

Sri Ramakrishna's Boon : 'May All of You be Spiritually Awakened!'

SWAMI VAMANANANDA

We get some glimpses of God and His unfathomable beauty when He comes amidst us and when we contemplate deeply His divine play. This had been done by Sri Ramakrishna's intimate disciples who had participated in his *lilā*.

In divine play God appears to have a beautiful form. Then He is an inexhaustible repository of qualities or virtues such as love and bliss. He is then a concentrated embodiment of goodness and heavenly joy. But these are not everything. God has another aspect of His being that is formless and eternal. Man cannot grasp this higher and infinite aspect of God because he himself appears to be very tiny and finite.

There are three levels of human existence. The first is organic or physical. The second is mental and intellectual and the third is spiritual. In society we come across different categories of people who live at the mental and intellectual level. To this group belong many eminent persons about whom we have some knowledge. In history and the Puranas we also get accounts of many great personalities. But the problem is: How can we have a vision of the Infinite? How to attain it? The answer to these questions are to be found only at the third level of human existence which is spiritual. Because our mind and intellect are limited, they can operate only up to a certain point. That is why they cannot cross the region of finite

existence. How then man, with his poor capacity will transcend his present limited existence?

Fortunately, those spiritual personalities who rise above the limitations of finite existence later try to give us some hints of the Infinite. Swami Premeshanandaji Maharaj, a blessed disciple of the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, for example, was such an illumined soul who had tried to depict in one of his famous songs this infinitude of God. Those who compose songs are no doubt poets, but so are those who sing them. The songs of those who are advanced spiritual personalities and, at the same time, poets, touch the heart of the listeners in such a way that they get absorbed in a divine mood and feeling. The first two lines of one such song composed by Swami Premeshananda is so sweet and delightful! The poet says,

*Arup sāyare lilā-lahari uthilo mridul
karunābai
Ādi antaheen, akhande bileen, māyāi
dharile mānabakāi.*

In these two lines the poet expresses an immensely profound idea that He, who has no beginning and no end, assumes a human body out of great compassion. God, who is essentially infinite, thus out of His free will, takes on, as it were, a finite form. Only when man, through spiritual practices, transcends his limitations, is able to feel this subtle mystery of God's assuming a human form

out of infinite grace. The poet here refers to *Māyā* because God really never gets bound or affected by the game of form and formlessness. *Māyā* is that which is not true at all times, ie in the past, present and future. All the created objects of this universe are perishable. Therefore *jagat* is not *nitya* or real forever.

In spite of its vastness, this universe is very tiny. In the galaxy there are innumerable solar systems which contain countless planets. But these are all limited entities. The scientists have been observing this universe for ages with the help of telescope; but in spite of that, they have not been able so far to demarcate space. Meditation, by contrast, has such a tremendous power that the mind of a *sādhaka* who has attained divine grace through austere spiritual practices, is able to go beyond cosmos and thus transcend all limitations imposed by forms and other attributes. This dissolution of the mind in the Infinite Reality is called *Nirvikalpa Samādhi* (in which the aspirant realizes his total oneness with Brahman) in non-dual Vedanta.

God sports with the help of *Māyā* or cosmic illusion, an inscrutable power, which is also worshipped in Tantra as *Shakti*. Indeed, Brahman and Its *Shakti* are inseparable. Sri Ramakrishna again and again has stressed this truth in the *Kathamrita* that 'which you call Shakti, I address Her as "Mother". My Mother is verily *Brahmamayee*.' *Shiva* and *Shakti* are in fact the obverse and reverse aspects of the same coin; they represent the same Truth (Reality) and the same Principle. When that infinite God comes to us assuming a name and a form, He seems then to be a finite being; all the same we should remember that it is His illusive appearance. So if we hold on to this illusive aspect of Ramakrishna, even though he appears to be limited, he can

reveal to us his infinite and imperishable nature (*Parāprakriti*). Then we realize that Ramakrishna is Kāli, he is Krishna, he is Rāma, he is Shiva—in short, he is everything that belongs to this finite world. Again, he is '*arupa sāyar*'—'the formless ocean of Existence'. From that formless and attributeless ocean he emerges out of boundless compassion and as a mark of grace permeates all beings. That is to say, He dwells in everyone and everything. So both the limited appearance as well as the all-pervading essence are none else but He alone. Both aspects belong to Brahman, the Absolute Reality.

Surprisingly, when God appears in human form, as a human being, He forgets Himself, as it were! This is due to His own *Māyā*. He Himself assumes a particular form, again He forgets His true nature (*svarupa*). There is a Paurānika story of Barāha Avatāra (the sow Incarnation). Sri Ramakrishna mentions it in his *Kathamrita*. The story goes that Lord Vishnu incarnated as a sow in order to kill a demon called Hiranyāksha. The demon was eventually killed, but Vishnu would not go back to His abode in heaven, for He enjoyed the life of a sow. The sow had given birth to several young ones and seemed quite happy with them, wallowing in the filth and swallowing all sorts of trivial things. Nārada saw this predicament of Vishnu and said to Shiva: O Lord, what a pity! Bhagavān Vishnu has descended on earth as a sow and completely forgotten Himself—His divine nature! He is trapped in the snares of the world and feels quite happy living in the muck! Shiva then said: Ok, let me do something about it.

Maheshvara then came to Vishnu and with His trident pierced the heart of the sow who so long had been behaving like an ordinary pig. Now, Vishnu came out of the sow body laughing aloud and returned to His own abode.

Thus God, gets limited, as it were, with the help of His own *Māyā*. His infinite compassion makes Him do this, for He wants to do good to the world. But we must remember that this self-forgetfulness is also His *Māyā*. It is just a game—a *lilā*. In reality He never forgets who He is. Had it not been so, He would have abused Shiva when the latter attacked Him. In this story we find that He leaves this world of name and form gladly because He never forgets His true nature. Why does not He forget His *svarupa*? Because He is *Māyādhisha*. He rules over *Māyā*. That is to say, *Māyā* is under His thumb. He is *Purusha*, the eternal, imperishable Principle, of the nature of Absolute Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. In short, He is divine Pure Consciousness (*Shuddha Caitanya*). That is why He never mistakes His own identity. Similar is His *Shakti* aspect. Kālī, Rādhā or Holy Mother Sarada Devi—all are manifestations of His illusive power. *Shakti* is inalienably rooted in Brahman and is ever active in Her work of creation, preservation and destruction.

The question is: Why man forgets God? Why do we fail to call upon Him all the time? What prevents us from doing so? The answer is that we have forgotten our true nature and got chained to a puny *aham* or 'I-ness'. The moment I get fettered by 'I-ness', that very instant I separate myself from my indivisible divine nature, and this is *Māyā*. Again, when this very 'I' yearns to know the real nature of God, that enquiring self is *Vidyāmāyā* or the *Māyā* of knowledge. The beginning of a struggle to transcend the puny ego and go back to our undivided, integrated existence with the help of this *Māyā* of knowledge is the real spiritual journey in search of immortality (*amritatva*).

As and when God feels intensely the human sufferings and out of compassion assumes a pure human body, we hear him say, 'May all of you be spiritually

awakened!' This great blessing shows us the way to awaken our divine conscious Self. In other words, this benediction is an attempt to help us regain our lost empire or our true identity we have forgotten, with the help of *Vidyāmāyā* or the *Māyā* of knowledge. This is nothing but the divine *lilā* of God when He appears as man.

In this context Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj says, 'When he (Sri Ramakrishna) prays or blesses us "Be you all illumined", the implication is that he wants to raise our declining consciousness upwards. Our present state of consciousness is worldly, hypnotized by *avidyā-māyā*, and always runs after sense pleasures; he wants to make it introspective and self-denying. The consciousness that is now inseparably mixed up with *anātmā* or non-self, he wants to draw it towards Ātman, the One eternal and imperishable substance' (See 'Sharanāgati' in *Bahurupe Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 38).

The spiritual practitioners or *sādhakas* pass many a sleepless night in meditation. They practise all kinds of austerities, forbearance and face innumerable hardship to regain or rediscover their true Self which is Pure Consciousness. Are not all these the results of Sri Ramakrishna's great blessing?

A new mould

Prior to the advent of Sri Ramakrishna there appeared many great personalities like Rammohun, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and others who sought to retrieve India from her rotten conditions and endless miseries. Indeed many eminent thinkers, scholars and kind-hearted persons made attempts to dispel the darkness that engulfed the then society and wanted to show us the path of light and redemption. They made efforts to redress the humiliations our womenfolk suffered at that time. They also had tried to drive away many social superstitions and improve the conditions of the countrymen in the light of

modern education. But Rammohun, Dayananda Saraswati and some other respectable persons, in order to show us the way of regeneration, were hell-bent on re-establishing Brahminism and Upanishadic religion in society. Although these attempts stirred the minds of a limited group of people, these were not enough for the entire society. In fact, neither they could give the mass a religion that would satisfy their heart, nor the path they charted could rejuvenate the society at large. *Dharma* or religion we had already and it contained many perennial truths. But the infinite potentials embedded in our age-old religion needed to be recast in a new mould, to be channelled in a new way to suit the needs of the present age. To prepare this kind of a shipshape royal road required the supreme wisdom that the ancient Rishis had. This wisdom was lacking in the religious prescriptions given by Rammohun and others who preceded Sri Ramakrishna. Naturally, how could the religion they professed remove the spiritual hunger of countless people of the entire world? Impossible!

The advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda was to fulfil that purpose, for they were endowed with the power of divine wisdom that welled from their direct transcendental experience. Who else but Sri Ramakrishna, who is capable of swimming in the ocean of Consciousness all the time, who remains ever united with his infinite nature in spite of dwelling in a limited body, who is the ground or substratum of everyone's consciousness, who always feels his oneness with everybody's life and heart belonging to all societies and religions, who is egoless, can remove the wants of humanity?

Swami Premeshananda, in another line of his song, says '*Premere tanu-atanu-ganjan*'. *Atanu-ganjan* means one who is absolutely pure and stainless. The common

people are limited by the constraints of birth and actions (*karma*). But when that Infinite Reality assumes the limitations of a human body, He remains all the same Infinite, in spite of appearing as a person. That is because he is a Divine Child, a God-man. Although he looks ordinary, he is the undisputed ruler of heaven. He is beyond limited knowledge and strength. That is why he knows fully well which part of the world is worst affected by disaster and the requirements of every society and how to remove their mental and spiritual poverty. He knows everything. It is said in the *Katha Upanishad*, '*Rupam rupam pratirupam vabhava*' (2.2.10). None knows so exhaustively about man as he does.

That is why the *dharma* or the spiritual ideals of Sri Ramakrishna have conquered the West through Swami Vivekananda almost immediately after his passing away. Vivekananda was Sri Ramakrishna's conduit, his alter ego. His spirit entered into Narendranath (Swamiji) and made this possible. Sri Ramakrishna happened to be '*atanu-ganjan*'—made of absolutely pure *sattva*. For this reason, he could not do lot of hard physical work. He used to regret often: 'Mother, Chaitanya Mahāprabhu walked on foot to preach God's name to every home and thus enlivened the mass; but I cannot do without carriage.' Indeed his body was so soft that while splitting a *luchi* (a thin bread made of flour and fried in butter) his fingers would occasionally get scratched and bleed! Therefore he knew his delicate frame would not be able to do all sorts of work; for that purpose he needed a strong and able-bodied receptacle, nourished by *dal* and *chapati*, who can stand the rigours of prolonged fasting, yet remain active, and who is not bound by the chains of *Māyā*. This chalice was none other than extremely powerful Narendranath Dutta who was born at Simulia in North Calcutta.

Therefore the advent of someone with tremendous capacity and power was absolutely essential for the dissemination of the kind of *dharma* and divine consciousness for which Sri Ramakrishna came. Thus the Master entered into his disciple, as if giving up the chariot of his corporeal body he seated himself on another chariot—the ‘Vivekananda Chariot’. And riding on that chariot he went to the West and gave his soul-stirring divine message. Frank Dvorak, the eminent painter got that message; so did the great writer Romain Rolland, Captain Sevier, the seeker after non-dual knowledge, Miss Dutcher, the aged American lady, to name but a few.

The religion of love

What are the special features of the *dharma* for the dissemination of which Ramakrishna and Vivekananda worked in India and abroad? First and foremost, this is the Religion of Love. They have not prescribed any specific rites and rituals and esoteric words of prayer. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated through his own life how to practise this religion. As a boy he was cheerful Gadadhar. Later we find him blissful and love personified. His ‘Mother’ is an idol, no doubt, but She is not stone-hearted. She is very much alive, vibrant and personification of Consciousness. She goes up to the temple-top to dry Her hair and dances around the temple in joy.

One day Sri Ramakrishna found his girlish, frolicsome Mother leaning on the high portico of the temple. The sight made him so anxious that he cried out—‘Mother, don’t move a little further or You will fall down.’

Sri Ramakrishna’s Mother is Consciousness Itself. Mantras and rituals do not matter much to Her. Sri Ramakrishna had the vision of this Mother by virtue of his love. As a priest of Goddess Bhavatārini, he

could not conduct Her formal worship for more than a few months. Why? Because an intense prayer welled up from the bottom of his heart—‘O Mother, show me Your true Divine nature; I am dying to know what You are really. You have appeared before Rāmprasād and Kamalākānta. Won’t You give me Your vision?’ To make this prayer fruitful, of course he put his life at stake. He vowed before the deity: ‘I shall kill myself in front of You if you do not reveal Yourself.’ Needless to say, Mother responded to this earnest prayer.

Thus, Sri Ramakrishna not only knew Kālī, but also practised Tantra and made known the nature of *Shakti* (the Primordial Energy). Also he practised Advaita (non-dual knowledge) under the guidance of Totapuri, a staunch Advaitic monk. But he did not stop there; he also gave his Guru something that the latter lacked and made him fulfilled.

This Totapuri was a *Māyāvadi* sannyasin. What does ‘māyāvadi’ mean? In the *Kathamrita*, Sri Ramakrishna, while explaining the term, says: ‘A man wanted to know the weight of the [bel] fruit. He separated the shell, the flesh, and the seeds. But can a man get the weight by weighing only the flesh? He must weigh flesh, shell and seeds together. At first it appears that the real thing in the fruit is the flesh, and not its seeds or shell. Then by reasoning you find that the shell, seeds, and flesh all belong to the fruit; the shell and seeds belong to the same thing that the flesh belongs to.’ (*Gospel*, p. 733)

That is to say, if one wants to attain comprehensive knowledge of Brahman, he has to accept *Māyā* or *Shakti* because *Nitya* or the Absolute and *Lilā* or the relative world are the two aspects of one and the same Reality. Totapuri at first, in spite of being a *brahmajñāni* (knower of Brahman), did not recognize this truth before he came

into contact with his disciple, Sri Ramakrishna.

Schopenhauer is the father of theism in the West. With the help of intellect, reasoning, scientific analysis and meditation he had gone a long way in unveiling many a subtle secret of the domain of energy. But as Brahman is much above our mind and intellect, such analysis can never take us to the desired goal. Nevertheless we cannot rule out the possibility that those who are exploring truth properly in the laboratories of science will some day get absorbed in meditation and attain the state of Paramahansa or be a father of a Paramahansa.

Sir C. V. Raman, the great Indian scientist, once went to Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and asked: 'Is it impossible for the scientists to know this Absolute Truth?' Abhedanandaji replied: 'Yes, they can. But mind you, God can't be investigated in the manner in which you probe and analyse gross, worldly truths. For that you have to follow a different method.'

What is that method? The method is to go beyond mind. The infinitely pure nature of Brahman cannot be reached with the help of mind and intellect. Human nature is ordinarily confined to the sphere of intellect. Brahman is realized when that intellect is purified. How is it purified? By giving up all desires. Our heart becomes pure and stainless when we become desireless.

Sri Ramakrishna had no ego, no 'I-ness'. As a result he was devoid of desires. When his Advaitic Guru saw him the first time, he asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Will you practise Vedanta? I see you are a fit candidate.' And what was Sri Ramakrishna's response? He replied, 'I know nothing. My Mother knows it all. Let me go and ask my

Mother.' Totapuri was amused to hear this apparently childish reply. So he just smiled. But later we find Totapuri, who never spent more than three nights at a stretch anywhere, spent eleven months at Dakshineswar. Living in Sri Ramakrishna's company he was forced to accept the Divine Mother. At the same time he realized that Brahman and *Shakti* are one and the same; *Lilā* (the relative) is as true as the *Nitya* (the Absolute). Brahman and Kālī are inseparable. Sri Ramakrishna, the disciple, thus nourished even his Guru spiritually.

The religion that Sri Ramakrishna has given us is the religion of love. He has opened our eyes that we can directly approach the Divine Mother of the universe and make an earnest plea to Her: 'Mother, why should you not reveal Yourself to me? I am Your child.' The moment we shall place this demand to Her lovingly and with utmost yearning, She will reveal Herself instantly. The formless Infinite will then become finite, as it were, for our sake. Again, some day, out of grace, it is She who will lift us from the finite realm to the Infinite. It is possible for him who attains the vision of God to have the knowledge of Pure Consciousness or Brahman which is beyond three *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*). We all aspire to attain this state. This is verily the goal of human life. At the point when we are endowed with this unrestricted vision free from *Māyā*, then all the imaginary differences of 'I' and 'you' disappear. Then remains Brahman alone. Sri Ramakrishna had taken up human form only to make us aware of this truth. The poet therefore sings—'You conjured up a human body out of *Māyā*'—'*Māyāi dharile mānabakāi*'. For earnest spiritual seekers, Sri Ramakrishna's greatest boon is 'May you all be spiritually awakened!' ■

* Swami Vamanananda is Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Baranagore.