

CHICAGO CALLING



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RELIGION MEANS KEEPING PROMISES

Many of us do not know what religion is, although all of us very sincerely try to practice it by visiting holy places, fasting, counting the holy beads, and giving in charity. But we still feel there is something lacking. We don't get the satisfaction of religion, and society doesn't get the benefit of these practices. Rather, some people try to satisfy their selfish goals by using one religion against another. As a result the educated younger generation is losing their faith in religion.

Then, what is religion?

Let us go back to the Upanishads. In the Katha Upanishad we find the conversation between a father, who loves his worldly possessions too much but at the same time wants to appear to be a spiritual man. His name is Vajasravasa and his son is Nachiketa. Once Vajasravasa promised before everyone that he would give all his property in charity. In those days cows were considered to be the wealth of a householder. On the promised day he began distributing his cows among the poor people. His young son, Nachiketa, noticed that his father in reality was cheating the people. He was giving away the old cows, which were of not much use, and keeping the best cows for himself. Being a pious son, Nachiketa felt sorry for his father's duplicity and wanted to save him from the bad karma. He said to his father, "O father, being your son, I am also your property. To whom will you give me?" When the son asked again and again, Vajasravasa became angry and said, "Well, I will give you to Yama, the King of Death." His devoted son, Nachiketa, although a bit surprised, prepared himself to go to the kingdom of Death. Seeing his son's seriousness, his father said, "My dear son, don't go to death. I didn't really mean it." Now, from the words of Nachiketa we find the definition of true religion. "O Father, once you make a promise you must keep it at any cost. Otherwise the whole human society will break down and be

filled with irreligious activities. Please remember that your ancestors all respected promises and by that kept religion alive. If you fail to keep your promises, it will hurt religion and, following your example, future generations will be come irreligious."

From this story we learn that religion is keeping our promises.

The story of King Shibi is another example of keeping our promises at any cost. In the Purana we find the story that a just king, Shibi, took an oath to protect anyone who came to him for protection— Otherwise why take the throne! Why become a king! It so happened that Indra and Dharma wanted to test the sincerity of King Shibi in keeping his promise. Dharma became a pigeon and Indra became a falcon. The falcon attacked the pigeon, and the pigeon fled to King Shibi for his protection. Shibi, being a great person, assured the pigeon that no one would harm it. In the meantime, the ferocious falcon reached the court of King Shibi and asked the king to give him the pigeon. "O King, I am hungry and that pigeon is my food." The king, Shibi, replied, "I understand that you are hungry and you need meat, and I will give you other meat, but not the pigeon. I have given my word to protect him. "No, no," said the falcon, " I need the pigeon or your flesh, O King. No other meat is acceptable to me." "Well then, you will get the same amount of my flesh as the weight of the pigeon." A balance was brought and Shibi put the pigeon on one side and his own flesh on the other. And lo, the pigeon was becoming heavier and heavier, and no amount of flesh from the king was sufficient. The king's men were concerned, and they requested the king to stop, but the pious king said, "I cannot break my promise even if I die." Then the gods took their own forms and blessed the king, saying, "O King, you are truly a man of religion."

We find the same in the life of Sri Ramachandra. His father, King Dasarathra, was ready to break his promise out of love for his son, Sri Ramachandra, but Sri Ramachandra persuaded his father to keep his promise saying, "O father, remember the tradition of the Raghu Dynasty that no one of this family will break his promise even if it causes his death."

We find the same truth practiced and propagated by Sri Ramakrishna. His mother promised to his newly married wife, Sarada Devi, that her son would give golden bangles to her. To keep his mother's promise, Sri Ramakrishna, the man of complete renunciation, arranged to collect the money to purchase two golden bangles. He breathed a sign of relief when he found that his money was sufficient to purchase the two golden bangles, "Ah, the promise of my mother has been kept." We find how sincere Sri Ramakrishna was to keep his word. Once he promised his neighbor that he would visit him, but for some reason he forgot. When he went to bed, he suddenly remembered his promise. He got up from the bed, took a

lantern, and walked to his neighbor's door. He put his foot on the doorstep and said, "Hey, I kept my promise."

Religion is keeping promises.

In human society you find that everyone is taking an oath when he assumes a position like president, minister or judge. Each and every one is promising to perform his duties according to the rule of the country. At the time of marriage the bride and groom take a vow before the people that they will love, honor and protect each other until death. At the time of sannyas a Hindu monk takes vows before his religious teacher and the assembled monks that he will never break the vows of chastity, poverty and non-violence. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "From me no danger be to aught that lives." Catholic monks also take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

If every one of us, in our different positions, keep our promises, we will practice true religion, and our human society will become a heaven on earth.



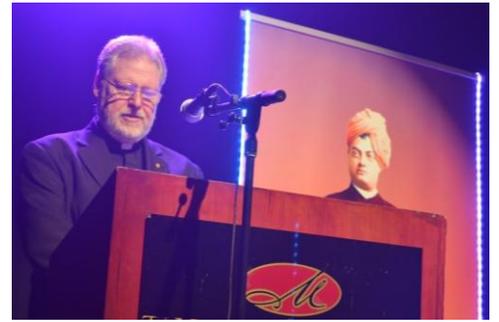
“Common men talk bagfuls of religion but do not practise even a grain of it. The wise man speaks a little, even though his whole life is religion expressed in action.”

-- Sri Ramakrishna

What It Means to be a Catholic

Father Thomas. A. Baima

(This article is based on the talk that was delivered at Vedanta Society of Chicago's 2018 Fall Banquet)



Swami Ishatmananda, President of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, fellow religious leaders, my long-time colleague Swami Varadananda, dear friends!

Allow me to begin this short presentation by bringing you the greetings of His Eminence Cardinal Blase Cupich, the Archbishop of Chicago, along with his good wishes for you on this occasion of your annual dinner. The Cardinal was pleased that the Hindu Community was represented in the delegation of the Council of religious leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, which attended the recent Ordination of our three new Bishops. It was affirming to the Catholic Community to see the presence of nearly 20 religious leaders. This is a testimony to the 30, or 40 or 50 years of institutional engagement and relationship between our communities. I emphasize the word institutional engagement deliberately. To foster harmony among peoples in an ad hoc approach simply does not work. Relationships cannot be invented in moments of crisis. Relationships must be there before the crisis occurs if they are to mediate harmony. Your community began its outreach 125 years ago with the World's Parliament of Religions. Your Christian neighbors, especially those in the Catholic Church, are grateful for this.

Let me now turn to the topic that's been given to me, "What does it mean to be a Catholic?." You see, both pastor Martin and I are Christians. When you use Catholic or Protestant, I would hope that you understand that it's an adjective modifying a noun. We are Christians first, our traditions by which we practice that religion are Catholic or Protestant. Is that okay brother? Okay. (Laughing

in the audience).

The origin of Christianity begins in the heart of God, the divine nature is love. Love is not something that comes from God. Love is God and God is love. If a Christian were to name the divine in the English language, he would be best served by creating a composite word, 'God - Love'. Within God-Love, before time, came an urge to create. This urge is not for pleasure, since God-Love is beyond such things. Rather, as Archbishop Joseph Reyes said, "It was for the multiplication of love." God created for this reason alone, that love might grow. Divine love by its very nature shares itself. Made in the images and likeness of God-Love, humanity had that essential quality or condition which makes loving possible and that condition is free will. Some humans chose to reject the offer of close friendship with God-Love. This rejection, which we name as sin, entered human experience and became a permanent part of it.

Sin is a separation or a false autonomy. False because it's not possible to be or exist independently of God. This false autonomy is the basis of human rejection of God-Love. The separation between humanity and God-Love required divine action to overcome it. As a permanent part of human nature, nothing we could do of our own power could heal the separation. A new offer of relationship by God-Love was required. So God-Love selected one of the nations of the earth to be a sign, an instrument of divine action. That nation, as Rabbi Glick has already told us, was the Jewish people. Through a process of self-disclosure, God-Love guided the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt, into an experience of rescue. God-Love guided them

through the naming of sin in the Ten Commandments, in calling to virtues through the commands to pray, celebrate sacred rituals, and to act with compassion. The guide in informing the Jewish people created a signing instrument which could extend and express God-Love.

Through almost 2000 years of faithfulness, this one people, guided by prophets, priests and kings, was the light of God's love among the nations. Then God-Love chose to graft onto this one people, all the nations.

In the small village in the northern part of Roman Palestine, a young woman became pregnant even though she was a virgin. Though no man had ever touched Mary, life grew within her. Nine months later a child was born, a son given, upon whom dominion rested, and the prophets called him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father Forever, Prince of Peace. Mary called him Jesus, a name which means 'God Saves'. It is here that Christianity, which began eternally in the heart of God, is made visible in the person, and in the event of Jesus. We, who are the disciples, have come to see the fullness of revelation from the God-Love in Him. For this reason we call Jesus, Lord, Son of God, Saviour. And it's in the teachings of Jesus that we have learnt something new about the inner life of the one God. Within the Godhead there exists relationships of Love as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is personal not merely as a way to relate to us, but in the very nature of divine being, and we would not know this, had Jesus not revealed it to us. In addition to this revelation of the inner life of God, the Lord Jesus taught a way of life that makes it possible for God-Love to be experienced as a reality in the world.

After his earthly ministry, He returned to his Father. He empowered and designated a few of his disciples to carry on the teaching. Thus, it's come to us, handed on by living witnesses. These living witnesses or apostles went out from Jerusalem, and they founded local assemblies of faith. Like the sacred assemblies of Israel of old that Rabbi Glick has already mentioned, these Christian

assemblies were the sign instrument of the Lord Jesus in that place. And it was by the example of Love that others became attracted to Christianity. It was through prayer, and life within the assemblies that the living witnesses were able to go forth and to preach. And it was through incorporation into these assemblies that an individual came to know the Lord Jesus, received formation in the teachings, was sanctified in prayer and guided in the Christian life. Within these assemblies believers entered into worship of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through the singing of psalms, hymns, and inspired songs, through the breaking of the bread and the prayers, they met the Lord Jesus, who sanctified their inner life. Through devotion to the teachings of the apostles, they came to know the revelation of God which Jesus had disclosed in Himself. Now, the primary elements of this teaching are that, there is one God who is Almighty, whom Jesus called Father. This one God is creator of Heaven and Earth. Jesus is divine and human, the only Son of this Father, and as we call God, Lord, we also call Jesus, Lord, for the Father is in Him and He is in the Father. The miracle of Jesus' virgin birth attests to this. Jesus suffered at the hand of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, giving His life in the process. He died and was buried as we all shall be, but He did not remain in the tomb, for God raised Him up out of death. His suffering and death broke the chains of sin for all who died before His coming, again making God-Love available to them. He rose from the dead, making life with God now and forever our blessed Hope. He ascended, returning to the presence of God-Love from which he came. And He sent all these spirits to create these assemblies of believers, and to be our constant guide in Faith, Hope, and Love. He will return to bring time to an end, to judge the living and the dead, and to complete creation with the inauguration of the Eternal Kingdom of God-Love. These assemblies of faith, which were formed and guided by the spirit, also taught a way of conduct not based on law but virtue. The Lord Jesus taught that all sin in

life could be overcome and rooted out of human experience by avoiding negative behaviour and substituting a corresponding virtue. These virtues are seen as active gifts of the Holy Spirit to the believer. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control are the spiritual means to the Christian life. This spiritual foundation of doctrines and virtues has been reflected on, over the centuries, in the development of our own understanding. Through prayer, holy women and men have penetrated to the depths of these mysteries. The assembly looked to four sources for insight, to develop the living faith carried in the mind of the whole people of Christ. These are the sources of theological

reflections. We name them as scripture, tradition, reason and experience.

Faith descended upon the assemblies, sometimes for preaching and sometimes for sacred rites. Baptism and Eucharist are the signs and means of the entrance into the assembly and of nourishment of the assembly's life. Confession of sins and anointing with oil heal the spiritual and physical life of the body, while marriage and ordination lead and guide the Christian family and the Christian Assembly. This description of Christianity in no way captures the breadth and height and depth of a religion, but it's my hope that the summary presents you with a glimpse of our lives. Thank You!

What It Means to be a Protestant

Rev. Herbert Martin

(This article is based on the talk that was delivered at Vedanta Society of Chicago's 2018 Fall Banquet)

Swami Varadananda, who had the audacity to invite me to appear here today, and to all my brothers and sisters, and fellow religious leaders and ladies and gentlemen! It is indeed an honor and a joy to be with you today! May I also express my deep appreciation for the hospitality and the warmth and generosity that we've received since we came through these doors. Thank you very much! I am so happy that Father Baima preceded me. He has made my task much easier, for he gave you a summary of Christology and the Theology of Christianity which I don't have to deal with. Let us say, "Amen!"

If there is any group of Christians who can appreciate this theme, 'Unity in Diversity', it will be the Protestant community, for we are one of the most diversified group of Christians anywhere in America, and on the face of the Earth. Protestant Christianity can trace its roots back to the Protestant Reformation of the 15th Century led by Martin Luther. Now, to be a Protestant Christian, in



many of the traditions, means to be a follower, an unapologetic unequivocal disciple of Jesus Christ, and to accept his teachings. To be a follower or a disciple of Jesus means that we Protestant Christians apply his teachings in the way we think, in the way we speak, and in the way we behave in our relations to others, without discrimination, bias or prejudice.

All Protestant Doctrine, all Protestant politics, all Protestant ethics, all Protestant liturgy and all Protestant social action, centers in one person—Jesus Christ! Jesus is the vicarious representative before God who has become the model of Protestant Christian discipleship, which demonstrates the interaction and cooperation with all the Christians and with one another, and, as the vicarious representative, Jesus Christ is the reality that shapes every believer's existence in this world.

As such, to be a Protestant Christian then means we must love our neighbors, and interact with empathy, and share their burdens and their joys as our own. Protestant Christians must also have a hermeneutic of Jesus to guide them in everyday life in their relations to one another, and others who may not be called by the name Christian. The Gospel of Jesus shapes Christian character in such a way that we must see beyond our primary Protestant loyalties, in terms of our personal selves, and see and recognize the need for peace and justice in communities of others and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

To be a Protestant Christian is to have empathy for others because empathy for others shows that we not only have the ability to reflect on the needs of others, but that we sacrificially enter their cause—their cause for justice, for equity, for fairness. Not as paternalistic outsiders from a socio-cultural hierarchy seeking our own selfish gratification, but helping those who are marginalized by powerful social agencies and to endeavor to transform those structures to be responsive to human need. It means to embrace, as Jesus did, the suffering of the poor, the voiceless, the powerless, and to struggle with them against the Imperial, systemic injustice of racism, gender inequality, ecclesiastical oppression, xenophobia and other types of marginalization. To be a Protestant Christian means to develop a Sermon on the Mount lifestyle and a Matthew 25 mission, to the least of these, as we seek to enter the kingdom of God, for the road to Heaven necessarily passes through a world that is fraught with the raw experience of human need as well as human abundance. To be a Protestant Christian, then, means to live a life of forgiveness, forgiving others and forgiving ourselves. We encourage ourselves and others to gratefully affirm ourselves as beings made in the image of God and as the children of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ. As God in Christ has forgiven us, we offer forgiveness to others unreservedly by the grace of God.

To be a Protestant Christian means we should

be fruitful. The Protestant Christian should resemble a fruit tree and not a Christmas tree because the artificial decorations on a Christmas tree are only tied on the branches; but fruit grows on a fruit tree. In other words, a Protestant Christian's life must not be an artificial human pretense but a genuine natural process of fruit bearing by the power of the Holy Spirit. To be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ means to know that when one suffers all suffer, and the death of any of our sisters and brothers diminishes all of us. May our gathering here today give us a fresh anointing of God's grace and the spirit that knows no politics, no economics, no race or clan but shows us a fresh way of Jesus Christ who continues to call us into the struggle for peace and justice and never releases us whether we fail or succeed. The love of nonviolence of Jesus, of Gandhi, of King, which led them to demonstrate justice both in India and America must be our passion also.

To be a Protestant Christian then, a true follower of Jesus Christ, is to stand against violence and all its manifestations, confessing our histories of bloodshed and war within and without our religious tradition. The Crusades, the Holy Wars, the Holocaust, the inquisitions and the practice of human slavery must be confessed today in the questions of peace and War. Protestant Christian ethics have sought to combine Jesus's message of radical love with the responsible exercise of power in our society.

With the exception of the principal pacifists as the Quakers and the Mennonites, who take the Sermon on the Mount injunction 'to turn the other cheek' literally, Protestant Christian leaders and theologians have sanctioned the use of violence in self-defense. The theory of just war is a shared point of view across major Protestant denominations. If the cause is just they say, in self-defense and for the protection of innocent life, war is justified. And out of this war, "just war" ideology, has risen support for the death penalty, although other institutions and traditions

condemn the death penalty as unjust, unnecessary. A lifestyle of non-violence is a continuing struggle within the Protestant Christian Community.

Today, as a broad interfaith gathering here, let us strive to create a world which John, the Revelator says in Revelation 21, where he sees a new Heaven and a new Earth. The world that Martin Luther King Jr called 'the Beloved Community,' a world that is indeed a global community wherein each of us is a global citizen, living by global ethics.

Then, let us resolve this day, by God's grace, to live according to the principles of this new world order of which Dr. King Jr. dreamed. Let us terminate racial discrimination and racial disparity, white supremacy and those policies that deny equality in living wages, healthcare, immigration, education and housing.

Let us eliminate the poverty that widens the gap between the Haves and the Have Nots and leads to the continuance of intergenerational

poverty and the strengthening of a cycle of intergenerational wealth. Let us pray for the coming of the day when no child goes naked and goes to bed hungry. Let us strive then to bring an end to the madness of war and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Help us Dear God to hear the voice of the oppressed, coming from abused women and children. Help us to heed their cries for help and for justice, then let us finally pray that one day the only law of the universe will be the law of love.

Then, let us pray that this great nation of ours, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, you know Thomas Jefferson wrote some good stuff even though he was a hypocrite, he wrote some pretty good stuff, "We hold these truths to be self-evident " he said, " that all men" and I say women, " are created equal endowed by our creator with inalienable rights, Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness". This is the truth to hold to and the spirit of the Sanskrit expression *Satyagraha!*



We have to surrender ourselves completely to the Lord with faith and devotion in Him, serve others to the best of our capacity, and never be a source of sorrow to anybody.

-- Sri Sarada Devi

What It Means to be a Jew

Rabbi Adir Glick

(This article is based on the talk that was delivered at Vedanta Society of Chicago's 2018 Fall Banquet)



Good Morning! Om Shalom! What an honor it is for me to be here today! And thank you to Swami Ishatmananda and Swami Varadananda for inviting me to this wonderful celebration of 125 years since Swami Vivekananda's historic speech at the World's Parliament of Religions, where he shared the ground-breaking vision of his teacher Sri Ramakrishna that he carried—the unity of religions as unique, distinctive paths to the realization of the one underlying reality that we call God.

It is always a pleasure for me to speak at Ramakrishna Missions, centers of true spirituality, that embody this vision of religion that is both wonderfully deep but also open at the same time. So, I've been asked to speak about Judaism. A colleague of mine once remarked that when you speak to a Hindu Swami, he mentions the word God almost in every sentence. You can speak to a Rabbi for 3 hours without using the word God. So, I seek to change that perception—speaking about God, not speaking for 3 hours! So, what is Judaism? Judaism is first a mother religion like Hinduism, that led to Christianity and Islam. An ancient mission that was given by God to a small people, the smallest of all people according to our scripture, the Torah, to be vessels to bring God's presence into this very world. Our religion was born when God appeared to the first Jew, Abraham, and said to him, "Go forth from your land, from the place of your birth, from your father's house to the land that I will show you."

Like the religions of India, our mission for God is linked to a land, our holy land Israel, which is the landscape of all of our religious and spiritual history, the place where our founding holy men and holy women, our forefathers, our patriarchs

and matriarchs, our prophets and prophet assessors walked the width and breadth of the holy land—of its sea, of its shores, of its hills and mountains—and imbued it with the atmosphere of holiness. Something that we still do, even Jews who are not very religious love to walk the width and breadth of the land. One of the reasons why I have always loved the stories of Sri Ramakrishna and of his disciples is that they remind me of our own prophets of those ancient days. Each one with their own voice and spiritual character, but each one resounding with the echo of the infinite and eternal! So when God said to Abraham, "lekh lekha...", go forth from your home, from your birth place, from your land, the word go forth "lekh lekha" in Hebrew literally means go to yourself. The path of Judaism is a path of encountering our own self, being transformed into vessels of God's presence. The first part of our history was played out in our holy land for 1500 years where we lived our spiritual lives centered around our temple in Jerusalem, we had just one temple. But then according to our tradition, that temple was a center point for God's presence in this world, and that temple had such holiness and hope, that all people in all the land lived under the presence of the Temple. This reminds me of Maharaj Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual dynamo, in some of the early days of Belur Math. Similarly we had our temple and our high priest.

Once a year on our holiest day of the year Yom Kippur, all the Jews in the entire land would gather in the courtyard of our Temple. The high priest would enter the holiest of the Holy, the inner sanctum of the Temple, house of the Ten Commandments that God gave Moses. The high priest would only go in the room once a year and

he had to be completely pure according to our tradition or the spiritual power of that inner sanctum would be too much for him and he would die!

And the Bible tells a story of two sons of the high priest who entered the inner sanctum of the Tabernacle unprepared, and they were struck dead. The danger was so real that on Yom Kippur, the high priest, when he would enter, the other priests would tie a red string around his ankle, should he not be able to take the holy atmosphere of the inner sanctum. But if he did survive, he would leave the holiest of the holy filled with that power and he would bless all the people saying out loud God's sacred ineffable name in our tradition. His words would send a spiritual blast that would purify the hundreds of thousands of millions in the courtyard and raise their minds to a new consciousness. But after 1500 years our fate changed, our Karma, and God had a different plan for us, and our destiny became tragic. Our temple was destroyed, and Jews were exiled through all the lands of the Earth, to Cochin in India, to China, to Africa, to Europe, all over the world. The way we understand it is that our mission became to be vessels for God's presence in all of those places in the world. The temple was destroyed but we are taught that God's presence, the female presence of God, śekīnah, the shakti followed us into Exile. So, what has been our spiritual path for the past 2000 years, without a temple, without a Holy Land? This has been the path of the rabbis, the names of our sages who saved our religion after the destruction of our Temple, and I am a rabbi so I'm part of that spiritual lineage.

According to one of our first initial scriptures, the path of Judaism is, first, learning our scripture, the Torah, an intellectual and spiritual path of wisdom and learning. Second, is the path of worship and prayer, and constant recollection of God. And finally, the third element of our path includes deeds of loving kindness, bringing God into the concrete world through our good actions and through our service to humanity, and the planet. So, let me tell you a little bit more in detail,

about these three paths.

The first I mentioned is the path of Torah, of our scriptures, of learning, of the intellect. We are people who love to ask questions and come to understand the nature of the world, the nature of the whole universe, of this world and other lokas as well. There is a French movie where a man (who is not Jewish) is fleeing criminals and he disguises himself as a rabbi and asks somebody, how can I pretend to be a rabbi? Somebody says to him if somebody asks you a question just ask him another question back. So our Torah, our scriptures, through all of these questions of ours, outline a path of how to live a Godly life and Godly existence. It deals with every aspect of life. And Talmud, our other sacred scripture which was compiled in Babylon and Israel over a thousand years ago, examines every detail of life - which shoelace does God want us to tie first, right or left, and how does a Godly person act when they find a lost object on the street, or when their animal hurts another animal in a public area. All the mundane details of how we mold our lives and how we live by God's will is included. And we think and debate this endlessly, believing that by doing so we are bringing God's presence into this world. We also ask about the deepest questions of life, about the heavens and the worlds that make up the spiritual realm. What exactly happens in these other realms we ask, how do the higher and lower worlds interact with each other. How do the Divine blessings flow into our world, into our prayers and into our meditation. This is the domain of kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. One of the founding stories of Shri Ramakrishna is of his coming down to this world and on his way waking up Swami Vivekananda, deep in meditation, saying that the world is burning. This is a story that we relate to and some of us would ask what world exactly was that and who else was there meditating with him. And then we have our devotional path. The path of encountering God and knowing God through prayer, meditation and ritual. In the Jewish path we have to do this all day, every day, carrying God's presence with us. 1

There is a beautiful Hasidic story that says doing that is like having a diamond in your pocket that is worth 10 million dollars. No matter what you are doing you would not forget that it's there, not while you're having an important business meeting, not while you're walking on the street, or getting together with your family or friends, because you know how precious it is. In a similar manner we are to keep within our mind God's presence, the most precious Jewel that exists. There is a song that says, "I placed the Lord before me and at all times". We also have a system of blessing that brings God's presence into every moment of the day, we have a blessing when we see a rainbow, we have a blessing before we eat, for every different item of food we have a different blessing, for vegetable, for fruit, for bread. To keep our mind on God we have to always ask ourselves, well, which blessing should I say first when before me I have grains, fruits and vegetables. We have a blessing for after we use the bathroom, thank you God that my pipes work, and we have a blessing when we see a beautiful person or when we cross the sea, for smelling a new fragrance. These blessings are also marked by three prayer services a day. You're supposed to say 100 blessings like this a day at least. And each starts with the same words "Blessed are you". And there's a beautiful Hasidic story of a rabbi who could never get past the words "Blessed are you" because he would go into deep meditation every time he would get to the word "you," at the thought that he could actually address God, that the infinite God could be in an intimate relationship with a small finite creature like all of us. This is, perhaps one can say, is the Jewish path of bhakti.

And then we have the path of doing deeds of loving kindness. This is bringing God's presence into the world by good deeds and serving others. This path has become very central today and is at the heart of the practice of many modern Jews. Perhaps this path is so important to us, of serving others because of our history, that we've seen our fair share of suffering and oppression over the past

two thousand years, culminating in the Holocaust 70 years ago when a third of our people were massacred. Or perhaps it was just our faith or Karma, since the very beginning when we started our journey as a nation so many thousands of years ago in Egypt, as slaves for 400 years. But this history has awoken in us a conviction that bringing God's presence into the world for us, is to be a force of compassion, revealing the Divinity present in all life by mirroring God's infinite kindness and care and love towards our fellow human beings. There is a story that illustrates this path of us. It's about a Hasidic spiritual master that when he died his son had no message, after 2 weeks, no message from him in a dream or in a vision. So he got worried and went to see his father's best friend and fellow Hasidic master, and asked him, "Have you heard from my Rabbi, from my father in a vision or in a dream?" And he said, "No, I have not heard from your father as yet. I have also been waiting for him. I think it is time for me to go see him." So the Rabbi went into deep meditation and ascended from world to world asking all the beings, "have you seen my friend?" and they said, "Yes he was here but he went further up." He went from world to world, from heavenly Jerusalem to the garden of Eden and got the same response until he came to a world with a very large forest and he crossed the forest to the other side. And as he walked through it, he saw a great ocean and he saw his friend standing by the ocean and as he approached it, he felt a great sadness overcome him and he heard a great cry coming from the waters. And his friend asked him, "Do you know what this is? This is the ocean of tears. Tears of all of the children of Israel and all of humanity and I told God I will not move from this spot until all the tears are dried up."

In this path of ours, we believe it is our duty to do whatever we can, even argue with God, as did our founder Abraham, to help save others from this burning world. When the Dalai Lama heard about this side of Judaism, he said, "Oh, you are a nation of Bodhisattvas!"

Like Avalokiteshvara the buddhist avatar, who said he would not accept full realization until all beings become realized, and then broke himself into a thousand Bodhisattvas to fulfill his mission. Through the practice of these three paths a human being, according to our tradition, can touch the infinite, can know God and become a divine instrument to uplift humanity in this world. Our task then is to be as Abraham, to know ourselves, to know God and to bring blessing into this world. It is not always easy for me as a Rabbi to be living here in Chicago, so far from our holy land in Jerusalem where I was born. We are back now in our holy land after 2,000 years. But I find solace that I am in Chicago where Swami Vivekananda spoke and enlightened and transfixed the comers to the World Parliament of Religions. So what was Swami Vivekananda's message to the World Parliament of Religions? The brotherhood and

sisterhood of mankind and the unity of religion! And this is the message we need to shepherd all people toward the unity in diversity of all religions and the path of serving God in man. The truth of God is real and can be experienced. I think of this message every time I walk on Michigan Avenue and see the street by the museum that's named after Swami Vivekananda. And I hold on to this message as I continue my work as a Rabbi as we all continue to work along all our different paths and religions, and ways, to fulfill the path that he opened up of bringing a new spiritual awakening to this country and to this continent.

When we say goodbye in Hebrew, we use the same word as hello because we hope to see each other soon! That word also means peace because when we greet each other, we hope for peace between us, peace between people and between all religions! Shalom, Peace, Om!



“The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor is a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.”

-- Swami Vivekananda

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: BRAHMAN PERSONIFIED

SWAMI ISHATMANANDA
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

यस्य वीर्येण कृतिनो वयम् च भुवनानि च
रामकृष्णं सदा वन्दे सर्वं स्वतन्त्रमीश्वरम्॥

*yasya vīryeṇa kṛtino vāyam ca bhuvanāni ca
rāmakṛṣṇam sadā vande sarvaṁ svatantramīśvaram.*

"I worship Ramakrishna the Supreme God, who is ever free and by whose power we, and the whole world, are sustained."

We worship Sri Ramakrishna to reach the goal of spiritual life—God-realization. Sri Ramakrishna, in order to help us to be successful gave the hint. He said, "You need not to do much, only try to know:

1. Who am I?
2. Who are you?
3. What is the relation between you and me?"

[*Sri Ramakrishna* by Brahmachari Akshay Chaitanya]

Who is Sri Ramakrishna? One day Sri Ramakrishna Dev said to the famous scholar, Gauri Pandit, "Do you know that Vaishnavacharan has declared that I am an Avatara. Vaishnavacharan was another very famous Sanskrit scholar of the time and a leader of the Vaishnava Society. He came to Dakshineswar along with a distinguished company of scholars at the invitation of Mathur Babu to have a scriptural debate with Brahmani, the lady ascetic and scholar of Tantra, about whether Sri Ramakrishna was an Avatara. On hearing the remark of Vaishnavacharan about Sri Ramakrishna, Gauri Pundit said, "Is that all he has to say about you? Then he has said very little. I am fully convinced that you are that Mine of Spiritual Power, only a small fraction of which descends to earth from time to time in the form of an Incarnation." [*Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, pg. 565]

Who is this Sri Ramakrishna from whom Avataras, Divine Incarnations, are formed?

All the biographers of Sri Ramakrishna have mentioned that even before his birth, his father, Kshudiram Chattopadhyaya, had a vision that Lord Vishnu wanted to be born as his son. Sri Ramakrishna's mother was also filled with the divine light of Lord Shiva, and she also saw Lord Brahma visiting her humble cottage.

Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahadev, the great gods of creation, sustaining and dissolution, were trying to manifest as the son of Kshudiram and Chandramani!

Who is this Sri Ramakrishna?

On May 30, 1897, Swami Vivekananda wrote to Sri Pramadas Mitra, "I have seen God in my life and am living according to His wishes."

Who is this Sri Ramakrishna? God?

We can't be certain, because in a letter to Swami Shivananda, Swamiji has changed his view. He wrote, "Brother, I don't have any doubt that Ramakrishna Paramahansa is the father of God". By the word "*Father of God*", Swamiji meant, *Param Brahma*, the Supreme Brahman.

According to Saiva and Tantra tradition, there is Shiva without action, who is known as Parama-Shiva. From Parama-Shiva comes Sada-Shiva, whose eyes are open, and the third stage is Kali.

In Vedanta tradition also we find Param-Brahman, Brahman without qualities or Gunas, also known as Nirguna-Brahman. From Nirguna-Brahman comes Saguna Brahman, Brahman with qualities, and from it creation begins.

Hence, we can now to some extent reply to the first question about Sri Ramakrishna — Who is Sri Ramakrishna?

In a Sanskrit stotra the answer has been given — Sri Ramakrishna is "*Para Brahma, Para Shakti Jagat-rupa Ramakrishna.*"

Now, the second question was, "Who are the Jivas?"

The answer would be that we are the same consciousness as Brahman only smeared with ego.

In the language of Tantra:

कुञ्चुकं आच्चादनं तेन आवृतं शिव -- जीव

kuñcukam āccādanam tena āvṛtam śiva – jīva

Vedanta says, *maya-upahita-chaitanya* (Consciousness covered by maya is an individual self.)

What else can we be?

Scripture states that Brahman has created this universe out of Itself. It is then clear that the Intelligent Cause and the Material Cause are both Brahman. As an example, Vedanta said, like the spider creating its web with its own saliva and, if it wishes, dwelling within it.

Similarly, this universe has been created by Brahman and is also sustained and destroyed by Brahman.

We human beings are also made of the same thing as our Creator. Vedantins have proved it through *avastha-traya* analysis.

Now, a very important question, "If we are the same as Brahman, the source of our creation, why don't we know that?"

Yes, this is the most subtle part of the game—the game of Life & Liberation. If we understand the rules of this game and follow them, we get liberation; if we fail to do so we go to Birth & Bondage.

Like a minefield in a war zone, the path to Liberation is covered with booby traps and mines, which are known as *Eshana* or desire. The most dangerous of these traps are Kama, Kanchana and Kirti (desire to be famous).

No doubt the Creator of the Jivas, the individual souls, created these hurdles, but at the same time He revealed to the Rishis the secrets of how to avoid these death traps.

Not only that, He has created great illumined

souls, gurus, to teach those methods, by understanding and practicing which, human beings can reach Liberation.

When necessary He, Himself, has taken birth in human form to guide humanity to the supreme goal.

This time we are fortunate that the Supreme Being, who manifested as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna in different yugas, has taken birth as Sri Ramakrishna

If we ask why, the great scripture, the Bhagavat (10/33/37), has given the answer: अनुग्रहाय भूतानां मानुषं देहमास्थितः *anugrahāya bhūtānām mānuṣam dehamāsthitaḥ* -- "Out of compassion for His best created thing, the human, He assumes human forms."

The great Lord, who took the form of Sri Ramakrishna first killed a demon named Doubt—and he brought back faith in the existence of God. He first realized it himself and then declared, "Truly, I say unto you that there is a God; one can see God and talk to Him.

When people were thinking, "Well, God realization is not for the householders because scripture clearly states that without renunciation Immortal Bliss cannot be achieved" — Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna assured them by saying, "You need not to give up anything except your ego."

He advised them to turn this tremendous power, ego, towards God.

He described four steps to turn the unripe ego into the ripe ego

1. Holy Company
2. Living in Solitude
3. Discrimination
4. Prayer

Human beings can be broadly divided into two groups according to their mental attitude.

First: Those who like God but love His creation, this world, known as 'Girihi', householder.

Second: Those who love God and do not like His creation, known as 'Tyagi', monk.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna is worshiped by both groups. In the words of Swami Virajanandaji

त्यागी गेही सेव्य नित्य (*tyāgī gehī sevya nitya*).

Both of these groups get sufficient inspiration from the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

Throughout the ages the paths to God became many. Argument, counter-argument, criticism and sideswiping, even war and blood-baths have happened in the name of God and religion. The chasm between the lovers of God with form and without form not only weakened human society, but also helped to grow many irreligious systems in the name of righteousness.

People with a pure heart and a genuine desire for God realization were groping in the darkness of confusion – "Which is the path for me?"

They found their answer in Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. "As many faiths, so many paths."

Philosophy that had become dark and gloomy in the closed Sanctum Sanctorum got illumined in the light of Vedanta practiced and propagated by Sri Ramakrishna. His famous question, "If you can see God with your eyes closed, can't you see Him with open eyes?" He rejuvenated Vedanta and Sanatana Dharma.

Vedanta became a powerful instrument to develop the material life and also a path of spiritual practice to realize the Atman.

To clear up this point let me quote Swami Vivekananda from his Karma Yoga, "As Jiva (individual self) and the Ishwara (God) are in essence the same, serving the Jiva and loving God must mean one and the same."

Both Tyagi and Grihi can follow this practice and reach their goals.

Dear devotees, let me share two great assurances of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna before I conclude.

In the "Great Master", Swami Saradanandaji has recorded Sri Ramakrishna saying, "Blessed souls having their last birth will surely come here."

Again, anyone who has truly called on God even once must come here."

Then Sri Ramakrishna Dev prayed to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, may those who come here (to Sri Ramakrishna) through sincere attraction, obtain perfection." [*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pg. 587]

Friends, like many millions in the past and many billions in the future, we are blessed that we have been able to come to our Thakur, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. Come let us pray! Since you have very kindly brought me here, please be gracious enough to understand who you are.



"Only two kinds of people can attain self-knowledge: those who are not encumbered at all with learning, that is to say, whose minds are not over-crowded with thoughts borrowed from others; and those who, after studying all the scriptures and sciences, have come to realise that they know nothing."

-- Sri Ramakrishna

Introduction to the Cover Page: *Sri Ramakrishna-murti of Shiva*

Br. Panchatapa

'Shiva' literally means 'auspicious'. The first mention of Shiva is found in Harappan civilization as Pashupati. During Vedic period he was manifested as deity Rudra who again became popular in the Puranic age as the great god, Mahadeva (Shiva). The cult of Shiva, later called Saivism is perhaps the most ancient monotheistic religion that is spread throughout the world.

Image of Shiva: He is conceived as wearing matted locks and tiger's skin. He rides a bull called Nandi and carries a trident. A ghost, Bhringi, is his attendant. Shiva is also worshipped through stone-emblems called Shivalinga.

In Hinduism, Shiva is the ultimate guru of all seven types of Yoga, namely: Jnana, Bhakti, Raja, Karma, Mantra, Tantra, and Hatha Yogas. He is the Lord of Yogis, who is ever in meditation for the good of the world.

Kshudiram and Chandramani, the parents of Sri Ramakrishna, were very devoted to Shiva. Kshudiram went on pilgrimages to Kashi and Rameshwaram by foot. From Rameshwaram, he bought a Shiva-linga and worshipped it daily with vilva leaves.

In the months of February and March vilva trees shed their leaves, making the worship of Shiva difficult. During that season, Kshudiram once was going to meet his nephew. He started early in the morning and walked several miles towards his destination when he saw a vilva tree on the way was already in new leaves. With utmost delight he gathered vilva leaves in a basket and walked back all the way to Kamarpukur. He reached home at about three in the afternoon, bathed, worshipped the Shiva with those vilva leaves and then only took his meal. He restarted his journey on the next morning. Such was the devotion of Kshudiram to Shiva!

According to one famous story in the Shiva

Purana, Shiva appeared before Brahma (the lord of creation) and Vishnu (the lord of sustenance) as a huge column of light. Brahma and Vishnu could not find the top or bottom of this light of Shiva and realized that Shiva was the greatest God. This manifestation of Shiva in the form of divine light out of Shiva-linga is called 'Lingodbhava Murti'.

Remarkably, Sri Ramakrishna manifested himself in the world similar to *Lingodbhava* Shiva. A flood of divine light emerged out of Shiva-linga of Yogi Shiva temple at Kamarpukur and entered the body of Chandramani. She felt that the light of Shiva entered in her womb and that she was pregnant. Thus the divine being Sri Ramakrishna was conceived and born out of the Joyti or Light of Shiva.

Sri Ramakrishna was born a few minutes before sunrise on February 18, 1836, three days after the Maha Shivaratri, the great night of Shiva. After doing the needful to Chandramani, when the mid-wife turned her attention to the new-born baby found that it had disappeared from the place where she had kept it! She took the lamp to look for the child and found that it had rolled down into the nearly hollow fire place. The child was lying there without crying, with its little body covered with ashes like Shiva! Based on the sign of the zodiac under which the child was born, Kshudiram named him Shambhuchandra, which is one of the names of Shiva. However, as Kshudiram also had a dream that Gadadhar-Vishnu of Gaya wants to come as his son, he finally went with the name Gadadhar.

When Gadadhar was about 9 years old, an open stage drama was supposed to be staged on the night of Shiva Ratri. The performer who was to act as Shiva had fallen ill. And Gadadhar had to act as Shiva, smearing body with ashes, hanging Rudraksha beads around neck, adorning head

with matted locks and a crescent moon, holding a trident in his hand etc.. His mind soared into Shiva consciousness as he entered the stage with slow and measured steps, stood motionless on the stage and the audience felt that Shiva Himself was standing before them. Gadadhar's friends has to take him back to home and he remained in that divine ecstasy rest of the Shivaratri night. He remained in that mood for three days. The birth tithi of Sri Ramakrishna is three days after Shiva Ratri. This can be looked as a transition from Shiva consciousness to Sri Ramakrishna awareness.

Apparently Sri Ramakrishna did not perform any special sadhana to realize Shiva as he did for Kali, Rama and Krishna. His devotion to Shiva and Shiva-manifestation was spontaneous.

In the whole of India, there are twelve most holy Shivalingas known as Jyotirlingas (the form of light column). In the Dakshineswar temple there are twelve Shiva temples too. As Sri Ramakrishna was born out of a beam of light from Jugi's Shiva Temple he himself was a living Jyotirlinga.

While in Dakshineswar one day Sri Ramakrishna was reciting the 'Shiva-Mahimna Stotra, a hymn composed by Pushpadanta in one of the Shiva temples. When he came to the verse that means: "*Oh Lord, if the Meru-mountain be the ink-tablet, the ocean the ink-pot, the heavenly tree be the pen, the earth the writing leaf and taking these if Sarada, the goddess of learning, writes at all times, even then the limit of Your virtues will not be reached*", he entered into an ecstatic mood.

Sri Ramakrishna recited the verse again and again this particular verse that is eminently applicable to his own life. For ages, many writers and poets are trying to express the glories of Sri Ramakrishna in words but are finding it difficult and endless!

Here, the words "*Sarada writes at all times*": also can be seen in another way: Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi was Goddess Sarada Saraswati herself and tirelessly is repeating the glories of Ramakrishna-Shiva 'Sarvakalam' (at all times); still the limit of his virtues could not be reached.

One of twelve Shiva lingas is called Jagadiswar. (literally, Lord of the world) seems to be especially important, as the real name of the Kali at the Dakshineswar temple is *Sri Sri Jagadiswari Mahakali*. Shiva (Iswara) manifested himself as Jagad (world) itself to the embodiment of Jagadiswar-Shiva, Sri Ramakrishna: "*One day while worshipping Shiva I was about to offer a bel-leaf on the head of the image, when it was revealed to me that this Virat, this Universe, itself is Shiva. After that my worship of Shiva through the image came to an end.*" But he used to send his disciples to Shiva temples for meditation.

Shiva is said to be in *Bhava Samadhi* during day time and in *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* at night. Sri Ramakrishna also remained in various types of Samadhi. By the will of Divine Mother he used to stay in the state of *Bhavamukha* (the threshold state between samadhi and normal consciousness). Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna remembered whenever songs on Shiva were sung in his presence Sri Ramakrishna entered into ecstasies. It also worth mentioning here that Shivananda was blessed with this name by Swami Vivekananda because of his Shiva-like qualities. While he was in Kashi he had the vision that confirmed Shiva-Ramakrishna identity.

Way before that when Sri Ramakrishna visited Kashi, he vividly saw, "*a tall white figure with tawny matted hair steadily approach each funeral pyre in turn, carefully raise each individual soul from its cast-off body, and whisper into its ear the particular name of Brahman that liberates a soul. Seated on the opposite side of the pyre, the all-powerful Divine Mother Kali untied the gross, subtle, and causal knots of bondage created by each individual soul, thus sending the soul to the Absolute by opening the gate of Liberation*".

In golden Kashi, Sri Ramakrishna said, "*Our boat was passing the Manikarnika Ghat on the Ganges, when suddenly I had a vision of Shiva. I stood near the edge of the boat and went into Samadhi. ... I saw Siva standing on that ghat, embodying in Himself all the seriousness of the world. At first I saw Him standing at a distance; then I saw Him approaching me. At last He*

merged in me". According to the puranas sannyasi Shiva begged alms many times. Once Shiva received alms from the Divine Mother Annapurna at Kashi. This is called "Bhiksha-dana". Sri Ramakrishna from the time of his sacred-thread ceremony through later period of his life accepted food of alms many times. He inspired his disciples also by saying, alms-food is very pure.

Sri Ramakrishna gave up his mortal body accepting cancer in his throat. That poison of pain got restrained within that area only, somewhat like the deadly poison *Kalakuta* that remained in Shiva's throat alone.

During the last days of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi wanted to pray to Tarak-Ishwar Shiva. When she was going to the temple, Sri Ramakrishna told her that prayer won't work. And that happened really. Ma Sarada had the vision of Shiva and the result of the visit was the same as predicted by Sri Ramakrishna. Only Sri Ramakrishna-Shiva would know the response of Tarakeshwar-Shiva.

In Swami Vivekananda's Aratrika hymn Sri Ramakrishna is hailed as Shiva and Hara only. Hindus believe that only Vishnu comes as Avatar. Shiva is generally considered with the Absolute Brahman and thought to be birthless. Though sages like Acharya Shankara or Swami Vivekananda are considered as incarnation of Dakshinamurti or Vireshwar Shiva respectively yet they are not worshipped as a Shiva-avatara. The manifestation of Shiva as Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna is the only exception who added a new dimension to the Hindu concept of Avatar.

After transition from the mortal frame to eternity Sri Ramakrishna is reached through Ramakrishna Sangha, the monastic order of Ramakrishna Math and Mission as it is considered as the gross body of Sri Ramakrishna. The Mission is serving all beings (Jiva) as Shiva. It is important to note that Swami Vivekananda received this message from Sri Ramakrishna. Though other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were there but only Swamiji got it correctly, as he, too, was Shiva incarnation.

The Ultimate Reality in Tantra is Shiva, the Chit, or Consciousness. This is same as Sat, or Being, and with Ananda, or Bliss. Man is identical with this Reality; but under the influence of Maya, or illusion, he has forgotten his true nature. Shiva comes with his trident and liberates all.

Shiva is *maya-dheesh*. The controller of maya. Through Shiva's grace one can go beyond the spell of maya. Sri Ramakrishna tells us a story: "*Vishnu incarnated Himself as a sow in order to kill the demon Hiranyaksha. After killing the demon, the sow remained quite happy with her young ones. Forgetting her real nature, she was suckling them contentedly. The gods in heaven could not persuade Vishnu to relinquish His sow's body and return to the celestial regions. He was absorbed in the happiness of His beast form. After consulting among themselves, the gods sent Shiva to the sow. Shiva asked the sow, 'Why have you forgotten yourself?' Vishnu replied through the sow's body, 'Why, I am quite happy here.' Thereupon with a stroke of his trident Shiva destroyed the sow's body, and Vishnu went back to heaven.*"

So far we have seen how Sri Ramakrishna's life resembles with the Shaiva mythology. Now we will see how the significant symbols of Shiva image got connected with Sri Ramakrishna's life also. The cover of this volume represents that. To show connections, all examples are collected from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

The Trident: Most renowned symbol of Shiva. Once Sri Ramakrishna's body was suffering from a burning sensation. One day he was meditating in the Panchavati, when he saw come out of him a red-eyed man of black complexion, reeling like a drunkard. Soon there emerged from him another person, of serene countenance, wearing the ochre cloth of a sannyasi and carrying in his hand a trident. The second person attacked the first and killed him with the trident. Thereafter Sri Ramakrishna was free of his pain.

After his marriage ceremony, Sri Ramakrishna when he returned to Dakshineswar spending over a year at Kamarpukur, he found himself again in the similar condition. An excerpt from his

biography: *"When he would sit in meditation, birds would perch on his head and peck in his hair for grains of food. Snakes would crawl over his body, and neither would he aware of the other. Sleep left him altogether. Day and night, visions flitted before him. He saw the sannyasi who had previously killed the "sinner" in him again coming out of his body, threatening him with the trident, and ordering him to concentrate on God. ... Sri Ramakrishna used to say later that in the case of an advanced devotee the mind itself becomes the guru, living and moving like an embodied being"*

In Sri Ramakrishna's own words: *"During my sadhana, when I meditated, I would actually see a person sitting near me with a trident in his hand. He would threaten to strike me with the weapon unless I fixed my mind on the Lotus Feet of God, warning me that it would pierce my breast if my mind strayed from God."*

The Vedanta prescribes an austere method of discrimination and renunciation. But Tantra takes into consideration the natural weakness of human beings and combines philosophy with rituals, meditation with ceremonies, renunciation with enjoyment. It bids an aspirant to enjoy the material objects of the world by seeing in them the presence of God. So the very "bonds" of man are turned into "releasers". Without outward renunciation Tantra can sublimate Bhoga, or enjoyment, into Yoga, or union with Consciousness.

Yogi-Ishwara or Yoga-Guru Shiva: Here we shall see how all the yogas that were initiated by Shiva, got reaffirmation from Sri Ramakrishna. One thing to remember, at the very beginning, as Sri Ramakrishna says, *"no spiritual progress is possible without the renunciation"*. Yogi Shiva first is the great renunciate Shiva. Sri Ramakrishna is the embodiment of renunciation too. Once he went to attend a program at Brahma Samaj and as the guru of Keshab Sen they showed much respect and presented him with mangoes, *"...but I couldn't carry them home. A sannyasi cannot lay things up. ... How can one expect to attain God without renunciation? Suppose one thing is placed upon another; how can you get the second without removing the first"*.

Raja Yoga: As a Raja Yogi to develop concentration, Sri Ramakrishna prescribed, *"The heart is a splendid place. One can meditate there or in the Sahasrara. These are rules for meditation given in the scriptures. But you may meditate wherever you like."*

Meditation is associated with Shiva's image. As Sri Ramakrishna experienced, *"When I meditated during my sadhana, I used to think of the unflickering flame of a lamp set in a windless place. ... In deep meditation a man is not at all conscious of the outer world."*

Meditation grants a person such single-mindedness that *"he will see nothing, hear nothing. He will not be conscious even of touch. A snake may crawl over his body, but he will not know it. Neither of them will be aware of the other."*

"In deep meditation the sense-organs stop functioning; the mind does not look outward. It is like closing the gate of the outer court in a house".

Sri Ramakrishna continues with further clarification: *"There are two kinds of meditation, one on the formless God and the other on God with form. But meditation on the formless God is extremely difficult. In that meditation you must wipe out all that you see or hear. You contemplate only the nature of your Inner Self. Meditating on His Inner Self, Shiva dances about. He exclaims, 'What am I! What am I!' This is called the Shiva yoga". While practicing this form of meditation, one directs one's look to the forehead. It is meditation on the nature of one's Inner Self after negating the world, following the Vedantic method of 'Neti, neti'.*

"There is another form of meditation, known as the 'Vishnu yoga'. The eyes are fixed on the tip of the nose. Half the look is directed inward and the other half outward. This is how one meditates on God with form. Sometimes Shiva meditates on God with form, and dances. At that time he exclaims, 'Rama! Rama!' and dances about."

Shiva is *Adi Guru*, the very first teacher. And Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of Shiva, is Jagad guru. Sri Ramakrishna reminded us, *"man cannot teach by his own power. One cannot conquer ignorance without the power of God. ... To realize God is the one goal of life. While aiming his arrow at the mark, Arjuna said, 'I see only the eye of the bird and nothing else-not the kings, not the trees, not even the bird itself. ... The*

realization of God is enough for me."

Sri Ramakrishna emphasized over and over that one pointed devotion is a necessity for God realization. Talking big but living an immoral life will not do.

Hatha Yoga: Sri Ramakrishna said, *"I have even gone through the exercises of hathayoga to increase longevity". He realized "A man practising hathayoga dwells a great deal on his body. All these are actions of prana. The Vedantists do not accept hathayoga". Though he did not approve Hatha Yoga is a straightforward path to God realization, yet he was respectful for the people of this path. Once one of them stayed in Dakshineswar. When Sri Ramakrishna heard about that hatha yogi who needed twenty-five rupees a month for his milk and opium he asked to several devotees: "A hathayogi has come to the Panchavati. Go and visit him. See what sort of man he is."*

Referring to Sri Chaitanya's practices he said: *Rajayoga describes how to achieve union with God through the mind by means of discrimination and bhakti. This yoga is good. Hathayoga is not good. The life of a man in the Kaliyuga is dependent on food."*

Integration Jnana and Raja Yoga: Sri Ramakrishna harmonized two paths -- Vedanta and Tantra -- that are associated with Shiva in his unique way: *"All scriptures-the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras -- seek Him alone and no one else, only that one Satchidananda. That which is called Satchidananda Brahman in the Vedas is called Satchidananda Shiva in the Tantra. Again it is He alone who is called Satchidananda Krishna in the Puranas."*

According to the yogis there are three nerves in the spinal column: Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. Along the Sushumna are six lotuses, or centres, the lowest being known as the Muladhara. Then come successively Svadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata, Visuddha, and Ajna. These are the six centres. The Kundalini, when awakened, passes through the lower centres and comes to the Anahata, which is at the heart. It stays there. At that time the mind of the aspirant is withdrawn from the three lower centres. He feels the awakening of Divine Consciousness and sees Light. In mute wonder

he sees that radiance and cries out: 'What is this? What is this?'"After passing through the six centres, the Kundalini [the serpent power] reaches the thousand petalled lotus known as the Sahasrara, and the aspirant goes into samadhi.

"According to the Vedas these centres are called 'bhumi', 'planes'. There are seven such planes. The centre at the heart corresponds to the fourth plane of the Vedas. According to the Tantra there is in this centre a lotus called Anahata, with twelve petals.

"The centre known as Visuddha is the fifth plane. This centre is at the throat and has a lotus with sixteen petals. When the Kundalini reaches this plane, the devotee longs to talk and hear only about God. Conversation on worldly subjects, on 'woman and gold', causes him great pain. He leaves a place where people talk of these matters.

"Then comes the sixth plane, corresponding to the centre known as Ajna. This centre is located between the eyebrows and it has a lotus with two petals. When the Kundalini reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God. But still there remains a slight barrier between the devotee and God. It is like a light inside a lantern. You may think you have touched the light, but in reality you cannot because of the barrier of glass.

And last of all is the seventh plane, which, according to Tantra, is the centre of the thousand-petalled lotus. When the Kundalini arrives there, the aspirant goes into samadhi. In that lotus dwells Satchidananda Shiva, the Absolute. There Kundalini, the awakened Power, unites with Shiva. This is known as the union of Shiva and Sakti. This universe, Virat, is only the play of Shiva and Shakti.

The Snake: Kundalini power is represented by snake. That is why image of snake is associated with Shiva. *"The mind of a worldly man generally moves among the three lower centres: After great effort and spiritual practice the Kundalini, when awakened, passes through the lower centres and comes to the Anahata, which is at the heart. It stays there. At that time the mind of the aspirant is withdrawn from the three lower centres. He feels the awakening of Divine Consciousness and sees Light.*

Jnana and Bhakti Yoga: Sri Ramakrishna explained the essence of Vedanta: *"In the light of Vedantic reasoning the world is illusory, unreal as a dream. The Supreme Soul is the Witness-the witness of the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. These things are in your line of thought. ... A Jnani realizes that the waking state is as unreal as the dream state. There is only one eternal Substance, and that is the Atman."* Still, even after realizing all these, he declared, *"for my part I accept everything: Turiya and ... all three states. I accept all -- Brahman and also maya, the universe, and its living beings. If I accepted less I should not get the full weight."* This all-accepting characteristic is Shiva's very nature. May it be demon, ghost, animal, anyone, or anything that is abandoned by all -- has a place with Shiva.

Only Knowledge bestows one with this all accepting nature. Sri Ramakrishna said, *"A Jnani cannot injure anybody. He becomes like a child. ... It may seem from the outside that a Jnani also has anger or egotism, but in reality he has no such thing"*.

Shiva is always in samadhi. According to Sri Ramakrishna, *"It is the complete merging of the mind in God-Consciousness. The Jnani experiences jada samadhi, in which no trace of I is left. The samadhi attained through the path of bhakti is called 'chetana samadhi'. In this samadhi there remains the consciousness of I — the I of the servant-and-Master relationship."*

Swami Vivekananda desired to be in the state of *nirvikalpa samadhi*. Sri Ramakrishna condemned that attitude severely and proclaimed there is a state higher than samadhi. That state, we saw in Swami Vivekananda's life, is to dedicate the life for the cause of others. Exactly what Shiva did by accepting the deadly poison to save all beings. *"The rishis of old had timid natures. They were easily frightened. Do you know their attitude? It was this: 'Let me somehow get my own salvation; who cares for others?'* A hollow piece of drift-wood somehow manages to float; but it sinks if even a bird sits on it. But Narada and sages of his kind are like a huge log that not only can float across to the other shore but can carry many animals and other creatures as well. A steamship itself crosses the ocean and also carries people across." Sri

Ramakrishna belongs to this second kind.

Karma Yoga: As selfless service is called karma yoga who can be greater karma yogi than Shiva who came down from his meditation again and again answering the sincere prayers of anyone and everyone. So is Sri Ramakrishna! How hard he had to work! He went out of Dakshineswar in the early morning and with the spirit of performing austerities and meditation, all day kept talking about God with the Brahmos, Vaishnavas, regular house holders, social dignitaries. Returning home at nightfall, he used to take a light supper of a little farina pudding and one or two luchis.

OM or Pranav Mantra: This Anahata, Sri Ramakrishna explained, *"is a spontaneous sound constantly going on by itself. It is the sound of the Pranava, Om. It originates in the Supreme Brahman and is heard by yogis. People immersed in worldliness do not hear it. A yogi alone knows that this sound originates both from his navel and from the Supreme Brahman resting on the Ocean of Milk"*.

Once a devotee per his intellectual understanding said, "That Eternal Word itself is Brahman" and "This Eternal Word, the Anahata Sabda, is ever present both within and without.". At this Sri Ramakrishna reminded, *"But the Word is not enough. There must be something indicated by the Word. Can your name alone make me happy? Complete happiness is not possible for me unless I see you."*

Mantra Yoga: Once a young man of 27-28, known as Thakur Dada came to visit Sri Ramakrishna. To earn money he was a religious recital performer (practicing *kathakata*). At one time being seized with the spirit of renunciation he had gone away from his family. He used practice spiritual discipline at home when he met Sri Ramakrishna.

The purpose of his visit was to know why did he suffer now and then from worries though he prayed to God. Sri Ramakrishna said, *"there is an obstruction somewhere"*. Then he asked if the boy was initiated. Receiving positive response, Sri Ramakrishna pointed out the problem in the form of a question, *"Do you have faith in your mantra?"*

The young man sang a Shiva-song. Hearing that Sri Ramakrishna became pleased and consoled him by saying, "Pleasure and pain are inevitable in the life of the world. One suffers now and then from a little worry and trouble. A man living in a room full of soot cannot avoid being a little stained." He then instructed that man, "Chant the name of Hari morning and evening, clapping your hands. Come once more when my arm is healed a bit." Devotee Mahimacharan recited a hymn on Shiva too.

"Brahman! my child! Cease from practising further penances. Hasten to Sankara, the Ocean of Heavenly Wisdom; Obtain from Him the love of God, the pure love praised by devotees, which snaps in twain the shackles that bind you to the world."

Hearing this Sri Ramakrishna commented, "Yes, Sankara will bestow the love of God." This love for God is necessary to have his vision. "Chaitanya was Divine Love incarnate. He came down to earth to teach people how to love God. One achieves everything when one loves God. There is no need of hathayoga."

Tilak: The mark that the followers of Shiva put on their forehead, consisting of three horizontal lines along with dot in the center. It is called *Tripundra*. The three lines stand for three states of consciousness and the dot represents *Turiya* or the state beyond all. Three lines also represent 3 *gunas* while the dot is *Guna-ateeta*. Sri Ramakrishna explained: "Man experiences three states of consciousness: waking, dream, and deep sleep. Those who follow the path of knowledge explain away the three states. According to them, Brahman is beyond the three states. It is also beyond the gross, the subtle, and the causal bodies, and beyond the three *Gunas-sattva, rajas, and tamas*. All these are *maya*, like a reflection in a mirror. The reflection is by no means the real substance. Brahman alone is the Substance and all else is illusory."

In order to realize the 4th or the final state, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Reasoning is one of the paths; it is the path of the Vedantists. But there is another path, the path of *bhakti*. If a *bhakta*, weeps longingly for the Knowledge of Brahman, he receives that as well. These are the two paths: *jnana* and *bhakti*."

Sri Ramakrishna explained how these two

paths merged in Sri Chaitanya, who "experienced all three states of mind. First, the conscious state, when his mind dwelt on the gross and the subtle. In the conscious state he chanted the name of God. Second, the semi-conscious state, when his mind entered the causal body and was absorbed in the bliss of divine intoxication. In the semi-conscious state he could only dance. Third, the inmost state, when his mind was merged in the Great Cause. In the inmost state he would remain in *samadhi*, unconscious of the outer world. ...

This agrees very well with the five *koshas*, or 'sheaths', described in the Vedanta. The gross body corresponds to the *annamaya kosha* and the *pranamaya kosha*, the subtle body to the *manomaya kosha* and the *vijnanamaya kosha*, and the causal body to the *Anandamaya kosha*. The *Mahakarana*, the Great Cause, is beyond the five sheaths. When Chaitanya's mind merged in That, he would go into *samadhi*. This is called the *nirvikalpa* or *jada samadhi*."

Now Sri Ramakrishna combined reasoning of *Jnana Yoga* with *Bhakti* and *Raja Yoga*. Reaching the 7th plane, the mind merges in Brahman. The individual soul and the Supreme Soul become one. The aspirant goes into *samadhi*. His consciousness of the body disappears. He loses the knowledge of the outer world. He does not see the manifold any more. His reasoning comes to a stop.

He clarified further: "When the *Kundalini* rises to the *Sahasrara* and the mind goes into *samadhi*, the aspirant loses all consciousness of the outer world. ... In that state the life-breath lingers for twenty-one days and then passes out. But the *Ishwar-kotis*, such as the incarnations of God, can come down from this state of *samadhi* ... because they like to live in the company of devotees and enjoy the love of God. .. In them retains only the 'ego of Knowledge' or the 'ego of Devotion' so that they may teach men. Their minds move between the sixth and the seventh planes. They run a boat-race back and forth, as it were, between these two planes. Sri Ramakrishna gave the example of *Trailanga Swami* who he named "moving Shiva of Kashi".

"*Atmaram*", as Swami Vivekananda called Sri Ramakrishna, described, "Shiva has two states of mind. First, the state of *samadhi*, when He is transfixed

in the Great Yoga. He is then Atmarama, satisfied in the Self. Second, the state when He descends from samadhi and keeps a trace of ego. Then He dances about, chanting, 'Rama, Rama!'" Hearing this vivid description directly from Sri Ramakrishna M could not help but to think: *Did the Master describe Shiva to hint at his own state of mind?*

Rudraksha mala or rosary is connected with Shiva. Literary Rudraksha means Rudra ("Shiva") and Aksha ("Eyes"). It is mainly used as prayer beads and stands for sadhana to attain fearlessness, spiritual enlightenment and freedom. Sri Ramakrishna has gone through "all sorts of sadhana. There are three classes of sadhana: sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic. In the sattvic sadhana the devotee calls on the Lord with great longing or simply repeats His name; he doesn't seek any result in return. The rajasic sadhana prescribes many rituals: purascharana, pilgrimage, panchatapa, worship with sixteen articles, and so forth. The tamasic sadhana is a worship of God with the help of tamas. The attitude of a tamasic devotee is this: 'Hail, Kali! What? Wilt Thou not reveal Thyself to me? If not, I will cut my throat with a knife!' In this discipline one does not observe conventional purity; it is like some of the disciplines prescribed by the Tantra.

During his sadhana period Sri Ramakrishna could "distinctly perceived the communion of Atman. A person exactly resembling me entered my body and began to commune with each one of the six lotuses. The petals of these lotuses had been closed; but as each of them experienced the communion, the drooping flower bloomed and turned itself upward. ... The drooping flowers turned upward. I perceived all these things directly.

The fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the moon (*krishna chaturdashi*) is marked for Shiva worship. Once on such day at one o'clock in the morning, when there was intense darkness everywhere, only one or two devotees were pacing the concrete embankment of the Ganges, Sri Ramakrishna came out and remembered his guru Totapuri. He said to the devotees, "Nangta told me that at this time, about midnight, one hears the Anahata sound." In the early hours of the morning M saw

now and then Sri Ramakrishna was pacing up and down the room with his clothes off, like a five-year-old child. This view may remind some the Shiva image only.

Ganges is closely related with Shiva. Sri Ramakrishna lived major part of his life by the Ganges and he used to refer water of Ganges as *Brahma varee*, meaning it is Brahman Itself!

With Sri Ramakrishna Dakshineswar appeared to be *Shiva-puri*, the abode of Shiva. We can remember Kalidas's poetical work *Kumara Sambhavam* (birth of Kartikeya) in this context. It is written when a young, beautiful daughter of Hiamalaya, Uma, came to serve Shiva, while he was engrossed in his spiritual practices, he gave her permission to stay with him without any hesitation; as: *Even though woman is a obstruction for unswerving state of concentration Shiva accepted her assistance in his austerity; only those are conscientious whose minds do not deflect despite the proximal existence of cause for such deflection* (Verse no. 59).

This reminds us when young Sarada came to Dakshineswar to serve Sri Ramakrishna, he also without any second thought started to stay with her in the same room. Though after a few months, Sri Ramakrishna found because of his samadhi, her sleep was getting disturbed and she moved to another room close by.

Swami Nikhilananda wrote in Swamiji's biography, "A short while before the curtain finally fell on Sri Ramakrishna's earthly life, the Master one day called Naren to his bedside. Gazing intently upon him, he passed into deep meditation. Naren felt that a subtle force, resembling an electric current, was entering his body. He gradually lost outer consciousness. After some time he regained knowledge of the physical world and found the Master weeping. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: 'O Naren, today I have given you everything I possess — now I am no more than a fakir, a penniless beggar. By the powers I have transmitted to you, you will accomplish great things in the world, and not until then will you return to the source whence you have come.'" Power of Shiva was transferred to Shiva for the service of Shiva!

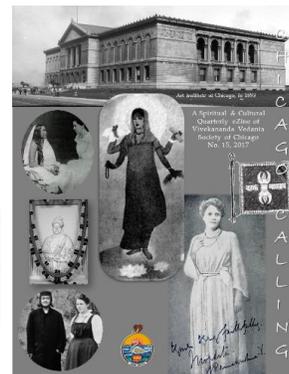
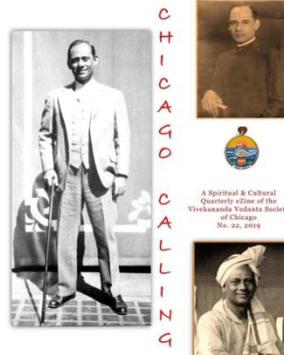
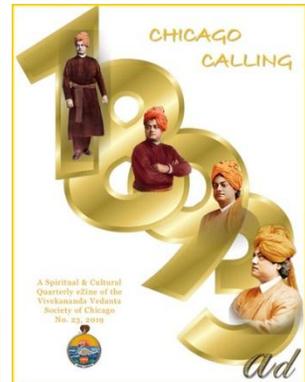
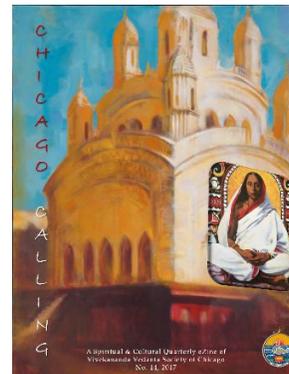
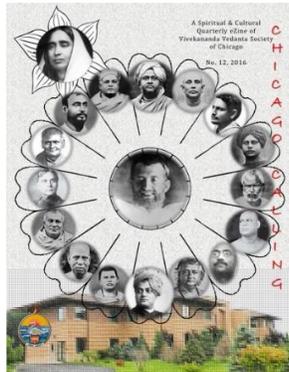
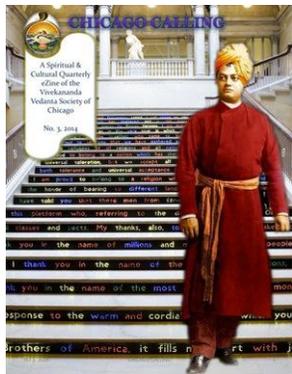
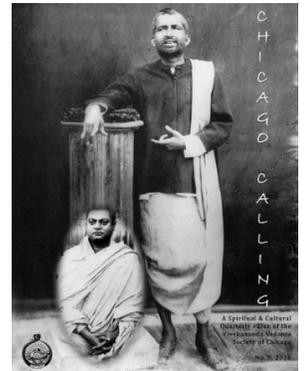
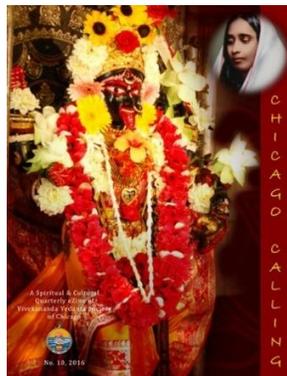
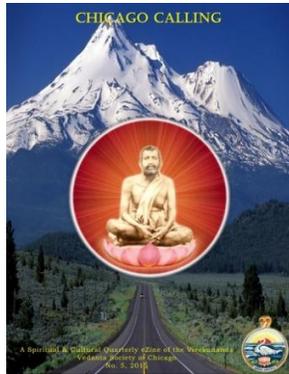
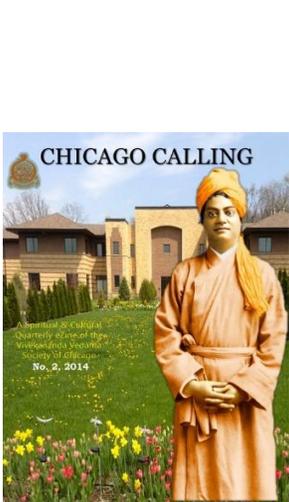
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