SWAMI SHIVANANDA

Swami Shivananda, more popularly known as Mahapurusha Maharaj, was a personality of great force, rich in distinctive colour and individual quality. His lionine stature and dauntless vigour, his stolid indifference to praise or blame, his spontaneous moods and his profound serenity in times of storm and stress, invested with a singular appropriateness his monastic name which recalls the classical attributes of the great god Shiva.

He was born sometime in the fifties of the nineteenth century on the 11th day of the dark fortnight in the Indian month of Agrahayana (Nov.-Dec.). The exact year of his birth is obscure. The Swami himself with his characteristic indifference to such matters never remembered it. His father had indeed prepared an elaborate horoscope for his son, but the latter threw it away into the Ganga when he chose the life of renunciation.

His early name, before he took orders, was Tarak Nath Ghosal. He came of a respectable and influential family of Barasat. One of his ancestors, Harakrishna Ghosal, was a Dewan of the Krishnanagar Raj. His father, Ramkanai Ghosal, was not only a successful lawyer with a substantial income but a noted Tantrika as well. Much of his earnings was spent in removing the wants of holy men and of poor helpless students. It was not unusual for him to provide board and lodging for twenty-five to thirty students at a time in his

1 It is inferred that he was born in 1854.
house. Latterly, when he became a deputy collector, his income fell, which forced him to limit his charities much against his wish. Subsequently, he rose to be the assistant Dewan of Cooch Behar.

We have already referred to Ramkanai Ghosal as a great Tantrika, and it will be interesting to recall here an incident which connected him with Shri Ramakrishna. For some time he was legal adviser to Rani Rasmani, the founder of the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, where he came to be acquainted with Shri Ramakrishna during a visit on business matters. Shri Ramakrishna’s personality greatly attracted him, and whenever the latter came to Dakshineswar, he never missed seeing him. At one time, during intense spiritual practices, Shri Ramakrishna suffered from an acute burning sensation all over his body, which medicines failed to cure. One day he asked Ramkanai Ghosal if the latter could suggest a remedy. The latter recommended the wearing of his Ishtakavacha (an amulet containing the name of the Chosen Deity) on his arm. This instantly relieved him.

From his early boyhood Tarak showed unmistakable signs of what the future was to unfold. There was something in him which marked him out from his associates. It was not mere bold conduct and straightforward manners. Though a talented boy he showed very little interest in his studies. A vague longing gnawed at his heart and made him forget himself from time to time and be lost in flights of reverie. Early he became drawn to meditative practices. More and more as days went on his mind gravitated towards the vast inner world of spirit. Often in the midst of play and laughter and boyish merriment he would suddenly
be seized by an austere and grave mood which filled his companions with awe and wonder. It is not surprising that his studies did not extend beyond school. Tarak like scores of other young men was drawn to the Brahma Samaj, thanks to the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen. And though he continued his visits to the Samaj for some time, his hunger was hardly satisfied with what he got there.

Meanwhile his father’s earnings fell, and Tarak had to look for a job. He went to Delhi. There he used to spend hours in discussing religious subjects in the house of a friend named Prasanna. One day he asked the latter about Samadhi, to which Prasanna replied that Samadhi was a very rare phenomenon which very few experienced, but that he knew at least one person who had certainly experienced it and mentioned the name of Shri Ramakrishna. At last Tarak heard about one who could teach him what he wanted to know. He waited patiently for the day when he would be able to meet Shri Ramakrishna.

Not long after, Tarak returned to Calcutta and accepted a job in the firm of Messrs. Mackinnon Mackenzie and Co. He was still continuing his visits to the Brahma Samaj. About this time, he lived in a house near that of Ram Chandra Datta. One day at the end of 1880 he heard that Shri Ramakrishna would come to Ram Chandra’s house on a visit. He decided to seize the opportunity of meeting him on the occasion. When the long-desired evening came, he went to Ram Babu’s house where he found Shri Ramakrishna talking in a semi-conscious state to an audience in a crowded room. Tarak hung on his words. He had long been eager to hear about Samadhi, and what was his surprise
when he found from the few words he caught that the Master had been talking on the very subject that day. He was beside himself with joy. He left the room quietly some time after. It had made a profound impression upon him. Tarak began to feel an irresistible attraction for Shri Ramakrishna and resolved to meet him the next Saturday at Dakshineswar.

At that time Tarak did not know much about Dakshineswar. He, however, managed to reach the place in the company of a friend. The evening service was about to begin when he arrived. Tarak entered the paved courtyard and began to look for Shri Ramakrishna. Coming to his room he found him seated there. Tarak was overpowered with a deep feeling as soon as he saw him. He felt as if it was his own mother who was sitting yonder in front of him. After the usual preliminary inquiries the Master asked if he had seen him the previous Saturday in the house of Ram Chandra. Tarak replied in the affirmative. “In what do you believe,” asked the Master, “in God with form or without form?” “In God without form”, replied Tarak. “You can’t but admit the Divine Shakti also,” said the Master. Soon he proceeded towards the Kali temple and asked the young man to follow him. The evening service was going on with the accompaniment of delightful music. Coming to the temple the Master prostrated himself before the image of the Mother. Tarak at first hesitated to follow the example, because, according to the ideas of the Brahma Samaj which he frequented, the image was no more than inert stone. But suddenly the thought flashed in his mind: “Why should I have such petty ideas? I hear God is omnipresent, He dwells everywhere. Then He must be
present in the stone image as well.” No sooner had the idea flashed in his mind than he prostrated himself before the image.

The Master’s practised eye judged at sight the newcomer’s mettle. He repeatedly asked him to stay over-night. “Stay here tonight,” he said, “you can’t gain any lasting advantage by the chance visit of a day. You must come here often.” Tarak begged to be excused as he had already decided to stay with his friend. When he came again, the Master asked him for some ice. Not knowing how to get it, Tarak spoke of it to a friend who was acquainted with Surendra, a householder devotee of the Master, and the latter procured some and sent it to the Master.

From that time on Tarak began to visit Dakshineswar frequently. His intimacy with the Master deepened. One day the Master asked Tarak, “Look here, I don’t ordinarily inquire the whereabouts of anyone who comes here. I only look into his heart and read his feelings. But the very sight of you has made me realise that you belong to this place, and I feel a desire to know something about your father and people at home.” He was agreeably surprised to learn that Ramkanai Ghosal was his father, and telling of the service the latter had done him, wished that he might see him again. Some time later Ramkanai Ghosal went to Dakshineswar and prostrated himself before Shri Ramakrishna, who placed his foot on his head and entered into Samadhi. Ramkanai eagerly grasped the Master’s feet and burst into tears.

One day—it was probably Tarak’s third or fourth visit to Dakshineswar—the Master took him aside and asked him to put out his tongue. Then he wrote some-
thing on it. It had a strange effect upon Tarak. He felt an overpowering feeling taking hold of him. The vast world of sense melted before his eyes, his mind was drawn deep within, and his whole being became absorbed in a trance. This happened twice again, once in the presence of Swami Brahmananda.

Association with the Master sharpened Tarak’s hunger for religious experiences. Long afterwards he described the state of his mind at that period in the following words: “I often felt inclined to cry in the presence of the Master. One night I wept profusely in front of the Kali temple. The Master was anxious at my absence and when I went to him he said, ‘God favours those who weep for Him. Tears thus shed wash away the sins of former births.’ Another day I was meditating at the Panchavati when the Master came near. No sooner had he cast his glance at me than I burst into tears. He stood still without uttering a word. A sort of creeping sensation passed through me, and I began to tremble all over. The Master congratulated me on attaining this state and said it was the outcome of divine emotion. He then took me to his room and gave me something to eat. He could arouse the latent spiritual powers of a devotee at a mere glance.”

From the very first meeting with Shri Ramakrishna, Tarak felt in his inmost heart that he had at last found one who could guide his steps to the doors of the Infinite. Intuitively he felt that the vague aspirations of his boyhood and youth were realised in the personality of the Master, who appeared to him to be the consummation of all religions. To know him was to know God. With the growth of this conviction his
devotion to the Master increased a hundredfold. The Master also made him his own by his immeasurable love. Tarak felt that parental love was as nothing in comparison. In a letter to an inquirer towards the end of his life he wrote about the Master, “I have not yet come to a final understanding whether he was a man or superman, a god or God Himself. But I have known him to be a man of complete self-effacement, master of the highest renunciation, possessed of supreme wisdom, and the very incarnation of love; and, as with the passing of days I am getting better and better acquainted with the domain of spirituality and feeling the infinite extent and depth of Shri Ramakrishna’s spiritual moods, the conviction is growing in me that to compare him with God, as God is popularly understood, would be minimising and lowering his supreme greatness. I have seen him showering his love equally on men and women, on the learned and the ignorant, and on saints and sinners, and evincing earnest and unceasing solicitude for the relief of their misery and for their attainment of infinite peace by realising the Divine. And I dare say that the world has not seen another man of his type in modern times so devoted to the welfare of mankind.”

While Tarak was still in service, his father was forced through poverty to agree to giving Tarak’s sister Nirada in marriage to a family from which he would accept a girl as Tarak’s bride. Much as Tarak disliked the idea, he was compelled to marry for the sake of his sister. He had resolved not to live a worldly life; but before he actually renounced the world, he opened his heart fully to the Master, who said, “Why should you be afraid? For I am there to help you. You have of
course to look after your wife so long as she lives. Have a little patience, and the Mother will settle everything.” Tarak followed the Master’s advice; he earned for his wife, but avoided all other relationship with her. That he was successful in this endeavour is evident from a letter which he wrote in his old age to Romain Rolland. There Swami Shivananda declares that he led an absolutely pure life of unbroken celibacy. Tragic as the event was, Tarak’s wife did not live long after his meeting with the Master. Tarak’s purity and prayer, Shri Ramakrishna’s advice and encouragement and the grace of all-merciful Providence did not allow him to fall a victim to the snares of the world. The perfect purity of his married life earned for him the popular name of Mahapurusha from the great Swami Vivekananda.

The wife’s death removed the only obstacle in the path of renouncing the world. With this end in view Tarak went to his father to bid him farewell. At this proposal, the father became deeply moved and tears began to stream down his face. He asked Tarak to go to the family shrine and to make prostration there. Then the father, placing his hand on his son’s head, blessed him saying, “May you realise God. I have tried very hard myself. I even thought of renouncing the world, but that was not to be. I bless you, therefore, that you may find God.” Tarak related all this to the Master, who was much pleased and expressed his hearty approval. With the Master’s consent, the monk Tarak now lived sometimes in an outer room of Ram Chandra Datta and sometimes at the Kankurgachi Yoğodyan, begging for his food and cooking it with his own hand.

Tarak continued his visits to Dakshineswar till the
Master fell seriously ill in 1885, which necessitated his removal first to Calcutta and then to the Cossipore garden-house. All these years the Master had been quietly shaping the character of his disciples, instructing them not only in religious matters, but also in the everyday duties of life. Cossipore, however, formed the most decisive period in their lives. Here Tarak joined the group of young brother-disciples—Narendra, Rakhal, Baburam, Yogin, Niranjan, Sharat, Shashi, Latu, Kali, Gopal (senior) and Gopal (junior) to serve and attend on the Master during his illness. Service to the Master and loyalty to common ideals forged an indissoluble bond of unity among these young aspirants. Much of their time was devoted to discussions on religious subjects. All this set ablaze the great fire of renunciation smouldering in them, and they yearned for realisation.

One incident during this period is worth recounting. Narendra, Tarak, and Kali were at this time very much engaged in the thought of Buddha and of Brahman without any quality. Impelled by this they went for Tapasya to Bodh Gaya. As they sat in meditation under the Bodhi tree, lost to outer consciousness, Narendra suddenly began to weep and then held Tarak in a warm embrace. According to one version, Narendra Nath, deep in the thought of Buddha’s compassion, was seized with such an emotional upsurge that he could not help embracing his brother out of overflowing love. Or perhaps, Narendra saw something of Buddha in Tarak. At least Kali affirmed that he heard from Narendra that the latter saw a light flash out of Buddha’s image and proceed towards Tarak. The Master too seems to have had a similar estimation of Tarak’s core of personality. About this estimation, we
Swami Vivekananda
Swami Niranjanananda
Swami Saradananda
Swami Ramakrishnananda
Swami Yogananda
Swami Akhandananda
Swami Turiyananda
Swami Adbhutananda
Swami Subodhananda
Swami Vijnanananda
have it on the evidence of Swami Turiyananda, that one day when Tarak was returning from the Kali temple, the Master remarked, "His ‘home’ is that high Power from which proceed name and form." Tarak had something of the Transcendental Verity in him. And Buddha, it must be remembered, was not an atheist, but an embodiment of the Upanishadic ideal.

After the passing away of the Master, the small group of disciples clustered round the monastery of Baranagore. The first to come was Tarak, with whom soon joined Gopalda, Kali, and others. The Master’s death had created a great void in the hearts of the disciples, who began to spend most of their time in intense meditation in order to feel the living presence of the Master. Often they would leave the monastery and wander from place to place, away from crowded localities and familiar faces. This period of their lives, which stretched over a number of years and which was packed with severe austerities and great miracles of faith, out of the mighty fire of which was forged the powerful characters the world later saw, is mostly a sealed book. Towards the end of his life, Swami Shivananda, the name received by Tarak when he became a monk, one day chanced to lift a corner of the pall of mystery which lay over these stormy years. "Often it happened", he said, "that I had only one piece of cloth to cover myself with. I used to wear half of it and wrap the other half round the upper part of my body. In those days of wandering I would often bathe in the water of wells, and then I used to wear a piece of loin-cloth and let my only piece of cloth dry. Many a night I slept under trees. At that time the spirit of renunciation was aflame and the idea of bodily comfort never entered the mind."
Though I travelled mostly without means, thanks to the grace of the Lord, I never fell into danger. The Master's living presence used to protect me always. Often I did not know where the next meal would come from. . . . At that period a deep dissatisfaction gnawed within, and the heart yearned for God. The company of men repelled me. I used to avoid roads generally used. At the approach of night I would find some suitable place just to lay my head on and pass the night alone with my thoughts."

Some indication of Tarak's bent of mind at this period can be had from a few reminiscences which have come down to us. He had a natural slant towards the orthodox and austere path of knowledge which placed little value on popular religious attitudes. He avoided ceremonious observances and disregarded emotional approaches to religion. He keyed up his mind to the formless aspect of the Divine. This stern devotion to Jnana continued for some time. Deep down in his heart, however, lay his boundless love for the Master which nothing could affect for a moment. In later years, with the broadening of experience, his heart opened to the infinite beauties of spiritual emotion.

During his days of itineracy Swami Shivananda, known as Mahapurushaji popularly among his disciples, visited various places in North India. In the course of these travels he also went to Almora where he became acquainted with a rich man of the place named Lala Badrilal Shah, who speedily became a great admirer of the disciples of Shri Ramakrishna and took great care of them whenever he happened to meet them. Here, towards the latter part of 1893, the year of
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Swamiji's journey to the West, Tarak met Mr. E. T. Sturdy, an Englishman interested in Theosophy. Mahapurushaji's personality and talks greatly attracted him. Mr. Sturdy came to hear of Swamiji's activities in the West from him, and on his return to England he invited Swamiji there and made arrangements for the preaching of Vedanta in England.

With the return of Swamiji from the West in 1897, Mahapurusha's days of itineracy came to an end. He went to Madura to receive Swamiji, and returned with him to Calcutta. In the same year, at the request of Swamiji, he went to Ceylon and preached Vedanta for about eight months. There he used to hold classes on the Gita, and the Raja Yôga, which became popular with the local educated community including a number of Europeans. One of his students, Mrs. Picket, to whom he gave the name of Haripriva, was specially trained by him so as to qualify her to teach Vedanta to the Europeans. She later went to Australia and New Zealand at the direction of the Swami and succeeded in attracting interested students in both the countries. He returned to the Math in 1898, which was then housed at Nilambar Babu's garden.

In 1899 plague broke out in an epidemic form in Calcutta. Swami Vivekananda asked Swami Shivananda and others to organise relief work for the sick. The latter put forth his best efforts without the least thought for his personal safety. About this time a landslip did considerable damage to property at Darjeeling, and Mahapurushaji also collected some money for helping those who were affected by it.

The natural drive of his mind was, however, for a life of contemplation, and so he went again to the
Himalayas to taste once more the delight and peace of meditation. Here he spent some years, although he would occasionally come down to the Math for a visit. About this time Swamiji asked him to found a monastery in the Himalayas. Although this desire could not be realised at the time, Swami Shivananda remembered his wish and years afterwards, in 1915, he laid the beginnings of a monastery at Almora, which was completed by Swami Turiyananda with his cooperation.

In 1900 he accompanied Swami Vivekananda on the latter’s visit to Mayavati. While returning to the plains Swamiji left him at Pilibhit with a request that he should collect funds for the maintenance and improvement of the Belui Math. He stayed back and raised some money.

Shortly before Swamiji passed away, the Raja of Bhingar gave him Rs. 500 for preaching Vedanta. Swamiji handed the money over to Swami Shivananda asking him to start an Ashrama with it at Varanasi, which he did in 1902.

The seven long years which he spent at this Varanasi Ashrama formed a memorable chapter of his life. Outwardly, of course, there was no spectacular achievement. The Ashrama grew up, not so much as a centre of great social activity, but as a school of hard discipline and rigorous Tapasya for the development of individual character as in the hermitages of old. Here we are confronted with an almost insurmountable obstacle in the way of presenting the life-story of spiritual geniuses. The most active period of their lives is devoid of events in popular estimation. It is hidden away from the public eye and spent in producing those invisible and intangible commodities whose value cannot be measured.
in terms of material goods. When they appear again, they are centres of great and silent forces which often leave their imprint on centuries. Realisation of God is not an event in the sense in which the discovery of a star or an element is an event, which resounds through all the continents. But one who has solved the riddle of life is a far greater benefactor of humanity than, say, the discoverer of high scientific truths.

Anxious times were ahead for Swami Shivananda; the funds of the Varanasi Ashrama were soon depleted. At times nobody knew wherefrom the expenses of the day would come. Mahapurushaji, however, carried on unruffled and the clouds lifted after a while. Most of his time was spent in intense spiritual practices. He would scarcely stir out of the Ashrama, and day and night he would be in a high spiritual mood. The life in the Ashrama was one of severe discipline and hardship. The inmates hardly enjoyed full meals for months, and there was not much clothing to lessen the severity of the winter. He himself used to pass most of the nights on a small bench. In the winter months he would usually get up at about three in the morning and light a Dhuni fire in one of the rooms, before which they would sit for meditation, which often continued far into the morning. During these times Swami Saradananda, the then Secretary of the Mission, would press him hard to try to collect funds for the local Home of Service and would say jocosely, "Will mere meditation bring money?" But the Swami could not be moved from the tenor of his life.

For some time he opened a school at the Ashrama, where he himself taught English to a group of local boys. About this time he translated Swami Viveka-
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nanda's Chicago lectures into Hindusthani so that Swamiji's ideas might spread among the people. He continued to look after the affairs of the Ashrama till 1909, when he returned to Belur and lived there for some time. In 1910 he went on a pilgrimage to Amarnath in company with Swami Turiyananda and Swami Premananda. On his return he fell seriously ill with dysentery, which proved very obstinate. He became specially careful as regards food after this and began to observe a strict regimen, which continued till the end and to which his long life was in no small measure due.

In 1910 he was elected Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Mission. In 1917 Swami Premananda who used to manage the affairs of the Math at Belur fell seriously ill, and his duties came to rest on the shoulders of Swami Shivananda. And in 1922, after the passing away of Swami Brahmananda, he was made the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, in which post he continued till the end of his life. Shortly before this, he had been to Dacca and Mymensingh in response to an invitation. This tour started a new phase in his long career which has left a very profound impression upon all who came in contact with him during this period. Large crowds flocked to him at places in Dacca and Mymensingh to hear him talk on spiritual matters, and for the first time he began to initiate persons into spiritual life at the earnest appeal of several devotees, though at first he was much against it.

In 1924 and 1927 he went on two long tours to the South, during which he formally opened the centres at Bombay, Nagpur, and Ootacamund and initiated a
large number of persons into religious life. The hill station of Ootacamund appealed to him greatly, and here he spent some time in a high spiritual mood. In 1925 during the winter he went to Deoghar accompanied by a large number of monks from the Belur Math to open the first buildings of the local Rama-krishna Mission. He stayed there for a little over three weeks which was a period of unalloyed joy and bliss for all who happened to be there. Wherever he went he carried an atmosphere of delight around him. Monks and devotees thronged round him morning and evening, and for hours the conversations on spiritual subjects continued. Two incidents at Deoghar and Ootacamund are worth recounting here.

During his stay at Deoghar, he had a severe attack of asthma, which compelled him to spend the night in a sitting posture. As the suffering was intense and he felt like dying, he concentrated his mind on the Indwelling Self and became immediately oblivious of pain. When relating the incident the next day, he said, “As it was the meditation of a mature age, the mind soon dived inward”, and he pointed to his chest. “What is that, sir?” inquired a listener. “That indeed is the Self”, replied the Swami. The Ootacamund hills had a spiritual tranquillity which easily lifted his mind to a higher level of experience. As he sat one day looking out at the blue hills spreading in front like the waves of a sea, he felt as though something emerged out of his body, spread all over the landscape, and became identified with all that existed. Did he realise God there in His cosmic form (Virat)?

After 1930 his health broke down greatly, though he could still take short walks. What a cataract of disas-
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ters had come upon him since 1927—loss of the com-
rades of old days one after another, trouble and defec-
tions, illness and physical disabilities! But nothing
could for a moment dim the brightness of his burning
flame of reliance on God. They only brought into
high relief the greatness of his spiritual qualities. At
night, after meals, he would usually pass an hour or so
all alone, except for the presence of an attendant or two
who used to be near. And whenever he was alone he
seemed to be immersed in a profound spiritual mood.
He would occasionally break the silence by gently utter-
ing the Master’s name. The mood would recur when-
ever in the midst of an almost uninterrupted flow of
visitors and devotees he found a little time to himself.
In the midst of terrible physical suffering he would
radiate joy and peace all round. Not once did anyone
hear him utter a syllable of complaint against the tor-
ments which assailed the flesh. To all inquiries about
his health his favourite reply was, “Janaki (i.e. Sita) is
all right so long she is able to take the name of Rama.”
Physicians who came to treat him were amazed at his
buoyant spirits which nothing could depress. Sometimes
he would point to his pet dog and say, “That fellow’s
master is here (pointing to himself)” and then pointing
one finger to himself and another to the Master’s shrine
he would add, “and this fellow is His dog”.

Age, which diminishes our physical and mental
vigour, serves only to heighten the force and charm of
a spiritual personality. The last years of Swami Shiva-
nanda’s life were days of the real majesty of a spiritual
sovereign. The assumption of the vast spiritual re-
 sponsibilities of the great office tore off the austere mask
of reserve and rugged taciturnity which so long hid his

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tender heart and broad sympathy. All these years thou-
sands upon thousands came to him, men and women,
young and old, rich and poor, high and low, the home-
less and the outcast, men battered by fate and reeling
under the thousand and one miseries to which man is
prey, and went back lifted up in spirits. A kind look,
a cheering word, and an impalpable something which
was nevertheless most real, put new hope and energy
into persons whose lives had almost been blasted away
by frustrations and despair. He cheerfully bore all
discomfort and hardship in the service of the helpless
and the needy. Even during the last illness which de-
prived him of the power of speech and half of his limbs,
the same anxiety to be of help to all was plain, and his
kindly look and the gentle movement of his left hand in
blessing, and, above all, his holy presence did more to
brace up their drooping spirits than countless words
contained in books could ever do.

During his term of office the work of the Mission stead-
ily expanded. The ideas of the Master spread to new
lands, and centres were opened not only in different
parts of India, but also in various foreign countries.
He was, however, no sectarian with limited sympathy.
All kinds of work, social, national, or religious, receiv-
ed his blessings. Labourers in different fields came to
him and went away heartened by words of cheer and
sympathy. His love was too broad to be limited by
sectional interests; it extended to every place and to
every movement where good was being done. Are not
all who toil for freedom and justice, for moral and reli-
gious values, for the removal of human want and suffer-
ing, for raising the material and cultural level of the
masses, doing the Master's work? He was no mere re-
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close living away from human interests and aspirations, away from the currents of everyday life. His was an essentially modern mind keenly aware of the suffering of the poor and the downtrodden. His clear reason un-befogged by sectional interests could grasp the truth behind all movements for making the lot of the common man happy and cheerful. When the Madras Council was considering the Religious Endowment Bill which aimed at a better management of the finance of the religious Maths, the Mohunt of a Math in Madras approached him seeking his help for fighting the measure because it touched the vested interests. But the Swami told him point-blank that a monastery should not simply hoard money, but should see that it comes to the use of society. When news of flood and famine reached him, he became anxious for the helpless victims and would not rest till relief had been organised.

One day he was invited for meal at a devotee’s house in Madras. When resting after food he was roused by some noise downstairs, and looking through the window he found some poor people gathering together the food in the leaves thrown down after the guests had been satisfied. Being much moved by the sight, the Swami asked the devotee to feed them properly, and he remarked, “India has no hope till she atones for this accumulated sin.” Mahapurushaji naturally avoided politics. But he was full of admiration for the spirit of renunciation and service that inspired some of the outstanding patriots. About Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, he said, “The patriotism of Swamiji has taken possession of Gandhiji. All should imitate Gandhi’s character. There will be some hope of peace only when
such people are born in every country.”

Full of praise though he was of the heroic efforts of the Mahatma and his followers, Mahapurushaji never for a moment deviated from the path of spirituality chalked out by Swamiji. Thus when in the heyday of Mahatmaji’s non-co-operation movement, some Bengali leaders felt that the Ramakrishna Mission should take an active part in politics, that being according to them the inner core of Swamiji’s teachings, and when, under such an impression, some people warned Mahapurushaji that the Mission was inviting disaster by thus standing aloof from the national movement, Mahapurushaji calmly told them that the path of national salvation lay through the formation of character on a spiritual basis. That was the real message of Swamiji. Others might follow the path they considered best, but the Mission could not give up its ideals for gaining any temporary advantage. In fact he spoke as a true son of the Master was expected to speak.

Though all kinds of good work found him sympathetic, he never failed to stress the spirit which should be at the back of all activities. One who witnesses the drama of life from the summit of realisation views its acts in a light denied to common understanding. Our toils and strivings, our joys and delights, our woes and tears are seen in their true proportion from the vast perspective of the Eternal. Work yoked to true understanding is a means for the unfoldment of the divine within man. So his advice was always: Behind work there should be meditation; without meditation, work cannot be performed in a way which conduces to spiritual growth. Nor is work nicely performed without having a spiritual background. He would say, “Fill
your mind in the morning so much with the thoughts of God that one point of the compass of your mind will always be towards God though you are engaged in various distracting activities."

His own life was a commentary on what he preached. Though he soared on the heights of spiritual wisdom he was to the last rigid in attending to the customary devotions for which he had scarcely any need for himself. Until the time he was too weak to go out of his room, every dawn found him in the shrine room meditating at a fixed hour. In the evening, perhaps, he would be talking to a group of people when the bell for evening service rang. He would at once become silent and lost in deep contemplation, while those who sat round him found their minds stilled and they enjoyed a state of tranquillity which comes only from deep meditation.

Not only did his life stand out as the fulfilment of the ideal aspirations of the devotee, as an ever-present source of inspiration, but his kindness and pity issued forth in a thousand channels to the afflicted and the destitute. Not all who came to him were in urgent need of spiritual comfort. Empty stomachs and naked bodies made them far more conscious of their physical wants than of the higher needs of the soul. His charities flowed in a steady stream to scores of persons groaning under poverty. Perhaps there came to him one whose daughter had fallen seriously ill, but who did not know how to provide the expenses for her treatment. There was another who had lost his job and stared helplessly at the future. Such petitions and their fulfilment were an almost regular occurrence during his last years, not to mention his constant gifts of cloths and blankets, etc., to hundreds of people.
SWAMI SHIVANANDA

His love for the Master, his monastery, and his devotees knew no bounds. His doors remained ever open to the monks and devotees, and so long as it was physically possible for him, he moved about the monastery grounds looking after everything and inquiring about everybody. The cowshed, the kitchen, the dispensary—in fact everything belonging to the Master got his fullest attention. His special care was of course for the shrine room. Everyday he inquired about the offerings to be made to Shri Ramakrishna. When any devotee brought fruits or flowers for himself, he insisted on those being first offered to the Master. The first duty for anyone entering the monastery was to offer his salutation at the shrine.

In the days of his physical decline, the grand old man, whom illness had confined to bed, was like a great patriarch, a paterfamilias, affectionately watching over the welfare of his vast brood. His love showed itself in a hundred ways. If anyone of his numerous devotees or members of the monastery fell sick, he never failed to make anxious inquiries about him. If any of the devotees did not turn up on the usual day at the Math, it never failed to attract his notice. And when the devotees came to the Math, even their petty needs and comforts engaged his attention. But very few of them came to know of this.

His numerous children, who felt secure in his affectionate care, went about their duties full of the delight of living. One night, after the meal, some of the members of the monastery at Belur were making fun and laughing loudly in the inner verandah of the ground floor of the main Math building. The noise of laughter rose up and could be heard in Mahapurushaji's
room. He smiled a little at this and said softly: "The boys are laughing much and seem to be happy. They have left their hearth and home in search of bliss. Master! Make them blissful." What an amount of feeling lay behind these few tender words of prayer!

His health, which was already shattered, broke down still more and beyond recovery in May, 1933, when he had an attack of apoplexy, which deprived him of the use of half of his body including speech. He passed away on February 20, 1934, leaving a memory which is like a golden dream flung suddenly from one knows not where into this harsh world of reality.

The real is that which is an object of experience. To Swami Shivananda God and religion were not vague words or distant ideals, but living realities. Lives like his light up the dark recesses of history and point to the divine goal towards which humanity is travelling with growing knowledge.
TEACHINGS

It is only by doing selfless work that the mind gets purified. And when the mind is purified, even the slightest suggestion would fill your heart with devotion for the Lord. If the mind be not purified, you may practise Japa to any extent, nothing will result by way of spiritual progress. What can Japa do if the mind is full of selfishness, jealousy, hatred, etc.? It is because the country is engrossed in Tamas (inertia) that Swamiji has prescribed work as a means to raise it up. You talk of patriotism. What else can be greater patriotism than this love for the poor and being of service to them?

If one practises meditation and Japa regularly along with work, then there will be no trouble. We have to work, that is certain. But then if one does not practise meditation, Japa, etc. along with work, then one will not be able to work in the right spirit. The whole trouble is about "me and mine", which always seeks comfort. Meditation and Japa are absolutely necessary — there should be no lapse in them. When you meditate, think that you and He alone exist, and forget everything else — work, (monastic) Order, Math, etc. Gradually you have to forget even your own existence. If work makes the mind impure, it is not good work, but an evil one.

The right kind of service is possible only when one sees God in the person served. But it is difficult to have this knowledge at the outset. So, to start with, one has to depend on the word of one's Guru, and take them on faith. We must have faith in Swamiji, who has
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propounded this doctrine of service. The Master's life is the aphorism, as it were, and Swamiji's is the commentary on it. Swamiji formulated this doctrine of service, seeing God in everything, from several incidents in the Master's life.

One has to meditate on the different centres in the Sushumna (the nerve current flowing through the spinal column). In the heart one has to meditate on one's Chosen Deity as sitting on a red lotus with twelve petals, and in the head on the Guru as seated on a white lotus with a thousand petals. These meditations help Japa, and therefore, should be practised.

You cannot realize God through Tapasya, sacrifice, charity, or study of the scriptures. He alone realizes Him on whom descends His grace. But then you have, on the other hand, the words of the Upanishad: "This Atman cannot be realized by the weak." One who is weak and effortless cannot realize Him. The Gita lays stress on personal effort. "The self must be raised by the self, so let no one weaken this self. For this self is the friend of oneself and this self is the enemy of oneself." One has to liberate oneself from bondage, one should never be despondent. Here "self" means mind, intellect, etc.

Don't yield to despondency. It makes the mind restless. Always think that you are all blessed, that you are the children of the Lord. If evil thoughts come to your mind, don't pay any heed to them. There are impressions of past lives in the mind and now and then they come to the conscious plane. Have strength. There is no fear. You will get everything in time.

Low thoughts will come and go. Don't mind them. Through His grace, as a result of constant practice,
you will get strength. Devote your whole mind to Japa, meditation, worship, and study of the scriptures, whichever appeals to you for the time being. The Lord will set everything right. Shri Ramakrishna never liked one-sidedness. He was always for many-sidedness.

Mere mechanical Japa does not help much. You must have love for the Lord. But then, even mechanical Japa has some results, for after all, it is the Lord’s name that is being repeated. But the main thing is love for the Lord with the idea that He is our father, mother, friend, master, everything. You must have some such relationship.

The one thing necessary is His grace. Without the Lord’s grace no spiritual practice is possible. No one works independently. Everyone works as directed by Him. He is the mechanic and the rest are machines. But it is very hard to remember all this. If one has this idea, then one gets beyond all good and evil. If the Mother is gracious, then everything is possible—dispassion, spiritual practice, etc. The Lord has two powers—Vidya Shakti (knowledge) and Avidya Shakti (ignorance). If He removes from us the influence of the latter and helps with the former, then everything goes on well. So pray, “Mother, be gracious unto me.” If Her grace is there, nothing is impossible.

Guru and Ista (chosen Ideal or Deity) are one. But then so long as you are in the relative world, bounded by name and form, you have to accept them as separate. When knowledge comes, you will find that the two are one.

Pray to the Lord for strength, knowledge, and dispassionateness. Pray to Him with all your heart for His grace, and for devotion and faith. It is not possible
for everyone to practise hard austerities, but then, through prayer everything is attained. If you find it difficult to meditate, be prayerful.

It is difficult to meditate on the formless. The Vedas prescribe Akasha as a symbol of the formless God. Other symbols like the ocean etc. may also be taken but Akasha is better. He resides in the heart of man as consciousness. But then one has to start with some form. There is no question of inferiority or superiority in this—it is a question of temperament. Whatever appeals to one is the best for him. Form melts into the formless, and again the formless takes a form. God is both with form and without form, and again beyond both.

It is not possible to comprehend Him with this mind. He can be comprehended only with the pure mind. The Master used to say, "The pure mind and the Self are one." That mind in which there are no entanglements or desires cannot be called mind. Then there exists only an all-pervading consciousness, power, or Brahman—whatever you may call it.
SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

Even while (Swamiji) Swami Vivekananda was in the midst of his arduous labours in the West, he realised that more important work was awaiting him in India. When the great leader returned to the motherland and made his triumphal tour from Colombo to Almora, it was in the city of Madras that he first intimated to eager listeners his plan of campaign. Some of the citizens approached Swamiji with the request that he should kindly send one of his brother-disciples to stay in Madras and establish a monastery which would become the centre of the religious teachings and philanthropic activities outlined by Swamiji in his addresses delivered in India and abroad. By way of reply he said, “I shall send you one who is more orthodox than your most orthodox men of the South and who is at the same time unique and unsurpassed in his worship of and meditation on God.” The very next steamer from Calcutta brought to Madras Swami Ramakrishnananda. In a few words the leader had summarised the individual characteristics of the apostle in relation to the field of work for which he was chosen. South India has all along been the stronghold of orthodox Hinduism. In order to infuse new life into the ancient religion without breaking the continuity of the tradition, the apostle to the South had to be a person of great intellectual attainments, of unflinching devotion to the ideals, and of deep reverence for the forms of worship and religious practices sanctified by the authority of a succession of great teachers. Swami Ramakrishnananda
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or Shashi Maharaj, as he was familiarly called, possessed all these and, in addition, he had an overflowing kindness, abounding sympathy for all, and a childlike nature which exhibited the inner purity of the soul.

Shashi Bhushan Chakravarti—that was the name by which Swami Ramakrishnananda was known in his pre-monastic days—was born in an orthodox Brahmin family of the Hooghly district, Bengal, on 13th July 1863. His father, Ishwarchandra Chakravarti, a strict observer of religious traditions and a devout worshipper of the Divine Mother, gave the early training that laid the foundation of the lofty character exhibited in the life of his great son.

Shashi went to school, and having successfully completed the school course, entered the Metropolitan College in Calcutta. He was a brilliant student at college and his favourite subjects were literature (both English and Sanskrit), mathematics, and philosophy. He and his cousin Sharat Chandra—afterwards Swami Saradananda—came under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj. Shashi became intimately known to the Brahmo leader, Keshab Chandra Sen, and was appointed private tutor to his sons.

On a certain day in October, 1883, Shashi and Sharat, along with a few other boy-companions, arrived at Dakshineswar to see the Master. Shri Ramakrishna received them with a smile and began to talk to them warmly about the need of renunciation in spiritual life. Shashi was then reading in the First Arts class and the others were preparing for matriculation. As Shashi was the oldest of the band, the conversation was addressed to him. Shri Ramakrishna asked Shashi whether he believed in God with form or without form. The boy
SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

frankly answered that he was not certain about the existence of God and was not, therefore, able to speak one way or the other. The reply pleased the Master very much. Shashi and Sharat were fascinated by the personality of Shri Ramakrishna whom they henceforth accepted as their Master, the pole-star of their lives. Of Shashi and Sharat, Shri Ramakrishna used to say that both of them were the followers of Jesus the Christ in a former incarnation.

Although Shashi was a brilliant student, his interest in the college curriculum began to dwindle. Slowly and silently he was progressing in the life of the spirit. His keen intellect, robust physique, and steady character were beginning to centre round the one grand theme of God-realisation. One day at Dakshineswar it happened that he was busily engaged in studying some Persian books in order to read the Sufi poets in the original. The Master had called him thrice before he heard. When he came, Shri Ramakrishna asked him what he had been doing. Shashi said that he was absorbed in his books. He quietly remarked, "If you forget your duties for the sake of study, you will lose all your devotion." Shashi understood. He took the Persian books and threw them into the Ganga. From that time on book-learning had little importance in his scheme of life.

Shashi was then in the final B.A. class; the examination was fast approaching. But at that very time Shri Ramakrishna was lying ill at Shyampukur in Calcutta. The young disciple had to decide between his studies and service to the person of the Master. Unhesitatingly he decided to give his body, mind and soul wholly and unreservedly to the service of the Master. He also followed the Master to the Cossipore
garden-house. Shashi was the very embodiment of service. Other disciples also gave their very best in the service of the Master. But Shashi's case was conspicuous. He knew no rest. He did not care for any other spiritual practice. Service to the Guru was the only concern of his life. Fortunately, he was endowed with a strong physique. But more than that, behind the body, there was a mind whose strength was incessantly sustained by his love and devotion to the Guru. Till the last moment of the earthly existence of the Master, Shashi was unflagging in his zeal to serve him as best as he could. Before Shri Ramakrishna lay down for the final departure, he sat up for some time against some five or six pillows which were supported by Shashi, who was at the same time fanning him. When the Master was in Mahasamadhi, the disciples could not at first realise what it was. Shashi rebuked those who thought that it was otherwise than Samadhi, and along with others began to chant holy texts. But despite their earnest hope the body did not indicate any sign of life, and the doctor finally declared it to be Mahasamadhi.

The greatest trial was at the burning ghat. Feelings of a contrasted character visited the soul of Shashi. Now the joy and bliss the Master had shed over them all at the time of the Mahasamadhi came over him and he sang the name of the Master in triumphant praise. Then a sense of utter loneliness stole over his joy and made him the victim of most violent grief. When the flames that had made ashes of the body of the Master had died out, amidst the silence that prevailed, Shashi gathered the sacred relics.

Then came the period of supreme depression. The boys who were children of the Master gathered together
at the newly founded monasterv at Baranagore. Shashi played no small part in holding the young band together and in regulating the routine of life to be followed by them. While others were indifferent as to whether the body lived or went in their intense search for the Highest, Shashi took care that his brother-disciples had not to face starvation actually. He went so far as to serve as a schoolmaster—though for a very short period—to meet the expenses of the Math. He would say to his brothers, "You just continue your spiritual practices with undivided attention. You need not bother about anything else. I shall maintain the Math by begging."

Swamiji recalling these blessed days many years later, said with reference to Swami Ramakrishnananda, "Oh, what a steadfastness to the ideal did we ever find in Shashi! He was a mother to us. It was he who managed about our food. We used to get up at three o'clock in the morning. Then all of us, some after bathing, would go to the worshiproom and be lost in Japa and meditation. There were times when the meditation lasted to four or five o'clock in the afternoon. Shashi would be waiting with our dinner; if necessary, he would by sheer force drag us out of our meditation. Who cared then if the world existed or not!"

The parents of the boys came and attempted to take them back to their homes, but they would not yield. Shashi’s father came, begged and threatened, but to no purpose. The son said, "The world and home are to me as a place infested with tigers." The time came when the boys decided to renounce the world formally by taking the monastic vows. They changed their names. Shashi became Ramakrishnananda. Narendra Nath, the leader of the young band, wanted to have that name
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for himself but thought that Shashi had a better claim to it because of his unparalleled love for the Master. Indeed Shashi's love for the Master sounds like a story—nay, has passed into stories. Death could not rob him of the living presence of the Master. He served the Master in the relics with the same devotion and earnestness as when he had been physically alive. Others went on pilgrimages, adopting the wandering life of the monk Swami Ramakrishnananda stuck like a sentinel on to the holy spot where the Master's relics were temporarily enshrined. Worshipping the Master and keeping the monastery as the centre to which the wanderers would occasionally return were the duties which Ramakrishnananda assigned to himself. He did not think of going to a single place of pilgrimage. What place under the sun could be more sacred to him than where the relics of the Master lay? He would personally attend to all the items of worship; he would bring water from the Ganga, gather flowers, and prepare the food to be offered. He would not take any food that was not offered to the Master. The very soul of devotion entered into Swami Ramakrishnananda.

If Shashi's devotion to the Guru was beyond comparison with any earthly example, his love for Swamiji whom Shri Ramakrishna had ordained as the leader of the whole group, was wonderful. Any word from the leader was more than a command to him. There was no trouble which he would not face, no sacrifice which he would not make in deference to the slightest wish of Swami Vivekananda. This spirit was so strongly manifest in him, that Swami Vivekananda would at times make fun with him taking advantage of his love. Shashi, as we have seen, was very orthodox in
his attitude. One day the leader asked him, "Shashi, I want to put your love for me to the test. Can you buy me a piece of English bread from a Mohammedan shop?" Shashi at once agreed and actually did the thing. After Swamiji's return from the West when he proposed to Shashi to go to Madras to do preaching work, Shashi at once responded to the call. It meant that he would have to give up many habits of long years, it meant that he would have to leave the place where he was so steadfastly worshipping the relics of the Master. But these were no considerations against the wish of the leader.

After the Master had discouraged his book-learning, Shashi lost all interest in study. His whole heart was centred in devotion and worship. Now he was asked to preach religion and philosophy. The great heart had to become the mighty intellect. It may be that for this reason the leader directed Swami Ramakrishnananda to go to Madras. A combination of deep devotion and keen intellect is something very rare. But this very rare type was needed for the work in South India, and it was the good fortune of that province to get such an apostle. The Ramakrishna Mission work in the South now stands as a noble edifice giving shelter to thousands of persons who seek the consolation which religion alone can give. But the strong foundation for this imposing edifice was firmly laid by the great monk, the first apostle of the Ramakrishna Order to Madras.

Swami Ramakrishnananda arrived at Madras in 1897. At first he was housed in a small building near the "Ice House," from where he had to shift to some rooms in the Ice House where Swamiji had lived after his return from the West. A little later when the house was
auctioned away by the owner, the Swami had to stay in an outhouse of the same building at great personal inconvenience. When the Ice House was put to auction, the devotees very much wished that if possible some of their friends should purchase it, so that Swami Ramakrishnananda might not be inconvenienced and his work might go on smoothly. As the auction was proceeding, the Swami sat unconcerned in a far end of the compound on a rickety bench. A devotee was anxiously watching the bidding, and now and then reporting to the Swami how it was progressing. The Swami looked up and said, "Why do you worry about it? What do we care who buys or sells? My wants are few. I need only a small room for Shri Guru Maharaj. I can stay anywhere and spend my time in talking of him." Indeed such was the attitude of the Swami throughout his whole life, even latterly when he received much ovation and many honours.

It was in 1907 that a permanent house\(^1\) for the Math was constructed on a small site in a suburb of the city. The house was a simple one-storied building consisting of four rooms, a spacious hall, kitchen, and outhouses. The Swami was delighted when at last there was a permanent place where the Master's worship could be carried on uninterruptedly. He said, "This is a fine house for Shri Ramakrishna to live in. Realising that he occupies it, we must keep it very clean and very pure. We should take care not to disfigure the walls by driving nails or otherwise."

The worship of the Master as done by Swami Ramakrishnananda was very striking. A spiritual aspirant

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\(^1\) This has since been replaced by a larger building.
longs to experience the tangible presence of God. But with Swami Ramakrishnananda it was an entirely different matter. He so vividly realised the presence of God that there was no room for any craving for that in his mind. It was only left to him to serve Him, and he did it with unwavering ardor. He would serve his Master exactly in the way he did while he was in the physical body. Some article of food is preferred hot; Swami Ramakrishnananda would keep the stove burning and offer that piece by piece to the Master. He would offer to the Master a piece of twig hammered soft to be used as a toothbrush, as is the practice in some Indian homes. After the midday offerings, he would fan the Master for some time so that the latter could easily have his nap. On hot days he would suddenly wake up at night, open the shrine and fan the Master so that the latter might not be disturbed in sleep because of the sweltering heat. Sometimes he would talk sulkily with the Master, blaming him for something. To a critical mind these things might seem queer, but he only knew what great Presence he felt. These actions were so natural and spontaneous with him that a witness would sometimes even fall into respecting him for them. Once a certain gentleman, who was then holding the highest position in Government service, called at the monastery to pay his respects to Swami Ramakrishnananda. The Swami, after finishing the morning worship, was at that time fanning the portrait of the Master, which he would do for a couple of hours and more, uttering the names of the Lord—Shiva Guru, Sat Guru, Sanātana Guru, Parama Guru, and so on. During such times, the face of the Swami would be flushed red with emotion and his tall and robust figure would look more
imposing. The whole sight struck the visitor with such awe and reverence that he could do nothing but prostrate before the Swami and return home.

A bold student to whom the Swami gave the liberty of arguing, once freely criticised him for worshipping the portrait of a dead man as that indicated an aberration of mind. The Swami said that the images in temples were not simply dull, dead, inert matter, but were living Gods who could be spoken to. There was such a ring of sincerity and genuineness of feeling behind these words that in spite of himself, the conviction stole on the critic, as he himself afterwards narrated, that what he heard could not but be true.

But if Swami Ramakrishnananda's devotion was great, his intellectual acumen was no less so. His scholarship in Sanskrit was immense. Not knowing the local dialect, he had sometimes to hold conversations with orthodox pundits in Sanskrit. He wrote the life of the great Acharya Ramanuja in Bengali, which has become an authoritative book on that saint. Not only of Hindu scriptures, but also his knowledge of Christianity and of Islam was superb. He knew the Bible from cover to cover and could expound it with a penetrating insight which would strike even orthodox Christian theologians with awe. Once on a Good Friday he gave a talk on the Crucifixion with so much depth of feeling and vividness of description that a Western listener, with experience of sermons in churches, became amazed as to how the words of the Swami could be so living. Though to all intents and purposes he was living like an orthodox Hindu, his love for the Prophets of other faiths was genuine and sometimes embarrassing to his orthodox followers. Those who have seen him going to St. Thomas's Church
in Madras relate that he would go straight up to the altar and kneel before it like a Christian and pray.

One evening some Mohammedan students, caught in the rain, took shelter in the monastery. The Swami warmly welcomed them and talked to them not of his own faith but of Islam. His exposition was so illuminating that those Mohammedan students repeated their visit to the monastery many times afterwards.

When holding scripture classes or giving religious discourses, he would not simply explain the texts or repeat the scriptural authorities. He would at times give flashes of illumination from the depth of his realisations. Because of this, his words were always penetrating. They would silence even those who came with a combative spirit. With a few words he could explain philosophical problems on which volumes had been written. He had a great knack of probing into the heart of things and of expressing the truth in pithy sayings. Once after discussions with the professor of a local college in regard to politics and religion, the Swami said, "Politics is the freedom of the senses, while religion is freedom from the senses." With reference to dualistic and monistic systems of philosophy he once remarked, "In the dualistic method enjoyment is the ideal; in the monistic method freedom is the ideal. By the first the lover gets his beloved at last, and by the second the slave becomes the master. Both are sublime. One has no need to go from one ideal to the other." "Science is the struggle of man in the outer world. Religion is the struggle of man in the inner world," he once said in the course of conversation: "Both struggles are great, no doubt, but one ends in success and the other ends in failure. That is the difference. Religion begins where science ends."
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He had, however, no prejudice against science. At times he would be doing mathematical problems as a pastime. Once he procured from a local college all the latest authoritative books on astronomy and began to study them assiduously. It was not difficult for him to understand them.

Throughout his stay in Madras, the Swami had to work very hard and pass through strenuous days. In the early period, he had to cook his own food, do service in the shrine, and hold classes in various parts of the city. Sometimes the financial trouble was appalling. But very few people outside his intimate group knew of his difficulties. He would often be very reluctant even to accept the help proffered, for he did not like that anybody should undergo any sacrifice for him. One day there was not a drop of ghee in the Math to fry chapati. He was in a fix and began pacing up and down the verandah, not knowing where help would come from. As a strange coincidence, a student of his class approached him exactly at that time and whispered into his ear about his intention of contributing his mite to the Math as he had a promotion in the office. But the Swami did not, at first agree to accept anything from him, lest it should cause him some hardship. It was only after great insistence and supplication that the Swami agreed to have some quantity of ghee. If questioned as to how the Swami was meeting his bodily wants, he would say with placid composure, "God sends me whenever I want anything." "If we cannot get on altogether without help, then why not ask the Lord Himself? Why go to others?" he would say. And on many occasions help would come to the Swami in quite unexpected ways. A devotee says, "Once the birthday of Shri Ramakrishna
was near and no money had been received for the feeding of the poor, which was an important item of the celebration. It was midnight and I was sleeping in the Math, when I suddenly woke up, roused by strange sounds in the hall. Looking about, I could see the Swami pacing up and down like a lion in a cage, mumbling noisily with every breath. I was afraid to see him in that condition, but I understood later that it was his praying for help to feed the poor. The next morning money did come. A large donation was received from the Yuvaraja of Mysore who had begun to admire the Swami, having read his book *The Universe and Man*, just then published."

Without caring for his bodily wants, quite indifferent to his personal needs, he worked tremendously to spread the message of the Master and in the cause of Vedanta. On certain days of the week he had to lecture more than twice or thrice. His classes were scattered over different parts of the city, and to many of them he had for a long time to go on foot. Sometimes he would return to the Math quite exhausted, and as little energy was left for cooking, he would finish his night meal with only a piece of bread purchased from a bakery. People would wonder how he could stand such a severe strain. But the secret of this lay perhaps in his complete self-surrender to the Lord. Once he said, "Suppose a pen were conscious; it could say, 'I have written hundreds of letters', but actually it has done nothing, for the one who holds it has written the letters. So because we are conscious, we think we are doing all these things, whereas in reality we are as much an instrument in the hands of a Higher Power as the pen is in our hands, and He makes all things possible."
While holding classes or delivering lectures he never posed himself as a superior personage having a right to teach others. He considered himself always as a humble servant of the Lord. Sometimes on returning to the Math after delivering lectures, he would undergo some self-imposed punishment and earnestly pray to the Master that the lecture work might not give rise to any sense of egotism in him. Sometimes he had strange experiences in the classes, and he had a novel way of meeting them. After the first enthusiasm had died out, all his classes were not so well-attended. That depended also on what part of the city the class was held in. If, for any reason, not a single student happened to come to any of his classes, he would still give his discourse as usual in the empty room or spend in meditation the period fixed for the class. If asked the reason for these unusual actions, the Swami would reply, “I have not come here to teach others. This work is like a vow to me, and I am fulfilling it irrespective of whether anyone comes or does not come to my class.”

In regard to what he taught, he was uncompromising and fearless. Someone, finding him to hold high the ideals of renunciation and fearing lest some of the young listeners might be attracted to the ideal, suggested that certain devotees who were subscribing towards the maintenance of the Math might not like his teaching such things to the young people. On hearing these remarks, Swami Ramakrishnananda flared up and thundered forth, “What, am I to preach anything other than what I have learnt from my Master? If the Math cannot be financially maintained, I shall very gladly find accommodation in the verandah of one of my students’ houses.”
SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

His work was not confined only to the city of Madras, but it spread throughout the Madras Presidency. One of the most important fields of his activities was the Mysore State. When the name and influence of Swami Ramakrishnananda as a bearer of the message of the Master and Swamiji began to spread, the Vedanta Society of Ulsoor in Bangalore sent him an invitation in 1903 to deliver a course of lectures there. He accepted the invitation, and a splendid reception was accorded on his arrival. He stayed in Bangalore for three weeks. During this period he delivered about a dozen public lectures and held conversations morning and evening. His lectures were attended by a large number of eager and enthusiastic people, and his classes were also equally popular.

In the same year he carried the message of his Master to Mysore as well, where he delivered a series of five lectures. A noteworthy address was given in Sanskrit to the pundits of the place assembled in the local Sanskrit College. In this he rose to the height of his eloquence and clearly showed how the message of his Master harmonised the interpretations of the Vedanta by different Acharyas. It was very bold of him to do so, for the Sanskrit scholars of the South, strong champions of orthodoxy as they were, could hardly believe in anything outside the particular system of philosophy they followed.

The interest created by him in Bangalore was kept up by the Ulsoor Vedanta Society. In the following year he was again invited to Bangalore, this time to open a permanent centre. He delivered a series of lectures, opened some classes and left a junior Swami there to continue the work. In August 1906, he revisited
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Bangalore and Mysore with his brother-disciple Swami Abhedananda, who had recently come from America. The two Swamis together delivered several lectures and consolidated the Vedanta work in Mysore State. During this visit the foundation-stone of the Bangalore Ashrama was laid. After the building was constructed, Swami Brahmananda came on invitation to open it. Afterwards, Swami Ramakrishnanananda would visit Bangalore whenever he could snatch away time from his busy life, and he directed the Ashrama and the Mission work in Bangalore and Mysore from Madras.

Swami Ramakrishnanananda also visited Trivandrum and spent about a month there creating enthusiasm in the minds of the people. Besides, he made extensive tours to several parts of South India, and as a result of this, centres were started in several important places. His fame as a teacher of Vedanta spread far and wide. Even from such distant places as Burma and Bombay he received invitations. He visited those places and achieved great success.

Some of the discourses he delivered in various places have been published in book form. They now furnish spiritual sustenance to innumerable people who had not the opportunity to come into direct contact with him. Of these books *The Universe and Man* and *The Soul of Man* give lucid expositions of some of the fundamental principles of Vedanta. *Sri Krishna, the Pastoral and King-maker* is, as the title shows, the life of that great Divinity on earth and is a study of the hero as God-man.

Swami Ramakrishnanananda was not a very eloquent speaker. There was no oratorical flourish in his speech. But his sincerity and thorough grasp of spiritual real-
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ities made his speeches very impressive. He was always at his best in the conversational method of teaching, which appealed directly to the heart owing to the sincerity with which it was uttered. Great truths, complicated questions, controversial problems, and all the heights and depths of ethics were discussed, but in the most simple manner possible, so that even a child might understand them.

In day-to-day dealings Swami Ramakrishnananda was full of overflowing love. We have seen how at the Baranagore monastery he was “like a mother” to all, taking extreme care of them. When any brother-disciple of his came to the South on pilgrimage, he would be beside himself with joy, and did not know how sufficiently to take care of him. All feelings of Swami Ramakrishnananda welled forth, as it were, when Swami Brahmananda visited the South, and there was nothing he would not do for him. His attitude towards Swami Brahmananda was the logical outcome of his devotion to the Master. Because Shri Ramakrishna loved Swami Brahmananda so much, Swami Ramakrishnananda also treated him more with reverence than with brotherly love. It was a sight to see Swami Ramakrishnananda, with his bulky body, prostrate himself before his great brother-disciple in all humility. A similar attitude in Swami Ramakrishnananda, though in a more intense degree, was in evidence, when the Holy Mother, with a party of women devotees, came to the South on pilgrimage. It is said that on this occasion he worked so hard to remove even the slightest inconvenience that might befall the party, that his health permanently broke down.

It was to his great loving heart that the Ramakrishna
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Mission Students’ Home in Madras owed its origin. At Coimbatore he once found that all the members of a family, except a few helpless children, had been swept away by plague. The pitiable condition of these poor children was too much for the loving heart of the Swami, so he took charge of them. This was the genesis of the educational activities of the Mission in the South, which have since expanded very greatly.

A teacher, he cared more for building up lives than for teaching a wide circle of indifferent auditors. He was a strict disciplinarian and insisted that all who came under his influence be perfect and exemplary in every detail of their conduct. Once a student was found sitting in his class with his chin resting on the palm of his hand. He at once said, “Do not sit like that, it is a pensive attitude. You should always cultivate a cheerful attitude.” Sometimes thoughtless visitors to the Math would take out the daily paper and begin to read. The Swami would at once administer a mild rebuke saying, “Put away your paper. You can read that anywhere. When you come here, you should think of God.” Once a proud and vainglorious pundit came to the Math and began to talk of his plans for reforming temples, society, etc. Swami Ramakrishnananda listened to him quietly for some time and then opened his lips to remark, “I wonder what God did before you were born.” The man at once became silent, and the conversation turned to healthier things. The man afterwards left the Math with a better attitude of mind. Once Swami Ramakrishnananda and an American devotee were putting up in the royal guest quarters at Bangalore as the guests of the Maharaja of Mysore. One day a member of the Maharaja’s official staff came to see them. The
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visitor began to detail some court gossip to the American devotee thinking that that would be a very entertaining topic of conversation. All the while that the conversation was going on, the Swami shifted his position in his chair again and again showing evident signs of great discomfort. When asked if he was feeling unwell, the Swami unsophistically said, “I am all right, but I do not like your conversation.” The visitor, however, took the rebuke without any offence and changed the subject of conversation.

His own life was extremely disciplined. He was very regular and punctual in his habits. He would follow his self-imposed daily duties under any circumstances. As a rule, he began the day by reading the Gita and the Vishnu-Sahasranāma. Once the Swami passed the night outside the Math, to keep company with Swami Premananda, when the latter was on pilgrimage in the South. That night Swami Ramakrishnananda had not with him the Gita and the Vishnu-Sahasranāma. When he discovered this, he sent some one out to procure copies of those two books, so that he might not miss reading them next morning.

Though in managing the monastery he was a stern disciplinarian, at heart he was extremely soft and kind. Once when the time came for the departure of a junior Swami of the Order who had come to Madras, Swami Ramakrishnananda fed him well sitting by him and actually burst into tears when the latter was about to leave. Another time Swami Ramakrishnananda had gone to Bengal, and when he visited Calcutta, he learnt that a young Brahmacarin of the Order who had for some time lived with him at Madras was lying ill at his parental home in the city. The Swami himself went to
see the patient at his home. At this the Brahmacharin was dumbfounded, that Swami Ramakrishnanananda who was held in such high esteem throughout the country should come to his bed-side. He could hardly believe his eyes.

It was his love for humanity that impelled him to work so hard in Madras. But after some time the body gave indication that it could no longer stand the stress of so much hard work. Yet the spirit was there. The Swami did not listen to the whisper of the flesh. In spite of his indifferent health, he carried on his hard labour till the body completely broke down, and the doctors diagnosed the disease as consumption. Word was sent to Calcutta, and his fellow-monks there begged him to pass his last days with them. This he felt was best. He had thought of it, but not until the command came from the President of the Mission did he leave Madras. In Calcutta he was housed at the monastery in Baghbazar, and the most noted physicians visited him of their own accord. But his condition grew worse.

Most remarkable, however, was the strength of his spirit which burst forth in eloquent discourses concerning high spiritual matters, even whilst the body suffered most. One who loved him dearly, noticing him speak thus in this distressed state of body, asked him to desist. “Why?” came the reply, “When I speak of the Lord, all pain leaves me, I forget the body.” Even in delirium his mind and his voice were given to God. “Durgâ, Durgâ”, “Shiva, Shiva”, and the name of his Master were ever on his lips. His great esteem and his love for Christ, which was manifest throughout his lifetime, revived constantly in those days. Speaking of Jesus he would become eloquent. He would speak of how Shri
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Ramakrishna had regarded Christ and of how, when the Master had had the vision of Christ during Samadhi, the very body of the great founder of Christianity had entered into him.

Swami Ramakrishnananda entered into Final Realisation on 21st August 1911.
TEACHINGS

We understand by God a being that is infinite in every way, infinitely powerful, infinitely lovely, infinitely conscious; and because He is infinite, He can never be finite.

Mind is bound on all sides by ignorance, and if you compare your knowledge with your ignorance, your knowledge seems infinitesimal. Now it is impossible for the limited to conceive the unlimited.

Our Master Shri Ramakrishna used to say that the poison of the cobra is most deadly, yet that poison does not hurt it. Similarly Maya is inside God, but can never interfere with the nature of God any more than the poison can injure the cobra. God plays the part of a creator, that He may have the fun of creating, preserving, and destroying. That is the method He always follows when He wants to create, and this is God's relationship with Maya. God is infinitely powerful, so He has the power to put down the irresistible power of Maya.

But what is our relationship with Maya? We are her slaves. You cannot be destroyed by Maya, but she can make you miserable through eternity. Then how are we going to get rid of her? Only by the help of God can we hope to get rid of her.

If you know that you are eternal and indestructible, then you are not body, you are spirit, and that Self is beyond the reach of Maya, that Self is one with God. If you can identify yourself with this real Self of yours and throw away your self, then you can go beyond the
dominion of Maya, and this path is known as Jnana-marga.

Those who can resist the demands of the body, can afford to wage an incessant war against Maya and come out victorious. But they are very few. For the others, they can only take refuge at God’s feet.

What kind of devotion takes us to God? The child’s devotion to the mother. Why does the baby go to the mother? Because it has reasoned out that the mother is the best friend it has. And why do you go to God? Because you have previously reasoned out that God will help you, and no one else can. So, as the baby goes to its mother, you will go to God.

The souls, not being free and not knowing to guide themselves, on account of the limited nature of their minds, should be guided by God, their omnipotent and omniscient Master, if they want to get rid of death and countless woes; and their highest wisdom should consist in allowing themselves to be guided by God and not by themselves.

No man who has not true love towards God can be religious. Religion begins when attraction towards God is greater than attraction towards the world.

The attraction towards the world means egotism, attraction towards God means self-surrender.

Actually very few of us believe in God all the time. How do we know this? Because we allow anxieties and fears to arise in our minds. If we really have faith in God and in His infinite power of goodness, we can never feel fearful about anything.

What makes the mind impure? Desire. Free the mind of all desires, and at once it becomes pure. A man, however, who has no idea of God, can never get
rid of desire. The lover of God sees that instead of bringing enjoyment, these desires are the source of all miseries. He understands that in God alone he can find the satisfaction of all desires, for He is infinite bliss, and all other pleasures are finite and perishable.

We seek matter first and spirit afterwards. We should reverse the process. Our hearts also must be free from any ulterior motive. If we love God for what we can get from Him in the world, we really love the world, not God, and we can never be true devotees. The true devotee loves God just for the joy of loving Him, because God is the Beloved.

Ananda or bliss is the best definition of God. The real ideal of every human being is Sachchidananda—eternal Life, infinite Knowledge, and everlasting Bliss, for all men wish to live for ever, to be all-knowing, and to have eternal bliss. But God alone is all-life, all-knowledge and all-happiness; therefore God is really the ideal of every living being.

Almost all men in the world have usurped the throne where God should sit. On that throne where God should be, a most worthless slave has been given place. This is the ego. When you know this, then drive out the ego. When you do this and become the slave or servant of God instead, you will realize your eternal nature. Being one with God, all fear of death will go, peace will come to you, and you will taste true Ananda (bliss).

So long as we have no ideal to follow, we will have to heed the calls of our lower nature. A characterless man is a slave to all worldly enjoyments.

All religions teach the necessity of hero-worship. Who is a hero? The man who has realised his oneness with
God, who has self-knowledge, for religion is not a matter of talk or learning or faith, but a matter of realisation. A man of realisation alone is the true teacher, the Guru. So you must hear, study, understand, and then try to realise with the aid of a real Guru.

The path which leads you to realise life eternal is not by the exercise of your outgoing energies but by your ingoing energies. You must collect your energies and direct them inwards.

You have been worshipping this god of your body for so many lives, it is not easy to begin to worship the true God all at once. If you would raise your Self, you must crucify the body and conquer the senses.

Always mixing with the world and identifying ourselves with the body, we are prone to forget religion which awakens us to the real state of affairs which we are in, and opens to us the gate of eternal bliss, and keeps us away from being drawn down to the abject life of beasts—doing nothing but eating and drinking and making merry. Such being the case, there must be something that will occasionally remind us as to who we are, and what we should do, so that we may not be altogether forgetful of our duties here. It is religion that fulfils this purpose.