

THE WONDER THAT IS SRÎ RÂMAKRISHNA



**An English translation by Swâmî Bhâskarânanda
of the Bengali book *Srî Srî Râmakrishna-Mahimâ* by Akshaykumâr Sen.**

PREFACE

Akshay Kumâr Sen's Bengali book *Srî Srî Râmakrishna-Mahimâ* is quite popular among Bengali-speaking readers of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. I have translated this book into English at the request of one of my close friends who lives in Canada.

The book contains many authentic anecdotes about Srî Râmakrishna and his teachings, some of which are not to be found in other books. But some of the author's views on how the mind functions, etc, may not be acceptable to traditional Hindu scholars. These views, by the author's own admission, are based on his own understanding and experience, and not necessarily on the scriptures. Nevertheless, this book is valuable because it is written by one who had the good fortune to have seen Srî Râmakrishna and associated with him more or less closely.

In the publication of this book the following persons have helped immensely, and I acknowledge their loving assistance with deep gratitude.

Ramakrishna Math, Belur, for permission to translate the book into English.

Charles Scott Wirth for computer typesetting the manuscript and helping with the front cover.

Devra Freedman for proofreading and editing.

I hope this book will be helpful to those for whom it is intended.

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INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the preface, this is an English translation of the Bengali book entitled *Srî Srî Râmakrishna-Mahimâ* written by Akshaykumâr Sen. He is famous as the author of *Srî Srî Râmakrishna Punthi*, a book about Srî Râmakrishna written in Bengali verses. *Srî Srî Râmakrishna-Mahimâ* is the only book written by him in prose.

This book has great historical value so far as the history of Râmakrishna -Vivekânanda literature is concerned. Through this book Akshaykumâr Sen has tried to present Srî Râmakrishna as the divine incarnation of this age. *Srî Srî Râmakrishna-Mahimâ* was published by the author in 1910, eight years after the first part of the *Srî Srî Râmakrishna-Kathâmrita* was published by Swâmî Trigunâtîtânanda. At that time not many had accepted Srî Râmakrishna as a divine incarnation.

Akshaykumâr Sen was one of the householder devotees of Srî Râmakrishna. His exact birth date is not known to us. But considering the fact that he passed away on December 7th, 1923. at age 73, he must have been born around 1850.

As a young man he was employed as a tutor (?) in the renowned Tagore family at Jorâsânko in Calcutta. There he came to know Debendranâth Mazumdâr, a devotee of Srî Râmakrishna. Debendranâth and Akshaykumâr went together to Mahima Chakraborty's home in Cossipore on the outskirts of Calcutta, where Akshaykumâr for the first time met Srî Râmakrishna, who had come there on invitation. Akshaykumâr felt very much attracted to the saint. But he did not have the opportunity of touching Srî Râmakrishna's feet even though he was very eager to do so.

However, according to Swâmî Gambhirânanda's *Srî Râmakrishna-Bhaktamâlikâ*, on January 1st, 1886, at the Cossipore country house, he got the opportunity to touch Srî Râmakrishna's feet for the first time. Before touching his feet, Akshaykumâr had put two Champaka flowers on Srî Râmakrishna's feet. As soon as he touched the saint's feet Akshaykumâr's mind was overwhelmed by an intense spiritual ecstasy. Unable to withstand the impact of that spiritual experience, the limbs of his body became temporarily contorted and he fell to the ground.

Nearly 24 years after the passing away of Srî Râmakrishna, Akshaykumâr Sen wrote the *Srî Srî Râmakrishna-Mahimâ*.

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Seattle 2002

CHAPTER I

Pâthak and Prabodh, two actors of the Calcutta stage, looked upon Girish Ghosh, the famous playwright and actor of Bengal, as their mentor. Both Pâthak and Prabodh had had the good fortune to meet Srî Râmakrishna Paramahamsa when he came to see the play “Chaitanya-Lîlâ” at their theater. They even had the opportunity to salute him by touching his feet at that time.

Pâthak (to Prabodh): You see Prabodh, I’ve taken many drugs (narcotics) in my life. Whenever I tried one it first gave me a pretty good high; and I enjoyed it for a while. Then it would go flat, wouldn’t work any more, So, I had to try a new one. Thus one after another quite a few of them have failed. The only one left for me now is my hemp smoking. But I’m afraid, this one will also meet the same fate.

In this manner Pâthak and Prabodh went on talking with each other while smoking. In course of their conversation their topic gradually shifted to Srî Râmakrishna Paramahamsa.

Pâthak (to Prabodh): You see, brother, this Paramahamsa—whom Girish Bâbu looks upon as his guru—seems to be a pretty good fellow, a good Sâdhu (holy man). Unlike other Sâdhus, he doesn’t have matted hair, he doesn’t wear ochre robes, nor does he smear his body with holy ashes. He doesn’t have any false pride either. He is so humble that whenever he meets people he salutes them first! Remember how he looks? His lips are a little reddish; his eyes are so bright, and his full face has some kind of glow. Once you see him you feel the urge to bow down and salute him. His words are so sweet and his voice is so pleasant! And I’ll tell you my friend, I’ve never heard anyone sing so sweetly! Our theater has so many good singers now, and it’s had quite a few good ones in the past. I’ve heard them all, but none of them can hold a candle to the Paramahamsa. Now they all praise him.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): The Paramahamsa has another wonderful ability. I’ve heard from others that while he was the priest in Rânî Râsmani’s temple, his loving worship pleased the Divine Mother so much that She appeared before him. Now, whenever he wants, he gets the vision of the Divine Mother and talks to Her. The day when he came to our theater, as soon as he set his eyes on the actresses he fainted, saying, ‘O my blissful Mother! O my blissful Mother!’ Then regaining partial consciousness he started muttering something strange and unintelligible.

Pâthak (to Prabodh): That’s not fainting, my dear friend, that’s called Samâdhi. And what you call muttering is the way he talks to the Divine Mother. He sees the Divine Mother in all women. That’s why he behaved that way. I’ve heard that he knows everything. The Divine Mother tells him everything. He never had any formal education, but he excels all the big and famous pundits in knowledge.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): He is not educated. How is it possible for him to excel the pundits?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): Don’t you remember that he talks with the Divine Mother? Do you think he is like any other ordinary person? He doesn’t even have to say much to the pundits. Let me tell you what happens. With great enthusiasm the pundits come to him from far and away places and start arguing with him vehemently. When their arguing reaches the highest pitch, the Paramahamsa simply touches them with his little finger. At his touch, the pundits lose all their wits and become speechless.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): Then what happens?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): What else? Their shouting and roaring having been silenced, some of them fold their hands and start chanting hymns in adoration of the Paramahamsa. Some others fall flat at his feet. Some say, "Please grant us divine consciousness!" Others go on shedding tears, and so on!

Prabodh (to Pâthak): But, my friend, they must see something strange, like spiritual visions about him, to behave that way. Have you heard from anyone what these people see when the Paramahamsa touches them?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): Yes, I've heard that some of them see the vision of Lord Shiva, some see the Divine Mother Kâlî, some see Lord Krishna, and others have some spiritual experience that they are unable to describe. So many arrogant people have become subdued after coming in contact with the Paramahamsa! Remember how in front of our very eyes Girish Bâbu became utterly transformed! Girish Bâbu is no ordinary person! Due to his pride he would never bow down to anybody! He even avoided going to his relatives' homes lest he had to salute his uncles and other relatives. He was a staunch atheist. Even if attacked by a tiger, to save himself he wouldn't pray or utter the name of God! The mere sight of holy people used to irritate him. He would chop down and destroy the clay images of gods and goddesses! You all know how he verbally abused the Paramahamsa when he first met him at our theater. After that, as soon as the Paramahamsa chanted a mantra and touched him, Girish Bâbu became completely subdued. Now he looks upon the Paramahamsa as God.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): Do you know anyone else who has been transformed?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): Sure! The other day Shashadhar Tarkachudâmani (a famous pundit of Bengal) came and stirred up the entire city of Calcutta with his oratory. Anyone who heard him speak even once, couldn't stop praising him highly. The entire city became crazy about him; every day he'd be invited to speak at one place or the other! Then one day the Paramahamsa went to see him at his home, touched him, and said something.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): Then what happened?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): What else? As soon as the Paramahamsa touched him, all his lecturing stopped! That great pundit, Shashadhar, began following the Paramahamsa for a while. Now he is completely silent, no word comes out of his mouth!

Prabodh (to Pâthak): Do you know anyone else like him?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): Oh, plenty of them! I'll tell you about them some other time.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): How did you get to know so many things?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): My dear brother, wherever I go nowadays, people talk about the Paramahamsa.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): Where is he now?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): I've heard that now he is living in a country house in Cossipore. He has developed some kind of sore throat. That's why his devotees have arranged for his treatment there. It seems his disease is quite serious. I've heard that the doctors in the city haven't been able to help him. Even Dr. Mahendra Sarkâr has failed to give him any relief.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): Let's go and see the Paramahamsa. I really am upset to hear about his serious illness.

Pâthak (to Prabodh): So am I. Let's go.

CHAPTER II

They started immediately. It was almost past noon. After walking a little distance they felt hungry.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): Brother, it's hard to walk on an empty stomach. And still we've got to walk more than three miles. And neither of us have a single penny in our pockets. Nevertheless, as we've started, we must somehow go there. You told me that you would tell me later about those people who were silenced by the Paramahamsa's spiritual touch. Why don't you talk about them now? It seems, the stories about the Paramahamsa are just as attractive as his looks.

Pâthak (to Prabodh): The other day I went to Bâbu Datta's crack house. Many were talking about the Paramahamsa there. I liked what they said. One of them said, "Keshab Sen has so many disciples. When he went to England he charmed many famous people there with his oratory. He has also established so many Brâhmo temples in India. Don't you remember, the Beadon Garden was completely filled with people when he lectured there? People even crowded outside the garden to listen to him. It created a big stir in the city. Some days later Keshab Bâbu met the Paramahamsa."

Prabodh (to Pâthak): What happened after that meeting?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): That man told me, "After associating with the Paramahamsa for a few days, Keshab Bâbu's life took a new turn, as though he became transformed into another man! Then he (Keshab) started visiting Dakshineswar with his disciples. Sometimes he would invite the Paramahamsa to his own home. In course of time Keshab Sen's enthusiasm for lecturing faded away, and he would come and just sit quietly at the feet of the Paramahamsa and listen to his words. One day the Paramahamsa said to Keshab Bâbu, 'Keshab, I would like to hear your lecture. Please say something.' Keshab Bâbu replied, 'Sir, do you expect me to sell needles to a blacksmith?'"

Prabodh (to Pâthak): How strange! A great man like Keshab Bâbu became changed like that after having come in contact with one who never had any formal education and who was just a humble priest at the temple of Mother Kâlî! Think of those thousands of priests and brahmins in the city, as well as the pundits who can dazzle everyone by rattling out Sanskrit texts from books. What to speak of them, I haven't yet heard of anyone anywhere who can even hold a candle to the Paramahamsa!

Pâthak (to Prabodh): It's you who told me a little while ago that you heard from someone that the Paramahamsa was a priest at the temple of the Divine Mother Kâlî. You also told me that the Divine Mother, pleased with his worship, appeared before him. Now whenever he calls on the Divine Mother, She comes and talks to him. How can you compare anyone with a person who talks with the Divine Mother Kâlî? The Paramahamsa is an exception. He isn't like anyone else. You mustn't forget that he has directly experienced God!

Prabodh (to Pâthak): The Paramahamsa got the vision of the Divine Mother Kâlî as a result of his intense devotion. There're so many temples of Mother Kâlî in this city. They all have salaried priests who decorate the images of the Mother nicely and give regular food offerings to Her. Why are those priests so different from the Paramahamsa? Take for instance, Kâlîghat. That's a famous place of pilgrimage, isn't it? The Divine Mother is considered "awake" there. But don't tell me, I know the inside story of that place as well!

Pâthak (to Prabodh): One gets what one wants. The Paramahamsa became the priest of the temple of the Divine Mother with the yearning to see Her and talk to Her. That's why Mother Kâlî accepted his worship, appeared before him, and even talked to him. Whenever he prays to see Her, She comes and talks to him. But other priests only make a superficial display of their devotion; they aren't true worshipers at all. They are in fact enemies of the Divine Mother's worship! Nevertheless, the compassionate Mother grants them whatever they want. They don't crave the vision of Her lotus feet. They don't really want to see or talk to Her. They only crave petty worldly rewards that the compassionate Mother gives to them.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): How have you come to understand all this? I've been with you all these years but I hardly know any of these things.

Pâthak (to Prabodh): I also couldn't understand any of these things until that day when the Paramahamsa came, and just setting his right foot into our theater went into Samâdhi. At that Girish Bâbu shouted to all of us who were there, "Come and take the dust of his feet!" I immediately rushed toward the Paramahamsa and saluted him touching his feet and said, "Please shower your grace upon me!" When I said those words tears came to my eyes. It's from that time onward that I've been able to understand certain spiritual things a little bit better. I feel that the Paramahamsa must have done something to me. I also realize that whatever I'm able to understand now is only due to the Paramahamsa's grace. Another advantage is that now the more I hear his words the more I'm able to understand them.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): You said that he did something to you. What do you mean by that? What did the Paramahamsa do to you? Tell me clearly what actually happened to you.

Pâthak (to Prabodh): You've got to excuse me! I can't tell you anything more than what I've already told you. You see, all I can say is it's as though I was in deep sleep; now I'm somewhat awake.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): I can't understand anything of what you're saying. I wonder when I'll be able to understand all these things like you!

Pâthak (to Prabodh): Both of us are going to the Paramahamsa. Once we see him, I shall pray to him for something; you also do the same.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): I don't know what I should pray for. Please advise me.

Pâthak (to Prabodh): One to whom you're going will let you understand everything. He himself will inspire you to pray for the right thing.

That is the glory of Srî Râmakrishna! The more Prabodh and Pâthak were talking about Srî Râmakrishna the more their spirituality was being awakened. They were also gradually becoming able to understand Srî Râmakrishna's divine play. Srî Râmakrishna's holy name itself is a great mantra. Talking about him is as good as doing your spiritual practice. The 'individual being' (Jîva) can become spiritually awakened just by talking about the Lîlâ¹ or divine play of

¹ Lîlâ: The divine play; the Relative. The creation is often explained in Hinduism as the Lîlâ or play of God. God by His magical power or Mâyâ has created the world. To God this world created by His Mâyâ is not real just as an apple tree created by the power of hypnosis of a magician is not real to him. It is real only to those who have been hypnotized by the magician. That's why from God's point of view His activities are only like His play or playacting, not real to Him. In this particular context this is the meaning of the word Lîlâ. As a philosophical term "Lîlâ" (the Relative) is the correlative of the "Nitya" (the Absolute).

Srî Râmakrishna. If people talk about him their spiritual consciousness becomes awakened. And it (the spiritual consciousness) dispels the gloom of “tamas” (mental and physical inertia and ignorance of God), just as rubbing two pieces of dry wood against each other produces fire that dispels darkness.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): Well, you told me that after associating with Srî Râmakrishna Keshab Bâbu’s life took a new turn. I couldn’t understand what you meant by that. Will you please explain?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): I also couldn’t understand it when I heard it from the person who was talking about Keshab Bâbu in Bâbu Datta’s crack house. So I asked him to explain. Then he said that previously Keshab Bâbu used to talk only about the formless aspect of Brahman (God). But after associating with Srî Râmakrishna, he started talking about the Divine Mother. It means that the spiritual path Keshab Bâbu had been following must not have been considered the right path for him by Srî Râmakrishna. That’s why he guided Keshab Bâbu to the spiritual path that was just right for him.

Prabodh (to Pâthak): Would you please elaborate a little more?

Pâthak (to Prabodh): Let me explain it with the help of an analogy. Consider a boat that doesn’t have a boatman. Suddenly a severe storm arises. The boat is tossed back and forth by the winds and it looks like the boat will surely dash against the bank or the rocks and sink. Before that happens, if an expert boatman can jump into the boat what does he do? He grabs the rudder and steers the boat along the right course. Keshab Bâbu was a great devotee of God. But he was drifting here and there like a rudderless boat. Srî Râmakrishna showed him the right path for him and guided him toward it.

CHAPTER III

Srî Râmakrishna hadn't been able to take normal food for nearly the past ten months because of his soreness of throat. At first his nurses gave him liquid food. But lately he was unable to take even that. He could hardly swallow even the little portion of the food that he would put into his mouth; the rest he had to spit out. That's why the nurses prepared a much larger quantity of food than what he could consume.

The day Prabodh and Pâthak came to visit him, Srî Râmakrishna could take only a negligible quantity of food because the pain in his throat had become much worse. The bowls containing food, mostly uneaten, were sitting in front of him.

Srî Râmakrishna's bed was in a secluded corner of his second-floor bedroom. The doors and windows were closed. A person staying in this upstairs bedroom wouldn't be able to know of anyone's arrival in the garden below. Nevertheless, Srî Râmakrishna's compassionate heart came to know that Prabodh and Pâthak had come to see him, and that both of them were very hungry. He immediately called one of his attendants and said, "Just now two men have arrived downstairs. Please bring them to me." As soon as the attendant brought them to his room, Srî Râmakrishna welcomed them saying, "Come, come. I've been waiting here for you to come and eat this food. I know that both of you are very hungry. Come and eat!" Prabodh and Pâthak saluted Srî Râmakrishna and started eating happily.

Dear God-loving reader, please paint that beautiful picture in your heart. It's impossible for me to draw a pen-picture of that wonderful play of Srî Râmakrishna. God's Lîlâ is so wonderful! His Lîlâ is so much more attractive than the Nitya (the absolute, Supreme Divine Reality). That country house in Cossipore had become God's own stage! God—who is beyond mind and speech, the Supreme Person, the all-knowing, all-pervading, beginningless, endless, infinite, Eternal Brahman—was playing His role as Srî Râmakrishna and enacting the last role of his life. Humility, simplicity and endless compassion for all living beings were, as it were, His external decorations. His body in the form of Srî Râmakrishna was devastated this time by illness, reduced to almost a skeleton. Even though beyond the reach of mind and speech, assuming the Râmakrishna form He was teaching human beings who He really was! Wearing the disguise of a destitute person, He was distributing priceless gems to anybody and everybody without any reservation. The divine game that He played with Pâthak and Prabodh that day is bound to melt the heart of even the most hard-hearted person. Is there any other comparison to this wonderful act of compassion anywhere? Isn't He the liberator of the fallen and the down-trodden? My intellect fails to understand how some people object to the doctrine of divine incarnations!

Srî Râmakrishna is a personification of Bliss. No matter how worldly-bound a person is, he will float or lie immersed in the ocean of bliss as long as he enjoys the company of Srî Râmakrishna. We continually witnessed Srî Râmakrishna's wonderful power to heal the pain and suffering of people.

That day Pâthak and Prabodh ate their fill of the sanctified food given by Srî Râmakrishna. Later, while taking leave of him, they said with folded hands and tears in their eyes, "Master, please bless us so that we can have love and devotion for your holy feet!" At this Srî Râmakrishna just kept quiet and smiled a little. He smiled that wonderful smile that could bewitch the entire universe. Anyone who saw that smile even once could never forget it!

CHAPTER IV

Prabodh and Pâthak returned home walking and talking all the while about Srî Râmakrishna. A few days later they heard the sad news that Srî Râmakrishna had passed away. For some days they missed him immensely, then gradually they became all right.

By Srî Râmakrishna's grace, gradually their natures started changing. They became aware of their responsibility as householders and regained their sense of duty in regard to their wives and children. Their addiction to drugs faded away. And they were eager to hear the stories about Srî Râmakrishna. They also developed respect for his devotees and would heartily join in whenever there would be any celebration in his honor. Occasionally they would get together with some friends and sing the glory of Srî Râmakrishna in songs composed in adoration of him. They also hung the picture of Srî Râmakrishna in the green room of their theater. On those days when they had to perform on stage, they would decorate Srî Râmakrishna's picture with garlands of beautiful flowers. Every time they went on stage to act, they first saluted Srî Râmakrishna. They also requested the actresses to adore Srî Râmakrishna, and occasionally talked to them about his wonderful saintliness. Thus all of them developed great love and respect for Srî Râmakrishna.

In this way twelve or thirteen years passed. Then they heard that Srî Râmakrishna—whom they loved and adored so much—was also loved and adored in other countries as well. People in other countries were also becoming astounded by Srî Râmakrishna's spiritual glory. The banner of Srî Râmakrishna had started flying in Europe and America. Many western men and women started coming to India to visit the places associated with Srî Râmakrishna. Even a very well-known scholar of England wrote a biography of Srî Râmakrishna. Some disciples of Srî Râmakrishna were getting ready to win over the world with their own spirituality. What they were trying to do was beyond the power of other ordinary people to accomplish. Hearing all these things, Prabodh and Pâthak became eager to know more about Srî Râmakrishna's life.

CHAPTER V

Then one day they met a close devotee of Srî Râmakrishna and said to him, “Sir, would you please tell us about Srî Râmakrishna? We’re very eager to know about him!”

That gentleman² became quite emotional seeing the great devotion these actors of the Calcutta stage had for Srî Râmakrishna. Shedding tears, he said to them, “I’m an ignorant fool, how can I tell you about his wonderful life? But since you’ve asked me, I’ll try to tell you what little I’ve come to know about him by his grace.”

Pâthak (to the devotee): I know that you all look upon Srî Râmakrishna as God. But, is he truly God?

The devotee: First you’ve to answer one of my questions, then I’ll talk about him. Whom do you call God? What’s your concept of God?

Pâthak: God is great, He is all-powerful. Whatever He wants He can do. He is the Lord of this universe—the entire creation. Also Srî Râma and Srî Krishna being divine incarnations are no other than God, that’s all that I know.

The devotee: Srî Râmakrishna is also that.

Pâthak: We’re sorry, we can’t understand what you are saying. Will you please explain? What’s the proof that Srî Râmakrishna is God?

The devotee: Experiencing the wonderful life of Srî Râmakrishna and receiving his grace are the only proofs. When God incarnates in human form, He displays a certain characteristic. Do you know what that is? He doesn’t display any outer sign whatsoever to indicate that He has incarnated in human form. Knowing a divine incarnation is a matter of personal realization and direct experience. Once you recognize Him you come to know that He is beyond all known worldly characteristics and outer signs—that’s the “sign” of a divine incarnation! That is what I think. The Paramahansa used to talk about one sign of a divine incarnation. It’s this: “One whose body and mind are deluged by devotion and love of God—one who is overwhelmed with love of God day and night—he indeed is one in whom God has incarnated in human form. One is unable to see this tell-tale sign of a divine incarnation unless one has directly experienced God.”

He also used to say that a divine incarnation is like an “*Achiney*” tree. There’s a kind of tree by that name. The name means “that which can’t be recognized by anybody.”

Aside from that, he used the analogy of a lantern used by a night watchman. The watchman uses the lantern when he’s on his rounds in the lanes and alleys in and around the city. He can focus his lantern on others and see their faces, but they can’t see his face. Only if he focuses the lantern on his own face can others see him. Likewise, God who is in hiding in a human form, sees the entire creation by the light of His own consciousness. Human beings can see and know Him only when He reveals His true nature through the light of His own consciousness. Now let me tell you one thing: it’s very difficult to know that Srî Râmakrishna is a divine incarnation because in him there’s no display of the power of Rajoguna.³ In him you only see the power and glory of pure

² This gentleman was no other than Akshay Kumâr Sen, the author of the Bengali Book: *Srî Srî Râmakrishna Mahimâ*.

³ Rajoguna: According to the Sâmkhya philosophy, Prakriti (nature), in contrast with Purusha (soul), consists of three Gunas (qualities or strands) known as Sattwaguna, Rajoguna, and Tamoguna. Rajoguna stands for activity or

Sattwaguna.⁴ The power of Sattwaguna can't be detected or recognized when one endowed with it remains like a humble devotee. In this Srî Râmakrishna Incarnation you won't see any killing of demons like Aghâsura, Bakâsura, Tâdakâ and Putanâ. In him you see only the power and glory of Sattwaguna. To enjoy and appreciate this glory you need special eyes and ears—special senses. Let me tell you what has happened during this incarnation. This time the invaluable gems in God's treasury, hidden in the deep waters of the infinite ocean, have been made available for anyone to come and take away. Through his intense spiritual practice Srî Râmakrishna was able to get those gems and then distributed them to one and all. From what Srî Râmakrishna has graciously shown and taught me, I've come to realize that he's no other than God incarnate and the Lord of the universe. He is that almighty Râma, Krishna, and the Divine Mother Kâlî. He is also Satchidânanda—beyond the grasp of the mind and intellect. At the same time, he is also knowable by the purified mind and intellect. For you and me, seeing his Lîlâ is the easy way to know him.

Pâthak: I thought one could only hear about Lîlâ. How can one visualize Lîlâ?

The devotee: You yourself will be able to understand this when you follow that spiritual path with great concentration. Should I give you a hint of what it's like? When you hear the description of a beautiful girl, you develop a mood that creates a picture of that girl in your mind. Similarly, when you hear about God's Lîlâ, it creates a mood, and that produces a picture of Lîlâ. While visualizing Lîlâ, you're able to know whose Lîlâ it is.

Pâthak: So many miraculous events took place when God incarnated as Râma and Krishna. Wood became transformed into cork; a petrified woman came back to life; Mount Govardhan was lifted by Srî Krishna; Srî Krishna became Mother Kâlî; Putanâ and Kamsa were killed; and Srî Krishna gave the teachings of the *Gîtâ*. Has anything like that happened in the Râmakrishna incarnation?

The devotee: In this incarnation of God many more incidents like these have taken place. Compared to what all the other divine incarnations have done, Srî Râmakrishna has done even a little bit more. Hearing about the Lîlâ of those whom you've named, you've come to believe that they are God. If you hear about the Lîlâ of Srî Râmakrishna you'll be able to understand who he is. As you have faith in Srî Râma and Srî Krishna, you'll be able to easily understand the Lîlâ of Srî Râmakrishna. One who understands one divine incarnation, understands other divine incarnations as well. One who lacks faith in one, has faith in none.

Pearls don't float on water; they lie at the bottom of the ocean. One can find them by diving down deep into the water. Likewise, dive deep in the ocean of Srî Râmakrishna's Lîlâ, then you'll find those gems, and also come to know him as the repository of those precious gems.

Pâthak: You've said that Srî Râmakrishna has done even a little bit more than what the other divine incarnations have done. Do you thereby mean that he is superior to the other divine incarnations?

The devotee: All are the incarnations of the same "one and only" God. God assumes different names and forms and performs different kinds of Lîlâ. He incarnates and acts according to the

restlessness. Sattwaguna stands for balance, serenity, compassion, clarity of understanding, revealing power, and wisdom. Tamoguna stands for mental and physical inertia and dullness.

⁴ See footnote #3 about Rajoguna.

need of the Lîlâ. All His incarnations have the same powers, but not all have to do the same things.

Take for example, your theater. There are many roles that you could have played, but let me suppose that you are required to play only the role of a comedian. But couldn't you also play the role of a king, the role of Lord Shiva or Arjuna? Surely you could play all those roles, but you may not be required to do so. Similarly, the same omnipotent God, in each of His incarnations, plays only the role that is necessary for that incarnation. God has displayed all the ideals of a divine incarnation in His Srî Râmakrishna incarnation. Therefore, the question about who is superior and who is inferior doesn't arise.

Pâthak: What you say sounds like great fun! So Srî Râmakrishna is God Himself! We touched him twelve or thirteen years ago, why then does nothing seem to have happened to us?

The devotee: You mustn't even think "Although we've seen him nothing has happened to us." A lot has happened to you, but you aren't able to realize it yet. A man can't realize the value of a rare object if he finds it very easily. Do you want to hear what has happened to you? You've been made free from the bondage of this world! Moreover, you've got Srî Râmakrishna's grace and developed the yearning to hear about his wonderful Lîlâ. And best of all, you've become eager to know who he really is! What better fortune can men have? The sole purpose of human life is to hear about God's glory and to experience Him. Human beings are slaves of "lust and gold." They're too eager to have them. You two also were that way. Now you've become attached to the lotus feet of God because of one good thing you've done—you've seen Srî Râmakrishna!

Pâthak: We saw Srî Râmakrishna nearly twelve or thirteen years ago. But only now do we like to hear stories about him and want to decorate his picture with flowers. Why didn't we feel that way before?

The devotee: There's an answer to your question. Srî Râmakrishna used to speak of some seeds that were lying on the cornice of a house. After many years, the house collapsed down to the ground. That brought the seeds in touch with the earth and they germinated. You're also in a similar situation. Now is the time for you to germinate. However, to get the fruits you've to wait for a while.

Pâthak: Your words have soothed our hearts. We are feeling very much encouraged and hopeful.

The devotee: These are not my words. All that I've said are the words of that great world teacher, Srî Râmakrishna. I'm only the conduit! There are gargoyles resembling tiger heads attached to the roofs of some buildings. When it rains, people say that water is coming down from the tigers' mouths. But no water comes from the tigers' mouths. The water really comes down from the sky. My words, strength, and intellect aren't mine at all; everything belongs to him! "The dispeller of fear" is one of the names of Srî Râmakrishna. By the power of that name your courage and optimism are increasing. Srî Râmakrishna is full of joy. Just talking about him generates a stream of overflowing joy. That's why you are now experiencing great joy. You are extremely fortunate, you've touched him and have eaten the left-over food sanctified by his touch. It's only natural that you must get joy hearing the story of his Lîlâ. Even for a worldly soul the wonderful benefit of hearing and talking about his Lîlâ is that he can become immersed in the ocean of bliss. Please listen carefully to what I'm now going to tell you in brief. There's no soul on earth who won't get supreme joy by chanting the name of Srî Râmakrishna with simple faith. No sin

has yet been created in this world that can't be instantly reduced to ashes by chanting his holy name only once with a simple heart. And there's no suffering in this world that can't be soothed by chanting his holy name just once.

Pâthak: There are some who have seen Srî Râmakrishna without recognizing him as God. Are they God-realized souls? Have they seen God?

The devotee: Yes, they've seen God. Suppose you arrived at night in Kashmir in the winter. You were a stranger there. Let me suppose you were looking for a certain home. Then you met a policeman who told you how to reach that house. But who was that policeman? He was actually the king of Kashmir. He was travelling inside his kingdom with some of his close associates wearing the disguise of a policeman. Now let me ask you who that policeman was with whom you talked and who gave you directions to that home. Who was that person really? Do you mean to say that he was not the king because you didn't recognize him as such? He indeed was the king, but in the disguise of a policeman. So also Srî Râmakrishna is truly the Lord and King of this entire universe, but he came here in the garb of a human being. He also brought along with him some close companions—his courtiers—all wearing the garb of human beings. Now try to understand if those people had seen God or not when they saw Srî Râmakrishna!

Pâthak: You've spoken beautifully. Your words have given us much joy. But will there be the same effect if a person sees God without knowing that he or she has seen God?

The devotee: Suppose a man is in deep sleep and is lying close to a burning hearth. When he is sound asleep, if his hand touches that hearth will his hand get burnt or not? Similarly, if unknowingly one sees God why shouldn't it be God-vision? Why should it not produce the same effect?

Pâthak: Hearing your words I've a strange sensation in my heart. I'm wondering if I could recognize Srî Râmakrishna as God now. Please tell me again how to recognize him.

The devotee: By seeing your yearning I've realized that you've got the grace of Srî Râmakrishna. I just told you that there's no special outer characteristic of a divine incarnation. Unless he reveals himself to us nobody can recognize him. We've heard from Srî Râmakrishna himself that when Srî Râma went to the forest only seven forest-dwelling hermits were able to recognize him as the Eternal, Supreme Brahman (God). All others knew Srî Râma as the son of King Dasharatha. In the ancient Sanskrit play *Srî Krishna Rahasya* we read that there was a controversy in the royal court of the Kurus about whether Srî Krishna was God or not.

Pâthak: The Paramahansa Deva is such a great soul, yet I wonder why people talk against him. Some say, "He is a Mahâtmâ (great soul)." Some say, "He is a Sâdhu (a holy man)." Others say, "He is a saint—a spiritually illumined soul." Again, some say such bad things about him that it's hard to listen to such things or to even talk about them.

The devotee: People may look alike but they differ in their inner nature. When they talk, they talk according to their own understanding and inner nature. Listen to one of Srî Râmakrishna's parables. "Out of spiritual ecstasy a saint lost outer consciousness, and was lying by the road. A holy man was passing by. He immediately realized that the person lying on the roadside was a saint. He saluted the saint and sat by his side with the hope of serving him when he would come down from his high state of spiritual ecstasy. A little later a person walking very unsteadily came by. He was completely drunk. He saw the saint and exclaimed, 'Bravo! Here's someone as dead drunk as I am!'"

Another saying of the Paramahansa Deva: “Just by looking at a thread a merchant who deals in threads can tell what number thread it is, so also a holy man can recognize another holy man as soon as he sees him.”

Another analogy has been given by him: “Consider a person who has eaten radish to his fill. When he belches, only the smell of radish will come out of his mouth.” Similarly, those who crave only money and objects of lust, and are extremely worldly-minded and bound in the meshes of worldly life, can they talk about anything except the ideas of Avidyâ?⁵ (i.e. other than the ungodly, worldly things?) You feel like shutting your ears when you hear them talk. You should immediately leave the place where they are. God and Avidyâmâyâ⁶ (“lust and gold”) are two completely different things. Between these two one gets what one chooses. A river with constant fluctuation in its volume of water can’t keep both of its banks intact. If one bank remains unchanged the other one changes. So also an individual being (Jîva) can’t have both God and objects of lust at the same time. He has to choose between wealth and poverty, between the luxury of staying on the third floor of a building and taking shelter under a tree. Those who have wholeheartedly chosen the path of “lust and gold” won’t have any access to the path to God. There’s some kind of addiction in the pursuit of Avidyâmâyâ (“lust and gold”). Those who are hooked by it are completely overpowered by that addiction; they can’t even lift their heads. Just as duckweed covers water, and clouds cover the sun, so also Mâyâ seems to hide God from our sight. A person suffering from jaundice sees everything looking yellowish. Similarly, one who is infected by the jaundice of Avidyâmâyâ can’t see anything other than the color of “lust and gold.”

Let me tell you about another power of Avidyâmâyâ. Addiction to Avidyâmâyâ completely confuses the intellect. After destroying the sense organs this addiction reduces human beings to the level of beasts, such as sheep. It doesn’t allow them to realize that their lives are a total disaster. And if you ask someone who is mad or possessed by a ghost, “Hello, how are you?” he will say, “I’m all right!” So also these people (who are addicted to “lust and gold”) say, “We’re doing wonderfully well.”

Well, I’ve answered the questions you asked. Try to understand clearly that it isn’t possible to experience God unless one has got over one’s addiction to “lust and gold.” Even if such people see a saint—a spiritually illumined soul—they may not respect him. On the contrary, they may speak ill of him. Only those who are most worldly-minded speak against Paramahansa Deva.

Pâthak: How can one get rid of this addiction to “lust and gold”?

The devotee: Srî Râmakrishna has prescribed an excellent medicine for that. And, by his grace, that medicine is easily available nowadays. The medicine is holy company. In this connection there is an apt analogy given by Srî Râmakrishna: “If anyone loses consciousness from smoking hemp, rice water can help him recover. Similarly, holy company is as effective as D. Gupta’s fever mixture for those who’ve lost their senses under the spell of Avidyâmâyâ.”

⁵ Avidyâ is also called avidyâmâyâ. See the footnote on avidyâmâyâ below.

⁶ Avidyâmâyâ/Mâyâ, or illusion causing duality, has two aspects: avidyâmâyâ and vidyâmâyâ. Avidyâmâyâ, or the “mâyâ of ignorance,” consisting of anger, passion, and so on, entangles one in worldliness. Vidyâmâyâ, or the “mâyâ of knowledge,” consisting of kindness, purity, unselfishness, and so on, leads one to liberation. Both belong to the relative world.

Pâthak: To wean themselves away from their addiction to “lust and gold” is it necessary for people to renounce their families, jobs and property?

The devotee: Why should it be so? Srî Râmakrishna didn't ask householders to give up “lust and gold.” But he did ask them to give up their *attachment* to “lust and gold.” He said, “Don't allow any room for ‘lust and gold’ inside your heart. Learn to float above ‘lust and gold.’” You know, no harm comes to a boat when it floats in water. But if the water enters the boat it's in grave danger. Look upon your wife as an aid to God-realization. After having one or two children, live like brother and sister. And both of you should always try to serve God. Consider “gold” (money) as only a means for your livelihood. The path for householders is considered very safe for God-realization. Srî Râmakrishna used to compare family life to a fortress. If you fight staying inside the fortress, no bullets or weapons from the enemy can hurt you. When you're hungry or thirsty you can get food and water inside the fortress. Similarly, in family life you can get your food and drink on time. And there's no harm in having a conjugal relationship with your wife. In family life you also have your relatives and friends. They may come and take care of you when you're ill. But if you escape from family life you won't have all these benefits. Yet, all your needs will remain.

However, you have to be aware of one thing. First recognize the true nature of the world and then enter into family life. Otherwise, there will be a lot of difficulty. For an inexperienced person to enter family life is like trying to break open a jackfruit without first smearing the hands with oil. The sticky milk of the fruit won't cling to his hands if they are first smeared with oil. Similarly, if a person enters worldly life with a mind smeared with the oil of divine knowledge and love of God, he won't get entangled in attachment to “lust and gold.” Therefore, one should first acquire Jnâna (divine knowledge) and Bhakti (love of God), and then enter the world.

Here is another teaching of Srî Râmakrishna: “If you rub turmeric paste over your body and then enter the river, you needn't be afraid of the crocodiles. (According to popular belief, crocodiles don't attack people who've rubbed turmeric paste over their bodies.) Similarly, if a person's mind has Jnâna and Bhakti, the crocodile of ‘lust and gold’ can't do him any harm.”

Another analogy: “In the game of hide and seek if you reach the home base first, you won't have to be ‘it.’ Similarly, if you have God-realization first, then you can remain safely in this world without any fear.”

Still another analogy of Srî Râmakrishna: “If you hold onto a post as you whirl around it, you won't fall down. Similarly, if you live in the world holding onto God, you needn't be afraid of a downfall.”

In this context Srî Râmakrishna used to tell this parable also: “A villager came to see the city of Calcutta. He was carrying a bag and an umbrella with him. All his clothes and travel money were inside that bag. To a villager like him, Calcutta was a strange and wonderful city. By the time he had seen the many interesting sights of Calcutta, it had become evening. Then he began wondering where he could find shelter for the night. Thinking about this for awhile, he sat down at the gate of a house and, as he was very tired, soon fell asleep. As he slept, a thief came and stole his bag and umbrella. When the villager woke up he realized that he had lost everything. Similarly, those who have come to the ‘city’ of this world must arrange to find their shelters first and then go sight-seeing. Otherwise, they'll have a fate similar to that of the villager. God is that shelter.”

Srî Râmakrishna also used to say something very beautiful. He used to say that the farmers put a kind of fish-trap in their fields during the rainy season. Little “Puti” fish (a kind of tropical fish found in India) become attracted by the traps, enter them and can’t get out. Similarly, people in this world become attracted by the lure of “lust and gold” and get trapped. They meet the same fate as that of the Puti fish.

One has to live in this world very carefully. Indulging in “lust and gold” and handling poisonous snakes are equally dangerous. If one wants to play with “lust and gold” there is no chance of saving oneself unless one gets a mantra (holy name of God) from a guru and learns from him which medicine can protect him from the poison of “lust and gold.”

Pâthak: Does the guru let us know all these things? Why, our “family guru”⁷ only gave us a mantra. He didn’t tell us anything else. Are there many different kinds of gurus?

The devotee: I understand what you’re saying. You’ve been speaking of a certain kind of guru and his disciple. But do you know what it’s like? It’s like one blind man leading another blind man. Eventually both will fall into a ditch. But if the disciple has genuine love of God, he will be able to find the “real guru” inside his guru. According to our view, an ordinary guru and the “real guru” are different from each other. Do you know who the real guru is? It’s the Ishta (the chosen deity). Let’s suppose a bird has laid an egg. Eventually the egg hatches and the baby bird comes out. The relationship between the guru and disciple is quite similar. When a guru gives a mantra to the disciple, the deity chosen by the guru remains associated with that mantra. Chanting the mantra, meditation, worship of the deity, etc., are like incubating the egg. In course of time the egg will hatch and the baby bird—the Ishta, the chosen deity—will come out. When the Ishta (the chosen deity) appears, the human guru disappears. When the baby bird comes out, the egg shell is no longer necessary.

Pâthak: If guru and Ishta are different from each other, then how do you look upon Paramahansa Deva?

The devotee: In his case the guru and the Ishta are one and the same. As long as he is playacting and not revealing his true divine identity, he is the guru. When he reveals his divine identity, he is the Ishta. In the other case mentioned before, the human guru disappears when the Ishta appears. But in this particular case, the Râmakrishna form of the guru still remains even when the disciple experiences the Ishta.

Pâthak: Sir, who actually is the guru?

The devotee: Guru is one. Guru is God Himself. Other than God no one can be called the guru. Those human gurus who instruct devotees about how to experience the divine guru are called *upagurus*. These upagurus are not necessarily only human beings. They can be animals, birds, trees and vines, or the deities (Devas and Devîs). When one travels along one’s spiritual path, one maintains a relationship with the upagurus. But once the disciple experiences the guru, his or her relationship with the upagurus becomes tenuous. At that time the only relationship is between guru and disciple. Let me explain to you with the help of an analogy how long the relationship lasts between the disciple and his upaguru. In rural India a proposal for a young man’s marriage first comes through a professional matchmaker, either a man or a woman, who

⁷ Family guru: Also known as *kulaguru*. Such a guru, usually a householder, plays the role of the spiritual teacher to certain families. When he dies, his descendants become gurus to the descendants of those families. Kulagurus are not necessarily god-realized souls.

lives in the potential bride's village. Hearing about the proposal, the young man comes to like that matchmaker simply because he or she lives in the village of his potential bride. Then the potential bride's neighbors come to see the young man. When the young man meets the neighbors of his potential bride he likes them even more than the matchmaker because they know her better and live closer to her. During the final stage of negotiations the bride's father, uncle, or brother may come to finalize the marriage arrangements. As the young man gets to know all these close relatives of his future wife, he begins to like them far more than he does the bride's neighbors. After the marriage, however, he feels closest to his wife. The importance of other people becomes secondary. Similarly, when the disciple finds his or her guru (Ishta), the relationship with the upaguru becomes of secondary importance.

Srî Râmakrishna used to say that the guru is like the matchmaker in a marriage. A matchmaker is needed for the union of the bridegroom and the bride. Similarly, a guru is needed for the union of the individual being (Jîva) and God. This guru is Srî Râmakrishna. You've heard that out of his grace when he would touch anybody, that person would see his or her guru in Srî Râmakrishna. Unless one is God how can he reveal God? Through his touch Srî Râmakrishna would transmit spiritual power to the devotee. By that power the devotee would see Divinity in Srî Râmakrishna.

Let me tell you what kind of guru Srî Râmakrishna was.

Even if a devotee accepts Srî Râmakrishna first and then leaves him, Srî Râmakrishna never abandons that devotee. Even if the devotee forgets Srî Râmakrishna, he never forgets the devotee. Even if the mind of the devotee vacillates, his mind never vacillates.

If a person accepts Srî Râmakrishna as his or her friend and then abandons him, Srî Râmakrishna never lets that person go. Anyone who has had the good fortune to touch Srî Râmakrishna even once, can never become attached to "lust and gold."

Once during his spiritual ecstasy Srî Râmakrishna gave this assurance: "When the green hornet grabs a cockroach, the cockroach becomes a green hornet.⁸ Similarly, if I accept anybody, that person will acquire my spiritual color."

Another time, during his spiritual ecstasy, he announced: "I am a cobra. Anyone whom I shall bite won't have to croak more than three times."⁹

A person whose guru is Srî Râmakrishna won't have to do anything. He can freely dance around with his arms upraised and have great fun. The boat is ready at the shore to take him across the ocean of this world at any time. The boat and the boatman are always visible to him. He can go on enjoying whatever game he is playing. He knows that whenever he wishes, he can cross the ocean. He no longer is afraid of playing games in this world. In the past (before finding Srî Râmakrishna as his guru) his eyes were closed and he fell down many times while playing here.

⁸ The green hornet first injects its venom into the cockroach's body. The venom kills the cockroach. The hornet then puts the cockroach's body in a little nest made of clay, lays its egg on the body of the dead cockroach, and seals the opening of the nest with clay. The putrefying body of the cockroach generates heat to hatch the egg. The larva feeds on the cockroach's dead body and becomes a fully grown green hornet. Then it bores through the wall of the nest and flies out. People who do not know what happens inside the hornet's nest think that the cockroach has become transformed into a green hornet.

⁹ If a poisonous snake like a cobra catches a frog, it dies after croaking only two or three times. It has a faster death due to the snake's venom. Using this analogy Srî Râmakrishna is saying that whomever he accepts as a disciple, will soon be liberated.

Now he has learnt to play with his eyes wide open. Previously the world was illusory to him. Now it has become a place of great fun.

Both of you have been able to understand things much better now. Open your eyes and try to see what Srî Râmakrishna is! He is not only the guru of you and me, he is the guru of this entire world. Srî Râmakrishna is “Uncle Moon”—he is the same to everybody.¹⁰

Pâthak: Wow! Srî Râmakrishna is God Himself! But what’s the effect of seeing God?

The devotee: Girish Bâbu is a great devotee of Srî Râmakrishna. I can hardly find another playwright and poet like him nowadays. He has written in one of his books: “The effect of having the vision of Lord Krishna is no other than that wonderful vision of Lord Krishna.” That’s also my view.

Pâthak: These words give us great hope. Would it be possible for me to see God as Srî Râmakrishna again?

The devotee: Surely you will. When you develop a great yearning to see him, you will have his vision. You will be able to see his Râmakrishna form as well as the other divine forms that he assumes. He indeed is an ocean of endless forms.

Pâthak: We’ve heard about his passing away. We were present when the urn containing his ashes was taken for burial to Ram Bâbu’s garden in Kankurgachhi. His body was destroyed. How can we see his body again?

The devotee: Brother, you are saying this to me with the assumption that he is a human being. But I’ve told you again and again that he is God. The form of Srî Râmakrishna is one of His divine forms. His body wasn’t composed of the five elements, even though it appeared to be so. His body was made of Divine Consciousness. It was solidified Divine Consciousness. We saw with our own eyes that the molecules and atoms constituting his body were made of Divine Consciousness. His divine play in the role of a human being has ended, but he still exists in his divine form. The form of the Divine Player can never be destroyed. God is the “wish-fulfilling tree” for the devotees. He takes on different forms in order to fulfill the wishes of His devotees, and He never destroys those forms. Nor does He have the power to destroy them, because those forms belong to the devotees; they don’t belong to God.

To dispel your doubts, if any, let me tell you the story of one of Srî Râmakrishna’s disciples. The name of that devotee is Durgâcharan Nâg. After the passing away of Srî Râmakrishna, he became extremely upset. He wouldn’t touch any food or drink. After he had fasted for three days, Narendra (Swâmî Vivekânanda’s premonastic name) found out about it. Narendra is very kind-hearted. He immediately went to Durgâcharan’s home and found him lying there almost half dead. Narendra tried hard to feed him something, but didn’t succeed. Then Narendra said, “Give *me* some food to eat.” Durgâcharan immediately went and bought some snacks from a nearby shop. Then he gave them to Narendra with a glass of water. Narendra lifted the bag of snacks and choosing one or two pieces, ate a little portion of each and offered the rest to Durgâcharan Nâg. Without the least objection Durgâcharan started eating Swâmî Vivekânanda’s leftovers. Durgâcharan considered them to be Swâmî Vivekânanda’s Prasad. [Durgâcharan had great respect for Swâmî Vivekânanda. He firmly believed that, as had been acknowledged by Srî

¹⁰In some parts of India parents often point to the full moon in the sky and tell their little children that the moon is their uncle.

Râmakrishna, Swâmî Vivekânanda was an incarnation of Lord Shiva. Therefore, Swâmî Vivekânanda's leftovers were considered sanctified food or Prasad by him and he had no objection to eating them.] But Narendra had already eaten before he came, so his stomach was full. How much more food could he eat? So he handed the bag containing the untouched food to Durgâcharan to eat. But Durgâcharan threw the snacks into the river Ganga instead and started hitting his forehead saying, "Woe unto me! Alas! What misfortune has befallen me!" The next day the neighbors with great insistence persuaded him to cook some rice for himself. When the rice came to a boil, Durgâcharan hit the clay cooking pot with a piece of firewood and broke it into pieces. Then he began to weep profusely, saying: "My wonderful Master is gone. How is it possible for me to eat anything!" Seeing the great yearning of Durgâcharan, Srî Râmakrishna appeared before him. Only then did he cook some rice again and eat.

Pâthak: Ah me! The stories about Srî Râmakrishna's devotees are just as charming as those about Srî Râmakrishna. Will you please tell me more about his devotees?

The devotee: Your question gladdens my heart. You must have obtained some special grace of Srî Râmakrishna. That's why while talking about his Lîlâ, a fountain seems to have opened up inside my heart! He is letting me know what I never knew before. I consider myself blessed to have the company of someone like you who is thirsty to know God's Lîlâ. The stories about the devotees of Srî Râmakrishna are indeed charming. And the games that Srî Râmakrishna played for the education of humanity are even more charming. Hearing these stories, even solid rocks drip water, dead trees burst into blossom, and worldly souls develop spiritual awareness and devotion to God. They find the means to cross the ocean of this world. Such stories about Srî Râmakrishna have been recorded in *Srî Srî Râmakrishna Punthi* and other books. You will come to know all about this if you read these books.

Pâthak: Sir, please talk about what happened here. You've said that there are other forms of God besides the form of Srî Râmakrishna. What are those forms? And how has Srî Râmakrishna become the ocean of different divine forms?

The devotee: The Râmakrishna form is our favorite form. This is his tangible, physical image (like the image of a deity). But he has a cosmic form as well. In addition to that he has his formless aspect. Srî Râmakrishna also said that beyond the corporeal and formless aspects, God has still another aspect. The devotees don't like to see anything other than God's corporeal image. But God won't leave them until they have seen some of His other forms.

Pâthak: Yes, I've understood what's meant by God's corporeal Râmakrishna image. That's the only form that we've seen. What's the cosmic form you mentioned?

The devotee: The form that includes all living beings and the entire universe is the cosmic form of Srî Râmakrishna. Even though endowed with a physical image, Srî Râmakrishna, the world teacher, has also become "many" as the Cosmic Being ("Virat"). He has become whatever is movable as well as unmovable in this universe—trees, vines, mountains, rivers, air, fire, and all kinds of living beings. He is both inside and outside all. Nothing or no one exists except Him. Whatever exists is no other than Him.

Pâthak: Strange words! While mentioning what's in the scriptures have you been unduly substituting Srî Râmakrishna's name in place of God and talking about *his* glory? Or, are you talking about what you've really experienced?

The devotee: Infinite is the glory of Srî Râmakrishna. He is God. He is the Lord of everything that exists. He is the King of all kings. You've been thinking that I've been talking about the scriptures! But I don't have the faintest idea about any scripture. The *Râmâyana* and the *Mahâbhârata*, which are read by even shopkeepers, I haven't read them even now, nor do I know anything about them. I got to see Srî Râmakrishna when I was thirty years old. Then I didn't even know whether the stories of the Kauravas and the Pandavas were in the *Râmâyana* or in the *Mahâbhârata*!

One day Srî Râmakrishna asked me, "Are you a Brâhmo?" I couldn't give any reply to that question. I didn't know then who was a Brâhmo, who was a Shâkta, and who was a Shaiva. Nor did I know what's meant by God. I didn't know if God existed or not, nor did I ever think about Him. But one year before I met the Paramahansa I was given spiritual initiation by a village guru who gave me a Krishna mantra (the holy name of Krishna) to chant.

I asked him, "I've chanted the holy name of Krishna a few times, why then am I not able to get his vision?"

He said, "How can you have His vision unless you've performed Purascharana¹¹ and gone through many other spiritual practices? Will just living on the bank of the river Ganga and chanting the mantra only twelve times after your bath do it?" Hearing that, something happened to me. From then onwards my heart yearned to have the vision of the divine incarnation Krishna, to play with Him, and to eat châpâtis and molasses with Him.¹² I yearned for all this not because I thought that Krishna was God, or that He could take me across the ocean of this Samsâra (phenomenal transient world). I yearned for Him because I thought that He was so handsome and beautiful. I thought that I would be able to snatch away His flute and make Him cry and that I would like to see His body that is as soft as butter. I thought I would like to decorate His body with flowers. Châpâti and molasses are my favorite snacks. I thought I would prepare those snacks and eat them with Him. It's hard for me to tell you how many such thoughts I had about Lord Krishna!

At the time I used to imagine that I was a dairyman (like those dairymen of Vrindaban mentioned in Srî Krishna's life). Had someone said to me, "I've arrived from Vrindaban, I live in Braja (the region where the city of Vrindaban is located)," I would ask him, "How is Kânâi (another name of Krishna)?"

Sometimes I would mix Bengali with Hindi and start talking like the people of Braja in that mixed language. Around that period I'd compose songs in adoration of Kânâi. And I'd compose them in the language of Braja. When I went to see Srî Râmakrishna, this craze of mine about Krishna grew even worse. Having visited him three times I became convinced that if anyone had had the vision of Krishna, it was none other than him! At that time I didn't know that Srî Râmakrishna was no other than Krishna. Do you want to know what my idea of Krishna is now?

¹¹ A kind of ritual performed to bring about some desired result.

¹² God incarnates in a tangible human form to enable human beings to relate to Him easily. Hindu tradition encourages devotees to develop certain mental attitudes which may help them feel closer to God. One of those attitudes is the "friendly" attitude or *sakhya bhâva*. In this attitude the devotee thinks of himself or herself as a friend of God (or a divine incarnation) and behaves accordingly. In this attitude the devotee considers God/divine incarnation as his or her equal. It is obvious that the devotee of Srî Râmakrishna referred to in this book had a friendly attitude (or *sakhya bhâva*) toward Srî Krishna.

I don't know if He is that enjoyer of Madhura Rasa¹³, the charioteer of the Pandavas, the killer of the evil king Kamsa, the performer of the great sacrificial worship in Prabhâsa, or the divine player in Dwâarakâ. All that I know is that Kânâi is Yashodâ's "blue jewel" (Srî Krishna had a very pleasant and bluish dark complexion), the friend of the cowherd boys, the flute player, the stealer of cream from His neighbors' homes, and the cowherd. I know that He is loved by everyone in Gokula, and more so by Râi (another name of Srî Râdhâ, the greatest woman devotee of Srî Krishna). He is beautiful. I know all this. Let me sing a song, you'll then understand my attitude of mind.

Song

There goes the beautiful moon of Vrindaban,
There goes the grazer of cattle,
There goes the darling, the charming one,
There goes the lover of forests.
His forehead is decorated with beautiful forelocks
And the mark of sandalwood paste.
Beautiful are the garlands of wild flowers around His neck.
Wrapped around His body is his cloth—
As though it is made of lightening.
He attracts the hearts of the milkmaids
And wears a charming headdress decorated with a (peacock's) feather.
The feather sways back and forth in the breeze.
With a steady gaze He looks at the milkmaids at a distance.
His ankle bells make beautiful sounds
And He laughs and dances in the midst of the cowherd boys.
He shines like the moon among the stars
Flashing His beautiful rays.
The cattle walk ahead of him.
And He follows them playing His flute.
O when will I get my Kânâi, the charming one,
Who holds the flute in His hands!
Look how far I've come now while talking about my knowledge of the scriptures!
Pâthak: It's very interesting! Please tell me more. I can see in all this the wonderful glory of Srî Râmakrishna.

The devotee: I knew that whenever he would touch anyone's chest, that person would lose outer consciousness and be blessed with Srî Krishna's vision. But I never really talked with Paramahansa Deva or asked him about it. Still, with the hope that he might touch me, and also because every time I saw him I would feel something strange inside me, I would go to him and think, "When will he be gracious enough to touch me?"

Many days passed but he never touched me. Nevertheless, hoping that he might one day do so I kept on going to him. But, unable to get that touch, every time I had to come back weeping.

¹³ One of the five spiritual attitudes cherished by the Vaishnava worshipper toward his Ideal Deity, Krishna: the attitude of a wife toward the husband or of a woman toward her paramour.

In my life I talked to him only twice. Once when we were alone, I said to him, “Master, I’m as good as blind!”

He replied, “God is there for you.”

Another day I said to him, “Master, I must have committed some offence. That’s why you didn’t touch the ice cream that I brought for you.”

He smiled and said, “ Had you brought the ice cream at noon, and not later, I would have eaten it. If I take cold ice cream in the evening I become sick. That’s why I didn’t eat it.”

Had anybody else got the kind of behavior I got from him, he would never again have come back to Srî Râmakrishna! Many would be allowed to stroke his feet, but as soon as I would try to touch his feet, he would pull them away, saying, “ No, that’s enough.” Again when I would try to salute him touching his feet, he would walk away from me saying, “All right, that’s enough!”

I couldn’t understand any of the high spiritual things he talked about. I would sit silently in one corner of his room and only look at him. He awed me just as I used to be awed by my father. I could also see some resemblance between his and my father’s face. I see that even now.

Many things happened. How much can I tell you? To me Srî Râmakrishna is all the scriptures. Srî Râmakrishna is my spiritual knowledge. For me, just seeing Srî Râmakrishna was as good as studying the scriptures. I am telling you only what he showed me. I haven’t been substituting Srî Râmakrishna for anyone else. Instead, I’ve been substituting Srî Râmakrishna with Srî Râmakrishna. I’m telling you what I actually experienced.

Pâthak: It’s strange that you see Srî Râmakrishna in everything that exists. If he has become every thing and every living being, then in what manner does he exist in them? Does he exist in them fully, or partially?

The devotee: Just as you can’t read the small letters of the alphabet unless you’ve first learnt to read the capital letters, so also you won’t be able to understand what the cosmic form of God is unless you’ve understood how God exists in His human image.

Sea water fills up every pot, big or small, when they are immersed in the sea. Similarly, I can see Srî Râmakrishna existing in everything in exactly the same way. From this analogy try to understand whether he is existing fully or partially in all these things. But the difference in the quantity of water contained in a big or small pot is due to the play of God’s power.

Pâthak: If every pot contains the same sea water then why are some living beings good while others are bad? Why is there such great variety in their goodness and badness?

The devotee: It’s due to their different qualities. Srî Râmakrishna used to say that water is Nârâyana (God). But water can be of various kinds. Some water is fit only for washing your hands and feet. But there’s water which is so holy that if you drink one drop of it or just touch it, you get rid of all the accumulated sins of your past incarnations. Then there’s some water which you mustn’t even touch! Similarly, Râma (God) is present in everyone. In some He is present as the “saintly” Râma, in someone else as the “licentious” Râma, and in some other person as the “thief” Râma. One Râma may deserve respect while the other Râma should be kept at a safe distance.

Srî Râmakrishna also gave other analogies: “The Divine Mother Shyâmâ is present in the temple holding a sword in Her hand. Elsewhere, She is present in the form of a veiled housewife. In another place She is seated on a veranda holding Her ‘hubble bubble.’”

It’s as the poet has written: “The Divine Mother manifests Herself in living beings in whatever way She chooses.”

It’s not possible to understand the play of the divine power or Shakti as long as one hasn’t been blessed by Srî Râmakrishna’s grace.

Pâthak: If God has become all this, and if He is of the nature of Divine Consciousness, why is there no manifestation of Divine Consciousness in nonliving objects like mountains and rocks? The bodies of living beings are undoubtedly unconscious, yet during their activities one can see the play of consciousness.

The devotee: When you transform milk into yogurt, evaporated milk, cream or browned butter, they still are different products of the same milk. Similarly, no matter what objects have come out of Divine Consciousness, they are no other than God. Or in other words, they are different expressions of the same Divine Consciousness. It’s He who is both the container and the contained. In His gross form He is the gross body. In His subtle form He is the embodied being or the soul. In creation we see that a very subtle form of Consciousness is “outer space” (Mahâkâsha). The grosser form of outer space is the “sky element” (Akasha). The grosser form of the “sky element” is the “air element” (Vâyû). The grosser form of the “air element” is the “fire element” (Tejas/Agni). The grosser form of the “fire element” is the “water element” (Ap), and the grosser form of the “water element” is the “earth element” (Kshiti). Similarly, the Paramâtman or the Supreme Spirit is the subtlest of all. A grosser manifestation of the Paramâtman is the individual soul or Jîvâtman. In this manner, the grosser manifestations of Jîvâtman are Manas (the mind), Buddhi (the determinative faculty of the mind), Chitta (the faculty of memorizing or recollecting) and Ahankâra (ego). Grosser than all these four is this gross body. Creation is indeed the wonderful play of Mâyâ!

Pâthak: Just now you told me that this creation is the play of God. Then why do you say now that it’s the play of Mâyâ? I’ve heard that Mâyâ is the power of creating illusions and is non-eternal. Mâyâ is simply a magician.

The devotee: God is of the nature of consciousness and is the subtlest of all. He is beyond the grasp of the mind and the senses. Yet by his extraordinary power He becomes this gross creation and all its creatures. This power is called Mâyâ. Mâyâ is as real and eternal as God. Can anything born out of the Real and the Eternal be unreal and non-eternal? This power of God—Mâyâ—is the power with which God performs His Lîlâ or divine play. The glory of this power, Mâyâ, is superior to even God Himself, although Mâyâ is subservient to Him. Had there been no play of Mâyâ, only God would have ever known God’s existence. Without the play of this Lîlâ-producing power there can’t be any creation, there can’t be any world and its creatures. And if there are no creatures, God will never be known to exist by anyone. Just as one who is born blind can never know the existence of the full moon, so also none will ever know the existence of God. By His power of creating Lîlâ, God becomes the mother of His creatures. Then through her He reveals Himself. It is like seeing a reflection in a mirror. The individual beings (Jîva) born out of Mâyâ have to take the help of Mâyâ itself to experience God. Unless Mâyâ opens the gate, no one can have God-vision.

The playful and ever-wistful Mâyâ, although one, becomes two while playing. One is Vidyâshakti and the other is called Avidyâshakti. You want to know how the same Power can have these two different modes? In this context Srî Râmakrishna gave an apt analogy. He used to say that the mother cat uses her teeth to hold her kitten by the scruff of its neck while carrying it to a safe place. The kitten's neck isn't hurt at all by her teeth. But when she catches a mouse with those same teeth, there is no end of distress for the poor mouse. Similarly, when Mâyâ grabs anyone by her Vidyâshakti she takes that person directly to God. But when she grabs anyone by her Avidyâshakti, she casts a spell on that person, ties his hands and feet, and puts him in worldly bondage.

I've just told you how Srî Râmakrishna by his power of Lîlâ has become the creation and its creatures, and has assumed his Virat form (cosmic form). He used to say that it's impossible to describe his formless mode. In that mode there are neither creatures nor creation; everything has disappeared into nothingness. Just as you've been told, it all happens due to the illusory and magical power of Mâyâ.

Mâyâ is real in spite of being unreal. It's also unreal in spite of being real. The Paramahamsa gave a solution to this paradox. He used to say, "When I'm seeing this world and its living beings, how can I say that they are unreal? However, in the view of Shankara (the great philosopher and saint Shankarâchârya), the creation and its creatures do not really exist. The solution is that both these positions are equally valid as well as invalid. God has infinite modes. If we say that God is 'this' or God can't be 'that,' then we are actually limiting the limitless, infinite God. God can become everything. About Him everything is possible."—This is the solution given by Srî Râmakrishna.

Pâthak: The Paramahamsa is indeed wonderful! You said that it's he who was Râma and Krishna. Then why haven't I seen him dressed up like Râma or Krishna or perform miracles like they did? I haven't heard anybody say that they've seen it either. But then, it's true that people talk about the Paramahamsa in many places nowadays.

The devotee: You asked this same question at the very beginning of our conversation. Now you are asking it again. You still have doubts about Srî Râmakrishna. Pray to him. Then he will show you everything and help you to understand him.

Let me tell you something. Every divine incarnation has His own individual form. When God incarnated as Râma He took the form of Râma. When He incarnated as Krishna He took the form of Krishna. In this incarnation He has assumed the form of Râmakrishna. God does not put on the same attire in every incarnation, nor does He do the same things every time. There are two categories of divine incarnations. Those belonging to the first category remove the worldly burdens of people, liberate the holy, and subdue the wicked. Incarnations belonging to the second category are called model incarnations. The functions of these model incarnations are to establish righteousness in the world, educate mankind, and liberate the fallen and the downtrodden. Model incarnations have all the powers and glories that are naturally present in all divine incarnations, but they don't display them in the grandeur of their clothes and in other ways. They only display their extraordinary sweetness. Model incarnations are glorious and powerful, although they don't demonstrate their powers. They are extremely beautiful even

though they don't display their physical beauty. In this context let me quote from *Srî Srî Râmakrishna Punthi*.¹⁴

O doubting mind, what will I say to you?
You're always wallowing in the mire of doubt and suspicion.
I don't care if you have faith or not!
I know that my master is the Lord of the entire universe.
He dwells in my heart and is my liberator, guide and protector.
He's the boatman who will ferry me across
The ocean of this terrible Samsâra (phenomenal world).
He is my most precious gem,
My life, intellect and strength.
He's my friend and companion
Both in prosperity and distress.
May I not be assailed by doubts like you, my friend,
By foolishly trying to judge him by glories and powers.
Although he's a simple priest
Having no home of his own,
And depending on others for his daily food,
I adore and worship him with all my heart and soul.
He may lack education, beauty and other good qualities,
And he may be considered mad by others,
Still I adore and worship him with all my heart and soul.
Acquiring a human form,
He is wearing the garb of a poor and lowly brahmin,
Childlike, devoid of fancy clothes and jewelry,
Lean and thin, and suffering from
Cancer of the throat,
I won't judge him by any of these things.
I only want to adore and worship him with all my heart and soul.
But you, my friend,
Are only eager to see his glory and powers.
You expect him to be like Râma
Whose charming complexion
Was the color of fresh new grass
And who had earrings made of gems,
And a crown adorned with jewels.
Râma had horses, elephants and beautiful chariots,
And he carried his bow and a quiver full of arrows.
On his left side sat his consort—the golden-complexioned Sîtâ,
Whom he won by breaking Lord Shiva's bow.
Alas, your foolish mind has been deceived
By Râmakrishna's non-display of powers!
Know that it's the same Râma
Who is hidden behind the form of Râmakrishna.

¹⁴ A book on Srî Râmakrishna written in poetry by Akshay Kumar Sen.

You want to see Krishna
 With his headdress decorated with peacocks' plumes,
 And forehead beautified by his forelocks
 And the Tilaka¹⁵ of sandalwood paste,
 You want to see his beautiful nose
 Decorated with a precious Gajamoti pearl
 And the Kaustubha gem hanging from his necklace
 Outshining even moonlight.
 You want to see his large beautiful eyes,
 And blue-complexioned body
 Made fragrant with sandalwood paste.
 You want to see his yellow garment
 That appears to be made of lightening
 And his world-bewitching flute held in his hand.
 You want to see his body
 That's bent in three places in response to Srî Râdhâ's ecstatic love.
 You want to see Krishna,
 The charmer of the milkmaids of Vrindâban,
 Around whose neck hang garlands of wild flowers
 Reaching down to his feet.
 You want to see Krishna
 Who wears a yellow wrapper
 And whose golden ankle bells ring sweetly.
 You want to see Krishna
 Whose feet are more beautiful than red lotuses,
 And whose every footstep makes a lotus bloom
 With bees rushing to it for honey.
 Let your mind know that it has been fooled
 By Râmakrishna's lack of display of powers!
 It's that same Krishna who is hidden
 Behind the form of Râmakrishna!
 Râmakrishna is none other than Râma and Krishna.
 God has started a new Lîlâ
 By assuming this different form.
 Although forms may change
 The characteristic qualities of the divine incarnations
 Remain the same.
 The wonderful Lîlâ performed by Srî Râmakrishna
 Is its proof.
 According to the need of the age
 The divine incarnations put on different garb
 And come down to earth.
 The same power is used by the divine incarnations to do their work
 Whether they externally display that power or not.

¹⁵Holy marking with sandalwood paste put on the forehead.

No matter which form God assumes all His other forms remain in it. When God appeared before Dâtâkarna¹⁶ taking the form of a very old brahmin, did He not have His Krishna form inside Him? When God incarnated as Krishna He had to show His Râma-form to Mahâvîra. Srî Râmakrishna also showed many divine forms to his devotees. All these things have been mentioned in *Srî Srî Râmakrishna Punthi*. But one who is a devotee of Srî Râmakrishna does not want to see any form other than that of Srî Râmakrishna.

Once Srî Râmakrishna asked Girish Bâbu, “Do you want to have some spiritual vision?”

In reply Girish Bâbu said, “Will I be able to see you in that vision?”

Srî Râmakrishna responded, “Why should I be in that vision?”

Thereupon Girish Bâbu said, “In that case, I don’t want to have that vision.”

A person who wants to test God by expecting Him to show other divine forms, only reveals his own lack of faith in God. Yet, in order to generate faith in the hearts of some faithless people, Srî Râmakrishna showed them his other divine forms. He also allowed them to test him the way they wanted.

Seeing Srî Râmakrishna is as good as seeing all the other divine incarnations. If a person really understands Srî Râmakrishna, he can understand the essence of the Vedas, Vedânta, Purânas, and the scriptures of all the other religions in this world. The body of Srî Râmakrishna includes this world—this entire creation. Let me recite a poem that I’ve written about him.

When absorbed in Samâdhi,
O how comely are his looks!
Beautiful like the moon is his face
That shines and playfully spawns ripples of light.
Beholding his handsome moonlike face
And viewing the ocean of his love
All mental darkness disappears in an instant.
Whoever is there on the shore of this ocean
Is swept by its waves far and away.
Not even Brahmâ (the creator) knows,
Where and how far the waves of his love travel.
See how marvelous is the play of Mâyâ—the wonderful power of God
That lies concealed in the Lîlâ of God!
Look, the yonder sun
Drinks the briny water of the sea
Then spits water—crystal-clear and fresh
To satiate the Châtaka bird’s thirst!

The earthly oceans play their games in the sky
Becoming heavily-laden clouds.
Alas, it’s hard to understand
What’s what and what causes what in Mâyâ.
There is but one primal power

¹⁶ Karna was a great hero in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. He was renowned for his extreme generosity. Thus he acquired the name Dâtâkarna meaning “Karna, the generous one.”

That, acting, has given rise to billions of worlds.
 Such is Mâyâ's wonder that you can't find
 Two objects made exactly the same.
 All objects are forever, none is lowly or high.
 Though differing in form,
 They remain essentially the same.
 Subservient to this power are Brahmâ, Vishnu and Maheshwara.
 In Mâyâ they come and go.
 Yet, in the domain of God's Lîlâ,
 This power, Mâyâ, is Srî Râmakrishna's humble maidservant.
 She serves him day and night
 With her hands folded in salutation.
 Such is the Lord of the universe that it's impossible to know
 The way of His Lîlâ.
 The domain of the Lord's Lîlâ is great and wonderful.
 It has no beginning, no end.
 It is indescribable!
 All the divine incarnations reside safely in Srî Râmakrishna
 Who is the King of all kings.
 His justice satisfies all.
 He reconciles all conflicts
 Caused by mutual hatred and divisiveness.
 He takes equal care of all
 Without infringing on anyone's rights and privileges.
 Holding dear to his heart the various religious views
 Such as those of Vedanta and others,

He is the supporter and sustainer of all the religions in the world.

Everything is miraculous about Srî Râmakrishna. His entire life is full of miracles. There is nothing ordinary about him. Till now very little has been said or known about him. When I tell you the story of his Lîlâ, I'll prove to you that Srî Râmakrishna has not only done all that was done by the divine incarnations who came before him, but also a little bit more. Now I shall quote to you some of his sayings that are as good as the teachings of the *Gîtâ*.

These sayings of Srî Râmakrishna are great mantras. Srî Râmakrishna has made available to us the essence of a universal religion through these sayings. Just as the gentle dewdrops of the month of Mâgha¹⁷ gradually penetrate the rocks and make them crumble away, so also the teachings of Srî Râmakrishna given in his unique, simple language can penetrate the hearts, bones, bone marrow, and arteries of even the most stone-hearted worldly souls!

You can't know something well unless you've handled it. The reason why the people of this country haven't yet recognized the spiritual glory of the Paramahansa is that they haven't seen him. Staying inside the glow of his spiritual glory and claiming that one hasn't known it, is like a person standing on the top of the highest Himalayan peak and saying that he isn't feeling cold. Those who say that they don't feel cold even in that extreme weather, must have something wrong with their bodies.

¹⁷ A month according to Indian calendar that corresponds to the period from mid-January to mid-February.

Some well-known scholars, scientists and religionists of a few progressive countries in the world have become charmed by the life and teachings of Srî Râmakrishna, who was a poor brahmin's son and an uneducated, ordinary priest in a temple owned by a Kaibarta¹⁸ woman. From faraway lands, with much love and devotion, some are coming to India to visit the people and places associated with Srî Râmakrishna. A great many people now collect dirt and fallen leaves from the holy ground near the tree under which he sat and attained illumination. They take these holy relics to their homes and preserve in glass cases.

Isn't it a miracle that cultured and spiritually-interested people from countries, which for many years sent Christian missionaries to India to bring Hindus from darkness to light (!) with the notion that the Hindus were weak, idolatrous, and no better than animals, now adore and worship Srî Râmakrishna with great love and devotion?

The very fact that some foreign scholars have recognized Srî Râmakrishna as a saintly and adorable soul makes it obvious that they must have seen some new light in him. Even a blind fool will be able to accept Srî Râmakrishna as a world teacher because he shines his spiritual light equally on aspirants of all countries and all faith traditions.

Srî Râmakrishna is the "Uncle Moon" I talked about before. I shall try to tell you as best I can about the wonderful teachings that he has given. His greatest spiritual glory, however, is that he is both Râma and Krishna. If people cannot understand this, then their eyes and ears are not working properly and their thinking has become confused.

It may sound like I'm talking too big if I say that all these thousands of people have defective eyes and ears and confused intellects. Nevertheless, I think that I've the right to say that those who want to judge Srî Râmakrishna, should judge him only with a pure and untarnished mind. Unfortunately, most people have a high opinion of themselves while, in reality, they are faithless, impure, mean, crooked, untruthful, deceitful, envious, jealous of others, slaves of lust and greed, and devoid of all human decency. How can they ever judge Srî Râmakrishna, who is more honest than honesty itself, and purer than the purest? In these people's estimation Srî Râmakrishna was just a crazy priest in the temple of a low caste Kaibarta woman, and the guru of a bunch of spoilt brats and worthless riff-raff of society. Then at the end he died of throat cancer!

I have just talked about people with defective eyesight and hearing. Now I'm going to tell you something that will let you know what obstructs these people's vision, hearing, and faculty of judgement—what doesn't allow them to recognize a divine incarnation.

During one hot summer day, Srî Râmakrishna was seated with a few devotees in the cool shade of the Panchavatî grove at the Dakshineswar Temple. They were all talking about God. Then the topic changed to the behavior of the people of Ariadaha, Dakshineswar and Baranagore. These people would speak against Srî Râmakrishna, just as the two critics Jatilâ and Kutilâ would do against Srî Krishna. One devotee said to Srî Râmakrishna, "Sir, from so many distant places people come to you and find peace in your company. I wonder why the people of Baranagore, Dakshineswar and Ariadaha don't come to you!" In response, Srî Râmakrishna pointed to a cow tethered to a post on the bank of the river Ganga, and kept quiet. On that hot day, the cow appeared to be very thirsty. It frequently looked wistfully at the water. The devotees, however, couldn't understand why Srî Râmakrishna had drawn their attention to the cow. Just then four or five cows that were roaming freely on the bank of the river went down to the water and started

¹⁸ One belonging to the fisherman's caste.

drinking happily. After satisfying their thirst, they climbed back up the bank. But the tethered cow, even though equally thirsty, wasn't able to drink any water. As it was tied to the post it couldn't satisfy its thirst. Through that example Srî Râmakrishna wanted to say that the people of Dakshineswar, Ariadaha and Baranagore were also similarly tied up. They were tied to their worldly desires. That's why they wouldn't come to him to find peace.

In this connection Srî Râmakrishna also used to say, "A lantern casts a dark shadow under it, but it lights objects that are away from it." Similarly, a saint is not recognized by those who live close by. He is recognized by those who live far from him.

Srî Râmakrishna used another analogy. He used to say, "Vajrabântul seeds don't drop under the tree. They scatter at a distance and strike roots wherever they fall." Similarly, the teachings of saints are appreciated by people who live away from them.

Human beings belong to four categories—Nityamukta (the ever-free), Mukta (those who have become free in this life), Mumukshu (those who want to be liberated), and Baddha (those who are in spiritual bondage). Those who are Mukta escape from their bondage by cutting through the net. The Mumukshus are trying to cut through the net to become free. Those who are Baddha feel comfortable inside the net and don't make any effort to become free. The other sign of Baddha human beings is that they are not aware of anything other than objects of lust and greed. Earning money, eating, drinking, and creating progeny—they consider these the only goals of life.

Just as a ghost can't stand hearing the holy name of Râma, so also a Baddha human being won't listen to any talk about God. He'll say, "What's the use of hearing all this? Let me go and chitchat with my friends." Someone else may say, "Later, when I become old, I'll hear talk about God. Now let me take care of my household matters." Those who talk like this aren't really that bad. But there are some who say such terrible things that if you even hear them once, you've got to atone for the sin of listening to them! They say, "When Krishna does something bad you say that it's His Lîlâ—divine play, but when we do such things you call that bad, and condemn us!" If Krishna, along with Srî Râdhâ, appears before them holding a flute in His hand, they will say, "Hello, folks! Which theater do you work for? Those are sure fancy costumes you're wearing!"

It isn't easy to develop faith in a divine incarnation. Dr. Sarkar was such a famous man. Yet, he said to Srî Râmakrishna, "I can't call that Râma who hid behind a tree and shot and killed Bali, God. He also sent his wife, who was five months pregnant, away to the forest."

Let me tell you about another obstacle that stands in the way of recognizing a divine incarnation. Nowadays all go for higher education. All seem to be pundits. They are full of vanity about their scholarship. Those who acquire humility through their studies are indeed genuine scholars. Their studies help them to undo the bondage of avidyâ (ignorance of God). The purpose of education is just that. Vidyâ (education) leads to Mahâvidyâ (the knowledge of God). But wherever there's the vanity of scholarship, the bondage of avidyâ becomes all the more intense. This avidyâ doesn't allow the pundit to realize that his vanity has caused him tremendous harm. False vanity is the main obstacle in the path to God. This false vanity itself is the personification of avidyâ.

There are many kinds of vanity. The vanity of scholarship belongs to the domain of Mother Saraswatî, who is the giver of both spiritual and mundane knowledge. Scholastic vanity is acquired by Her grace. Mother Lakshmî is the giver of wealth and prosperity. Only by her grace can one develop the vanity of wealth. There are also the vanities of honor and aristocratic

ancestry. Avidyâmâyâ has ropes of many colors. Using different color ropes She has tied people and brought them under Her control.

Pâthak: You mentioned earlier that Srî Râmakrishna allowed some devotees to test him. What kind of tests did he undergo?

The devotee: That's a long story! Nevertheless, let me tell you something about him. At the insistence of Rânî Râsmani, the elder brother of the Paramahansa accepted the position of the chief priest at the temple of the Divine Mother Bhavatârinî in Dakshineswar. Sometimes the Paramahansa would come and stay with his elder brother in Dakshineswar. One day Mathur Bâbu, the son-in-law of Rânî Râsmani, saw the Paramahansa walking in the temple compound. The Paramahansa at that time was charmingly handsome. He was broad-shouldered, bright-eyed, long-armed, and as pleasant-looking as the "sun at dawn." Seeing the Paramahansa, Mathur Bâbu was greatly attracted to him. Becoming curious, he wanted to know who he was. On inquiry he came to know that he was the younger brother of the chief priest of the temple. Mathur Bâbu then fervently requested Paramhansa's elder brother to ask the Paramhansa to come and see Mathur Bâbu and also to accept the responsibility of performing the worship of the Divine Mother Kâlî in the temple. When the chief priest gave that message to his younger brother, he said, "I don't want to go and see a rich man, nor am I willing to do the worship!" Mathur Bâbu tried hard to persuade him, but failed. So he remained quiet for awhile.

From his boyhood Srî Râmakrishna could make beautiful images of gods and goddesses out of clay. He could paint the eyes of the deities perfectly. As a result, the images looked like they were alive. In his native village whenever other clay modelers would construct images of deities for worship, they would invariably show them to Gadai (Srî Râmakrishna's nickname) for his approval. He would point out the defects, if any, in the images. Besides that, he would be requested to paint the eyes of the deities. Otherwise, they wouldn't be satisfied.

He once made images of Lord Shiva and His bull with clay collected from the bed of the river Ganga. Then he put them in his elder brother's quarters at the Dakshineswar temple complex. Somehow Mathur Bâbu got to see those images. The images appeared to be almost living to him. On inquiry he came to know who had made them. He also showed them to Rânî Râsmani. Mathur said to her, "If we can appoint the person who made these images to do the worship of Mother Kâlî in our temple, I'm sure he will be able to 'awaken' the Mother in no time."

Thinking this way, he again requested Srî Râmakrishna's elder brother to persuade Srî Râmakrishna to accept the offer. At the insistence of his elder brother, Srî Râmakrishna agreed; he couldn't say, "No." But he said to his brother, "If our nephew, Hriday, is also appointed to assist me, I'll accept the position." Getting that news Mathur Bâbu became very happy. After finalizing their salaries, he appointed both of them.

Sometimes Srî Râmakrishna would sing devotional songs in his beautiful, melodious voice, and talk about God. Mathur Bâbu heard him talk and sing that way a few times. In this manner time passed.

At first Srî Râmakrishna took the responsibility of decorating the image of Mother Kâlî. Every day he would decorate the Mother differently. Mathur Bâbu and Rânî Râsmani were charmed by his decorations. Then Srî Râmakrishna started performing the worship of the Mother every day. As a result, he would become overwhelmed with different spiritual moods. Sometimes he would lose consciousness of the outside world. Sometimes he would lose the awareness that he had a

body. His mind would always be absorbed in the thought of the Mother, and with great yearning to see Her he would call out, “Mother! Mother!” Sometimes he would weep so profusely for the vision of the Mother that his tears would fall to the floor. Sometimes he would fan Her with the Châmara (yak tail fan) for a long time. He would also offer the Mother butter and rock candy saying, “Mother, please eat!” Other times during the worship of the Mother he would put flowers on top of his own head and lose all outer consciousness. Sometimes he would hold cotton wool in front of the Mother’s nose to see if She was breathing or not! On some days, after the music of the bells, gongs, and the evening melodies played by the Sehnai players at the Nahabat (music tower inside the temple premises) had stopped he would still be waving lights in front of the deity. He went on and on not wanting to stop! Sometimes he would lose outer consciousness from intense spiritual ecstasy and Hriday had to support his body to prevent it from slumping to the floor. The brahmin employees of the Kâlî temple thought that he suffered from fainting fits, and that he had become insane! Strange that people readily consider anyone who is different from them crazy.

Gradually his spiritual ecstasy became more and more intense and he started having many different spiritual moods every day. Unable to understand these spiritual moods of Srî Râmakrishna, the brahmin employees of the Kâlî temple finally concluded that he was suffering from insanity as well as fainting fits. They complained to Mathur Bâbu that Srî Râmakrishna had become useless and totally unfit for work. As a result, Mathur Bâbu had some disturbing thoughts about Srî Râmakrishna, but didn’t dare say anything to him.

Think of the glory of Srî Râmakrishna! Just around this time a brahmin lady suddenly arrived at the Kâlî temple in Dakshineswar. She was extraordinary. She had great mastery over the scriptures of the Bhakti cult, the Purânas, and the Tantras, and she could quote them from memory without the slightest difficulty. She knew all the spiritual disciplines of Tantra. Later, Srî Râmakrishna said about her that she was the very personification of the four Vedas.

The brahmin lady recognized Srî Râmakrishna as God, seeing that he had the same kind of spiritual ecstasy (Mahâbhâva) that divine incarnations have. She started talking about it to others at the Kâlî temple. At first no one would believe her. When she tried to prove her point by quoting from the scriptures, Mathur Bâbu became amazed at her deep scriptural knowledge. He then invited some famous pundits of Bengal to come and argue with her to see if she was right about Srî Râmakrishna. When the pundits came, it was as though Mother Saraswatî, the goddess of learning, descended on her tongue. No pundit could refute her arguments. She proved that Srî Râmakrishna was God by pointing out the physical signs and symptoms that appeared in Srî Râmakrishna during his Mahâbhâva (spiritual ecstasy). She supported her view by quoting from the scriptures. The pundits had to admit that all the signs and symptoms of a divine incarnation mentioned in the scriptures were present in Srî Râmakrishna. Still they wouldn’t wholeheartedly accept him as God.¹⁹ Nevertheless, as a result of their defeat by the brahmin lady, Mathur Bâbu developed great faith in her words. His respect for Srî Râmakrishna also increased greatly. He then relieved Srî Râmakrishna of the duty of worshipping Mother Kâlî daily in the temple. He also made some permanent arrangements for his free board and lodging at the temple and accommodated him in a room on the second floor just above his drawing room.

¹⁹ The obvious reason for it was that Srî Râmakrishna was almost an illiterate person.

Nevertheless, Mathur's mind was not too different from the minds of other people. Occasionally doubts arose in his mind. In order to test Srî Râmakrishna, one night he sent some very beautiful prostitutes to Srî Râmakrishna's room.

Pâthak: How did Srî Râmakrishna behave when he saw the prostitutes?

The devotee: Just as a little child would get extremely scared seeing a female monster and would run to its mother for protection, so also Srî Râmakrishna got extremely frightened and cried out for the Divine Mother. Then he lost outer consciousness.

Pâthak: Then what happened to the prostitutes?

The devotee: Some ran away screaming. Others stood there and started crying.

Another time Mathur Bâbu tested Srî Râmakrishna again with some other prostitutes. There was a prostitute named Lachhmîbâi. Her beauty could even lure ascetics. Not only was she exceedingly beautiful, but her house, furniture, clothes, and everything else were in extremely fine taste. Mathur Bâbu said to her, "I'll set a day. In the evening of that day, please be present in your home with fifteen other nicely dressed prostitutes. Make sure that they are just as beautiful as you are. I'll come to you accompanied by the younger priest (Srî Râmakrishna). So far no woman has been able to tempt him. If you succeed, I'll give you a special reward."

Lachhmîbâi said, "No problem. I've turned the heads of so many big ones! This is a simple case."

On the appointed day Lachhmîbâi and the other prostitutes put on their fanciest clothes and set a trap for Srî Râmakrishna. They waited for him like a tigress lies in wait for her kill.

In the late afternoon Mathur Bâbu had his phaeton readied and said to Srî Râmakrishna, "Let's go to Calcutta for a ride in the esplanade." Srî Râmakrishna agreed to go. After their ride in the esplanade, the phaeton stopped at Lachhmîbâi's house around evening-time. Mathur Bâbu first made sure that everything had been arranged as planned. Then he took Srî Râmakrishna inside the house, and making an excuse, left him there alone with the women.

Pâthak: What did Srî Râmakrishna do then?

The devotee: As soon he entered the house he started singing a song on the Divine Mother and immediately entered into Samâdhi. He completely lost body consciousness. His dhoti became loose and dropped to the floor. Having lost all consciousness of the outside world, he stood there stark naked!

Pâthak: What did the prostitutes do?

The devotee: They had no idea what to do. Some of them became completely confused and stood there like zombies with their mouths wide open. Some sprinkled water on Srî Râmakrishna's face. Others got alarmed and started calling for Mathur Bâbu. Hearing the commotion Mathur Bâbu realized that something must have gone seriously wrong. He came and saw that Srî Râmakrishna was in Samâdhi. The prostitutes started scolding Mathur Bâbu saying, "You shouldn't have done this to him, he is like a child!" Mathur Bâbu somehow pacified them, and as soon as Srî Râmakrishna's mind started coming down to awareness of the world, he quickly took him to the phaeton and rushed back to Dakshineswar.

After that incident Mathur Bâbu was so embarrassed that he couldn't face Srî Râmakrishna for some days.

Pâthak: How strange! If an ordinary man becomes attracted to even one beautiful young woman, he can easily give up his family image, good name, and sense of modesty for her. But what to speak of sixteen beautiful women! Hearing this incident about him, I think that only God could have behaved the way he did! We are theater people; we know how to judge people in this area.

By the way, did anyone test Srî Râmakrishna to see if money attracted him?

The devotee: Once Mathur Bâbu offered 50,000 rupees to Srî Râmakrishna, but he refused. Then Mathur Bâbu said, "If you don't want to accept this money, I can buy company stocks for that amount in the name of your nephew, Hriday." Hearing this, Srî Râmakrishna became very displeased and said, "I can't allow that either. Although the stocks will be in Hriday's name, I may have the thought that they're actually mine; they will only nominally belong to Hriday."

Brother, see Srî Râmakrishna's wonderful renunciation! He renounced verbally, bodily and mentally. His mouth would say, "I won't accept it." His body and mind would also say the same thing. I've seen how he would renounce things physically. As soon as anyone would put money into his hand it would immediately become bent, twisted and numb for a long time! Have you ever heard of such renunciation anywhere else?

Another time Lakshmî Mârhowâri pressured Srî Râmakrishna to accept some money. Having failed to persuade him, he arrived one day with a large bag full of money. At the very sight of the bag, Srî Râmakrishna cried out in terror like a little boy and lost all consciousness! At this Lakshmî Mârhowâri hurriedly left with his bag of money. Through many such incidents Mathur Bâbu eventually became convinced that Srî Râmakrishna was completely unattached to both women and money. Having seen Srî Râmakrishna's nonattachment to money, Mathur Bâbu became quite generous. I'll tell you about this later.

Pâthak: If a person has the vision of God all his doubts are dispelled. Mathur Bâbu lived so close to Srî Râmakrishna, yet why did he have all those doubts?

The devotee: Mathur Bâbu was a great devotee of Mother Kâlî. He had always been a devotee, even in his past incarnations. He came this time to play his appointed role in the Lîlâ of Srî Râmakrishna. He didn't really have any doubts. Srî Râmakrishna made him play that role in order to teach human beings. He tried to show the weakness of human beings and how their minds worked. Then by his own example he tried to teach mankind what God is like, and how God conducts His divine play. Brother, the human mind is indeed troublesome. But when it's brought under control it turns out to be so beautiful!

Pâthak: What's this mind? We talk about the mind all the time but we never hear or know what it actually is.

The devotee: Sometimes you raise very difficult topics. I'm an uneducated man. How can I tell you what the mind is! Nevertheless, I'll tell you what Srî Râmakrishna has revealed to me.

Wilson is a very famous magician in Europe. He knows all the tricks of magic. For his show, however, he has to teach those tricks to some of his assistants. One or two of those who learn from him become just as good as Wilson is. Similarly, Srî Râmakrishna has the power to perform magic in this world. The mind is the chief among the assistants that Srî Râmakrishna uses for his show. The mind is also the chief player in Srî Râmakrishna's grand magic show. If you understand the games that the mind plays, you'll be able to understand the play of the world as well.

Pâthak: What you're saying sounds like a riddle. Would you please explain it to me?

The devotee: This mind is very funny. One of its activities is playing games. It always wants to play. It plays games inside every man and in all living beings. Its games are of many kinds. It's not easy to understand them. Actually, they are only played by one mind. For the sake of playing games, that one mind becomes many. Its game continues through various incarnations. It plays its games using the body. When the body is destroyed it enters into another body and starts playing again. This mind also has a bed to rest and sleep. Until it goes there and has its deepest dreamless sleep (Sushupti), the game continues.

The mind doesn't have any special form or character. It adopts the form and character of the body through which it plays its games. If you understand all these things you'll know what the mind is. If you want to see the mind or catch it when it's playing, it will immediately disappear and hide from you. You won't be able to see or touch it, even if you search the whole world! This hiding is also one of its games.

The mind exists all over the body. Do you want to know how? It's like the oil in a sesame seed. The oil is everywhere inside the seed. There is no place where it's not. If the mind leaves the body or any of its parts, the body or that part becomes unconscious.

You must have seen the performance of the horses in Wilson's circus. The mind also puts on similar shows with horses. The horses owned by the mind are extremely well-trained. They do whatever they are commanded to do. The mind is the soul of those horses. When the horses rest in the stable they seem to be almost lifeless. But as soon as the mind sits in the saddle and grabs the reins, they run at lightening speed, or at the speed of "Uchchaishravâ" (a mythical horse).

The mind has five horses. Do you know what they are? They are the five senses—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin. If mind doesn't ride them they can't work. The eyes cannot see, the ears cannot hear, the nose cannot smell, and the skin cannot feel. The performances of the horses are no other than the play of the mind. The mind plays other complicated games as well. Let me tell you about them.

Just as the sea contains many pearls, so also the sea of the mind contains many objects in it. These objects are "sense-knowledge." Whatever the mind learns by riding its horses is sense-knowledge. This sense-knowledge gets accumulated at the bottom of the mind. Whenever such knowledge is needed, the mind dives down to its bottom and brings it to the surface. When the mind acts that way, it is called "recollection" (Smriti). When the mind determines what is good and what is bad, then that determinative faculty of the mind is called "intellect" (Buddhi). When the mind becomes a painter and paints mental pictures on itself, it is called "Chitta." When the mind says "I," it is called "ego" (Ahankâra).

The mind owns many costumes. You are actors, you know very well that the same actor can play different roles wearing different costumes. The mind also plays different roles using its different costumes. When it wears the costumes of lust, anger, greed, delusion, false pride, and envy it plays the roles of demonic personalities. When the mind gives up playing those roles and worships God, it acquires a godlike personality. When it plays demonic roles it becomes man's enemy. When it plays the role of a godlike character, it becomes man's greatest friend. When the mind wears an unholy demonic costume, it puts man in bondage. When it wears a holy costume, it liberates man.

Do you know how the mind behaves when it wears an unclean costume? Srî Râmakrishna used to say, “It behaves exactly like the curly tail of a dog.” When you pull it, it becomes straight. As soon as you stop pulling, it becomes curly again. The mind has two states—pure and impure. You can’t trust an impure mind. The pure mind remains all right as long as you fasten it to the lotus feet of God. But if you release it into the world, it may easily become unclean. Srî Râmakrishna used to say that if an elephant is kept tied in its shed after it has been given a bath, it remains clean. But if it’s allowed to go outside it becomes dirty again. When the mind is pure and holy it can no longer be called “mind.” It’s then called “consciousness.” This mind can no longer play dirty roles, because having become “consciousness,” it has experienced “Divine-Consciousness”—the consciousness of which permeates the entire world and makes it conscious.

The average mind has another characteristic. It acquires the character of the company it keeps. If you keep it in the company of the unconscious, it becomes unconscious. If you keep it in the company of the conscious, it becomes conscious. It’s like charcoal. If a piece of charcoal be inside clay, it behaves like clay. If it’s inside fire, it burns like fire.

Just as many notes can be played using a single string of a musical instrument, so also can the same mind produce many melodies. The human body is the Veena (a stringed instrument) of the mind. There are four kinds of bodies—gross (sthûla), subtle (sûkshma), causal (kârana) and supra-causal (mahâkârana). When the mind uses the gross body as its musical instrument it (the musical instrument) produces the music of lustfulness. Then the mind enjoys only “lust and gold.” It’s not aware of anything other the pleasures of eating, sleeping, and sensuality.

When it uses the subtle body as its musical instrument, the individual soul then can see the games played by the mind. The individual soul can then fight with the mind. In that fight it sometimes wins, and sometimes loses.

When the mind uses the causal body as its musical instrument, it (the musical instrument) produces a soothing and becalming sound. Then the mind enables man to enjoy the bliss of God-experience.

When the mind uses the supra-causal body as its musical instrument, it (the musical instrument) produces such sublime music that by that music the mind first lulls its owner (man) to sleep and then it itself falls asleep. In this sleep the mind loses all its qualities and characteristics and transports its owner (man) to the abode of Supreme Peace.

Let me explain a little bit more. The Sitar, a musical instrument, has sixteen frets. Similarly this human body is like a Sitar with seven frets (or levels of consciousness). Using these frets, the mind creates many melodies. Srî Râmakrishna used to say that the first three frets form a group. Using these three frets, the melodies that the mind creates makes man lose his judgement. Then man considers eating, sleeping, and other sense pleasures as the only goal of human life. Considering “lust and gold” dearest to his heart, he enters into a deep sleep.

When his mind rises to the fourth level, he is no longer in deep sleep. He now sleeps fitfully, waking up every now and then. In that state he realizes that there are many more enjoyable things in the world than “lust and gold.”

This fourth level is the domain of divine consciousness. Being in it, man gets a faint idea about divinity. In the beginning that idea is very feeble. It’s as fleeting and short-lived as lightening. After staying at this level for a while, his body experiences a kind of heat. He then sees that the feeble idea of divinity that he had before has turned into a kind of light. But this light is also

short-lived and restless. That's why he cannot concentrate his mind on God for a long time. Like a fly his mind sometimes sits on Sandesh (a delicious sweetmeat made of sugar and fresh cheese), and sometimes on filth.

When a man's mind rises to the fifth level his nature becomes almost completely transformed. Those who have known him won't recognize him as the same old person. He is no longer interested in "lust and gold." Just as an alcoholic is addicted to drinking, he is now deeply interested in talking about God or listening to spiritual discourses. He has at last acquired a mind that he likes. He has seen the ugly form of Avidyâ (ignorance that obstructs God-vision) and has found out how the mind plays its games. He has learnt to fight with the mind and make it obedient and subdued. He has come to know its mischievousness and how it performs its puppet-show.

When the mind rises to the sixth level, man gets the vision of God but can't touch Him. Srî Râmakrishna used to say, "At that level you can see the flame of the lantern, but can't touch it because of the barrier of glass between you and the flame." Similarly, at that level man can see God, but can't touch Him because of a barrier between him and God. Nevertheless, this is a highly covetable mental state for a human being to attain.

Srî Râmakrishna used to say that there is great fun in ferrying across the fifth and sixth levels of consciousness.

Do you understand what Srî Râmakrishna meant by "ferrying across the two levels?" It's like a rowing contest between two boats on the river Ganga. The contestants row their boats back and forth between the two banks to win the race.

So also the mind of the spiritual aspirant, as it were, rows back and forth between the fifth and sixth levels. While at the sixth level it enjoys the vision of God. Then it comes down to the fifth level and sings the glory of God or talks about God. There is no fun, however, at the fourth level, because at that level the spiritual aspirant is sometimes overpowered by Avidyâ Mâyâ.

When the mind ascends to the seventh level, the spiritual aspirant loses the ability to enjoy sense pleasures. At this level the mind loses itself and the aspirant attains Samâdhi. This is "Laya" or dissolution of the mind. Do you want to know what Laya is like? It's like a drop of water getting lost in the river Ganga after losing its identity (form and qualities). The mind, like a salt doll, enters the river and melts away. This is how all the games of the mind end.

Pâthak: People say that you are uneducated and haven't read the scriptures. How have you come to know all these things?

The devotee: I've told you at the very outset that seeing Srî Râmakrishna is as good as seeing all the other divine incarnations. If you can understand him, you'll be able to comprehend the deeper meaning of all the scriptures. Understanding him, you can easily get the fruits of all your spiritual practices. Seeing him is so beneficial that a senseless, worldly-bound person regains his senses; a sleeping person becomes awake; an illiterate fool becomes a scholar; a blind man gains sight; a cripple jumps across the ocean; and a mute becomes eloquent. His spoken words are like great Mantras. They're extremely powerful. Even if chanted in the darkest of places, it lights up that place instantly. Srî Râmakrishna used to say, "If you light a matchstick in a room that has always been dark, it becomes lit up immediately. Similarly, God's words and His grace can instantly dispel the darkness of people's hearts."

Just as cannon powered by fire and gunpowder can shoot balls of lead and make a mountain collapse, so also Srî Râmakrishna's words, charged with spiritual power, can demolish the thick covering of Mâyâ that hides God and the spiritual truths. Srî Râmakrishna's words indeed are as powerful as those cannon balls.

Let me tell you about another wonderful aspect of Srî Râmakrishna's words. When ordinary people talk, their words are just some vibrations generated in air that produce no enduring effect. They create some temporary commotion in the air, then die down and disappear. Srî Râmakrishna's words are different. When he speaks, his words enter through the ears into the listener's heart and produce pictures of the ideas contained in the words. It's like taking pictures with a camera. The listener hears the words, sees the pictures, and understands the meaning of the words perfectly. Then he stores that knowledge forever inside his heart. What other people say are only sounds produced in the atmosphere. They enter one ear and go out the other without leaving any trace whatsoever. It's like a ship cruising through water. When the ship moves, it leaves behind a trail in water, but the trail disappears as soon as it's produced. While cruising, the ship appears to divide the surface of the water into two parts. But no trace of it remains when the ship is gone. Similarly, when ordinary people talk their words create a temporary commotion, but no trace of their words remains. Their words don't enter the listeners' hearts. Even if they do, they find no accommodation there. It's like young boys playfully throwing potsherds into lakes. The potsherds skid over the water; they don't enter the water.

Let me tell you about another wonderful power of Srî Râmakrishna's words. The pictures of the ideas of Srî Râmakrishna that I just mentioned have the ability to become alive. Once alive, they sing beautifully of Srî Râmakrishna's glories. That singing is extremely sweet. That soothing music makes even the heat of a forest fire feel cooler. Do you know when they sing these songs? They sing them at those difficult times when you're grief-stricken, or when Avidyâ Mâyâ is trying to kindle a fire inside your heart.

Do you want to know what else they (the living ideas of Srî Râmakrishna) do? If you are attacked by robbers, like your best friends, even before you've asked for help they come out armed and ready to fight. Then they roar and threaten the robbers in such a way that they get scared and run away helter-skelter in all directions. There's no dearth of robbers in the domain of Avidyâ. Truly speaking, that's the territory of rogues and robbers. They peek at you from all the nooks and corners. Unless you've the help of those living ideas of Srî Râmakrishna, you can't escape from them. Do you know who these rogues and robbers are? They are lust, anger, greed, delusion, false pride, and envy, as well as their offspring!

To a person who has seen Srî Râmakrishna and has had his grace, the unmanifest God becomes fully manifest, the faraway God becomes very near, "that" God becomes "this" God, and the gods and goddesses appear to become members of his own family. Therefore, please try to understand who Srî Râmakrishna is! You've been very fortunate to see him in person, and to have taken refuge in him. In time you'll surely be able to understand him.

Pâthak: You were talking about the mind. Mind is so powerful! It appears that the mind is the all in all. Doesn't Srî Râmakrishna have any authority over it?

The devotee: Mind is not the all in all. It's Srî Râmakrishna who is the all in all. Just as the mind rides the sense organs like so many horses, so also Srî Râmakrishna rides the mind like a horse. The mind obediently does what Srî Râmakrishna asks it to do. It's the will and strength of Srî Râmakrishna that enable the mind to jump, romp, dance, act arrogantly, and do all its evil tricks.

You want to know what it's like? When you put rice and lentils in water in a cooking pot and let it boil, you'll see the rice and lentils jumping up and down inside the pot. They can't, however, jump by their own strength. It's the fire under the pot that enables them to do so. Similarly, inside the cooking pot of the human body the mind and intellect jump around by the strength of Srî Râmakrishna, not by their own strength. Srî Râmakrishna himself has given this simile.

Pâthak: When Srî Râmakrishna used that simile did he say that the mind and intellect inside a human body jump around by the power given by him, and not by the power of Mother Kâlî? Anyway, he knew Mother Kâlî to be his all in all.

The devotee: He said, "They jump around by Mother Kâlî's strength."

Just as the God incarnate Jesus used to refer to his Father's power, Father's will, Father's glory, etc., for everything, so also Srî Râmakrishna always referred to his Mother's power, Mother's will, and Mother's glory, even though he himself was the Divine Mother, Srî Râma and Srî Krishna. Sometimes he would also refer to Srî Krishna's power, Srî Krishna's will or Srî Râma's power and Srî Râma's will. Although he referred to those deities, he has shown me that he is no other than them. That's why I don't know Mother Kâlî, Srî Râma or Srî Krishna; I only know the one and only Srî Râmakrishna. Again through him alone, I've come to know Mother Kâlî, Srî Râma and Srî Krishna.

Srî Râmakrishna is my only thought and realization. At one time I saw him as the Self-existent Lord, as a god, now I see him as Virât—the cosmic Being. I see him permeating this universe and all living beings. Well, you know very well that I'm an uneducated fool. I haven't studied the *Râmâyana* and the *Mahâbhârata*. Nor have I done any spiritual practice or any great thing in my life. My only resource is Srî Râmakrishna. No matter which name of God you mention to me, in that name I see only Srî Râmakrishna. Therefore, how can I say that Srî Râmakrishna and his power are different from each other?

Pâthak: As nothing can be done unless the mischievousness of the mind is destroyed, how can I understand my mind or control it? I feel a great desire now to know the mind.

The devotee: Just think of the wonders of Srî Râmakrishna! Think of the benefit of seeing him in person! See the glory of hearing and talking about him. He's indeed a wonder, he's no other than glory personified!

Among the thousands of people in this world there're hundreds of people who are great scholars, great linguists, famous lawyers, scientists, highly respected officials, fabulously wealthy people, and greatly revered religious leaders of various faiths and denominations. And you're just an ordinary stage actor. Yet, the yearning that you've expressed to know high spiritual truths is very rare among all those people! You're extremely fortunate. You're indeed blessed. And blessed also is the glory of Srî Râmakrishna! The grace of Srî Râmakrishna that has created such yearning in your heart will also let you know all about your mind. Srî Râmakrishna is most compassionate. If you take refuge in him, all the mischievousness of your mind will be destroyed. Just hold onto him.

Pâthak: How to hold onto him?

The devotee: Mentally visualize his form and pray for love and devotion. Also talk and hear about his Lîlâ.

Pâthak: Will that alone do? Don't I have to do anything else? I've heard that one has to go through a lot of spiritual practice to achieve something worthwhile in spiritual life.

The devotee: Brother, you haven't yet realized the wonderful effect of seeing Srî Râmakrishna in person. You haven't yet been able to realize what a great spiritual practice it is to talk and hear about the Lîlâ of Srî Râmakrishna! I don't know any higher spiritual practice than the way you decorate the picture of Srî Râmakrishna with flowers and garlands. I know that nothing is achieved in spiritual life without intense spiritual practice. Besides that, Srî Râmakrishna won't liberate you unless you've done some spiritual practice. But the spiritual practice that he inspires you to do can be great fun. In that kind of spiritual practice no human effort is necessary, and there's great fun and joy in it. It's like a man who has developed a wish to go to Vrindaban. He has an intense desire to have the vision of Râdhâ and Krishna. But he doesn't have any money to travel. Nor does he have any other way of going there. All that he has is the wish to visit Vrindaban. So he starts wandering and accidentally meets a wealthy gentleman. Hearing of his desire, that gentleman says, "Please come with me." Then he takes the man to the Howrah railroad station and buys a ticket for him for Vrindaban. That gentleman also buys him enough food for the trip. He arranges for a bed as well. Then he tells the man, "Go and enjoy your visit to Vrindaban!" In the same way Srî Râmakrishna provides the devotees with whatever they need to have the vision of their chosen deities. By Srî Râmakrishna's grace one gets such miraculous help.

Srî Râmakrishna used to say, "When the natural breeze blows there is no more necessity for fans. Now that the natural breeze is blowing, there's no more need for the fan of spiritual practice." Do you understand what's meant by natural breeze? It's the grace of Srî Râmakrishna. He has said, "I'm now present in this body. There's no need for you to labor. You'll get your harvest without any effort." One day Harish (an attendant of Srî Râmakrishna) was meditating, sitting in the Panchavatî (a grove of trees close to Srî Râmakrishna's room on the grounds of the Dakshineswar Kâlî temple). Srî Râmakrishna came to know about it while he was in the Kâlî temple. He immediately went to the Panchavatî and touched Harish's chest with his hand to break his meditation. Then he said to Harish, "On whom have you been meditating? Come with me and eat the ripe mangoes!"

Tell me who else has given such courage and hope to the devotees! It's only Srî Râmakrishna who has done so. How can I praise enough the glory of a guru who effortlessly shows the devotee his chosen deity (Ishta)! To talk about him my lips become sealed.

Pratâp Hâzrâ lived at the Kâlî Temple when Srî Râmakrishna was there. Hâzrâ was quite an austere person. He was very fond of doing Japa (chanting the holy name of God) with his rosary. He would perform Japa all the time. Srî Râmakrishna snatched away his rosary many times to discourage him and would say, "You've come here. By the Mother's grace, you'll get everything. Just by snapping your fingers three times you'll achieve everything. What's the use of so much effort?" But Hâzrâ wouldn't believe Srî Râmakrishna. He would take back his rosary from Srî Râmakrishna and start doing Japa again. Hâzrâ lived with Srî Râmakrishna for a long time. It was when Srî Râmakrishna went to Sihar and lived in Hriday's home for three or four months, that Hâzrâ got to know Srî Râmakrishna, and then came with him to Dakshineswar.

Hâzrâ is a very interesting character in the Lîlâ of Srî Râmakrishna. Srî Râmakrishna has given some glowing teachings for skeptics as well as provided a lot of fun to his devotees through his interesting playacting with Hâzrâ. Hâzrâ couldn't believe that by Srî Râmakrishna's grace alone

one could have a full harvest even without doing any farming. Srî Râmakrishna's glory becomes obvious to those who have heard about the game he played with Hâzrâ, Hearing about it, even the most skeptical heart develops devotion for the lotus feet of Srî Râmakrishna. One also clearly realizes that the words of the guru are deeper, more potent, and more fruitful than the teachings of the Vedas. Another important point that should be mentioned here is that one won't ever doubt again that one can effortlessly experience God by taking refuge in Srî Râmakrishna.

To fulfill the desire of those who wanted to do spiritual practice, Srî Râmakrishna would tell some of them, "Sit inside the temple of Mother Kâlî for three days and do Japa (chanting of the holy name of God)." To some he would say, "Perform Japa for just one day if you can't do it for three days." He would say to someone else, "If you can't meditate or perform Japa just think of here (Srî Râmakrishna himself)." He would also tell some people, "It'll be enough if you come here off and on. You've come here today; come just two more times." Sometimes he would tell someone, "Come here once either on a Saturday or a Tuesday. That should be enough." Sometimes in spiritual ecstasy he would say, "If anybody comes here and says honestly, 'O God, how shall I know you?' he'll surely see God! He'll surely see God! He'll surely see God!"

Had he given that assurance only once that would have been enough. Why then did he give that assurance three times? There's a reason for it. People nowadays are faithless, without devotion, senseless under Avidyâ's spell, and stricken by the poison of worldliness. Still Srî Râmakrishna gave the assurance thrice hoping that it might generate faith in them. Srî Râmakrishna used to say, "If the people of the Kali era (the "iron" age) be asked to develop sixteen measures of faith, they may at the most develop one measure." That's why Srî Râmakrishna demonstrated through his teachings and actions how to develop sixteen measures of faith in God.

Is there any limit to the kindness and compassion of Srî Râmakrishna whose words are so wonderful? In spite of all this, people haven't accepted him, nor have they listened to his teachings. Yet these people are called human beings! O Srî Râmakrishna! Give me whatever you wish, place me wherever you want, but please don't let me think the way these people think. Please don't put me in their company. These people are so eager for just a little wealth, honor, fame, and position. They never talk about where you are, or how to see you. Such is their intelligence! They prize worthless glass, not gold! They throw away diamond necklaces and put poisonous snakes around their necks! I shudder when I think of such people.

Brother Pâthak, let's say with all our heart, "Victory to Srî Râmakrishna!" Please listen to the comforting words of Srî Râmakrishna. Hear about his wonderful treasures, his compassion, his words that give hope and optimism, and his wonderful glory. One day while in spiritual ecstasy he said, "One who will come and salute me only once won't have to be afraid of anything! One who has taken refuge in me won't have to do anything else. I've created a mould inside me by doing spiritual austerities for many years. I'll put you all in that mould and you'll be transformed instantly." The analogy of the mould has reference to the minting machine that manufactures coins. At one end of the machine you put in a lump of silver, and a shiny silver coin with the queen's face embossed on it rolls out of the other end! The mould that Srî Râmakrishna talked about is like that. Just try to understand how wonderful Srî Râmakrishna is! Isn't he a real wonder? Please try to realize whom you've seen in person and whose sanctified left-over food (Mahâprasâd) you got to eat! There's no other spiritual practice for you to do. In your previous incarnations while doing your spiritual practices you must have sacrificed your life many times to have God-vision. That's why you've been able to see Srî Râmakrishna in person. You wandered here and there for a while under the addictive spell of Avidyâ. You got rid of that

addiction when you saw Srî Râmakrishna. What you're suffering from now is a hang-over. Now talk about Srî Râmakrishna, decorate his picture with flowers, offer food to him to your heart's content, and joyfully dance and clap your hands chanting loudly, "Victory to Srî Râmakrishna!" You're indeed liberated souls now.

Pâthak: How can we be liberated? We're just as we were before—suffering as usual from diseases and bereavements and laboring hard in the world. In addition, we're still wandering aimlessly.

The devotee: You feel this way because your hang-over is still there. It's as though you were riding a fast horse and decided that you would stop it at a certain spot. So you went on pulling the reins and the horse gradually slowed down. But it stopped ten arm-lengths ahead of the place you wanted it to stop. Something similar has happened to you. You've stopped ten arm-lengths ahead of your goal. When you get rid of your hang-over you'll realize that you're liberated.

Also you've said that you still have to labor hard in the world. Please listen to what Srî Râmakrishna says in this context. He used to say, "When a clerk is released from prison what should he do? Should he look for a clerical position or start dancing around?" The people in the world who've become liberated by God's grace must go on living their life in the world. Is this world (Samsâra) outside God? This world belongs to Him.

In regard to diseases and bereavements it can be said that if you're close to a hot stove you'll feel its heat. This world (Samsâra) is like a hot stove. And you're living in it. Won't you feel the heat? Won't you have scars? In spite of all this, people become liberated by God's grace. You yourself have to understand your own condition.

Pâthak: Even though liberated, I'm still wandering aimlessly. And you tried to explain something using that horse-riding analogy. But I couldn't understand it clearly. What does it mean?

The devotee: Let me explain it in a different way. A potter makes his wheel spin with a treadle. After the wheel starts spinning very fast, the potter sometimes stops working the treadle. Still the wheel goes on spinning for a while due to inertia. You're like that potter's wheel. The moment you saw Srî Râmakrishna he released the treadle. In spite of that you've been spinning for a little while more. This will serve a purpose. While you spin Srî Râmakrishna will use you to make a new and different batch of pots. You'll see that for yourself later.

Pâthak: When will this spinning stop? And how shall I know that it has stopped?

The devotee: As Srî Râmakrishna gradually draws your mind toward him this spinning will start to slow down. By the time he has drawn your whole mind to him something strange will have happened. Although the problems of the world—bereavements, diseases, fear, etc—may still remain, they won't affect you anymore. You'll attain peace.

I won't be able to make you understand now how these problems may remain and yet not affect you. You'll understand this when it happens to you. Your own mind will show you everything and let you understand. Now your mind is saying, "I'm still in bondage. How can I be free?" But later your mind will say, "Where's my bondage? I'm ever-free." That's why Srî Râmakrishna used to say, "People's bondage is because of their minds. Their freedom is also because of their minds." A liberated soul never enters into bondage, no matter how much work he has to do.

Pâthak: The mind that creates bondage also sets me free! So the mind seems to be the all in all. Yet you said earlier that Srî Râmakrishna was the king of the mind.

The devotee: By the grace of the Master (Śrī Rāmakrishna) you've been able to see and understand his Līlā. Now you should understand the difference between Śrī Rāmakrishna and the mind. I told you earlier about God's Self-existent Īshwara aspect as well as the Virāt (cosmic) aspect. I also told you about the divine play (Līlā). I also told you to the best of my ability about God's play in the subjective as well as the objective worlds. But now I'm talking about His play inside our minds. Please remember that in this creation there's only "one" who is playing games. That "one" is none other than Śrī Rāmakrishna. Other than him there's nothing else. In God's Līlā it's this "one" who has become the countless billions of beings. When there's only one existing, there can't be any conversation. Conversation is possible only when there's Līlā, when there're countless billions of beings. While discussing Līlā, whenever I talk about the soul (Ātman), the Supreme Soul (Paramātman), God, the Divine Mother (Shakti), Mâyâ (God's illusive power), the mind, intellect, etc. you should understand that they're all no other than Śrī Rāmakrishna. In the divine play (Līlā) this "one" has become "many" assuming innumerable forms depending on situation, appearance, form, qualities, names and propensities. Therefore, within the domain of Līlā this "one" has to be called by different names. Do you know why in this world everything is a variation of only this "one?" To use an analogy, consider a large furniture factory. The main material used in the factory is wood. Using the same material many different things are made there, such as beams, boards, doors, chests of drawers (almirahs), beds, wooden chests, boxes, caskets, and toys. But where there's nothing else except wood—you won't hear any talk about anything else. There one could only talk about "wood." In a furniture factory there is a great variety of products, each with a different name. Depending on their individual shapes, sizes, colors, etc. they all look different from one another. But essentially they are made of the same material—wood. It's the same wood that as different products has assumed different names. Similarly, the same Śrī Rāmakrishna has acquired many different subtle and gross forms in the factory of God's Līlā. Thus he has also assumed different names. In this creation Śrī Rāmakrishna exists in everything and every being. All that exists is made of the same material—Śrī Rāmakrishna. Now listen to a song.

Song

O my mind, chant "Harey Rāmakrishna" again and again!
 Rāmakrishna is my moon; he has lit up the entire world.
 One who is Rāma and also Krishna
 Has become this Rāmakrishna.
 I've clearly read the signs on his body
 And have come to know him as the guru
 And the adorable Self-existent Lord of the world.
 If you find him you'll know that he has form,
 And also that he is formless. He is present as the soul of all.
 He is the essence of all that's conscious and unconscious.
 He is the Kārana (Cause) of the Mahākārana (the Great Cause).
 You needn't try to know who Rāmakrishna is

And where he comes from.

You're just a drop of water.

How can you contain him who is the limitless ocean?

If you want to cross the ocean of this world,

Worship his holy feet, and all your fears will disappear.

It's the one Paramâtman (the Supreme Spirit) who has taken the cosmic form of the Virât and has become multiform. This multiform Paramâtman appears to be various due to different shapes, colors, qualities, and properties. It's beyond the capacity of anyone to know how He has become innumerable and infinite. How can anyone understand that it's that one and only Paramâtman who has been playing this game of multiplicity? It's this "One" whom we call by various names. He Himself is the Paramâtman (supreme spirit/cosmic soul), Jîvâtman (the individual soul), mind, etc. It's He who plays the role of the horse as well as the rider. Some actors play the roles of ghosts in the play "Daksha-yajna" at your theater. It's the human actors who play the roles of ghosts by smearing their bodies with black soot and other paint. Similarly, smearing itself with dirt, the Âtman (the soul) becomes all the individual minds and plays its various roles. Then it's called the Jîvâtman (individual soul). Well, keeping himself hidden, these are the roles that Srî Râmakrishna plays. Unless he reveals himself, no one can see him.

Even though all the roles are played by just one person, people only see those different roles played by him. He plays the role of an embodied soul (Dehî or Jîvâtman). At the same time he plays the role of that embodied soul's mind. Another time, he becomes the viewer and sees both of them as distinct from himself. Such playacting is indeed wonderful!

Pâthak: In what manner does the mind exist in relation to an embodied soul? And who is that person who sees the mind and the embodied soul as distinct from himself?

The devotee: You want to know how the mind exists in relation to the embodied soul? It exists like either water or cream in milk.

One who sees the embodied soul and the mind as distinct from oneself is none other than the embodied soul (Dehî). It's the embodied soul that sees itself. At one time it smeared dirt over the mind and was playing with it. Now it has stopped playing, and has washed its mind clean of all dirt. Through that pure mind it is now seeing itself. This also is one of its games.

When it sees itself, saints call it "Âtma-Darshanam" (seeing or realizing the Divine Self). This realization happens when the mind is still there. At that time the "sense-horses" of the mind are gone. Besides that, another funny thing happens. That "ego" (Ahankâra), which was always howling, roaring and ceaselessly saying, "I," "I," disappears without leaving any trace! Even if you search the entire creation you'll never find it.

Pâthak: As you have said, the realization of the Divine Self (Âtma-Darshanam) is seeing one's real nature (Swa-Swarupa-Darshanam). Is this "seeing" done with the help of these eyes?

The devotee: No, It's done through experience (Bodha).

Pâthak: Does one experience the Self as formless or with form?

The devotee: It's hard to describe through words what's it like. I can at the most give you some hints about that experience. You know what is the condition of a person who has had that experience? It's like a person enjoying a high after smoking hemp. His mind has stopped riding its "sense-horses." It appears that such riding had never even happened. Now there's no happiness or sorrow. Nor is there anything good or bad. No matter how long this condition lasts, it's a state of perfect peace!

Pâthak: How is God experienced in this state?

The devotee: The Master (Srî Râmakrishna) used to say, "Once Lord Râma asked Hanumân, 'How do you look upon me?' Hanumân replied, 'O Râma, sometimes I think that you're a huge fire of which I'm only a spark. Sometimes I think that you're my master and I'm your servant. At another time I see no difference between you and me.'" At that time God appears to be a huge fire.

Pâthak: How does a person behave in this world when he becomes liberated?

The devotee: He floats above this world. The water of this world can't wet him anymore. He is no longer disturbed by the happiness and misery of this Samsâra (world). He never loses sight of God, his polestar. No matter how his body sways, his mind, like the needle of a compass, always remains glued to the lotus feet of God. This is a state of supreme peace. Man cannot achieve this state without the infinite grace of God. In this liberated state (Jîvanmukti) the ego doesn't completely disappear, still a little of it is left. And what's left remains as the "dead ego."

Pâthak: If all problems are resolved when the entire mind enters into Srî Râmakrishna, then I would like to know how my mind can go toward him. How to do it? At the present state my mind is just like a fly. Sometimes it sits on honey, sometimes on filth.

The devotee: Previously your mind never cared to go toward honey, it would only seek filth and dirt. The one whose grace has enabled you to taste honey will eventually help you acquire the nature of a bee, and you will be always attracted to honey. Now you should only cling to him. That will take care of everything. The Master used to sing a song.

Song

Brother, hold onto Hari (God).

Thus striving, some day you may attain Him.

By His grace, Ankâ and Bonkâ have been liberated,

So also the butcher named Sujan.

Teaching her parrot how to chant the name of God

The prostitute became liberated.

Also liberated was Meerabâi.

Owning wealth, land and worldly treasures

The merchant drives his bullocks proudly.

But he may suddenly drop dead,

And no one will know his whereabouts.

Give up hypocrisy and cleverness

And take recourse to devotion.

Through service, worship and self-surrender

You'll easily find Lord Râma.

The Master used the following beautiful analogy. When the farmland becomes submerged under water during the rainy season, one can't even see the land; it seems to have become transformed into a large lake. What does the farmland do then? It waits in silence and goes on looking at the sky. Later it sees that the rainwater that covered it has dried up and disappeared.

You should also wait and keep on looking at the face of Srî Râmakrishna. In course of time you will see that the "juice" of "lust and gold" that has drowned your mind will disappear.

The Master also used to say, "O human beings, you all have two hands. Place one hand on the lotus feet of God and the other in the world (Samsâra). Whichever is more powerful between the two will draw you eventually."

Pâthak: The Paramahansa's words are so beautiful! I forget everything else when I hear his words. My mind seems to become absorbed in his words. Until now I've heard many things in my life, but none as charming as his words. The more I hear, the more I'm eager to hear them. But I don't understand what I've been gaining from hearing all this. Nor do I know how much of the meaning of his words I've understood.

Now let me ask one thing, "While talking about Jîvanmukti you mentioned that the 'ego' dies, or if a trace of it remains, it remains as the 'dead' ego. Will you please explain it further?"

The devotee: It's even more difficult than to explain what you wanted to know about the mind. But by the grace of the Master, what little I've seen and understood about it I'll tell you.

From his very childhood man starts generating the noise "I," "I." This noise is extremely alarming. Children become scared when you talk about the *bogeyman*. But the *bogeyman* is not real. So also man goes on saying "I", "I," but there's really no "I." When a child grows up he understands that the word *bogeyman* means something that doesn't exist. Similarly, when man grows in intelligence he understands that the word "I" means Ahankâra (ego). This "I" doesn't really exist. It's as unreal and false as the word *bogeyman*.

Srî Râmakrishna used to say that the "I" is like an onion. If you go on peeling it there won't be any onion left at the end. Similarly, if you try to find the "I" in you, you'll end up finding it nowhere.

Man considers the nonexistent "I" to be real, and so he suffers unnecessarily. He feels like he's drowning under twenty fathoms of water, or having lost all direction he has entered into a labyrinth. Standing on dry, firm land, he thinks that he's floating on an endless sea! If he can realize that this false idea of "I" is rooted in his ignorance and the bondage of Avidyâ, then he can get rid of all his illusions, including the riddle of virtue and vice. He can realize that there's no difference between the holy and the unholy. He can know that the necklace he thought he had lost has always been around his neck. He then goes beyond the need of all worship rituals. He experiences God everywhere. Only those who're in that state can know what more is experienced at that time. Others can never know.

That “I,” which out of vanity proclaims, “I’m so and so, don’t you know who I am?” doesn’t seem to be quite false. Do you want to know what it really is? That “I” is no other than “He.” It’s not possible to understand this with the help of intellect or speculation. Even if explained one thousand times, one may not understand it. But if God makes a person understand, he realizes what it is, and gets rid of that “I” completely. In this creation there is not “many,” there’s only “one.” Whatever you see in this world is “He.” People say, “I” “I,” as they’re in Mâyâ’s tricky bondage. So bewitching is this spell of Mâyâ that it’s impossible to know that this “I” is no other than He. All the living beings are enchanted by Mâyâ’s spell. Mâyâ never allows the living beings to discover her tricks. There are two kinds of Mâyâ—Vidyâ Mâyâ and Avidyâ Mâyâ. Those who are under the spell of Avidyâ Mâyâ don’t have any spiritual guides. Becoming entangled in “lust and gold,” they’re completely engrossed in playing their own games. They’re totally incapable of seeing through any of Mâyâ’s tricks. They pass their days and nights doing the same things over and over. On the other hand, by God’s grace, those who are under the spell of Vidyâ Mâyâ, are gradually taken home by Vidyâ Mâyâ. On the way she lets them play and also shows them how she plays her own games. But you may find only one in a million who belongs to this latter group. If you find one, you should know that he must be a blessed child of the Divine Mother. Yet you should know that although he’s a blessed child of the Divine Mother, he is not free from the play of joys and sorrows. As long as one plays these games one is still within the domain of Mâyâ. Everyone—from Brahmâ, Vishnu and Maheshwara down to the tiny worm and insect—is spinning inside the whirlpool of Mâyâ. Do you know what Mâyâ’s bondage is like? It’s like a highly elastic cord made of special rubber. No matter how large and wide the object, the cord can stretch and tie it up. On the other hand, no matter how narrow and small the object is, the cord can shrink and tie it up. It doesn’t matter how narrow and subtle the object is, still it’s in the bondage of Mâyâ. What lies beyond this bondage, I don’t know. I don’t have the faintest idea. A person may be a blessed child of the Divine Mother, still he is not free from Vidyâ Mâyâ’s bondage. But this bondage is desirable to even the gods. Because there is only happiness in this bondage, no misery. Those who are the blessed children of the Divine Mother watch and enjoy the games played by Mâyâ. Even in this state there are joys and sorrows just as there are joys and sorrows within the bondage of Avidyâ Mâyâ. But these joys and sorrows are of a different kind. They don’t overwhelm people and make them lose consciousness. Besides, there’s great fun in experiencing them. All this is the play of Vidyâ Mâyâ. By Mâyâ’s grace alone one can watch these wonderful games played by her. They can only to be watched, they can’t be heard or talked about.

We were talking about the “I.” Mâyâ doesn’t allow anyone to know this “I.” Nor does this “I” totally disappear. Srî Râmakrishna went through a lot of Sâdhanâ (spiritual practice) to let people know about all these things. Sometimes he used to say, “Not I, not I, it’s all Thou, it’s all Thou!” I’ll use an analogy of Srî Râmakrishna to explain to you when people stop saying, “I, I,” and start saying, “Thou, Thou.”

Cows are dumb animals. When they are born, they start saying “Hâmbâ, hâmbâ”(the Hindi counterpart of the English “Moo, moo”). It means “I”, “I.” When the male calves grow up, they are used either to till the soil or pull carts. They are made to work day and night. Still they don’t give up saying, “Hâmbâ, hâmbâ!” Even when they get very old and emaciated, they don’t stop saying, “Hâmbâ.” Eventually they die. Their skin is tanned and processed and used in making drums. When the drums are beaten the skin still says, “Hâmbâ, hâmbâ.” At last, their guts are dried in the sun and made into strings. The carding tools are fitted with these strings. When the

carders hit the strings to card cotton, the strings say, “Tuhum, tuhum” (“Thou, Thou” in Hindi). They no longer say, “Humbâ, hâmbâ.” Similarly, when people are forced to carry heavy loads in this world, and made to labour so hard that blood comes out of their throats, they stop saying, “I, I.” When they are stripped of their wealth and honour; when they are made to lose their near and dear ones and are devastated by all kinds of suffering and bereavement, they no longer say, “I, I.” Then they say, “O Lord, Thou, Thou!” This wicked “I” never leaves a person unless he has gone through this kind of terrible suffering. This wicked “I” is Mâyâ personified.

Pâthak: You told me earlier that the “I” is not me, it’s “He.” Then again, you’re calling that “I” the wicked “I.” How has that “I” become the wicked “I?”

The devotee: Mâyâ’s games are indeed terrible. As long as you haven’t experienced God, the dualities, such as virtue and vice, goodness and badness, honesty and dishonesty, etc. will remain. Once God is realized, it’s no longer possible to say who is good and who is bad. Do you know how long the wicked “I” remains? It remains as long as you haven’t realized the ripe “I” (i.e., as long as you haven’t realized God as the “I”). Once you see Him, the wicked “I” disappears. As long as the “I” exists it remains full of ego (Ahankâra). This ego or Ahankâra is Mâyâ. When Ahankâra is destroyed this wicked “I” becomes transformed into “Thou.” As soon as “I” becomes “Thou,” Mâyâ disappears instantly. When you recognize the true nature of “I,” Mâyâ escapes so fast that you can’t find her even if you search all the three worlds (Tribhuvana). Srî Râmakrishna used to say occasionally, “I tried to discover my ‘I,’ but couldn’t find it anywhere.”

That “one and only” almighty God, along with Mâyâ, has created this world and His creatures. Although He is one, He has become countless billions of “I” and is playing His games. He is the only Reality. But having entered into countless containers He exists as countless “I”s. It’s He who exists through each and every state of all these containers. When this knowledge is acquired, the wicked “I” ceases to exist. What remains is God.

When the Jnânayogîs (those who follow the path of knowledge or philosophy) can recognize this “I,” they say, “I am He.” And the devotees (Bhaktas) call this “I,” “Thou” or “He.” Srî Râmakrishna was internally a Jnânî, but outwardly he displayed devotion (Bhakti) to teach others. Srî Râmakrishna’s personality is composed of Jnâna, but it is wrapped by a covering of Bhakti. The Master (Srî Râmakrishna) knows that in the Kali era it’s extremely difficult to follow Jnânayoga. The path of Bhakti or devotion is relatively easier. That’s why he always covered himself with the wrapper of Bhakti. In other words, he advised everybody to follow the path of Bhakti.

Seeing the “I” is called Âtmarshananam (experiencing the Self). The wicked “I” disappears after Âtmarshananam. It is gone. One has Âtmarshananam when one attains Supreme Knowledge. Or, one attains Supreme Knowledge through Âtmarshananam.

Do you know how the wicked “I” disappears when one attains Supreme Knowledge? You know that during the day every object casts a shadow as long as the sun is not high over our heads at noon. When the sun reaches its zenith, the shadows cast by all these objects disappear. Similarly, the wicked “I” disappears when the sun of Knowledge shines forth in its full splendor. Then one comes to understand that all this time the wicked “I” existed only as a shadow. A shadow doesn’t have any real existence, so also the wicked “I” doesn’t have any real existence. As long as ignorance of the Reality lasts, the wicked “I” exists as a shadow. When one acquires Supreme Knowledge, the shadow or the wicked “I” disappears. Who then exists? Only that one who

created the shadow exists then. But the experience of Supreme Knowledge doesn't continue forever. When the mind descends to the worldly level that "I" appears again. But it can't fool the mind with its wicked tricks anymore.

After Âtmarshanam (Self-realization) one can see that "the one and only" God through His divine play has become the "many" in His creation. This Darshanam (vision) is called Virâtdarshanam (seeing the cosmic form of God).

Please try to remember what I told you earlier. I told you that Srî Râmakrishna has his Virât form (cosmic form). Him whom I saw in his human form, is being seen by me now in everything. This world is permeated by Srî Râmakrishna. He has his human form as well as his cosmic form. After Âtmarshanam one can clearly see the ignorance of those people who condemn the use of images in worship and declare it to be false.

When Keshab Sen first started coming to Srî Râmakrishna, he noticed that Srî Râmakrishna had great love and devotion for Mother Kâlî. Keshab asked him, "Sir, how large is your Mother Kâlî?"

Srî Râmakrishna replied, "Keshab, you visited England. You must have seen the sea during your trip. My Mother Kâlî is even larger than the sea."

Another time, accompanied by Srî Râmakrishna, Keshab Sen was going somewhere with some of his disciples. At they were walking a man was seen cutting the branch of a roadside tree. At that Srî Râmakrishna started crying pitifully, saying, "This man is cutting my Mother!" Through this behavior Srî Râmakrishna taught Keshab that Mother Kâlî was both the creator and Brahman. She was not just that familiar form depicted by her image. Also Srî Râmakrishna proved so many other times that Mother Kâlî in the image was just as real. He held cotton wool in front of the Mother's nostrils and could clearly see that She was breathing. Let me tell you one incident. Srî Râmakrishna was seated on the small couch in his room in the presence of some devotees. Suddenly he bolted out of the room through the eastside door and ran to the courtyard of the temple. From there one can have a view of the entire temple of Mother Kâlî. Extremely alarmed, Srî Râmakrishna looked at the dome of the temple and raising his arms started shouting, "Mother, be careful. Otherwise you'll fall down!" After this he almost lost outer consciousness. Supporting his body the devotees carefully brought him back to his room. After a while when his mind came down to the awareness of the world, the devotees asked him why he had run out to the courtyard. He said, "I saw the Mother walking on the cornice around the dome. She appeared to be drunk and looked like She might fall at any time. That's why I got alarmed and behaved that way."

Those who believe in God with form enjoy all these stories about Srî Râmakrishna. They think that the Mother is endowed with form. But in Her formless aspect She is Brahman and the Cosmic Being. One person asked Srî Râmakrishna, "What's the difference between Hinduism and the Brâhmo religion?"

Srî Râmakrishna replied, "Have you heard Sehnâi music? One musician plays the Sehnâi and creates beautiful melodies using various notes, while a second musician playing the Sehnâi produces just one note. Similarly, the Hindus use many different notes while the Brâhmos hold onto just one note."

Using various notes means that the Hindus enjoy God in many different ways. They adore and worship God as the Self-existent Îshwara and Virât (the Cosmic Being). Both God with form and

God without form are worshipped by them. Srî Râmakrishna went through various kinds of Sâdhanâ (spiritual disciplines) and enjoyed God in so many different ways. He has taught the world that everything is possible for God. He *can* be everything and He *does become* everything. Srî Râmakrishna also said many times, “Do not limit God by claiming that God is this and God isn’t that, or God can be this and God can’t be that. When you express any definite opinion about God you limit God’s infinite nature and interfere with His omnipotence.

Nowadays some preachers who use religion as a business say, “Our religion and our view alone are true, what others say or do is false.” I offer my salutations to these ignorant preachers for their wonderful way of thinking!

When the “I” dies man becomes free. Srî Râmakrishna used to say, “When the ‘I’ will disappear man’s bondage will also disappear.” Do you know what helps you to understand these two states—bondage and freedom? It’s the mind that helps you. When the mind makes you feel that you’re bound, you’re bound. When the mind makes you feel that you’re free, you’re free. Everything is the play of the mind. The instrument that the mind uses is no other than the mind. As long as the mind is in bondage, it’s always infested with doubts. In this state the name of the mind is “doubts.” When the mind is free, its name is “consciousness.” The mind and the intellect are different from each other. But when they’re pure they become one, and acquire the name “consciousness.” Although God is beyond the reach of the mind and the intellect, He is knowable by the pure mind and the intellect. It means that God can’t be known by a doubting mind. On the other hand, God can be known by the pure mind, the pure intellect, or by “consciousness” (which is another name of the pure mind and the pure intellect). The Divine Consciousness that makes this world conscious can be experienced by the pure mind and pure intellect (or consciousness). During this experience the pure psycho-intellectual consciousness (Khanda-Chaitanya) may melt away in Divine Consciousness and become one with it. Let me quote a few lines of a beautiful song. Srî Râmakrishna used to sing this song occasionally.

Song

The bumble-bee of my mind has become one

With the blue lotus feet of Mother Shyâmâ.

Her feet are dark, so also dark is the bumble-bee.

The dark color of one has blended with the dark color of the other.

When the mind becomes one with the blue lotus feet of Mother Shyâmâ (Mother Kâlî) that mind acquires the state of Divine Consciousness. Then it can no longer be called “mind.” It’s then called the “pure mind” or Consciousness. Losing its own color it acquires the color of Mother Shyâmâ’s feet. The Mother is Divine Consciousness. Being the same, the Mind-Consciousness and Mother-Consciousness blend with each other. This is what’s meant by darkness blending with darkness. Through this union, all problems are resolved and the two Realities are proved to be one.

After becoming purified the mind becomes Consciousness. The Divine Consciousness blends with it. It means that psychic Consciousness and Divine Consciousness are of the same kind. As they’re of the same kind, their union is inevitable. No two things can blend unless they’re of the same kind. Milk mixes well with milk. But if you put clarified butter in milk it won’t mix. It’ll float. Yet if you transform milk into clarified butter there won’t be any difference between the

two. Having lost their difference, they mix and become one. This world and its creatures are the products of the mixing of Divine Consciousness and Mâyâ. When the world and the creatures become free from Mâyâ, they become Divine Consciousness. In this state the multi-form becomes mono-form. What this state is, is known only to Divine Consciousness.

This Divine Consciousness has become this world and its creatures by associating with Mâyâ or using Mâyâ as its limiting adjunct (Upâdhi). Is there anything other than this Divine Consciousness that has become all these countless billions of beings in this world? This world is only the play of the “one” (Divine Consciousness). Mind (Manas), intellect (Buddhi), Chitta, ego (Ahankâra), the soul (Âtman), and the individual soul (Jîvâtman)—these are different names of that one and only Reality.

Pâthak: What are the Âtman (soul) and the Jîvâtman (individual soul)?

The devotee: All the “play” in this world concerns these two—the Âtman and the Jîvâtman. The Âtman is also called the Paramâtman. “Brahman” as experienced by a knower of Brahman, “Âtman” as experienced by a Yogî, and “Bhagavân” (God endowed with a personality) as experienced by a devotee—are one and the same. These are only three different names of the same Reality. Just as from a big fire innumerable sparks are produced, similarly, Jîvâtman are produced from the Âtman or the Paramâtman. With the help of His Mâyâ the one and only Paramâtman becomes the billions of Jîvâtman of different races, appearances, qualities and colors. The Paramâtman is their creator. The Jîvâtman move around in the Paramâtman. They are created in the Paramâtman and eventually merge in the Paramâtman. I’ll tell you with the help of an analogy how the Jîvâtman exist in the Paramâtman. The Paramâtman is like an endless ocean. This ocean has no beginning nor end. The Jîvâtman are like billions of pots immersed in the ocean. Each water-filled pot is a Jîvâtman. All these billions of Jîvâtman with their different bodies and appearances have originated from that ocean water. I told you earlier that what is subtle becomes the gross. For example, water vapor is extremely subtle. That vapor becomes clouds; from clouds originate raindrops; raindrops become water; and water becomes ice. Similarly, the subtle Paramâtman becoming gross has become the pots. Paramâtman is also the water contained in the pots. The Jîvâtman doesn’t have any birth or death. It comes out of the ocean of Paramâtman, thereafter it exists in that ocean, and finally merges in the same ocean. The Jîvâtman that is like the water in the pot, becomes one with the water of the ocean when the pot is broken. In the same manner, the “gross” pot that was produced from the water of the ocean eventually becomes the “subtle” water. Do you know what death is? When the pot breaks, the water that was contained in it becomes one with the ocean water and then enters into another pot. This is called death. Just as the subtle becomes the gross, the gross can also become the subtle. For instance, ice melts into water, and water becomes water vapor.

I compared the Paramâtman to the ocean. But He can be compared to “outer space” (Mahâkâsha) as well. I’ve heard that the Paramâtman has been mentioned in the Vedas as Mahâkâsha.

Clouds are the gross state of water vapor. Just as raindrops, water and ice are the gross states of water vapor, all the five gross elements (Pancha-mahâbhûta) are the gross states of Mahâkâsha. The five gross elements undergo a process called Panchîkaranam and become this manifold universe. The subtle (Sûkshma) becomes the gross (Sthûla) and the gross becomes the subtle. Similarly, the Nitya (the Absolute/ the noumenon) becomes the Lîlâ (the phenomenal world) and the Lîlâ becomes the Nitya. From the first (Nitya) you can go to the second (Lîlâ), and from the second you can come back to the first. Srî Râmakrishna called this kind of coming and going—

Anulom and Vilom. He also used to say something very beautiful. He used to say, “It is the same Reality that plays the roles of both the Nitya and the Lîlâ.” That’s why unlike Shankara he wouldn’t declare this world to be false. Yet, he didn’t totally dismiss Shankara’s view.

Let me tell you how Srî Râmakrishna explains the Jîvâtman. The Jîvâtman is no other than the Paramâtman. The only difference between the two is that there is no Mâyâ in the Paramâtman, while Mâyâ exists in the Jîvâtman. It’s the Paramâtman who has become the Jîvâtman, using Mâyâ as His Upâdhi (limiting adjunct). Mâyâ is there in the Paramâtman, yet it can’t be said that she really exists there. Mâyâ is not an “illusive power” in regard to the Paramâtman; Mâyâ can’t deceive Him. She can’t touch Him. There’s venom in the snake’s mouth, but it can’t harm the snake. Similarly, Mâyâ exists in the Paramâtman but cannot delude Him. But Mâyâ deludes the Jîvâtman. The Paramâtman is unattached, while the Jîvâtman is attached. The Paramâtman is like a witness—noninvolved. The Jîvâtman is the taster of fruits (sense experiences). The Jîvâtman experiences happiness, misery, virtue and vice. These are experienced by the Jîvâtman, but the Paramâtman is not touched by them. The smoke can soil a wall, but it cannot leave any mark on the sky. The Paramâtman is Shiva (God), free from the influence of Mâyâ. It’s He who is the Jîvâtman, entangled in Mâyâ. Giving up Mâyâ, the Jîvâtman regains its true identity as Shiva (God). Becoming Shiva the Jîvâtman or Jîva transcends the fear of repeated births and deaths.

Pâthak: Would you please explain to me more clearly how the Paramâtman is the witness and the Jîvâtman is the taster of fruits?

The devotee: I can only tell you what I heard from Srî Râmakrishna. Once he said, “During the period of my Sâdhanâ I was one day sitting in the Panchavatî grove. When I looked at a tree I saw two birds sitting on a branch. One of the birds was calm, quiet and not moving at all. It appeared to be like one of those birds made of cork. The other one was moving, playing, and jumping up and down. It was chirping as well. A little later the bird that was sitting quietly opened its mouth. The frisky bird entered into its mouth and was immediately swallowed up by the quiet bird.” Seeing that spiritual vision Srî Râmakrishna understood that the quiet bird represented the Paramâtman—the witness. The other bird represented the Jîvâtman. The Jîvâtman dances, laughs, cries, and tastes the fruits of happiness and misery. But in course of time it merges in the Paramâtman.

Pâthak: As the Paramâtman has become the Jîvâtman, why is there any difference between the two? Besides, why should the Jîvâtman merge in the Paramâtman?

The devotee: I told you a little earlier that the Paramâtman is without beginning and end, infinite, immutable, formless, unknowable by the mind, intellect and the senses, nameless, all-pervading, and the origin of everything. But the same Paramâtman while playing (performing His Lîlâ) has become these manifold forms, colors, qualities, tastes, smells, sounds and tactile sensations. Using the different products of Mâyâ as limiting adjuncts (Upâdhis), the Paramâtman exists as one thing or the other. Take for example Girish Ghosh, His name is Girish, and judging by his caste he is Kulîn Kâyastha. He is a playwright, a scholar, a great poet, the manager of a theatre, a teacher, etc. Each one of these is a limiting adjunct or Upâdhi. In reality, however, he is free from all these Upâdhis. But he has become a Jîvâtman because he is entangled with these Upâdhis. The moment he will know his real nature and free himself from the bondage of the Upâdhis he will merge in the Paramâtman. Have you seen large tracts of farmland? Sometimes a very large tract of agricultural land is partitioned into hundreds of smaller plots by building narrow ridges of mud on their boundaries. When the partitions separating these small plots are

demolished, there remains one vast tract of agricultural land. The small plots are like so many Jīvâtman and the mud partitions are their Upâdhis. The vast tract of agricultural land free from partitions is the Paramâtman. When the Jīvâtman become free from their Upâdhis they merge in the infinite and limitless Paramâtman. This merging is called Laya or dissolution of the Jīvâtman.

Pâthak: Is it true according to your view that the Paramâtman is formless and beyond the reach of mind and intellect?

The devotee: The Paramâtman is both with form and without form. Although space and air are both formless, they seem to assume the forms of the containers in which they are enclosed. Similarly, the formless Paramâtman seems to assume the forms of His containers. When His container is a human being, He takes the human form. When His container is a cow, He takes the form of that cow. When His container is a tree, He takes the form of that tree. It's also like water. Water doesn't have any specific form. If you put it in a round dish, it takes the shape of that round dish. If you put it in a pitcher, it takes the shape of that pitcher. If you put it in a jar, it takes the shape of that jar.

The Paramâtman can be both known and unknown to the mind (Manas) and intellect (Buddhi). He is not known by the impure mind and intellect. On the other hand, He is known by the mind and intellect that are pure. Due to the Upâdhi of Mâyâ the infinite Paramâtman appears to be finite. Even though immutable, He appears to be mutable. Although beyond names, He appears to assume names. In other words, it's the same Paramâtman who appears to be the Jīvâtman. That's why the world teacher, Srî Râmakrishna, used to say with a chuckle, "This is true, that is true, and what is left out is also true!" In this manner Srî Râmakrishna resolved all doubts and disputes. He established the harmony of all religions, and laid the foundation of a universal religion. He turned out to be a successful arbiter having resolved the longstanding intolerance and hatred among the religions of the world. Everything that Srî Râmakrishna said or did conform to the teachings of the scriptures. Yet there is some novelty in what he did and said. The novelty is that he didn't ignore or discard any religious teaching. To teach humankind he said, "All religions are true and essential. There's no need for quarreling. Whichever path you choose, go along that path with true spiritual yearning and guilelessness. Sooner or later you will all certainly experience God." People of all religions used to come to him. And he would satisfy everybody. Anyone who accepted Srî Râmakrishna as an aid to experiencing God, was able to have that experience. In Srî Râmakrishna's pantry spiritual knowledge was as abundantly available as popcorn. Whoever would ask for it would get a basketful. While in spiritual ecstasy, he would say, "If you're asking for wealth and progeny go to the temple of Târaknâth, but if you're seeking God come here."

Pâthak: What do you pray to Srî Râmakrishna for? What do you ask him to give you?

The devotee: I pray to Srî Râmakrishna saying, "O Lord, may I never develop any dislike toward you. May I never have the wish to stop worshipping and serving you." These are my two prayers to him.

Pâthak: I hear people talk about God. I've also heard that people can realize God. They see Him, talk with Him, play with Him—I've heard all this. Others say, "God is formless and beyond the reach of the mind and intellect." Then the Yogîs say, "God can be realized through Yoga." If all this is true, then what's God like?

The devotee: Your question contains the answer. The way you think of Him so He is. I've heard from Srî Râmakrishna that a sincere devotee wanted to know from his guru what kind of Sâdhanâ he should do. The guru asked, "Whom or what do you love most?"

The disciple replied, "I love this black buffalo the most." The guru then asked his disciple to meditate on the buffalo. The disciple obediently followed his guru's instruction and experienced God in the form of that buffalo.

For ages hermits, sages, ascetics and Yogîs have engaged themselves in various austerities, meditation, etc. Through their meditation they have come to know God as so limitless and great that they realize that it's impossible to limit His greatness in no matter what small measure. God is limitless and infinite in one place. In another place He is with form. You've heard of divine incarnations such as Varâha, Vâmana, etc. When God incarnated as Srî Krishna He became the child of Yashodâ and also the friend of the cowherd boys. When incarnated as Srî Râma, He went to the forest as a result of His stepmother's conspiracy. One who is present inside the lotus of the devotee's heart as a tiny point, is also the Lord of this entire creation. In a single pore of His skin rest billions of Brahmândas (universes). He is beyond the reach of all senses objects, such as form, taste, smell, sound and touch (Rûpa, Rasa, Gandha, Shavda and Sparsha). Yet, it's He who has become those same five sense objects, as well as their enjoyer. He is harder than the thunderbolt and softer than the petal of a newly-bloomed lotus. The way a person thinks of Him or looks upon Him, God reveals Himself to him that same way. From all this try to understand what God is like.

Pâthak: What's the condition of one who has experienced God?

The devotee: The condition of a person who has experienced God is like that of boiled potatoes and eggplants. After the realization of God animal tendencies disappear. The nature of a person who has experienced God becomes totally transformed. He doesn't have the characteristics of a human being anymore. When worldly-bound souls or ordinary human beings see such a person they think he is crazy. Most people are of a certain kind. He is completely different from them. A person is considered crazy if he is not like all other people. I mentioned this to you quite a while ago. A very small number of people appreciate a God-realized soul. Those who belong to that small group are spiritual aspirants. They are attracted to God. These aspirants seek God. They haven't found Him yet. Only one out of a hundred thousand spiritual aspirants can experience God. That's why the saint Râmprasâd said through a song composed by him, "O Divine Mother, You clap Your hands when only one out of a hundred thousand kites is cut loose." From this try to understand how many are "real" human beings and how many are not!

Pâthak: We were talking about the Âtman. That topic interests me. Therefore, I can't help asking one or two questions.

My first question is: "If the Jîvâtman is no other than the Paramâtman, how has the Paramâtman become all these innumerable Jîvâtmans of varying natures and forms?"

The devotee: Undoubtedly what you've asked about is very serious, complicated, and difficult to understand. It's like a riddle. Once I told you something about it, now I'm telling you more. When it rains, innumerable water bubbles are produced in a lake, isn't that so? Let us now find out what these water bubbles are, what are they made of, and what's inside them. Through observation and analysis you can know that the bubbles are created out of water, and inside them

there's water. Similarly, the Jīvâtman are created by the Paramâtman, and inside them there is the Paramâtman.

You should understand clearly that the bubbles are created out of the water of the lake. But a bubble is not the entire lake. Similarly, billions of Jīvâtman have come out of the Paramâtman. But none of the Jīvâtman is the Paramâtman. In other words, the difference that exists between the bubbles and the lake is similar to the difference between the Jīvâtman and Paramâtman. In this analogy I should have used the word "ocean" instead of "lake," but I used that word because that's something you've seen. The self-existent Paramâtman exists through eternity without undergoing any change, just as the unchanging ocean exists through time without beginning or end. The creation, preservation and dissolution of the world are a play similar to the rise and fall of waves in the ocean. Similarly, there is an eternal play of transient, created objects in the Paramâtman.

You may ask, "It's the raindrops that caused the creation of innumerable bubbles in the ocean. What caused the creation of this transient world in Paramâtman?" The answer is that the raindrops are no other than ocean water. Clouds, generated from the ocean water, remain for a while in the sky. Then they come down to the ocean as raindrops. Becoming waves and bubbles they become the same ocean water that they were before. Similarly the creative power or Shakti comes out of Paramâtman. That Shakti falls on Paramâtman. As a result, creation takes place. Since both are water, there is no difference between the raindrops and ocean water. So also there is no difference between Shakti and Paramâtman. But depending on the situation and circumstances the same Reality assumes different names, such as Brahman, Paramâtman, Bhagavân, Mahâmâyâ, Kâlî, Krishna, Râma, Jesus, Allah, etc. People of different spiritual paths call the same Reality by different names. The devotees and spiritual aspirants seem to be different depending upon their mental attitudes and beliefs, but eventually there won't be any difference between them. They will all unite.

There's nothing other than the "one." It's the "one" that has become the "many" through Lîlâ. Those who are the "many" exist in the "one." Eventually they will merge in the "one." Objects are created in eternity, exist for a while in eternity, and then disappear in eternity. Nothing in creation is really destroyed. Only sometimes they undergo changes in quality, color and form, and go from one plane of existence to another. That's why creation is said to be ever-changing.

By God's grace, those who have acquired this wisdom aren't happy or sad at the thought of either birth or death. This wisdom is the raft that carries them across the ocean of this world. This wisdom is the amulet to protect them from worldly afflictions. This wisdom helps a person become liberated and transcend happiness and misery. This wisdom, if achieved, severs worldly bondage and one is never born again. Srî Râmakrishna would compare this state to a pot of baked clay. An unbaked clay pot, if broken, can again be shaped into a pot by the potter. But if a pot of baked clay breaks it can't be given the shape of a pot again. Similarly, the fire of wisdom so transforms a person that he isn't reborn after death. Srî Râmakrishna used another analogy to describe liberated souls. This is the analogy of boiled rice. Boiled rice cannot germinate. Similarly, those pious ones who have been "boiled" in the fire of wisdom are never reborn. Even if a person who has acquired this wisdom kills himself, the terrible sin of committing suicide won't touch him.

It's only known to the Divine Mother—the Lîlâ-Shakti (the Creative Power of God)—how the "one" assumes so many forms and also how the soft sperm and ovum get transformed into hard

bones. In every form there is the existence of the same Reality. Objects appear to be small or big—less or more—depending on the difference in the manifestation of Power (Lîlâ Shakti) in them. Where there is more manifestation of Power, there is more manifestation of the Reality. On the other hand, where there is less manifestation of Power, there is less manifestation of the Reality.

Now I have to tell you a great riddle. Where there is a greater manifestation of Shakti (Creative Power), the Reality is just as infinite and limitless as the Shakti Herself. On the other hand, where there is the least manifestation of Shakti, there also the Reality is just as infinite and limitless. Whichever way you go, the Reality is infinite and limitless. Whether anything is big or small makes no difference in the Reality. The Reality is the “indivisible whole”—Akhandâ. It doesn’t have any part (Khandâ). In the Lîlâ the indivisible whole may “appear” to have parts but they are essentially Akhandâ, infinite, and limitless. That’s why Srî Râmakrishna used to say, “You won’t be able to comprehend either the finite or the infinite aspect of God.”

Pâthak: How does the Paramâtman exist as the indivisible whole (Akhandâ) when due to Lîlâ-Shakti He has become reduced to parts (Khandâ)?

The devotee: Srî Râmakrishna used to say that the Paramâtman exists as the piston rod in a syringe. It’s aloof (it doesn’t touch the wall of the cylinder). Similarly, the Paramâtman is aloof. In this state the “whole” and the indivisible Paramâtman is actionless. He remains as the witness. On the other hand, the Jîvâtman —the part—enjoys happiness and misery.

Pâthak: According to you, the Paramâtman is the only Reality, and it’s the same Paramâtman who has become the innumerable Jîvâtman with various qualities and forms. Then what are mind, intellect, etc.?

The devotee: To let the Jîvâtman enjoy the pleasures and sweetness of His creation, the Paramâtman has created instruments like the mind, intellect, and sense organs. These instruments enable the Jîvâtman to enjoy pleasures.

The Jîvâtman differs from the Paramâtman due to the influence of Mâyâ. Mâyâ doesn’t allow the Jîvâtman to know itself as the Paramâtman. Under the influence of Mâyâ, the Jîvâtman goes on saying “I,” “I,” again and again. After placing the pleasurable world in front of the Jîvâtman, the creator hides behind it. The Jîvâtman has got the world of enjoyments as well as the instruments to enjoy it. Who can stop them now? Thinking of the world as the only source of happiness they keep busy playing. The creator hasn’t, however, left His creation. In course of time if someone gets any hint of His existence he will be able to experience Him with the help of those instruments (the mind, intellect, etc.). One property of the instruments is that in whichever direction you lead, they take you there. If you lead them towards pleasures, they will take you to pleasures; if you lead them towards the Paramâtman they will show you the Paramâtman. But if you get attracted to pleasures it’s very difficult to wean yourself away from them and go elsewhere. You should remember that under the influence of Mâyâ the Jîvâtman think that they are free and independent but they are not really so. The Master (the Paramâtman) is holding their reins in His hand. Whenever He wants He will give other instruments from His storehouse to the pleasure-seeking Jîvâtman to change the direction of their minds and the senses. These new instruments are discrimination (Viveka), renunciation (Vairâgya), spiritual knowledge (Jnânâ), and devotion (Bhakti). The same mind, intellect and senses that have pushed the Jîvâtman into the whirlpool of the Vishâlâkshmi River will rescue them. From this try to understand how the mind, intellect and the senses exist in the Jîvâtman, and what they are.

Pâthak: What are Jnâna (knowledge of God acquired through reasoning and discrimination), and Bhakti (devotion to God)?

The devotee: It's hard to describe through words what devotion or Bhakti is. But Bhakti expresses itself as a mental wave. We can at the most talk a little about this wave. Do you know what this wave is? It's the most intense yearning to see God and serve Him unselfishly. That source from which this yearning originates is called Bhakti or devotion. That source is the only "emerald" (the most precious gem) in God's treasury. That's why it is extremely dear to God. Not only that, the container in which He keeps it is also dear to Him. There's no way of acquiring devotion or Bhakti except through the grace of God. In other words, getting His grace is acquiring Bhakti. He gives it away to people according to His own whim. God has the nature of a little child. Let us suppose a father gives a candy to his little son who clutches it tightly in his fist. Then his father or another relative playfully tries to get the candy from him. The boy is extremely reluctant to part with his candy. He tries to hide it. Being upset, he says, "No, I won't give you my candy!" Then he suddenly sees a man walking by, and as little children sometimes do, he calls the man and gives him the candy even without his asking for it. God is childlike and He gives Bhakti to people in the same way. God makes people His own by giving them Bhakti. By giving Bhakti first, He makes Bhaktas (devotees). Srî Râmakrishna used Bhakti as jewelers use touchstones to test the purity of gold. After testing, when he found a person whom he liked he would accept him. Otherwise, he would reject that person. Just as a merchant appreciates gold no matter who brings it to him, Srî Râmakrishna appreciated those who had Bhakti in their hearts. It didn't matter whether they were Hindus, Muslims, Brahmins or Christians. Nor did it matter whether they were prostitutes, debauchees or drunkards.

Srî Râmakrishna's love of this Bhakti (devotion to God) is a proof that he is God. Srî Râmakrishna considered any person endowed with devotion to be his very own, irrespective of that person's condition, nature, country or religion. Have you noticed another characteristic of Srî Râmakrishna? Anyone who has seen that characteristic can easily realize that Srî Râmakrishna himself is a devotion-loving God. Srî Râmakrishna exists in every heart that has devotion. If a person who had never seen Srî Râmakrishna had great devotion in his heart, Srî Râmakrishna would rush to him and within a short time make him his own. Just as the telegraph offices scattered all over this country are connected to the main telegraph office, so also it's clear to me that anyone anywhere endowed with devotion has some connection with Srî Râmakrishna. I submit evidence for this by quoting from page 210 of the article "Sâddhwî Shavarî" (Shavarî the Saint) in the fourth issue of the 20th volume of *Navya Bharat*. The quotation is as follows:

"Reading what Mr. Digby, Member of the Parliament, wrote about Srî Râmakrishna that day, it is hard to find a single Indian whose heart won't be filled with pride and optimism. Mr. Digby said, "Robert Browning and John Ruskin are the two most famous men of England today. But compared to the illiterate Srî Râmakrishna even they are groping in darkness."

Brother, see the wonderful power of devotion (Bhakti) and the spiritual greatness of Srî Râmakrishna. What's Srî Râmakrishna compared to the honorable Mr. Digby? But, Srî Râmakrishna did something to Mr. Digby's mind that made him think that those two great scholars of his own country were much smaller than Srî Râmakrishna. Blessed indeed is Srî Râmakrishna and blessed is his devotion to God (Bhakti)! It is when we compare darkness to light that we are able to appreciate the importance of light. Similarly, it is when we compare non-devotees with devotees that we can appreciate the greatness of the devotees.

In that faraway land across the seven seas (England), Mr. Digby had only heard Srî Râmakrishna's name and a little bit of his teachings, sayings, and life. Through that he understood the spiritual greatness of Srî Râmakrishna. He wrote several articles about Srî Râmakrishna's greatness and unselfishly publicized him..

On the other hand, our own countrymen who lived so close to Srî Râmakrishna and heard about his miraculous life, concluded that Srî Râmakrishna was crazy and insane. Not only that, at the same time they formed a firm opinion about themselves. They thought that they were very clever, shrewd, intelligent, virtuous, meritorious, dignified, spirited, etc. In other words, they were paragons of all the virtues!

Why did the people of the West appreciate Srî Râmakrishna's greatness while my own countrymen didn't? It's because the Europeans had devotion in their hearts, while my countrymen lacked it.

Our Master (Srî Râmakrishna) was more clever than the cleverest! On one hand, he was extremely compassionate. Had he seen anyone go without food he would shed tears so profusely that even the ground in front of him would become soaked with his tears. On the other hand, he was more miserly than the most miserly person in regard to bestowing devotion on anybody. No one could fool him and steal away anything from him! His generosity in bestowing Bhakti wouldn't be exercised anywhere and everywhere. In high spiritual ecstasy he would sometimes say, "If I wish I can transform hog-plums into delicious mangoes. But why should I do it?" When anyone prayed to him for devotion (Bhakti) he would sing the following song:

Song

Though I²⁰ am never loath to grant salvation,
I hesitate indeed to grant pure love (Bhakti),
Whoever wins pure love surpasses all;
He is adored by men;
He triumphs over the three worlds.
Alone in Vrindâban can pure love be found;
Its secret none but the gopas (dairymen) and gopis (milkmaids) know.
For pure love's sake I dwelt in Nanda's house;
Taking him as My father,
I carried his burdens on My head.
Listen Chandrâvali!²¹ I shall tell you of love;
Mukti (liberation) a man can gain, but rare indeed is Bhakti.
Solely for pure love's sake did I become
King Bali's door-keeper

²⁰ The song represent Srî Krishna's own words.

²¹ One of the milkmaids (gopis) of Vrindâban.

Down in the realm of the nether world.²²

The milkmen and milkmaids of Vrindāban are the best examples of devotees or Bhaktas. From this try to understand what Bhakti is!

Bhakti (pure love of God) and Jnâna (knowledge of God arrived at through reasoning and discrimination) are one and the same. But there is some difference between the two in their “taste.” Let me explain this with the help of an analogy. You must have eaten the sweetmeat called Kâncchâgolla (balls of sweetened fresh cheese) and also rock-candy. Both are sweet but they differ in how they taste. So also is the difference between Bhakti and Jnâna. If Bhakti is Kâncchâgolla, then Jnâna is rock-candy.

The difference between these two can be shown by another analogy. You’ve seen the Hooghly bridge across the Ganga. There are sidewalks on both sides of the bridge. And each sidewalk is guarded by a high and sturdy fence on the river side. The purpose of putting the fence is to prevent pedestrians from inadvertently falling into the river. In this analogy Bhakti is the sidewalk and Jnâna is the fence. If somebody slips carelessly while walking the path of Bhakti, the fence of Jnâna saves him. Wherever Bhakti exists, Jnâna exists also. It’s like fire. Wherever there is fire, there is air. When Bhakti and Jnâna coexist the combination is called “Bhakti mixed with Jnâna.” When Jnâna exists alone as rock-candy, it is pure, severe, and unfeeling. Srî Râmakrishna used to compare Jnâna to a man and Bhakti to a woman.

One can experience God by both Jnâna and Bhakti. But there is a little difference between the two. Srî Râmakrishna used to say, “Wealthy people have their houses divided into outer and inner quarters. Anyone can go to the outer quarters, but only women are allowed to enter the inner quarters. Men can only go to the outer quarters. If God is present in the outer quarters, Jnâna (who is like a man) can see Him there. But when God is in the inner quarters, Jnâna must wait for Him in the outer quarters. But Bhakti being a woman can straightway go to the inner quarters and find God. Bhakti can go to both the inner and outer quarters of the house. But Jnâna can’t enter the inner quarters. As long as the Jîvâtman hasn’t had God-realization through either Jnâna or Bhakti, it has to again and again enter different bodies and die repeatedly. In other words, the door to repeated births and deaths doesn’t close.

Pâthak: It’s great fun to hear all these things. It appears that all this is no other than the play of God. Now my question is: “How does the Jîvâtman enter the body and how does it depart from it?”

The devotee: You must have seen a solar or lunar eclipse. The entering of the body and the leaving of it by the Jîvâtman are very similar. When Râhu²³ (the head of the mythological demon Sainhikeya) swallows the moon or sun nobody can see him. But by seeing the moon or sun disappear and then reappear, one can know if they are inside Râhu or if they have come out. Similarly, the activity of the body or the lack of it shows if the Jîvâtman has entered the body or has left it. Judging by some general signs it can be known if the Jîvâtman is in the body or has given it up. It is said that the Jîvâtman comes to the body at the time of birth and leaves it at the

²² An allusion to the story of Vali, narrated in the Purâna. He was punished by the Lord for his excessive charity and was condemned to rule over the nether world. But he succeeded in extracting from the Lord the boon that He would be his door-keeper.

²³ Râhu is the severed and yet living head of the mythological demon Samhikeya. The head of the demon swallows the sun and the moon, but after passing through the throat of the severed head they come out.

time of death. This I can understand. When someone dies it can be clearly understood that the Jîvâtman has left the body. But how the Jîvâtman enters the body at the time of birth cannot be understood. The Jîvâtman is a puppet in the hand of the Paramâtman. The Jîvâtman too can't understand the mystery of birth and death. There are many tricks in Mâyâ's play. Mâyâ will never let you know that she has entered you and has been making you dance like a Gypsy's monkey. Until Mâyâ leaves, there's no chance of your entering the room (That is, experiencing the Divine Reality.).

Pâthak: How does Mâyâ leave?

The devotee: Mâyâ escapes as soon as she is recognized. You want to know how? Let's suppose a burglar has entered a man's home. Once the owner discovers him the burglar immediately escapes. Similarly, Mâyâ leaves as soon as one recognizes her.

Srî Râmakrishna has a beautiful story about it. One Goswâmî brahmin—who was in the guru business—was going to a disciple's home. But he didn't have a porter to carry his baggage. He searched for a porter here and there, and finally met a cobbler. The brahmin asked the cobbler, "I need a porter. Will you carry my baggage?"

The cobbler replied with hesitation, "But, sir, I belong to the very low cobbler caste!"

The brahmin was desperate to have a porter. So he said to the cobbler, "Come along. I won't tell anybody that you are a cobbler."

The cobbler agreed to accept the job but told the brahmin, "If anyone recognizes me, I'll immediately run away." The brahmin agreed. Then with his baggage carried by the cobbler the brahmin arrived at the home of a brahmin disciple. The porter sat in one corner of the home for fear of being discovered as a low caste cobbler.

Then one day someone in the brahmin disciple's family requested the porter, "Would you please bring me the water pot? I want to rinse my mouth." Since he belonged to a very low caste, the porter was afraid to touch the brahmin's water pot. The more he hesitated, the more the brahmin kept on asking him to bring the water pot. At last the brahmin became angry and exclaimed, "What, you don't respect a brahmin! What kind of a fellow are you! Are you a cobbler or something?"

Trembling with fear the porter ran to the brahmin who had hired him and said, "Sir, I'm leaving, they've found me out." So saying he ran away as fast as he could. Similarly, Mâyâ runs away as soon as she is recognized. But that Mâyâ who allures man with "lust and gold" is Avidyâ Mâyâ. When Avidyâ Mâyâ leaves, one enters the domain of Vidyâ Mâyâ. There is no end to the domain of Vidyâ Mâyâ. No matter how far you go, her domain continues. I've heard that one transcends Vidyâ Mâyâ when one experiences Samâdhi. But that's a far cry; I have no experience of that yet. Now I see that everything is the play of Shakti (the creative power of God). This entire universe (Brahmânda) is the domain of the Divine Mother. This creation has come from the primordial Paramâ Prakriti (Shakti). Brahmâ, Vishnu and Maheshwara are subordinate to Her. When the one and only Îshwara (God) descends on earth as a divine incarnation He has to manifest Himself through Paramâ Prakriti (Shakti). He playacts using the power of Paramâ Prakriti, and later returns to His own abode through Her. It's just as the Vaishnava scriptures say, "It's impossible to describe the endless Mâyâ of Srî Râdhâ (Paramâ Prakriti/Shakti). Billions and billions of Krishna appear and disappear inside it."

Srî Râmakrishna used to say, “Each divine incarnation is a bubble in the ocean of Mahâshakti (Paramâ Prakriti).”

Everything that you see, hear, feel or imagine is created in Paramâ Prakriti and She is immanent in it. It’s She who is the body and the owner of the body. She is the instrument and the engineer. She is the chariot and the charioteer. She is both Purusha and Prakriti. She is Sharva (Shiva) and Sharvânî (Shiva’s consort).

Prabodh: Sir, your words are very confusing, they are like a riddle. Sometime earlier you declared the Âtman to be supreme. Now you are saying that Shakti is supreme. One whose Shakti She is, you’ve shoved Him under a cover, and made Her supreme! Another thing, if Prakriti-Shakti is the contained, container, and all the created objects, then where has Purusha gone?

The devotee: Srî Râmakrishna said that it is extremely difficult to understand these complicated spiritual truths (Tattwa) until one has experienced God and had Self-realization by the grace of guru. Unless one has experienced God all this screaming, shouting and running won’t stop. One gets rid of all doubts and acquires direct knowledge of the internal world and all its spiritual truths when one gets the vision of God and realizes the Self.

No matter by which names the beginningless, all-pervading, one and only God is called, the Reality is only one. He has two states—Nitya (the Absolute) and Lîlâ (the Relative). What He is like in the Nitya state is known only to Him. But in the Lîlâ state that one Reality has become so varied and diverse that in whatever way you think of Him that’s what He is. Besides, in regard to that state of the Reality there is so much to see, speak about, and hear, that if you go on seeing, talking, and hearing throughout the ages you’ll never reach an end.

One who is the Purusha is also the Prakriti. Two are present in one, yet there is no separation between them. Both of them constitute one. Do you want to know how “two” have come out of “one” for the sake of Lîlâ or creation? It’s like Bengal gram (a kind of legume). When soaked in water it swells and becomes split into two cotyledons (parts). From inside the cotyledons appears the sprout. Similarly, the One Reality has been transformed into two modes—Purusha and Prakriti—and has become the cause of creation. No matter how the Paramâtman or the Brahman is in His true state, in order to create or perform His Lîlâ, He needs Shakti (Prakriti/Mâyâ/the Divine Mother/Mâyâ-Shakti). Dry clay can’t be used to model clay images. To make clay images you’ve got to mix water with clay. Similarly, for Lîlâ or creation, Brahman alone is not adequate, you need Shakti. In Lîlâ, Purusha and Prakriti are two modes of the same Reality. There’s no essential difference between the two, but apparent difference is created by Lîlâ. It’s like a hand-operated flour mill. What is the mill made of? There are two circular, flat stones placed one on top of the other. The lower stone has a wooden peg firmly installed at its center, while the upper one has a hole at its center. The peg passes through the hole of the upper stone. When they are operated, together they grind wheat into flour. In other words, the product of their grinding process is flour. Similarly, the same Reality becoming two (Purusha and Prakriti) has created this world. You may call that Reality either Purusha or Prakriti, or Purusha-Prakriti (the combination of both).

When the two modes of the Reality—Purusha and Prakriti—are engaged in their play (creation), the Reality is said to be performing Lîlâ. One can see more play of Shakti than that of Purusha in Lîlâ. Do you want to know what analogy Srî Râmakrishna uses in this context? He uses the analogy of the boss of a home. He is elderly and has the habit of smoking a hookah. He spends

the whole day and night smoking his hookah. Besides that, he is reticent, and talks very little. If at all he has to speak, he just says, "O.K." His wife takes care of all the household chores and responsibilities. She is very capable, knows all about housekeeping, and makes all the decisions. But every time she does something, she asks her husband once for his approval. Although she is extremely capable she doesn't do anything without her husband's concurrence. She goes to him and gives a detailed report of her work. After listening to her, the husband gives his "OK." The wife then returns to her work and starts ordering people around. Those who have a working relationship with her think that she is the boss. They aren't aware of the existence of the real boss. Similarly, in the realm of Lîlâ you only see the play of Shakti. You see her preponderance only. The realm of Lîlâ is the territory and workshop of the Divine Mother's Shakti (power). In the analogy of the flour mill the bottom stone doesn't do anything. It's the stone at the top that does all the work. Similarly, in the case of Lîlâ, the Purusha does nothing. All the work and play is the activity of Shakti (Prakriti). As long as the mind remains, as long as the "I" exists, one belongs to Her territory. Beyond that territory, when my the mind and ego are dissolved, what happens and where one exists I can't say.

Pâthak: When is He the husband, and when is He the wife?

The devotee: In the attributeless or Nirguna aspect He is the husband. And when He is with attributes He is the wife. These are the two states of the one and the same thing. One who is the attributeless (Nirguna) is also the one with attributes (Saguna). One can't "taste" the attributeless God. But God with attributes can be "tasted."

Pâthak: Do you believe in the Jîvâtman's assumption of another body after death? In other words, do you believe in reincarnation?

The devotee: Surely I do. Not only do I believe in reincarnation, but I also believe that the Jîvâtman carries with it like a shadow its Karmaphala (effects of its actions) and tendencies to its next incarnation. To explain this deep mystery Srî Râmakrishna told a story. A king had four sons. They live in the palace and often play there. One day the four princes and a few sons of their servants got together to play. The eldest prince said, "I'll play the role of the king." The second son of the king said, "Then I'll be the minister." The king's third son said, "I'll be the commander-in-chief." The king sat on a high seat. The minister stood in front of him with folded hands. The commander-in-chief made the other boys his soldiers. The youngest prince saw everything and announced, "I'm not going to play this game!" His eldest brother asked him, "What game would you like to play then?" The youngest prince replied, "You lie on your stomach and I'll wash clothes by thrashing them on your back." After telling this story Srî Râmakrishna said, "The youngest prince had been a washerman in his previous incarnation. Due to his good karma he has been born this time as a prince. But the tendencies (Samskâra) of his past incarnation are still strongly present in him."

Have you seen oils perfumed by extracts of fragrant flowers? Take for example, jasmine oil. This oil is made fragrant by chemically mixing the fragrant substance contained in jasmine flowers. The body of the jasmine flower isn't present in jasmine oil, but in a subtle form it does exist in it. The fragrant substance contained in a jasmine flower is its most vital part or essence. Before being mixed with oil this essence is present in the flower. After mixing, it is present in the oil. Just as in jasmine oil the fragrant essence of the jasmine flower is present, so also the Jîvâtman retains the tendencies of its previous body when it enters a new one.

Pâthak: Who is the cause of karma and the tendencies?

The devotee: Lust is the desire for pleasure and sense enjoyment. You must have heard some people say, “What’s the use of all this spiritual practice? What’s most important is to learn how to die properly.” This statement means that if a person dies with unfulfilled worldly desires, he has to be born again to fulfill them. But if he dies remembering God, or chanting the holy name of God, he won’t have to be born again. Spiritual practice or Sâdhanâ means incessantly chanting the holy name of God either orally or mentally, or the constant remembrance of God. The purpose of spiritual practice (Sâdhanâ) is to make sure that God is remembered at the time of death. I told you earlier that the mind entangled in Avidyâ, because of erroneous thinking constantly imagines all the pleasures of the world, such as the acquisition of wealth, honour, progeny, home and property. These imaginings don’t stop even during sleep. When you consider this subject carefully you’ll realize that the wheel of imagination is turning day and night like the potter’s wheel. This rotation has to be halted. This stopping is called the cessation of worldly desires (Nivritti). There are two ways to attain this. The first and foremost way is to chant the holy name of God, offer service to Him, keep holy company, take part in spiritual discussion, occasionally live in solitude, and pray to God.

Pâthak: What should one say during prayer? How should one pray?

The devotee: One should say, “O God, There is no one else other than You to call my own. Those whom I have, and whatever I own, last only for two days!” One should also say, “Please grant me devotion. I crave nothing other than devotion. May I be able to fix my mind at Your lotus feet with the help of devotion.”

Pâthak: What’s the second way of getting rid of worldly desires or of attaining Nivritti?

The devotee: It’s discriminating between what is eternal and what is not, or what is real and what is not. In this context Srî Râmakrishna’s advice is this: “Satisfy the smaller worldly desires and expel the bigger ones from your mind using discrimination.” In the words of Srî Râmakrishna, the cessation of all these worldly tendencies is “turning the mind in another direction.” It’s like the mind that was going towards Metiaburuj (a locality in the north of greater Calcutta) being diverted toward Dakshineswar (a neighborhood in the south of greater Calcutta). To cause this kind of change, the company that the mind was keeping has to be given up and new companions have to be acquired. The imagination of worldly pleasures in which the mind was indulging has to be switched to an opposite kind of imagination. The activities that the mind was engaged in have to be exchanged for better ones. Let me tell you here that the mind is the root cause of everything. If you can turn the mind around everything will be all right. In every activity it’s only the mind that’s making the body dance like the Gypsy’s pet monkey. Whatever the mind dictates the body has to do. Tell your mind, “Brother, don’t go in that direction. Don’t wish to have that thing. Don’t crave to own that thing. Don’t stay with them. Please come here, think of this, and stay here.”—This is called turning the mind around. On both the paths of Pravritti (worldly desires) and Nivritti (cessation of worldly desires) there are Samkalpa (rosy imagination), company (Sanga), and activity. But the nature of Samkalpa, Sanga, and activity on the path of Nivritti is very different from that on the path of Pravritti. This is the only difference.

While talking about the mind I told you that one of its characteristics is to get 100% absorbed in whatever it’s interested in. Just as water is for fish, so also is a sense object for the mind. It can’t survive without sense objects. But if you can somehow turn it around and direct it toward God it won’t want to go back to the sense objects. If you can turn it away from the path of intense Pravritti and place it on the path of Nivritti, it won’t go toward Pravritti anymore. If from the

momentum of past habit it once in a while goes toward Pravritti, it will immediately return to the path of Nivritti and will proceed along that path with threefold strength. It will appear as though it went that one time toward Pravritti just to enhance its strength.

Pâthak: I couldn't understand what you meant by enhancing the strength of the mind. Would you please explain? Besides, the path that makes the strong lose their strength, how can one gain strength walking on that path?

The devotee: Haven't you seen anybody jump across an open drain or ditch? If somebody has to jump across a ditch he has to run a little before jumping. He first backs away from the ditch a little and then runs very fast to increase the strength of his legs and then leaps across the ditch. But the whole difference lies in whether he willingly backs away or backs away because of a blunder committed by him. One can understand all these things automatically when one gets engaged in activities. These truths can't be realized unless one has gone through certain experiences. Work is extremely necessary. It's through our actions that we go toward Pravritti. Again, it's through our actions that we can return to Nivritti. Just as Pravritti is the outcome of activities directed to Pravritti, so also Nivritti is the outcome of activities directed to Nivritti. But it has to be admitted that there is more difficulty and hard labour in following the path of Nivritti than that of Pravritti. Do you want to know what kind of difficulty and labour those are? Suppose I live in Pathuriaghata in the city of Calcutta. Dakshineswar is six miles to the north of Pathuriaghata and Metiaburuj is six miles down to the south. Let us suppose the way to Metiaburuj is the path of Pravritti, and the way to Dakshineswar is the path of Nivritti. Let me suppose I have gone to Metiaburuj. Once there, I discover that it's a peaceless place. Then I inquire about finding a peaceful place and I come to realize that I've no alternative but to go to Dakshineswar. What should I do now? I've to leave Metiaburuj and return to Pathuriaghata. I have to go through a lot of difficulty, labour and toil on my way back. But as I proceed toward Dakshineswar I gradually feel more peaceful. The more I proceed, the more peace I feel. While walking my mind may occasionally think of Metiaburuj because of the mental impressions I gathered there, but it'll do me more good than bad. It is very difficult to unlearn the meaning of a word that has already been learnt, or to generate hunger by vomiting food. Similarly, it is very difficult to follow the path of Nivritti after following the path of Pravritti. Another thing, no matter what difficulties are encountered while walking the path of Nivritti, they only help one to progress farther. The difficulties, pain and labour gone through by the traveler act as an amulet to protect him from all future difficulties and pain. Only a traveler knows the difficulties of travel. Similarly, if one hasn't been busy in the field of activity one won't understand all these things. That's why Srî Râmakrishna used to say, "You won't find pearls unless you have dived deep into the ocean of Sâdhanâ or spiritual practice. Work hard. Action is needed. You can't be inebriated just by chanting, 'Hemp, hemp.' You have to procure hemp, make a paste of it, swallow it, then only will you have your inebriation!"

By performing Karmayoga on the path of Pravritti (sense pleasures) one arrives at the domain of Pravritti. Similarly, performing Karmayoga on the path of Nivritti one arrives at the domain of Nivritti. In both the domains there is action or Karma. Karma (action) is a generic word, but there are different kinds of Karma, and they produce different fruits. Mango, jack-fruit, custard apple, pineapple—all are fruits. Then there are fruits of Nux Vomica as well. Mango, custard apple, etc. are nutritious fruits, while Nux Vomica fruit is poisonous. It can cause death. Similarly, Karma (action) is of many kinds. Some action saves while other action kills. The actions performed on the path of Pravritti only increase the volume of work and put people in

unbreakable bondage. And the actions performed on the path of Nivritti reduce the volume of work and release people from bondage.

Pâthak: It's very difficult to perform the kinds of work that can bring one to Nivritti. In the worldly life there is so much attachment. Moreover, this attachment doesn't want to leave. How to get rid of it?

The devotee: Again and again you're asking the same question. Work hard to get rid of attachment. It may not leave immediately, but it's not the case that it won't leave gradually. A serious illness is not cured that fast, but gradually does get cured if medicine is taken regularly. Living under the tamarind tree you've eaten a lot of tamarinds. That's why you've become sick. Go to a margosa (Neem) tree, live under it, and eat margosa leaves, then you will be cured. You are still under the tamarind tree. If you go on crying, "I'm not getting cured! I'm not getting cured!" will it help?

Pâthak: What's an easy path to experience God?

The devotee: Srî Râmakrishna used to sing a song about this. Listen to it.

Song

Brother joyfully cling to Hari (God).

Thus striving, some day you may attain Him.

Ankâ and Bonkâ were liberated, so also the butcher Sujan.

Teaching her parrot how to chant the name of God,

The prostitute was liberated.

Meerâbâi was also liberated.

Give up hypocrisy and slyness

And take recourse to devotion.

Through service, worship

And self-surrender

You'll easily find Lord Râma.

Cling to God and give up the slyness of your sense-contaminated, impure mind. Then you will experience God.

Pâthak; How can I cling to Him unless I've experienced Him first? I can't understand this, please explain.

The devotee: I've spent all these days talking with you about the spiritual glories of Srî Râmakrishna. From your words I've understood that you adore God with form, and also that you like Lord Krishna. I know that you have an image of Srî Krishna in your home. Decorate that image every day with sandal paste and flowers. You belong to the theatre, and know well how to decorate. Decorate the deity (Srî Krishna) in your home the same way you decorate Sri Krishna in the Vilwamangal play. Fan Him during the summer, cover Him with warm clothes in the winter, and make a fine bed for Him. When you find something very nice somewhere, bring that for Srî Krishna. Offer Him fresh cheese and cream to eat. At the time of offering cry and tell

Him with great love, “O Krishna, you must eat what I’ve offered.” Sometimes read the story of Srî Krishna’s life. And try to keep the company of those who love Him deeply or have had His vision. If you do all this, then it will be as good as clinging to Him.

Pâthak: Sir, I felt something inside my heart when you said, “Cry and tell Krishna, ‘You must eat.’” But, will He really eat?

The devotee: He will certainly eat. Have no doubt about it. I myself have seen God eat.

Pâthak: Sir, what are you saying? Hearing you my body shudders, and I feel like crying. I’m a wretch, an impure soul, tarnished by all sorts of evil deeds. Will God touch the food offered by me?

The devotee: I also used to think that way. But by Srî Râmakrishna’s grace that doubt is gone. It’s not there anymore. Let me tell you one thing—just as you see in yourself impurity and the blemish of sin, so also if you could feel even a trace of God’s compassion you would never be able to say all these things. God is the ocean of compassion and the repository of mercy. No matter how many sins I may commit, they are nothing to that ocean of compassion. If you pour the ink of an inkpot into a lake the ink disappears. By mixing with the lake water the ink becomes water. Can a dewdrop reach the sun in the sky? The sun makes it evaporate and disappear. For the sake of devotees God took birth inside a prison (as the divine incarnation Krishna), allowed himself to be tied by a rope, ate the leftovers of cowherd boys, carried a brahmin’s footprint on His chest, and protects and sustains His creatures and creation with His heart’s blood. Do you think He is keeping account of what little sin you’ve committed somewhere? Shame on you! Please don’t put that stain on God who is the ocean of compassion.

Had people had any idea of God’s compassion they would neither salute nor care for Him. There is no end to God’s compassion, no limit. Consider parents. They don’t mind even if their son has many, many defects. God is the Father and Mother of all creatures. His creation and creatures are very dear to Him. His parental affection for His creatures is like an endless and infinite ocean into which if even billions of oceans of sin be poured they will disappear without leaving a trace.

Coming to know of the infinite compassion of Srî Râmakrishna, Girish Ghosh said, “Had I known earlier that there was such a big ditch to dump my sins into, I would have indulged in many more sins. Now that I’ve seen him I can’t sin anymore!”

Pâthak: Sir, is it not possible for anyone to commit sin after seeing Srî Râmakrishna?

The devotee: It’s impossible. The effect of God-vision is indeed wonderful! Just as a dry leaf is burnt instantly by a big fire, so also the sins accumulated through billions of incarnations are destroyed in an instant by the vision of God. Something else also gets destroyed along with the sins—it’s the germ of reincarnation. After God-vision there is no rebirth. Let me quote to you just four lines of a song.

Song

Victory to God who is the Friend and Life of the world!

I’ve heard the Purânas say, “Seeing once

The beauteous moonlike face of God,

People go beyond repeated births and deaths.”

After their release from their sins, when their hearts have become pure, people cannot commit sin anymore.

Pâthak: If God has so much compassion for His creatures why does He not relieve them of their immense suffering from disease, bereavement, and poverty?

The devotee: Is it God's fault if you dig a drain and let the flood water into your room? Every action or Karma produces some effect. Don't you agree that the doer has to suffer the effect of his own actions? Yet, you do exactly what God has forbidden you to do! He says, "Don't put your hand into fire." But you're doing just that. Will your hand burn or not? He is clearly showing as well as telling you what's right and what's wrong, yet willfully you refrain from doing what's good, and staunchly hold onto what's bad. It's not possible for you to escape from disease, bereavement, poverty, etc. If you keep the company of an animal you get from it only what it's capable of giving. If you live with a snake you will get its poison. If you live with a milk cow you'll get milk. The Avidyâ snake is the very embodiment of "lust and gold." You're constantly with her and meditating on her. So what else can you expect to get other than diseases, bereavement and sorrow? The divine Mother—the destroyer of all kinds of suffering—is like the wish-fulfilling celestial cow, Kâmadhenu. If you stay close to Her and think of Her all the time, She will give you the "milk" of enduring peace.

Do you know what the scriptures such as the Vedas, the Vedânta, Tantra, the *Bhagavadgîtâ* and the Purânas are? They are the words of God. They have come out of the mouth of God. Through all of them God has said only one thing: "O my creatures, do what keeps you happy. Then I will also be happy."

God has spoken these words with His own mouth. Yet, by His creative skill He has produced such a tricky machine (the world) that whenever human beings strive for their own happiness or well-being, they are forced to realize that there's no chance of achieving their goals unless they take recourse to spiritual practices and adoration and worship of God. That's why they are obliged to do their spiritual practices and serve and worship God. There is no chance of finding peace and happiness in this world except through the grace of God.

But hapless human beings are so lost, blind, and deaf that they only rush toward that thinly-gilt package of "lust and gold." They don't get attracted to God who is pure and solid gold. They don't even want to see or listen to Him. When human beings get very much out of control, the Ocean of Compassion assumes a human form and descends on earth to bring them under control. But do they still open their eyes? (The meaning is: Do they realize that God has come down to earth to save them?) Yet, out of his infinite compassion the divine incarnation cannot rest. He goes from door to door trying to restrain human beings from pursuing evil ways. When they discover that the divine incarnation won't leave them alone, they make fun of him and call him insane! They would rather die than listen to anyone talk about the divine incarnation! My friend, such are human beings! Such is their intelligence! On the other hand, using their intelligence they fly through the air in airplanes. In three days they get to places that would have taken three years to reach before. They send messages from one country to another in only five minutes. They use the five powerful elements (Panchabhûtas) as their slaves. They give organs to those who have lost them. They also do many other wonderful things. The entire earth is being shaken by their intelligence! Yet, this intelligence collapses whenever the topic of God arises. The son of an illiterate village oilman (a merchant who sells edible oil) exhibits great stamina and strength working on the farm with ploughs, spades, and scythes, but if he is asked to study books

his mind revolts against it. If at all he shows some interest it's like a barge of the Hoare & Miller Company. It needs a lot of pulling and pushing to move. The average human beings' interest in spiritual subjects or God is exactly like that.

Ordinary human beings don't know what the source of their happiness or well-being is. When they finally come to know, they try to take shelter in God leaving behind all worldly objects. Nobody ever gets happiness through worldly things. All our religious mythologies teach that. Those who take shelter in this Samsâra (the world) looking upon it as the only source of happiness lose everything. Do you know what Samsâra is like? It's like the grindstone that crushes Kalâi pulses into flour. If a single Kalâi grain somehow clings to the wooden peg that runs through the middle of the grindstone, it doesn't get crushed. The grains that are away from the peg are crushed. In relation to the world God is like that peg. If you can cling to God you won't be crushed by the world (Samsâra). If you move away from God, the world will crush you. Similarly, one becomes a victim of suffering and restlessness if one remains in the world (Samsâra) abandoning God. God has placed human beings (Jîvas) in the world after first teaching them the difference between a litter-bin and a gold-bin. If you choose the litter-bin what can He do? God is the wish-fulfilling tree, whatever you want from Him He will give you. When a thief worships Mother Kâlî and prays for some boon, does She say, "I won't grant you your boon."? She grants boons to both a thief and a holy man (Sâdhu) if they worship Her mentally with devotion. She has fastened every action to its fruit. The thief gets the fruit of his stealing, and the holy man gets the fruit of his spiritual practice. From this you must realize that God is kind and compassionate, but people must suffer from the consequences of their actions.

Pâthak: I've heard that human beings remain in the state of Yoga when they're in their mothers' wombs. At that time their minds are concentrated on God. Is this true?

The devotee: I haven't heard anything about this from Srî Râmakrishna's mouth, nor do I know anyone to whom he might have said anything about that. But what you've said seems to be true judging by what Srî Râmakrishna has been allowing me to understand. Besides, I heard this saying of some wise man: "I was a Yogî when I was in my mother's womb. Being born, I've tasted the dirt of this earth." The sayings of wise men are certainly reliable. In one's childhood one may sometimes show the signs of a spiritual aspirant (Sâdhaka). Many times God's words come out of a child's mouth. Srî Râmakrishna used to say that after spiritual enlightenment one acquires the nature of a child. Little children are just as guileless and artless as holy people. A child is not under the control of any of the three Gunas—Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. The qualities such as guilelessness, etc. that are present in little children indicate that they must have been in a state of Yoga while they were in their mother's wombs.

Pâthak: Let's not talk about these things now. Sometime earlier you told me something that touched my heart. It's true that I love Srî Krishna very much and like to offer Him food. I feel that Srî Krishna is wonderful. Had I been able to see Him I would have enjoyed Him in so many ways. All these days I suppressed these feelings, but today I'm no longer able to do so. I'm extremely interested in Srî Krishna. All that I can do now is think only of Him. Would you please tell me how I can have His vision? You say that both Srî Râmakrishna and Srî Krishna are God. Yet I feel that I'm more attached to the form of Srî Krishna than that of Srî Râmakrishna. You're charmed by the form of Srî Râmakrishna so you may not like my words. You know Srî Râmakrishna to be the all in all, you talk about his life and activities, and you keep busy chanting his name and doing his worship.

The devotee: You mustn't say that I don't like Srî Krishna, His life-story, and His devotees. You're fond of Srî Krishna and are devoted to Him. That's why you're very dear to me. As you are a devotee of Srî Krishna, you've been able to see Srî Râmakrishna. The same Srî Krishna is Srî Râmakrishna. The difference is that this time His play is different and His outer looks have changed. But to whomever He has revealed His secret realizes that it's the same milk that sometimes becomes butter, sometimes curd, sometimes cream, sometimes Râbri (a kind of sweet, thickened milk), and sometimes clarified butter. The difference is only in their outer appearances and tastes. Similarly, no matter which form God assumes when He descends on earth, inside each form it's only He who exists.

Srî Râmakrishna is the Inner Controller. He resides in everybody's heart. Anyone who has thought of God even once with a guileless heart has to come, either now or in the future, to Srî Râmakrishna. During his spiritual ecstasy Srî Râmakrishna said many times that anyone who thought of him only once with a simple, guileless heart would have to come to him.

Pâthak: After attracting a devotee who loves some other divine incarnation what does Srî Râmakrishna do?

The devotee: First Srî Râmakrishna talks to the devotee both openly and in private about his cherished deity. He talks about the deity's wonderful qualities and Lîlâ (divine play). Do you know what purpose it serves? It enhances the devotee's love and devotion for his cherished deity. Then when Srî Râmakrishna notices that the devotee's attraction for God has greatly increased, he takes the devotee wherever he wants to go, and shows him whatever divine form he wants to see. At that time Srî Râmakrishna doesn't let the devotee know that his beloved deity is no other than Srî Râmakrishna himself, just in a different form. Do you know why Srî Râmakrishna plays this game? Srî Râmakrishna doesn't want to disturb anyone's spiritual attitude. To one who loves Srî Krishna he talks only about Srî Krishna, sings songs about Srî Krishna, and describes and shows Srî Krishna's beautiful Lîlâ. To one who loves Mother Kâlî he talks only of Mother Kâlî and sings songs about Her.

To one who is a believer in the formless God he talks about the highest Vedanta; to one who loves God with attributes, he talks about the divine attributes; and to one who believes in God without attributes, he talks about the attributelessness God. No matter which means, which path, and which attitudes are used, the devotee arrives at the same divinity. Attracted by Srî Râmakrishna's all-embracing, universal attitude, the followers of Yoga, Vedanta, Sufism, Christianity, etc. would come to him. Just as the earth provides nutrition to its numerous plants, trees and herbs so also Srî Râmakrishna provided spiritual food to aspirants of different spiritual paths and faiths. That's why Srî Râmakrishna is a world teacher and a reconciler of religious disputes. Anybody who has taken refuge in him has got his desire fulfilled and has achieved his spiritual goal. Some come to Srî Râmakrishna with the desire to see God in forms other than that of Srî Râmakrishna. Srî Râmakrishna shows them the paths to have their cherished visions of God. It's only after having God-vision by Srî Râmakrishna's grace that they can understand Srî Râmakrishna and know who he really is.

Pâthak: What does he come to know about him?

The devotee: He comes to know through direct experience that God whom Srî Râmakrishna helped him to see is essentially one and the same as Srî Râmakrishna. Only in form, temperament and taste is there a little difference. By difference "in taste" I mean difference in attitude. Do you know what it is like? Sometimes you will be aware of His divinity, at other

times you won't. For example, you look upon Srî Krishna as your friend. You have a friendly attitude toward Srî Krishna. If you see Him, will you salute Him or sit at His feet respectfully with folded hands? Just as you sit and eat together with your chums, you will behave with Him. But you will not look upon Srî Râmakrishna as a chum, you will look upon him as Guru or God. Although you will know that Srî Krishna and Srî Râmakrishna are one and the same, still from your point of view there will be an attitudinal difference between the two.

Pâthak: Does the same God and Reality exist in all divine forms? Are the forms of Kâlî, Krishna, Râma, Shiva, Râdhâ, Sîtâ, etc. the forms of the one and the only God? Does the same Divine Reality exist in both Personal God and Impersonal God?

The devotee: What else?

Pâthak: If it is true then how does the one and only God who eternally exists in all these multifarious forms and shapes fulfill the expectations of the different devotees? Let us suppose a certain actor of our theatre has to play two or three different roles. To play one role he has to put on the costume of a king. To play another role he has to put on the costume of a police chief. To play still another role he has to put on the costume of a prisoner. But in a particular scene if all the three—the king, the police chief and the prisoner—have to be present, is it possible for the same actor to play those three roles simultaneously? He can appear on the stage at different times to play different roles wearing different costumes, but it is impossible for him to play more than one role at a time.

The devotee: Yes, I've understood what you're saying. But if God can't always be equally present everywhere in many shapes and forms, how can He be called God? Do you know why God is infinite? Because God is not infinite in just one way, He is infinite in infinite ways. Everything is possible for God. Who other than God can ever know what He is? Who else has known or can know Him completely? You've talked about just a few forms of God, but I heard Srî Râmakrishna say that God is infinite in any one of His forms.

To give to his devotees the idea of the infinite Srî Râmakrishna once said something wonderful. He said that on both sides of a road there are rows of trees. From their branches, like so many bunches of grapes, Râmas and Krishnas are hanging in clusters. In each cluster there are an infinite number of Râmas or Krishnas. Then again, those clusters are also infinite in number. Only one Krishna from one of these clusters performed his Lîlâ in Vrindaban, while a Râma from another cluster took birth in Ayodhyâ. Each form (such as Râma or Krishna) is infinite in number, and each contains the Supreme Brahman (God). Just as God is infinite in one specific form He is infinite in His infinite forms. We are puny human beings, our capacities are extremely limited. That's why it's not possible for us to grasp the idea of infinity. Srî Râmakrishna used to say, "Can a one-seer²⁴ bottle contain five seers of milk?"

The final solution is that one who exists in "form" also exists in "the formless." Form and formlessness belong to the same Divine Reality. What lies beyond form and formlessness is also that Reality. Nothing exists other than that one Reality. Therefore, whatever variety you've heard of or seen is no other than that Reality. One who is the Container is also the Contained. That one Reality is both non-dual (Advaita) and the multiple (Dvaita). Dvaita and Advaita are only the sport of that "One and Only Reality."

²⁴ Seer is a measure of weight or a measure of volume (in case of a liquid).

That lucky person who is a *true* Dvaita-vâdin (believer in the multiple forms of Divinity) is also a *true* Advaita-vâdin (believer in the oneness of God, the soul and the universe). There is no difference between a true Dvaita-vâdin and a true Advaita-vâdin. One who has seen the sport of that one Reality in the Infinite, has acquired the true knowledge of Advaita (non-dualism). Experiencing the one existing in the many is called the knowledge of Advaita. Gaining this knowledge, one attains the Shiva state—a state not achievable even by the gods (Devas). That’s why Srî Râmakrishna used to say, “First keep the knowledge of Advaita secure in your pocket, then do whatever you like.”

The statement “do whatever you like” means that a person who has acquired the knowledge of Advaita cannot do anything bad. Whatever he performs is right and proper action since it’s impossible for him to step out of line and do something that’s harmful.

Wonderful is the play of God! Then again, that play is infinite. No matter how long you watch that play, it will still appear to be infinite. The farther you move away from the shoreline on the sea, the larger the sea appears to become (because the shoreline disappears from sight). Similarly, the more you watch God’s play, the bigger and bigger it appears to become. Judging by the variety of the play it’s infinite. Judging by its largeness also, it’s infinite. The average human mind fails to comprehend infinity. A person who conceives only the most negligible fraction of it can at the most utter the first letter of the word “infinity.” Then he becomes completely speechless and unconscious. Do you know what kind of unconsciousness it is? Let us suppose a liquor shop contains quite a few barrels of liquor. A person goes there and just by drinking a single bottle of liquor becomes dead drunk and loses consciousness. Similarly, one who has grasped only the faintest idea of infinity loses outer consciousness (having reached the limit of his power of comprehension).

Pâthak: There are some people who object to the doctrine of a divine incarnation or the idea of a Personal God. They say that the Infinite and the Indivisible God can never become finite and divisible (i.e. have parts). Therefore, attributing infinity and indivisibility to a divine incarnation or any other divine form is a mistake.

The devotee: One who says such a thing hasn’t got the slightest idea of the infinite. He hasn’t understood the meaning of the word “infinity” even superficially. When he calls God infinite, he does so with his lips, not with his heart. What I want to explain is that the one who is infinite is infinite in every possible way and under all conditions. He is infinite in size, infinite in form, infinite in moods, infinite in taste, infinite in smell, infinite in sound, and infinite in touch. He is both indivisible and divisible. No matter what form or what limitation the Infinite may choose to have, His infinity will continue in every state. Just as He is infinite in His infinity, so also He is infinite in His finite parts. The water of the river Ganga is an apt analogy. The holiness of Ganga water exists throughout the entire length of the river from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. The same holiness is present in a single drop of water collected from anywhere in the Ganga. Even when God manifests Himself through a finite form, He still retains His infinity, indivisibility and omnipotence. The Divine Mother who inhabits the entire universe is also present in a little drop of water. She is the same whether She inhabits the universe or dwells in a single drop of water. She—the Divine Player (Lîlâmayî)—sometimes remains naked (like Mother Kâlî), and sometimes wears clothes (like Mother Durgâ). In all conditions She alone exists. You are a stage actor. Regardless of the costumes you wear, your “you”-ness remains the same. These things can’t be known through mere study of books or intricate reasoning. Only devotees can know them through direct experience. To say that God who is infinite and

indivisible cannot become finite or divisible is to question God's infinite power. If the infinite God doesn't have the power to become finite then how can He be considered infinite in His power? If we insist that "God is infinite and nothing else," then it is *we* who limit His limitlessness. God is not made finite by those who worship Personal God, or God endowed with form.

Saint Râmprasâd says through the following song that he composed:

Song

He it is, says Râmprasâd, that I approach as Mother;
But must I give away the secret here in the market place?
From the hints I have given, O mind, guess what that Being is!
Through another song he says:

Song

Who is there that can understand what Mother Kâlî is?
Even the six Darshanas are powerless to reveal Her.
In the Mûladhâra and the Sahasrâra the Yogî meditates on Her.
Within the cluster of blooming lotuses
She sports beside Her mate, the Swan (Shiva, the Absolute).
She is the Inner Self of the Self-Satisfied God,
Just as Sîtâ, the beloved of Râma, was.
It's Mother Kâlî that of Her own sweet will inhabits every living thing.
The macrocosm and microcosm rest in the Mother's womb;
Now do you see how vast it is?
While my mind has understood, alas! My heart has not;
Though but a dwarf, it still strives to capture the moon.
Listen to another song by Râmprasâd:

Song

"All creation is the sport of my mad Mother Kâlî.
Being hidden, She continues with Her sport.
Creating a conflict between the Personal and the Impersonal,
She breaks one stone with another.
Though She is willing to do everything else,
She won't do Her duties.
Keep your raft," says Râmprasâd, "afloat on the sea of the world,
Drifting up during the flood-tide, drifting down with the ebb."

The Mother Kâlî whom Râmprasâd saw as the Personal God is the same Mother Kâlî he experienced as the Impersonal Brahman. Vyâsa, the world-renowned author of the Purânas (books of Hindu mythology), is also the author of the *Vedânta Sûtras*. It is not possible to understand the works of Vyâsa without the grace of God and spiritual practices performed in one's past incarnations.

One should know a person intimately before expressing any opinion about him. Similarly, one should experience God before giving a public lecture on Him. After experiencing God, some become silent. Others will talk only on spiritual topics as long as they live. No one has the authority to speak about God unless one has experienced Him or has been commissioned by Him to preach. Those who condemn the worship of the Personal God are not true followers of any spiritual path. A genuine spiritual aspirant, no matter which path he follows, doesn't condemn or criticize the followers of other paths, because he clearly understands that other aspirants are worshipping the same Divine Reality according to their own particular temperaments and spiritual attitudes. The second reason is that he is absorbed in his own spiritual thoughts. He has no time to notice anything else. The loud noise of the breakers can be heard on the seashore, but when you are at mid-sea you don't hear the noise. Similarly, you hear a lot of noise *outside* the path leading to God. When you're *on* that path, there is no noise. According to Srî Râmakrishna, it is extremely foolish to condemn the worship of the Personal God (or God with form). The advent of Srî Râmakrishna into this world is meant to resolve the disputes between the followers of different faiths. This is writ large and clear in every line and word in the story of his Lîlâ (divine sport).

It is futile to object to the idea of the Personal God using intricate logic and reasoning. This kind of thinking is called skepticism. If simple-hearted people have doubts, they should take refuge in a guru. Steadfastness in following the instructions of the guru is the axe to cut down the tree of doubts. Spiritual aspirants call these doubts the "disease of worldliness." Some say that these doubts are the terrible Tamoguna²⁵ that hides God from people. They also soil the mirror of the intellect in which God is reflected. A disciple's association with his guru and his guru's grace dispel Tamoguna from the disciple's mind, just as darkness is dispelled by the rising sun. I've directly experienced this from my guru Sri Râmakrishna.

From many places sometimes pundits well-versed in the scriptures would come to Sri Râmakrishna. Out of scholastic vanity they would start arguing with Sri Râmakrishna on spiritual subjects and dazzle him with their pedantic dialectics. He would become overwhelmed by all this, and wouldn't know what to do or say. People present there thought that Sri Râmakrishna had admitted defeat. But just at that moment he would say, "Excuse me, I've got to respond to nature's call." Then he would get up and go out of the room. A devotee would follow him carrying water in a pot.²⁶

Pâthak: Why would Sri Râmakrishna admit defeat?

The devotee: Don't be in such a rush. First let me tell you the whole story. There was a reason for him to admit defeat. People proud of their learning rejoice when they get praise for winning a

²⁵ According to the Sâmkhya philosophy, Prakriti (nature), in contrast with Purusha (soul/spirit), consists of three gunas (qualities or strands) known as Sattwaguna, Rajoguna, and Tamoguna. Tamoguna stands for inertia, or dullness; Rajoguna for activity or restlessness; and Sattwaguna for balance or wisdom.

²⁶ It is customary in Bengal (India) to rinse one's feet and hands after using the bathroom. That's why the devotee carried water in a pot.

debate. The very purpose of their education is to get such praise. Hearing Sri Râmakrishna's reputation, they came with the wish to defeat him. But Sri Râmakrishna is the wish-fulfilling tree (Kalpataru). He came to fulfill the wishes of everybody. I haven't heard of anyone as generous as Sri Râmakrishna in showering praise on even the least praiseworthy of people.

On the way to the bathroom he would enter into a deep spiritual ecstasy and would mutter words like a drunk person. Sometimes his words could be understood by others, sometimes not. Then quickly returning to his room he would touch the pundits and say, "Please tell me again what you were saying before." This touch was actually an expression of Sri Râmakrishna's infinite compassion. That magic touch would bring an instantaneous change in the pundits. Their condition was exactly like that of a cobra when it is touched by the snake charmer's wand. The scary, hooded cobra instantly becomes subdued. All its hissing stops; it becomes like an earthworm. The pundits would have a similar transformation. All their hissing and arguing would stop and they would just stare at Sri Râmakrishna without even blinking. Some of them would then kneel down, fold their hands, and chant hymns in adoration of Sri Râmakrishna. Others would pray, "Please grant us spiritual consciousness." Still others would roll on the ground in front of Sri Râmakrishna's feet and would wet the earth with their tears.

Now I've got to say something. What I want to say is that every event has a visual image. Just now you've heard an interesting event. Close your eyes and try to visualize it taking place in front of you. If you can visualize it, you'll realize how Sri Râmakrishna's grace could instantly remove Avidyâmâyâ's terrible covering of Tamoguna. What can't be achieved by spiritual austerities performed in many different incarnations would be achieved simply by seeing and touching Sri Râmakrishna. There is no end to Sri Râmakrishna's compassion. The proud pundits who came to see Sri Râmakrishna with heads held high were filled with scholastic vanity caused by the dark covering of their doubts (Tamoguna). Those doubts hindered their understanding of the spiritual Reality. Sri Râmakrishna's magic touch humbled them and made them bow down their heads. The spiritual Reality that was beyond the pundits' comprehension while they were debating with Sri Râmakrishna, came within their clear grasp as soon as Sri Râmakrishna touched them. Sri Râmakrishna—the compassionate, "wish-fulfilling tree"—removed the pundits' Tamoguna by granting them spiritual consciousness. Thus they acquired the power to directly experience the Reality.

Another thing. Just as bullocks with blinders over their eyes are made to go round and round and turn the wheel of the oil mill, so also these doubts force all living beings to go round and round in this working plane (Karmakshetra) called Samsâra (the world). The dark cloud of doubts can be dispelled by the performance of spiritual austerities, but it may need many many incarnations to succeed. On the other hand, just see the wonder of Sri Râmakrishna. Do you know the difference between getting rid of Tamoguna through self-effort and getting rid of Tamoguna by Sri Râmakrishna's grace? It's like the difference between going to Vrindaban on foot as a beggar and going there by train carrying food and everything needed for the road. Or it's like the difference between getting drinking water by digging a well and finding a lake with crystal clear water for drinking. Is it possible for ordinary human beings to understand him whose touch raises the spiritual consciousness of people? Brother, with an open heart shout, "Victory to Sri Râmakrishna!" One who has studied a lot of scriptures without gaining spiritual consciousness is at the most one step higher than animals. There is no difference between infusing spiritual consciousness into the spiritually unconscious and infusing life into rocks. When God incarnated as Râma, He gave life to a petrified woman. This time in His Râmakrishna form God out of

compassion has infused consciousness into hundreds of petrified hearts. That is His glory. Words cannot describe the kind of transformation that a person undergoes after gaining spiritual consciousness. Sri Râmakrishna's Lîlâ cannot be described, nor can one hear about it. It can only be experienced.

Pâthak: Please tell me as much as you can about what happens after one gains spiritual consciousness.

The devotee: Gaining spiritual consciousness and getting the grace of the Divine Mother are one and the same thing. If an uncultured village bumpkin who has never been to a theatre, asks you, "Sir, what do they do in a theatre? What is there in a theatre?" you will be at a loss to know what to tell him. Similarly, it is difficult to tell what happens after one becomes spiritually conscious. This creation is the theatre of the Divine Mother. There is another world inside this visible world. This visible world is the external world and the world inside it is the mental world. The external world is like the index of the inner world. The Divine Mother is a great actress. The game She plays in both the worlds is called the "theatre of wonders." Just as a ticket or a free pass allows a person to enter a theatre and enjoy the show, so also to enter the internal mental world from outside one needs the grace of the Divine Mother or spiritual consciousness. Once you attain spiritual consciousness, the outer world will *appear* to be very different. The outer world before and after you gain spiritual consciousness remains the same. Yet, after gaining spiritual consciousness it will *appear* to be different in character, appearance and color. When you have spiritual consciousness, you see the outer world with your eyes closed, not with your eyes open. At that time you see it in both darkness and light. For this kind of seeing, the physical eyes are of no use, you need special eyes. With those eyes you can watch the Divine Mother's "theatre of wonders." Let me tell you a little about this "theatre." You own a body of flesh and blood that's three and half cubits long. You think of this body as "I." But in reality you and your body are different from each other. You have a mind inside your body. That mind is busy day and night imagining and cognizing things. That same mind sometimes becomes two, and quarrels with itself. Then the mind itself becomes the arbiter of the quarrel. The mind is there; Chitta (the memorizing faculty of the mind), Buddhi (the determinative faculty of the mind), Ahankâra (ego), Jîvâtman (the individual soul), Paramâtman (the supreme soul), and the six enemies of spiritual life²⁷ such as lustfulness, anger, etc. are also there. I talked about all these things earlier.

As the mind is there, there exist many indescribable things inside the body. You can neither see nor know them. The fun-loving Divine Mother has put all these things inside us and makes us dance like puppets. She plays Her game of creation using human beings. But such is Her skill that She doesn't let us know what She is doing. Only when She is gracious to somebody, does She grant spiritual consciousness to him and allows him to watch the games being played in Her theatre.

These are the wonders in Her theatre. Inside every human body there is an "I." Because of that ego everybody is shouting, "I, I." In reality, however, there are not millions of "I"s. Without the Mother's grace it's not possible to know the "one" who exists in place of these "I"s.

A person says that he knows many people intimately. But in reality he doesn't know anyone. He doesn't even know his own mother, wife, son, or relatives. He doesn't know even himself. Who

²⁷ The six enemies of spiritual life called Shadaripu in Sanskrit are lustfulness, anger, greed, delusion, false pride, and envy.

he is, where he came from, where he is, where he is going, or what he will do—he doesn't know any of these things. Unless the Divine Mother graciously grants him spiritual consciousness it is impossible for him to know any of these things.

Whatever variety you see in the objects of the senses, such as sights, tastes, smells, tactile sensations, and sounds—all have been cooked together in the same cooking pot. Among them there is no big or small, good or bad, superior or inferior. Whatever exists in the universe also exists in every individual being. Nothing is destroyed; only the forms and qualities change. Only one who has spiritual consciousness can experience these things.

From all this try to understand what spiritual consciousness is. This consciousness, which is difficult even for the gods to have, would be transmitted to people by just a single compassionate glance of Srî Râmakrishna. This consciousness alone is the boat to cross the ocean of this world, and Srî Râmakrishna is its only helmsman.

To give a hint to blind and ignorant people about his great liberating power and infinite compassion, Srî Râmakrishna would sometimes say from a state of high spiritual ecstasy, “When a venomous snake catches one, one doesn't have to croak many times—only twice or thrice.” Do you know what he meant by that? There are some extremely poisonous snakes, such as cobras, etc. Then there are non-venomous snakes, such as garter snakes and fresh water snakes. If a non-poisonous snake catches a frog, the frog croaks for a long time before it dies. But if a poisonous snake catches a frog, it dies after croaking only two or three times because of the snake's venom.

Using the above analogy Srî Râmakrishna would say, “I belong to such a class that if I touch anybody he won't have to argue much. He will very soon achieve his (spiritual) goal.”

Sometimes he would say, “When a green hornet catches a cockroach, the color of the cockroach changes into the color of the green hornet. It means that anyone I catch will get my color.” He said to Girish Bâbu, “Have all your enjoyments now, later you won't be able to have any.” (That is, before he is accepted by Srî Râmakrishna, let him have all kinds of sense enjoyment. Once Srî Râmakrishna accepts him, his nature will completely change and he won't be interested in such enjoyments.)

Some rich, highly qualified and respectable devotees of Srî Râmakrishna at first talked disrespectfully about him. When they heard that people called him Paramahansa (Supreme Swan—a title given to the saints) one of them said by way of ridicule, “I've seen plenty of Hansas (ducks) like him! Let me go and give him a good 'nose-twisting' (a mode of insult in Bengal).” Someone else said, “I'll go and prove that he is an utter fool in just a few words!”

After his first meeting with Srî Râmakrishna, Girish Bâbu said, “I've seen a lot of charlatanism in this nineteenth century, but Srî Râmakrishna is an exception. He has an extraordinary power to charm people!” Some self-conceited devotees surrendered themselves at the feet of Srî Râmakrishna after meeting him just once or twice. Their false pride and pedantic arguments disappeared without a trace in the sea of Srî Râmakrishna's spirituality. It was also difficult to resist the attraction of Srî Râmakrishna's wonderful spiritual beauty. It was hard to imagine that the Formless could take such a beautiful form. Not only was his appearance charming, but his qualities were also equally charming. He had such bright magnetic eyes that they could attract anybody. In this context let me quote for you a few lines from *Râmakrishna Punthi* (a book written in poetry on Srî Râmakrishna by Akshay Kumar Sen).

“However it may try, the bird of one's mind can't escape

That never-failing arrow.

When hit by an arrow, one surely gets killed.

But when hit by the arrow of his (Srî Râmakrishna's) quick glance,

One doesn't die but gets a new life.

Alas! How shall I paint the beauty of those eyes?"

His forehead was large; his well-chiseled lips were slightly reddish. His handsome face beamed a smile resembling the moon reflected on the clear water of the Yamunâ. His neck was well-proportioned. His voice was as sweet as the sound of a flute. His chest was broad. His long arms almost reached his knees. His feet were beautiful. The soles of his feet were softer than the lotus flower; and the touch of those feet could transform baser metal into gold. Besides, he was endowed with all the noble qualities. He was more than one hundred percent compassionate. He showered his compassion on all without reservation. Even if a person needed only one drop of compassion, Srî Râmakrishna inundated him with his infinite compassion. Those who saw all this were simply overwhelmed. That's why they were unable to know what other wonderful qualities Srî Râmakrishna had. His divine play (Lîlâ) was very deep; none could fathom its depth. He didn't display externally his divine grandeur or powers. But his infinite inner grandeur defies all description. His Lîlâ is not something to be talked about, it's only to be seen and experienced. And what's seen or experienced can't be described through words. Srî Râmakrishna is an Avatâra (a divine incarnation) who kept his divinity well-concealed. His Lîlâ is also hidden that way. Wonderful indeed is his divine play! Although revealed, he is also well-concealed. It's extremely hard to understand one who is simpler than the simplest. It's harder still to understand a combination of the simplest and the most complex. Similar is the combination of a revealed Avatâra and a concealed Avatâra. Unless one has experienced the Divine Reality, it is impossible to understand the play of these two opposites existing in one.

Pâthak: Yes sir, it's true. All that you've said sounds nice, but I can't understand anything. What are "external grandeur" and "internal grandeur"? Then again, what's meant by the statements "concealed yet revealed" and "a combination of the simplest and the most complex"?

The devotee: God's Lîlâ cannot be explained that clearly. You can make someone understand only by giving hints. Words can't express as much as can be expressed by body language, such as the gestures of the eyes, nose and face. I've been telling you all along that I lack education, language skill, knowledge of the scriptures, and spiritual practice. I've never even been on a pilgrimage. Srî Râmakrishna is my only strength, intellect, help, and refuge. I'm only trying to babble about whatever he has shown and allowed me to experience. Do you want to know what God's external grandeur is? This grandeur is the divine power that transformed a rock into a human being, turned a wooden boat into gold, broke the bow of Lord Shiva into two, killed the terrible female monster Tâdakâ, made rocks float in water, made a little finger support a mountain, made the water of the Yamunâ flow backward at the sound of a flute, turned Krishna into Kâlî, puzzled the Divinities Brahmâ and Shiva, enabled a bare hand to sever a head, made three footsteps cover the three worlds, and made teeth support the whole world, etc., etc. This external display of divine power is included in Srî Râmakrishna's Lîlâ as well. Nevertheless, there is some difference. In his Lîlâ there is the play of pure Sattwaguna. By the power of Sattwaguna a single word uttered by him awakens that sleeping serpent inside all (that is, awakens the Kundalinî or the dormant spiritual power in man), the door to the Divine Mother's

“theatre of wonders” flings open, indifference is created toward the objects of extreme attachment, relatives are converted into strangers and strangers into relatives, the very nature of the mind is transformed, the long and arduous path of reincarnations is instantly ended, the sense organs find new wholesome food, the old world is renovated, the soul is separated from the body, the essence of the Vedas and the Purânas manifest in the hearts of people, billions and trillions of things become the One, the One becomes the Infinite having been transformed into the infinite varieties of beauty, color, smell, taste and sound. This power of Sattwaguna makes the opposites “good and bad” lie together in the same bed. It also makes God—in whose presence the divinities, Indra, Chandra, Vâyu, Varuna and Yama tremble out of fear—become dearer than one’s own self. All these wonderful things happened during Srî Râmakrishna’s Lîlâ. The activities of the external powers of God take place in the domain of sense perception. That’s why they can be described through words. Although the activities of God’s internal powers seem to be within sense perception, they are not really so. It’s impossible to describe them. That is why I’ve been telling you repeatedly that the Lîlâ of Ramakrishna can be experienced, but it cannot be described. One who has experienced Srî Râmakrishna’s Lîlâ slowly but steadily can never talk about it. It’s like watching that “theatre of wonders.” Can it be described through words, or is it possible to make anyone else understand it?

Please listen carefully as to how Srî Râmakrishna is revealed and concealed at the same time and how he is both very simple as well as complicated. His birthplace was in a place that was practically unknown to most people before his birth. His ancestral home is situated in a respectable neighborhood of the village. This neighborhood is at one end of the village, very close to where people belonging to some lower castes, such as the Doms and Jolas, lived. Close to that was a cremation ground—a dirty patch of fallow land covered with various bushes that was the playground of carcass-loving vultures and foxes. Next to it was a canal. It was unsafe to go there at night. Srî Râmakrishna’s father owned only a small piece of property measuring one and a half Bighâs. They were very poor—poor but respectable. Their modest house had walls made of bamboo. The family was too poor to use wooden walls. They had their family shrine in a small hut. They also had a kitchen, and a little hut where paddy would be husked by a foot-operated husking machine. Due to lack of space in the residential part of the house Srî Râmakrishna was born in this hut. The woman who took care of him at the time of his birth was a young widow from a blacksmith family. There were wealthy neighbors who had large families with quite a few children. But Srî Râmakrishna wouldn’t mix with those children. He would prefer to mix with the children of day-laborers. He would spend most of his time with them. He would play with them and join them in grazing cattle. He didn’t show the slightest interest in studies. With much effort he learned to do simple arithmetic. He also learned the alphabet and could write the holy names of God on palm leaves (the substitute for paper in rural India at that time). And there ended his education! When he was a young man, he started working as a priest in a temple. The temple was owned by a person belonging to the Kaivarta caste. That being a lower caste, people belonging to the higher castes wouldn’t openly eat the Prasâda (food sanctified by offering it to the deity) distributed by the temple. The owner of the temple was the famous Rânî Râsmani. She made excellent arrangements for the worship of Bhavatârinî and Râdhâkânta, the two deities she installed at the temple. I’ve heard that a lot of Prasâda had to be thrown into the river Gangâ because there were not enough people willing to eat it. As said earlier, Srî Râmakrishna was the priest at that temple. Unlike the other priests there, Srî Râmakrishna didn’t observe the traditional rules of worship. He performed the worship of the deities out of pure love and devotion. He didn’t care for ritualistic formalities. Srî Râmakrishna’s

nature was diametrically opposite to that of other people. That's why the ritualists determined that he was insane. Then his elder brother Râmkumâr took Srî Râmakrishna to their village home and arranged for his marriage. The gentleman whose daughter Srî Râmakrishna married was also a brahmin priest. He was very poor, had to support five or six family members, and lived in great financial difficulty. According to the local custom, Srî Râmakrishna had to pay a dowry of three hundred Rupees for his marriage—a fairly large sum in those days. Srî Râmakrishna's nature was like that of a boy. In him there was no trace of the three Gunas—Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. He had no interest in “lust and gold.” He hated anything associated with “lust and gold.” Also, he would occasionally enter into states of high spiritual ecstasy. Oblivious of the external world, at times he wasn't even aware if he had clothes on or not. Moreover, he was fond of singing spiritual songs in his beautiful voice. His behavior was just the opposite of other people's. As a result, his in-laws also decided that he was mad. Srî Râmakrishna returned to Calcutta. While performing the daily worship of Mother Bhavatârinî in the temple, intense spiritual emotions arose like a storm in his heart. He started performing rigorous spiritual practices. Most of these practices were hidden from other people's eyes. During that period of intense spiritual practice his behavior became strange. Sometimes he behaved like a child, sometimes like a mad man, and sometimes like a ghoul. For example, he would sometimes lie in the bed of Mother Bhavatârinî, sometimes he would climb a tree and start urinating from it, and sometimes he would go beyond all abhorrence of dirt and filth. Everybody, from high class scholarly brahmins to lower class people, decided that Srî Râmakrishna had gone totally insane. When he finally became normal on completion of his Sâdhanâ (spiritual practices) he eagerly wanted to give to people Jnâna (spiritual knowledge), Bhakti (pure love of God), Chaitanya (spiritual consciousness), and Îshwara-tattwa (truths about God). But most people were attached to “lust and gold,” scholastic vanity, honor and fame. They paid no heed to Srî Râmakrishna's words. He then started going from door-to-door to find those who would accept his teachings. He looked for pure souls, holy people, and scholars with scriptural knowledge. He went and met them in their homes or Ashramas. But not one appreciated him. Nobody even offered him food when he was hungry. Besides, his body was very soft, as though made of butter. To walk on foot was difficult for him because the soft soles of his feet would bleed. Once the sharp edge of a Luchi cut his hand (Luchi is a kind of flat bread deep-fried in butter. Such bread is usually very soft.)! This will give you some idea of the softness of his body. For this reason he needed a carriage to go even the shortest distance, and he had to depend on others to pay the carriage hire.

Please try to understand one thing here. Srî Râmakrishna was the crest jewel of renunciate monks. He renounced all sense objects with “body, mind and speech.” His body literally recoiled from any physical contact with women and gold. He never craved worldly things. He got rid of all sense of want. Mother Kâlî was his life and soul. He talked with Mother Kâlî all the time. Whenever he wanted he would lose himself in thought of Her. Why would he go from door-to-door like a beggar? If you want to know the reason for this I ask you to look at the clouds in the sky. This is the rainy season, the clouds didn't have to be asked to come. They've come on their own and have been restlessly moving all over the sky. Why have they come? They have come to bring the rains and relieve the earth of heat and to help it grow food grains. Srî Râmakrishna, who is an infinite ocean of compassion and an Incarnation of mercy, was like these clouds. He was as restless as the clouds, but his restlessness was for a special reason. His love and compassion for humanity made him restless. He would eagerly go to people from door-to-door. His only purpose was to save and soothe humankind from all kinds of suffering by giving them spiritual teachings. His compassion knew no bounds. It's impossible for human beings to

understand even a tiny bit of his compassion. Let me tell you about it. He was the very embodiment of love and compassion. He also had great endurance. Mother Earth is a beautiful example of compassion and endurance. People dig into her with spades, ploughs, etc. but she never complains or becomes angry. She helps people and gives them so many good things. Similarly, many people said many bad things about Srî Râmakrishna. Some even made him suffer physically. Many misbehaved with him. Yet, he only thought of their well-being and did what was best for them. I've told you that he had a very soft and delicate body. Even the slightest irregularity or physical strain made him sick. Once he was suffering from severe stomach trouble. His only food was sago water that he would take once a day. Even in that condition he wouldn't stop visiting people and giving them his teachings. Another person lived with Srî Râmakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple. His name was Hâzrâ and he practiced asceticism . One day Hâzrâ told Srî Râmakrishna, "You are spiritually enlightened and a liberated soul. You also have mastery over Samâdhi. Why don't you remain absorbed in God? Besides, you are not well. What's the use of running here and there?" Srî Râmakrishna was like a child. He trusted everybody. Hearing Hâzrâ's words he thought, "That's right. Why should I go here and there to give spiritual teachings to people?" Thinking in that way, he went to the Panchavaî (a grove of trees). There his mood suddenly changed. Overwhelmed by compassion he started weeping profusely. After returning to Hâzrâ he said, "I won't listen to you anymore. Even though I'm on a sago water diet, I'll still go from door to door to help people." From this try to understand the extent of his compassion! Is it possible for ordinary people to have such compassion? Human beings are extremely selfish. They won't do a single thing that isn't in their self-interest. So it's not possible for them to be compassionate, nor can they understand the greatness and glory of compassion.

In this age people don't care for a guru. Nowadays they don't even care to think of God, nor do they believe in God's existence. Out of millions of people a small number of those who have faith in God have decided that it's impossible to experience God. They think that it is a mere grandma's tale that in ancient times devotees and holy people experienced God. What happened to them isn't worth considering. Those days are gone forever! A few relatively noble people among millions have only understood the importance of philanthropy, nothing higher. This is the modern trend. This is the period during which Srî Râmakrishna has incarnated on earth. How has he incarnated? He has incarnated without any display of external power or grandeur. There is no external show to let people know that he is a divine incarnation. He is extremely simple, straightforward, and poorly-clad. The One who is Brahman to the seekers of knowledge, Bhagavân (God) to the devotees, consort of the Primal Power, Mahâdevî, and the Deity responsible for creation, preservation and dissolution of the universe, is now a poor, uneducated brahmin walking from door-to-door to people's homes. How can ordinary human beings understand all this? When God incarnates on earth in the garb of an Avatâra and performs His Lîlâ it's extremely difficult to recognize Him. Have you understood now what's meant by the expressions "revealed yet concealed" and "the simplest yet the most complicated"?

Among all aspects of God the most wonderful and incomprehensible is His assumption of a body and descent on earth—the plane of His Lîlâ. God is Divine Effulgence according to the Yogîs and the Jnânîs. The devotees look upon God as Personified Love. For this reason the attitude of a devotee is one thousand times better and much more desirable than the attitude of a Jnânî or a Yogî. The attitude of a Yogî or a Jnânî is monotonous. They enjoy God in only one way. But the devotee enjoys God in many different ways. Srî Râmakrishna has explained this with the analogy

of Sehnâi (a kind of flute) playing. There are usually two players. One of them plays a single note continuously, while the other one plays various melodies. Similarly, a Jnânî or Yogî tastes God in only one way, as though they like to taste only one dish. The devotees taste God in many different ways. It's like tasting various dishes—some hot, some bland, some sour. Don't think, however, that God shows only His divine form to the devotees. He also lets them know that He has become the world, its creatures, and the twenty-four cosmic principles mentioned in the Sâmkhya philosophy. He lets them know that He exists as the Âtman (Indwelling Self) in the universe and has a formless aspect as well. The Jnânîs and Yogîs have no inkling of the spiritual disposition of the devotees. God is fully aware of the different attitudes of devotees.

Srî Râmakrishna explained this by quoting a conversation between Srî Râma and his greatest devotee, Hanumân. One day Sri Râma asked Hanumân, “How do you look upon me?”

Hanumân replied, “O Râma, sometimes I see that you are my Master and I'm your servant. At another time, I see that you are a great fire and I'm a spark. Then again, I see that you and I are one.”

Srî Râma revealed all his divine aspects to Hanumân. But Hanumân preferred to remain a devotee and held onto the attitude that Srî Râma was the Master and he was his servant. He ignored the other two attitudes. If one gets the taste of pure love of God one doesn't want any other attitude. The divine sage Nârada also had the attitude of a devotee. Compared to a Yogî or a Jnânî, devotees have to undergo a million times more suffering. But such is their nature that in order to attain pure love of God, they treat their sufferings as valuable ornaments.

Uddhava²⁸ talked to the Gopîs of Vrindaban about the disciplines of Yoga, but they paid no heed to his words because they were devotees of Krishna. The unbearable pain of separation from their beloved Lord, Krishna, turned their golden complexion black. They shed tears constantly to get the vision of Krishna. They wouldn't close their eyes lest they miss the sight of Krishna.

One who has tasted rock candy syrup won't eat molasses ever again. Similarly, those who have enjoyed seeing God even once with open eyes do not want to see Him with eyes closed (by meditating on God with eyes closed as prescribed by Yoga). Brother, the devotional attitude of the Gopîs is wonderful. Compared to that attitude the joy attained through Yoga or the bliss of Brahman attained by the Jnânîs is nothing.

Let me quote a few lines from *Srî Srî Râmakrishna Punthi*.

The great sages and ascetics are adored and venerated

By beings in all the three worlds.

Observing fasts throughout their lives,

Taking shelter under trees,

Performing many austerities,

They live a life of extreme renunciation.

All their striving, however, is for just a trifle.

Scared of the three types of affliction—

²⁸ The name of a follower of Srî Krishna.

Material, spiritual and divine—they yearn to go beyond,

Attaining bliss through Yoga

Or the bliss of Brahman.

Alas, they have no interest in Braja’s events.

One drop of bliss enjoyed by the Gopîs of Braja

Is far superior to the bliss attained through Yoga

Or the bliss of Brahman-consciousness.

It is extremely difficult to recognize God in human form. No matter in which form or in whatever manner God incarnates, it is impossible to recognize Him unless He gives us the power to do so. He can only be known by developing spiritual consciousness (Chaitanya).

I can see clearly that the body of Srî Râmakrishna is no other than solidified Divine Consciousness. In cold weather water freezes and becomes ice. Similarly, through devotion or Bhakti, Divine Consciousness has become Srî Râmakrishna’s body. God-given spiritual consciousness is the only means to attain this personified Divine Consciousness. Only through spiritual consciousness can we recognize personified Divine Consciousness. I don’t see much difference between pure love of God (Bhakti) and spiritual consciousness (Chaitanya). Both are the same. When the mind becomes pure, it is called spiritual consciousness.

It is seen in this world that people can recognize others who are similar to them in nature. That’s why those endowed with spiritual consciousness can attain Personified Divine Consciousness. On the other hand, those lacking spiritual consciousness can only recognize and attain objects (sense objects) belonging to the domain of Avidyâ-Mâyâ. The Personified Divine Consciousness grants spiritual consciousness to devotees so that they can attain Him. Devendra Bâbu, a devotee of Srî Râmakrishna, once became overwhelmed with spiritual ecstasy when he recognized the divine nature of Srî Râmakrishna. Srî Râmakrishna immediately understood what had happened to Devendra Bâbu. He then smiled and started singing a song. This was the song:

O Kusha and Lava, why are you so proud of taking me as your prisoner? Had I not allowed myself to be taken prisoner, would you be able to capture me?”²⁹

One with spiritual consciousness can recognize Personified God no matter how simply God is dressed. With the help of spiritual consciousness the devotees of Srî Râmakrishna see him as Omniscient God even though he used to wear the disguise of poverty and illiteracy. There is no outward demonstration of his divine power, yet the devotees see him as Omnipotent God. In spite of his finite human form they see him as limitless and infinite.

I would therefore ask you to develop faith in him, then all your wishes will be fulfilled. If you think that you’ll be able to have faith in him if he takes the forms of different deities or displays superhuman powers, then that faith will be no better than faithlessness.

Let me explain a little more clearly. For example you may think, “If Srî Râmakrishna becomes transformed into Kâlî, Krishna or Râma then I shall accept him as God.” That kind of thinking

²⁹ This song refers to an episode in the Bengali version of the *Râmâyana* written by Krittivâsa. According to this episode, Lord Râma was once defeated by his young sons, Lava and Kusha, and taken prisoner. At that time Lord Rama said this to his sons.

only proves that you lack faith. If you lack faith in one form of God (such as the Râmakrishna form) you also lack faith in any other form of God.

See how intelligent people are! To cross the ocean they have enough faith to trust just a log! In this terrible world (Samsâra) they easily trust Avidyâ Mâyâ and surrender to her their lives and hearts. But they argue over whether they should trust Srî Râmakrishna or have faith in him!

Well, I've acquired the wisdom of knowing how far people's intelligence goes. From what I've learnt I'm telling you, "Brother, don't chew your food, swallow it." Do you know what is meant by chewing? The attempt to develop faith through arguments and reasoning is called chewing the food. Arguments and reasoning can't take you to your spiritual goal. God is beyond logic, arguments and reasoning. He is beyond the reach of the senses and the mind.

Your sole possession is the mind. Is it ever possible for your mind to reach Him? It may at the most go only a part of the way. How can arguments, logic and reasoning help you? The easy way to reach Him is "to swallow." That means, to surrender to Him saying, "O Lord, do whatever you think best!" If you can't get Him immediately, take recourse to chanting His holy name.

As long as the mind isn't clean it goes on shouting and roaring and doing its tricks. But when it gets rid of its dirt, it behaves like a dog obedient to its master. Have you heard of people becoming possessed by ghosts? When the mind is unclean, it's like a person possessed by a ghost. When it's clean and pure, it's like a person who has got rid of the ghost.

To purify a dirty mind is like exorcising a person possessed by a ghost. This purification can be easily accomplished by chanting the holy name of God. One's heart becomes pure when one incessantly chants the holy name of God with a simple heart. Srî Râmakrishna has talked many times about the wonderful power of the holy name. The holy name of God itself is the seed, the tree and the fruit. God exists in His holy name. But people don't easily accept these ideas. So to set an example to people, Srî Râmakrishna himself chanted the holy name every morning and evening while dancing rhythmically and clapping his hands. He would become intoxicated while chanting the holy name. That intoxication would lead him to deep Samâdhi.

To experience Samâdhi, one has to perform intense spiritual practice in many incarnations. But Srî Râmakrishna has taught by his own example that Samâdhi can be attained just by chanting the holy name of God. He has also explained how one has Samadhi by the power of the holy name. For example, a Vaishnava (one who looks upon God as Vishnu) holy man started singing, "My beloved Gourânga is like a God-intoxicated elephant." Gradually the singer became spiritually intoxicated and couldn't complete the sentence. He started saying, "God-intoxicated elephant." When he became even more intoxicated, he could only utter the word "elephant." Then at the peak of his spiritual intoxication he couldn't even utter that word. He completely lost outer consciousness and entered into a deep Samâdhi.

According to Srî Râmakrishna, Nâradyâ Bhakti³⁰ means self-surrender to God, and hearing and chanting the holy name. Nâradyâ Bhakti is most suitable for this Kâlî era (Iron Age). Srî Râmakrishna was internally 100% a Jnânî, but externally he always used a shawl (wrapper) of Bhakti And he did that for the education of people.

An elephant has two kinds of teeth. Its tusks are visible from outside, but people cannot see the teeth inside the elephant's mouth. The elephant uses these teeth to chew its food. Similarly, Srî

³⁰ Devotional practices as prescribed by the sage Nârada.

Râmakrishna had Jnâna inside him. Others were not aware of it. His external mood of Bhakti (pure love of god) was meant to inspire others. Srî Râmakrishna used to sing these two songs in praise of the holy name of God:

Song # 1

O Shyâmâ, my only hope is in Thy hallowed name!
What need have I of Koshâ and Koshî? What need of smiles and conventions?
Thy name dissolves death's bonds, as Shiva has proclaimed,
And I myself am Shiva's servant; whom else should I obey?
O Mother, come what may, I shall repeat Thy name;
Why should I fret myself to death? To Shiva's words I cling.

Song # 2

If only I can pass away repeating Durgâ's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be?
I may have stolen a drink of wine, or killed a child unborn,
Or slain a woman or a cow,
Or even caused a brahmin's death;
But, though it all be true,
Nothing of this can make me feel the least uneasiness;
For through the power of Thy sweet name
My wretched soul may still aspire
Even to Brahmanhood.

Srî Râmakrishna used to be completely absorbed in divine fervor while singing these songs. Those who have seen him in that state could understand the wonderful power of the holy name. I know that as actors you sing this song composed by Girish Bâbu. The song talks about the glory of God's holy name.

Song

So sweet is the holy name of Hari! Chant Hari's name!
On the path of your desire you could have bought Hari's name.
But, alas, why didn't you ever have that desire?
If you just chant Hari's name once,
You won't ever be judged a sinner.
Incomparable is His compassion.

Be intoxicated by Hari's name;

Don't get involved in useless activities and forget Him.

Brother, there is no need for logic and reasoning. Just follow the path shown by Srî Râmakrishna. In course of time you will reach your spiritual goal. You don't have to study the *Gîtâ*, Vedânta or Sâmkhya philosophy, nor perform the Panchatapâ³¹ ritual. You needn't go and visit places of pilgrimage, or perform Japa and meditation. You don't have to become an all-renouncing monk, leaving behind your wife and children. There is no need to abandon your home and country or to perform severe spiritual austerities. Just hold onto Srî Râmakrishna who is the depository of compassion and the pilot in the voyage of life. Results will come quickly.

Acquiring spiritual illumination after many years of intense spiritual practice, Srî Râmakrishna saved the fruits of his spiritual austerities for the benefit of the hapless, homeless, and poverty-stricken people who have never done any spiritual practice in their lives.

Just as a father's hard-earned wealth is inherited by his lazy and worthless son, so also the worst of those who have taken refuge in Srî Râmakrishna will inherit Srî Râmakrishna's spiritual wealth. Don't worry, look upon Srî Râmakrishna as your very own and go on having fun in this world. You will see that in course of time he has taken you beyond the sea of worldly bondage. But I must caution you, you may do whatever else you want to do, but you must never leave the boatman.

Srî Râmakrishna is so compassionate that he gladly accompanies those who take refuge in him to any place where they want him to go. He also saves them from all dangers. I warn you again and again not to abandon Srî Râmakrishna. If you say, "I'm impure, I'm driven by my impure mind, I'm under the control of lust and anger, and I've committed many sins. Do I have any way of salvation?" Then I would say that you haven't really seen Srî Râmakrishna. You haven't been able to know the extent of his compassion. God keeps a wonderful thing called compassion securely in His store. Srî Râmakrishna's body is made of that compassion. He has no other ingredient in his body other than compassion.

Do you want to know why the Creator has taken the form of Srî Râmakrishna out of compassion? It is for the salvation of despicable, foolish and untouchable beings like us. Srî Râmakrishna is the savior of the lowly and the refuge of the poor. In spite of that you've been thinking that you're an impure soul, you've an impure mind, and you're under the control of evil tendencies. As a result, you're feeling helpless in this world. Shame on your thinking!

The police arrest a thief with all his accomplices. Similarly, Srî Râmakrishna, the compassionate one, will arrest you along with your mind and its evil tendencies. In the court of law the criminals are sentenced to prison. But in the court of compassionate Srî Râmakrishna everyone is set free from the prison of this world. The police uphold justice, Srî Râmakrishna showers compassion. So powerful are the waves of Srî Râmakrishna's compassion that they can wash away thousands of Himalayan mountains of sins committed by human beings. Srî Râmakrishna has made a rule that anyone who takes refuge in him will soon be drawn closer. Any person who appears in Srî Râmakrishna's court and sees his compassionate face becomes instantly free. That person's mind is set free and his accumulated Karma-Phala is completely annihilated. From this

³¹ A ritual in which the spiritual aspirant has to chant the holy name of God being surrounded by five hot stoves.

you must have realized the glory of both God's holy name and Srî Râmakrishna. Beware! Never stop chanting the holy name of Srî Râmakrishna, the compassionate one.

According to Srî Râmakrishna, objecting to the idea of Personal God using reason is a sign of ignorance. Srî Râmakrishna experienced God in all His different aspects through the disciplines of every major faith. To resolve the disputes between the adherents of different faiths he said, "What you all have been saying is true. Follow your own spiritual paths honestly, you will surely experience God in course of time."

This universal and all-embracing attitude toward religions is only to be seen in Srî Râmakrishna. Now this attitude is also noticeable among the devotees who have taken refuge in him. Wherever his grace extends, no malice or animosity toward different faiths can exist. The followers of Srî Râmakrishna accept all different aspects of God with great respect. They may differ from one another in their views, but they never harbor any malice or animosity in their hearts. This characteristic is very prominent among Srî Râmakrishna's devotees. Just as children inherit the nature of their parents, so also Srî Râmakrishna's devotees have inherited this broadmindedness from Srî Râmakrishna.

I've told you again and again about Srî Râmakrishna's spiritual attitude. As he displays this universally acceptable, universally praised, all-encompassing attitude he is fit to be called a world teacher. He can help all irrespective of their individual spiritual paths or faiths.

The sunlight reveals the colorful world . So also many great spiritual truths of different faiths have been revealed during Srî Râmakrishna's Lîlâ. The manifestation of this universal, all-encompassing divine truth is only possible in God. Having gone through austere spiritual practices enjoined by different religions, Srî Râmakrishna experienced the same God and proved that all religions are true. Nobody other than God could have accomplished it. Only God can play the flute of Divine Consciousness (Chaitanya) and awaken beings who are enslaved by Mâyâ and immersed in the intense darkness of worldliness, sense pleasures, lust, greed, and stupidity.

How is it possible for anyone, who hasn't studied any scriptures to effectively, explain the most abstruse religious truths in simple language and with the help of parables to the renowned scholars of scriptures? Can anyone other than God do that? In whichever being we see the full manifestation of divinity, we should call that being God. Wherever the devotees see the manifestation of Krishna's characteristics, they think that they are seeing Krishna there.

Some followers of Yoga say that every man can become Krishna through Sâdhanâ (spiritual practices). But it isn't believable because Srî Râmakrishna didn't accept this idea. Through a parable Srî Râmakrishna has told us that a devotee has no alternative but to always remain subservient to God. Even the highest position that a devotee can acquire is totally dependent on God's mercy and grace.

Once a devotee was stroking the feet of God when God was lying in bed. After a while the devotee felt tired and sleepy. God noticed it and out of compassion said to him, "You are sleepy. Lie next to me in my bed and sleep." It was impossible for the devotee to even think of sleeping in his Master's bed! But what was impossible became possible only thorough God's compassion and grace. This shows that a creature can never be equal to the Creator. [That is, the master and servant relationship always exists between God and His devotee.]

Out of ignorance one may or may not accept this, but one in whom there is full manifestation of God's power has to be recognized as God. Otherwise the scriptures such as the *Gîtâ* and the

Purânas must be false. The qualities that are ascribed to God by the Purânas and other scriptures are all present in Srî Râmakrishna. But so wonderful is the play of Mahâmâyâ that She lets people recognize a divine incarnation, but doesn't give them the power to accept him.

I explained this once to you, but I'll explain it again. When Srî Râmakrishna was playing his role as a spiritual aspirant and going through many spiritual austerities, a woman appeared at the Dakshineswar temple. She was as devoted to God as she was learned. In scriptural debates no pundit could defeat her. In Srî Râmakrishna's Lîlâ she is known as the brâhmanî (a brahmin woman). One day Mathur Bâbu invited many renowned scholars of the scriptures to come and talk to her. The brâhmanî told them that she had come to know from her scriptural knowledge and intuition that Srî Râmakrishna was a divine incarnation. But the pundits wouldn't accept it. Then she pointed out to them that the characteristics of a divine incarnation recorded in the Purânas and other scriptures were all present in Srî Râmakrishna.

The pundits had to agree that all the characteristics recorded in the scriptures were identical with those present in Srî Râmakrishna. Still they couldn't wholeheartedly accept Srî Râmakrishna as God. From this we can learn that the scriptures may help one to know God, but not to accept or acknowledge God. Even a little common sense can help us to admit that where the characteristics of an object are present, the object must also be present there. Wherever there is a shadow the object casting that shadow must also be there.

Suppose you have learnt by studying botany that there is a tree called the banyan tree. The tree has some special characteristics. Its shadow is warm in winter but cool in summer. Let me suppose you have come to know these characteristics through your studies, but you've never seen a Banyan tree. If you suddenly see one, you won't be able to recognize it as a Banyan tree.

Suppose you're travelling on foot in summer in a foreign country. You are thirsty, perspiring and tired. Suddenly you see a big tree and take shelter in its shade. The shade is very cool and pleasant. Soon you realize that it must be the banyan tree about which you've read. You decide not to leave that area until winter comes. In the winter you go and sit under that tree and can feel its warmth. Now, is there any way to deny that it's a Banyan tree? So also it's not possible to deny that Srî Râmakrishna is a divine incarnation because he has all the characteristics of a divine incarnation.

Let me conclude by singing a song.

Song

Do I worship Râmakrishna for nothing?
My shoreless ocean of love is he,
He is the compassionate boatman
To ferry me from here to the other world.
My greatest friend is he,
He sought me and found me on his own.
He never minds my faults.
He agrees to give whatever I ask for.
He is always behind me in case I slip into difficulties.
I try but can never understand
If he adores me or I adore him!
He is my very own;

He takes care of me as though I'm his life.
Who is there as good a friend as my Srî Râmakrishna?