not the Master given you all that is covetable in spiritual life?" To this Maharaj simply smiled and replied, "What I got from him I want to make a permanent possession." After some time Swami Subodhananda left for a pilgrimage to Hardwar, and Maharaj lived alone. This gave him greater freedom of life and an opportunity to practise harder Tapasya.
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At Vrindaban he heard the news that the great devotee Balaram Bose had died. This upset him so much that he left Vrindaban and went to the Himalayan region at Hardwar for greater solitude. He stayed at Kankhal near Hardwar for a period. Afterwards he would say that the atmosphere of Kankhal was very favourable for spiritual growth. While he was living there, Swamiji (Vivekananda), with Turiyananda, Saradananda, and Vaikuntha Sanyal unexpectedly came from Almora to meet him. The joy of such a meeting can be better imagined than described. Swami Vivekananda feared that perhaps Swami Brahmananda would impair his health by hard Tapasya and living alone; so he compelled him to accompany him on his way to Meerut. After some time, when Swamiji left his brother-disciples in order to wander alone, Swami Brahmananda, accompanied by Swami Turiyananda, started on a pilgrimage to Jwalamukhi and from there he visited various other sacred places in the Punjab, Sind, Bombay, and Rajputana. At Bombay they met Swamiji who was then preparing to sail for America to attend the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. With the Swami they travelled up to Abu Road Station, from where they returned to Vrindaban. Here both of them gave their time entirely to spiritual practices, Swami Turiyananda also taking care of Maharaj. They had a very enviable time at Vrindaban, both of them being absorbed day and night in communion with God. Afterwards they would very delightfully recount many happy incidents of their lives there.

While the two brother-disciples were enjoying spiritual bliss in the holy atmosphere of Vrindaban, the news reached them that a tremendous success had attended
the mission of Swamiji in America. They were very glad to see that the prophetic utterances of the Master with respect to their leader had come true. Swamiji was constantly writing to his Gurubhais to plunge themselves into work for the regeneration of India as well as for the welfare of humanity. Repeated requests began to come from Swamiji, as also from the monastery which had now been removed to Alambazar from Baranagore, asking the two brothers at Vrindaban to return to Bengal, so that all might organise themselves together into a band for future work. At first Swami Turiyananda returned, and he was followed also by Maharaj at the end of 1894.

The arrival of the “Raja” at the Math created a great stir and enthusiasm. Everybody was so glad to have the privilege of his company. His very presence had an uplifting influence on the atmosphere. Maharaj also was glad to see that the message of the Master made such a tremendous appeal to the world. Knowing the Master as he did, he was not surprised at that, but he wanted to make the Math a more powerful vehicle for the spread of that message. Once he said to his Gurubhais: “Your life, your Math will be the source of solace, hope, and inspiration to all who are weary and heavy-laden. Just build up your life accordingly.” When Swami Vivekananda heard in America that “Raja” had returned to the Math, he was highly delighted. For he had always a great regard for the judgement and opinion of Swami Brahmananda. And had not the Master said that Rakhal possessed the capability to rule a kingdom? Swami Vivekananda fell upon the world like an avalanche. He moved like a whirlwind from one end of the world to the other to impart
his message. He was too busy and dynamic. He had no time, as he said, to give his message a finish. He had some big plans in his hand, which required sustained effort for fruition. But he knew that his life was short. Hence after launching some of his schemes very successfully, he needed somebody to carry them out faithfully. So far as the Ramakrishna brotherhood was concerned, Maharaj, with his infinite calm and patience, extraordinary common sense and wisdom, and faithfulness to the leader, was the very man to make that message fruitful in the soil of India. Swamiji came upon the world as a thundering voice. Maharaj’s life was like the gentle dew that falls unknown and unperceived but brings in the rich autumnal harvest.

Two years after Maharaj had returned to the Math, Swami Vivekananda also had returned to India. When the great Swamiji met Maharaj, he handed over to the latter all the money he had collected for the Indian work, and said: “Now I am relieved. I have handed over the sacred trust to the right person.” Maharaj was the “friend, philosopher, and guide” of Swamiji in everything concerning the management of the monastery and the philanthropic works of the Mission. He gave advice about his plans, and followed his ideas in action. He also took care of his health. When the Ramakrishna Mission Society was started, Swamiji became the general President and Maharaj was made the President of the Calcutta centre. But in the beginning of 1902 Swamiji relinquished his position. Swami Brahmananda was then elected to that place and he worked as the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission till his last day.

The relation between Swamiji and Maharaj was
wonderful, and very enjoyable to anyone who witnessed it. Both were beloved of the Master. Both were termed by the Master as Nityasiddhas and Ishvarakotis, that is souls who are eternally free and belong to the divine class but come down to earth for the good and guidance of humanity. Both knew each other intimately from their school days, and their lifelong relationship only increased their love and respect for each other. When Swamiji returned from America, he bowed down to Maharaj saying, “The son of the Guru is to be respected as much as the Guru himself.” Maharaj too did not lag behind in his sense of humour. He returned the compliment saying, “To the elder brother is due the respect that is given to a father.” To impress on others’ minds the spiritual eminence of Swami Vivekananda, Maharaj said: “Where else would you find a holy man like Naren?” He also remarked that when one sat in meditation with Swamiji, one’s mind naturally became meditative, to which he himself would bear witness.

With this spiritual background the human relationship between the two was very interesting. Sometimes with his practical common sense and intimate knowledge of local affairs Maharaj had to modify plans given by Swamiji. At that the latter would at times become angry and upset. But afterwards when he understood his own mistake, he repented in such a way that the supposedly aggrieved party felt embarrassed, and regretted the suffering caused to Swamiji. Swami Vivekananda was fond of animals; Swami Brahmamandana was a lover of gardens. When the animals of one would damage the garden of the other, there would ensue a quarrel the seriousness of which would cause side-splitting laughter to the bystanders.
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Swamiji had infinite faith in the loyalty of Maharaj to his cause. He would say: “Others may desert me. But Raja will stand by me till the last.” The two giants put their shoulders together to further the cause of the work started in the name of the Master. The new monastery at Belur was established in 1899. A permanent centre was started in Madras, another was opened in the retreat of the Himalayas. Others in India were growing. The Vedanta centres in New York and San Francisco came into existence in 1894 and 1900 respectively. The work was progressing apace. But the two Swamis could not work together long. The life of Swami Vivekananda was prematurely cut short in the year 1902.

The passing away of the leader was a great blow to the work he had started. And it was a great shock to his Gurubhais, specially to Maharaj on whom the whole responsibility now fell and who was looked up to for guidance by the whole institution. But suppressing the feeling of personal bereavement at the passing away of Swamiji, he turned his attention to the discharge of the duties that devolved on him.

Maharaj’s method of work was wonderful. Though his responsibility was too great for any ordinary mortal, his calmness was never disturbed, the serenity of his mind was never ruffled. About the secret of work he once said: “Give the whole of your mind to God. If there is no wastage of mental energy, with a fraction of your mind you can do so much work that the world will be dazed.” The truth of this was exemplified in the life of the Swami himself. Who could have believed on seeing him that he was bearing such a heavy burden? Rather it seemed as if he was indifferent with regard
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to the affairs of the organisation and that his whole mind was given to God. It was as if only by an effort that he could bring his mind down to mundane things. His far away look, his half-closed eyes, deeply calm composure indicated that his thoughts did not belong to this plane of existence. Yet he was sure of the progress of the work for he relied more on the spiritual attainments and character of the members of the organisation than on the outer circumstances, though he never neglected the latter. He had intimate knowledge of the minds of the different members working even in distant centres. He could read characters at a glance and guide them accordingly. Every member of the vast organisation felt that his interest was safe in the hands of the Swami. His gentle wish was more than a command to all the workers.

The interests of the Swami were varied. He could give wise direction for the design of a building, he could formulate plans for relief works, his suggestions on the methods of education were valued by educationists, his advice regarding the principles to be followed in editing books was at once found to be extremely sound, and in every Ashrama, he visited or stayed in, he encouraged people to have flower and kitchen gardens. His love of flowers was great. To his spiritual vision, the flowers that bloomed in the gardens were the offerings of Nature to the All-pervading Deity. Anyone plucking a flower or injuring a flower plant would incur the greatest displeasure of Maharaj. He would see that the accounts of public money were kept with the strictest regularity. He would not tolerate the slightest carelessness in this respect.

In spite of all these interests, one could vividly see
in him that here was a mind which could not be brought down to the level of ordinary work. It was very difficult to persuade Maharaj to attend the meetings of the Trustees of the Math or of the Governing Body of the Mission. He had a happy knack of feeling "slightly indisposed" on such occasions or of giving suggestions that the meeting might be postponed. Those who were responsible for convening such meetings had a hard time with Maharaj in this respect. They felt that they were trying to bring within the constitution of the law a soul which eternally soared above all laws. They felt greatly pained at the thought of what a great torture it meant to the Swami. But once he could be brought to the meeting his opinions and suggestions were invaluable. Experiences showed that his counsels were so very correct that nobody, even in the course of the debate, later on, would feel inclined to dispute what he had said. And there was hardly any debate at such meetings. What the Swami would say or even remotely suggest would invariably be accepted by all. Swami Saradananda, who was the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, once said to a young worker, "When I say a thing, you should judge and discriminate whether I am right or wrong, but when Maharaj says a thing you may safely accept that as true without the slightest doubt."

Swami Brahmananda could count on such implicit allegiance just because he kept the Master's spiritual ideal above all other considerations. Two illustrations will suffice. A rich man of Calcutta, who had lost his only son, came to live at Belur to be near the monks for whose philanthropic work he had great respect. After a few days, he proposed to donate all his property
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to the Ramakrishna Mission for charitable purposes. When this was communicated to Maharaj by Swami Premananda, Maharaj said: "How strange it is, my brother, that this man should imbibe our renunciation by living in our company, and we should get his worldliness from him!" Swami Premananda understood and felt ashamed, so that the matter was dropped. Maharaj knew that the man's renunciation was temporary, brought on as it was by his grief, and as such, monks were not to take advantage of this.

The other incident related to the movement for national liberation. Some young men, connected with the revolutionary movement, for this purpose, approached Maharaj for his opinion. For ordinary people this might be a very embarrassing situation. As Indians, all wanted liberation, so that, even if they avoided encouraging a revolutionary movement in public, for fear of the police, they talked eulogistically of this in private, as otherwise they would be branded as anti-national. Maharaj also might have taken the help of such a subterfuge; but instead of doing so, he told the revolutionary young men, even in that private interview that, according to him, the way for progress chalked out by the Master and Swamiji was the only true one, for without a strong moral and spiritual basis, no movement could succeed.

Swami Brahmananda made several tours in North and South India. By the inspiration of his presence existing centres received a fresh impetus and new centres began to spring up. Wherever he went there came a crowd of visitors—young and old—to see him. They were invariably so much impressed by his love, kindness, and the force of his personality, that
they became lifelong friends and supporters of the Mission.

In his talks with the monks of the different centres, one of the problems that repeatedly cropped up was with regard to the adjustment between work and meditation. He knew that humanitarian work, without any spiritual inspiration behind it, leads to egotism and becomes a danger to one’s religious life. At the same time there is the other danger of gliding back into indolence in the name of meditation. Maharaj’s aim was to strike a balance without undermining the primacy of spirituality. He had to raise humanitarian work to a spiritual level. “We have to work so hard that we do not get sufficient time for meditation”, said a disciple expecting to get the sympathy of one whose whole mind was given to God. “You should feel ashamed to say that, my child!” replied Maharaj, “You are monks, you ought not to complain of hard work. It is not the quantity of work but the vagaries of the mind that create obstacles in the way of meditation.” “Just sacrifice this one life for the sake of the work of Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda), even if you consider it a loss. Have you not lived countless lives before? But if you give yourself up whole-heartedly to his cause, rest assured, through his grace, your spiritual life will progress with the speed of a rocket.” “Don’t be ungrateful to Swamiji,” he said to some young men on another occasion, “he worked himself to death for you and the country. Just plunge yourselves into his work and repay the debt due to him.”

When he visited any centre, he would not go so much into the details of the work as he would be interested in giving the members a spiritual uplift. According
to him, one cannot do really unselfish work unless one's whole mind is given to God. He would say to the monks, "Fie on you, if after giving up the world, cutting yourself from the love of your parents and relatives, you cannot devote the whole of your energy to the realisation of God." He would exhort one and all to make the realisation of God the one and only aim of their lives. He would say: "Create dissatisfaction in your mind even by an effort. Ask yourself whether you are devoting the whole of your energy to your spiritual welfare. Ask yourself at night how much of the time has been spent in communion with God and how much in other things. The time that has not been given to God has been spent in vain, has been wasted." Yet, strange to say, though he laid the main emphasis on spiritual growth, the work of the Mission steadily grew under his care, for it was the spirituality in practice that the Mission really stood for.

Maharaj knew that ordinary mortals had not the aptitude either to carry on or appreciate a long spiritual talk. So he came to the level of ordinary conversation, through which he revealed and imparted higher spiritual truth and knowledge. It was very difficult to draw him into purely spiritual conversations. But when he did talk, his words scintillated with fire, and those who heard him got a lifelong inspiration. As a result of his influence many young men joined the Order. Sometimes a doubting mind found its scepticism vanish by merely coming into his presence. One could rarely argue with him, nor was he given to theoretical discussion. His presence was enough to solve many complex problems which had troubled people for many, many weary years. Innumerable persons had such
experiences. Those who had known both Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Brahmananda used to say that Maharaj represented some of the characteristics of the Master; there was some similarity even in physical appearance.

Wherever he would go there would be so much joyous festivity that all found themselves immersed in it. But there was this characteristic about it, that it was highly uplifting. Once there was so much disaffection amongst the members in a certain centre that the whole atmosphere was vitiated. When all other remedies failed, Maharaj was approached and persuaded to visit the centre. When he went to the place, he did not at all inquire into the grievances of the individual members. Yet his presence created such a great wave of spiritual enthusiasm, that all petty problems were automatically solved.

After the passing away of Swami Vivekananda, the first thing that Maharaj gave his attention to was the consolidation of the work at the headquarters. After about one year, when he had put the day-to-day work of the organisation in the hands of Swami Saradananda and the management of the Belur Math in charge of another Gurubhai, Maharaj left for Varanasi. In Varanasi at that time there was a centre of the Ramakrishna Math, called Advaita Ashrama, meant exclusively for meditative life, and there was also a philanthropic institution started by some young men under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda. When Swami Brahmananda reached Varanasi, the committee of the latter institution formally handed over the management to the Ramakrishna Mission. Maharaj stayed at Varanasi for about a month. Some years later, on another visit,
he laid the foundation-stone of the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service on a new plot of land. Some of the buildings that have been constructed there were according to his plan and design.

From Varanasi he went to Kankhal, near Hardwar, where Swami Kalyanananda, a young disciple of the Order, had started medical work for the sick and the needy. In the quiet of the holy atmosphere at Kankhal, Maharaj remained day and night absorbed in divine communion. Here as elsewhere his silent presence gave impetus to the work of the institution and the Ashrama began to improve after he had been there. From Hardwar he went to Vrindaban where Swami Turiyananda was practising Tapasya. Arriving at Vrindaban, Swami Brahmananda again felt an urge to devote himself exclusively to Tapasya. He stayed there for a period along with Swami Turiyananda, spending his time in hard spiritual practices. He would at that time get up regularly at midnight for meditation. It is said that one night he was fast asleep and the time to get up was almost over when he suddenly felt a push. He woke up, to find a good spirit beckoning and reminding him to meditate.

From Vrindaban, Maharaj went to Allahabad, where Swami Vijnanananda, a brother-disciple of his was staying and building up the nucleus of the future Ramakrishna centre. He next went to Vindhyachal, a sacred place of pilgrimage associated with the memory of the Divine Mother. At this place he was in a highly ecstatic mood. At the temple of the Divine Mother one night he asked an attendant to sing some song. As Maharaj stood before the Divine Presence listening to the song, tears flowed down his cheeks, and soon he was so much
absorbed in communion that he lost all outward consciousness, and the bystanders had to take care of him. He had a similar experience in another temple at Vindhyachal. After staying at this holy place for a few days, he returned to the monastery at Belur.

In the month of June, 1906, he went to Puri. Of all the holy places he liked Varanasi, Vrindaban, Puri, and Hardwar most. When at Varanasi, he would be full of the thoughts of Vishwanath and Annapurna, the presiding deities; at Vrindaban the association of Shri Krishna would throw his mind into ecstasy; at Puri his emotion would be stirred by the remembrance of Chaitanya and Jagannath, whereas at Hardwar his mind would be absorbed in contemplation of the all-pervading Presence. At different places he would be in different moods—every one as inspiring as another.

In October, 1908, at the earnest request of Swami Ramakrishnanananda, head of the Ramakrishna Math at Madras, Swami Brahmananda started for South India. With his wonderful devotion Swami Ramakrishnanananda considered Maharaj as a veritable representative of the Master on earth. So when Maharaj arrived at Madras, Swami Ramakrishnanananda told the innumerable devotees who came to see the new Swami, “You have not seen the Master. Just make your life blessed by seeing his beloved son.” The childlike simplicity and very unassuming nature of Maharaj, hiding within an extraordinary spiritual personality, made a wonderful impression wherever he went. If anybody approached him with a question, he now and then said with his inborn humility: “Just go to Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnanananda). He is a great scholar. He will answer your question.” But if the inquirer persisted and
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could persuade the Swami to speak, his words removed a heavy load from the mind of the aspirant.

In those days the gulf of separation in the social lives of Brahmins and non-Brahmins was much greater in Southern India. During Maharaj’s stay at Madras Math, a non-Brahmin devotee invited him to his house. He accepted the invitation readily. And to the house of that devotee, along with Maharaj went Brahmins, non-Brahmins, Christians, Brahmos, all of whom took their meal together. There was no fuss about social reform in this inter-dining. It was inspired by a spontaneous feeling of brotherhood that arose in the presence of a saint.

From Madras City he went on a pilgrimage to Rameshwaram and Madura. As he entered the temple of Minakshi at Madura, he began to utter the name of the Mother like a child, and he lost soon all outward consciousness. Swami Ramakrishnananda, who accompanied him, immediately took hold of the Swami lest he should fall down. It was nearly an hour after when he came down to the normal consciousness. Maharaj usually had great control over his religious emotion. Rarely could a person detect what was going on within him. His spiritual experiences, of which he had a great many as circumstantial evidences indicate, are a sealed book to the outside world. But at times a flood-tide of feeling would break down all barriers of control even in such a powerful personality, and the bystanders could then be blessed by seeing the outward signs of his spiritual experience. From Madura he returned to Madras and from there went to Bangalore to open the new building of the monastery there.

It was in July 1916, that Maharaj went to visit the
South for the second time. On 4th August, he laid the foundation-stone of the new building of the Rama-
krishna Math at Madras and after a week went to Bangalore. At the monastery at Bangalore many un-
touchables would meet in the main hall for prayer and worship. Maharaj was specially pleased at this sight. One day, of his own accord, he suddenly visited the quarters of the untouchables, saw the shrine-room they had built, and encouraged and blessed them. It was beyond the farthest limit of their imagination that such a great saint, whose presence had created a stir amongst the elite of the town and to see whom even the big people of the place were very eager, could feel so interested in them as to go to their place unasked and mix with them so freely.

This time Maharaj visited many sacred places in the South including some notable temples in Travancore. During this visit he laid the foundation-stone of an Ashrama on a beautiful spot on the top of a hill in Trivandrum overlooking the sea. And on 6th May 1917, he laid the foundation-stone of the new building of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home in Madras and soon after left for Bengal. His last visit to the South was in 1920, when he opened the new spacious building of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home in Madras.

In the meantime, in 1916, he went to Dacca in East Bengal to lay the foundation-stone of the local Rama-
krishna Mission on a new site. He took advantage of this occasion to visit the holy shrine at Kamakhya in Assam. Then he went to Mymensingh and visited Narayangunge as also Deobhog, the birthplace of Durga Charan Nag, a great devotee of the Master.
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It has been mentioned that he went to North India several times. He would usually stay at Varanasi or Kankhal and visit other sacred places occasionally. Whenever he visited a sacred place or a temple, a large number of monks and devotees would accompany him, for to go with him was to get an added inspiration. On such occasions he would often take with him some musicians whom he would ask to sing devotional songs in the presence of the Deity. The combined effect of all these was simply marvellous. Those who were present on such occasions would be lifted up to a plane beyond the reach of any earthliness. And the one who was the centre of all this would remain absorbed within himself also oblivious of his surroundings. Once while he was hearing devotional music in Ayodhya standing in front of the Deity, there came a downpour. Still he stood steadfast almost unconscious of the rains. Others came hurriedly and took care of him. It was long after the rains had ceased that the Swami came back to the conscious plane.

He had a great love for music. Latterly it became a rule to arrange for good devotional music, vocal or instrumental, at evening wherever he happened to be. During such performances, he would sit quiet in the midst and his very serenity would create such an atmosphere that nobody would dare whisper a word lest there should be disturbance. Such occasions brought to the listeners the blessings of a spiritual bath, as it were.

With respect to Swami Brahmananda, Shri Ramakrishna used to say in his inimitable homely way, "Rakhal is like a mango which does not give any outward indication when ripe." He meant that Rakhal had
within him great spiritual potentiality which he would keep hidden from the outside world. But in spite of all his attempts to keep his powers hidden, people in larger and larger numbers began to flock to him when his spiritual personality began to unfold itself. And they were of all classes—actors and dramatists, lawyers and doctors, old and young men. They all wondered what was in him that attracted them so much. They always failed in their analytical estimation of his personality; but the total spiritual effect was so irresistible that they could not help going to him. He would not necessarily talk of spiritual things with them. As a matter of fact, he was very taciturn in that respect. He would talk of all sorts of things, but if any spiritual question was put to him, he would look grave, and the questioner would not like to press his point. But still there were many who would feel miserable if they had not seen him at least once in the course of the day.

Perhaps one of the secrets of this magnetic attraction was his deep love for one and all, though there was hardly any sentimental expression of his love. He would say, “The love that expresses itself outwardly is not sufficiently deep.” Behind his silence people could not gauge how deep was his concern for them. They would feel drawn by a strong current, as it were, but they could not understand the why and wherefore of it. Innumerable were the lives that were changed by his touch. Many would come, with whom he would crack jokes and make fun, but afterwards they would find to their great astonishment that their lives had taken a new turn. There were persons who thought no sacrifice too great to fulfil his slightest wish. Many young men, caught in the current of his love, gave up
the world and worldly prospects. They felt that in comparison with the love they got from him, the love of their parents dwindled into nothingness.

In the earlier years it was very difficult to get initiation from him. He was very searching about the aspirants, and the standard he demanded was an extremely high one. But latterly he was more liberal in this respect. The method of his giving initiation was novel. Once he said that in giving initiation he had to find out through deep meditation the exact Mantra and the Chosen Deity of the disciple. Until he could get that, he would not give initiation. He was conscious of the fact that to make a disciple is to take upon oneself the spiritual responsibility of the person concerned. And until the disciple gets his salvation, the Guru willingly forgoes his own desire for that. Naturally, he was careful to give initiation only to those who were really earnest about their spiritual life.

His human relationship was wonderful. We have seen how everybody felt the touch of his infinite love. His courtesy and dignity were remarkable and revealed more a prince than a monk. He had actually the majestic appearance of a prince. If nothing else, his mere appearance compelled reverence from others.

He had also his moments of fun or play with children, when he identified himself so completely with them that one would hardly take him to be Swami Brahmananda, the head of the Ramakrishna Order, before whom the monks bowed and big men felt themselves humble. His fund of humour was great, and no less was his capacity for mischief-making. One of his Gurubhais, Swami Akhandananda, wanted to take leave of him to
go to his field of work. Maharaj reluctantly agreed to the proposal. A palanquin was engaged which would carry the Gurubhai to the railway station for the night train. Before the palanquin started Maharaj whispered something to the bearers. The bearers, instead of going to the station, walked throughout the whole night to the tune of their droning sound of “hoom, hoom” and returned with the inattentive Gurubhai at sunrise to the place from which they had started. Maharaj came out and greeted his brother there gravely. The Gurubhai realised the mischief. The condition of his mind can well be imagined; but he did not know whether to get angry or to admire the cleverness of his brother. It was difficult to cope with Maharaj in such matters.

The last important act of Maharaj was to build under his personal supervision an Ashrama at Bhubaneshwar, in Orissa. He was of the opinion that Bhubaneshwar had such a congenial atmosphere that progress would be very rapid if one undertook spiritual practice there. He saw that many monks of the Order had to work so hard that they did not find sufficient time for Tapasya. And those who went to Rishikesh and other places for this broke down in health by too much hardship. He desired very much that there should be a place where the monks could get proper facilities for spiritual practices. He had an idea of personally carrying out the development of the place according to this plan; but he was not able to see his dream fulfilled.

After his last Madras tour he returned to Bengal, stopping on the way for some time at Bhubaneshwar. While at the headquarters, he sometimes stayed at the house of Balaram Bose in Calcutta, made sacred by the visits of Shri Ramakrishna. In the last week of March
1922, Maharaj went to stay there. Suddenly, on 24th March, he had an attack of cholera. The best doctors were called in, the best attendants were engaged. But he had hardly recovered from the attack when symptoms of diabetes developed which took an alarming turn. Out of great anxiety, different kinds of treatment were tried, different physicians were called in, but there was no sign of any improvement. He had great suffering attended with various ailments. But even in that state he began to talk of high spiritual things punctuated with masterly strokes of sudden humour. In a great spirit of compassion he began to bless one and all. The devotees apprehended that this might mean his bidding farewell. Shri Ramakrishna had one day had a vision that floating on the waters of the Ganga there came a thousand-petalled lotus illuminating the whole surroundings. On the lotus stood a boy holding the hands of Shri Krishna. When the Master first met Rakhal, he identified him as that boy. But he kept that vision secret, giving it out only to a select few, and said that if Rakhal recollected his true identity, he would give up his body. Now Swami Brahmananda, in an ecstatic state, began to refer exactly to the same vision that the Master has seen. People grew more alarmed at this. Another day passed. The following evening, on 10th April, Swami Brahmananda closed his eyes in deep Samadhi, and the spirit which had put on mortal flesh for the benefit of humanity fled away.

So long as the devotees and disciples lived with Maharaj they were enveloped in ceaseless bliss. But now everybody felt as if a great Himalayan peak had suddenly been bodily removed. Everyone began to ask himself, “Now, what about the future?” And those who
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had moved with him closely thought within themselves, "Was it a fact that we lived with a soul like that of Maharaj? Indeed, what have we done to deserve that blessed privilege?" A great dream had faded away all too suddenly.
TEACHINGS

Practise a little Japa and meditation every day. Never stop for a single day. The mind is like a restless child, it wants to run away. You must bring it back again and again and apply it to the meditation on the Lord. Go on this way for two or three years, and then an inexpressible joy will fill your mind. Meditation and Japa appear dry in the beginning. But still you must engage the mind in the contemplation of the Deity, like swallowing a bitter medicine. Slowly spiritual joy will grow in you. People work so hard to pass an examination! To realise God is even easier than that. Only let them call on Him with a calm, cheerful heart.

Initiation into a Mantra helps concentration of mind, otherwise your mind will change and fluctuate; today you will like the Kali-form, tomorrow the Hari-form, and next day perhaps the formless aspect of God. And thus your mind will not be concentrated on any one.

Pranayama and other Yogic practices are not suitable to the present times and conditions. One must observe complete Brahmacharya in order to practise them. One's food must be absolutely pure, Sattvika, and one must be guided by an expert teacher.

Practice is the means of concentrating the mind. Pranayama, breath-control, is also one of the means. But it is not safe for a householder; if one is not continent, one falls ill. Moreover, one must have nutritious food, a fine place, and pure air. In order to have meditation and concentration, you must practise in
solitude; the more you will try, the more you will achieve. Wherever you find conditions favourable, say if there is a fine scenery, sit down to meditate.

God is with form and is also formless and He is also above form and formlessness. What does Vedanta mean by saying that “Brahman is true and the world is false”? That the world as we see it now is false. The world vanishes in Samadhi, but you feel that you are experiencing a great joy.

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

This apparent universe, which you see, is within the domain of the mind. The mind is the author, the mind has conjured it up. It cannot go beyond its own domain. Behind the mind, of which we are aware, is a subtle spiritual mind, existing in seed form. Through contemplation, prayer, and Japa this mind develops, and with its unfoldment a new vision opens. This subtle mind also cannot reach God, the supreme Atman. But it leads you near Him. At this stage, the world loses all its charm for the aspirant. He remains absorbed in the consciousness of God. Next comes Samadhi. The experience of Samadhi is indescribable —beyond is and is not. In this blessed experience there is neither happiness nor misery, neither light nor darkness. All is infinite Being, inexpressible.

The mind is susceptible to suggestions. It learns whatever you teach it. If through discrimination you can impress upon it the joy and fullness of life in the spirit and the folly of worldly attachments, then your mind will devote itself more and more to God.
Everyone must have an ideal firmly established in his life. This ideal must never be lowered. The supreme ideal of human life is to know God—God.

The Guru leads the disciple through different stages until he leaves him with the Lord. But there is no greater Guru than your own mind. When the mind has been purified through prayer and contemplation, it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties this Guru will guide you.

The way of steadying and purifying the mind is to retire into solitude, control all cravings, and engage yourself in contemplation and meditation. The more you occupy the mind with holy thoughts, the greater will be your spiritual unfoldment.

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

Can anything be achieved without spiritual discipline? Do you not see what severe disciplines even Avatars had to perform?

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

Resign yourself utterly to the Lord. He is everything. There is nothing besides. Never be calculating. Is self-surrender possible in a day?

Work and worship must go hand in hand. It is very good if one can devote oneself solely to spiritual practices. But how many can do that? Two types of men can sit still without work. One is the idiot, who is
too dull to be active. The other is the saint who has
gone beyond all activity. Work is a means to the state
of meditation. Instead of working for yourself, work
for the Lord. Know that you are worshipping the Lord
through your work.

I will declare again and again and emphasize this
truth—that however busy you may be in carrying out
your duties, you must practise Japa and meditation. If
you work and forget God, egotism and pride will over-
power you. Therefore I tell you, never forget God, no
matter whether you are working or sitting idle. To
maintain this attitude, you must keep your spiritual
practices as well, whatever happens.

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

Why are you afraid of work? Work for Him. You
can overcome all disinclination for work if you consider
it as dedicated to God.

In performing Japa and meditation, certainly suffi-
cient time and favourable conditions are important.
But those who are inclined to practise spiritual exer-
cises will do so under all circumstances. Cultivate the
habit of constantly remembering God whether you are
idle or engaged in work.
SWAMI PREMANANDA

Shri Ramakrishna used to refer to half a dozen among his disciples as Ishwarakotis (divine and ever free); and to this select group belonged Swami Premananda. Talent and greatness like cream do not always float on the top; oftentimes they lie hidden like gems in the dark caves of the sea. And though the aroma of this saint of angelic beauty and sweetness did not travel beyond a small circle of devotees and acquaintances, yet he occupies a place of great eminence among the children of Shri Ramakrishna.

Swami Premananda was born on December 10, 1861, in the prosperous and picturesque village of Antpur, in the district of Hooghly, Bengal. His parents came of two well-to-do and influential Kayastha families of the village. His father Taraprasanna Ghosh was a man of piety, who had inherited enough means to meet the demands of the family with ease and to conduct the daily service of the household deity, Shri Lakshminarayana. Taraprasanna Ghosh was married to Matangini Dasi, daughter of Abhay Chandra Mitra, of the same village. Like her husband, she was also of devout disposition; and they formed a happy pair. The couple had a daughter and three sons. The daughter’s name was Krishnabhavini and the sons were called Tulsiram, Baburam, and Shantiram. Of these Baburam came to be known in later life as Swami Premananda, though he was familiarly called Baburam Maharaj.

The marriage of Krishnabhavini with Balaram Bose of Calcutta brought Taraprasanna’s family into close
touch with Shri Ramakrishna some years later. Balaram paid frequent visits to Shri Ramakrishna. Often he would take his wife and children with him. One day he took his mother-in-law also to Shri Ramakrishna. The devoted lady was highly pleased with the meeting and felt herself blessed by seeing him.

Born of pious parents, Baburam had a natural slant towards spirituality. But blood cannot explain all the rich endowments native to the soul of young Baburam. A few memories of his childhood, accidentally preserved, acquire a great significance in the light of later events. Renunciation spoke through the broken accents of his childhood. When a mere stripling of a few summers, if anybody teased him about marriage, he would lisp out his protestations, “Oh, don’t marry me, don’t don’t; I will die then.” His mates in the village school were drawn to this young cherub by an invisible tie of affection; they regarded him as their near and dear one. At eight years his ideal was to lead a life of renunciation with a fellow monk in a hut shut out from the public view by a thick wall of trees. Later on we shall see how correctly his boyish dreams anticipated future events. He loved to associate with holy men from the period of his adolescence. The sight of ascetics on the banks of the Ganga drew the comely boy to them; and in their company he would be unaware of the flight of time.

Passing out of the village school, Baburam came to Calcutta for higher studies. After joining the Aryan School for some time, he finally entered the Shyampukur Branch of the Metropolitan Institution. At this time Mahendra Nath Gupta, later the celebrated author

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of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna happened to be the headmaster of the school. By another curious coincidence, Rakhal (later Swami Brahmananda) was also a student of the school and read in the same class as Baburam. The two boys quickly became drawn to each other by a hidden tie, and there soon sprang up between them an intimate relationship which was only deepened with the passage of years. About this time Rakhal also came under the influence of the Master and began visiting Dakshineswar now and then. These contacts brought to Baburam's notice the holy personality of the Master and opened up opportunities which led to an early acquaintance with him.

Baburam chanced to see Shri Ramakrishna for the first time in a Hari Sabha at Jorasanko, where the latter had gone to hear the chanting of the Bhagavata, though Baburam scarcely knew then that he had seen him. He also heard from his elder brother about a monk at Dakshineswar, who, like Shri Gauranga, lost all consciousness of the world while uttering the name of God. Baburam became eager to see the saint. He knew that Rakhal was in the habit of visiting Dakshineswar frequently, and it was settled that on the following Saturday they should go together to see him. On the appointed day, after school hours, they set out by boat and were joined on the way by an acquaintance named Ramdayal Chakravarti, who also used to visit Shri Ramakrishna. Rakhal inquired of Baburam if he would like to stay for the night. Baburam thought that they were going to a monk who live in a hut, and replied, "Will there be accommodation for us?" Rakhal only said, "There may be." The question of food troubled Baburam, and he asked, "What shall we
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eat at night?” Rakhal simply said, “We shall manage somehow.”

At sunset they reached the temple of Dakshineswar. Baburam was fascinated with the beauty of the place which looked like fairyland. They entered the Master’s room, but he was not there. Rakhal asked them to wait and hurried to the temple. In a few minutes he was seen leading the Master by the hand. The Master was in a state of God-intoxication, and Rakhal was carefully directing his staggering footsteps, warning him of the high and low places. Reaching his room he sat a while on the small bedstead and presently regained normal consciousness. He inquired about the newcomer. When Ramdayal introduced Baburam, Shri Ramakrishna said: “Ah, you are a relative of Balaram! Then you are related to us also.” After a little more familiar talk, Shri Ramakrishna caught hold of Baburam’s hand and said, “Come closer to the light. Let me see your face.” In the dim light of an earthen lamp he carefully scrutinised his features. Satisfied with the results of the examination, he nodded his head in approbation. Next he examined the boy’s arms and legs. Finally he said, “Let me see your palm.” He looked at it and placed it upon his own as if to weigh it. Then he said, “All right, all right.” Turning to Ramdayal he said, “Narendra has not come here for a long time, and I feel a great longing to see him. Will you ask him to come here one day? You won’t forget it?”

Ramdayal said, “I shall ask him positively.”

The night advanced. It was about ten o’clock.

1 Most probably in 1882 (vide The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 90).
Ramdayal had brought a large quantity of food for the Master who took only a part of it, arranging the rest to be distributed among the three devotees. Then the Master asked them where they preferred to sleep—in his own room or outside. Rakhal chose inside, but Baburam thought that his presence might disturb the meditation of the saint. So he and Ramdayal preferred to sleep outside, though Shri Ramakrishna invited them to remain within.

The two devotees had already fallen asleep when they were roused by the cry of guards. Presently the Master approached them reeling like a drunkard with his loin cloth under his arm. Addressing Ramdayal he said, “Hullo, are you asleep?” “No, sir”, was the reply. Then the Master said with great eagerness, “Will you please tell him to come? I feel as if somebody were wringing my heart like this”—and he twisted his cloth. His every word and gesture expressed the unspeakable agony of heart at the separation from Narendra Nath. “What love!” thought Baburam, “But how queer that he does not respond?” Shri Ramakrishna proceeded a few steps towards his room. Then he returned and said to Ramdayal, “Then don’t forget to tell him about it.” He repeated these words and went back to his bed with staggering gait. About an hour after he appeared again and unburdened his mind to Ramdayal: “Look here, he is very pure. I look upon him as the manifestation of Narayana and cannot live without him. His absence is wringing my heart like this”, and he again twisted his cloth. Then he said in bitter anguish, “I am being put on the rack, as it were, for his sake. Let him come here just once.” The scene was repeated at hourly intervals throughout the night.
When Baburam met the Master next morning, he found him quite a different man. His face was calm like a sea after the storm, no anxiety lined his face. He asked Baburam to go round the Panchavati. As he advanced towards the spot a strange sight greeted his eyes. The place looked so familiar and known. We knew how his boyish imagination used to conjure up the vision of a hermit's life in future in a secluded spot. What was his astonishment when he found that the Panchavati tallied exactly with his dreams of boyhood! How could he have foreshadowed the picture so accurately? He, however, kept this to himself and returned to the Master. In response to a question as to how he liked the place, he only said it was nice. The Master then asked him to visit the Kali temple, which he did. When he took leave of Shri Ramakrishna, the latter affectionately asked him to come again.

The visit left a deep impression on Baburam's mind. "He is an exceptionally good man", he thought, "and dearly loves Naren. But strange that Naren does not go to see him." The next Sunday at eight o'clock he again went to Dakshineswar. A few devotees were seated before the Master, who welcomed him and said, "It is nice that you have come. Go to the Panchavati where they are having a picnic. And Narendra has come. Have a talk with him." At the Panchavati, Baburam found Rakhal who introduced him to Narendra and some other young devotees of the Master who had assembled there. From the first Baburam was filled with admiration for Narendra. To look at him was to love him. Narendra was talking with his friends. Presently he burst into a song, which charmed Baburam. With bated breath he listened saying to
himself, “Ah, how versatile he is!”

This became the prelude to a closer association with Shri Ramakrishna, whose great love, purity, and holiness drew Baburam nearer and nearer to him as days went on. Slowly the knowledge began to dawn on Baburam that his relation with him was not of this life alone, but dated from a remote existence. In the personality of Shri Ramakrishna he discovered the realisation of the highest ideals of life, whose vague contours flitted across his mind in the dreams and phantasies of his boyhood.

Baburam was just twenty when he met the Master, though he appeared to be much younger and very handsome. His character was untouched by the least blemish of the world. Indeed to the end of his days he maintained a childlike innocence and was unaware of the common erring ways of humanity. Shri Ramakrishna divined his absolute purity and held him very high in his estimation. In a vision he saw Baburam as a goddess with a necklace. This gave him an inkling as to the personality of this disciple. “It is a new vessel, and milk can be put into it without fear of turning”—this was that he used to say of the boy. He would also say, “Baburam is pure to his very marrow. No impure thought can ever cross his mind and body.”

Owing to his absolute purity Baburam was deemed a fit attendant for Shri Ramakrishna, who liked to have him about. The inner group of disciples of the Master began to come from 1879; from that time onward they began to take personal care of him. Among them Rakhal and Latu attended on him continuously for a fairly long period. After a time Rakhal had to be away occasionally, so the Master sometimes felt difficulty with
regard to his personal care. There were others, no doubt, but the Master could not bear the touch of all in all his moods. So one day he said to Baburam: "Such is my condition that I cannot bear the touch of all. You stay here, then it will be very good." Baburam began to stay there now and then, though he did not dare to do so permanently, apprehending trouble from home.

Closer association with the Master drove Baburam's mind so inward that studies became insipid to him, and he began to neglect them. In 1884 he appeared in the Entrance Examination and failed to get through. When Shri Ramakrishna heard about it he said, "So much the better; he has been released from bonds", playing a pun on the Bengali expression pāṣh which means bondage and sounds like the English word "pass". Baburam heaved a sigh of relief on hearing this. The Master had not failed to notice that Baburam was neglecting his studies. To test the boy's mind he asked him one day: "Where are your books? Do you not mean to continue your studies?" And then turning to Mahendra Nath Gupta, who was present, he said, "He wants to have both", and added, "Very difficult is the path. What will a little knowledge avail? Just imagine the sage Vasishtha being seized with grief at the loss of his son! Lakshmana was amazed at it and asked Rama the reason. Rama replied, 'Brother, there is nothing to wonder at. Whoever has knowledge has also ignorance. May you go beyond both.'" "I want just that", Baburam smilingly replied. The Master said: "Well, is it possible to have that if you stick to both? If you want that then come away." Still smiling Baburam replied, "You please draw me away."
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Baburam's mother had already become a devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. One day as she came to see him, the latter requested her to leave her son with him. The mother was rather pleased and gave her ungrudging consent. She only asked that she might have devotion to God and that she might never live to suffer the bereavement of her children. Her desires were fulfilled. From this time on Baburam began to live constantly with the Master, who used to call him daradi, i.e. the companion of his soul; so great was the love the Master bore towards him.

In later years Swami Premananda would often recount with tenderness the Master's great love for him. "Do I love you?" he would say addressing the young monks of the Math, "No, if I did, I would have bound you for ever to me. Oh, how dearly the Master loved us! We do not even bear a hundredth of that love towards you. When I would fall asleep while fanning him at night, he would take me inside his mosquito net and make me sleep on his bed. When I would remonstrate with him saying that it would be sacrilegious for me to use his bed, he would reply, 'Outside, mosquitoes will bite you. I shall wake you up when necessary.' " The Master would often come to Calcutta to see Baburam and feed him, through his own hands, with sweets which he brought from Dakshineswar. And often the intensity of affection made the Master cry out like a child when Baburam was away from him in Calcutta.

Shri Ramakrishna's love and sweet words began to mould the pliant soul of the young disciple. His life was the greatest teacher of all, and he taught in strange ways. One night Baburam was sleeping in the Master's.
room. After some time he was awakened by the sound of the Master's steps. Opening his eyes he found Shri Ramakrishna pacing up and down the room in a state of trance with his cloth under his arm. A feeling of deep abhorrence was written on his features. With a face flushed with emotion, the Master was repeating vehemently, "Away with it! Away with it!" and praying, "O Mother, don't give me fame, Oh, don't Mother!" It appeared to the boy as if the Divine Mother was following the Master with a quantity of fame in order to make a present of it to him and that he was remonstrating with Her. The incident impressed the boy so profoundly that he conceived the uttermost hatred of fame for life.

The holy life of the saint of Dakshineswar sharpened the boy's appetite for religious experiences. In the saint's company he noticed that many went into ecstasies while hearing devotional songs, and he felt sad that he was denied such experiences. He pressed the Master that he might also enjoy such states. At his importunities the Master prayed to the Divine Mother for his sake, but was told that Baburam would have Jnana (knowledge) instead of Bhava (ecstasies). This delighted the Master.

One day Pratap Chandra Hazra,¹ in his characteristic way, was advising Baburam and some other young boys to ask of Shri Ramakrishna something tangible in the shape of occult powers, instead of, as was their wont, merely living a jolly life with him with plenty of good things to eat. Shri Ramakrishna, who was near, scented

¹ Who lived at the Dakshineswar temple and often sat near the Master's room with all the paraphernalia of a spiritual life to make a show of his supposed saintliness.
mischief-making and calling Baburam to his side said, "Well, what can you ask? Is not everything that I have yours already? Yes, everything I have earned in the shape of realisations is for the sake of you all. So get rid of the idea of begging which alienates by creating distance. Rather realise your kinship to me and gain the key to all that treasure."

When the Master fell ill and was brought to Cossipore for treatment, Baburam served him whole-heartedly; and after the Master's demise, he joined the monastery at Baranagore. During the Christmas-tide of 1886, Narendra Nath took the young band of the Master's disciples to the ancestral place of Baburam at Antpur. Here they spent about a week in holy discourse and in intense meditation. The imagination of all took fire at Naren's eloquent portraiture of the glories of a life of renunciation, and they decided to take up the monk's garb. On returning to Baranagore, they took formal initiation into Sannyasa. Narendra gave Baburam the name of Premananda as he thought it conformed to the remark of the Master that Shri Radha, the Goddess of divine Love, Herself was partially incarnated in him.

First at Baranagore, then at Alambazar, the little band passed days of hard austenities. On Swami Ramakrishnananda's departure to Madras in 1897 to preach the message of the Master there, Swami Premananda took up the duties of the daily worship of the shrine. Some time later he left for a pilgrimage in Northern India and returned on the eve of the removal of the monastery to Belur in the beginning of 1898. Here he again resumed the worship of the Master.

A new chapter of his life opened with the passing away of Swami Vivekananda. One could hardly realise
then what boundless love and tenderness, what compassion and sweetness, what leonine power and great fire lay hidden within this meek and unobtrusive figure. The heavy responsibilities which came to rest on his shoulders gradually unfolded the beauty and richness of his personality. The task of looking after the affairs of the Mission had devolved on Swami Brahmananda. For this reason he had to travel in different parts of the country. So Swami Premananda was entrusted with the management of the Math at Belur. The daily service in the shrine, the training of the young Brahmacharins and Sannyasins, the various household duties of the monastery, the receiving of devotees and guests and instructing them on spiritual matters—all these crowded his hours with activities and left him little respite.

The father is reflected in the son. Some of Shri Ramakrishna’s disciples specially recalled some aspects of the infinite excellences of the Master. Swami Premananda mirrored more than anyone else the Master’s all-consuming love for all. Monks, householders, devotees, visitors, and guests, all felt the tenderness of his affection and came to regard him as the mother of the monastery. Like an indulgent mother, he sheltered under his protecting wings those whose perverse ways had alienated them from society. His sympathy unlocked in many of these lost souls of the world unsuspected springs of devotion and service.

A young man of Calcutta had strayed into evil paths under the influence of vicious company. An addict to intoxicants, he appeared to be heading towards utter ruin every day. The efforts of his friends and relatives to wean him away from his associates and habits came
to naught. In the end they abandoned all hope in despair. Fortunately one of the relatives of the young man happened to be acquainted with Swami Premananda. He related everything to the Swami and begged his mercy. The Swami listened to everything patiently. He went to the boy’s place one day and asked him to come to the Math. The boy came and enjoyed the day at the Math. As he was returning the Swami asked him to come again. The boy felt attracted to the Swami even at the first meeting and visited the Math several times. The alchemy of the Swami’s love and kindness slowly transmuted the base metal of the boy’s character. “How strange!” he thought, “how could he bestow such tenderness and affection upon me who have been shunned even by my relatives and acquaintances in horror and shame. He knows all my misdeeds. No worldly ties bind me to him. No selfishness rules his affection. Yet how wonderful is his love!” Shortly afterwards he gave up the world and embraced the life of renunciation and service.

Drawn by the invisible bonds of Baburam Maharaj’s (Swami Premananda’s) love and consideration, the devotees began to flock in larger numbers to the Math. A single meeting sufficed to create a lasting impression on their minds. The springs of action of great saints remain hidden from public gaze. Baburam Maharaj’s purity and devotion and the Master’s grace had lifted him to a plane of realisation where the service of man became transformed into the worship of God. The extreme care which the Swami took in receiving and entertaining the devotees betrayed to the dullest mind glimpses of his transformed outlook. None could leave the Math without being entertained. The visitors
often turned up at odd hours, so the midday meal could not usually be served earlier than one or two in the afternoon. And sometimes it so happened that a group of devotees unexpectedly arrived from a distant place while the monks were resting their tired limbs late in the afternoon. Swami Premananda would then proceed alone in silence to the kitchen to cook food for them himself, as he did not want to trouble the boys in their rest. The young monks, however, when they came to know of this, would hurry to the kitchen and do everything. Baburam Maharaj was highly pleased with those who came forward. He used to encourage and bless them saying, "Well, the householders have to do a lot of things. Is it possible for them to come always at the proper time? And what can we do for them? We can only serve them and that costs us nothing but a little physical trouble. Through the Master's grace nothing is wanting here. Should we not be blessed by giving these things to his children?"

Concern for the devotees did not leave him even during his fatal illness. If anybody remonstrated with him for his anxiety lest it should affect his health, he would reply, "It is my nature. The service of the devotee is the worship of God." A couple of days before he passed away, he called to his side a Sannyasin who looked after the management of the Math during his absence and asked him in a voice tender with emotion, "Could you possibly do one thing?" The Sannyasin replied, "Please tell me what I am to do." "Will you be able to serve the devotees?" was the question he met with. "Yes, I shall", was his reply. "Don't forget, then", said Baburam Maharaj almost imploringly.
Standing on the adamant of faith, Swami Premananda believed that everybody who chanced to partake of the food which had been offered to the Master was sure to put forth the sprout of spirituality at some future date. In his eyes persons who visited the Math had some special worth in them. He used to say, "Innumerable are the places where people can seek pleasure! Some go to garden-houses, and others, maybe, to places of amusement. But those who come here, must, therefore, be understood to have some spiritual worth in them. Or, why should they come at all?"

His ministrations did not end with entertainments of a merely physical nature. He was anxious above everything that the devotees should grow in spirituality. He would snatch a few moments from his crowded hours in order to infuse into their hearts a spirit of devotion to God and the ideal of detachment. His words, having their roots in love and untarnished by the slightest speck of egotism, would find their way direct into the sanctuary of the soul. He talked to the visitors and the new-comers when they had rested for a while after the midday meal, and again after the evening service he talked to those who happened to have stayed on. His one idea was to kindle the fire of devotion in them. When he spoke, an exalted feeling would take possession of their minds, and they would always experience a certain degree of spiritual uplift.

During holidays and vacations students would sometimes come to spend a few days at the Math. Baburam Maharaj treated them as would a mother. He often wrote instructive letters to those who came in close contact with him. His words and influence spread into the hearts of many a young soul and tinged them with
the dye of a noble idealism. A good many monks of the Ramakrishna Order today look back to his inspiration as the decisive influence on their lives. To him they owe a debt which they cannot repay.

The Swami's solicitude for the well-being of the novitiates in the monastery knew no bounds. With infinite patience he endeavoured not only to instil into them the supreme ideal of renunciation and service but also to train them in the various practical duties of life. He aimed at an all-round development of abilities and disliked one-sidedness. "You should learn", he would say, "how to work in every walk of life—be it service in the shrine, cooking in the kitchen, the tending of cows, or scavenging. Be they great or small, all works should receive your equal attention. Always take as much care of the means as of the ends." Though he would eye with disfavour the slightest indifference to work, he was quick to forgive and forget all remissness.

Great teacher as he was, he knew that the leader must be prepared to sacrifice and to set the example. He taught more by his actions than by precepts. One of his favourite sayings was that a leader (Sardar) must be ready to sacrifice his head (Sirdar). A remarkable incident reveals not only this trait of his character but also his breadth of vision free from the trammels of a conventional social code.

A Mohammedan gentleman from Diamond Harbour, in the district of Twenty-four Parganas, had one day come to the Math with a few Hindu friends. After he had visited the shrine, he was given some food on a few leaves. Everybody present showed some hesitation in taking away the leaves and cleaning the spot after the gentleman had partaken of the food from
them. Noticing this Swami Premananda came forward and took them away to the great surprise and discomfiture of all. A similar event also took place during his visit to East Bengal in 1917. A Mohammedan of a village in Mymensingh, where Baburam Maharaj had gone, heard him speak of the one God who existed in all. Thereupon he asked the speaker if he could partake of the food touched by him. "Yes, I can," came the quick reply. Immediately some food was brought in a plate, and he partook of it from the hands of the Mohammedan without the least hesitation.

The management of the vast organisation with its members of diverse temperaments and natures made heavy demands on Swami Premananda's endurance, patience, and forgiveness. His spirit was more than equal to it. One day he revealed to a senior monk of the Order with what mind he proceeded to his daily duties. He said, "After finishing my meditation and Japa when I come down the stairs of the shrine, I utter again and again the Mantra of the Master—'Endure, endure, endure (sa, sha, sha),' one who endures abides, one who does not is ruined." Devoid of any trace of pride and egotism, he felt himself to be an instrument in the hands of the Master. His lofty spiritual vision had clothed the world with a divine light from which evil had taken its flight. In the errors of others he detected his own shortcomings. He wrote in several of his letters:

"This lesson I have learnt at the feet of the Master. When the boys do any wrong, I reason and find that they are not at fault. Whatever fault there is, is mine. I do not harbour the idea that I am good. I have come to learn. There is no end to learning. May the
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Master give us right understanding—this is my prayer. . . . By observing the faults of others we are gradually infected by them. We have not come to look at the faults of others and to correct them. But it is only to learn that we are here. . . . Lord, Thou art everything. Whom should I scold? Everything is He; there is only a difference in the quantity of dust that covers the gold."

Despite this meekness of spirit and humility, he could be stern as well if it became necessary. When sweet words and loving counsels fell on deaf ears, he would not hesitate to reprimand the delinquents severely. It was, however, a rebuke which had no sting in it. If it made the boys sulk, he would soothe them with affectionate words and offer them the best things to eat.

Swami Premananda was loved and honoured because in life and talk he was full of the Master. On the younger monks he impressed the idea that all their duties were a sort of worship to the Master, to whom indeed belonged the whole monastery and the Mission. The devotees were to be served because they were his, the ground was to be kept clean because he walked there and so on.

During his last illness at Deoghar, a devotee used to bring the best available things for his attendants to eat. One day he scolded one of the attendants for taking such things, saying, "The Master used to say that a Sadhu must restrain his greed and lust, and take only half a meal at night. But you are doing just the opposite out of greed." The attendant felt hurt and left the place without anybody's knowledge. At the time of the midday meal Baburam Maharaj noticed his absence and grew anxious. He suspected that the young man had taken his rebuke to heart and left the
place. He sent out his other attendants to find him, but they failed. In the evening, while he was sitting in a sad mood, the attendant entered the house by a backdoor. Coming to know of this he called him to his side and said, "My boy, I am old and weakened by illness. I cannot always keep my temper. Should you fly into a rage if I happen to say anything in my present condition?" As he said this, tears filled his eyes. And he brought some sweets and fed him with his own hands.

He laid great stress on the gentleness of behaviour. "Be gentle first" he would often repeat, "if you desire to be a Sadhu!" He regretted, "Nowadays none pays any attention to social and common good manners and gentle behaviour. The Master used to take extreme care to teach us these things." And by his eloquent and impassioned appeals, he would firmly impress upon the novitiates the high ideals of the Master and Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda).

In obedience to the advice of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Premananda did not to the end of his days make any personal disciples. Yet his eagerness to help all along the path of spirituality seemed beyond comparison. Every action of his betrayed his anxiety for the spiritual welfare of the young flock under his care and supervision. He is even said to have imparted spiritual power to a young monk by a touch. Besides his own help, he used to send those who pressed him for initiation to the Holy Mother or to Swami Brahmamananda and had them initiated by them.

It was Swami Vivekananda's dream that the Mission he founded should become the rallying point of a new resurgent spirit in India and that the monastery at
Belur should become a great centre of learning from which would emanate noble and inspiring ideas. Swami Premananda made earnest efforts to realise an aspect of Swamiji’s dream, namely to convert the Math into a great centre of Sanskrit learning. Through his efforts a study circle was gradually formed under the guidance of a competent pundit. He also encouraged the study of other subjects like Western philosophy. The dissemination of education among the illiterate masses also interested him greatly. He blessed and encouraged all who undertook such activities. He wrote to one:

“Be you the torch-bearers in the path of spreading knowledge. The cultivation of knowledge in the company of the Sadhus will impart a new appearance to the country, and the boys will have their life’s aims correctly determined. It is only by so doing that the boys will become men—nay, they will become Rishis and gods. . . . What will one school or three or four Sevashramas avail? Have faith in God’s grace, establish schools and Sevashramas in every town, village, and hamlet.”

To his saintly eye, women were the manifestations of the Divine Mother. His attitude to them was literally one of worship. He behaved himself like a child in their presence. Drawn by his guileless manners, spotless purity and charm, and a certain amount of feminine grace about him, women found themselves quite at ease in his presence. Even the ladies of certain aristocratic Mohammedan families, where the strict rules of the purdah were observed, would come to him at the Maths at Dacca or in Calcutta to listen to his words. Imbued with the ideals preached by Swamiji, he realised that a nation could never be great unless its women were
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educated and honoured. He not only exhorted the mothers of the nation to follow in the steps of the ideal womanhood of the past, but took great pains to instil into their minds the necessity of a liberal education. “Let thousands of Niveditas come out of Bengal . . .”, he wrote to a lady, “Let there arise anew in the land numbers of Gargis, Lilavatis, Sitas, and Savitris. . . . What better thing is there in this world than learning? Give knowledge, and ignorance will vanish through its culture.”

The tie that bound the children of Shri Ramakrishna was built up in equal measure of the strands of love and reverence. This reverential attitude among the brother-disciples was specially manifest in Swami Premananda. In the presence of Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Mission, he behaved himself like a humble servant. He would start his daily work only after saluting him profoundly in the morning, if the latter happened to be at the Math.

He had the typical disregard of a Sadhu for personal comfort. When he sat down to eat, he would take the best things from his plate and distribute them among the junior members. His wardrobe never exceeded the demands of sheer necessity. During his illness at Deoghar a devotee gave to his attendant four shirts for the Swami’s use. On coming to know of this, he severely scolded the attendant saying: “I have never been accustomed to keeping too many shirts. Besides, it does not become a monk to have so much clothing.” When he passed away, diligent search could discover only an empty canvas bag and a few books which could be preserved as souvenirs.

Thus Swami Premananda lived his unostentatious
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life for years, away from the public gaze. After about six years of service in the Math he set out on a pilgrimage to Amarnath in 1910 in company with Swamis Shivananda and Turiyananda. On his return he went on a tour of different parts of Bengal preaching the universal message of the Master. The enthusiasm he evoked by this tour is still a living memory with many. East Bengal in particular was fortunate in sharing his holy company, love and blessing. Wherever he went, his enchanting figure left an unforgettable impression upon all, young and old, high and low. His tour reminded one of the triumphant procession of a hero. Men in crowds followed his trail wherever he stopped. People flocked in from the morning till late at night to listen to a few inspiring words from his lips.

Many touching and remarkable incidents occurred during this journey. One which we are tempted to insert reveals his vision and greatness. In the course of his travels he found a village in Dacca filled with that scourge common in villages, namely, water-hyacinth. He asked the young men who accompanied him to remove the pest and himself proceeded to clear the pond. Inspired by his example the young men at once cleared the whole pond. Nor did they stop there. They organised a party and in several villages of Vikrampur carried on this work of removing water-hyacinths, which had been a standing nuisance for several years.

The long trip told on his health, and he returned to the Math with fever. The doctors diagnosed it to be the deadly Kala-Azar. He was sent to Deoghar for a change. After suffering from the malady for about a year and a half, when he was on the road to recovery,
he suddenly fell a victim to influenza. He was brought down to Calcutta to the house of Balaram Bose. All medical help and care proved to be of no avail, and in the afternoon of Tuesday, July 30, 1918, he left the mortal coil and entered Mahasamadhi in the presence of his brother-disciples and monks of the Order.

The fell disease which held him in its deadly grip could not for a moment becloud the serenity of his faith. As in health, so also in illness, he would ever repeat, "The grace of the Master is the only support"; and the name of Shri Ramakrishna was ever on his lips. It is not for ordinary mortals, whose gaze is fixed on the procession of phenomena, to measure the heights of spirituality to which he attained. Only a jeweller can appraise a diamond Shri Ramakrishna used to refer to him as a jewel-casket. But does that lift the veil of ignorance which obstructs our vision?

Like all men who have soared to the empyrean heights of spiritual realisations, he was reticent about his own experiences. One significant incident which we reproduce here may give a momentary glimpse into the light that burnt within. One day after evening service Swami Premananda sat down for meditation in a corner of the southern verandah of the shrine at Belur Math. The usual period of time flew by, but he did not get up. The attendant of the shrine, when he came to offer Bhoga (offering to the deity), found him sitting stock-still with his body tilted a little backward. He surmised that sleep had overtaken his exhausted flesh. He called him repeatedly, but in vain. He returned after the service, called him again—still there was no response. He then held a light before him. The Swami opened his eyes by and by. On being asked if he had
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fallen asleep, the Swami broke into a sweet song, "I am awakened and will sleep no more. I am awake in the state of Yoga. O Mother, I have given back Thy mystic sleep to Thee and have put sleep to sleep." Turning to the attendant he said, "When you find me in that state, don't call me or cry aloud, but repeat the Master's name in my ears. That will bring me back."