



BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

**STORIES AS TOLD
BY SWAMI RAMDAS**

Swami Ramdas

GENERAL EDITORS

**K. M. MUNSHI
R. R. DIWAKAR**

**294.5
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BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, 1-89-i

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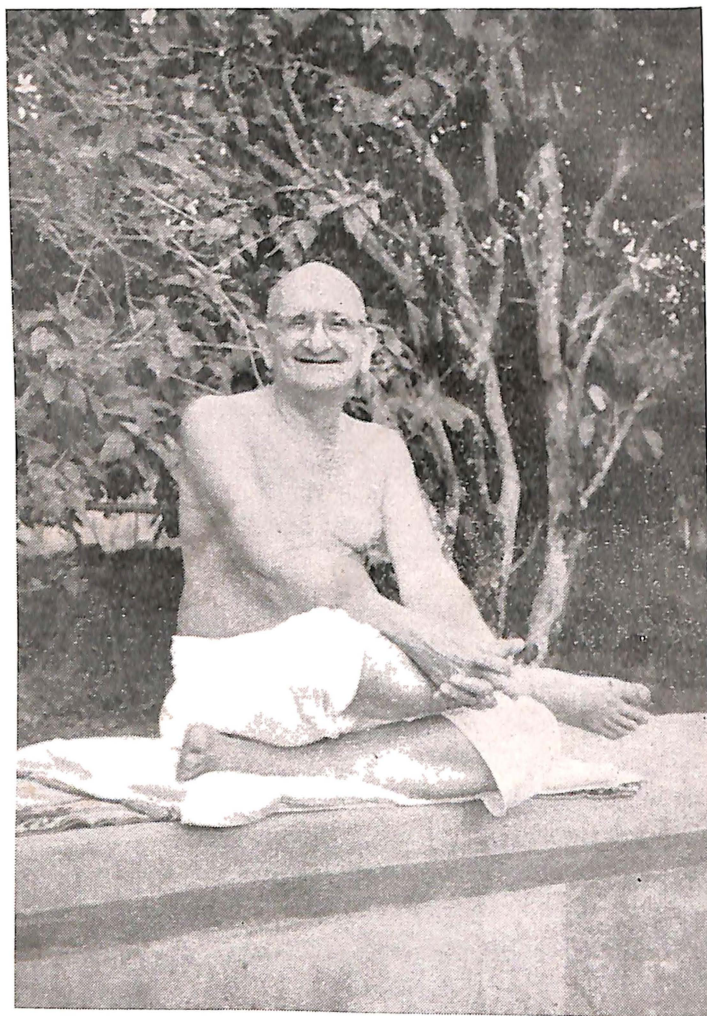
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SWAMI RAMDAS
(1955)

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1961

PUBLISHED FOR ANANDASHRAM

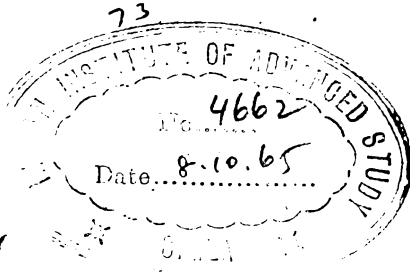
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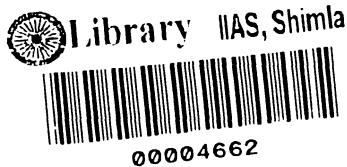
First Edition in this Series, 1962



22/12

Price Rs. 2/-, Sh. 3/6 or \$ 0.90
Rupee Price (Outside India) Rs. 2.25

294.5
R1114



PRINTED IN INDIA

By P. H. Raman at Associated Advertisers and Printers, 505, Tardeo,
Arthur Road, Bombay 34, and published by S. Ramakrishnan,
Executive Secretary, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 7

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulses of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2/-.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the

Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, con-

taining a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,
NEW DELHI
3rd October 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI

FOREWORD

The book contains 108 stories. Many of the stories were either heard or read by Ramdas on various occasions. The reader will find in the book also stories told by Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramana Maharshi and other saints of India and abroad. The collection is by no means exhaustive. But the stories presented here will no doubt prove to be a source of instruction and enlightenment to the spiritual aspirant.

—Ramdas.

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MATAJI'S UNBOUNDED CHARITY

Mother Krishnabai's life is a life of total self-dedication. Her vision is universal, her identity with all beings is perfect as it is based on the realization of the Atman. She looks upon all beings and creatures as her own expressions and embodiments. This is exemplified in all the attitudes and acts of her daily life. Here is a story about her.

A very poor man living in a village near Anandashram, unable to maintain his family, was in great distress. He came to the Ashram and, enquiring for Mataji, met her.

He prayed to her: "Mother! my wife, children and myself are all starving. I am without employment and so I have no means to earn my bread and there is no other support for the family. Hence I have come to you for help. Please save us."

Mataji reflected for a while and said, "Shall I give you a milch cow with calf? You can sell the milk and, from its proceeds, maintain your family. What do you say?"

The poor man replied, "I agree with you and will gladly receive the gift of a milch cow and calf. But the plot in which my house stands, belonging to some other

people, has no other building in it which can accommodate the cow and calf.”

Mataji suggested: “That matter can easily be solved. I will get you a small cow-shed built in your compound by our workmen so that you can securely house the cow in it.”

“Well and good,” said the poor man. “But I have not the wherewithal to pay for grass and also oil cakes for feeding the cow.”

“That also can be arranged,” rejoined Mataji. “We have plenty of hay with us out of which I shall send you three or four big bundles. I will also instruct our provision supplier to supply you with the necessary quantity of oil cakes.”

In a week’s time, the cow-shed was built. The cow and the calf, bundles of hay and oil cakes were sent to him. All went well for a few days. Then, the poor man came to Mataji again and grumbled, “Mother, the cow yields milk all right, but I find it hard to sell the milk. Sometimes, there are no buyers and at other times the buyers offer very low rates for the milk. From the proceeds, I find it hard to make both ends meet.”

“Why do you worry?” Mataji replied. “There is an easy way out. We will purchase the milk. Ashram needs anyway a good quantity of milk every day. So from tomorrow, bring all the milk that you get from the cow. I will pay you reasonable rates.”

The poor man was happy ever afterwards. This is charity *in excelsis*. * * *

2

HOW MATAJI TAMED A MODERN DURVASA

Sadhus, to whatever denomination, sect or creed they belong, are welcome at Anandashram. Sometimes, we would find scuffles and fights going on amongst them in the Ashram Dharmashala. One would say to the other, "You should not touch me. Stand farther away! You belong to a lower sect. You have no business to sit close to me. Why did you touch my leaf? You have polluted the leaf on which I was served my food," and so on and so forth.

Once, a Sadhu came to the Ashram and would not eat food in the common dining hall. So he cooked his food separately. He was given the necessary provisions, such as rice, dal, ghee, wheat-flour and vegetables. One day, he had taken a bucket from the Ashram for storing water. He had, of course, his own Lota which was used by him for drinking water and other purposes. He also kept the bucket, nearly half full, by his side. It was rather close to the plantain leaf on which he had, as usual, served his food, prepared by himself. He sat down for eating.

Just then, a woman worker of the Ashram went there. She wanted the bucket, as it was the one used by her for washing utensils. She was about to take the vessel, and had hardly touched it, when the Sadhu shouted:

“How did you dare to touch my bucket? You have polluted the whole place. I cannot take this food.”

He became wild and started cursing and shouting at her. We could hear him in the Ashram. He was jumping about with uncontrollable fury. The woman, unable to stand all this, ran away from the place and came to Mataji. In a moment, another person came and reported to Mataji: “The Sadhu has collected all the food he had cooked and served on the leaf and thrown it away to the dogs! He is still fretting and fuming. Nobody dare approach him.”

The Sadhu was short and stout in stature and had a ferocious look. He had a grizzly beard and matted hair on his head. Mataji looked at his wild behaviour from a distance and found he was burning with anger. He looked like a modern Durvasa in action. She felt something must be done to calm him down. She went inside the kitchen store. There were in it some water-melons. She cut them into nicely-shaped pieces and got also some fine variety of plantains and two tender coconuts. All these she placed on a plate and asked another worker to take it to the Sadhu. She also followed the worker to the place where the Sadhu was.

When the Sadhu saw the plate with the juicy red water-melon pieces and other fine fruits, and Mataji coming along with them, his anger cooled down a bit. Mataji said to him: “The woman worker committed a mistake but she never intentionally did it. Will you just take these fruits on the plate?” She handed him also a big pitcher full of sweet warm milk. He now sat down and

began to eat and when nearly half the fruit and milk was finished, he came back to normal.

Mataji is a tamer of lions. A smile appeared on the Sadhu's face when the whole quantity of fruits and milk went down. Now he was perfectly cheerful. Mataji then asked him: "How do you feel?" He replied: "Quite happy, mother!" At last, he went about telling everybody that Mataji was supremely gracious. "The food I had prepared was nothing in comparison," he said. "What she gave me was veritable nectar. My body was burning, but it has cooled down now. I am most grateful to her."

* * *

Let life be like a flower—born in full bloom and given
away utterly—petals, scent and all to the Gardener who
brought it into existence.

* * *

Put yourself into His hands and what a wonderful lustre
your life takes!

* * *

3

DO YOUR GOOD ACTS NOW

Once a poor man approached King Yudhishtira, who was also called Dharmaraja, who strictly followed the path of virtue. He asked the king for some help. Yudhishtira said, "Come tomorrow, I will give you what you want."

Yudhishtira's brother Bhimasena overheard this and at once ran to the place where a huge bell was hanging, and which was rung only when there was any great victory, or on certain great occasions. Bhimasena straightaway rang the bell. It created great commotion everywhere because the ringing of the bell was sudden and people did not know of any function or victory. They all came out to ascertain the reason. Yudhishtira was also surprised. Report came to him that Bhimasena had rung the bell. Bhimasena was called and asked for an explanation.

He replied, "We have gained a great victory today, victory over death for twenty-four hours. Dharmaraja asked that man to come tomorrow, saying that he would give him then what he wanted. It means that till tomorrow Dharmaraja is not going to die—which is indeed a triumph over death. This is a great victory."

Yudhishtira was awakened. He called the poor man

back, gave him what he wanted and sent him away without waiting for the next day.

* * *

Let dissatisfaction and discontent seize your soul to such a degree that your mind runs in breakless flow towards the Divine within you.

* * *

How sweet it is to love Him, knowing that you and He are one.

* * *

4

SAINTS EVER FORGIVE

Samarth Ramdas was once going with his disciples to meet Shivaji. On the way they rested under a big tree. The disciples feeling hungry, entered the sugar-cane fields nearby and without the owner's permission, cut some sugar-canes which they brought to their Guru. Hearing about the trespass and not knowing who the saint was, the landlord came there and in a fit of anger, took hold of a sugar-cane and thrashed the Guru and his disciples, who took the blows coolly and proceeded on their way. Reaching Shivaji's palace, they did not mention this incident to any one.

When Samarth Ramdas was given a bath by Shivaji, he saw red stripes on the saint's back and enquired of him about it. The saint brushed aside the topic. But the royal disciple pursued his enquiry and learnt the truth from others. He sent for the owner of the sugar-cane fields, who was soon brought before Shivaji and Samarth Ramdas when they were sitting together. On seeing the landlord, the saint asked the king why he was ordered to come there. Shivaji replied that the wrong-doer who inflicted injury on the saint and his disciples, must be punished.

Samarth Ramdas then said: "The owner of the sugar-cane field has done no wrong. He was quite right

in belabouring us as he did. We had no right to enter his field and cut the canes without his permission as we did. So he must not be punished; nay, as compensation for his loss of sugar-cane, for the trouble of coming here and the anxiety caused by the fear of punishment, you must grant him a gift of five villages.” Thus he who expected heavy punishment for beating the saint was not only forgiven but also given a rich reward.

* * *

His love has transfigured me
Into His likeness.

* * *

Let His name ring in the hearts of us all and produce a
divine symphony, a rapturous music and an eternal song.

* * *

5

GOD'S NAME ALONE SAVES

There was once a Sadhaka who aspired after God-realization. He went to a Sadhu and asked him what he should do for realizing God. The Sadhu said that he should repeat God's name and think of God constantly. The young aspirant did not like this simple advice. He thought poorly of the power of the Name. He had the idea that one should learn Sanskrit and master the Vedas and Shastras, before he could get God-realization. So he left this Sadhu and went to another who was well-versed in the Vedas and Shastras and requested him to teach him Sanskrit so that he might gain proficiency in the same. The teacher agreed, but added that the student should also do some service, besides pursuing his studies. He was given the work of tending the cows in the Ashram. So the young friend took up the service of the Ashram cows and whenever he had spare time, he went to the teacher and took his lessons in Sanskrit. Thus twelve years passed. He became a great Sanskrit scholar and had good knowledge of the Vedas and Shastras. But he did not realize God. So he asked his teacher why he had not attained God even though he had become learned in the Vedas and other scriptures.

The teacher then said that mere scholarship and learn-

ing did not lead to God-realization. To realize God, one must love Him intensely and ceaselessly remember Him by taking to Ramnam. Now the young aspirant realized his mistake in not listening to the advice of the first Sadhu, who had asked him to take to God's name twelve years ago. He regretted he had wasted many precious years in merely acquiring learning without chanting God's name or cultivating love and devotion for God.

* * *

To be in tune with Him is to be like Him.

* * *

Behold and love the world as God.

* * *

6

SAINTS GIVE WHAT GOD CANNOT

In a village there was a devotee of Vishnu. Though married for many years, he had not been blessed with a child in spite of all the austerities performed by him for the purpose. One day, sage Narada happened to pass through the village. Meeting the sage, the devotee enquired where he was going. Narada replied he was going to Vaikuntha. Thereupon, the devotee requested Narada to enquire of Lord Vishnu why He had not yet blessed him with a child and when he might expect to have that blessing. On reaching Vaikuntha, Narada told Vishnu about the devotee's grievance. The Lord replied that the devotee was not destined to have a child.

Narada did not wish to communicate this unpleasant news to the devotee. So, many years passed before he again saw the devotee in the village. When he entered the latter's house, he saw three children playing in the court-yard and was surprised to learn that they belonged to the devotee. Narada was naturally curious to hear how the devotee got the children and made enquiries of him.

The devotee replied that since he met Narada last, he chanced to have the Darshan of a saint and serve him. The saint, pleased with the service, asked him

what boon he wished to have. The devotee begged to be blessed with a child. The saint blessed saying that he would have not one but three children.

Hearing this, Narada went straight to Vaikuntha and accused Lord Vishnu of uttering an untruth. Narada said, "You told me some years ago that a devotee about whom I mentioned to you was not destined to have a child. Now I find that he has got three children." Vishnu laughed and said, "That must surely be the work of some saint, for saints alone can change one's destiny."

* * *

You cannot dislike people and expect God's grace to come to you.

* * *

Give up criticising others.

* * *

7

GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS DEVOTEE

There was a sepoy in the service of a State. He was put on duty as guard at night. One night, when he was as usual on duty as a sentry, he saw at a distance devotees going in a procession singing God's name. At this, the sepoy was overcome with devotional fervour. He ran, giving up his duty, and joined the Kirtan party and started singing God's name in their company. The whole night was spent in Kirtan and the sepoy returned to duty only in the morning. Soon after, he was ordered to appear before his commanding officer to answer the charge of absence from duty the previous night. The sepoy explained what had happened. Though the charge was a serious one, he was let off with a warning.

The following night also he was on duty and again the same Kirtan party was seen passing nearby singing God's name. Though the sepoy had been warned the previous day for his lapse, he could not resist joining the Kirtan party again. He spent all night with the party and returned to his post in the morning. After reaching his place of work, he thought it would be better for him to go and report himself to the commanding officer about his absence from duty and he did so. But the commanding officer could not understand what

the sepoy was saying. He said: "Why do you say you were absent from duty? Thinking that last night also you would absent yourself from duty and join the street singers, I myself came at midnight to the sentry post to check if you were there. And I saw you there on duty. So where is the question of your absence?"

At this the sepoy was stunned. He could guess how God was so gracious to him as to stand sentry assuming his form so as to save him from punishment. This incident completely changed his vision and life. He renounced everything and dedicated his life entirely to God.

* * *

Brush aside pride and permit God to work in you.

* * *

God's grace is for him who has developed a mountain of patience and prays to Him only for devotion and nothing else.

* * *

8

NARADA ENLIGHTENED

You must have heard of Sage Narada. He was a great votary of God's name. He repeated the Name all the twenty-four hours of the day and went about all over the world proclaiming the greatness of the Name. He became proud of his continuous chanting of the Name. He saw people in the world taking the Name only for a time, whereas he was taking the Name all day and night. Therefore, he considered himself to be the greatest devotee of God. In the course of his wanderings he went to Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Vishnu. Looking at Narada, Vishnu came to know that Narada had become proud of his devotion. Narada, with an air of self-importance, asked Vishnu who His greatest devotee in the world was.

Lord Vishnu asked Narada to go to a certain village on the earth where, He said, lived a farmer whom He considered as His greatest devotee. Narada was surprised: How could a poor farmer rank first among the devotees of Vishnu? However, he went to the house of the farmer-devotee and was received by him with great honour and hospitality. The devotee served the sage with all love and reverence and begged him to stay in his humble abode for a few days. Narada stayed

on and watched what the farmer was doing.

The farmer's routine was to get up early in the morning, take aloud God's name once, and then go to attend to his work in the fields. In the evening, on returning home after his day's work, he would perform the usual household duties and before retiring to bed, utter once again God's name. Narada noticed this routine of the farmer for two or three days and was utterly disappointed. He was wondering how Lord Vishnu could take this farmer, who uttered the name of God only twice a day, to be His greatest devotee. He left the house and proceeded straight to Vishnu and recounted to Him all that he had seen when he was with the farmer-devotee. Narada then asked Him how He could consider the farmer as the foremost of His devotees.

"I will show you how he is My greatest devotee," said Vishnu, and, having got a cup filled with oil to the brim, handed it over to Narada and told him to go round Vaikuntha and return to Him without spilling a drop of oil. Accordingly, Narada, taking the cup in his hands, walked slowly and carefully, concentrating all his mind upon the cup, and after some time returned to Vishnu without spilling even a drop of oil.

Vishnu, on seeing him back, questioned him: "How many times did you remember Me during the period of your circumambulation of Vaikuntha with the cup of oil in your hands?" Narada was surprised at this question and said: "Lord, are You joking with me? How is it possible to remember anything else when carrying out a task of such a difficult nature? My whole mind

was centred on the cup so that I might not spill any drop.”

At this reply, Vishnu laughed and remarked: “Look at the case of the farmer. He engages himself in hundreds of activities, carrying heavy responsibilities of his worldly life. Nevertheless, he does not fail to remember Me at least twice a day, whereas in a short period, when you were engaged in carrying the cup of oil you utterly forgot Me.”

This reply from Vishnu humbled Narada. He realized that Vishnu was right, and that he had made a mistake in thinking that he was superior to all other devotees.

This illustration goes to show that the best way is to offer prayers to God, take His name, even though for a short time daily, and then be engaged in your work and perform it honestly and conscientiously, having God-remembrance stamped on your heart.

* * *

To soothe the aching heart, to infuse courage into the
drooping spirit, to bring a smile upon the face pale with
woe, to assuage sorrow by loving words are the works
of a God-lover.

* * *

9

THE DEVIL AND THE POLE

A man wanted to propitiate a devil to make it do whatever he wanted. So he did the necessary Sadhana to that end and, by the power of some Mantra, he was able to summon the devil before him. The devil said that it would obey his commands, but on one condition: "If at any time you do not give me work, I will devour you. You must keep me engaged all the twenty-four hours." The man agreed. He immediately gave an order to build a palace for him. To his great wonder, the palace was built in no time. Then he gave an order for a long road to be made ready. That work was also executed in a short time. Next minute, the devil was standing before him, asking for more work. He had no time even to think. He gave an order to build a big town. It was ready within ten minutes. Now the man was perplexed and afraid. He did not know what new orders to give. If he did not give any work, he would be eaten by the devil. He hastened to a holy man and asked for advice. The holy man suggested that he might get a bamboo pole, plant it in the ground and ask the devil to climb it up and down until further orders. He did so and the devil was bound to carry out the order. This meant no rest whatever for the devil. Finally it got disgusted and ran away.

Now, in your case, Ram Mantra is the pole and the ego is the devil that teases you. Ask him to go up and down the pole repeatedly and he will soon get tired and run away. Ramnam is given to you in order to subdue the ego. The ego must be made to disappear by its own endeavour.

* * *

So long as meekness, purity and love
Do not adorn your expressed life;
Mind you, self-surrender is not real for you.

* * *

True freedom and joy consist in living from moment to moment in the consciousness of God through utter surrender to His will.

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10

SATSANG AND PENANCE

There is a story about sage Viswamitra. Once there was a discussion between him and sage Vasishtha, the Guru of Sri Rama. The discussion was: which was greater, the power of austerities or the power of the company of saints. Vasishtha said that the power of the company of saints was greater. Viswamitra disagreed with him. The matter was brought before Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu directed them to Mahasesha, the big serpent on whose head this earthly globe is supposed to be resting.

The sages went to Mahasesha and asked him which was greater—company of saints or austerities. Mahasesha said: “I have this heavy burden of the earth on my head. If you will just lift it for a moment from my head I will be free to give you the answer.” At this, Vasishtha and Viswamitra looked at each other as to how best this problem could be solved. Viswamitra suggested that he would apply the power he had gained by his austerities and lift the earth. He put forth all the strength he had gained by his austerities but the earth did not move. Then Vasishtha came forward and applying the strength which he had gained by one minute’s company of saints, lifted the earth. Now Mahasesha said: “Your question has been answered.”

11**SEE YOURSELF IN ALL BEINGS**

In order to have some fun, a man procured innumerable small mirrors and had them fixed up in his room on the walls, in the ceiling and on the floor. There was not an inch of space where there was no mirror. After closing the door, he switched on the light and stood in the middle of the room. He saw himself reflected in myriad forms in the mirrors—above, below and on all sides. He enjoyed the sight very much because he loved to see himself everywhere. After having had this fun for a while, he left the room, but forgot to close the door. His dog entered the room a few minutes later and it saw its own reflections in the mirrors. The dog started barking at its own reflections and jumped and fought with them, as it thought those were dogs different from itself. It fought till it got completely exhausted and fell down dead.

So, man in his ignorance, when fighting with his fellow beings, thinks they are separate from him. When he realizes that all beings are the images of his own Self, instead of quarrelling with and disliking them, he will love them all equally.

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12

LOVE YOUR ENEMY

This happened during the Great Indian Mutiny in the year 1857. Indian soldiers revolted against the British Government and the Government took stern steps to put them down. The result was, people deserted the villages in panic. At one place, when they were running away, they saw a Sadhu coming towards the village which they had abandoned. The villagers warned the Sadhu that the British soldiers would be there shortly and kill him mercilessly. The Sadhu did not pay heed to the advice, but went on. When he was nearing the village, a British soldier came towards him and stabbed him. The Sadhu was fatally injured. He fell down and was about to die. The soldier was looking at him to make sure if he was dead. Before breathing his last, the Sadhu looked at the soldier, his murderer, and smilingly said: "You also are He."

Even in the agony of death, the Sadhu saw God in him. What a glorious vision was his! It is indeed wonderful. Such is the vision of one who has realized God.

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13

THE MEANING OF PILGRIMAGE

There was a great saint named Tukaram. He was a votary of God's name. Once some people from his village decided to go on a long pilgrimage and they requested Tukaram also to follow them. Tukaram expressed his inability, but requested them to be kind enough to take with them to all the places they visited a bitter gourd that he would give them. He wished that the bitter gourd should be given a dip in all the holy waters where they took bath and also have it taken to all the temples they visited. Not caring to know the significance of what the saint said, the villagers took the bitter gourd from him and carried it all along the pilgrimage, obeying the instructions of the saint in regard to dipping it in the holy waters and taking it to the temples.

In a few months, the party returned from the pilgrimage and handed the bitter gourd back to Tukaram. Tukaram was happy and invited all the members of the party to a feast the next day to celebrate the successful completion of their pilgrimage. Tukaram made a special dish out of the bitter gourd which he had sent on the pilgrimage. They were served with the various preparations and they started eating. When they tasted the gourd dish, they all remarked it was bitter and

asked Tukaram why he had served it. Tukaram, as if greatly surprised, asked them how it could be bitter when it was made out of the gourd that had gone on a pilgrimage. It was no doubt bitter when he handed it over to them before the pilgrimage, but he wondered why it had not lost its bitterness in spite of the pilgrimage. This was a great lesson to all the pilgrims.

There are so many who go on pilgrimage and return as bitter as before. But, if you go on a pilgrimage as urged by God within, and continuously remember Him all through the pilgrimage and see only purity and goodness of God everywhere, you will achieve purity. Such a pilgrimage will surely be beneficial to you.

* * *

To sell eternity to relieve the sufferings of a petty span of
life is pure folly.

* * *

Let the veil of illusion break up by your declaring:
"I and my Beloved are one."

* * *

14

IS THERE AN EGO?

Once a man invited his son-in-law, who was living far away, to stay with him during the holidays. When the letter was received by the son-in-law, there was an adventurer in his place, who happened to know the contents of the letter. This man thought it was a nice occasion for him to make the best of. When the son-in-law got into the train, he also boarded the same train, and at the destination both got down. The son-in-law was greeted by his brother-in-law who had come to the railway station in a car to receive him. When the son-in-law got into the car, the adventurer also got into it. The son-in-law thought that this man might be some friend of his father-in-law's family. His brother-in-law thought that he might be a friend of the son-in-law. They all reached the father-in-law's house and the guests were received with great honour and given nice rooms to stay, and they were all quite happy.

At the time of meals, this impostor would go and sit first, and before the others he would begin eating. Sometimes he even went into the kitchen to demand certain kinds of food he liked. Though this was noticed by the father-in-law, he did not tell him anything lest he should wound the feelings of one who, he thought, must be an intimate friend of his son-in-law. The

impostor was also freely going to the son-in-law's room and using his shirts, ties, shoes and so on, without asking him. Though the son-in-law got annoyed at this, he did not complain as he took him to be a member or friend of his father-in-law's household. Thus from both sides this impostor was allowed full liberty and was having a very fine time.

Things went on like this, but a time came when both the father-in-law and the son-in-law were fed up with the fellow's behaviour. They did not know how to deal with him as each thought he was the friend of the other. At last, when the father-in-law could not tolerate him any longer, he decided to go to his son-in-law and ask why he had brought such a man with him. At the very moment, the son-in-law also wanted to ask the father-in-law, "What a pest you have here! Wherefrom has he come? He does not seem to be a member of the family. He comes to my room and uses freely whatever I have in my room. All my clean shirts have been put on and soiled by him." When the father-in-law and son-in-law met together in a room to discuss privately about this impostor, the impostor found out that they were making enquiries about him, and suddenly disappeared by the back door.

So in the case of the ego: a mere enquiry makes this impostor also disappear. In fact, you will discover there was no impostor-ego at all. Ego is only an illusion caused by your ignorance. The ignorance is removed by Atma-vichar or Self-enquiry. But you do not want to make the enquiry. You are so much obsessed by him

that you allow him to make you dance to his tune. He brings nothing but misery for you.

* * *

The Beloved awaits you, you have only to take
His name and He runs to you.

* * *

Sweetly sing the name of the King of kings
And draw Him to your heart.

* * *

15

IN THE END WE LEAVE EMPTY-HANDED

Happiness does not consist in storing or accumulating wealth. You bring nothing with you when you come into the world and you take nothing with you when you leave it. The wealth, name, fame and glory you earn—all these you have to leave behind. There is a story about Alexander the Great. He amassed vast wealth by waging wars with other countries and looting the people. He was a powerful king, greedy, selfish and cruel. In his time, he was considered to be the richest man on earth. When death was nearing, he reflected within himself: "I have committed so many evil deeds to amass all this wealth. Now death's call has come. When departing, I have to leave all the riches behind and go alone without taking a single coin." He told his courtiers and followers: "When my body is taken to the grave, you have to see that my two hands are stretched out, with palms open, and fully exposed, while the rest of the body is covered, so that my subjects may see that I, a great king, the richest man in the world, went on my final journey, quite empty-handed, as I could not take anything with me."

Such is the fate of all those who cling to material objects.

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16

THE YOGI HUMBLLED

When you serve your fellowmen, God is pleased and acknowledges you as His child. There was a Sannyasi who was practising meditation, sitting beneath a tree. One day, while meditating, a bird's excreta fell on his head from above. Thus disturbed, the Sannyasi became angry, looked up and saw the bird sitting on the branch of the tree. The Sannyasi gazed at the bird, his eyes full of anger. At once, he found to his surprise that the bird was burnt to ashes.

His astonishment soon gave place to an overweening pride at his own Yogic powers. As usual, that day he went to the village nearby for alms. He stopped in front of a house and asked for alms. When he saw nobody coming out of the house to attend to his needs even though he had waited for about five minutes, he called out again in an angry tone. He considered himself as a great Yogi and was puffed up with conceit.

The mistress of the house was busy attending on her husband who was ill, and could not leave him suddenly. Hearing the angry words of the Sannyasi, she warned him from inside the house: "I am not a bird to be burnt to ashes by your curse." The Sannyasi was taken aback and wondered how this woman could know the

incident of the bird. Because of her loyalty, service and devotion to her husband, she had acquired supernatural powers. She also directed the Sannyasi, if he wanted to learn more, to the village butcher. Finding the latter in his shop, he approached him. The moment the butcher saw him, he asked the Sannyasi if he had not been sent by such and such a woman. The Sannyasi's surprise was now still greater. He asked the butcher how he could know things in the way he did. The butcher replied: "I am serving my old parents with all love and devotion. They are to me the very images of God. I also carry on my business honestly and for their sake."

The Sannyasi's eyes were really opened now and light came to him. He realized that one could get supernatural powers not merely by going to the forest and meditating on God, but also doing one's duty and service of humanity, looking upon all beings as manifestations of God. Perhaps, living in the world and serving humanity with love is a better way. Ramdas can definitely say that such service, done with absolute unselfishness, can by itself lead to God-realization.

* * *

Let the flame of life burn with the splendour that heals,
uplifts and serves humanity.

* * *

17

DEATH SNATCHES AWAY EVERYONE

Lord Buddha, the great teacher, was going from place to place preaching Dharma—the path of liberation—to the people. He happened to go to a village where he found a woman had lost her only son and was sunk in deep grief. She was going round the village asking everyone to do something to bring back her son's life. All of them said that as her son was dead, there was no chance of recalling him to life any more. But she would not believe it. A man advised her that she had better go to Buddha who was on a visit to the village at that time.

The woman went to Buddha and told him that her only son had passed away and that she was very much grieved over the loss and requested him to restore her son to life. Buddha replied that he would revive her son, provided she could bring for him a handful of sesamum seeds from a house in which no death had occurred. She agreed and went about from house to house asking for a handful of sesamum seeds. When the people were about to give her what she wanted, she told them that the condition was that nobody should have died in the house. They all said death had occurred in their houses and the dead were more than the living, with the result that nowhere could she get the seeds as

required by Buddha. Now the truth dawned upon her that death was common in the world and that those who were born had to die one day or the other. She found consolation, and giving up her grief, came to Buddha and begged him to teach her Dharma—the way to Nirvana.

* * *

Universal love is not a thing to be believed or not believed. He who possesses a universal vision spontaneously lives it.

* * *

Be a blazing flame of Truth, be a beautiful blossom of love and be a soothing balm of peace.

* * *

18

TRANSCEND THE GUNAS

A traveller, passing through a forest late in the evening, was captured by three robbers. All the three attacked him together. One bound him with a rope and another took a knife to kill him. At this the third pleaded with his comrades not to kill the traveller. He prevailed over his comrades to set him free. On coming to know that he was to go to a nearby village, he escorted him up to the outskirts of the village and asked him to go further on himself. He regretted his inability to accompany him, saying that he could not go to the village as he would be arrested by the police, being a robber himself. So the robber returned.

Now let us see who these robbers were. They were the three qualities of nature which caused the soul's bondage and ignorance—Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. Rajas tried to bind the soul to the desires of the flesh. Tamas sought to destroy the soul by overcoming it with sleep and torpor. The role of Sattwa was to liberate it from the clutches of Rajas and Tamas. Though Sattwa took him up to the boundary beyond which was the realm of the Atman, it could not accompany him there. Even Sattwa Guna had no entry into the realm. All the three qualities must be transcended before you can enter into the infinity of divine existence in which you

lose yourself. He who goes there never returns to tell the tale of his experiences because there he becomes one with the eternal reality—God.

* * *

The man of true vision acts without regard to the praise or blame of the world, because he finds joy in the action itself.

* * *

Real sin consists in performing or rejecting actions through Moha (attachment) born of the ego-sense.

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19

TRANSFORMATION

Valmiki was a robber. Once sage Narada was passing through the place where Valmiki lived. The robber fell upon the sage and wanted to wrest from him the musical instrument he was having with him. The saint told the robber what a great sin he was committing by robbery. The robber said, "I am doing it only to feed my family. What I earn this way is not for me alone. I have my wife and children."

The saint said, "Will you go and ask your wife and children if they would share the sin you are committing?" The robber agreed, went to his house and told his wife and children, "A saint who is passing this way, has asked me to enquire if you are prepared to share the sins of my robbery, which I commit only to feed you all." They replied: "We cannot share your sins. How you get the moneys for our maintenance is not our concern."

The robber came back to the saint, prostrated before him and said, "I do not want to commit sins any more." Then the saint asked him to chant the name "Rama." The robber could not repeat the Name properly. He was repeating it in the opposite way as "Mara, Mara." He gave up his sinful life, went into solitude and devoted all the time to repetition of the Name. His austerities

were so severe that he sat in one place for many years with the result that his body was covered by ant-hills. He had faith in the words of the Master who said, "If you repeat this Name, you will be saved." So he became a great saint.

Doubts should not cross our mind. Doubts are our worst enemies.

* * *

It is not philosophy, however high sounding, that can really sweeten life. It is simple love and joy that elevates, ennobles and liberates it.

* * *

Love makes life gentle, soft and sweet. Love is the crown of spiritual experience. Love embodies the highest realization of Godhead.

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20

GOPI'S LOVE

Many people are mistaken in their belief that the love between Krishna and the Gopis was of an ordinary nature on the physical level. This was not so. Their love was on the higher spiritual level. When the Gopis merely thought of Him, they were lost in Him and were raised to such a state of ecstasy that, for the time being, they forgot their bodies and their surroundings. All worldly inclinations, desires and thoughts were drowned in that ecstasy. The physical pains and attachments to the nearest kith and kin were all obliterated.

Once it so happened that a Gopi asked her daughter-in-law to light the lamp in the house, getting fire from a neighbouring house. In those days, there were no electric lights or even match-boxes. Fire was made by striking flint or rubbing two pieces of wood against each other. The daughter-in-law went with a cotton wick soaked in oil to light it from the lamp at the neighbour's house. She placed the wick on the fire when, just at that moment, somebody said: "Krishna is at the door." Her eyes turned towards the door and she beheld Krishna standing there. She was so struck by the sight of Krishna that she stood gazing at Him, oblivious of time and the fact that her hand was holding the wick over the fire. The wick having taken fire

was burning. The flame was licking her fingers, but she was not aware of it. She did not feel the pain, for she was unconscious of her body. The mother-in-law, finding after a long wait that her daughter-in-law did not come, went to see what the matter was. She saw her looking at Krishna, entranced and enchanted by His presence, although her fingers were burning.

That was the love of the Gopis for Krishna, their Adored One. Their love was of the purest and the holiest type. Devotees reach this climax of love when they are utterly absorbed in God—their heart's Beloved.

* * *

When you see yourself everywhere
You have the vision of God.

* * *

Every blade of grass, plant and tree says:
"Give your all like us and make world's life
beautiful."

* * *

21

GOD'S WILL BE DONE

In a town in India there lived a humble weaver. He had no family and was living alone. He had a loom on which he used to weave cloth daily. He sold the cloth in the market, and whatever profit was derived from the sale was enough for his daily maintenance. As he had no house to live in, he had his loom installed under a huge tree. After his work for the day was over, he slept near the loom under the tree. When the cloth was ready for sale, he would go to the market and tell everybody how much he paid for the yarn, how much other sundry expenses came to, how much profit he had added, and at what price he would sell the cloth. People knew that he was a simple and honest man and a great devotee of God. They believed his word and, at once, purchased the cloth for the price quoted by him. Out of the money thus realized, he would purchase some yarn and other necessary things, and the balance would go for his simple food which satisfied his hunger. He was thus carrying on his simple life.

Just opposite to the place where he had his loom, there was the house of a rich man. One night, a very dark night, this weaver had his meal as usual, and slept soundly under the tree. Two thieves entered the rich man's house, broke open the safe and took many

valuable things—clothes and jewellery—which they bundled up and brought out with great difficulty to the place where the weaver slept. The question arose between them as to who should carry the bundle. They could not divide the stolen property between themselves in that darkness. They woke up the weaver and asked him to carry the bundle for them. The weaver unquestioningly took the bundle on his head, as he was always ready to help others in their need. He did not know they were thieves, nor did he care to know. So the two men made the weaver walk in front, themselves following.

Meanwhile the owner of the house, from which the things were stolen, came to know of the robbery and informed the police, who, at once, set out in search of the thieves. The weaver with the big bundle and the two men behind him on the road were confronted by a policeman. As soon as the thieves saw the police, they took to their heels. The weaver with the bundle was caught by the policeman. He examined the bundle and found the stolen goods inside it. He also verified the goods from the rich man whose house was broken into by the thieves. The weaver was taken to the police station and kept under custody. Next morning the weaver was taken before the magistrate on a charge of theft. The news spread all over the town that the weaver was arrested on a charge of theft. People, who knew that he was a humble devotee of God, were surprised when they heard the news, and some of them came to the court to watch the proceedings of the case. The trial started. There was no lawyer to represent the

weaver. The magistrate directly questioned the weaver as to what happened the previous night. The weaver then said:

“Last night, by the will of God, after my work and meal were over, I was sleeping under my tree as usual. At dead of night, by the will of God, two persons came and woke me up. By the will of God, they placed a big bundle on my head, and by the will of God they asked me to go with them. After walking a short distance, by the will of God, we saw a policeman coming in front of us. By the will of God, the two men who were close at my heels, ran away. By the will of God, the policeman caught me, and by the will of God, he took me into custody. By the will of God, I slept well inside the prison. In the morning, by the will of God, I was brought here before you, and by the will of God, you are putting questions to me.”

Hearing the story of the innocent man, the magistrate laughed. He could realize that the weaver was not the real thief. So he was acquitted. The weaver came out, and when his friends asked him what happened, he said, “By the will of God, I am released.” He saw only God’s will from beginning to end. He never felt disturbed in any way.

Such submission to the divine will is the way to be blessed with peace and happiness in all moments of life.

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22

WHAT IS SAMADHI ?

Once there was a talk between Shiva and Parvati. Shiva is one of the Hindu Trinity, who is always in a state of Samadhi. His place is often in the cremation ground. He used to freely roam about, never feeling separate from the universe. He would leave Parvati in Kailas, while on his itinerary. Parvati asked Shiva to teach her to meditate and enter Samadhi so that she could always remain in that state without at any time feeling the separation. Shiva asked her to sit down in Asana, close her eyes and turn her gaze within and meditate. Then the following dialogue took place:

Shiva: What do you see now?

Parvati: I see your form before my mental vision.

Shiva: Go beyond that form. What do you see now?

Parvati: I see a brilliant light.

Shiva: Still go beyond the light; what next?

Parvati: I hear the sound 'Om.'

Shiva: Transcend the sound. What is your experience now?

To this last question, there was no answer. Parvati had become one with the Cosmic Self! There was now

no subject and object, no seer and seen, no hearer or heard, for her. All had dissolved into one Reality, one Existence. There was only one changeless, nameless, formless, non-dual Brahman. Some time later, when Parvati was gradually coming back to body-consciousness, she was heard uttering softly "I am Brahman!"

This story of Shiva and Parvati may or may not be true but its value consists in teaching, by way of illustration, the process of meditation and ultimate realisation.

* * *

The sky and space resound:
 "Know ye, one Reality—one God
 Pervades like us everywhere."

* * *

The sea speaks incessantly:
 "Thy heart be like my billows—
 Rise and fall with love and compassion."

* * *

23

WORLDLY LOVE IS FALSE

There was a saint living near a village. A Bhakta was going to him daily. He used to tell the saint that he was very much loved by his parents and more so by his wife. He was speaking about this to the saint every-day. So the saint one day wanted to show him the reality about his relatives' love. He asked the Bhakta to go home and pretend that he was suffering from a serious stomach-ache. He also gave him a pill and asked him to swallow it. The effect of the pill was that he who took it would apparently be dead even though he was fully awake and aware within.

The Bhakta agreed, went home, pretended that he had a serious stomach-ache, took the pill and lay down like a dead man. All his relatives including his parents, wife and children, were weeping over his death. In due course, the saint came to the house and enquired what the matter was. They explained to him everything and requested him to bring the dead one back to life. The saint said, "Yes, I can bring him back to life, if any one of you will give your life for his in exchange."

Addressing the mother of the Bhakta, he said, "You love your son so much. Why don't you give up your life for his sake? You are already old and you won't live long." At this the mother stopped weeping and

said, "How can I give up my life for the sake of one son? My younger sons will be sorry if I die. So I cannot do what you say." Then he suggested the same to the father who also similarly expressed his unwillingness.

The saint then asked the Bhakta's wife: "Can you at least not give your life for your dear husband? What is the use of living without him, as a widow?" To this she replied, "If I am destined to become a widow, who can help it? My parents would be shocked to hear about my death. Moreover, I have to look after my children—so I cannot give up my life." Thereafter, all his children were asked in turn and only negative replies came from them.

The Bhakta who heard all the talk jumped up from the bed and told the saint, "I thought these people really loved me. Now you have revealed to me the truth. I am not going to remain with these people any longer. Let me follow you." That is the sort of love relatives in the world bear for one another.

* * *

Love fills the heaven above and the earth below
Love alone survives and all passes away.

* * *

24

GRACE FOR ALL ALIKE

A priest was preaching a sermon in the church. Hundreds of people formed the congregation in which there were some diseased, poor and crippled persons. The priest told the people that God does not make any difference between the rich and the poor, the diseased and the healthy, the able-bodied and the crippled. His grace pours on all alike, whatever their external conditions. In the course of the sermon, the priest's eye lighted upon a broken candle lying on the floor. He got down from the pulpit, took the candle, and holding it before the congregation, lit it up with a match and it gave light. The candle, though crushed and crumpled, burnt bright by the touch of the flame. The match did not deny its fire to the candle because it was broken, and the candle gave full light in spite of its broken condition. This example struck Ramdas as unique. Really, God is all compassion and mercy. He pours His grace on any person who opens his heart to receive it.

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25

PAY THE FULL PRICE

There was once a merchant who had a pearl necklace for sale. A customer came and asked him what the price of the necklace was. The merchant said that the price was one thousand rupees. The buyer started haggling. He demanded the ornament for seven hundred and fifty rupees. The merchant refused to sell it for less than one thousand rupees. But the customer wanted it for 900, 960, 975 and lastly 999 rupees. The merchant did not part with it for anything less than one thousand rupees. "I cannot give you the necklace without payment of its full price," he said. The customer, in order to have the necklace, had to pay the full price for it.

So also, God demands of you the full price before He can be yours. Verily, God is priceless. None can get Him without paying the full price, that is, your entire being in all its aspects. In fact, dedication of one life is nothing, compared to the absolute freedom, peace and joy you get from Him. Even millions of lives offered to Him are only meagre recompense for the unimaginably precious and magnificent return you get.

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26

GOD IS FOR THE HUMBLE

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a humble devotee of Mother Kali. He was childlike in all his talks, actions and ways of life. Once Keshab Chandra Sen went to see him. He had heard about the fame of Sri Ramakrishna. In the course of his talk, Keshab Chandra Sen said he had recently enacted a religious drama in which he took the chief part. Sri Ramakrishna quietly listened. A disciple of Keshab Chandra Sen said that Keshab played his part very well and everybody applauded him. They were planning to enact another drama. Keshab Chandra Sen jokingly asked Sri Ramakrishna if he would like to take part in it and if so in what role. Without a moment's hesitation, Sri Ramakrishna replied, "I shall take the part of the dust of your feet."

What was the result of his reply? Sudden stillness and silence. By humbling themselves, saints humble others. When we reduce ourselves to the dust, we realise the glory of the Spirit within.

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27

INVITE GOD

There was a poor man in a country. He was very anxious that his king should visit him one day. But his condition was so poor that he could not make necessary arrangements to receive the royal guest. However, he expressed his wish to the king who at once agreed to visit him. The king knew that the man lived in a very small cottage. So he sent in advance everything that was necessary for his reception at the cottage. Royal messengers went with all the things and asked the man to make use of them and also cleaned the place, spread the carpet, arranged the furniture, made the necessary decoration and brought flowers, garlands, etc. When everything was ready, the king paid his visit. The man's wish was fulfilled.

So also, if we invite God to take His seat in us, He will do everything necessary. He will Himself purify our hearts and take His seat there. So the only thing we have to do is to pray to Him to come to us. Nothing more. He will see to everything else. If your heart is sincere, you will feel the need for His coming and He will surely come to you. If your life is disorderly, He will see that it is set right and when He comes to you once, your life becomes blessed.

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28

ACME OF COMPASSION

You must have heard of the three great Teachers—Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa. They have established their systems of philosophy in India. Ramanuja went to a Master and requested him to initiate him. The Master gave him God's name and also advised him not to give this Name to anybody, adding that if he did so, he would go to hell. At once, Ramanuja went to the top of the local temple and shouted, "I am going to give you all a Name which will save you. My Master has given me the Name." He uttered the Name loudly so that everybody could hear.

The Master heard about it and asked why he did so in spite of his warning. Ramanuja's reply was, "I am prepared to go to hell a hundred times if I can save thousands."

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If you want God
Love all beings,
If you want Joy
Serve the distressed.

* * *

29

THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION

Purandhardas was a rich jeweller, but very miserly. God in the form of a Haridas came to him daily for six months begging for some help for the Upanayanam of his son. The rich man refused to give any help. He abused him and sent him away everyday. This continued for six months. At last, he threw a bad coin to him. Haridas then went to the merchant's wife and narrated that he had been going to a merchant daily for six months and finally got a bad coin from him—a bad man. The wife knew whom he was referring to and did not like her husband to be called a bad man. She tried to send Haridas away by saying, "What do you want? I can give you some grain only."

Haridas: "No, I want money."

Woman: "I have not got any money."

Haridas: "If you have a mind to give, you have enough to give. You have your diamond nose-ornament. That will quite serve my purpose." She hesitated. Haridas continued, "If you do not like to give, I shall go somewhere else."

Woman: "No, No. You are God Himself. How can I allow you to go away without giving you what

you want?" She then removed the ornament from her nose and was about to give it to him.

Haridas: "What will your husband do when he hears about it?"

Woman: "What does it matter? I am prepared even to give my life for you."

Haridas: "Then, say 'Krishnarpanam' and give."

The woman said 'Krishnarpanam' and gave the nose-ring to Haridas. He then went straight to the merchant (her husband) under the pretext of selling it. Seeing Haridas coming, the merchant, in a contemptuous tone, asked: "Shameless fellow, have you come again?"

Haridas: "I have come here to do business, not to beg. Take this and give me its price."

The merchant took the ornament from Haridas. He could recognise that it was his wife's nose-ornament. He asked Haridas from where he got that jewel to which he replied that a generous woman gave it to him as a present.

Merchant: "You thief, is it true that you got it as a present?"

Haridas: "Thief! Krishna also was a thief."

Merchant: "If Krishna was a thief, must you also be one? Come here tomorrow. I shall deal with you then."

Haridas left, and the merchant, in a fit of rage, came straight to his house and knocked at the door. Hearing the knocks, the wife thought it was another

devotee who had come for alms and asked, "Is that Gopaladasayya?"

Merchant: "Ha, Gopaladasayya, I shall show you Gopaladasayya by a slap on your cheek. Open the door."

The door was opened. The merchant asked his wife, "What did you give to the beggar?"

Wife: "I gave him alms."

Merchant: "What alms?"

Wife: "I gave him some maize."

Merchant: "You gave him your nose-ornament with as big a diamond as a maize. Where is your nose-ornament, tell me?"

Wife: "I have kept it in the Puja room."

Merchant: "Bring it here immediately."

Wife: "I shall do Tulsipuja and then go to the Puja room to get it."

Merchant: "Now you have no other go but to take refuge in Tulsi."

She was greatly agitated. She performed her usual Puja to Tulsi and, with folded hands, prayed: "O Mother, save me from this situation. If you are not going to help me now, I must commit suicide." With her eyes closed, she was standing still. There was a sudden "tuk" noise. She opened her eyes. Lo! Her nose-ornament had dropped down from somewhere near the Tulsi! She took it to her husband.

Merchant: "Ha, how could this come here? I had locked it in my box in the shop." He ran up to his shop

30

FAITH IS THE WAY

Faith is a wonderful thing. A certain spiritually illumined soul was sitting, with many friends about him, talking of God. Suddenly, a man stricken with sorrow, who wanted to know God, happened to pass that way. Seeing the Master and disciples sitting there, he approached them and said, "I am utterly miserable. I want to know God, I want to see God." At that time the Master was telling some story to the disciples and he had just said the word 'pestle.' The master told him, "Go on repeating 'pestle, pestle'." The man took that word with all faith. He thought that must be the name of God. He went on repeating the word day and night. He got inner illumination by the power of the Name. It is said that from heaven a golden pestle came and took him to heaven because of his faith in the Name. Whatever it was, he took it for God's name. By the power of his faith, he could go to heaven.

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Wake up from the dream of separation:
Know that you and He are not two
All life is one.

* * *

31

YOU ARE NOT THE BODY

There was a Greek philosopher. His name was Epictetus. He was a slave under the Roman Emperor and he was harshly punished by his master even for slight mistakes. He was almost everyday beaten by his master. One day, for no serious fault of Epictetus, the master beat him so severely that his leg broke and he became lame. After some time, a friend of Epictetus, who lived far away, came to see him and finding him limping, asked him how he became lame. Then Epictetus gave a characteristic reply, "I am not lame, but my leg is lame." His detachment from the body was so perfect that whatever happened to it, he never thought it had anything to do with his real Self.

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Life should have intensity in it; else it is a dull and insipid show.

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The secret of true joy lies in self-sacrifice and not in self-seeking.

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32

SERVE PARENTS

In Pandharpur, a place famous for the temple of Vithoba, whose image represents Lord Krishna, there was an ardent devotee. He was also an affectionate son of his parents whom he served with great love. One day, when he was engaged in the service of his parents, Vithoba came to the door of his house and called him out. The devotee said, "Please wait, O Lord, I shall come to you after I have finished serving my parents." So, he made Lord Vithoba wait. Service of one's parents is most important and is held superior to all other service.

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Clasp the whole universe in one vast embrace of love.

* * *

On the ashes of the dead self the kingdom of the Spirit
is built.

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33

A TRUE YOGINI

In a forest lived a great Tapaswin. His wife was a highly evolved soul. She passed away leaving an only daughter. The daughter grew up in all innocence and purity. Her father was getting old. She used to seat him in a Jhula and swing it to and fro. She was guileless and pure and free like a child. One day, a Raja who happened to pass that way, saw the young girl in the company of her old father. The Raja was a bachelor and had declined to marry so far, though he had many offers. Seeing this girl, he told his minister that if at all he married, he would marry her only. So they went and asked the Tapaswin if he would be willing to give his daughter in marriage to the Raja. The old hermit replied: "I have absolutely no objection if she agrees. You may approach her and get her consent."

They then asked the girl. She replied, "I have no objection. But there are two conditions to be fulfilled. Firstly, you should engage somebody here to look after my old father. Secondly, I will bring with me the clothes that I am wearing now and I should be permitted to spend one hour daily in a solitary room in the palace where I will put on these clothes." The king agreed.

The marriage was duly performed and the girl cheerfully left her father and carried on the duties of the queen peacefully in the kingdom. She was very loving and compassionate to every one. According to her vow, she was spending an hour daily in a lonely room, wearing her simple forest-dress. In course of time, a girl was born to her. Unfortunately, the subjects felt that as their king had married some forest-girl, they should not allow her children to inherit the throne. They requested the king to get the child killed. The king conveyed this tragic news to the queen. She gladly agreed to give away the child. The child was then handed over to two men who were instructed to take it to the jungle and kill it. They took the child to the jungle but seeing its beauty and innocence, were prompted to leave it there alive. They falsely reported to the king that they had killed it. The child was soon taken away by another king who happened to pass that way.

Two years later, a son was born to the queen. Again the subjects agitated that the son should be killed. The queen readily gave away this child also. The men who were commissioned to kill it left it alone in the forest as before and reported to the king that they had killed it. It so happened that this child was also found and taken away by the same king who had taken the first baby girl. After some time, another daughter was born to the queen, which went the way of the previous two, and was adopted by the same king who took away the first two children. The three children grew up nicely under the loving care of the king and queen who had no children of their own.

Now the subjects requested the king to send the queen back to the forest and marry another—a princess,—as they thought there was no use having a queen whose children were unfit for the throne. The king told the queen about this. She cheerfully fell in with the idea and went back to her father and started as before to serve him, swinging him in the Jhula. She was as happy as ever. She had no regrets, because she took all that happened in such a detached spirit that life was, to her, nothing short of a dream.

Some years passed. The king, who sent back his queen to the forest, decided upon marrying the daughter of the king of the neighbouring State. The marriage was settled. As there was no female member in the palace for making the necessary preparations, the subjects requested the king to send for the former queen and ask her to arrange everything for the king's wedding. They all knew that the former queen was very wise in managing all affairs. The king sent messengers to the forest to call her. She came willingly and supervised over her husband's marriage.

Before the function commenced, however, the father of the bride told the king in the presence of the assembly: "I wish to tell you some details of my family before the marriage takes place. These three children of whom you are going to marry the eldest are not really mine. I found them all one by one in the forest. I took them to my kingdom and brought them up."

Now the king—the bridegroom—suspected that the bride was perhaps his own daughter and that the other

two were also his children. He sent for the two men who were ordered to kill them. On questioning they confessed they did not kill the children and begged to be pardoned. After careful enquiries he was convinced that they were his own children. Of course, he could not marry his own daughter. So the marriage was cancelled. All were pleased with the result. The people of the kingdom highly appreciated the good and lofty qualities of the queen who calmly passed through the severe trials that befell her. They then prayed that she should not go back to the forest but should remain in the palace as the queen. She agreed to the proposal.

See how detached the queen was while living and moving in the world. That was because she was brought up in her most impressionable age by a saint, in an atmosphere far removed from worldly distractions. So she had developed detachment from worldly pleasures and position.

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If thou wouldst truly live, then live in the Eternal.

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34

HOW AMAZING—THE POWER OF GOD'S
NAME

There was a woman saint who lived with her Guru serving him. Both were votaries of the divine Name. She used to prepare cow-dung cakes which are used as fuel in India. She had put them up in the sun for drying. A neighbouring woman had also prepared similar cakes and spread them out nearby. When the cakes were dry, the woman saint and her neighbour went to collect them. The cakes had all got mixed up somehow. The neighbour wanted to take, besides her own cakes, the cakes of the saint also. Hearing of it, the Master, whom the woman saint was serving, said he could easily find out the cakes prepared by his disciple. He took each cake and placed it near his ear. In some of them, he heard the sound of God's name. Those in which God's name was being sung, were sorted out from the others—these belonged to his disciple. Thus the dispute was settled. As the woman saint was always repeating God's name, even while preparing the cow-dung cakes, the cakes absorbed the divine vibrations and her Master could hear God's name in them!

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35

LONGING FOR THE MOTHER

Once several years ago, Ramdas was living in a cave on the top of a hill from where he used to come down for bathing in a tank. Near the tank was a rest-house intended for wandering mendicants. One day, after his bath, Ramdas went to the rest-house where he saw a party of seven or eight young men who had come from the town for a picnic. The town was about four miles from the rest-house. These young men had brought with them a child, may be a year or two old. Perhaps, they thought it would be great fun to have the child with them during the picnic. Each one by turns played with the child and kept it quite happy and cheerful.

After some time they found the child getting restless. It was looking in every direction for something which it missed and was crying. The young men made out that the child was thinking of its mother. But she was far away in the town. So they tried to divert the child's attention by giving it some sweets, toys, and so on. It kept quiet for some time, but again turned its eyes here and there and started crying, "Mother!" The young men got frightened as it was not possible to take the child to its mother soon.

They brought some more toys and some more sweets, but all these interested the child only for a few minutes after which it started crying again for the mother. Now the child grew more restless, fell on the ground and cried aloud, beating its hands and feet. So, one of the young men had to take the child at once on his shoulders and run to the town for handing it back to its mother.

We must be like that child, without any serious attraction for the toys with which we play in the world, and be satisfied only when we get the Mother. The Guru will take us to the Mother's place, or the Mother Herself will come to us. It is the Guru who brings us into contact with the Mother. Here, the man who took the child to its mother is something like the Guru. So, if our longing for God is as intense as that of the child, no time will be lost in getting Him; we are sure to have His vision.

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When thy heart glistens with purity and peace
That is the temple of the Lord.

* * *

When love takes possession of one completely,
one becomes the very image of God.

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36

PLEASURE GOES WITH PAIN

A man was passing on the road when he saw a blind man. He wanted to take the blind man for dinner. But as he had to go in a hurry, he told the blind man to come to his house and have dinner with him. He went to his wife and asked her to have one more meal prepared as he had invited a blind man for dinner. His wife replied she would prepare two extra meals. When asked why she was preparing meals for two instead of one, she said "The blind man will not come alone, he will be led by another."

This illustration is to show that worldly happiness does not come to us alone but is always accompanied by sorrow. Pleasure born of material things is always mixed with sorrow. The objects of the senses cannot give us unmixed happiness; this is the experience of every one of us. We must, therefore, rise above the pairs of opposites and, going deep into the heart, discover the eternal source of joy within and behold the whole universe as Divine, ever filled with light, joy and peace.

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37

GOD IS HIS OWN DEVOTEE

In the Bhagavad Gita, it is said that a devotee who has attained Jnana or liberation is verily God Himself. Lord Krishna showed the world how he venerated those who had reached this blessed state. His humble devotee, Sudama, went to have His Darshan in Dwarka. As soon as He saw Sudama, He received him, placed him on His throne and worshipped him.

On another occasion, when Narada went for the Darshan of Krishna in Dwarka, he was told, at the entrance of the palace of Krishna, that Krishna was not then available for Darshan.

When asked for the reason, Narada was told that the Lord was engaged in His usual worship. Narada was surprised to hear this and wondered whom Krishna worshipped, He Himself being the Supreme God. So he went inside quietly and peeped into the room where Krishna was sitting for worship. He saw Krishna busy worshipping the images of Prahlada, Ambarisha, Draupadi, Valmiki, Narada and others. Narada went inside and asked Krishna what He was doing. Then Krishna said, "I am worshipping these devotees who are the images of my God."

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38

MIND CONTROL

An itinerant Sadhu, in the course of his wanderings, came to a village and settled himself down in a temple for some days. He used to sit quiet and serene on one of the verandahs of the temple. He was hardly going out, and spent all his time inside the temple. The Pujari of the temple, finding in the Sadhu high spiritual qualities, gave him at mid-day a part of the food offered to God as Naivedyam. The Sadhu lived only on one meal a day. This went on for some days. One day, the manager of the temple happened to pay his periodical visit to the temple for inspection. He saw the Pujari in the act of giving food offered to God to the Sadhu. The manager did not like this. He told the Pujari, "Why do you feed this lazy fellow? He is sitting quietly without doing anything. Such people do not deserve to be given food. So I order you not to feed him any more."

The Pujari obeyed. The Sadhu did not mind the stoppage of food to him. He would go out at mid-day, beg for food in two or three houses, and having satisfied his hunger, return to his seat in the temple in about half-an-hour's time. Thereafter, he would continue to sit silent in his Asan until the next day. Thus the Sadhu continued to live in the temple.

About a week later, the manager, as usual, came and saw the Sadhu sitting quietly as before at the same place at the temple. He came to know from the Pujari that the Sadhu did not receive any food from the temple and that he was satisfying his hunger by begging.

Now, the manager, getting interested in the Sadhu, was curious to know why he was sitting the whole day practically doing nothing. He went up to the Sadhu and, sitting near him, asked him: "Sadhuji, what is the meaning of your sitting the whole day without stirring out?"

The Sadhu replied, "I will give you the answer in five minutes. Please wait."

The manager waited. Five minutes passed. But no answer came from the Sadhu. The manager reminded the Sadhu about his question. The Sadhu again said, "Brother, will you wait for five minutes more to get the answer?" The manager, with a little impatience, told the Sadhu he would wait for five minutes more but would not do so any longer.

Again five minutes passed. Still the Sadhu was silent. Then the manager questioned him a little sternly, "What is this, Sadhuji, ten minutes have passed and you have not yet answered my question?" The Sadhu calmly replied: "Brother, will you please wait for another five minutes?" The manager was impatient and excited at what the Sadhu said. He stood with his watch in hand and told the Sadhu finally: "Look here, Sadhuji, I have a lot of work to attend to. I cannot afford to

idle away my time like you. I give you five minutes more for the answer. If you do not fulfil my wish, I will go away.”

The manager waited for five minutes more and no answer came. In a huff, grumbling and in an irritated mood, the manager went out of the temple. When he had gone a few yards, he stopped and reflected—“I cannot sit at one place for 15 minutes quietly, whereas the Sadhu is there on the verandah all the 24 hours except for a short period. What a tremendous power he possesses for the control of his mind!” His admiration for the Sadhu became very great. He turned back and, entering the temple, called the Pujari and said: “Pujari, from tomorrow, you should feed the Sadhu from the offerings of food to the Deity as you were doing before and as long as he chooses to stay in the temple.” After saluting the Sadhu in all humility and reverence the manager left.

Verily, to control the mind and sit steadily at one place without the thought of moving about is not a joke. Only rare souls who have subdued the mind by concentration upon God can do this.

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39

SURRENDER AND YOU GET GOD

In a house there was a pot of curds kept in the kitchen. The pot was not covered. Two frogs, one big and the other small, while hopping about, fell into the pot of curds. Both of them struggled for some time to get out, but could not do so. The bigger frog gave up all hopes, kept quiet, and sank to the bottom and died. The smaller frog did not want to give in easily. He struggled and struggled for hours together. He was now completely exhausted and therefore kept quiet for some time. By the frog's continuous struggles and his constant movements in the curd pot, the curds were churned and butter was formed on its surface. When the frog stopped struggling through exhaustion and became still, the butter gradually formed itself into a lump. This gave a chance for the frog to leap out of the pot.

It is clear from this story that struggle or Sadhana is essential to secure freedom from the toils of worldly life. You should strive hard to get God and when you are completely exhausted in the effort and lie still in surrender at His feet, He comes to you as your saviour.

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40

COMPASSION TO THE REVILER

Buddha is a great example of one who, through the attainment of Nirvana, had love and compassion towards all living creatures whether they were good or bad. Once, in the course of his wanderings for spreading the message of Dharma, he went to a certain place where lived a man who did not appreciate the life and mission of Buddha. The man went up to Buddha and hurled abuses at him. Buddha smiled and felt great compassion for him. In his serene way, he told the man: "Friend! I am not at all affected by what you said to me. Suppose you offer a fruit to anyone and the fruit is not accepted by him, where does it go?" It was a simple question and the man answered. "Of course, it comes back to me."

"Friend," said Buddha again, "I can tell you I have not accepted your abuses."

That very instant, a change came over the man. He fell at Buddha's feet and prayed for pardon. It is rightly said by a famous saint that God dwells in that heart in which there is compassion, forgiveness and peace.

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41

BE NEAR GOD ALWAYS

Once a saint was passing through a street. On the verandah of a house, a man was making flour on a grinding stone. When the rice grains were being crushed between the two stones, he thought within himself that he too, like those grains of rice, was suffering untold miseries in this worldly life. At this thought, his heart moved and he began to cry. The saint seeing him thus, went up to him and asked, "Brother, why are you crying?" The man replied that he felt he was like the grains of rice which were being crushed between the two stones. Then the saint asked him to lift up the upper stone and showed him how the grains near the centre peg remained whole and uncrushed, while those that had moved away from the peg had been powdered. He exhorted the grinder: "Look here, if you remember God and be near Him, you will never be caught in the meshes of the world. You must always be devoted to God, and then you will be able to live in the world just like the uncrushed grains which are in close touch with the peg. You will then remain unaffected by adversities incidental to worldly life."

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42

SEE GOD EVERYWHERE

During the fight between Rama and Ravana, there came a time when all the monkeys who formed the army of Rama, were attacked by the Rakshasas with such a terrible destructive force that their condition was most precarious. Sri Rama, seeing the pain and panic of His monkeys, decided to do something to save the situation. By His divine power, He suddenly changed the combatants on both the sides into His own form. All the monkeys of Sri Rama's army and all the Rakshasas of Ravana's army now appeared as Sri Rama Himself. Thus each monkey saw the other monkey on the battlefield as his Lord Sri Rama and so embraced him and danced with joy whereas every Rakshasa saw the other Rakshasa as Sri Rama—his avowed enemy. So, they fought ferociously among themselves in the battlefield and killed one another.

If, like His monkeys, you also see Rama everywhere with the eye of faith and devotion, fear will vanish from you. You will have nothing but love flowing from your hearts. You will love all alike and swim in an ocean of bliss.

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43

YOU BECOME WHAT YOU THINK

In a school, a teacher was giving lessons to a class. He noticed that one of the boys was not attentive to the lessons taught. His mind seemed to be somewhere else. The teacher asked the boy why he was so inattentive. The boy admitted that his mind was not in the lessons. He had a bull in his house which he loved so much that he was always thinking of it alone when away from the house. The teacher then asked the boy to go to a hill nearby, sit there and think of the bull as long as he liked. The boy accordingly sat on the hill consecutively for seven days, thinking only of his beloved bull. After seven days, he felt he had no more to think of the bull and so decided to attend his class. He went and waited outside the class. The teacher from the class-room asked him to enter the class if he had done with the meditation on the bull. The boy replied that he was not going to the hill any more but that he could not enter the class-room as his horns were too long to allow him to pass through the door. By constant thought of the bull, the boy felt he had become the bull itself. Such is the power of concentrated thought. By this concentration on the bull, he came to believe he was the bull. Whereas a man, whose real nature is already divine, can attain Divinity more easily by fixing his mind on God in meditation.

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44

KING'S SECRET WAS OUT

There lived a king and a queen. The queen was a very devoted woman, engaged most of the time in the worship of God and repetition of His name. She was happy in every way except in one thing, namely, that her husband was not devoted to God. She wished so much that her husband should also have faith and devotion. She never saw him sitting for prayers or repeating God's name.

Once when the queen woke up at midnight from sleep, she heard the king, who was sleeping by her side, uttering "Ram, Ram" in his sleep. This gave her a pleasant surprise. To hear her husband repeating God's name even in sleep was not an ordinary joy to her. To celebrate the great event, she arranged for a festival and a grand feast the next day. When the king found the great preparations going on for an unusual festival, he enquired of the queen as to what the matter was.

The queen replied that it was a very important day in her life as she had heard him uttering God's name the previous night in his sleep. Hearing this, the king was taken aback. He was extremely sorry that the spiritual discipline, which he had carried on so long in secret, was then revealed to others.

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45

A TRUE MIRACLE

There was once a king in India. One of his many servants received divine grace with the result that his mind turned towards God. After devoting himself to God for some time, he found he could no longer serve the king. So he gave up his job and went to the Himalayas for performing austerities. Some years later, he realised God and came down to the plains to work for the benefit of humanity—what in Sanskrit is called Loka Sangraha.

In that connection, he decided to perform a great Yagna or sacrifice. Sacrifices are done in India by offering oblations to God through fire for gaining particular ends. In this case, the end was the securing of plenty and prosperity for humanity. The saint invited donations for this great work from various princes and other rich men he knew. He was very popular already. So large donations poured in. He had sent his appeal also to the king under whom he had served some years ago. Though the king did not make out from whom he had received the appeal, he too sent a decent amount as his contribution for the sacrifice. When the day for the sacrifice arrived, all the donors came and attended the function. The Yagna was performed on a very large scale and many people were present, among them this

46

GOD SAVES HIS DEVOTEE

Under the Nawab of Bijapur there was a revenue officer in charge of the Mangalwedha Taluka. His name was Damaji. He was a great Bhakta of Vithoba. In those days, taxes and rents from landowners were collected by the village officers in kind, i.e., in the form of rice and wheat, and stored in a godown. So the godown at Mangalwedha was full of grains, collected as taxes and rents. There was once a great famine in the Taluka and people were starving. They came to Damaji for help. He gave whatever he had and finally distributed all the grains from the government godown to the starving people.

The head-clerk of Damaji was jealous of him and thought that if Damaji were to be removed from his office, he would get a chance to take his place. So he sent information to the Nawab of Bijapur that Damaji had distributed all the government grains to the people. Hearing the news, the Nawab immediately sent his men to arrest Damaji and bring him before the Nawab. When the sepoys reached Mangalwedha, Damaji was performing Kirtan. The sepoys interrupted it and wanted Damaji to follow them. Damaji told his people that he was summoned by the Nawab to see him at once, and left. Beholding His devotee in great trouble

Vithoba decided to go to the rescue of Damaji. Vithoba took the form of a Pariah, appeared before the Nawab and said, "I am the servant of Damaji of Mangalwedha. He has sent with me the money to cover the full value of grains due to you as taxes and rents." The Nawab replied, "That will amount to lakhs of rupees. How are you going to pay it? Where have you got the money?" The Pariah said, "I have got it here. You may take the money from this bag." So saying, he handed over to the Nawab a small bag. The Nawab emptied it and got the money counted. It contained the exact amount due to him by Damaji. As required, the Nawab then gave the Pariah a receipt for the money.

The Nawab was fascinated on seeing the strange Pariah with his lustrous eyes, radiant face and attractive features. When asked to give his name, he said, "I am only a poor servant of Damaji. My name is Vithoo Mahar", and disappeared. The Nawab was simply mad after Vithoo Mahar. He ran here and there to find the Pariah. But nowhere could he be found. The Nawab refused to take food and drink until he met the Pariah again. Two or three days passed. Now the sepoy brought Damaji before the Nawab. The Nawab was surprised on seeing Damaji and asked: "Why have you come? There is no charge against you. The money due to me has been paid up by you three days ago. Your servant Vithoo Mahar came and paid it. I want to see your servant again. Where is he?"

Damaji: "I have not paid you the money. I have no servant named Vithoo Mahar."

Nawab: "How can it be? He has paid in cash all the money—the full value of the corn—and I have given him a receipt also."

Damaji was astonished to hear this. He had a copy of the Bhagavad Gita in his hand. A small piece of paper was protruding from it. The Nawab asked what it was. Damaji took it out and found to his surprise that it was the receipt, the one given by the Nawab to Vithoo Mahar.

Nawab: "You said that you did not know about Vithoo Mahar. He has handed over the receipt to you. So you surely know about him. Otherwise how could you be in possession of the receipt I gave him?"

Damaji was greatly perplexed and did not know what to say.

Nawab: "Now I want to see Vithoo Mahar. You must show him to me."

Damaji: "Oh Lord, you have saved me from one trouble and put me into another. The Nawab wants to see Vithoo Mahar. How can I show him whom I have myself not seen?"

Damaji then took the Nawab to Pandharpur for Darshan of Vithoba. Both of them stood in front of the Deity.

Nawab: "I do not want to see the stone idol. I want to see Vithoo Mahar. You should show him to me."

Then Lord Vithoba revealed Himself to both of them in the form of Vithoo Mahar. The Pariah who handed

over the money to the Nawab was standing in front of them in place of the stone image. Thus the Lord saved His devotee and gave Darshan to the Nawab also. The Samadhi of Damaji and that of the Nawab are side by side in Mangalwedha.

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Wherever you turn, wherever you look, whomsoever and whichsoever you see, that is the form of the Beloved.

* * *

Life is a beautiful gift of God. It is intended to be placed at His feet as a dedicated flower.

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47

THE TWO BIRDS

When we turn our gaze from the world to God, we grow into His likeness and become one with Him. Otherwise, we are subject to all kinds of anxieties and miseries. Here is an example.

On a tree were two birds. One was seated on the top-most branch of the tree, still, calm, serene and peaceful. The other bird on the lower branch was hopping from branch to branch, in pursuit of the fruits of the tree. It would once eat sweet fruit and feel happy and at another time eat raw or sour fruit and feel unhappy. It was restless and running about constantly for objects that yielded it momentary joy and grief. At last, it aspired to achieve a peace and joy which never changes. So it turned its gaze upward in search of that blessed state. It now saw the bird on the uppermost branch seated in a state of perfect joy and peace. That very instant, the bird of the lower branch vanished and now there was only the one on the top branch. The lower one had become one with it.

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GOD IN YOUR HEART

A devotee, who was very keen on beholding his Ishta, Sri Krishna, desired to have guidance. So he asked some devotees he met whether they could help him in finding Krishna. They said they had themselves not seen Him and so they were not able to guide him. They suggested he might be able to get suitable advice in the matter from the devotees living in Brindavan. Krishna's devotee made his way directly to Brindavan with the purpose of fulfilling his quest. He went to various temples of Sri Krishna, met the Pujaris and the devotees assembled there and asked them if they could give him the clue for beholding Krishna. With one voice they all said that they themselves had not met Krishna; so they were unable to help him in the quest. They directed him to Gokul where they thought he might be able to succeed in his attempts to see Krishna. He went to Gokul but did not gain his purpose. As directed by the people, he went also to Govardhan, Mathura, Dwarka and other places. Practically he went over the whole of India, wherever temples of Krishna existed and devotees of the Lord resided. But, all to no avail.

The devotee was stricken with despair and did not know what to do next. In a dejected mood, he at last sat on a stone in a solitary spot and in a plaintive voice

said, "Oh Lord, I am tired of searching for You. Where can I find You? How can I have Your Darshan? Oh Lord, knowing that I am Your devotee craving intensely to meet You, do grant me Your beatific vision."

Then a strange thing happened. A charming and melodious voice spoke from within his heart—"Oh my child, I am here seated in your heart. Turn to Me and behold My resplendent figure and be permanently blessed."

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Whenever depression comes, throw the whole burden
on Him and be free from it.

* * *

The whole burden of the universe is on Him. Take
it that yours also is on Him. All along it has been
nowhere else.

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49

GOD IS EVERYWHERE

Once a saint, to test his disciples to find out if they are conscious of God's presence everywhere, called a few of them, gave them a mango each and asked them to eat it in a place where nobody could see them. They all went with their mangoes and, except one, returned and reported that none saw them eating the mango. But the disciple who was an exception came back with the mango and told the Guru that he could not find a place where he was not watched by God, who is an eternal and all-pervading witness.

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Divine grace is always on you. Know this and be free.

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Call on the Lord with all the love of your heart. Concentrate all your longing in the call and you may be sure that God will respond.

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50

YOU MAKE YOUR OWN BONDAGE

Once a man went and embraced a thorny tree. He embraced it so hard that the thorns caused him intense pain. He was crying aloud but was only tightening his hold on the tree. Seeing a man pass by, he shouted for help. The man told him, "Give up your clutch on the tree and free yourself from the prick of the thorns." But, he would not leave his hold on the tree. He went on wailing for help to set him free. Who, in such a state, can help him except himself? So, to free yourself from bondage is in your own hands and not in the hands of others.

* * *

Love is your way and love is your goal.

* * *

You are neither a weak, nor a puny, nor a faulty creature, but you are the radiant child of a resplendent Mother whose song of power and victory resounds through worlds and space.

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51

GOD HUNGERS FOR DEVOTEE'S LOVE

There was a butcher in a small town. He was a great Bhakta. Even when he was plying his trade, he used to take God's name mentally, and in course of time he found it hard to kill animals. He, therefore, stopped killing. But he had to carry on his business as he had no other means of livelihood. So he purchased meat and sold the same at a small profit. For weighing the meat, the butcher was using a stone which happened to be a Salagram of whose sanctity he had no idea. He did not even remember how the stone came into his hands. He had been using it for a long time.

One day, a Brahmin who was passing in front of his shop chanced to see the butcher placing the Salagram on the balance for weighing meat. Naturally, the Brahmin was pained and surprised. He, therefore, asked the butcher to have the stone washed and handed over to him for closer scrutiny. Confirming himself that it was a Salagram he enquired why the butcher used such a sacred stone for weighing meat. The innocent butcher replied that he did not know anything about a Salagram or its sanctity. The Brahmin then explained to him that Salagram was a sacred object worthy of worship with flowers, sandal paste, etc. The Brahmin asked for the Salagram so that it could be worshipped along with

the other deities in his shrine room. The butcher readily agreed.

The Brahmin took it home and kept it in his shrine room along with other images of God, and carried on the worship as usual with elaborate rituals and offerings of food, etc. But the deity embodied in the Salagram did not like the change. It missed in the Brahmin's house the spirit of true love and devotion with which it was handled in the butcher's shop. Unable to bear the loveless worship and company of the Brahmin any longer, the deity appeared to him in a dream and said: "Why have you brought me here? I was very happy with the butcher who is a true devotee. He was always chanting my holy names and, now and then, putting me gently on the balance with his own hand. Oh, what a soft and loving hand he has! His touch is like a warm embrace. His heart is full of devotion. He used to talk with his customers mostly about my glories. But here, for want of love and devotion, I am not at all happy though you give me rich offerings, and perform elaborate Puja. Please take me back to the butcher so that I can again be happy."

God hungers only for love. He is not satisfied with mere rituals and ceremonial worship. Pure love and devotion alone does satisfy Him.

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52

TRUE SAINTHOOD

The name of Saint Jaffer Sadi is famous. One day a person's purse containing some rupees was stolen. Wrongly, the owner of the purse suspected the saint and caught hold of him, rudely demanding the return of the money.

The saint calmly asked the man, "How many rupees were there in your purse?"

The man said: "One thousand rupees." The saint quietly paid him from his own pocket one thousand rupees and went away.

A short time after, the real thief was captured. The owner of the purse was now terribly frightened over the wrong he had done to the saint and taking the thousand rupees he had unjustly got from him, he laid it at the feet of the saint and sued for pardon.

The saint, in all humility, said: "My dear friend, keep the money with you. What was once given by me to anyone I never take back." Seeing the extraordinary magnanimity and good nature of the saint, the man felt great repentance and became one of his ardent devotees.

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53

VIVEK — TRUE COUNSELLOR

In the kingdom of Dehapuri, Mind was the ruler and Vivek was the minister. The king had six friends. They were Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada and Matsarya. The king, Mind, in the company of these friends, engaged himself in all sorts of evil ways and made Dehapuri subject to all vices. When the minister, Vivek, advised the king to go on the proper path, the latter would not listen but would obey the false friends. Things gradually got worse. One day, the king was found heavily drunk rolling in the streets. Another day, he was found unconscious in a gutter. The minister, Vivek, rescued him. Later on, the king realised his folly in following the advice of his six false friends and in not paying heed to his minister's counsel. He was able to realise this only after experiencing great misery. Now he repented for having wasted his life so long and resolved finally to break off his connection with the false friends and act only as Vivek advised.

The last scene shows the king, Mind, as a Sannyasi in Gerrua clothes with his head shaven, Mala on and a Kamandal by his side, sitting calm and serene. From a distance, the old friends, Kama, Krodha, etc., are looking at him, not daring to come closer. They have realised very well that when the king is under the control of Vivek, they have no influence over him.

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54

ABSOLUTE RELIANCE ON GOD

A devotee of Shiva was passing through a forest. He had with him some valuable things. He saw a robber who was about to attack him and he got frightened. He called upon the Lord to save him. Shiva then rushed towards His devotee for his rescue. By the time He had gone near his devotee, however, the latter had taken a stone in hand and was about to fling it at the robber to save himself. Seeing this, Shiva turned back. Parvati, Shiva's consort, asked why He returned so soon. Shiva replied that His help was no longer required by His devotee as he was trying to protect himself, and so He had returned.

People have no real faith in God, though they say they are His devotees.

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Worship of the Mother means to know that your body is Her expression and your activities are Her activities.

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55

HOW PRIDE DELUDES

There was once a Brahmin in a village. He had a beautiful garden in front of his house. One day, a cow entered the garden and damaged some of the plants. The Brahmin became very angry and, in a fit of fury, dealt such a heavy blow to the poor cow that it died on the spot. It is deemed a great sin to kill a cow. But the Brahmin consoled himself thinking that he was not responsible for the cow's death, as his right hand with which he killed the cow was an instrument of Indra, and so Indra was responsible for the cow's death.

Indra planned to test the Brahmin. So he went to him in the guise of an old man and praised the beauty of his garden. The Brahmin was naturally pleased and proudly took the old man round. The visitor appreciated very much all that he saw and asked him who had reared up the garden with so much skill. The Brahmin unhesitatingly replied that he did everything himself, with his own hands. At this, the old man turned round, and revealing himself in his true Deva form, told the Brahmin: "So whatever good you do, for which others praise you, is done by you with your own hands, but the act of killing the cow alone rests with Indra and the sin goes to him!" Many people in the world are like the Brahmin in this story.

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56

GOD DWELLS IN ALL BEINGS

This happened more than fifty years ago. The famous saint of South India, Sri Sai Baba, had gained a great name in the spiritual world. Once, he was absorbed in some thought when, suddenly, a smile appeared on his lips. "In your temple, does any person come to you?" he lovingly asked his well-known disciple Sri Upasani Maharaj.

Upasani Maharaj, as commanded by Baba, was then living in the outskirts of Shirdi, in the temple of Khandoba, in the cremation grounds near the river. The temple was dilapidated. Being an orthodox Brahmin, he had refused to stay in the Dwarika Mayi Masjid where Baba stayed. He was having Darshan of Baba every day. He was preparing meals daily in the afternoon and taking them to Baba in the Masjid. Only after Baba's meal was over, he would take food and water.

"Baba, nobody goes there," replied Upasani Maharaj in reply to Baba's query.

"Well, sometimes I shall come to you," Baba graciously told the Maharaj.

Some days passed. Then, on a midday during summer, when the earth had become very hot by the fiery rays of the sun, Upasani Maharaj was taking to his Guru

a plate containing food. Maharaj was suddenly obstructed on the way by a black dog which was very hungry. Maharaj thought to himself, "Only after feeding the Guru, and not before, will it be proper to give food to the dog." On going a little distance, his mind changed. Looking back for the dog, he found that it had disappeared. He walked on and reached the Masjid. There he met Baba who asked him: "Where was the need for you to come as far as here in this terrible heat, when I had already met you on the way?" When Baba spoke like this, Upasani Maharaj remembered the dog he had met on the way and repented very much over his failure to feed it. Sai Baba remained silent.

The next day, when Maharaj started as usual from the temple with the food, he saw near the compound wall a Sudra standing and asking for food. Maharaj did not even cast a look at the hungry Sudra who cried for food. He wanted to reach the place of the Guru as early as possible. So he walked towards the Masjid. When he reached the place, Baba again told his disciple: "Today also you have needlessly taken so much trouble. I was standing near your temple itself. But you did not care to look at me."

The disciple's eyes were now opened by Sai Baba who said: "I myself appeared before you as the dog and the Sudra. In all these resides one Paramatma or God. I wanted to teach you the secret of Parabrahman. He is all-pervading, as established by Vedanta. He resides in all beings. So you have to look upon all with equal vision, bear good feelings towards everybody and always

do the right action, which is the highest duty. God dwells in all beings. Recognize Him, know Him and serve Him in all." Thus, Sai Baba blessed his great disciple.

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Worshipping brass images and conceiving hatred for man is not devotion.

* * *

You truly love, when you feel one with all.

* * *

SAINT IS GOD HIMSELF

A woman who had lost her only child was utterly desolate and grief-stricken. She approached physicians and temples and pious men and prayed to them to bring her child back to life. Having received no help in any direction, she at last went to a devotee of a Mahatma living in the nearby forest.

The devotee advised her to go to the Mahatma and pray to him for the fulfilment of her wish. Accordingly, she went to the place where the Mahatma lived and requested him to pray to God for the revival of her dead child.

The Mahatma came to the house of the sorrow-stricken woman and, before a large crowd which had gathered hearing of the visit of the Mahatma, prayed thrice for the revival of the dead child. But it was of no avail. All were astonished that in spite of the Mahatma's prayer the child did not return to life. The mother was greatly disappointed and began to cry aloud. Seeing the pitiable condition of the woman and feeling great compassion for her, the Mahatma looked at the dead body of the child and said: "I command you to get up." To the joyous surprise of the mother and all

the assembled people, the child got up as if from sleep and rushed to its mother.

The moral is: Saints are the very embodiments of God. There is no meaning in asking them to pray to God for their sake. Pray to them for blessings and grace.

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The whole world is good to us if we are good.

* * *

Seek not to transform the world before you have wrought the needed change in yourself.

* * *

THE COCOANUT THIEF

At about 2 o'clock after midnight, we in the Ashram heard noises at one of the Ashram windows. We came to the window to find out what the matter was. We saw two able-bodied Ashram workers bringing with them a stout young man by holding him firmly by his arms. One of the workers related that the man was a thief. "We caught him red-handed when he plucked cocoanuts from the Ashram trees." The workmen said that the man had already plucked 11 cocoanuts which were lying under the tree when they found him.

Mataji told the workers to take him down to the kitchen and keep him there till day-break. This was done. Mataji detained the thief till breakfast-time and, having served him a full breakfast and presenting him with eight of the 11 cocoanuts, sent him away with a mild and motherly advice.

A few days later, in the evening, after the daily Bhajan was over, the Ashram workers again brought the same cocoanut thief to the front-door and Ramdas was called to see him. Ramdas asked him why he had committed theft again, and whether he would give his word to Ramdas that he would no longer commit such thefts. The man felt shy and, lowering his head, said, "I promise

that I will not in future steal cocoanuts—from the Ashram compound.”

Ramdas said he was not satisfied with such a promise. He must give his word that he would not steal cocoanuts from anywhere henceforth. The man stood silent for some minutes and then with an air of assurance he promised not to commit thefts in future.

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The greatest virtue that shines forth in all its splendour in the Bhakta is forgiveness.

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To suffer calmly, act nobly and live peacefully is the purpose of life.

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59

A SILENT MEETING

Emerson, the famous philosopher of America, wished to see the Englishman, Thomas Carlyle. The former travelled from America to England by steamer and it took him more than a month to reach Southampton.

On landing, he proceeded straight to London where Carlyle lived. He went to Carlyle's house and not finding him there, went as directed to the Club frequented by him. The man in charge pointed to Carlyle seated on a chair at one of the tables. Emerson made for the table and sat on a chair by the side of Carlyle. They sat beside each other without exchanging a single word for about two hours. Then, Emerson departed from the place, proceeded to Southampton, caught a steamer and came back home.

One of his friends, on his return, asked Emerson if he had met Carlyle in England and whether he had had any talk with him. Emerson replied he felt extreme peace and joy in the delectable company of Carlyle. That was all he said.

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60

SHIVAJI'S PRIDE HUMBLLED

Shivaji was an ardent disciple of Samarth Ramdas, the famous saint of Maharashtra. Once it happened that Shivaji was building a new fort for which he had engaged thousands of workmen. Shivaji used to go to inspect the construction work every day. One day, seeing the thousands of workers busy with the construction of the fort, he felt a certain amount of pride in being responsible for feeding thousands of men. Just at this psychological moment, his Guru Samarth Ramdas arrived on the spot. He made out from the demeanour of his disciple that a wave of pride had risen in his heart. In order to free him from it, the saint asked him to call some of his workers for breaking open the huge rock which was lying nearby.

Shivaji, obeying the instructions from his Guru, called upon some workmen to break open the rock. This was done and lo! inside the broken rock were holes in which there was water and which were occupied by a number of frogs. Now the Guru, drawing the attention of Shivaji to the frogs and the water, questioned him: "Shivaji, are you feeding and looking after these frogs as well, who reside in the holes inside the rock?" Hearing this, Shivaji's pride was humbled and at once he fell at the feet of the Guru and sought pardon for his erstwhile conceit and sense of self-importance.

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61

IGNORANCE IS LIKE DUST IN THE EYE

To realise God is to know the Self which is our real and eternal nature. We are always That, but through ignorance we come to believe we are perishable bodies and changing individual souls only. What is needed is to remove the veil of ignorance and reveal our inherent divine Self. Here is an instance.

A man travelling in the train, when peeping outside the window, got coal dust into his eyes. Irritation in the eyes started and the man became restless and unhappy—his eyes reddened. He tried to remove the dust by rubbing the eyes with his handkerchief but the speck of dust could not be dislodged. Soon after he got down from the train and reached home, he asked his mother to remove the dust by pouring oil into the affected eye. When the mother did so, the coal dust came off and the irritation stopped. Now the man exclaimed: “Oh! how happy I am!”

The question now is: after the removal of foreign matter from the eyes did he get any new happiness or did he only recover the happiness that he had lost for the time being? It is certainly the latter. But when he was relieved of the irritation, he felt at first as though he had got a new happiness.

So, in the case of an ignorant soul, the removal of ignorance means the recovering of Divine Consciousness, which he had lost, being obsessed by illusion. We are eternally one with God, and the false sense of separation must go.

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Be fixed like a rock in the awareness of your deathless nature and earn everlasting peace, power and freedom.

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Do what God spontaneously makes you do. Remain unattached both to the action and its result.

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62

LOVE FOR THE DIVINE NAME

Faith in the power of God's name is a rare thing. Those blessed ones who acquired this faith have scaled the supreme heights of spirituality and attained the vision of God. Tukaram, a famous saint of Maharashtra, was a great votary of the Name. He would sing and dance in ecstasy taking God's holy names. His songs would awaken and thrill the souls of those who went to listen to him. He was in the habit of performing Kirtans in the temple of his place. Vast crowds would gather to partake of the spiritual feast he offered.

One day a friend who attended Tukaram's Kirtans came to him and requested him to perform a Kirtan which should excel all those he had done previously. Tukaram agreed. The following night was appointed for the unique performance, and the news of it spread far and wide. The crowd this time was unusually enormous. The temple was filled to overflowing.

All waited expectantly for the Kirtan. Tukaram stood up with his pair of cymbals and started "Vithal, Vithal"—the name of God worshipped in the great shrine of Pandharpur. The sweet Name rang through the audience. "Vithal, Vithal" continued to pour out from the lips of the saint like a stream of nectar. Love welled up in his heart, and in ecstasy he danced, his eyes closed—absorbed

in Divine Consciousness. He went on and on—the sound of “Vithal, Vithal” in his melodious voice mingled with the music of cymbals issuing ceaselessly from him. One hour passed, two, three and on and on the fleeting hours sped, and Tukaram continued dancing and singing “Vithal, Vithal”. The night advanced unconsciously and the morning drew near. The faint streaks of dawn had cast their magic glow in the waking world. Tukaram stopped and opened his eyes. All who assembled there the night before except one had disappeared.

One man was sitting with sleepy eyes in front of Tukaram on the blanket on which he stood. Tukaram’s joy at the sight of the friend who sat up to the last for the Kirtan knew no bounds. He could not resist saying, “My friend, I am simply delighted to see that there is at least one in the vast audience collected here who has a love for the divine name “Vithal”.

“None of your devotion and talk of love for the Name”, retorted the devotee. “I am fed up with it all. The reason why I have remained here till now is that you are standing on my kambal and I cannot go home without it.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Tukaram, “I am very sorry, my friend. Here, take it,” and Tukaram moved away from the blanket. Instantly rolling up the kambal, the friend walked away with it as quickly as he could.

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63

LIFE IS BUT A DREAM

A man and his wife lived in a cottage with their only child. Once it happened the child fell ill and, after some days, it passed away. The mother of the child was sorely stricken with grief over the loss of her only child, whereas the husband remained quiet, composed and griefless. The wife saw the strange attitude of her husband towards the death of their own child. She made bold to ask him straightaway, "How is it that the death of our only child does not in any way affect you? You seem to possess a heart of stone. You have no grief for his loss. How is this?"

The husband then in a gentle and quiet voice replied: "Look here, my dear, last night I had a wonderful dream. I was a king married to a beautiful queen and had seven children. I was very fond of them and they used to play with me, and I enjoyed their company very much. They used to sit on my lap, climb on my shoulders, clasp my neck and so on. Suddenly, I woke up and the dream vanished. Now I find a son of mine has died. I am wondering whether I should bemoan the loss of the seven children I had when I was the king in the dream or the loss of one son of my so-called waking state. In this perplexity I am unable to decide and so am keeping quiet and at peace.

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64

GOD IS A MYSTERY

The world-famous Swami Ram Tirtha, when he was lecturing to an American audience, spoke ecstatically about God. He was a Mahatma of the highest spiritual eminence, for he could behold his own immortal Self in all beings and creatures, nay, he was conscious that the whole universe was his own expression and manifestation. He addressed audiences in the following manner: "Myself in the form of Ladies and Gentlemen!"

In the course of one of his lectures, he referred to God as 'He' another time as 'She' and yet another time as 'It'. This way of talking about Him nettled some of his listeners, one of whom stood up and asked, "Swamiji, you speak of God sometimes as He, sometimes as She and sometimes as It. I should like to know whether your God is a Mr., Mrs., or Miss?"

Without a moment's delay, the Swami shot out the answer: "My God is neither Mr. nor Mrs. nor Miss but a mystery."

Verily God is a mystery.

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65

GOD IS MY PROTECTOR

A saint was once sleeping under a tree. A man who bore ill-will towards him, was trying for some time to capture him. He arrived there and raising his sword shouted: "Lo! Get up and see. Now, you are caught at last. Who is there to protect you now?"

The saint got up and in a fearless tone replied: "God, my Master, is my protector and He is here ready to help me." This unnerved the enemy. Suddenly the saint wrested the sword from his enemy's hands and asked: "Tell me now, who is going to save you?"

The enemy finding the tables so suddenly turned on him, trembled with fear and with dried-up lips, said: "I am, indeed, helpless. There is none here to protect me. Have mercy on me."

The saint threw away the sword and told him: "Take your sword and from today learn from me the way of kindness and mercy." The man was ashamed of his conduct and fell at the saint's feet. From that day he gave up his enmity and became an ardent follower of the saint.

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NATURE OF SAINTS

A saint was earning his bread by stitching clothes. A person, who got a great quantity of cloth prepared into garments by this saint, used to pay him for the work in counterfeit coins. The saint was quietly accepting the bad coins although he knew them to be false. One day, the saint had to go out on some work, leaving his shop in charge of the servant. At that time, the patron came for getting the clothes made. And, as usual, he offered some bad coins. These the servant returned saying, "These are bad coins. Give me good ones."

When the saint returned, his servant said: "A certain man from the town had come to deceive me by paying me counterfeit coins." The saint replied: "Why did you not take the false coins? He is always paying me such coins which I accept readily. I am burying them all underground. If I do not accept them, you know, other people will be cheated by him."

That is how saints serve society.

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A MAHATMA'S MADNESS

In Brindavan there was a Mahatma whose name was Narayanaswami. He was staying on the banks of the Kusumsarovar. There also lived a Pujari, a worshipper at the temple. One day, the Pujari saw Narayanaswami running like a mad man from Kusumsarovar towards a nearby hill. Having reached the hill, Narayanaswami again ran back to the Kusumsarovar. Once again, he ran towards the hill and back. He did this several times. He was coming and going, again and again. The Pujari was astounded at the sight. Yet, he did not ask the Swami any questions that day.

Next day also he saw Narayanaswami running as on the previous day. That evening, the Pujari caught the feet of the Swami and asked him: "Maharaj! Why are you running like this?" Narayanaswami did not at once choose to answer. But the Pujari persisted. In the end, in consideration of the questioner's great love for him, the Swamiji said:

"Lo, brother, I am going daily to Kusumsarovar to perform prayers. Whenever I sit down, I see Lord Krishna standing at a distance. Seeing His beautiful form, I become mad. I run to catch Him, but He runs faster than I. When I reach the hill, I find Him

suddenly standing at my back. So, to catch Him, again I run after Him. Like this, for several days, I have been running after Him.”

The Pujari asked him: “Maharaj! Do you not ask Him for anything?”

The Swami said: “As first, I think of putting Him some questions to clear my doubts. But the moment I see Him, I forget all problems. His remembrance and love alone remain. His beauty is so enchanting that I cannot think of anything else. I simply go mad for Him.”

* * *

Do repeat the Mantra constantly. It is the seed of everlasting peace.

* * *

Do not lose thy balance in the midst of the storm.
Let the Light Divine guide thee to the goal.
The goal is peace within thee, sacrifice and service without.

Love is not love
If it does not serve and sacrifice.

* * *

68

TRUE WEALTH AND CHARITY

Minal Devi, the famous Rajmata of Gujarat, was a very generous-hearted queen. Once she went for the Darshan of Lord Somnath, taking with her one-and-a-quarter crores of rupees worth of gold. She weighed herself in gold and distributed the wealth to the poor. Jubilant over the merit acquired by the queen-mother by this great act of charity, her son, Raja Siddharaj, remitted the taxes payable by his subjects, to the value of several lakhs of rupees.

Now, Minal Devi became so proud that she believed nobody in the world could be as charitable as herself. Bhagwan Somnath, who wanted to save His devotee by teaching her a lesson, appeared before her in a dream and told her: "A poor woman has come to My shrine for Darshan. Go to her tomorrow and beg of her to give you the merit she has amassed."

Roused from her sleep, Minal Devi fell to thinking over the dream. Finally she came to the conclusion: "This is nothing too much for me. I will give her money and purchase her merit."

Accordingly, in the morning, the queen-mother sent messengers to find out the woman devotee. Soon they brought to her an old pilgrim—a poor Brahmin woman.

The queen-mother told her: "Give me your merit in exchange for whatever wealth you wish to have."

The poor woman refused the offer without any hesitation. The queen-mother was surprised and asked her to describe the nature of the merit she had acquired.

The Brahmin woman then narrated her story. She said: "After leaving home, I wandered for many months in hundreds of places as a mendicant. I have at last reached this sacred place, Somnath. Yesterday was a day of fasting for me. Today, a holy man gave me a little food without salt. Half of this I offered to Lord Somnath. Of the remaining, one-half I gave to a guest and with the rest I broke my fast. What merit have I gained? I am an insignificant creature. You are a great soul who has acquired a lot of merit for yourself. Your father, brother, husband and son are all Rajas and princes. You have, according to reports, performed Shankarji's Puja spending more than a crore of rupees and your son has granted remission of taxes amounting to many lakhs to commemorate the great event. Having acquired so much merit, why do you ask of me the little merit gained by me, a poor woman? If you won't get angry I will tell you something more."

On Minal Devi assuring her that she was free to speak out her mind, the Brahmin woman began to explain why she was not willing to exchange for money the merit of her humble devotion. She said: "All the material wealth in the world cannot yield the peace and joy that pure love for the lotus feet of the Lord gives to a true devotee, however poor, low and humble the

latter may be in the eyes of the world. There is no wealth equal to devotion. So it is that I refuse to part with even the smallest measure of the merit of my Bhakti in exchange for your vast riches. It is not enough to have money. More precious than wealth is the right conduct and true unbargaining love for God. So one should observe the rules of Dharma. Similarly, it is not enough to have power. One should also have patience combined with humility. One should control one's mind by practising vows and spiritual disciplines from youth. Even when one is in extreme poverty, one should never refuse to give alms. These rules, though seemingly insignificant, are highly important and must be followed in life by all devotees."

Hearing these words from the lips of the Brahmin woman, Minal Devi's pride was destroyed. She expressed her gratitude to the poor woman. Shankarji, the Lord of Somnath, out of His infinite grace, had sent the Brahmin woman to teach this precious lesson to the queen-mother.

* * *

Life is immortal. Life is glorious. Life is a positive
expression of the Divine. Know that this is the truth
about your life.

* * *

69

A HYPOCRITE AT PRAYER

This happened several years ago. In Bengal, on the banks of the river Dwarka, there was a famous place called Tarapeeth. A big zamindar once went to this holy place for the worship of Tara Devi. Before having the Darshan of the Mother, he thought he should have a bath in the river and finish his routine prayer and other religious rituals.

After bath, he sat down on the banks of the river performing his prayer. Just at this time, the famous Aghori saint Vamakshepa was taking his bath in the river. He was watching the zamindar and in a few minutes began to laugh and splash water on him. The zamindar did not know that this was Mahatma Vamakshepa. He was annoyed and wondered why he was being disturbed like this while in his religious practices. He bore it patiently for a few minutes. But, the saint's pranks did not stop. So, getting wild, he called out to the person splashing water and asked: "Are you blind? Don't you see I am doing worship? Why are you disturbing me?"

At this the saint laughed aloud and asked the zamindar: "Are you performing prayers, or are you buying a pair of shoes from Moor and Company of

Calcutta?" Saying this, Vamakshepa resumed splashing water with greater force than ever before. The zamindar was taken aback at this rude exposure of his inner working of the mind. For, even though he was outwardly praying, his mind was, all the time, wandering in the streets of Calcutta, thinking of purchasing shoes and that at the very firm mentioned by the saint. He was utterly surprised and thought: "This person is no ordinary Mahatma. He has read my mind correctly."

Completely humbled, the zamindar felt ashamed of himself. After bowing with great respect to the Mahatma, he said: "Yes, Maharaj, I was thinking of what you said just now. Kindly bless me so that I may control my mind better and think only of God in my prayers."

Mahatma Vamakshepa smiled and said: "You should not be a hypocrite, my son, even when you are doing your spiritual practices."

* * *

When Love made me Her own
My life became pure and holy
Love is Mother Divine
I am Her child—
Ever free and happy.

* * *

70

BEGIN PRACTICE NOW

A wealthy Seth had opened an Annakshetra (free feeding house) in his town. His feeling of charity, however, was not pure. He was at heart a miser who loved praise and fame. He only desired that society should look upon him as a great philanthropist and that people should praise him.

The Seth was also a wholesale dealer in corn. From whatever was left in his granaries at the end of the year, all that was rotten and bad-smelling was sent to the Annakshetra for feeding the poor and hungry. The Roties made out of this rotten corn alone were served to the hungry ones.

In due time, the Sethji's son got married and the daughter-in-law came to stay in the house. She was very good at heart and charitable by nature. She was also gifted with great wisdom and courage. Seeing the miserly ways of her father-in-law, she felt pain and resolved to mend them. She took upon herself the task of preparing Sethji's food in the house.

The first day itself, she got some flour of the rotten corn from the Annakshetra and prepared a Roti out of it. When Sethji sat for his meals, along with other items of food, the daughter-in-law also served him this Roti

in his plate. Seeing the thick black Roti, Sethji thought it was some new preparation specially made for him by his daughter-in-law and started eating it with great eagerness. To his great surprise, he found it was made of some rotten stuff and quite uneatable. Spitting it out, the Seth cried out: "Oh daughter, there is plenty of good flour in the house. Wherefrom did you get this bad flour from which this Roti is made? What have you done?"

The daughter-in-law replied: "O father, on my arrival here, I saw that in your Annakshetra this kind of Roti alone was given to the hungry. I have heard it from my elders that what we give here we get in the heaven after death. So I thought it was better you got used to eating this kind of Roti here itself so that in the other world you might not find any discomfort whatsoever in eating such Roties."

Needless to say, the Sethji learnt his lesson and the rotten stuff served in the Annakshetra was thrown away and replaced by good corn. From that day onwards the hungry were fed on fine Rotis.

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When I sit calm and silent
In the hour of dawn
Comes my Mother.
She talks with words of love
I alone can hear.

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71

CONTENTMENT

There was a time when discontent seized the souls of men in the world to such an extent that they unitedly raised a wail to the throne of God for relief. Every man, dissatisfied with his own lot, felt he would gladly exchange places with his neighbour.

God heard their cry and appeared before them. All the aggrieved people assembled around Him on a vast plain. God now said: "O men, in response to your prayers, I have come here. I give each of you the power to throw down on this plain the particular disability or woe which is the cause of your discomfort and misery."

At once, in hot haste, all the people divested themselves of their burdens of sorrow and flung them on the plain. The accumulated heap of woes formed a veritable mountain. "Now, O men," exclaimed God, "You may pick up from this heap any burden which you prefer in exchange for the one you have given up."

Immediately, there was a furious scramble and each man grabbed at the burden of woe belonging to his neighbour. The blind man exchanged his blindness for a broken leg and *vice versa*. The poor man exchanged his state with the man of riches. The barren woman became fruitful and *vice versa*—so on and so forth.

Thus in a short time, the mountain of woes disappeared. All the people felt for the moment happy and relieved. God left them and they returned to their homes.

What happened the next day? Louder lamentations, a hundred times more than what it was the day before, rose from the people. God again presented Himself before them. Now all the people cried out: "O Lord, give me back my own woe, for I cannot endure the pains and grief which I have taken in exchange." God granted their prayer and they returned perfectly satisfied.

* * *

Love travels quicker than thought—it is invisible,
mystic touch.

* * *

I come from the Infinite
Infinite is my home
I go back there
And become the Infinite.

* * *

72

GIVE UP DESIRES—GAIN PEACE

So long as a man is clinging hard to the transitory objects of life, he can never know true peace and happiness. This is exemplified by the story of the crow and the piece of bread. Once a crow got somehow a piece of bread. With the bread in its beak, it wanted to fly to a tree, and sitting on its branch, make a quiet meal of it. But a number of other crows pursued this crow to wrest the bread out of it. The crow with the bread flew with all its speed in order to escape from the clutches of the others. It flew and flew, hotly pursued by other crows, in all directions to save the bread in its beak. This went on for two or three hours.

The crow with the bread was dead tired as a result of its continuous flying and felt it would be well to drop the piece of bread and get relief. It dropped the piece of bread which was picked by another crow, which in turn was also pursued by the other crows. The first crow, having thrown away the piece of bread, flew to the branch of a tree and sitting under its cool shade, attained perfect rest and tranquillity. Peace truly comes when we give up desire for the perishable things of the world.

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73

EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR GOOD

This happened in the province of Mishr. A poor devotee of God who was a householder, had his hut near a forest. In his house, besides his wife, there was a bull, which was used as a beast of burden. It was the sole means of livelihood for the couple, for on its back articles were carried for sale by its master. There was also in the house a dog which was useful for keeping guard and protecting them in the woodland. The devotee had in addition a parrot of which both he and his wife were very fond, as they had no children. The parrot, when the night passed and the day dawned, used to wake up the couple by calling out, "Awake, and pray to God!"

One day, it so chanced, a lion from the forest came and killed the bull belonging to the poor householder. The dog, being afraid of the lion, ran inside the house and hid himself. The householder got up in the morning and when he saw the dead body of the bull, he exclaimed, "It is well done! God does everything for the best! This has happened by His will. Therefore, it cannot be but for our good."

Hearing these words, his wife was greatly displeased, but she did not say anything. Misfortunes, however,

never come single. Later on, that day, the parrot somehow came out of its cage and was killed by the dog. When the master of the house heard of the incident, he repeated: "Well done! God does everything for the best!"

On hearing these words, this time his wife became desperate and beat her own head. She became so distressed over these remarks that she did not even try to express her feelings to her husband. A short time afterwards, somebody told them that their dog was rolling in agony in the street. It died soon after. The master of the house again said: "It is all very well! Whatever God does is always for our good."

Seething with anger, his wife was now unable to control herself and told him: "What do you mean by repeating such senseless words? Without any means of livelihood, now remain in the house and starve. Take to your bed and sleep till morning. The bull that gave us food, and the parrot that was waking us up in the morning have both gone. The faithful dog also died. This night someone will send us also to the cremation ground. Then you will realise to the full God's goodness!"

"What has happened cannot be changed," said the man, who was perfectly calm and cheerful. He took everything as God's grace. He was quite unperturbed by his wife's ironical outburst. But his wife was feeling very miserable. She was worried as to how they would eke out their livelihood.

The day passed and night came. Both slept. When they woke up in the morning and went out, they saw in the whole town dead bodies lying scattered everywhere. In the night, a gang of dacoits had entered the town and had left not a single person alive. They had looted every house and taken even broken vessels from the homes. A house near the jungle, without a dog, is generally taken to be unoccupied. So, thinking that the cottage of this couple was vacant and deserted, the dacoits did not enter it. Thus God had really saved them in His mysterious way. The man said to his wife now: "If our dog was there with us, the dacoits would have entered the house and surely killed us also. Even if the bull had been seen by them, they would not have spared us. The parrot too would have been a source of danger to us. If it had shouted before dawn to wake us up, the dacoits would have heard it and got scent of us. God, who is all kindness, had arranged for the death of all these three beforehand in order to save us. It is on account of this that we are alive today. Do you now doubt that all that happens is for good?"

* * *

Awareness, watchfulness and effort are the true qualities
of a Sadhaka.

* * *

The divine Name is pregnant with a power to trans-
form the world by its magic.

* * *

74

LEARNING *VERSUS* REALISATION

A Brahmin once sent his two sons to a learned pandit to study the Vedas and Upanishads. Having completed their studies after twelve years, they returned home. Their father asked one of them: "Have you understood Brahman?" The boy said, "Yes" and started quoting Sloka after Sloka from the scriptures to explain what Brahman was. Listening patiently to his son's verbose exposition, the father told him, "Boy, you have not understood Brahman." He then asked his other boy if he had understood what Brahman was. He did not give any answer, but kept quiet. The father asked him the same question twice, thrice and four times. Still the boy remained silent. The father then said: "My boy, I am delighted to see that you have really understood Brahman." This goes to show that by silence alone can one know the Truth. What you experience after your thoughts have completely ceased to flit about in the mind, does not admit of description because it is inexpressible.

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75

BE GOOD AND SEE GOOD

Remembrance of God means elevation to a higher consciousness. We must keep this light burning within us always. You know, as soon as the light goes out, we fall into darkness. When our vision is pure, we see only God. If impure, we see evil.

There was a very good king named Yudhishtira who led a righteous life. In his own time, there was another king named Duryodhana who was evil-minded and lived an unrighteous life. One day, Lord Krishna, a great incarnation of God, asked Yudhishtira, the virtuous king, to pick out for him a bad man in the world. The king went about in search of a bad man. He returned and told Krishna that he could not find such a one. Krishna called Duryodhana, the vicious king, and asked him to find out for him a good man. Duryodhana went in search of one. He could see only bad men everywhere and not a single good man. He came and reported this to Lord Krishna.

The moral of this story is that if we are good, the whole world is good for us; if we are bad, the whole world is bad for us. Every man has got some good points in him. We should see only the good points. If we are to see the bad points let us see them in ourselves. If

we do so, we shall find in course of time that what is bad in us will disappear. If we see evil in others and good in us, what good we have will disappear and the evil in us will grow. We are condemning, criticising, and thinking ill of so many in the world. By so doing, we are only getting our mind more and more impure. So the way to progress on the spiritual path is to see the good points in others and love everybody. To see good in others is to see God in them, because God alone is good. By seeing God in others we shall realise God in our own heart. So long as we criticise others, we shall never see God in them.

* * *

What is sweeter than Thy name?
It soothes my heart—
Instils nectar into it.

* * *

Life is sweet when it is spent in the service of saints.

* * *

76

NON-ATTACHMENT IS TRUE FREEDOM

Machhendranath and Gorakhnath were once wandering together from place to place. Machhendranath was the Guru and Gorakhnath the disciple. The disciple in this case was a Siddha, but the Guru was not yet ripe. The Guru had a bag which he would not trust anybody with, not even his disciple. He took it wherever he went, being ever cautious about its security. The disciple was surprised at the attachment of his Guru for the bag and wanted to see what it contained. But he could not easily find an opportunity to do so. One day, the Guru had to leave the bag under the care of his disciple as he had to attend to the call of nature. Now the disciple opened the bag and saw a gold bar in it. He said to himself, "Ah! This gold bar is what has put my Master under bondage. I should free him from it." So thinking, he threw away the gold bar into a nearby well.

The Guru soon came back and when he took the bag found the gold bar missing. He asked his disciple about it. The disciple replied that he threw the bar away. This made the Guru furious. He took a big stick and started beating Gorakhnath, who ran and ran until he got exhausted and sat down on a rock, saying, "Let me die at the hands of my Master." The Master continued to shower severe blows on the disciple. The latter, un-

able to stand it any more, fell into a swoon and passed urine, the touch of which turned into gold the whole mass of rock on which he sat! The Guru beat him for throwing away a small bar of gold and here was a whole rock turned into gold! This opened the eyes of Machhendranath who now realised the greatness of his disciple and gave up his attachment for gold.

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Guru is he who satisfies the spiritual hunger of the aspirant.

* * *

Guru and God are one.

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77

THE KING AND THE SLAVE

A king had a slave serving him with all faith and love. In fact, the slave adored his master and was ever ready to please him in all manner of ways. The king appreciated his lovable nature and made him a minister in his Court. He gradually raised him to the position of his Prime Minister. Seeing his rise to the highest position under the king, the other ministers, who had served long in the State, becoming envious of the slave, grumbled and complained. All of them joined together and went to the king in a deputation with the complaint. The king heard them patiently and said, "Exactly a week hence all ministers including the Prime Minister should meet me in the garden rest-house five miles away from the city, at 4 p.m. sharp. He who would meet me first would be considered to have real love and regard for me."

Soon after, he sent for the Prime Minister and, after telling him what he said to the ministers, asked him to build houses, camps and shamianas on both sides of the road that led to the distant garden where the ministers had to meet him as arranged. In the newly constructed camps and houses, all kinds of entertainment, shows, etc., should be exhibited besides lines of shops and restaurants providing the most tempting foods and articles—the condition for meeting the king was that all those who go to the garden house should do so on foot.

The day came. The Prime Minister along with the other ministers started on the journey. When they walked on the road leading to the place, except for the Prime Minister, all other ministers were tempted to see the shows, witness the entertainments, visit the restaurants, etc., as all these could be had without payment. They thought that there was plenty of time to reach the place where they were to meet the king. Leisurely, they went from one place of entertainment to the other. Time passed. The Prime Minister, without looking to the left or the right, walked straight to the garden where the meeting was fixed, and reached there an hour before schedule. The other ministers reached the place half-an-hour late, or one hour late. Some of them failed to be there at all.

The next day, the king called all the ministers and addressed them thus: "Now you all know why I made this slave (pointing to him) a Prime Minister. He is a man possessing sterling qualities for the high post." Ministers hung down their heads in shame and unani- mously applauded the king for his choice of the Prime Minister.

So also, God's devotees, when they possess genuine love and devotion for Him, never think of anything or anybody other than God. They take the straight course that leads to Him and are not drawn away by the attractions and temptations of worldly pleasures.

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78

FREEDOM IS THE GOAL

In a war in Europe, a sailor was captured by the enemy and was put into prison. After fifteen years he was released, as the warring countries contracted an alliance through a treaty. On the day of release, a friend placed in his hands a purse containing about £50/-. When the sailor was passing through the streets, he saw a shop in which there were various species of birds in cages kept for sale. He went up to the shop and bought all the cages from the money he possessed and, by opening the trap doors of the cages, set free the imprisoned birds one by one. The shopman was astounded at this. He asked why the sailor, having bought the birds at such high prices, released them all. The sailor replied, "You see, I alone know what it is to be in prison, being denied the privilege of freedom. For fifteen years I have suffered prison life. I could not bear to see these birds unhappy in their cages."

Similarly, a saint having attained spiritual liberation himself is ever eager to release others from the bondage of ignorance.

* * *

The Guru's injunction to the disciple is—
Seek and find me within yourself and then see me as
everybody and everything.

* * *

79

CONTACT OF SAINTS SAVES

You know that a mongoose and a serpent are deadly enemies. Whenever they meet at any place, they would fight with the object of killing each other. Sometimes the fight continues for a pretty long time in the course of which the serpent in desperation bites the mongoose which, due to the poison injected into it, feels like dying. In order to save itself, the mongoose runs to the hill-side and eats a particular herb which is an antidote for snake poison and getting relieved from its effects, returns to fight with the serpent with increased vigour and strength. The fight goes on. Every time the serpent bites the mongoose, it gives up the combat, eats the herb, becomes free from poison and again continues the fight. At last, through utter exhaustion, not being able to offer any resistance, the serpent succumbs to the fury of the mongoose. Thereafter the mongoose has no occasion to go to the hill-side for the antidote.

So also a person, whose mind can be compared to the mongoose, when bitten hard by deep attachments to worldly things, becomes utterly miserable. In this condition, for relief and peace he goes to a saint and, by association with him, gets free from attachments and becomes happy and peaceful. Thus freed from the painful effects of the worldly life, he goes back into the

world and continues to live there. Again in course of time he is obsessed by attachment to worldly pleasures and becomes miserable, and this time also he rushes to a saint, and getting himself relieved of the poisonous effects of worldly life once more returns to his usual activities in the world. Thus by repeated contact of saints he ultimately overcomes attachment to transitory objects and remains in the world perfectly free and blissful. So the society of saints is an absolute necessity for an earnest spiritual aspirant to realise the state of inner freedom, joy and peace.

* * *

God-realisation is nothing but manifestation of one's
own divinity.

* * *

Hearken—despair not. Turn thy gaze within.
I am thy goal—the Lord and Master of all the worlds—
The seat of immortality and peace.

* * *

80

TIE GOD BY THE CHORDS OF LOVE

Surdas was a great devotee of Sri Krishna. He was blind and had to make use of a stick whenever he went along the streets. One day he missed the way and inadvertently fell into a pit on the roadside. Seeing the helpless condition of the devotee, Sri Krishna came as a boy of ten years, and with great love and kindness helped Surdas out of the pit and leading him up to the road was about to go away releasing his hold on the hand of his devotee. Surdas, understanding the intention of Sri Krishna, did not wish to allow him to go away and so attempted to catch him and detain him. But Sri Krishna was too clever to be caught that way, and he ran away from him laughing. Then Surdas, in a tone of defiance, told Sri Krishna, "Krishna, you think you are very clever. You may run away from me externally, but I have caught you and tied you up to my heart with the strong chords of love. It will not be easy for you to free yourself from there and run away."

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81

PRIDE GOES BEFORE A FALL

A man with a long and high nose was fast asleep on his back. A group of ants held a council and discussed a plan to climb up the body of the sleeping man and reach the tip of his nose. He who first reached it would win a prize. In due course, an expedition started, made up of about five or six ant-mountaineers. They climbed from different directions and all of them reached the tip of the nose of the sleeping man at the same time. Now, discussion arose among them as to who reached the point first. When they were hotly contesting each one's claim, moving their hands and feet in gesticulation, they caused an unpleasant irritation on the nose of the man. He quickly raised his right hand, produced a strange hissing noise and brushed off with his fingers the tip of the nose. What happened then? The ants, who were proud of their adventure and were fighting for precedence, were nowhere to be found. So vain are human beings who strut on the stage of this life, proud of their powers and achievements. In their arrogance and bravado they threaten the peace-loving people. But God in His own mysterious ways brushes them off the face of this earth by His supreme power. The story teaches us a salutary lesson that we should not be proud of anything.

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82

WHEN YOUR EGO DIES, YOU ARE FREE

In Kashmir there was a big merchant who was dealing in all kinds of goods made in Persia. Every year he would go to Persia with some merchandise for sale and return with goods purchased in that distant land for sale in his country. This was going on for several years. On one occasion he saw a beautiful talking parrot for sale in a shop in Persia. He bought the parrot, brought it to Kashmir and hung its cage in a prominent place in his house. The parrot talked like a human being and was very much loved by its master and his family. Once it so happened that the merchant fell ill at the time of his usual annual visit to Persia for business. So he asked his secretary, who was a trustworthy man, to go to Persia on his behalf and transact business. On the day of the secretary's starting on the journey, the parrot, coming to know that he was to go to Persia in place of his master, called him and said, "Since you are going to my native place will you do me a favour? You know I am here imprisoned in a cage and denied the joy of flying about freely and cheerfully. Kindly go to the big forest lying to the east of the town which you are going to visit. On the trees of this forest are living my relations and friends. You have to report to them about my miserable condition

in Kashmir, as I am imprisoned in a cage and living far off from them. Then you have to ask them on my behalf what means I should employ in order to get free from the cage. Whatever answer you receive from them, please report it to me on your return.”

Accordingly, after the business in Persia was over, the secretary turned towards the forest as directed by the parrot and looking up at the trees found hundreds of parrots flying from branch to branch in those trees. The secretary then spoke to the parrots placing before them the question raised by their brother parrot living in a cage in Kashmir. He asked the question three or four times but got no reply. He waited for some time and was about to turn away in disappointment. Just then he saw an old parrot drop down to the ground apparently dead. Of course the secretary did not attach any importance to this as he thought the parrot must have died of old age.

In due course the secretary returned to Kashmir and, presenting himself before his master, reported about his business transactions in Persia. Before going home the secretary was called by the parrot to ascertain the result of his enquiry with its friends and relatives in Persia. The secretary said that he had carried out the instructions of the parrot as suggested but in spite of his repeated questionings he got no response. But a strange thing happened, namely, an old parrot fell down from the tree dead. This may be due to the sudden attack of some illness or old age, and there may be nothing strange about the occurrence.

As soon as the parrot heard the secretary's story, it fell down from its perch on to the floor of the cage and stretching out its wings and legs lay as though dead. The secretary thought the parrot must have had a stroke which caused its sudden death. He conveyed the sad news immediately to his master. The master came and noticed the prostrate condition of the parrot without any sign of life. He called a servant and asked him to take the dead parrot out of the cage and throw it somewhere far away from the house. The servant, as ordered, took the parrot from the cage and, going some distance, threw it on a heap of debris in a pit. The moment the parrot touched the ground it got up and flew away.

This story teaches us the lesson that the soul can achieve freedom only when its ego-sense is dead.

* * *

In walking I am the Cosmic I
 In dream the Cosmic I, I am
 In sleep there is one and that is Cosmic I.

* * *

My life is a song resounding the echoes of eternity.

* * *

83

BEG ONLY OF GOD

A Sadhu living in a forest wanted some money for repairs to be done to his hut. He therefore went to the nearby kingdom so as to request the king to provide him with necessary funds. He entered the palace and enquired where the king was so that he could see him. The minister in charge of the palace asked him to sit for a while in the waiting room as the king was at prayers. The king's prayer room happened to be adjoining the one in which the Sadhu sat. Now the Sadhu could distinctly hear the king praying: "Oh, Lord of the universe, I appeal to You to grant me more wealth and prosperity than what I have now. Deign to shower Your grace on me so that this prayer of mine be fulfilled." On hearing this the Sadhu suddenly got up and started to go. The prayer being over, the king came to the waiting room just at the moment the Sadhu was leaving. The king asked the Sadhu why he came and what he wanted. The Sadhu replied, "I came to request you for some money for reconstructing my small hut in the forest. But I heard your prayer to God begging for more wealth and more prosperity. I find you are a beggar like myself. So I felt no purpose will be served by asking for anything from a beggar like

myself. I prefer on the other hand to directly approach the same Supreme God to whom you appeal for help.” So saying the Sadhu left.

* * *

Ecstasy is my being—love is the fragrance I shed
on all.

* * *

My thoughts like the river ran and ran
In devious paths until they found perfect rest
In Thee, O Lord, the peace infinite.

* * *

84

GOD ALONE PROVIDES

God is the great provider and supporter of all living beings and creatures in the world. Man in his ignorance thinks that without his initiative and effort nothing could happen. He leaves God totally out of account thinking that he acts and moves by his own will and power. Whereas, the universal power of God is responsible for all activities in the world, whether in men, animals, plants or other moving objects.

A man, who was under such an illusion, was travelling once in a train with his bag. As soon as he sat in a carriage and the train started, he took the bag and placed it on his head. He thought his bag would not be with him unless he carried it on his head. Such was his folly. The entire burden of the universe is borne by God and we think that our little burden must be carried by ourselves.

* * *

I plunged into the depthless sea of life
And came by the rarest gem—Thy name.

* * *

85

MORE JOY IN PINING FOR GOD

There is a Sufi story which illustrates how familiarity breeds contempt. Some devotees, therefore, do not wish to meet God but would prefer to thirst and pine for Him all their life. They find a peculiar joy and ecstasy in merely crying and wailing for Him. The story is this:

On a hot day a herd of sheep was grazing on a hill. When the sun had gone down the meridian, the sheep felt inordinately thirsty. With raised heads they looked for water in all directions in great expectation of seeing a water course or stream some distance from there. Fortunately for them, they saw down on the slope, about half a mile away, a stream of crystal water flowing. The sight enchanted them because their thirst was great, so also their love for water. All the sheep now rushed in a body towards the stream in tremendous haste. Soon they reached the stream and, going in it knee deep, drank the water to their fill. Then they stood for a while in the water and turned it dirty by passing into it urine, etc. They lost the ere long eagerness to see and drink the water. On the other hand, they made the water dirty.

Too near association of your Beloved gradually wears away your high veneration and love for Him or Her who was held by you at one time in high esteem as your all in all.

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86

NAME IS THE ONLY REMEDY

Tukaram was a great saint of Maharashtra. He lived in a place called Dehu. He was spending all his time in singing God's name, talking about His glories and performing Kirtan in the company of devotees. At home, he was sitting in a corner engaged in chanting the name of his favourite God, Vithoba of Pandharpur.

One day, when he was absorbed in the chanting of Vithoba's name, "Vithal, Vithal," one of his children took ill and was rolling on the ground with excessive stomach ache. Tukaram's wife was very much upset over the child's condition and told Tukaram to go and fetch a physician. But Tukaram, taking no notice of what his wife said, went on singing God's names. Tukaram's wife got wild over his indifference. But Tukaram kept quiet.

Soon after, the child vomitted and all the indigestible stuff in its stomach was thrown out. The child immediately ceased groaning from stomach pain. It sat up and was perfectly cheerful. Then Tukaram, seeing the recovery of the child, went up to his wife and said, "The child has now recovered from its pain by God's grace. If I had called in a physician to treat it as suggested by you we would have had to pay him his fees for the

treatment. Will you kindly pay me the fees which you would have paid the physician so that I can use the amount for feeding the poor?" The wife turned away from him without giving any reply.

* * *

There is nothing greater than Thy name
For the Name is God.

* * *

The real way of taking the Name is to do so by
feeling that the Divine Power within you is making
you do it.

* * *

87

KRISHNA HAS STOLEN MY HEART

Mirabai was a great devotee of Sri Krishna. She was married although she had dedicated her life to Krishna. Even after marriage she was always found singing of and worshipping Krishna. She was pining for her divine Lord and was perfectly indifferent to the world.

Mirabai belonged to the royal family and was married to a Prince of Udaipur. On account of her devotional nature, all in the royal household were against her and she underwent untold persecution through the hands of her sister-in-law and others in the palace. Her husband was kind and good to her. One day the Prince came to her and said, "I am your wedded husband and so I am entitled to your love and affection. But whenever I come to you, I find you intoxicated with divine ecstasy. You have no time even to talk to me. My earnest wish is that you should give me also a portion of your love. What do you say?" Mirabai replied, "My lord, what you say is perfectly right. As a dutiful wife, I should love and serve you. But what can I do? Krishna, to whom I had dedicated my life when I was yet a girl, has stolen my heart entirely. He has filled it with Himself so much so that there is no place left for you. I am helpless. Even if I wish to love you

I cannot do so. So understanding my position, you should be gracious enough to forgive me.”

* * *

We want a religion that knits man to man, irrespective of any apparent distinctions, into a common community on earth.

* * *

We want a religion which brings love and joy to the heart, and light and wisdom to the head.

* * *

PRIDE AND DEVOTION

Sri Eknath Maharaj was a householder. He had his wife and a son. They were very poor, but much devoted to God. They lived a simple life. Eknath Maharaj used to read Srimad Bhagavat or other scriptures daily to the villagers and they enjoyed his exposition very much. This went on for years together. Meanwhile, Eknath Maharaj's son, who had been sent to Banaras for study of the Vedas, etc., returned home. One day, while watching his father reading the original Sanskrit scripture and explaining it in Marathi to the audience, the son said, "Father, your explaining the scripture in Marathi is not good and proper. You must explain it in Sanskrit." To this the father replied, "I have been explaining it in Marathi for many years and the villagers like it very much. All cannot understand Sanskrit, nor can I explain it in Sanskrit." From the next day the son started reading and expounding it in Sanskrit.

The villagers listened to him on the first day. But they missed the devotion with which Eknath was reading and explaining till then. They felt that the high scholarship of the son was a poor substitute for the father's simple devotion. Gradually, therefore, the daily

audience began to grow less and less. Ultimately the reading had to be stopped completely for want of an audience. The villagers wanted Eknath Maharaj himself to resume his reading and exposition. But he was prevented from doing so by his scholarly son who insisted on the Sanskrit medium.

Now something happened to put down the son's pride of learning. A poor old woman in the village had taken a vow to feed one thousand Brahmins. She had absolutely no means to do it. When she consulted a Sadhu about it, she was advised to feed Eknath Maharaj, as feeding him would bring her the merit of feeding one thousand Brahmins. The old woman came to Eknath Maharaj and requested him to accept her invitation for meal on a certain day. He was unable to accept the invitation as his son stood in the way. Then it was finally agreed with the permission of the son that the food prepared by the devotee might be brought to the house of Eknath Maharaj.

Accordingly, the old woman cooked the food and brought it to Sri Eknath's house and fed him with great devotion. The meal over, she was about to take Prasad (sanctified food) from what was left on the leaf, when the proud and learned son objected to it and prevented her from taking the Prasad. He himself removed the leaf and threw it outside in contempt. When he came back to clean the place, he was surprised to see another leaf there. He removed that also, and when he returned, found yet another one. Thus he had to remove, one after another, not less than one thousand leaves!

This miracle opened the eyes of the proud son and then alone he could know the real greatness of his father's devotion. He fell prostrate at his feet and begged his pardon, shedding profuse tears of penitence for his folly.

The moral of this story is clear. True knowledge is to know that you know nothing. Before you attain God, you have to unlearn what you have learnt. Those who think that they know everything really know nothing. If you are humble, the whole universe can be won over.

* * *

Verily, all the different religions are so many paths that lead mankind to the one universal God.

* * *

God is the friend of the helpless and the shelter of the weak and the suffering.

* * *

GOD DOES EVERYTHING FOR THE BEST

Once a king, with his minister, followed by his retinue went into the depths of a forest on a hunting expedition. Now the minister was well known for his wisdom. He held the motto: 'God does everything for the best,' and whenever anyone went to him for advice in his trouble, woe or misfortune, the minister would console the distressed party by convincing him of the wisdom of submission to the will of God.

The king and the minister in their hunt for game were separated from the followers and roamed far into the interior of the extensive forest and eventually lost their way. The sun rose to the meridian. The king was oppressed with fatigue and hunger. They rested in the shade of a tree.

"Minister," said the exhausted king, "I am sorely upset through pangs of hunger. Can you get me something to eat?"

The minister looked around and discovered fruits on trees. Climbing up a tree, he plucked a few ripe fruits and presented them to the king. The king, in his haste to eat the fruit, while cutting it with a penknife, chopped off a bit of his finger. With a cry of pain, he drop-

ped both the fruit and the knife, his injured finger streaming with blood.

“Ho!” he cried out, “how it pains—O, minister.”

“God does everything for the best,” put in the minister quietly.

These words tended only to rouse the already petulant king. He flew into a rage and cried out:

“Fool, truce to your philosophy. I have had enough of it. While I am suffering from excruciating agony, the only consolation you can tender is: ‘God does everything for the best.’ How can this be for the best when the pain is intense and real? Avaunt, I will have nothing to do with you in future. Get out of my sight, and never show me your face again.” Unable to control himself, he kicked the minister furiously and commanded him to take himself off at once. While the minister was leaving the king, he calmly reiterated: “God does everything for the best.”

Now the king was left alone. He tore a strip of his garment and bandaged his injured finger. When he was musing over the sad event, two stalwart men approached him. They instantly fell on the king and bound him hand and foot. Struggle or resistance was utterly useless, as the men were strong and sturdy.

The frightened king now asked: “What are you going to do with me?”

They replied: “We want you to be sacrificed at the altar of our goddess Kali. It is the custom to offer to

her a human sacrifice once a year. The time has arrived for it and we were on the look-out for a human being. We are fortunate in having found you."

These words of his captors thoroughly alarmed the king. He remonstrated: "Let me go, I am the king of a province. You cannot, therefore, kill me for the sacrifice."

The men laughed and said: "Then this year's sacrifice is going to be unique, and our goddess will be highly pleased when she finds that we bring to her altar this time an exalted personage as an offering. Come along."

They dragged the victim to the Kali shrine, not far away from the spot. He was duly placed on the sacrificial altar. Things were ready for the death-blow, when the priest, observing the bandage on his left hand forefinger removed it, and discovered that a portion of it was cut off. He said to the men: "This man is not acceptable to our goddess. Set him free. The goddess wants a whole man, while the man here has a defect in his body. A bit of his finger is gone. Let him go."

Accordingly, untying the ropes with which he was bound, the men set the king free and allowed him to depart in peace.

Now the king remembered the words of the minister, uttered when his finger was cut: "God does everything for the best"—indeed had it not been for that cut of the finger he would have by now been a dead man. He felt keenly for the ill-treatment he had meted out to his friend. He was anxious to remedy the blunder by beg-

ging his forgiveness. So he rambled in the wood, called aloud the name of the minister, and at last found him. The minister was resting beneath a tree. Going up to him the king embraced him with extreme love and said: "Friend, I seek your forgiveness for the cruel treatment accorded to you. The truth of your golden saying is brought home to me."

Then he narrated the incident of the intended sacrifice to the goddess, and how he was set free on account of the defect in his hand, caused by the knife-cut.

"Sire," replied the minister, "you have done me no harm. So there is nothing to forgive. In truth, you have saved me. While you kicked and drove me away, you may remember I repeated the same saying: 'God does everything for the best.' Now in my case as well it has come true. For, if you had not driven me away, I would have been in your company when the men of Kali captured you and, when they discovered that you were unfit for the sacrifice, they would have offered me for it instead, since I had no such cut in my body as the one you had so providentially got. So God does everything for the best."

* * *

A saint is a real redeemer and a saviour of the fallen soul, for a saint is God Himself manifest in flesh and blood.

* * *

IMITATION IS NOT THE WAY

In a hut lived a Guru and his disciple. The hut was situated outside the town limits in a forest. As they were troubled every night by rats, the Guru reared up a cat. Both the Guru and disciple were very fond of the cat. But during the meditation in the early mornings, the cat would sit on the lap of the Guru and disturb his meditation. So the Guru got a string and tied up the cat to the leg of his charpai or coir-cot. This went on from day to day. Eventually, both the Guru and the cat passed away through old age. The disciple stepped into the shoes of his Guru and was the sole owner of the hut. He carried on the practice of early meditation. When meditating, he found that he had no cat which he could tie up to the leg of the cot. He went to the town, begged of the devotees to give him a cat and brought it to the hut. Every morning, before he started the meditation, he tied up the cat to the leg of the cot as his Guru did. He was under the impression that tying up the cat was necessary for successful meditation. So some disciples, who look upon their Gurus as models for guidance, follow strictly the mode of life lived by them, without understanding the import underlying the same. Imitation is not the way—each one should develop on the spiritual path according to

his or her individual nature and temperament. An all-beneficent influence and guidance is, of course, necessary from an illumined sage.

* * *

It is not a question of external renunciation but of a total dedication of your life to Him.

* * *

Peace dawns in the soul when the tumult of passions ceases.

* * *

91

GIVE UP PRIDE TO ATTAIN GOD

Hiranyakasipu was a king of the Asuras or demons. At one time he was a most powerful and proud monarch of all the worlds. Being an Asura he was an enemy of the gods. He used to wage war with the gods from time to time. By the great powers he had gained by penance, he used to defeat the gods who would flee from him because of his severe onslaught on them. Once Hiranyakasipu thought of taking possession completely of Devaloka, the abode of Devas, and also of Vaikuntha where God Vishnu lived. He started the campaign and, with a sword in hand, fought with the Devas and drove them away from Devaloka. Then he proceeded to Vaikuntha. The news having reached Vishnu and his Dutas, they in a body took to their heels and disappeared. Hiranyakasipu entered Vaikuntha and finding the place vacant, searched for Vishnu everywhere, in all the secret hiding places in the three worlds. But Vishnu could not be found anywhere. He returned to his kingdom utterly disappointed. Soon after, Vishnu came out of His hiding place and returned to Vaikuntha.

The news about Vishnu's flight from Vaikuntha out of fear on the invasion of Hiranyakasipu spread like wild fire. It reached the ears of Narada. Narada was astonished to hear of it. He directly went to Vaikuntha

for making enquiries. After paying due obeisance to Vishnu, Narada, with a curious smile on his face, asked the Lord, "How is it You ran away when Hiranyakasipu invaded Your heaven?" Vishnu confessed that since Hiranyakasipu was gifted with invincible powers acquired by his long continued penance, He could not face him. Then Narada queried, "It appears You hid yourself in such a place that Hiranyakasipu, in spite of his combing every possible place of hiding all over the three worlds, could not discover You. May I know where You were hidden when the search was going on?"

Vishnu with a wink replied, "Don't you know! I was hiding in the heart of Hiranyakasipu himself." "Is it so!" exclaimed Narada, "How was it Hiranyakasipu failed to find You out while You were so near him, hiding in his own heart?" Vishnu replied, "How could he see me unless he bends down his head? He would not bow down as he was sitting and walking always with a puffed chest and upright head, with a feeling of colossal pride that he was the suzerain of all the worlds. So I felt safe in his heart while search for me was going on."

The lesson we have to learn from this story is: "Unless we bow down in all humility to God, we cannot find Him."

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92

WORLD IS GOD

A man living in the world was disgusted with life and, renouncing it, went to a solitary spot and dwelt in a cave praying God to give His Darshan. He fasted and prayed for a long period and just when he was despairing of seeing God, He appeared before him saying: "Lo! I am here." What did the man see before him? God had come to him in the form of the world itself which he had renounced in search of Him. On having this vision the man returned to the world and saw God everywhere in it and ever remained filled with bliss and peace.

* * *

Yoga means equilibrium—a state of unalterable peace and bliss of the Atman.

* * *

Simplicity and child-like nature means true divinity. What words can express that state!

* * *

93

EQUAL VISION

A king of a certain State was highly spiritual in temperament and so was a great lover of saints. Whenever any saint or Sannyasi came to his palace, he would take him inside and treat him with great hospitality. He would make him sit on a decorated place in his shrine room, worship his holy feet, load him with presents and give him a feast. This was the usual custom with the king. The news of his high respect for saints and the presents lavishly given to them reached the ears of a professional juggler. Taking advantage of the king's devotional nature, the juggler dressed himself in the robes of a Sannyasi and with staff and Kamandal in hand, appeared in front of the palace and demanded Bhiksha. The Sannyasi's arrival was reported to the king. He, at once, came out and in all humility begged the Sannyasi to enter the palace. He was taken to the shrine room and duly worshipped with great reverence.

Meanwhile, an informer, knowing that the Sannyasi was a bogus one, and was receiving honour, worship and rich presents from the king, approached the Prime Minister and told him the real situation. The Prime Minister, at once, came to the palace to inform the king about the mistake he was making. But when he saw him engaged in the worship of the impostor with all

devotion, he dared not interfere, and so turned back. Moreover, he was uncertain whether the news he received about him was true or false. Hence he kept quiet.

After Puja and feast, the Sannyasi left the palace. The next day the juggler having divested himself of the Sannyasi robes, announced by tom-tom that he was going to give a performance on an open plain. Thousands of people assembled to witness his magic show.

The news reached the ears of the Prime Minister through the same informer that it would now be easy to expose the juggler and mete out proper punishment for his deception. The Prime Minister, going up to the king, suggested a stroll in the city so that his subjects might see him and he too could understand their condition. The king agreed. The Prime Minister took him to the spot on the maidan where the juggler's performance was going on. On the suggestion of the Prime Minister, the king entered the big ring of spectators to see the play.

The Prime Minister, pointing at the juggler, told the king, "Oh, Maharaja, look at him. Is he not the same person who came to you yesterday pretending to be a Sannyasi and received worship and rich presents from you? He can be easily recognised and punished." The king intently looked at the juggler and the light of recognition dawned on him. Without a second's delay, the king, with a delighted exclamation, rushed to the juggler and prostrated with all reverence before him. Standing before the juggler with folded hands, he addressed him thus, "O Supreme Lord, Your Lila is simply

wonderful. Yesterday You came to me at the palace dressed as a Sannyasi and today I find You in the garb of a juggler exhibiting Your powers—Your Lila is simply wonderful!”

This is the equal vision or Samadarshan described in the Bhagavad Gita.

* * *

To divinise life is to beautify it.

* * *

Prayer releases an invincible Divine Power that
stands for righteousness, harmony and peace.

* * *

94

YOU ARE A PART OF THE UNIVERSAL BODY

Swami Rama Tirtha had been to Japan, America and other places. On his return to India his wife went to meet him. In the course of the talk, the wife questioned him, "During the tour in foreign countries far away from me, did you at any time remember me?" To this the great Swami gave the characteristic reply, "Is it necessary to remember about my nose? Since it forms a part of my body I need not think of it now and then. So also, since you are a part of my universal body, there is no need for me to think of you as some one separate from me."

* * *

Contentment is a gift of God which we get through
faith in and submission to Him.

* * *

God works in His own mysterious ways and, wherever
we turn, His hand is visible.

* * *

95

GOD EVER PROTECTS THOSE WHO RELY
ON HIM

One day a man, who had not much faith in God, heard from the lips of a saint that God always protects his devotees when they are absorbed in His remembrance and meditation. This protection comes to him in all respects. The man became curious and wanted to test the assurance given by the saint. So, one day, he went to a forest some miles away from the town in which he lived and sat in the midst of a cluster of trees. He had gone to the forest in the morning and continued to stay there till midday. All the while, he was unceasingly repeating God's name with mind fixed on Him. When he was thus engaged, a man passed through this forest intending to visit a neighbouring village by a short cut. He was carrying his meal tied up in a bundle. When the traveller saw the man sitting alone by himself, it evoked sympathy and he thought he could offer him the food he was carrying with him. Accordingly, going up to the man, he gave the food to him. The man accepted the offer and ate the meal.

A question arose in his mind whether it was God who fed him at the proper time or whether it was a coincidence. He felt that the test that he made was not a proper one. His mistake, he thought, was in having

selected a spot frequented by human beings. So he planned to take himself off the next day to a distant place where no human beings would go.

Next day, he started early from home and walking a distance of about 4 or 5 miles and crossing a river, he saw a pretty tall hill which he climbed up looking out for a suitable lonely place for his prayers. To his pleasant surprise, he saw a hollow on the top of the hill and thought that if he sat in it, nobody would be able to find him out. He descended into it and, sitting in the middle of it, started chanting God's name with great devotion. Hours passed.

Meanwhile, from the town in which this man lived, a party of ten to fifteen youngsters started on a picnic. They travelled on a boat to the appointed place up the river referred to above. Merrily the boatman rowed the boat and the young men were quite happy. But when they neared the place, where on the top of the hill the devotee was sitting, a strong breeze blew from the opposite direction and the boat would not move in spite of the strenuous efforts of the boatman. Then the boatman suggested that the party might halt at that place and finish up the picnic programme. The party had no other alternative. Getting down from the boat, they proceeded to the base of the hill. They proposed to spread a cloth on the sands and, sitting on it, make a good picnic repast of the many fine eatables they had brought with them.

One wise young man of the party warned that it would not be possible for them to eat there since the strong

wind would sprinkle the sand on their refreshments. Then another suggested that they might go to the top of the hill and find a suitable place there. Soon all of them, with their picnic articles, went up the hill. In their search for a place, they came across the devotee seated in the hollow of the hill. They were all delighted to see him. They, with one voice, declared that the man should be fed first from the food they had brought with them. Accordingly they placed before the devotee a plate containing the most delicious preparations. The devotee had a hearty meal of the tasteful dishes. Now he fell to thinking seriously as to who fed him in that unknown and deserted place. It clearly dawned in his mind that God alone provided him with food as he had depended entirely on Him. 'God ever protects those who rely on Him' is an incontestable truth.

* * *

A soul fired with a burning zeal and an unconquerable heroism can alone cross the boundary and enter the kingdom of joy and peace.

* * *

96

GOD AND GURU ARE ONE

The method by which a parrot is taught to speak is unique. The trainer places a big mirror in front of the newly caught parrot and talks to it from behind the mirror. The parrot thinks that another parrot is teaching it to talk and imitates the voice of the trainer. Trained in this manner, the parrot, picking up the language of the trainer, begins to talk fluently in the human language.

This is how a saint teaches his disciples. Apparently, it is a human being who is instructing them, but, verily, it is God hidden in the Guru that gives the illuminating advice to the disciples. So, whenever the aspirant receives instructions from the Guru, he should consider that such instructions come from God Himself. Truly, God and Guru are one.

* * *

Right action is that action in which the idea of
self is totally absent.

* * *

97

THE ASPIRANT MUST STRUGGLE

A monkey was tied up to a peg fixed on the floor near the wall of a small room. A few feet above this peg there was a small niche-like hole on the wall. The monkey was so much neglected that it had to remain at the same place for days together. So it was feeling uncomfortable not only on account of loss of liberty, but also because of having to lie and sit in the dirt and urine passed by it. Its condition was very miserable. Besides, a big stone was hanging down its back from a rope tied round its waist. It was seeking some relief. It looked up and saw the niche-hole on the wall. Suddenly it took a leap to the hole, even though the stone offered some resistance. But it could find only a small space in the hole for sitting. The big stone was hanging down its waist. The down-pulling force of the stone soon brought the monkey back to its place on the floor. Again it took a leap to the hole but with the same result. After a long struggle in going up and down, the rope tied round the stone got loosened gradually until at last the stone fell down. Thereafter the monkey could securely sit in the hole without the risk of falling again.

The above story illustrates the struggle of the aspirant to concentrate his mind on God during meditation. The attachment to worldly things is the stone that exerts a

force to drag down the mind again and again from a state of communion with God to the desires of the world. The mind, before meditation, is weltering in the various low and grovelling desires which make it perfectly restless and unhappy. But, by constant effort at concentration and meditation, attachment to worldly pleasures, which are accompanied by pain and sorrow, gets loosened and, eventually, having become free from its clutches, the mind gets settled in a calm and steady meditation which leads to the realisation of the divine Self.

* * *

To fight in a righteous cause has a divine sanction

* * *

98

RELIANCE ON GOD

In the olden days, a wealthy youth was once passing along a public road, when he heard sounds of sobbing and crying proceeding from a house nearby. He stopped and listened to the pitiable cry of a small girl in the following terms: "O father! how long have we to suffer the pangs of hunger? Let us go from here. We can eke out our livelihood by begging alms in the bazaar." The child was sobbing as she uttered the words.

"It is true that all our wealth is gone," replied the father, consoling his child: "There is not a single pie left with us. But be sure that it is God who has manifested Himself in our house in the form of this poverty. We have to depend upon God alone. He will fulfil our wants."

Standing outside the window, the rich young man heard the talk going on in the house. He was touched by what he heard. He came home directly. From his treasury, he took out a bar of gold and in the darkness of the night, unnoticed, he dropped it in the poor man's house through the window. The poor man and his daughter took it as a gift from heaven and glorified God for having heard their prayers. The following night also the youth dropped into the house another

gold bar. On the third night, again, as he was throwing a bar of gold into their house, the poor man happened to see him. At once, the poor man fell at his feet and cried: "O brother, what is this you are doing?"

The youth replied: "You got the gold bars only by the favour of God. If God had not directed me towards your house on the first day and prompted me from within to help you, how could I have given the gold to you?"

Saying this, St. Nicholas, for that was his name, embraced the poor man with all love and humility.

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May divine grace enlighten your path; may divine power actuate you to great, noble and selfless deeds; may divine grace transform you into the images of the Divine.

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99

QUALITIES OF A TRUE SADHU

A Sadhu, having finished his ablutions in a river, stood in a state of meditation, upon a stone by the river, which was used by a Dhobi (washerman) for washing his clothes.

The Dhobi came there in due course with his donkey laden with clothes for wash. He lowered his bundle of clothes and waited for the Sadhu to leave the stone so that he could commence his work. After waiting for some time, the washerman prayed to him:

“Mahatmaji! if you kindly leave the stone and come to the bank, I can start my work. It is getting late for me.”

The Sadhu did not care to take notice of the Dhobi. The Dhobi waited for a still longer time and then again he appealed to the Sadhu but in vain. As he was in a hurry, he slowly took hold of the Sadhu's hand and tried to take him down the stone.

The Sadhu felt that he was disgraced by the Dhobi by holding his hand and pushed him away. The Dhobi had by this time lost all his faith in the Sadhu and seeing him angry, he forcibly pushed him away from the stone.

The Sadhu quarrelled with the Dhobi and words led to blows. The Dhobi was a strong man and he soon felled the Sadhu on the ground and sat on his chest.

The Sadhu, being pressed down hard, prayed: "O my worshipful Lord! I have been doing Your Puja with all faith and devotion. Yet, You do not come to free me from the hands of the Dhobi."

The Sadhu, that very instant, heard a voice coming from the heavens: "What you say is right. I wish to free you. But, the difficulty is that I cannot make out who between you is the Sadhu and who is the Dhobi."

Hearing the voice, the pride of the Sadhu melted away. He sued pardon of the Dhobi and from that time he cultivated truthfulness, forgiveness and compassion and became a true Sadhu.

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100

JUSTICE AND DHARMA

The Hindu kings of Kashmir were famous for their generosity, learning and justice. Maharaja Chandrapeed was one of them. He made a resolution to build a temple. He invited architects and ordered his ministers to provide the architects with the necessary materials for carrying out the task.

The architects selected a place for the temple. When they were measuring that ground, a cobbler raised an objection and stopped them. In one part of the land, there stood the hut of the cobbler. To leave out that part of the land would make the position of the temple awkward. The ministers tried to buy the land from the cobbler at a higher price than usual. But, the cobbler was not willing to part with the land, on which his house stood, for any price.

The matter reached the ears of the Maharaja. The Maharaja who was just and righteous, said: "You cannot take by force, the land of a person against his will. The temple may be built in some other place."

The chief among the architects said, "The resolution has been made already that the temple should be built on this spot. The temple worthy of becoming a place

of worship should be built on a sacred place and for us there is no place so holy as the one already selected.”

At the order of the Maharaja, the cobbler was called. The Maharaja told him: “Whatever price you wish to have for your land, it will be given to you. Whatever other land you wish to have in exchange will also be granted to you. If you agree, a beautiful house will also be constructed for you on that land. Why do you put an obstacle to the sacred work we have undertaken? To obstruct the construction of a temple is considered to be a sin. This fact you know very well.”

The cobbler replied in all humility: “Maharaja! It is not a question of the hut or the land. In this hut lived my father, my grandfather and other ancestors. So, as it is a place where they lived, this land is as a mother to me. Just as for any price you will not part with your palace, so also I am not going to sell my hut.”

The Maharaja was disappointed. The cobbler was silent for an instant and then again said: “You have placed me in a dilemma. By my coming in the way of the construction of the temple, there will no doubt be sin which will affect me and also my ancestors. You are a king who follows the path of Dharma. You are generous while I am a poor low-caste man. But, if you come to my hut and then beg of me for the land and hut for building a temple in its place, I will give it to you as an act of charity. By this, there will be merit for me as well as for my forefathers.”

“A Maharaja receiving as charity a land from this cobbler!” this thought ran in the minds of the assembled

ministers and courtiers. They started whispering among themselves.

The Maharaja said to the cobbler, "Well, you can go." He sent him away without telling him anything further. The next day, this great and righteous Maharaja of Kashmir went to the hut of the cobbler and accepted as charity the cobbler's land.

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101

A SAINT IS ALL FORGIVENESS

Eknath was a great saint of Maharashtra. He lived in Paithan. He was married and had a wife and a son. He had gained fame for his extremely patient and forgiving nature. He was kindness, mercy and peace personified.

Once it happened, a poor Brahmin who wanted to give his daughter in marriage was wandering from place to place for getting monetary help from wealthy people. He came to Paithan and went to a rich man of the place. The rich man had no respect for saints. He had heard that saint Eknath never got angry. He was on the lookout for an occasion to make him angry and falsify the report about his patient and forgiving nature.

He told the poor Brahmin, "Go to saint Eknath and provoke him to anger. If you do so, I will gladly give you Rs. 200 for the marriage expenses." The avaricious Brahmin undertook to fulfil the wish of the rich man and directly proceeded to the saint's house. When he approached the house, he found the saint seated on the verandah chanting God's name. The Brahmin, as he ascended the steps of the house, started abusing the saint. The saint was unperturbed. He led the Brah-

min guest inside the house and giving him a proper seat, asked him what he wanted.

The Brahmin, without giving any reply, continued to hurl abusive epithets at the saint. The time was nearing for the midday meal. So the saint requested the Brahmin to have his bath and then partake of the humble meal which was being prepared for him. Eknath's wife was his ideal partner. She was also devout and very good-natured. Eknath took the guest to the bathroom and gave him a clean wash and brought him to the dining room for taking food. The Brahmin had tried his best to provoke the saint to anger but so far he had failed completely. When he and the saint sat for meals, a new thought struck the Brahmin. He got up from the seat and, as the saint's wife was bending to serve food, sat on her back as on horse-back. Now, he fully expected that the saint would fly into a temper. On the contrary, calmly looking on the scene, he warned his wife not to stand erect lest the honoured guest should topple down. Then the wife replied: "Certainly I shall see to it that the Brahmin does not fall down. I know how I balanced our son when he used to climb on my back."

When the Brahmin heard this conversation between the saint and his wife, he was stung with remorse. He got down from her back and, falling prostrate before both of them, sobbing with grief, prayed for their forgiveness.

Saints are so kind and gracious that they do not recognise any harm or insult from anybody. The saint

assured the Brahmin that he had done nothing wrong. They somehow persuaded him to take his food.

After the meals, when they sat together, the saint asked the Brahmin why he had been so highly disturbed. Now the Brahmin told the entire story—how a rich man had promised to give him a sum of Rs. 200 provided he provoked Eknath to anger. But fool as he was in trying to make the saint angry by the use of abuses against him, once more he fell at the feet of the saint and sought pardon for his bad behaviour.

Then the saint, with great love and compassion, said: “O, if only you had told me earlier, I would have got angry so that you might get the generous gift from the rich man.”

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102

WHAT IS TRUE CHARITY

Soon after the Mahabharat war, King Yudhishtira proposed to perform a big Yagna called Rajsuya Yagna in commemoration of the Pandava victory. The Yagna was attended by thousands of Rishis, Munis, Brahmins, besides innumerable subjects and poor people. Lord Krishna, of course, graced the occasion with His presence.

After the Yagna, all the assembled people were sumptuously fed. All the poor in the land also feasted and in serving them all Lord Krishna actively helped. Witnessing the feast provided to thousands of poor people, Yudhishtira became proud. Lord Krishna came to know what was passing in the mind of Yudhishtira. Soon to the surprise of Yudhishtira and others, a mongoose with half its body shining like gold, was found rolling on the plaintain leaves on which the people had taken their meals. At this sight, Yudhishtira felt curious and called the mongoose to explain its strange behaviour. The mongoose then told the following story:

“I belong to a place far away from here. I lived in the house of a poor man with a wife and a son. Owing to drought that part of the country was stricken with

famine. People in thousands were dying of starvation. The poor man and his family were also in great distress. Days passed without their having any food, with the result that they became weaker and weaker every day. When they were about to collapse, a strange man entered the house and placing before them a pot of cooked rice, left immediately. Glad to get the food when they were about to die, the poor man and his wife divided it into three parts and were about to take it.

“Suddenly, a hungry man passing in front of their house saw the food and rushed in and prayed to the poor man to give him a portion of the food. The poor man offered his entire share to the guest who ate it with great relish. But his hunger was not appeased. He looked at the share of the poor man’s wife with gloat-ing eyes. Then the wife handed over her share of the food to the hungry man. He finished this food also quickly and looked at the share of the son. The worthy son of the parents also gave his share to the man who finished it in no time. The man left the house soon after. The three starving ones, who had given their food, laid themselves down through utter exhaustion and died. I was witnessing the phenomenon and was amazed at the charitable nature of the family. Seeing a few grains of cooked rice on the floor, I rolled on them and, to my surprise, half my body which had touched the rice shone like gold. I departed from the house and wandered from place to place and attended small and great functions where the poor were fed. I rolled on the leavings left on the leaves used for eating. In spite of going to hundreds of places, where such feeding went

on, I could not succeed in getting the other half of my body turned into the colour of gold.

“Then, I heard that King Yudhishtira was performing a Yagna where millions of poor people would be fed. I came here and saw a huge number of people lavishly fed. Turn by turn thousands were being fed and I have been rolling on the leaves after the meals but, to my great disappointment, the other half of my body remains the same as before.”

Yudhishtira heard the story of the mongoose and turned to Lord Krishna who stood near him, His face suffused with smiles. Meanwhile the mongoose had disappeared. Yudhishtira understood that all this was the Lila of Lord Krishna performed to teach him a lesson and begged pardon for his pride and conceit.

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103

POWER OF THE NAME

A famous saint of Maharashtra once paid a visit to a place called Mangalwedha, about eight miles from Pandharpur. At that time a huge fort was under construction at Mangalwedha. While the saint was passing by the side of a high wall of the fort, where hundreds of labourers were working, the wall collapsed and many including the saint were killed, smashed down by the fall of the wall. The devotees of the saint missed him and started a search. After a long and arduous search, they could not find him. Some people of Mangalwedha reported that in all probability the saint must have been crushed to death beneath the fallen wall of the fort.

Accordingly a large number of devotees joined together in the work of removing the fallen wall. When they did so, they found a number of skeletons of people who had died in the accident. The devotees of the saint wished to single out his bones so that they could raise a tomb over them. The difficulty, however, was that the bones of the people killed were mixed up and they did not know which were the bones of the saint.

Now a great devotee of Pandharpur Vithoba—the Deity of the great temple there—happened to pass that way. He understood the perplexity of the devotees and

said: "I shall be able to pick out the bones of the saint." So saying, he took out the bones that were lying helter-skelter and holding them one by one to his ear, he was able to separate the saint's bones from those of others. Such of the bones as were singing the name of the Pandharpur deity—Vithal—he separated from others. The sound of the name of God had entered into the very marrow of the saint's bones by his unceasing practice of chanting the Name. Such is the power of the Name.

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104

THE TWO SADHUS

Once two Sadhus came to a town from different directions. One settled down beneath the shade of a peepal tree and the other under a banyan tree. Hearing of their arrival a Bania householder first went to the Sadhu of the peepal tree and prostrated before him.

“Maharaj,” said the devotee, “it appears another Mahatma has come to our town. Do you know him?”

“Yes,” returned the Sadhu contemptuously. “I know him; he is a buffalo.”

Soon after, the devotee arming himself with a bunch of hay visited the Sadhu of the banyan tree and, placing the hay before him, prostrated.

“Well,” cried out the Sadhu, “What do you mean by this? Why this hay?”

“It is an offering, Maharaj; deign to feed upon it and bless your devotee,” appealed the Bania with folded hands.

“What! are you mad?—eat hay!” flared up the Sadhu.

“Maharaj, a Sadhu below the peepal tree, at the other corner of the town, was good enough to inform me that

you were a buffalo. So I thought I could bring you a fitting present," coolly said the devotee.

"How could you believe him? Have you no sense?" asked the Sadhu reprovingly.

"Maharaj, how could a poor and ignorant man like your slave dare to understand Sadhus? A Mahatma alone can know a Mahatma," returned the devotee.

"Go then and tell him he is an ass," said the Sadhu.

The Bania devotee left the place, and directly going to the bazaar, purchased a seer of cotton seeds and making a bundle of it, proceeded to the first Sadhu of the peepal tree. Untying the bundle he poured out the contents in front of the Sadhu and prostrated before him.

"How now," asked the Sadhu with a surprised look, "what is this for?—it is cotton seed!"

"Right, Maharaj—a stuff so dear to you. Do accept the humble present and making a full meal of it shower your grace upon your slave," prayed the Bania.

"Is anything wrong with you?—what do you mean, eat cotton seeds?" uttered the Sadhu in consternation.

"Why not? Maharaj, a Sadhu over there, beneath the banyan tree, told me that you are an ass. An ass has a great partiality for cotton seeds—"

"You fool," he roared in rage, "don't you see that I am not an ass?"

"How should I know, Maharaj—a poor man like me caught in the meshes of Maya! It is said: a Mahatma

alone can recognize a Mahatma," replied the devotee with a sly twitch at the corner of his thin lips.

The Sadhu was by this time thoroughly roused and, rising to his feet, said in an imperious voice:

"Bhaktraj, take me to the place where the other Mahatma is; I should like to teach him how to speak of his betters."

They went. It appears there was a terrible fight between the two Mahatmas, the Bania devotee witnessing the fun from a distance. The affair ended in the Sadhus going without food for that day!

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105

THE TAIL IS OUT

Once a Guru was teaching his disciple about the highest Truth; but the disciple was not, in fact, a proper Adhikari, prepared to listen to or understand him. The Guru was seated leaning against a wall and the disciple was facing him. In the wall there was a rat hole. When the teaching was going on, the rat was slowly proceeding towards the hole and all the attention of the disciple was fixed on the rat; he was watching keenly what the rat was doing. It had almost entered the hole and its tail only was seen outside. The Guru, coming to know that the disciple was not attending to him, asked, "Do you listen to what I say? Has what I told you entered your head?" Suddenly the answer came from the disciple, "Yes, only the tail is out." Many disciples are of this type. So, Adhikara or preparedness to imbibe spiritual teachings is necessary and that can be only through purification of the mind.

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106

A LESSON LEARNT

In a village there lived a couple. The husband was often given to quarrelling with his wife. Whenever they quarrelled the husband would hold out a threat to his wife that he would renounce his home and become a Sadhu. On the outskirts of the village a Sadhu lived in his hut engaged in meditation and in imparting spiritual advice to aspirants who went to him in the evenings. Among them, this young man was one. Every time he quarrelled with his wife he used to warn her that if she did not obey him in all respects he would give up home and join the Sadhu. The wife led a miserable life owing to her husband's behaviour.

One day when the husband was away to a neighbouring village on some business, the wife paid a visit to the Sadhu and complained to him how her husband threatened her that he would run away from home, and become a Sadhu. The Sadhu advised her that when her husband next held out the threat, she should tell him to go away and do what he liked.

After some days the husband again had sharp differences with his wife and as was his vogue said that he would assume Sannyas and run away from home. The wife retorted that he might do as he pleased. The husband, in a huff, left home and went straight to the

Sadhu in the hut. The man told the Sadhu that he had cut off all relationship with his home and the world and would spend the rest of his life in the service of the Sadhu. The Sadhu welcomed him and asked him to be seated.

Lunch time was approaching. The Sadhu instructed one of his disciples to bring a good quantity of margosa (Neem) leaves. These leaves are very bitter. He was asked to grind them and have Laddus made out of them. The disciple did not take much time to get the Laddus ready. The man who had quarrelled with his wife was closely watching the situation.

Meanwhile the Sadhu held a discourse on the efficacy of margosa leaves. He said for improving health and observing Brahmacharya, Neem leaves are most efficacious, and added that he had decided to have for food that day and the next day the diet of Laddus made of Neem leaves. At the suggestion of the Guru, Laddus were at once served to the devotees who were present in the hut at that time. A big Laddu fell to the share of the irascible visitor. The visitor had no other go than to eat the Laddu with a wry face. The same food was served also in the evening, and the next morning. Before noon next day the visitor strangely disappeared and found himself at his home, as quiet and tame as one could be under the circumstances. From that time he neither quarrelled with his wife nor threatened her as he did before.

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107

SAINTS *Versus* PLANETS

An itinerant Sadhu came to a certain place along with his young disciple. The routine was that the disciple should go for alms, and after collecting sufficient provisions, come back to the Guru. Both would then cook food from the provisions thus secured and satisfy their hunger.

As usual, the disciple, who was yet a boy, started in the morning on his daily Bhiksha. When he was passing through a lane he was called by an astrologer who sat on the verandah of his house waiting for customers. Having had no customers till then and finding no work to do he asked the boy to sit by his side. Taking that moment as the basis, the astrologer studied the planets governing the life of the boy and found out that the boy, according to his reading, should die next day. The astrologer told this anticipated event to the boy.

The boy hearing the prediction of the astrologer was thoroughly frightened. He could not collect the Bhiksha for the day, but hurriedly went back to his Guru. With tears in his eyes he told his Master about the dire prediction of the astrologer. Then the Guru calmly replied: "Look here my boy, nothing is going to happen to you tomorrow. You will be all right."

Next day, the Guru, lest the boy should be scared at the thought of the predicted death, kept the boy with him the whole day. The boy was safe and sound. The day passed. On the following day the boy was asked to go for Bhiksha in the usual course. The boy again happened to pass through the same lane in which the astrologer lived. The astrologer was astounded to find him alive, contrary to his prediction. He called the boy, asked him who his Guru was, and expressed a wish to have his Darshan.

Accordingly, led by the boy, the astrologer went to the Sadhu whose disciple the boy was. The boy introduced the astrologer to his Guru. The Sadhu looked at the astrologer and said, "You frightened my disciple unnecessarily. Do you think he will meet with any harm so long as he is under my protection? It was unwise of you to have upset the mind of the boy by saying that he would die yesterday."

Such is the power of saints.

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108

SADHUS DO NOT TOIL FOR FOOD

There was a Sadhu in Malabar, a tall and stout person. He was in the police service before he became a Sadhu. He used to wear only a small towel round his waist. Once when he was going for his Bhiksha, a householder, seeing his good physique, asked him why he should not work and earn his bread, instead of begging for it. The Sadhu was told that he would be given a meal if he was prepared to cut a few logs of firewood that were lying in the householder's courtyard. The Sadhu, without uttering a word, started splitting the firewood with an axe given to him and, within a short time, cut the whole lot and stacked the pieces in the proper place. Then, leaving the axe near the stack, the Sadhu simply walked away. The householder saw the Sadhu going without taking food. He called him back and asked him why he was going before getting his meal. The Sadhu then replied: "I do not take my food where I work, and I do not work where I take my food!" This means Sadhus subsist only upon alms offered to them with love.

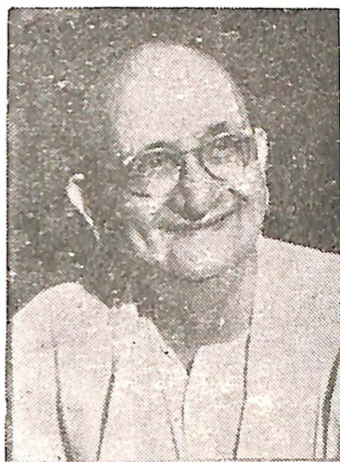
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GLOSSARY

Adhikari	.. One who is fit to imbibe spiritual teachings.
Bania	.. A Hindu trader.
Bhakta	.. Devotee.
Bhiksha	.. Alms.
Brahmacharya	.. A spiritual discipline involving strict continence.
Dharma	.. Righteousness.
Darshan	.. Visit or Divine vision.
Guru	.. Spiritual preceptor.
Ishta	.. Chosen deity.
Jhula	.. A swinging cradle.
Kirtan	Devotional music.
Laddu	A sweetmeat in the shape of a ball
Loka Sangraha	Universal good.
Maya	Illusion.
Mahatma	Saintly soul.
Naivedyam	Food-offering to God.
Nirvana	Liberation.
Pujari	Worshipper.
Puja	Worship.
Roti	Home-made bread.
Sadhaka	Spiritual aspirant.
Sadhana	Spiritual practice.
Sadhus	Saints.
Salagram	Stone emblem of God.
Samadhi	State of trance.
Sannyas	Renunciation of worldly life.
Sannyasi	Religious medicant.
Satsang	Society of saints.
Sloka	Verse.
Tapaswin	Ascetic.
Upanayanam	Sacred thread ceremony, initiating into Brahmacharya.
Yagna	.. Sacrifice.



THE AUTHOR

After receiving initiation of the *Ram Mantra* from his father, Swami Ramdas, who was then known as Vittal Rao, renounced the worldly life in 1922 and wandered as a mendicant Sadhu all over India and in the Himalayas, in a frenzy of God-intoxication, with the holy and all-powerful *Ram Mantra* ever on his tongue, and with God as his only refuge and guide. His was the completest surrender to the Will of God.

Many years of wandering life brought him finally back to South Kanara. Having attained spiritual liberation and God-vision, he started his mission to guide and serve mankind in order to awaken it to the awareness of God. He founded an Ashram named Anandashram near Kanhangad, N. Kerala, which is fostered by love and care by Mother Krishnabai, his foremost disciple and a Self-realized soul. Swami Ramdas' writings come from the deeps of Reality and therefore go straight to the heart. In 1954 he and Mother Krishnabai went on a world tour and hundreds of his devotees, friends and admirers who had loved and venerated them from a distance, had a with them. Since the la been a powerful spiritual constantly visiting it, can Light, Love and Service.



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