

Various Facets of Vivekananda

Swami Chetanananda

Sri Ramakrishna brought Narendranath Datta (Swami Vivekananda) to the world to preach his message. He knew Narendra's true nature and made remarks about him, such as: "Narendra was one of the seven great sages who were in a perpetual state of meditation in the divine kingdom." "He is that ancient sage Narayana, in human form." "Narendra is a great soul, perfect in meditation."

One day Keshab Chandra Sen, Vijay Krishna Goswami, and other celebrated leaders of the Brahma Samaj were seated with the Master. Young Narendra was also present. In an exalted mood, the Master looked on Keshab and Vijay with an affectionate gaze. After Keshab and Vijay had left, the Master said: "Keshab possesses one power, which has made him world famous, but Narendra is endowed with eighteen such powers. I have seen the divine light in Keshab and Vijay burning like a candle flame, but in Narendra it shines with the radiance of the sun, dispelling the last vestiges of ignorance and delusion."

Narendra considered himself unworthy of such praise and vehemently protested to the Master: "Sir, why do you say such things? People will think you're mad if you talk like that! Keshab is famous all over the world. Vijay is a saint. I am an insignificant schoolboy. How can you speak of us in the same breath? Please, I beg of you, never say such things again!" Pleased, the Master responded: "But what can I do about it, my child? You don't suppose I'd say such things of my own accord? It was Mother who showed me the truth

about you, and so I had to say it. Mother has never lied to me.”

One day Sri Ramakrishna took Narendra to the Panchavati and told him: “Look, I possess the eight occult powers. But I decided long ago that I would never use them, and I find no need for them. But you will have to preach religion and do many other things. I have decided to give those powers to you. Please accept them.”

Narendra asked in reply, “Sir, will they help me to realize God?”

When the Master explained that they might help to some extent in preaching religion but would not help him to attain God-realization, he declined those powers. Swamiji later said that the Master was extremely pleased by his refusal. However, before leaving his body, Sri Ramakrishna empowered Narendra and said: “Today I have given you my all and I have become a beggar. With this power you are to do much work for the good of the world.”

Much later, someone asked Swami Saradananda what 18 powers that Swamiji possessed, and he replied that the Master had not told him anything about them. It is possible that the powers are the same listed in the Bhagavata (Book 11, chapter 15), where Krishna describes 18 powers to Uddhava:

The sages, who are expert in yoga, have said there are eighteen *siddhis*, or supernatural powers. Of these, eight *siddhis* originate from Me and the remaining ten emerge from *sattva* qualities. *Anima, mahima, laghima, prapti, prakamya, ishita, vashita* and *kamavasaita* -- these eight are my intrinsic powers.

Freedom from hunger or thirst, the ability to hear and see from afar, speed like mind, the ability to take any form and

enter anyone's body, to die according to one's wish, to watch the *devas* playing with the *apsaras*, to achieve whatever one resolves, and to have access to anywhere -- these ten siddhis emerge due to the preponderance of *sattva*.

In addition to these eighteen siddhis, there are eight lesser powers, such as knowledge of the past, present, and future; the capacity to endure heat and cold; the ability to read others' minds, and overcoming the effects of fire, sun, light, water, and poison. My devotees are endowed with these qualities naturally."¹

Moreover, in the Yoga Sutras Patanjali mentioned in the chapter on Powers that yogis can achieve various kinds of occult powers by practising *samyama* on concentration, meditation, and samadhi. Like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda considered occult powers to be obstacles to spiritual life.

Power or energy is one, but it manifests in many ways: for example, the same electricity is behind the function of a light bulb, a fan, a computer, and so on. Similarly, the divine power in Vivekananda manifested in many ways. Seldom is it found that so many talents are manifested in one person. Sharat Chandra Chakrabarty, a disciple of Swamiji, wrote: "In knowledge, Swamiji was Shankara; in large-heartedness, Buddha; in devotion, Narada; in the knowledge of Brahman, Shukadeva; in debate, Brihaspati; in beauty, Kamadeva; in heroism, Arjuna; and in the knowledge of scriptures, Vyasadeva."

Swamiji was a man of wisdom, an ideal worker, a yogi, and a devotee; he was a monk, an ascetic, a sage, and a mystic; he was a leader, a orator, a poet, an artist, a writer, a conversationalist, a debater, a singer, a musician, and a humorist; he was a philosopher, a linguist, a educationist, a patriot, a humanist, and a reformer. According to Swami Turiyananda, Swamiji was the perfect man.

We never get tired of hearing about a person whom we love. The more we hear about our beloved, the more we wish to know. This is a sign of love. In this article I shall depict a few incidents that reveal various facets of Vivekananda. Some of these anecdotes were published, some were hidden in old magazines, and some were in the unpublished diaries of monks. These lesser-known incidents must come to light so that we can have a complete picture of Swamiji's gigantic personality.

Swamiji wanted to see how people manifest their true greatness through little actions, such as how they eat or wear their clothes, or how they treat their servants. A meek, cowardly person can also be a hero when in the limelight. A great person should demonstrate greatness in each and every deed -- big or small. In this account, we will chronicle some incidents from Swamiji's life that seem insignificant but in which his divinity and love for humanity are amply revealed.

A few years before he gave up his body, Swamiji began to sing his swan song. In 1900, he told an American devotee in San Francisco, "See, I have to take birth again."

"Why Swamiji?" asked the devotee

"Because," he replied, "I have fallen in love with human beings."

This statement arose from the inmost feeling of Vivekananda --

Narayana in human form, a universal man, and a lover of humankind.

Narendra's Sadhana and Siddhi (Perfection)

Swamiji's brother Mahendranath reminisced:

The main goal of Naren's spiritual disciplines was not to obtain occult powers but to attain control over such powers. He sought to become completely detached from the objective world. At that time his thought was: "Who will win? I, the pure consciousness, or you, the objective world? The world cannot overpower me, I will conquer it."

Girish Ghosh once told me that Naren said to him: "Maya is trying to overpower me and I am trying to overpower her. There cannot be any compromise. Either maya will die or I will die. Both of us can't exist together."

Girish Babu later said, 'What lofty ideas Naren had! What firm determination! I have never heard such things. He wanted to trample the world of maya and establish his real Self over it. This is an original idea! Only Naren can say such a thing, as he is a man of strong determination. But not many people liked his ideas. Some criticized him.'

This was Naren's mood in the first stage of his sadhana: Acquire power and preserve it in a deep recess of the heart. This was the attitude of Naren, which many of his brother disciples deeply imbibed.

Once Naren lamented to Girish: "I can forget everything, even the body, except that crazy brahmin of Dakshineswar. He has

become my obstacle. If I do not forget him, I can't have the supreme knowledge of Brahman, which is beyond name and form." Girish Babu was dumbfounded as he was a great devotee of the Master.

On another occasion Girish Babu said: "What is Naren saying? He will forsake his guru!" Then he continued: "I can't even imagine what a lofty plane Naren had ascended to! He is saying that the crazy brahmin of Dakshineswar is the hindrance to his goal. This kind of attitude is possible only for Naren, not for others."²

Service and Sadhana

One day during a conversation a gentleman pointed out that Swamiji placed great emphasis on renunciation. Swami Turiyananda replied: "Yes, it is true. But he also initiated *seva dharma* (service to humanity). If you want to accept Swamiji's ideas, take him in totality and not partially. There are some people who do not want to work at all. Sri Ramakrishna used to say about them: 'Put readymade butter in their mouth.' These people want to lead an easygoing life. Such people cannot make progress even after taking monastic vows. They remain in the same place. One cannot do good to others without sacrificing one's own life. This requires unbounded compassion and patience. One needs good health to serve others, otherwise one feels angry and frustrated.

"Swamiji was a man of *sattva guna*. Who else had so many noble qualities? It is not hearsay. I lived with him and saw for myself. He sat for meditation at nine o'clock at night and got up at five in the morning, and then went to bathe. Mosquitoes covered his body in such a large numbers that it seemed as if he were wearing a blanket. He looked like Lord Shiva

when meditating. These are the signs of sattvic qualities -- full control over the senses and the mind and complete tranquility. He observed that India would not make any progress without developing rajas, activity. So he introduced *nishkama karma* (unselfish action). Thus rajas is blended with sattva.

“It takes great effort to serve the common people. One must go to the level of those people and then lift them slowly to a higher plane.”³

Guru and Disciple

Swami Shuddhananda recalled: “It is extremely difficult to build one’s life according to Sri Ramakrishna’s ideals. So the compassionate Master said to ordinary people like us: ‘I have done sixteen parts, you do one sixteenth of that.’ This reminds me of an incident that took place between Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. Swamiji, then Narendranath, used to visit Sri Ramakrishna regularly. Narendra had a stylish haircut. Without saying anything Sri Ramakrishna pointed out his foppishness. Narendra responded in turn by pointing at Sri Ramakrishna’s fancy sandals, his water pipe, and his mattress and bolster. Sri Ramakrishna then told him: ‘Listen, I have practised severe austerities to realize God. If you can do even one-sixteenth part of that, I will make you sleep on a fancy bedstead with several mattresses.’

Inspired by the Master’s life, Swamiji practised sadhana and austerities for many years. When Swamiji returned from America, after spreading the message of Vedanta in the West, his Western disciples gave him a spring bed and soft mattresses. (These are still in his room at Belur Math.) While using that bed, Swamiji would remember the Master’s words and relate

them to the monks while shedding tears.

While replying to the address at his Calcutta reception, he said, referring to his guru Sri Ramakrishna: 'If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped anyone in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his. But if there have been curses falling from my lips, if there has been hatred coming out of me, it is all mine and not his. All that has been weak has been mine, and all that has been lifegiving, strengthening, pure, and holy, has been his inspiration, his words, and he himself.... Judge him not through me. I am only a weak instrument. Let not his character be judged by seeing me. It was so great that if I or any other of his disciples spent hundreds of lives, we could not do justice to a millionth part of what he really was.'⁴

Swami Vimalananda recalled: "While Sri Ramakrishna was suffering from his last illness, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar had diagnosed the disease to be cancer of the throat. He told the disciples that it was an infectious disease and advised them to be careful when they cared for. Some of the young disciples became a little nervous. Swamiji noticed this. He went into the room where the Master was lying, looked at the vessel containing the discharges of mucous and pus, took it up and drank from it in front of the other disciples of the Master. From that day the thought of infection never again troubled their minds."⁵

Golden Memories

Swami Nirlepananda recalled: "I remember that old abandoned house in Baranagore that was notorious as a haunted house. In fact, Swami

Turiyananda told me that he had seen a ghost there. Narendra would call the indwellers of the Baranagore Math *dana*, or demons, who did not care for the world of the senses. If you wish you can meditate on Narendra, the leader of that group. Imagine him as a shaven-headed, well-built, lively, beautiful, ochre-clad sannyasin (not as in his American picture showing stylish haircut). Even the poet Kalidasa, the favourite son of Saraswati, would be incapable of describing his beauty with appropriate words. It seemed as if he was a creation of an eminent artist. His large lotus-like eyes were beyond comparison. Once referring to Swamiji's eyes, Swami Saradananda said, 'How can I describe those eyes?' and then remained silent. One disciple said, 'When Swamiji slept in Balaram Basu's hall, I saw that his eyelids were not fully closed. His eyes remained partly open, like Lord Shiva's.'"6

"I had the good fortune of seeing Swamiji a couple of times at Belur Math. I found him to be a very reserved person. The members of the Math were afraid of him. One evening we went to Belur Math by boat and Pulin was singing for us in the living room. But the music stopped when we heard Swamiji coming downstairs. We heard from the Master's disciples that Swamiji had a very deep and serious personality. While walking on the bank of the Ganges, he began to chant in his melodious voice the invocation of the Gayatri mantra -- *ayahi varade devi* -- 'O adorable goddess Gayatri, do Thou reveal Thyself to us.' Then he came under the mango tree in the courtyard and went into samadhi. Swami Premananda and other disciples were extremely concerned. Swamiji's eyes were as red as hibiscus and his steps were faltering as if he were drunk. Gradually that mood dissipated and he paced in the courtyard for a long time. Sometimes he

said something loudly. We observed him from a distance.

“When he was in a good mood he was very warm and friendly; even animals would flock to him. He had a magnetic personality. One can rightly say about him: when he laughed, everyone laughed; and when he cried, everyone cried. Once he instructed me to be self-reliant, saying: ‘Do not take service from anybody. Do your own work. Know for certain, no task is insignificant.’”⁷

Swamiji’s Empathy for Others

Swami Vimalananda writes: “While living in the Baranagore Math, Swamiji was taken ill, and it was necessary in the interest of his health to leave the city. His brother monks, set upon restoring Swamiji to health, collected a few rupees to pay his passage to Shimultala, about 200 miles northwest of Calcutta. One day as Swamiji was going to eat his meal, he saw some poor people anxiously waiting at his door. Upon enquiry, he came to know that they were waiting for the water that the rice was cooked in to satisfy their hunger. Swamiji immediately gave his meal to them and returned to Calcutta.

“Swamiji could not bear to see others suffering. One day Swamiji had to go to the other end of the city on some business. He took with him his tram fare, probably an anna, and left home. As he was about to step into the car, a man in distress came to him and asked for help. Swamiji immediately gave him what little money he had -- which in those days of suffering meant a good deal -- and walked to his destination.”⁸

Swamiji’s Humility

Prabodh asked Brother Ramlal (Sri Ramakrishna's nephew): "Where were you at the time of Swamiji's death? It is said that blood came out of his nose."

Brother Ramlal replied: "No, I was not present at the time but I heard of his death. I don't remember that he had any bleeding from the nose. I visited Belur Math four or five days before Swamiji passed away. The boat that I took was about to capsize. My clothes were soaked by the turbulent water. On reaching the Math, I found Swamiji sitting in a chair under a mango tree, talking to the devotees. When he saw me, he got up and bowed. He said, '*Guruvat guruputreshu, guruvat tatsuteshu.*' -- (Look at the son of the guru as the guru.) He also asked his disciples to bow down to me. I said, 'Practice is better than preaching.' Then I went upstairs with Swamiji. He told his disciples to bring some dry clothes and asked me to change from my wet ones. He then asked them to make a bed for me. They made a bed for me in an adjacent room. Swamiji said to me, 'Brother, please come with me.' He held my hand and took me to his room. He made me sit on his spring bed and asked me to lie down. I said: 'No, no, they have made my bed in the other room. I will be comfortable there.' Despite my protests, Swamiji said, 'No, no, please take rest here.' Then he held my arm, made me lie down in his bed, and began to massage my feet. I asked, 'Swamiji, what are you doing?' I tried to dissuade him but he said: 'Keep quiet or else I will hit you. Why should you be afraid? Brother, you have done so many things for me -- you have made my bed, set my mosquito net, prepared the water pipe for me. How shall I ever be able to repay my debt?' He told me all this with great humility."⁹

Swamiji's Truthfulness

Brother Ramlal told the devotees: "Once when Swamiji was leaving Dakshineswar, he told the Master that he would visit him again the following Wednesday. The Master asked, 'What time?' and Swamiji replied, 'At three o'clock.' The following Wednesday, Swamiji arrived at Dakshineswar at two o'clock and waited outside the gate. He did not come to see the Master then, as he had promised to see him at three o'clock. The Master was talking to devotees in his room. When he was informed that Swamiji was waiting outside the gate, he asked the devotees to wait, and he walked towards the gate. When he saw Swamiji, he said: 'Hello, Naren. When did you come? Why are you standing there? What happened?' Swamiji replied: 'Sir, I promised you that I would come at three o'clock, but I left home earlier and when I arrived here I found that it was two o'clock. For the sake of truth I am waiting here.' The Master was very pleased to hear that. They remained there talking for some time, and then at three o'clock Swamiji went with the Master to his room."¹⁰

Swamiji's Lullaby

Swami Vireswarananda recounted this story: "When Swamiji was travelling in western India, he was the guest of a lawyer in Mahabaleswaram. Now this lawyer had a baby that cried so much that no one could sleep at night. One day Swamiji said to the parents: 'Well, will you give the baby to me? I shall take care of it tonight.' The mother said: 'Well, Swamiji, I do not object, but how will you keep it from crying? When I am not able to stop its crying, will you be able to do so?' Then Swamiji said, 'Let me try.' So the baby was handed over to Swamiji. Swamiji put the

baby on his lap and began to meditate. He meditated the whole night and the baby did not cry. I have no doubt that it kept silent due to Swamiji's meditation."¹¹

Shiva as the Guru

Sharat Chandra Chakrabarty was a great devotee of Nag Mahashay and later wrote his biography. One day he begged Nag Mahashay to initiate him, but he refused, saying: "I am not a brahmin. A non-brahmin is not supposed to initiate a brahmin. You are a brahmin and scholar and I am an illiterate man. How can I initiate you?" Thus Nag Mahashay refused Sharat Babu. One day Nag Mahashay went to the market and Sharat Babu followed him. They reached a spot where the road was narrow and cane bushes were on both sides. In that secluded place Sharat Babu held Nag Mahashay's feet and begged for initiation. Nag Mahashay said: "Don't lose heart. Lord Shiva Himself will be your guru." Overwhelmed with joy Sharat Babu understood that Nag Mahashay had given him a boon, and he would definitely get Lord Shiva as his guru. He had complete faith in Nag Mahashay's words because he was a man of truth. From then on Sharat Babu never pestered Nag Mahashay for initiation, instead he waited for the right time.

In April 1897 Swami Vivekananda was staying at the Alambazar monastery after returning from the West. Sharat Babu went to see Swamiji and found him resting in his room. He sat down to wait for Swamiji, but all of a sudden he saw that Lord Shiva was lying where Swamiji had been. He could not believe his eyes at first, but as he stared at the figure he could not doubt what he saw. He then remembered the boon Nag Mahashay had

given him. Swamiji initiated him on 1 May 1897.¹²

Broad-Minded Vivekananda

Sharat Chandra Chakrabarty wrote in a Bengali article titled *Avataravad* ("The Doctrine of Incarnation"):

Will a separate sect come into existence following the teachings of the present avatar Sri Ramakrishna? Swamiji addressed this topic at Lahore in 1897, as my brother disciple Swami Shuddhananda told me. During the course of his discussion on various religious issues with Lala Hansaraj, the leader of the Arya Samaj, Swamiji said: "Sir, you emphasize that there can be only one interpretation of the Vedas, which I consider a kind of fanaticism. I know it helps to spread a sect rapidly. Again, a personality cult spreads faster than scriptural dogma. I have the power to bring one-third of the population of the world under the banner of Sri Ramakrishna, but I have no intention of doing that, because that would counteract my guru's great message of harmony: 'As many faiths, so many paths.' A new sect would originate in India."

Swamiji was deeply concerned that a new sect might come into being in the name of Sri Ramakrishna, so after establishing the Belur Math, he did not install a picture of the Master on the altar. The OM symbol was printed on a piece of silk cloth and was worshipped there. However, one night Swamiji had a vision, and on the next day he installed the Master's picture on the altar, which is still worshipped in Belur Math (1921).

Swamiji was apprehensive that a new sect might crop up in India in the name the Master, who did not promote any sect. But after closely

associating with the Master's disciples for the last thirty years, I realize that the spirit of harmony of religions and the nonsectarian idea are fully alive in the Order.¹³

In the Background

Swami Akhilananda told this story to Dr. Hilary Holt, an American devotee: After one of Swamiji's lectures at Harvard University, Professor William James was walking behind two undergraduates who had just attended the lecture and overheard the following conversation:

First student: "I was really disappointed with today's lecture."

Second student: "Why?"

First student: "Well, we were told that this man was so great and that his ideas were so profound."

Second student: "What makes you say his ideas aren't profound?"

First student: "Because I understood every word he said."¹⁴

In a Cheerful Mood

Swami Atulananda recalled: "Once in London, Swamiji was smoking a big cigar. Some young men watched him and made comments: 'What sort of yogi is he? Even now he is a slave to smoking.' Swamiji overheard them. One of the youths approached Swamiji and asked him, 'What is the name of the cigar?' Swamiji replied, 'Well, don't you know a slave should not utter the name of his master?'"¹⁵

Swami Akhilananda said: "Swamiji delivered a lecture on yoga at the Ethical Society, but he did not mention anything about *pranayama* (breath control) or dietary restrictions. During the question-and-answer session, a

lady asked him, 'Swami, what do you think about breathing and eating?' Swamiji replied, 'I assure you, Madame, that I am in favour of both.'" ¹⁶

Swami Akhandananda said: "Once someone asked Swamiji in Rishikesh, 'To which monastic sect of Shankara do you belong -- Giri or Puri?' Swamiji replied, '*Kachuri* (spicy stuffed fried bread).'" ¹⁷

Two Lost Memories

A student from San Francisco recorded: "Swamiji's lecture was an intellectual and spiritual feast -- we seemed to be transported to a higher region of thought and feeling.

"A part of the afternoon was given to answering questions, some of which were somewhat trivial, but the Swami always answered with unfailing courtesy.

"The subject of diet was being discussed when a student asked, 'Swami, what about eating onions?' 'Well,' answered the Swami, 'onions are not the best diet for a spiritual student, but how fond I was of them when I was a boy! I used to eat them and then walk up and down in the open air to get them from my breath.'

"The last half-hour of the afternoon was devoted to meditation and the Swami became completely lost to the external world. His presence seemed to radiate a divine influence which permeated our very being. We went home, our feet scarcely touching the ground. It seemed as if the Swami had given us to drink of the divine nectar."

An English lady who took Swamiji to see Napoleon's tomb in Paris in 1900, said: "I see him now leaning over and looking down upon Napoleon's tomb and saying, 'A great man, a great force! Shiva! Shiva!'

And at St. Peter's in Rome, he said, 'This is splendid!' And when I said, amazed, 'You, Swamiji, like all these ceremonies?' He replied, 'If you love a personal God, then give Him all your best incense, flowers, jewels, and silk. There is nothing good enough.' A great wonder it was, knowing Swamiji."¹⁸

A Great Lover of Humanity

Sister Christine recalled: "His love and compassion were reflected in so many small incidents even in America. Once he started taking French lessons from a gentleman. When I asked him why, Swamiji said: 'He is very poor. This is the only way M.L. can keep from starving.' On another occasion, thrusting a ten dollar bill into the hand of another, he said, 'Give this to S..., do not say it is from me.'

"A member of the Vedanta Society was accused of juggling with the Vedanta Society's money. When Swamiji came to know about this, he said, 'I will make good any deficiency.' Then the matter was dropped and he said to one of the others, 'I do not know where I could have found the money to make up the loss, but I could not let the poor suffer.'

"Another time a woman was using Swamiji's name and reputation to get a following and making some money from the newcomers. When Swamiji was informed, he said, 'Poor thing! Poor thing! Shiva, Shiva!' With this 'Shiva! Shiva!' he put the matter out of his mind. We had noticed that when something disturbed him, after allowing himself to be troubled by it for a few minutes, his 'Shiva! Shiva!' seemed to end it. We knew that he had reminded himself of his true nature, in which everything of a disquieting nature was dissolved."¹⁹

Saga of Olden Days

Swami Akhandananda told us this incident on 26 September 1933, during Durga Puja at Belur Math: "It was Swamiji who started Durga puja at Belur Math. He spent fifteen thousand rupees of his own for it. He wanted animal sacrifice as a part of the ritual, but Holy Mother objected. Later, when Swamiji was ill, a doctor told him, 'Swamiji, a blood vessel in one of your eyes is completely ruptured.' Swamiji said, 'I sacrificed this eye to Mother Durga during the worship.' Thus he sacrificed one of his lotus-like eyes to the Divine Mother.

On 8 December 1930 Swami Shivananda said: "Swamiji used to tell us, 'If you find any fault or anything wrong in me, abandon me right away. The Master's work will not stop for a single person. Nobody is indispensable. He can get his job done even through an insignificant person.'"

Swami Subodhananda reminisced: "One day Swamiji was absorbed in reading a book lying on his stomach. It was dinner time and the bell was rung. But who would go to call him? Nobody had the courage to disturb him. I decided to go ahead. Slowly I tiptoed near him, noted the page number, and suddenly closed the book. Swamiji was furious and came rushing to punch me. He said, 'Rascal! Why did you close the book? How shall I find the page that I was reading?' Then I opened that page and told him, 'Swamiji, let us go for dinner. The chapati is getting cold.' He angrily said, "Let it be." I said: 'No, Swamiji. Everyone is waiting for you. Moreover, it is too difficult to heat the food again.' He then came to the dining hall. He said to his brother disciples: 'You did not have the guts to

call me, so you sent Khoka [Subodhananda]?’

“I used to handle the monastery’s cash at that time. Swamiji received a lot of donations from America and England. He was so generous that whoever would come to him for help, he never refused.”

Swami Nirbhayananda recalled: “Whenever Swamiji had his meal, he ate little but liked to have several items. He always shared his food with others. If someone did something wrong and then begged forgiveness, he would calm down immediately. He always preferred to be neat and clean.”

On 7 February 1933 in the Belur Math visitor’s room, Swami Paramananda reminisced: “Once Swami Brahmananda was suffering from malaria and Swamiji was very anxious about him. Seldom can one see such love for one’s brother disciples. He would candidly praise Maharaj, saying: ‘Rakhal is the best amongst us. He has patience like Bhismadeva.’”²⁰

Swamiji’s Prophecy

Swami Santoshananda recounted this story: “I used to visit Belur Math after lunch. It was probably one day in 1916 that I went to the Math and found Swamis Shivananda and Premananda sitting on a bench in the western veranda of the Math building. Generally after lunch the senior swamis would share stories of the Master and Swamiji to the devotees. In the course of the conversation, Swami Premananda said, ‘One day Swamiji was seated here and told me: “Look Baburam, I can see what will happen to India in the next four to five hundred years.” I said, “Wonderful! My goodness, we cannot see what is going to happen even after four-five days and you have seen four-five hundred years!”’

“Swami Shivananda remarked: ‘Four to five days? I do not know what

will happen after four minutes -- even the next moment.' Swami Shivananda pointed his finger towards a room in the north and said, 'One day Swamiji was seated there. He patted his thigh and made this prediction: "Look, the Japanese civilization is borrowed from the West, which will not last long. China, which is in deep slumber now under the influence of opium, will rise soon."'"²¹

Sister Christine reminisced: "Swamiji said: 'Europe is on the edge of a volcano. Unless the fires are extinguished by a flood of spirituality, it will blow up.' This of Europe in 1895 when it was prosperous and at peace. Twenty years later came the explosion!"²²

In 1897 in Madras Swamiji mentioned in his lecture titled 'The Work Before Us': "The whole of the Western world is on a volcano which may burst tomorrow, go to pieces tomorrow."²³

Later one day, Swamiji told Sharat Chakrabarty: "The Kali whom you worship, I saw that Kali in the West sitting in the mouth of a canon."²⁴ After this prediction, Europe suffered two world wars.

The Infinite in the Finite

[This section contains excerpts from an unpublished letter dated 23 June 1928 of Swamiji's disciple Swami Shuddhananda to Swami Ashokananda (the editor of Prabuddha Bharata at the time).]

The Bengali gentleman whom you referred to in your letter is Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay. In 1912 when I was in Varanasi, I went to invite him to give a lecture on Swamiji at Advaita Ashrama. He told me this story:

"I used to visit Sri Ramakrishna and knew Swamiji well from that time

on. Once there was a discussion with him on how the Infinite can exist in the finite. In reply Swamiji said that this truth could be realized only through sadhana. Then in the later part of 1897, when Swamiji visited Lahore after returning from America, he stayed with Nagendra Nath Gupta, the editor of the *Tribune*. I was the sub-editor of that paper. To understand the truth of religion, I explored Islam, Arya Samaj, and other religious sects. Swamiji was very fond of me and every morning he would call for me, saying humorously, 'Come Kali Babu, let's take Khoda's (the Lord's) name.'

"One morning when Swamiji called for me, I asked him, 'Swamiji, do you remember when we were with the Master, we had a discussion about how the Infinite could be in the finite?' He said: 'Of course I do. I learned a technique from an American in Philadelphia through which I can demonstrate this theme in a practical way.' I pleaded with Swamiji to show me, but he said, 'I am not feeling well now. But let me give it a try.' Then he sat for meditation for a while and held my hand for a minute. I had the following vision:

"I felt as if I were flying over a vast ocean. I was flying for ages after ages through rain and thunderstorms. I was not aware of how long I was moving that way and finally I got exhausted. As I started looking for a shelter, I found a raft. I boarded it and it took me to Dakshineswar where I saw Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees."

The purport of this vision was that the experience of a long period took place within one minute.²⁵

A Recollection

Brahmachari Praneshkumar wrote: "During the Vivekananda festival at Lahore, Gokulchand Narang, the principal of D.A.V. College, gave an inspiring lecture in Hindi. He told me this new story of Swamiji: Narang said that in 1900 when Swamiji came to Lahore and gave lectures, he was then a college student and a volunteer. The lecture was arranged in the Town Hall of Lahore. He and his two friends went to escort Swamiji half an hour before the lecture. Reaching his host's home they found that Swamiji was in deep sleep. They did not dare to wake him up. After waiting anxiously for about twenty minutes, they saw Swamiji suddenly got up, went to the bathroom, then put on his ochre robe, and began to fix his turban. Then an English gentleman knelt down to tie Swamiji's shoelaces. Narang felt embarrassed seeing an Englishman tying the shoelaces of an Indian; he rushed to tie Swamiji's shoes. But Swamiji stopped him, saying: "No, no. Just see, if you are worthy, even an Englishman can tie the laces of a native." When they reached the venue with Swamiji, only a couple of minutes were left for the beginning of the meeting. They felt as if there was an in-built alarm clock in Swamiji. His punctuality and love for his countrymen were truly remarkable."²⁶

In Belur Math

Swami Ambikananda recalled: "I was then fourteen or fifteen years old and would visit Belur Math regularly. I noticed that Swamiji used to lie down on a cot under the mango tree. One day he asked me, 'Can you massage my feet?' When I started giving him a massage, he said: 'What kind of massage is this? Don't you have any strength in your body?' I said, 'No, I do not have that much strength.' Swamiji asked, 'Don't you eat

sufficient rice?’

“On another occasion, Swamiji was taking a stroll along the bank of the Ganges. He was wearing socks and hunting shoes, a loin cloth and a shirt, and smoking his hubble-bubble. I was with him. Suddenly he looked towards Dakshineswar and became motionless. Dumbfounded, I looked directly at his face and stood by his side. After some time he came back to his normal state. He then said: ‘What happened? Nobody gave me tobacco?’ Someone prepared a smoke for him? It seemed he was remembering those olden days.

“Swami Brahmananda was very fond of gardening and Swamiji had several pets, including a goat, a dog, a duck, a crane. Whenever the animals strayed into the flower garden, Swamiji and Maharaj would have a friendly fight. Maharaj drew the boundary and said, ‘This is your side and this is mine. Your goat should not enter my garden.’ It was hilarious. Swamiji used to lie on his camp-cot in the courtyard and the goat would jump up on it. When his pets roamed around the Math, it looked like a passing regiment. With the ringing of the bell at mealtimes, they used to make a beeline and wait in front of the kitchen for food. Swamiji used to sing, ‘Let’s go to the city of Varanasi.’ and his pet goat Matru would jump in joy as if she was dancing to her master’s tune.”²⁷

A Knower of Brahman Becomes Brahman

Swamiji was truly a phenomenon. He looked like a human being but in fact he was a knower of Brahman. His true nature radiated through his words and deeds.

Vijaynath Majumdar recalled: “One Sunday I went to Belur Math after

visiting Dakshineswar. I asked Swamiji, 'Maharaj, what is the duty of mankind?' He replied, 'Not doing anything.' I did not understand him. He said: 'You didn't understand? It is the nature of a man always to do something; he cannot help it. But when a man attains the knowledge that the duty of mankind is not to do anything, he is then capable of doing *nishkama karma*, selfless action. It is not possible for him to work in order to enjoy the results of his actions. Always tread the path to Brahman. Meditate on Brahman only. This is the duty of mankind.'"²⁸

Brahmachari Ram Maharaj told this story to Swami Bodhatmananda in Almora: "One day, I went to Belur Math. Swamiji was trying to milk his goat Matru, but he was having difficulty because its udder was hanging low. He told me, 'Hey dumbbell, what are you looking at? Lift this goat's rear legs.' I obeyed him. He milked the goat as if he was pumping something. Having finished, he said, 'Did you feel bad because I called you dumbbell? Don't mind. That is only a name. Look, names and forms are all false. Brahman alone is the truth.'" Swamiji's teaching penetrated into Ram Maharaj's mind.²⁹

Vivekananda as a Worshipper

[Swami Bodhananda told Swami Siddheswarananda these stories in 1924 when the former was in Ramakrishna Math, Madras. Swami Bodhananda was the head of the Vedanta Society of New York, from 1912 to 1950. Swami Siddheswarananda founded the Vedanta Society in France in 1937 and breathed his last in 1957. Swami Chetanananda discovered this account in Swami Siddheswarananda's personal papers in Paris. -- Editor, Udbodhan]

Sometimes Swamiji was in an exalted mood. Bodhananda, a disciple of Vivekananda, recalled: "Once Swamiji said that he would do the worship of Sri Ramakrishna that day. So all of us went to watch Swamiji do it. We were curious to see how he would perform the ritual. First, he took his seat as the worshipper in the usual way and meditated. We meditated too. After a pretty long time we sensed that someone was moving around us. I opened my eyes to see who it was. It was Swamiji. He got up and took the tray of flowers meant to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna. But instead of placing them before the Lord, he came to us, dabbed the flowers with sandal paste, and placed one on the head of each disciple.

"Considered from the ordinary traditional standpoint, this was a blasphemous act. Imagine flowers meant for the Lord, offered by Swamiji to his disciples! Generally after the worship service, the leftover flowers are set aside to be thrown away. But instead of doing this, Swamiji approached the altar and offered what remained in the tray before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna. He then carried out the usual rites. Then he indicated that the time had come for the food offering; so we all got up to leave the room. It is a custom in India that during the food offering no one should be in the shrine except the worshipper. From outside we heard Swamiji saying, addressing Sri Ramakrishna, "Friend, please eat!" Then he came out of the shrine and closed the door. His eyes were bloodshot with emotion."

Bodhananda later explained the significance of Swamiji's manner of worship: "Swamiji was not actually worshipping the disciples. In placing a flower on each of our heads, he was really offering each flower at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna in each disciple. Thereby he awakened his presence in us. That presence took different aspects in each disciple. Some were devotional;

others had the jnana [knowledge] aspect predominant. By his act of worship, Swamiji awakened the Divine in us. The remaining flowers were not in any way defiled. The same divine presence that Swamiji saw in the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna on the altar, he also saw in his disciples; and at the altar he offered the remaining flowers. Lastly, Swamiji's relation to his Chosen Deity was that of a friend. That is why, in offering the food, he addressed Sri Ramakrishna by that term."³⁰

Lord Forgive Me

Swami Shuddhananda witnessed the following incident himself. He told this story to Swami Prabhavananda, and the latter recounted this incident in Hollywood on 24 November 1973: "One afternoon Swamiji was giving a class on Panini's Sanskrit grammar. When it was time for the vesper service, Swami Premananda came and said: 'Hello, boys, it is time for the vesper service. Please come to the shrine.' Swamiji angrily told him, 'Is not this class also worship of Sri Ramakrishna?' Without saying a word Swami Premananda left and performed Sri Ramakrishna's *Arati* alone. Afterwards, Swamiji went alone to the shrine and started striking his head on the marble altar. He repeatedly said: 'Master, forgive me. Forgive me. Forgive me, Lord.' He kept on striking his head till his forehead bled."³¹

At the Time of Farewell

Swami Bodhananda reminisced: "Many years later, Swamiji said to one of his disciples: 'One eye shed tears of grief when I left home, because I hated to leave my mother, grandmother, brothers, and sisters; and the other eye shed tears for my ideal (Sri Ramakrishna).'"

On another occasion, Swamiji said that if he had not renounced home, the Master's message would not have spread.

"A few days before Swamiji's passing away, one of his boyhood friends came to him asking for money. At that time I was Swamiji's personal attendant and it was my responsibility to maintain his personal fund. Swamiji asked me to give his friend two rupees from his wallet. I said, 'If I give him two rupees, nothing will be left.' He said, 'Do you think I care for that? Give him two rupees plus a little more.' Then he continued: 'In a room, if one window is open and the corresponding window is closed, there is no ventilation; so let it go by one window and it will come by the other.'"³²

On the fourth of July 1902, when the vesper bell was rung at 7:00 p.m., Swamiji went to his room upstairs. Bodhananda, who was Swamiji's secretary, recalled: "I was standing by the stairway down on the ground floor. It was the month of July. In India the mosquitoes are so numerous and so dangerous that you get malaria from them, and no one can sleep without mosquito curtains. He had discovered that the curtains of some monks were torn, and his last command to me was, 'See that they all get new mosquito curtains.'"³³ Even in his last moments Vivekananda showed his great love and concern for the monks.

* * *

Swamiji wanted people to mould their lives according to his teachings. Once he jokingly said to his disciple Swami Achalananda: "If you people declare me an avatar after my death and start worshipping my picture by waving lamps, I will certainly return as a ghost and break your necks."³⁴

* * *

Swami Shuddhananda recalled: "You may say that Swamiji has done

this, or said that. But this is my firm conviction that whatever he did or said does not reveal his true nature. His real nature was revealed through meditation and austerity. I have a reason for my conviction. Towards the end of his life, I was fanning him in his room. He had to be fanned throughout the night. Generally, this was not my duty -- but that day there was no one else available, so I took up that assignment. As I was fanning him, I could hear him saying a few words in his sleep. I could not understand everything, only a few words. He was saying, 'The ego has to be crushed completely.'"³⁵

* * *

Swami Vijnanananda said: "When Swamiji lived in Belur Math, I felt that the whole monastery was full of light and joy. When he was not there, it appeared a little gloomy. When one entered the Math, one could sense whether Swamiji was there or not." Swami Vijnanananda's room was to the north of Swamiji's room. One night he left his room by the eastern veranda and heard a piteous cry coming from Swamiji's room. He thought that perhaps Swamiji was sick. He entered Swamiji's room and found him crying in great distress on the cement floor. "Swamiji, are you sick?" Vijnanananda asked. Startled, Swamiji came to his senses and said, "Peshan, I thought you were sleeping." Vijnanananda then asked him why he had cried out. Swamiji replied tearfully: "I cannot sleep because I am thinking about the suffering and poverty of our countrymen. My mind is disturbed with agony and anxiety. So I was praying to the Master for the welfare of our country." Swami Vijnanananda consoled Swamiji and asked him to sleep on his bed.³⁶

¹ *Bhagavata*, 11: 15: 3-8

- ² Mahendranath Datta, *Gurupran Ramchandrers Anudhyan*, 56-57
- ³ Swami Chetanananda, edited, *Swami Turiyanander Smritikatha*, 237
- ⁴ *Udbodhan*, 38:59-60; *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 3:312,316
- ⁵ *Vedanta Keshari*, 1923:336
- ⁶ Swami Nirlepananda, *Ramakrishna-Vivekanander Jivanaloke*, 115
- ⁷ *Udbodhan*, 47:69
- ⁸ *Vedanta Keshari*, 1923:340-41
- ⁹ Kamal Krishna Mitra, *Sri Ramakrishna O Antaranga Prasanga*, 37-38
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9
- ¹¹ *Bulletin*, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1983:51-52
- ¹² Binodini Mitra, *Sri Sri Nag Mahashay*, 227-28
- ¹³ *Udbodhan*, 25:730-31
- ¹⁴ Swami Chetanananda's Diary
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *Udbodhan*, 75:335
- ¹⁸ *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1927:125
- ¹⁹ *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, 199-200 and *Udbodhan*, 35:46
- ²⁰ Swami Shraddhananda's Diary
- ²¹ Swami Apurvananda, *Shivananda Smritisamgraha*, 64
- ²² *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, 188
- ²³ *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 3:277
- ²⁴ *Udbodhan*, 21:195
- ²⁵ *Udbodhan*, 88:501-02
- ²⁶ Brahmachari Praneshkumar, *Mahim Babu va Sri Mahendra Nath Datta Sange Baro Vatsar*, 74-75, 81
- ²⁷ Swami Dhireshananda's Diary
- ²⁸ *Udbodhan*, 67:84
- ²⁹ Swami Chetanananda's Diary
- ³⁰ Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them*, 66-67
- ³¹ Swami Chetanananda's Diary
- ³² *Vedanta Darpan* (New York), 1932:9-10

³³ *God Lived with Them*, 72

³⁴ *Ramakrishna-Vivekanander Jivanaloke*, 225

³⁵ *Udbodhan*, 54:648

³⁶ *Udbodhan*, 52:24