TEACHINGS

It is a truism that the world is full of selfishness, but since one has to continue in the world, all the same, it is vain to go on thinking for ever that the world is selfish. One has to apply oneself to work after fully realising the truth of this fact through deep thought and reasoning. “Let the world be selfish, but that should be no excuse for my becoming selfish”—that should be one’s attitude. And how can the world continue unless there be selfishness? Selfishness there will be just because the world is what it is. And it is nothing very condemnable, for God created this world and all this selfishness is the result of His Maya. Now, the point is that one should make oneself free from selfishness. Instead of finding fault with the world, one should first find one’s own fault. Bearing with all the selfishness of the world, we must become free from the least touch of it—that is our ideal.

To follow the Master means to practise what he taught, otherwise nobody can advance by just offering to him a few flowers or through some momentary sentimental outbursts. One must have deep emotion and at the same time one must reason out everything uncompromisingly. One must give play to one’s intellect—else, there is no way out. That is why the Master said, “You should be a devotee, but that’s no reason why you should be a fool.”

Can one become a great devotee of God simply by dancing and jumping, or by quoting plentifully from the scriptures? What is wanted is freedom from selfish-
ness—freedom from egotism. The present age is in need of selfless heroes in the field of service. Mere talk will not do, this is an age of action, one must prove all this in practice. The need is for silent workers, the need is now for silent preachers.

When one goes on finding fault with others, one becomes imperceptibly infected with those faults. We have not come to this world either for fault-finding or for correcting others, we have come simply to learn. We must always ask ourselves, what we have learnt. If you can, love others, and then you will be blessed with peace and happiness.

One must love the ideal with one's whole heart. Dive deep with whichever name of the Lord appeals to you. It won't do to swim merely on the surface. Call forth faith—faith in the Guru's words, faith in holy men's teachings, faith in the scriptures, then only you can have results. Mere namby-pamby attitude will be of no avail. You must have this forceful determination. “Even in this life I must attain success, I must become detached, I must become free in this very body. Can there be anything impossible for me?” Throw away all fear and anxiety. Think, “We are the children of God”, then weakness will find no loophole to creep in.

Can there be any end of action? So also misery is unending. On the one hand, science is trying to remove misery, and on the other hand, it is bringing about a terrible revolution. So the most reasonable position is to take shelter under God.

The Master descended in disguise as an unlettered man in order to reveal the path of peace. He incarnated in order to smash the pride of scholarship. Be sincere, and meditate on him by making your thoughts
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and words fully consistent with each other.

Not mere theory; actualise it—there has been enough of talk and writing. Put the books aside, and let your action speak. This is what the lives of the Master and Swamiji stand for. Reduce the external paraphernalia and serve men as God with all love and utmost sincerity. This will certainly bring you devotion and liberation.

Initiation (by a Guru) is a necessity. One has to move along some definite path, initiation is that path and the Guru is the guide along that path. One must accept a Guru, that is what the scriptures say. One has to abide by the scriptures, not all can become self-made men by independent thinking. Earnestness itself is a Mantra, but not all can have it.

The poor, the weak, the fallen, the ignorant—all these you have to make your very own. And yet I warn you, that in loving one section of society, you must not become hateful of the other—the rich.

Soon you will be blessed with concentration of mind, you need have no anxiety on that score. God Himself blesses one with the power of meditation who thinks of Him. He it is again who ordains holy company, pure mind, and sound intellect. Never desist from meditation. Your mind itself will play the role of holy company, and saintly Guru, and will show you the right path. Go on practising meditation with a little determination. When you become used to it, you will find that you cannot do without it, and you will derive pleasure from it.

Make the whole world your own through love. Let there be none outside the pale, none your enemy. Let there be no egotism, and drive away such foreign ideas.
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as enmity. Let the whole world become one through love.

We have to make a single community of this whole world. If there is anything that is to be treated as an alien, it is “me and mine”. This “me and mine” is the worst enemy. This great enemy has to be killed, extirpated. Then only will this whole world become your own—of God—and full of peace and happiness. And he alone will be able to impart this lesson who has killed “me and mine”.

The Master used to say, “The devotees belong to a class by themselves. They are neither Brahmins nor non-Brahmins, neither are they Hindus nor Mussulmans.” The devotees belong to the divine class—God’s relatives and blood relations—His very own.

The people of this country have no food to fill their stomachs, no cloth to put on, they have no physical stamina, and no continence; they are reduced to skeletons through diseases, and to crown all, the number of their children is on the increase every year. Instead of speaking to them of the Râsalila of Shri Krishna, one should make them hear the words of Shri Krishna, the charioteer of Arjuna and the preacher of selfless work: “Don’t become unnerved, O Arjuna”; “Remove your faint-heartedness”; “Be man”; “Enjoy the world”. And you have to narrate that ideal life of the great hero Hanuman.

Money can do nothing; it is love and character that can achieve everything. Show it all by your actual life, and then will people listen to you. Let the mouth be closed, and action speak.
SWAMI YOGANANDA

At the time when Shri Ramakrishna was attracting devotees—old and young—to the temple-garden at Dakshineswar, a young man in his teens, belonging to a neighbouring family, used to visit the garden of Rani Rasmani. He had read of Shri Ramakrishna in the literature of the Brahmo Samaj; but his aristocracy and rural prejudice stood in the way of any personal acquaintance. One day he had a desire for a flower. A man was passing by. The boy took him for a gardener and asked him to pluck the flower for him. The man obliged. Another day the boy saw many people seated in a room in front of that gardener and listening to his discourse. Was this then the Ramakrishna of whom Keshab wrote so eloquently? The boy went nearer but stood outside. At this time the Master asked someone to bring all those who were outside within the room. The man found only a boy and brought him inside and offered him a seat. When the conversation ended and all went away, the Master came to the boy and very lovingly made inquiries about him.

The name of the boy was Yogindra Nath Chaudhury. The Master was delighted to know that the boy was the son of Nabin Chandra Chaudhury, his old acquaintance. The Chaudhurys were once very aristocratic and prosperous, but Yogin’s parents had become poor. His father was a very orthodox Brahmin and performed many religious festivals. Shri Ramakrishna, during the period of his spiritual striving, had sometimes attended these festivals, and was thus known to the family.
Yogin was born in the year 1861. From his boyhood he was of a contemplative temperament. Even while at play with his companions, he would suddenly grow pensive, stop play and look listlessly at the azure sky. He would feel that he did not belong to this earth, that he had come from somewhere in some other plane of existence and that those who were near about him were not really his kith and kin. He was simple in his habits and never hankered after any luxury. He was a bit reserved and taciturn by nature. This prevented his friends from being very free with him. But he commanded love and even respect from all. After he was invested with the sacred thread, he spent much of his time in meditation and worship, in which he now and then became deeply absorbed.

Yogin was about sixteen or seventeen when he met Shri Ramakrishna for the first time. He was then studying for the Entrance Examination. At the very first meeting the Master recognised the spiritual potentiality of the boy and advised him to come to him now and then. Yogin was charmed with the warmth and cordiality with which he was received; and he began to repeat his visits as often as he could.

To the people of Dakshineswar Shri Ramakrishna was known as an "eccentric Brahmin". They had no idea that the "eccentricity" in his behaviour was due to his God-realisation and disregard for this world. The orthodox section looked upon him with suspicion because of his seeming regard for strict caste rules etc. Therefore, Yogin did not dare to come to him freely and openly, for he was afraid there would be objections from his parents if they knew about it. So he visited the Master stealthily.
SWAMI YOGANANDA

But love like murder will out. Soon it was known that Yogin was very much devoted to Shri Ramakrishna and spent most of his time with him. Yogin’s friends and companions began to taunt and ridicule him for this. Of a quiet nature as he was, he met all opposition with a silent smile. His parents were perturbed to see him indifferent to his studies and so much under the influence of Shri Ramakrishna. But they did not like to interfere with him directly as they thought it would be of no avail.

Yogin thought that his continuance of studies was useless, for he had no worldly ambition. But just to help his parents, who were in straitened circumstances, he went to Kanpur in search of some job. He tried for a few months, but could not get any employment. So he devoted his ample leisure to meditation and spiritual practices. He shunned company and liked to live alone with his thoughts. He spoke as little as possible. His movements and behaviour were unusual. The uncle of Yogin with whom he stayed at Kanpur, got alarmed lest he should go out of his mind. He wrote to the father of Yogin all about him and suggested marriage as the only remedy; for that might create in him an interest in worldly things.

Things were arranged accordingly at home. Yogin knew nothing about this. He only got information that some one was ill at home, and thinking it might be his mother to whom he was greatly devoted, he hurried to Dakshineswar. But to his great dismay he found that he had been trapped; all this was simply a pretext to bring him home for his marriage. He was in a great fix. He was against marriage, for that would interfere with his religious life. His great desire was to live a life of
renunciation and devote all his time and energy to the realisation of God, but now there was a conspiracy to frustrate his noble resolve.

Yogin was too gentle to be able to resist the wishes of his parents—specially of his mother, and in spite of himself he consented to marry. His parents wrongly thought that marriage would wean his mind from other-worldliness. But the effect was just the reverse. The fact that his resolve of living a celibate life had been frustrated, weighed so heavily on his mind that he felt miserable over it. He became moody and brooded day and night over his mistake. He did not even like to show his face to the Master, who had a high expectation about his spiritual future and would be sorely disappointed to learn that he had falsified all his hopes through a momentary weakness.

When the news of all that had happened with regard to his beloved Yogin reached the Master, he sent information again and again to Yogin to come and see him. But Yogin was reluctant to go. Thereupon the Master hit upon a plan to drag him in, and told a friend of Yogin: “Yogin once took some money from here (i.e. from a temple officer). It is strange that he has not returned the money, nor has he given any account of that!” When Yogin heard of this, his feelings were greatly wounded. He remembered that a temple official had given him a small sum to make some purchases for him before he left for Kanpur, and a small balance of that remained. But because of his marriage he had felt ashamed to go to the temple and therefore could not return the unspent money. At the remarks of the Master, however, he was so aggrieved that he resolved to take the earliest opportunity to return the money.
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and at the same time he thought that it would be his last visit to him.

Shri Ramakrishna was seated on his cot with his loin cloth on his lap when Yogin came to see him. Putting his cloth under his arm, he ran like a child to receive Yogin as soon as he saw him. Beside himself with joy at the coming of Yogin, the first thing that the Master said to him was: “What harm if you have married? Marriage will never be an obstacle to your spiritual life. Hundreds of marriages will never interfere with your spiritual progress if God is gracious. One day bring your wife here. I shall so change her mind that instead of an obstacle she will be a great help to you.”

A dead weight was lifted, as it were, from Yogin’s heart, as he heard the Master utter these bold and encouraging words in an ecstatic mood. He saw light where it had been all darkness for him. He was filled with new hope and strength. While taking leave of the Master a little later, he raised the topic of the balance of the money which he was to return, but to this the Master was supremely indifferent. He understood that the earlier remarks about the money had simply been an excuse to bring him there. Now his love and admiration for the Master became all the more great, and he began to repeat his visits.

Even after marriage Yogin was indifferent to worldly affairs just as before. This was a great disappointment to his parents who had thought of binding him to the world through the tie of wedlock. Once the mother of Yogin rebuked him for his growing detachment to the world as unbecoming of one who had a wife to support. He was greatly shocked. Did he not marry only at the earnest importunity of his mother! From this time on,
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his aversion for worldly life increased all the more. He thought the Master was the only person who consistently and most selflessly loved him. And he began to spend greater time with him. The Master also found an opportunity to pay greater attention to the training of Yogin.

We have said that Yogin was very soft-natured. It was difficult for him to hurt even an insect. But sometimes too much gentleness becomes a source of trouble rather than a virtue. Shri Ramakrishna noticed this unreasonable softness in the character of Yogin, and he wanted to set this right. He once noticed that there were some cockroaches in his bundle of clothes and asked Yogin to take the bundle outside the room and kill the insects. Yogin took the clothes outside the room. But as he was too gentle to kill the insects, he simply threw them away, hoping that the Master would not follow up the matter. But strangely enough he did inquire whether the cockroaches had been killed. When the answer was in the negative, Shri Ramakrishna gave him a mild reproof, for not obeying his words in toto.

A similar incident happened on another day. Yogin was going from Calcutta to Dakshineswar by a country boat in which there were other passengers as well. One of them began to criticise Shri Ramakrishna as being a hypocrite and so on. Yogin felt hurt at such remarks, but did not utter even a word of protest. The Master needed no defence from Yogin: he was tall enough to be above the reach of any cynicism of fools—Yogin thought. When after coming to Dakshineswar he narrated the incident to Shri Ramakrishna, thinking that the Master would approve of his goodness in not opposing the passengers, the reaction was just the
opposite. He took him to task for pocketing the blasphemy heaped upon the Guru. “A disciple should never hear criticisms hurled against his Guru”, said he. “If he cannot protest, he should leave the spot forthwith.”

Once Yogananda went to the market to make some purchases for the Master. The cunning shopkeeper feigned to be very religious-minded and Yogananda took him to be such. But when he returned to Dakshineswar, he found that the shopkeeper had cheated him. This called for a sharp rebuke from the Master. “A man may aspire to be religious; but that is no reason why he should be a fool”, said Shri Ramakrishna by way of correcting him.

Though Yogananda trusted a man easily and had the simplicity of a child, he was not a simpleton. Rather he had a keen discriminating mind and was critical in his outlook. But his critical attitude once led him into a quandary. One night he slept in the same room with the Master, but when he woke up in the dead of night he missed him and saw that the door was open. At first he felt curious, then he became suspicious as to where he could have gone at such an unearthly hour. He came outside, but Shri Ramakrishna could not be seen. Did he then go to his wife who was staying at the concert-house just opposite?—Yogananda thought. Then Shri Ramakrishna was not what he himself professed to be! He wanted to probe into the mystery, and stood near the concert-house to see if he came out of the room. After some time Shri Ramakrishna came from the Panchavati side and was surprised to see Yogananda standing near the concert-house. Yogananda was stupefied and felt ashamed of himself for his suspicion. A more sinful act could never be conceived of: to suspect even in thought.
the purity of a saint like Shri Ramakrishna! The Master understood the whole situation and said encouragingly, “Yes, one should observe a Sadhu by day as well as at night.” With these words he returned to his room, followed mutely by Yogin. In spite of these sweet words, Yogin had no sleep throughout the rest of the night, and later throughout his whole life he did not forgive himself for what he considered to be an extremely sinful act.

There are many incidents to show that Yogin, with all his devotion to the Master, kept his critical faculty alert and did not fail to test him in case of a doubt. Once he asked the Master how one could get rid of the sex-idea. When Shri Ramakrishna said that it could be easily done by prayer to God, this simple process did not appeal to him. He thought that there were so many persons who prayed to God, but nevertheless there came no change in their lives. He had expected to learn from the Master some Yogic practice, but he was disappointed, and came to the conclusion that this prescription of a simple remedy was the outcome of his ignorance of any other better means. During that time there stayed at Dakshineswar a Hatha-Yogi who would show to visitors his dexterity in many Yogic feats. Yogin got interested in him. Once he came to the temple precincts and without meeting the Master went straight of the Hatha-Yogi where he sat listening to his words spellbound. Exactly at that moment the Master chanced to come to that place. Seeing Yogin there, he very endearingly caught hold of his arms and while leading him towards his own room said, “Why did you go there? If you practise these Yogic exercises, your whole thought will be concentrated on the body.
and not on God." Yogin was not the person to submit so easily. He thought within himself, perhaps the Master was jealous of the Hatha-Yogi and was afraid lest his allegiance be transferred to the latter. He always thought himself to be very clever. But on second thought he tried the remedy suggested by the Master. To his great surprise he found wonderful results and felt ashamed of his doubting mind. Afterwards Swami Vivekananda used to say, "If there is any one amongst us who is completely free from sex-idea, it is Yogin."

To recount another incident of a similar type. Once he found that the Master was very much perturbed over the fact that his share of the consecrated food of the temple had not been sent to him. Usually the cashier of the temple would distribute the food offered in the temple after the worship had been finished. Being impatient Shri Ramakrishna sent a messenger to the cashier and afterwards he himself went to him to inquire about the matter. Yogin was proud of his aristocratic birth. When he saw the Master agitated over such a trifle, he thought that he might be a great saint, but still his anxiety at missing the consecrated food was the result of his family tradition and influence: being born in a poor priest-family, he was naturally particular about such insignificant things. When Yogin was thinking in this way, the Master came and of his own accord explained, "Rani Rasmani arranged that the consecrated food should be distributed amongst holy men. Thereby she will acquire some merit. But these officers, without considering that fact, give away the offerings at the temple to their friends and sometimes even to undesirable persons. So I am particular
to see that the pious desire of that noble lady is fulfilled.” When Yogin heard this, he was amazed to see that even an insignificant act of the Master was not without deep meaning, and he cursed himself for the opinion he had formed.

Yogin grew spiritually under the keen care of the Master. Afterwards when Shri Ramakrishna fell ill and was under medical treatment at Cossipore, he was one of those disciples who laboured day and night in attending to the needs and comfort of their beloved Master. Long strain on this account told upon the none too strong health of Yogin, but the devoted disciple worked undauntedly.

It soon became apparent that no amount of care on the part of the disciples could arrest the progress of the Master’s disease. His life was despaired of. One day he called Yogin and asked him to read out to him a certain portion of the Bengali almanac, date by date. When Yogin had reached a certain date and read it, Shri Ramakrishna told him to stop. It was the date on which the Master passed away.

The Mahasamadhi of Shri Ramakrishna threw all into deep gloom. To recover from this shock the Holy Mother went to Vrindaban with Yogin, Kali, Latu, Golap-Ma, Lakshmi Devi, and Nikunja Devi (“M”). At the end of a year the Holy Mother returned to Calcutta. After staying there for a fortnight, Yogin, who now became Swami Yogananda, escorted the Holy Mother to Kamarpukur, from where he went out for Tapasya. When in the middle of 1888 the Holy Mother came to live in Nilambar Babu’s garden-house at Belur, Swami Yogananda also returned to attend on her. His service to the Holy Mother was wonderful. In
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looking after the comfort of the Holy Mother, he threw all personal considerations to the wind. For, did he not see the living presence of the Master in her? Then to serve her with all devotion and care, he thought, was his best religion. Whenever the Holy Mother left her village home for other places Swami Yogananda used to be on attendance almost invariably. Thus in November 1888 he was with her at Puri, where along with Swami Brahmananda and others they stayed till the beginning of the next year. It is definitely known that he was with her at Ghushuri, near Belur, in 1890, at Nilainbar Babu’s house at Belur in 1893, at Kailwar in 1894, at a rented house at Sarkarbari Lane, Calcutta, in 1896, and at another rented house at Bosepara Lane, Calcutta, in 1897. Most of the intermediate periods in the early years he spent in Tapasya at various places till his health compelled him to give up the practice and stay permanently in Calcutta.

It is not possible to give a full account of his days of spiritual practice; for not much has been preserved. Some time in 1891, he went to Varanasi where he lived in a solitary garden-house absorbed in spiritual practices. It is said that during this period he would grudge the time he spent even for taking meals. He would beg some day some pieces of bread for his food, and for the following three or four days these pieces, soaked in water, would constitute his only meal. During this time there was a great riot in Varanasi, but he commanded such respect in the vicinity that rioters of both sides would not even disturb him. But the hardship which he was undergoing was too much for his constitution, which broke down completely. He never regained his normal health. From Varanasi he returned
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to the Math at Baranagore. He was still ailing. But his bright, smiling face belied his illness. Who could imagine that he was ill when he would be seen engaged whole-heartedly in fun and merry-making with his beloved brother-disciples!

When the Holy Mother came to Calcutta, Swami Yogananda again became her attendant. He spent about a year in devoted service to the Holy Mother. After that he stayed chiefly at the house of Balaram Bose in Calcutta. He was now a permanently sick person—a victim of intestinal ailments. But he was the source of much attraction. So great was his amiability that whoever would come into contact with him would be charmed with him. One would at once feel at home with him. Some young men who got the opportunity of mixing with him at this time afterwards joined the Ramakrishna Order and became monks.

From 1895 to 1897 Swami Yogananda organised public celebrations of the birthday anniversary of Shri Ramakrishna on a large scale at Dakshineswar. And in 1898 he organised a similar celebration at Belur. The success of these celebrations, against tremendous odds, was due to the great influence Swami Yogananda had over men—specially of the younger generation. The organising ability of Swami Yogananda was evidenced also when a grand reception was given to Swami Vivekananda in 1897 on his return from America. Swami Yogananda was the moving spirit behind it.

When Swami Vivekananda, after his return from the West, told his brother-disciples about his proposal to start an organisation, Swami Yogananda was the person to raise a protest. His contention was that Shri Rama-
krishna wanted all to devote their time and energy exclusively to spiritual practices, but that Swamiji, deviating from the Masters' teachings, was starting an organisation on his own initiative. This provoked the great Swami too much and made him unconsciously reveal a part of his inner life. Swamiji feelingly said that he (meaning himself) was too insignificant to improve upon the teachings of that spiritual giant—Shri Ramakrishna. If Shri Ramakrishna wanted he could create hundreds of Vivekanandas from a handful of dust, but that he had made Swamiji simply a tool for carrying out his mission, and Swami Vivekananda had no will but that of the Master. Such astounding faith had the effect of winning over Swami Yogananda immediately. When the Ramakrishna Mission Society was actually started, Swami Yogananda became its Vice-president.

This was not the only occasion when Swami Yogananda showed the power of individual judgement and of a great critical faculty by challenging the very leader—Swami Vivekananda, though his love for the latter was very, very deep. Indeed, one who dared examine the conduct of his Guru with a critical eye before fully submitting to him, could not spare his Gurubhai (brother-disciple). Two years after the incident referred to above, Swami Vivekananda was accused again by some of his Gurubhais of not preaching the ideas of their Master who had insisted on Bhakti and on spiritual practices for the realisation of God, whereas Swami Vivekananda constantly urged them to go about working, preaching, and serving the poor and the diseased. Here also Swami Yogananda started the discussion. At first the discussion began,
in a light-hearted mood on both sides. But gradually Swami Vivekananda became serious, till at last he was choked with emotion and found visibly contending with his love for the poor and his reverence for the Guru. Tears filled his eyes and his whole frame began to shake. In order to hide his feelings he left the spot immediately. But the atmosphere was so tense that none dared break the silence even after Swamiji had left. A few minutes later some of the Gurubhais went to his apartment and found him sitting in meditation, his whole frame stiff and tears flowing from his half-closed eyes. It was nearly an hour before Swamiji returned to his waiting friends in the sitting room, and when he began to talk, all found that his love for the Master was much deeper than what could be seen from a superficial view. But he was not allowed to talk on that subject. Swami Yogananda and others took him away from the room to divert his thoughts.

Swami Yogananda commanded respect for his stentorian saintly qualities. But what distinguished him among the disciples of the Master was his devoted service to the Holy Mother. He was one of the earliest monks who discovered the extraordinary spiritual greatness of the Holy Mother, hidden under her rural simplicity of manners. The conviction led to an unquestioning dedication to her cause. He looked to her comfort in every way. If by chance a few coins were offered to him by somebody, he preserved these for the Mother's use. He considered no sacrifice too great for her.

When Swami Yogananda became too weak to attend to all the works of the Holy Mother, a young monk (later known as Swami Dhirananda) was taken as his assistant. When the Holy Mother was in Calcutta,
naturally many ladies would flock to her. Seeing the situation, Swami Vivekananda once took Swami Yogananda to task for keeping a young Brahmacharin as his assistant: for, if the celibate life of the latter was endangered, who would be responsible? "I," came the immediate reply from Swami Yogananda, "I am ready to sacrifice my all for him." The words were uttered with so much sincerity and earnestness that everyone who heard them could not but admire the large-heartedness of Swami Yogananda.

Swami Yogananda's health was becoming worse every day, and his suffering soon came to an end. On March 28, 1899, he passed away. He was the first among the monastic disciples of the Master to enter Mahasamadhi. The blessed words that he uttered before death were: "My Jnana and Bhakti have so much increased that I cannot express them." An old Sannyasin brother who was at the bedside at the solemn moment said that they felt all of a sudden such an inflow of a higher state of being, that they vividly realised that the soul was passing to a higher, freer, and superior state of consciousness than the bodily state. Swami Vivekananda was greatly moved at the passing away of Swami Yogananda and very feelingly remarked, "This is the beginning of the end." The Holy Mother also said: "That's like a brick falling out of the wall of a building; it is an evil omen." She cherished his memory affectionately for ever.

Outwardly the life of Swami Yogananda was uneventful. It is very difficult to give or find out details through which one can see his personality. Only those who moved with him closely could see something of his spiritual eminence. One of the younger members
of the Math at that time wrote with regard to him: "He was such a great saint that it fills one with awe to belong, even as the youngest member, to the Order that contained him." Swami Yogananda commanded great love and respect from all the lay and monastic disciples of the Ramakrishna Order. He was one of those whom the Master spotted out as "Ishwarakotis" or "Eternally perfect"—one of the souls which are never in bondage but now and then come to this world of ours for guiding humanity Godwards.
Swami Niranjanananda was one of those few disciples whom Shri Ramakrishna termed as Nityasiddhas or Ishwarakotis—that is, souls who are perfect from their very birth and are not caught by Maya at any time. With particular reference to Niranjanananda the Master once said that he was born with the characteristics of Rama inherent in him.

The early name of Swami Niranjanananda was Nityaniranjan Ghosh, and he was usually called by the shortened form of Niranjan. He came from Rajarhat-Vishnupur, a village in twenty-four Parganas, but lived in Calcutta with his uncle Kalikrishna Mitra. In his boyhood he became associated with a group of spiritualists in Calcutta. He was very often selected as a medium, and a very successful medium he always proved himself to be. At this time he developed some psychic powers—e.g. powers of curing people in a miraculous way and so on. It is said that a very rich man, suffering from insomnia for eighteen long years, sought the help of Niranjan for recovery. Niranjan said afterwards, “I do not know whether that man got any real help from me. But finding the man suffering so much in life in spite of all his riches and wealth, I was seized with a feeling of the emptiness of all worldly things.”

Hearing about the great spiritual power of Shri

1 Though their names are not definitely known, the following six are accepted as such: Narendra, Rakhal, Yogin, Baburam, Niranjan, and Purna. Except Purna all embraced monasticism.
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Ramakrishna, Niranjan one afternoon came to Dakshineswar to see him. Some say that Niranjan came there first with his spiritualist friends. It is said that they tried to make Shri Ramakrishna a medium. At first the Master agreed and sat like an innocent child to be a medium. But soon he disliked the idea and left the seat.

Niranjan was about eighteen years old when he met the Master for the first time. He had a very majestic appearance—being a tall figure with broad shoulders and a strong physique. Though a boy, fearlessness beamed through his eyes.

Shri Ramakrishna was surrounded by a circle of devotees when Niranjan came to him. In the evening when all the devotees dispersed, the Master turned to Niranjan and inquired all about him. Coming to know about his interest in spiritualism, he told young Niranjan, “My boy, if you think of ghosts and spooks, ghosts and spooks you will become. And if you think of God, divine will be your life. Which do you prefer?” “Of course the latter”, replied Niranjan. Thereupon Shri Ramakrishna advised Niranjan to sever all connections with the spiritualists, to which Niranjan agreed.

At the very first meeting the Master talked with Niranjan as if he had known him for a long time. Shri Ramakrishna, seeing it was getting dark, pressed Niranjan to pass the night at Dakshineswar. But Niranjan could not do so lest his uncle should be anxious for him. He, however, promised to come again.

This meeting, though short, so much impressed Niranjan that all the time on his way home he kept thinking about Shri Ramakrishna. At home also Shri
Ramakrishna occupied all his thoughts. So within two or three days he again came to him. As soon as the Master saw the boy near the door, he ran to him and warmly embraced him. Then with deep feelings he began to say, "My boy, days are passing, when will you realise God? And if you do not realise God, the whole life will be meaningless. I am extremely anxious as to when you will whole-heartedly devote yourself to God." Niranjan was mute with wonder, and thought, "Strange indeed! How could he be so anxious because I have not realised God! Who could this man be?"

Anyway these words, uttered with deep feeling, greatly touched the heart of the boy. He spent the night at Dakshineswar. The next day and the day following that were also spent there in ecstatic joy. It was on the fourth day that he returned to Calcutta. His uncle was in great anxiety for him. When Niranjan returned home, he was scolded for his absence and put under surveillance so that he might not go anywhere. Afterwards, however, Niranjan was permitted to go to Dakshineswar whenever he liked.

Niranjan was very frank and open-minded. The Master liked this trait in him because frankness and open-mindedness, in his opinion, were rare virtues—the effect of much Tapasya in one's previous life and they indicated the possibility of realising God. Niranjan had great abhorrence for married life. When his relatives pressed him for marriage, he was alarmed at the very idea. He thought he was being dragged towards his ruin. He was an extremely pure soul. The Master used to say that Niranjan was without any "Anjan"—i.e. without any blemish in his character.

Niranjan was of violent temper, though he had a
very tender heart. When provoked, he would lose all sense of proportion. One day he was going to Dakshineswar in a country-boat. Some fellow passengers began to speak ill of Shri Ramakrishna in the hearing of Niranjan. Niranjan at first protested. But finding that it was of no avail, he began to rock the boat, threatening to drown the passengers for their misconduct. The robust appearance and the furious mood of Niranjan struck terror into the hearts of the calumniators, who immediately apologised for their improper behaviour. When Shri Ramakrishna heard of this incident, he severely took Niranjan to task for his violent temper. “Anger is a deadly sin, why should you be subject to it? Foolish people in their pitiable ignorance say many things. One should completely ignore them as beneath notice”, said Shri Ramakrishna. The reader may contrast this with a similar incident in Swami Yogananda’s life, and find for himself how the Master's teaching varied according to the character of the disciple.

At one time Niranjan was compelled to accept a situation in an office. When the news reached Shri Ramakrishna, he was greatly aggrieved and remarked. “I should not have been more pained, had I heard of his death.” Afterwards when he learnt that Niranjan had accepted the situation to maintain his aged mother, Shri Ramakrishna breathed a sigh of relief and said, “Ah, then it is all right. It will not contaminate your mind. But if you had done so for your own sake, I could not have touched you. Really it was unthinkable that you could stoop to such humiliation.” Hearing these words, when one of the audience asked the Master if he was decrying service and if so, how one
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could maintain oneself and one's family, the Master remarked, "Let others do whatever they like. I say these with reference to those young aspirants who form a class by themselves."

Niranjan could not be long in the service. When Shri Ramakrishna was ill at Cossipore, Niranjan was one of those young disciples who stayed with him and night and night attended to his needs, with the hope that they would be able to cure him through their devoted service.

After the demise of the Master all the devotees agreed to inter the ashes somewhere on the Ganga. But later on Ram Chandra Datta and others wanted to take the ashes to Kankugachhi, in the eastern part of Calcutta. Niranjan is remembered for his bold advocacy of the original plan. By his intervention the greater portion of the ashes was retained by the world-renouncing young men.

After the passing of Shri Ramakrishna, Niranjan joined the monastery at Baranagore and gave himself up heart and soul to the realisation of Truth. Now and then, spurred by the spirit of freedom, which does not allow a monk to confine himself to one place, Niranjan also would go hither and thither; but the monastery at Baranagore and afterwards at Alambazar, when it was removed there, was, as it were, the headquarters for him as also for all his Gurubhais.

He was the peer of Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) in extraordinary steadfastness to the worship of the relic of the Master enshrined in the monastery. His faith in Shri Ramakrishna was so very living that it made him strong enough not to care at all for the praise or the blame of the whole world.
When Swami Vivekananda, after his triumphant success in the West, was returning to India, Swami Niranjanananda hastened to Colombo to receive him there. Afterwards Niranjanananda accompanied Swami Vivekananda to some places in his tour through Northern India. For some time he stayed alone in Varanasi performing Tapasya and living by begging from door to door.

During the last few years of his life he suffered greatly from dysentery, and passed away on the 9th May 1904, from an attack of cholera at Hardwar where he had gone for Tapasya.

Swami Niranjanananda had a very loving heart, though his appearance would inspire awe. His last meeting with the Holy Mother was very touching. "It disclosed", a devotee records, "his loving, impulsive nature. He made no mention of the approaching end, but was like a tearful child clinging to its mother. He insisted that the Holy Mother do everything for him, even feed him, and he wanted only what she had made ready for his meal. When the time came for him to leave her, reluctantly he threw himself at her feet, weeping tears of tender sadness; then silently he went away, knowing that he would never see her again."

Indeed his devotion to the Holy Mother was unsurpassable. Swami Vivekananda used to say, "Niranjan has got so much devotion to the Holy Mother that I can forgive his thousand and one faults only because of that."

Girish Chandra Ghosh also bore testimony to Niranjan's devotion to the Holy Mother. In those early days the divinity of the Holy Mother was not so widely acknowledged; and Girish confessed that he too was a
disbeliever. But soon his eyes were opened by Niranjan who first took him to the Holy Mother and then to her village home at Jayrambati, where Girish stayed with Niranjan under the affectionate care of the Holy Mother for some months, deriving thereby immense spiritual benefit. In fact, it was partly through Niranjan's active preaching that many devotees came to recognise the spiritual greatness of the Holy Mother.

There was a strange mixture of tenderness and sternness in him. His love for truth was uncompromising and counted no cost. Once a gentleman of Calcutta built a Shiva temple in the city of Varanasi. When Swami Vivekananda heard of this, he remarked, "If he does something for relieving the sufferings of the poor, he will acquire the merit of building a thousand such temples." When this remark of the great Swami reached the ears of the gentleman, he came forward with a big offer of pecuniary help to the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service at Varanasi—then in a nucleus state. But afterwards, as the first impulse of enthusiasm cooled down, he wanted to curtail the sum which he had originally offered. This breach of promise so much offended Swami Niranjanananda's sense of regard for truth that he rejected the offer altogether, though that meant great difficulty for the institution.

It is very hard to estimate a spiritual personality by external events. The height of spiritual eminence of a person can be perceived, and that also only to some extent, by the inspiration he radiates. Swami Niranjanananda left the stamp of his life on many persons. Some even renounced everything for the sake of God and joined the Ramakrishna Order because of his influence.
He left one Sannyasin disciple. Above all, to know Swami Niranjanananda we must turn to what the Master said about him: that Swami Niranjanananda was one of his "Antarangas," i.e. belonged to the inner circle of his devotees.
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One day at Dakshineswar Shri Ramakrishna in a state of ecstasy sat on the lap of a young man and said afterwards, "I was testing how much weight he could bear." The young man was none other than Sharat Chandra, and the burden he had to bear in later life as the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission required superhuman strength. He succeeded because with implicit faith in the Master he could maintain his equanimity under trying circumstances and could tell all around him, "The Master will set everything right. Be at rest."

Swami Saradananda came of a rich and orthodox Brahmin family, living in Amherst Street, Calcutta. His early name was Sharat Chandra Chakravarti. He was born on 23rd December 1865. As the time of birth was a Saturday evening, many were alarmed as to the future of the child. But an uncle of Sharat Chandra, expert in astrology, predicted that the new-born babe would be so great that he would shed lustre on his family.

From his very boyhood Sharat Chandra was so quiet that this could be mistaken for dullness. But soon he showed his extraordinary intelligence in class works. In almost all examinations he topped the list of successful boys. He took delight in many extra-academic activities, and became a prominent figure in the debating class, and his strong physique developed through physical exercise, attracted notice.

His deep religious nature expressed itself even in his early boyhood. He would sit quietly by the side of his
mother when she was engaged in worshipping the family deity, and afterwards faultlessly repeat the ritual before his friends. On festive occasions he would want images of deities and not the dolls which average lads buy, and for a long time the play which interested him most was to perform imitation-worship. After he was invested with the sacred thread, he was privileged to perform regular worship in the family shrine. He was also strict about the daily meditations required of a Brahmin boy.

Sharat was very courteous by nature. He was incapable of using any harsh word to anybody or of hurting anyone’s feelings in any way. He had a very soft and feeling heart, and lost no opportunity to help his poor class-friends as far as his means permitted. The small sum of money which he got from home for tiffin, he often spent for poor boys. Sometimes he would give away his personal clothing to those who needed them more. Relations and friends, acquaintances and neighbours, servants and housemaids—whoever fell ill, Sharat Chandra was sure to be by their side. Once a maidservant in a neighbouring house fell ill of cholera. The master removed her to a corner on the roof of his house to prevent infection, and left her there to die. But as soon as Sharat Chandra came to know of this, he rushed to the spot and all alone did everything that was necessary for her nursing. The poor woman died in spite of all his devoted service. Finding the master indifferent about her last rites, Sharat made arrangement even for that.

As he grew up, he came under the influence of the great Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen. Gradually, he began to study the literature of the Brahmo Samaj
and even to practise meditation according to its system.

In 1882 Sharat Chandra passed the University Entrance Examination from the Hare School and the next year he got himself admitted into the St. Xavier’s College. Father Laffront was then the Principal of that college. Being charmed with the deep religious nature of Sharat, he undertook to teach him the Bible.

Sharat had a cousin, Shashi, who also stayed in the same family and read in the Metropolitan College. Once a class-friend of Shashi said that there was a great saint in the temple-garden of Dakshineswar about whom Keshab Chandra had written in glowing terms in the Indian Mirror. In the course of conversation the three decided that one day they would visit the saint.

It was on a certain day in October 1883, that Sharat and Shashi were at Dakshineswar. Shri Ramakrishna received them very cordially. After preliminary inquiries, when the Master learnt that they now and then went to Keshab’s Brahma Samaj, he was very pleased. Then he said, “Bricks and tiles, if burnt after the trade-mark has been stamped on them, retain these marks for ever. But nowadays parents marry their boys too young. By the time they finish their education, they are already fathers of children and have to run hither and thither in search of a job to maintain the family.” “Then, sir, is it wrong to marry? Is it against the will of God?” asked one from the audience. The Master asked him to take down one of the books from the shelf and read aloud an extract from the Bible setting forth Christ’s opinion on marriage: “For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb; there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs which
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have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive let him receive.” And St. Paul’s: “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.” When the passage was read, the Master remarked that marriage was the root of all bondage. One among the audience interrupted him saying, “Do you mean to say, sir, that marriage is against the will of God? And how can His creation go on if people cease to marry?” The Master smiled and said, “Don’t worry about that. Those who like to marry are at perfect liberty to do so. What I said just now was between ourselves. I say what I have got to say: you may take as much or as little of it as you like.”

These stirring words of renunciation opened up a new vision to Sharat and Shashi. Both were charmed by the personality of Shri Ramakrishna. The college, where Sharat was reading, remained closed on Thursdays. He made it a rule to visit Dakshineswar every Thursday unless something very important stood in the way. As he came more and more in touch with Shri Ramakrishna, he was more and more attracted towards him. Sharat Chandra was caught in the current of his love.

The Master also noticed the spiritual potentiality of the boy at the very first sight and began to give directions and to watch his spiritual development. One day the Master was seated in his room at Dakshineswar surrounded by a group of devotees. Ganesha, the Hindu god of success, was the topic of conversation. The Master praised highly the integrity of character of this deity, his utter absence of passion and single-minded devotion

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to his mother, the goddess Durga. Young Sharat was present. Suddenly he said, “Well, sir, I like the character of Ganesha very much. He is my ideal.” The Master at once corrected him saying, “No, Ganesha is not your ideal. Your ideal is Shiva. You possess Shiva-attributes.” Then he added, “Think of yourself, always, as Shiva and of me as Shakti. I am the ultimate repository of all your powers.”

On another occasion the Master asked Sharat, “How would you like to realise God? What divine visions do you prefer to see in meditation?” Sharat replied, “I do not want to see any particular form of God in meditation. I want to see Him as manifested in all creatures of the world. I do not like visions.” The Master said with a smile, “That is the last word in spiritual attainment. You cannot have it all at once.” “But I won’t be satisfied with anything short of that,” replied the boy, “I shall trudge on in the path of religious practice till that blessed state arrives.”

Sharat Chandra had once met Narendra Nath—afterwards Swami Vivekananda—even before he came to Shri Ramakrishna. But at that time Sharat had formed a very wrong impression about one whom afterwards he loved and followed as a leader. Sharat had once gone to see a friend in central Calcutta about whom the report was that he had gone astray. At the house of the friend he met a young man who talked of high things but who seemed to be self-conceited and whose manners were anything but decorous. Sharat came to the conclusion that it was by mixing with this young man that his friend had gone wrong.

A few months after this, Shri Ramakrishna was greatly praising a young man named Narendra Nath. He was
speaking so highly of him that Sharat Chandra felt
tempted to have a personal acquaintance with such a
person, and got his address from Shri Ramakrishna for
this purpose. And what was his wonder when on meet-
ing Narendra Nath, he found that he was none other
than the young man whom once he had met at the house
of his friend! The first acquaintance soon ripened into
close friendship. So great was their attachment to each
other that sometimes Sharat and Narendra could be
found in the streets of Calcutta, deeply engaged in con-
versation, till one o'clock in the morning—walking the
distance between their homes many times—one intend-
ing to escort the other to the latter's home. Sharat
Chandra afterwards used to say, “However freely
Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) mixed with us, at the
very first meeting I saw that here was one who belonged
 to a class by himself.”

One interesting incident happened when Narendra
once went inside the house of Sharat Chandra. It was
in the winter of 1884. Sharat and Shashi came to the
house of Narendra Nath at noon. Conversation warm-
ed up, and all forgot how time passed. So long Sharat
and Shashi had thought that Shri Ramakrishna was only
a saint. Now on hearing what Narendra had experienc-
ed with Shri Ramakrishna they began to think he was
as great as Jesus or any other Prophet of similar rank.
In the course of the conversation the day passed into
evening. Narendra Nath took them to Cornwallis
Square for an evening stroll. There also the conversa-
tion continued, broken by a song sung by him. Suddenly,
“Sharat woke up to the consciousness of time as he heard
a clock strike nine at night. Narendra proceeded with
them to given them his company for a little distance. But
engaged in talk he came actually to the house of Sharat Chandra, and Sharat requested him to take his meals there. Narendra agreed. But as he entered the house, he stopped in astonishment. It seemed as if he had been in this house before, and knew every corridor, every room there! He wondered if it could be the remembrance of any past life.

The Master was glad beyond measure when he learnt that Sharat Chandra had not only met Narendra Nath, but that a deep love had sprung up between the two. He remarked in his characteristic, homely way. "The mistress of the house knows which cover will go with which cooking utensil."

Sharat passed the First Arts Examination in 1885. His father wanted him to read medicine, specially as he had a pharmacy for which he had to employ a doctor. Though Sharat had no aspiration to be a doctor, on the advice of Narendra Nath he joined the Calcutta Medical College. But destiny willed that Sharat was not to be a medical man. When the Master fell ill, and he was removed to Cossipore, Sharat, along with others, began to serve him there.

Sharat Chandra's father was alarmed at this development. He had, as his family Guru, Jagannath Taraklankar, a famous pundit and an adept in various kinds of Tantrika practices. Leaving aside such a capable preceptor, should Sharat follow another person! Girish Chandra, Sharat's father, one day took Jagannath Taraklankar to Shri Ramakrishna at Cossipore. His idea was that in the course of conversation between the family preceptor and Ramakrishna it would transpire what a pigmy the latter was in comparison with the former, and Sharat would clearly see his folly in giving up the
family Guru. But in a moment’s talk, an adept like the pundit found that he was in the presence of a blazing fire. Secretly he told Girish that his son should be considered blessed to have such a Guru.

So Sharat continued to serve that Master. His steadfastness in this work was put to the test on the first of January 1886, when the Master in an ecstatic mood blessed many a devotee with a touch which lifted their minds to great spiritual heights. Finding the Master in such a mood of compassion, all who were near-by rushed to the spot to receive his blessings. But Sharat and Latu at that time were engaged in some duty allotted to them. Even the consideration of a spiritual windfall could not tempt them away. Afterwards, when asked as to why he did not go to the Master at that time, Sharat replied, “I did not feel any necessity for that. Why should I? Was not the Master dearer than the dearest to me? Then what doubt was there that he would give me, of his own accord, anything that I needed? So I did not feel the least anxiety.”

One day the Master commanded the young disciples to go out and beg their food. They readily obeyed. But with their nice appearance they could hardly hide the fact that they belonged to good families. So when they went out for alms, some were pitied, some were abused, some were treated with utmost sympathy. Sharat Chandra would afterwards narrate his own experience with a smile thus: “I entered a small village and stood before a house uttering the name of God just as the begging monks do. Hearing my call an elderly lady came out and when she saw my strong physique, at once she cried out in great contempt. ‘With such a robust health are you not ashamed to live on alms? Why don’t you
become a tram conductor at least?" Saying this, she closed the door with a bang."

When, after the passing away of the Master, Sharat returned home, his parents were at rest. But Narendra Nath and others would come to his house now and then and the subject of conversation would be only how to build up life in the light of the message of the Master. At their call Sharat would visit the monastery now and then. This alarmed his father, who reasoned with Sharat, "So long as Shri Ramakrishna was alive, it was all right that you lived with him—nursing and attending on him. But now that he is no more, why not settle down at home?" But seeing that arguments had no effect, he locked his son within a room, so that he might not go and mix with the other young disciples of the Master. Sharat was not perturbed in the least. He began to spend his time in meditation and other spiritual practices. But as chance would have it, a younger brother opened the door of the room out of sympathy for his elder brother, who then came out and fled to the monastery at Baranagore.

During the Christmas of 1886, Narendra and others went to Antpur, the birth-place of Swami Premananda, and there they resolved to lead a life of renunciation. Soon after they formally took Sannyasa, and Sharat became known as Swami Saradananda. His parents came to know of this and visited Baranagore, this time not to dissuade but to give him the complete liberty to follow the line of action he had chosen.

Now began a real life of Tapasya. At Baranagore at dead of night Narendra Nath and Sharat Chandra would secretly go out to the place where the body of the Master was cremated, or to some such spot, and
practise meditation. Sometimes they would spend the whole night in spiritual practices. Though so much inclined towards the meditative life Sharat Chandra was ever ready to respond to the call of work. And with his innate spirit of service he was sure to be found near the sick-bed if any of the brother-disciples fell ill.

Swami Saradananda or Sharat Maharaj, as he was known in the Order, had a sweet musical voice which from a distance could be mistaken for that of a woman. One night some neighbours, led by curiosity as to how a woman could be there at the monastery, scaled the boundary wall and entered the place of music. They were ashamed of themselves after discovering the truth and frankly apologised. When Saradananda read the Chandī or recited hṝmns with his melodious voice, the bystanders felt spiritually uplifted. Afterwards, even in advanced age, he would sing one or two songs, out of overflowing love and devotion, on the occasion of the birthday of Shri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda.

Soon Swami Saradananda began to feel a longing for a life of complete reliance on God. So he went to Puri to practise Tapasya. After returning to Baranagore he started for Varanasi and Ayodhya and at last reached Rishikesh via Hardwar. Here he passed some months in Tapasya, till in the summer of 1890 he started for Kedarnath and Badrinarayan via Gangotri with Swami Turiyananda and Vaikuntha Nath Sannyal. This pilgrimage was full of thrilling experiences for them. Some days they had to go without food, some days without shelter. Even on such a difficult journey he was not slow in doing acts of utmost sacrifice. Once on the way they were climbing down a very steep hill with the help of others. The two Gurubhais were ahead, Swami
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Saradananda was behind. As Swami Saradananda was climbing down slowly, he found a party behind in which there was an old woman. She found it had to descend as she was without a stick. Swami Saradananda quietly handed his stick to the old lady—following the historic example, “Thy need is greater than mine.”

After visiting Kedarnath, Tunganath and Badrinarayan, Swami Saradananda and Vaikuntha Nath came to Almora in July, 1890, and became the guests of Lala Badrinath Shah. Towards August, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) and Swami Akhandananda reached Almora, when all of them started for Garhwal. After seeing various places in Garhwal, as they arrived at Tehri, Swami Akhandananda fell ill. As there was no good doctor in the town, he was taken to Dehra Dun. On their way, at Rajpur, below Mussoorie, they met Swami Turiyananda unexpectedly. Swami Turiyananda had separated from Swami Saradananda on the way to Kedarnath and had come here for Tapsya. When Swami Akhandananda was slightly better, he went to Meerut, and Swamiji, Turiyananda, and Saradananda went to Rishikesh, where they heard that Swami Brahmananda was practising Tapasya at Kankhal near Hardwar. So they all went to meet him at Kankhal, where they learnt that Swami Akhandananda was at Meerut. Hence the whole party went to Meerut to have the pleasure of seeing him. At Meerut they all lived together for a few months before they came to Delhi. At Delhi Swamiji left them to wander alone. Then Swami Saradananda came to Varanasi visiting holy places like Mathura, Vrindavan, Allahabad, etc., on the way. At Varanasi Swami Saradananda stayed for some time practising intense medita-
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tion. Here an earnest devotee, in search of a Guru, met him and was so much impressed by him that he afterwards took Sannyasa from him. He then became Swami Sachchidananda. In the summer of 1891, Swami Abhedananda met Swami Saradananda at Varanasi, and the two, accompanied by the above-mentioned devotee, made a ceremonial circuit on foot, round the sacred area of the city covering about forty square miles. This caused them so much hardship that all the three were attacked by severe fever. Some time after they had recovered from fever Swami Saradananda got dysentery, which compelled him to return to the monastery at Baranagore in September, 1891.

At Baranagore with better facilities for medical care, Swami Saradananda completely recovered. Then he started for the Holy Mother’s native village, Jayrambati, to see her. Although he had a very happy time here, he got malaria and suffered for a long time even after returning to Baranagore.

When Swamiji’s work in the West made headway, he was in need of an assistant, and the choice finally fell upon Swami Saradananda. So when Swami Vivekananda came to London for the second time in 1896, he met Swami Saradananda who had arrived there on the 1st of April. Swami Saradananda delivered a few lectures in London, but he was soon sent to New York, where the Vedanta Society had already been established. Soon after his arrival in America he was invited to be one of the teachers at the Greenacre Conference of Comparative Religions. At the close of the Conference, the Swami was invited to lecture in Brooklyn, New York, and Boston. Everywhere his dignity of bearing, gentle courtesy, the readiness to meet questions of all kinds,
and, above all, the spiritual height from which he could talk, won for him a large number of friends, admirers and devotees. Swami Saradananda afterwards settled down in New York to carry on the Vedanta movement in a regular and organised way.

After returning to India, Swamiji started the Ramakrishna Mission Association which was the forerunner of the present Ramakrishna Mission. For this Swamiji wanted an able hand. So he called back Swami Saradananda, who sailed on January 12, 1898, and reached Calcutta early in February, visiting London, Paris, Rome, etc., on the way. In Rome he visited the famous St. Peter’s Cathedral. It is said that while visiting it the first time on his way to London two years earlier, he fell into an ecstasy and became oblivious of his surroundings. Does this experience confirm the remark of the Master that he had been a companion of Jesus in a previous incarnation?

Soon after his arrival at the Math, he was made the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, an office which he ably held to his last day. In addition to his official duty, he also looked after the spiritual well-being of the Math inmates, and he delivered lectures and held religious classes for the benefit of the public.

After a few months, Swami Saradananda started for Kashmir on receipt of a wire from Swamiji who was ill there. On the way Swami Saradananda met with an accident. Between Rawalpindi and Srinagar the horse of the coach by which he was travelling suddenly took fright and started down a hill. When the coach had gone some way down, it struck against a tree, which gave him an opportunity to get out. Just then a boulder fell from above and crushed the horse to death. Swami
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Saradananda thus escaped miraculously. What was more surprising was that Swami Saradananda did not lose his equanimity even at such a critical hour.

Similar calmness had been seen in him when, on his voyage to London, his ship was overtaken by a cyclone in the Mediterranean. Everybody in the ship was restless, running up and down in despair of life. Many gave vent to their fear in cries. But Swami Saradananda was the silent spectator of the whole scene.

On another occasion, he was on the Ganga in a country-boat on his way from Calcutta to Belur. A devotee also accompanied him. Soon a severe gale arose and the boat was tossing amidst flashing waves. But Swami Saradananda was calmly smoking a hookah. This composure so much exasperated the devotee that he threw the pipe into the Ganga. To this fury of the devotee he answered only with a kindly smile.

After his recovery at Srinagar Swamiji asked Swami Saradananda to guide some Western disciples in their pilgrimage to the holy places of North India. After this pilgrimage the party reached Calcutta.

On the 7th February 1899, Swami Saradananda along with Swami Turiyananda started for Gujarat for preaching and collecting funds for the Math. After visiting Kanpur, Agra, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Limbdi, Junagadh, Bhavnagar, etc., they returned to the Math in early May on receiving a wire from Swamiji who planned to start for the West again.

In December of this year he went on pressing invitation to Dacca, Narayangunge, and Barisal. In all places his presence created a great stir. In Barisal he stayed for eight days. Here he delivered three public lectures, but day and night he had to talk with crowds of eager
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souls who would come to him to solve their spiritual problems. Ashwini Kumar Datta, the great devotee and political leader of Barisal, was beside himself with joy to have a Gurubhai of Swami Vivekananda and a disciple of Shri Ramakrishna in his town. At Ashwini Kumar’s house Swami Saradananda spent most of his time receiving visitors and discussing various problems with them. He returned to the Math at Belur in January 1900.

At this time he undertook the Tantrika form of spiritual practice. Ishwar Chandra Chakravarty, father of Shashi and uncle of Saradananda, was an adept in the cult. He initiated the Swami into its practices. The goal of the Tantrika discipline is the realisation of the Divine Mother in all. That he succeeded in this can be guessed from what he wrote in the dedication of his beautiful Bengali book —Bharate Shakti Puja (Mother Worship in India). He writes, “The book is dedicated with great devotion to those by whose grace the author has been blessed with the realisation of the special manifestation of the Divine Mother in every woman on earth.”

Swamiji, who returned unexpectedly to Belur in December 1900, after his second visit to the West, was not keeping well. Partly owing to this and partly to the fact that he wanted to see his work progress as quickly as possible during his lifetime, he was now and then very severe in his dealings. During such moods even his brother-disciples, including those on whom he relied most and for whom he had the highest love would not dare approach him. But Swami Saradananda was an exception. His deep calmness could freeze anybody’s anger. Seeing this trait in him, Swami Viveka-
nanda used to say jocosely, "Sharat's is the blood of a fish, it will never warm up." Many instances are told as regards the great self-control of Swami Saradananda. Once while the monastery was still at Alambazar, he went to the shrine and found that the place had been made dirty by the footprints of the cook. He very sharply called the cook to him. The poor man came trembling with fear to face, as he thought, an outburst. But immediately the Swami took possession of himself and said, "No, there is nothing, you may go." The patience and power of forgiveness of the Swami were limitless. There were many instances in which the Swami brought round a recalcitrant only by his love and tolerance. Around him lived persons, doing useful work, who were unmanageable anywhere else.

Swamiji passed away on 4th July 1902, and the leadership devolved on Swami Brahmananda, with whom Swami Saradananda co-operated fully in carrying on all the complex and growing works efficiently and successfully.

When Swami Trigunatitananda left for America to take up the work of Swami Turiyananda, the Bengali magazine *Udbodhan* faced a crisis financially and otherwise. Swami Saradananda now played a decisive part in keeping it alive. A few years later he thought that the *Udbodhan* should have a house of its own. There was need also for a house for the Holy Mother to stay in when she came to Calcutta. So the Swami planned to have a building where downstairs there would be the *Udbodhan* Office, and upstairs would be the shrine and the residence of the Holy Mother. Specially the second reason so much weighed with the Swami, that he started the work by borrowing money on his personal
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responsibility in spite of strong opposition from many quarters.

This was a blessing in disguise. For to repay the loan Swami Saradananda had to write *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*—discourses on the life of the Master—which has become a classic in Bengali literature. Yet for this great achievement the Swami would not accept the least credit. He would say that the Master had made him the instrument to write this book. The book, in five parts, is still incomplete. When hard pressed to complete the book, the Swami would only say with his usual economy of words, “If the Master wills, he will have it done.” One’s admiration for the Swami increases a thousandfold, if one knows the circumstances under which such a scholarly book was written. The house in which he lived was crowded. The Holy Mother was staying upstairs, and there was a stream of devotees coming at all hours of the day. There was the exacting duty of the secretaryship of the Ramakrishna Mission. Even in such a situation the Swami would be found absorbed in writing this book—giving a shape to his love and devotion to the Master and the Holy Mother in black and white—oblivious of the surroundings or any other thing in the world.

The “Udbodhan Office” was removed to the new building towards the end of 1908 and the Holy Mother first came there on 23rd May 1909. And what was Swami Saradananda’s joy when the Mother came and stayed in the house! For after Swami Yogananda’s demise and Swami Trigunatita’s departure for the West, Sharat Maharaj felt it his first duty to look after her comfort. To him she was actually the manifestation of the Divine Mother in human form, and he would make no distinc-
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ation between her and the Master.

In 1909 a situation arose which showed how courageous this quiet-looking Swami was. Two of those, accused of being revolutionaries connected with the Manicktola Bomb Case—Devavrata Bose and Sachindra Nath Sen—came to join the Ramakrishna Order giving up their political activities. To accept them was to invite the wrath of the police and the Government. But to refuse admission to a sincere spiritual aspirant, simply because of his past conduct, was a sheer act of cowardice. Swami Saradananda accepted them and some other young men—political suspects—as members of the Order. He saw the police chief and other high officials in Calcutta and stood guarantee for these young men, all of whom amply repaid the Swami’s trust by their exemplary lives.

Some years later in the Administration Report of the Government of Bengal there was the insinuation that the writings of Swami were the source of inspiration behind the revolutionary activities in Bengal. And soon after, Lord Carmichael, the then Governor of Bengal, in his durbar speech at Dacca in 1916 made some remarks with reference to the Ramakrishna Mission, which had a disastrous effect on its activities. To remedy the evil consequences, Swami Saradananda wrote to the Governor and saw the high officials and removed all misconception from their minds about the Mission’s activities.

However much he might try to ignore it, Swami Saradananda was passing through a great strain. As a result, he was not keeping well. Amongst other ailments he got rheumatism, for which the doctors advised a change to Puri where sea bathing would do him good.
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The Swami went to Puri in March 1913, and returned in July. There also he did not stop his regular work. Throughout his stay at Puri he made it a rule to go to the temple of Jagannath every morning. During the Car Festival it was a sight for the gods to see a fat person like the Swami holding the rope of the Car and pulling it with great enthusiasm and devotion.

At Puri an incident happened which indicated the inborn courtesy and dignity of the Swami. Swami Saradananda with his party put up at “Shashi-niketan”, a house belonging to the great devotee, the late Balaram Bose. One evening, the Swami on returning to the house after his usual walk, found that it had been occupied by the Raja of Bundi. This was due to the mistake of a priest-guide of the temple. The Swami could easily have asked the Raja to vacate the house. But to save the Raja as well as the guide from embarrassment the Swami agreed to remove to another house temporarily. Not knowing the real situation, the Private Secretary of the Raja at first showed some hauteur. But the reply and attitude of the Swami so much overpowered him, that he soon took the dust off the feet of the Swami as a mark of respect and veneration.

In 1913 there was a great flood in Burdwan. The Ramakrishna Mission started relief work under Swami Saradananda’s leadership; for his heart always bled for the poor and the afflicted. Whenever there was flood or famine the Swami would arrange for raising funds and see that proper workers went to the field of work. This Burdwan relief lasted for many months.

The next year the Swami was attacked by some kidney trouble. The pain was severe, but he bore it with wonderful fortitude. At that time the Holy Mother
stayed upstairs. Lest she should become worried, the Swami would hardly give out that he had been suffering from any pain. Fortunately, after a few days, he came round.

In 1917 Swami Premananda fell ill of Kala-Azar. He stayed at the house of Balaram Bose in Calcutta, and Swami Saradananda supervised all arrangements for his treatment. Soon he had to rush to Puri, because Swami Turiyananda was seriously ill there. Whenever anybody in the Math was ill, Swami Saradananda was sure to be by his bed-side. If he could not make time to attend the case personally, he would make all arrangements for his treatment. But if any emergency arose, the Swami was the person to meet it. A patient does not like to take injection, Swami Saradananda would go there. Sometimes by his very presence the patient would change his mind. A patient was clamouring for some food which would be injurious for him, the Swami in words of extreme love and sympathy, would say he would get the food he wanted, but after some days. The patient like a child would agree. There were instances when even in his busy life he passed the whole night by a sick-bed when the patient was difficult to manage. His sympathy was not limited to the members of the Order alone. Once a devotee fell ill of smallpox and was lying uncared for in a cottage on the Ganga. When the Swami heard of this he immediately went there and after careful nursing for a few days cured the patient.

In his old age, he could not personally attend on the patients. But the same love and sympathy were there. Once in his old days he walked out alone at noon. Feeling anxious as to where he could go and at such an odd hour, his attendant followed him. Soon he attracted
the notice of the Swami, who at first asked him not to come, but at the latter’s earnest appeal allowed him to follow. The Swami went to a hotel and, entering a room upstairs, sat by the side of a patient. It was not difficult for the Swami’s attendant to understand that the man had tuberculosis. The Swami began to caress the patient lovingly, talking all the while in a tone of greatest sympathy. The patient was careless; as he talked, sputum fell on all sides. Now he got up, cut some fruits, and offered them to the Swami. While returning, the attendant took the liberty of blaming the Swami for eating there and under such circumstances. The Swami at first remained quiet, and afterwards said, “The Master used to say, ‘it will not do you any harm if you take food offered with love and devotion’.”

From 1920 onward the Swami sustained such heavy bereavements that he became altogether broken in heart. In 1920 the Holy Mother passed away. And two years later Swami Brahmananda followed her. There were other deaths too. Brother-disciples were passing away. He began to feel lonely in this world. Gradually he began to withdraw his mind from work and to devote greater and greater time to meditation. Those who watched him could easily see that he was preparing for the final exit.

At this time one task which received his most serious attention was the construction of a temple at Jayrambati in sacred memory of the Holy Mother. He would supply money and supervising hands for the work and keep himself acquainted with the minutest details of the construction. He would openly say that after the completion of the temple he would retire from all work. The beautiful temple—emblem of Swami Saradananda’s.
devotion to the Holy Mother—was dedicated on 19th April 1923.

Another very important work which the Swami did and which will go down to history was the holding of the Ramakrishna Mission Convention at Belur Math in 1926. It was mainly a meeting of the monks of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres—about one hundred in number, sprinkled over the whole of India as well as outside India—in order to compare notes and devise future plans of work. Though not keeping very well, he took great interest in it and worked very hard to make it a success. In the Address of Welcome that the Swami delivered at the first session of the Convention he surveyed the past of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in a sweep, very frankly depicted the present position, and warned the members against the dangers and pitfalls that were lurking in the future. Every new movement passes through three stages—opposition, acceptance, and decline. There is great opposition when a new movement is started. If it has the strength to stand the opposition, the public accepts it and showers praise and admiration. Then comes the real danger for the movement. "For security brings a relaxation of spirits and energy, and a sudden growth of extensity quickly lessens the intensity and unity of purpose that were found among the promoters of the movement."

The whole speech was full of fire and vigour. It was like a veteran General's charge to his present army and future unknown soldiers.

After the Convention, the Swami virtually retired from active work, devoting more and more time to meditation. With his ill health, finding him devoted so much to meditation and spiritual practices, the
doctors got alarmed and raised objections. And after all what was the necessity of any further spiritual practices for a soul like Swami Saradananda! But to all protestations the Swami would give simply a loving smile.

It was Saturday, 6th August 1927, Swami Saradananda, as usual, sat in meditation in his room early in the morning. Generally he would be meditating till past noon. But that day he left meditation earlier and entered the shrine. He remained in the shrine for about twenty-five minutes—an unusually long period, and then returned to the door. Again he entered, stood for a few moments near the portrait of the Holy Mother and returned. Thus he did several times. When he finally came out, a great serenity shone through his face. He followed his other routines of the day as usual. In the evening, when the usual service was going on in the shrine, he remained absorbed in thought in his own room. After that an attendant came with some papers. As the Swami stood up to put them inside a chest of drawers, he felt uneasy, his head reeled, as it were. He asked the attendant to prepare some medicine and instructed him to keep the news secret lest it should create unnecessary alarm. These were the last words, and he lay down on the bed. It was a case of apoplexy. The Swami passed away at two in the morning of 19th August.

Swami Saradananda was the living embodiment of the ideal of the Gita in the modern age. To see him was to know how a man can be “Sthitaprajna”—steadfast in wisdom—as taught in the Gita. He was alike in heat and cold, praise and blame, nay, his life was tuned to such a high pitch that he was beyond the reach of
such things. In spite of all his activities, one could tangibly see that his was the case of a Yogi "whose happiness is within, whose relaxation is within, and whose light is within". He harmonised in his life Jnana, Karma, Bhakti, and Yoga, and it was difficult to find out which was less predominant in him. Everyone of these four paths reached the highest perfection in him, as it were.

We find Swami Saradananda mainly in two roles—as the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and as a spiritual personality. As the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission he was so much in the love and esteem of the workers that his slightest desire was fulfilled with utmost veneration. And this love and esteem was the effect of the Swami's extreme solicitude for their welfare and his unreserved confidence in them. It was very difficult to prejudice him against anybody. And his confidence and trust were never betrayed. He was very democratic in attitude and always kept an open mind. Even to the words of a boy he would listen with great attention and patience. When at any time he found that he had committed a mistake, he would not hesitate to acknowledge it immediately. Once he took a young monk to task for a supposed fault. Afterwards when the Swami knew that the monk was not really at fault, he felt so sorry that he tenderly apologised. Though wielding so much power, he had not the slightest love of power in him. He was humility itself. He felt that anyone might know better than he. His idea was that everyone was striving after Ultimate Freedom, and that that hankering expressed itself in the love of freedom in daily action. So the Swami would not willingly disturb anybody's freedom.
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It must not, however, be forgotten that the secret of his power and influence was his spiritual personality. It was only because spiritually he belonged to a very, very high plane that he could love one and all so unselfishly, remain unmoved in all circumstances and keep his faith in humanity under all trials. It is difficult to gauge the spiritual depth of a person from outside, especially of a soul like Swami Saradananda who would overpower a person by his very presence. This much we know that hundreds of persons would come and look up to him for spiritual solace when they became weary of the world or torn with conflict and affliction. And whoever came in touch with him could not help becoming nobler and spiritually richer. Records in his personal diary show that he had communion with the Divine Mother on many occasions, but more than that people would tangibly feel that here was one whose will was completely identified with the will of God. It was because of this perhaps that one or two words from his lips would remove a heavy burden from many a weary heart. Once an attendant, who felt the touch of his love so much that often he could dare to take liberty with him, asked him what he had attained spiritually. The Swami only replied, “Did we merely vegetate at Dakshineswar?” At another time quite inadvertently he gave out to this attendant that whatever he had written in Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga about spiritual things, he had experienced directly in his own life. And in that book he has at places delineated the highest experiences of spiritual life.

But with all his spiritual attainment, the Swami was quite modern in outlook. Those who did not believe or had no interest in religion would find joy in mixing
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with him as a very cultured man. He was in touch with all modern thoughts and movements. This aspect of his life drew many to him, who would afterwards be gradually struck by his spirituality.
TEACHINGS

To repeat the Lord's name and to worship Him, no special time and place are necessary. In whatever condition one may be one can take His name.

Through selfless work the mind gets purified. And when the mind becomes pure, there arise knowledge and devotion in it. Knowledge is the very nature of the Self; but being covered with ignorance it is not manifest. The object of selfless work is to remove this ignorance.

First you have to attain knowledge. After attaining knowledge, when one returns to this world of diversity, one will see everything as before, but will no longer be attached to anything in it. After one realizes God, the world seems to be a mere appearance like the mirage. There is nothing in it that can attract one.

What really comes in the spiritual domain is this unswerving faith—faith in the words of the Guru, in the Lord, in the scriptures.

The Master would compare the mind to a packet of mustard seeds, "If the packet is once untied, the seeds get scattered in all directions. How difficult it is to collect them again! Some are perhaps lost for ever." But absolute faith makes the impossible possible.

No man is wholly above defects. But some try to get rid of them, while others do not feel any need for that. Since you have taken refuge at the Lord's feet, you certainly feel the need of eliminating them and have also the will to do so, and the Lord too will grant you the strength for this. We too have taken shelter under
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Him and are trying to free ourselves from all shortcomings, that is all. What power have we to do some thing for somebody? But I always pray whole-heartedly for the good of yourself and all others, and I do so even now.

Whatever work stands in the way of God-realization and increases discontent is bad work. You should wholly discard it.

All souls are ever free, and that is why all minds ever hanker for freedom. A true leader is he who never hampers that craving for attaining freedom, his only concern being to see to it that when the person concerned gets liberty, he does not misuse it.

Brahman and Brahman's power are non-different, like fire and its power of combustion. The scriptures speak of this Brahman as the Cosmic Person (Virat) and the power associated with Him as the Mother of the universe. That is why the presiding deity of Gayatri is sometimes spoken of as the Cosmic person, and sometimes as the Mother of the universe. That is why there is no contradiction in imagining either way.

You complain that thoughts of duties sometimes intrude when you sit for meditation. All minds are in the same predicament. You cannot escape this even if you leave work and retire to a forest. But if through God's grace it becomes firmly impressed on your mind that the world is impermanent, and if the idea that God alone is your true goal takes a grip on your heart, then this kind of unsteadiness of the mind will be greatly eliminated. To have a strong longing for God and feel ill at ease just because God has not been realised are, however, dependent on His grace. Pray to Him for this with all earnestness.

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You need not meditate long on your Guru, but just remember and salute him and then spend most of the time in the meditation of your Chosen Deity. Meditate on the Deity as you go on repeating His name. Since past mental tendencies cannot assert themselves during the performance of duties, you should apply your whole mind to them. Selfless work is the best means of winning a victory over past tendencies.

The (Ramakrishna) Mission does not like to express any opinion, good or bad, about political discussions, for the Master did not instruct us to do anything of the kind, and Swamiji asked the Mission to keep itself aloof from such effort. That is why the Mission has been all along engaging itself in spirituality and service to humanity. Since all things are subject to change, therefore the present condition will change some day and political freedom will come. But the Mission does not know and does not care to know how far off is that consummation. The Mission’s concern is with how the general public can become strong in spirituality and character. Once the people become possessed of character, spirituality, and strength, they will themselves be able at that time to decide how they will organise their society and conduct the administration of their country.

One must have faith in the enlightened souls and carry on religious practices accordingly. Otherwise it leads nowhere trying to understand the pros and cons of their teachings through our impure minds—occupied as they are with thoughts of the world—and then to carry them out in practice. Hence give up the attempt for understanding everything, and start your spiritual practices by relying on what the Master has taught.
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When you sit down for meditation, first think thus: “It is my own Chosen Deity, who like an eternally pure and indivisible ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, pervades everything and I also exist within Him. It is He who exists everywhere inside and outside myself.” Thinking on this idea for a while start your Japa and meditation as usual. This will remove the unsteadiness of the mind.

If the mind continues to be unsteady, pray to the Lord, “Lord, kindly make my mind steady!” Know this for certain that He hears whatever you say, and knows whatever passes in your mind.

Both peace and peacelessness come to us, for the sake of our own experience, according to God’s dispensation, but we have to remain steady under all circumstances by holding on to Him. Again, from one point of view, peacelessness appears to be the more welcome, for then one can call on the Lord with greater earnestness.

The greatest sin is to think oneself weak and sinful. If you have to believe anything, believe that you are His children, His part, the heirs to His infinite strength and bliss.

Nowadays there are so many religious societies, but people lose all interest in them after a few days. What is the reason for this? The reason is our words are not in accord with our thoughts. The first step in religion is to be sincere to the core.

Our scriptures say, and we too proclaim that all men are the images of the Lord. But what do we do in practice? We do not scruple to despise sweepers and other low caste people. We treat our women as slaves—those in whom lies dormant the wonderful strength of the Mother of the universe! Only at the time of
worship do we simply utter the words that all women are but images of the Divine Mother!

The four kinds of spiritual practices (Jnana, Yoga, Karma, and Bhakti) are meant for four classes of men. But the aim is the same—to kill the lower self. Think deeply and you will find, there is hardly any difference among them. In fact, there is none. Kill the self and you will be free.