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I. Sri Ramakrishna's Background and Mission

1. Millennial Expectations at the Time of His Birth

Swami Saradananda explained that when religion is in an impoverished state, motivated by loving compassion the Avatar [Divine Incarnation] assumes a human body for the good of humanity. They appear when the forces of atheism, agnosticism, and materialism are predominant. "The Avatar then realizes that the purpose of his birth is to reestablish religion. Again, whatever is necessary to fulfill that goal comes spontaneously to the Avatar.... The eternal, universal religion declines with the passage of time. Infatuated by the inscrutable power of maya, people lead their lives in the belief that this world and its mundane enjoyments are their all in all; they consider the Atman, God, liberation, and other eternal transcendental realities to be a poet's fancy—an illusory dream.... Out of compassion for human weakness, He takes a human form and again puts humanity on the spiritual path. As there cannot be an effect without a cause, so God in His lila [Divine play] never assumes a human body without the purpose of removing the sufferings of humanity. When such suffering affects every part of society, God's infinite mercy crystallizes and induces Him to appear as a world teacher."¹

Furthermore, Saradananda tells us of the perplexing state of affairs in India at the time of Ramakrishna's birth,

“The West brought about a radical change by influencing the fundamental ideals that had guided the individual and national lives of India from time immemorial.... Indians gradually became convinced that Western ideas were valid. Relinquishing their previous life goals, which had been based on renunciation and self-control, they became eager for more material pleasures. Their ancient system of education and training disappeared, and they became atheistic, fond of imitating the West ... Indians came to believe that the long-cherished beliefs they had held and practiced were completely wrong. They believed it was true that their traditions were primitive and semi-civilized because Western science had proved them to be so. Infatuated by earthly pleasures, the Indian people forgot their ancient history and glory. This failure of memory led to the ruin of discrimination, and thus India's, national identity was at stake.”²

Swami Abhedananda added, “During the 19th century materialism was deluging India. There was confusion in the minds of the Hindus regarding their religion. It was then that Ramakrishna appeared to awaken the eternal religion.” “English education, on the other hand, has disturbed the minds of the people; has shaken their faith in their religion; has made its students advocates of atheism, agnosticism, and utilitarianism.”³

Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother took birth in India because of all of the countries of the world, it is the one that best maintained the sacred spiritual culture against the rising wave of materialism. Being brought up in rural India provided them the optimum environment to work out their spiritual destiny.

The creativity of a Ramakrishna or Vivekananda is so unexpected and unique that it was basically unpredictable. There are two forms of history: sacred (which the Christians call Salvation History) and secular. “Sacred History” is not

easy to forecast, since it involves Divine Beings taking human birth and teaching their message to a large segment of humanity. The details of Brahman-God's plan of liberation-salvation are obviously unknown to us humans. It manifests through the life's work of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Sri Chaitanya, Sri Ramakrishna, and others. Through the grace of the Lord, it is the history of Brahman-God's special revelatory and regenerative action in the world performed to fulfill a special religious mission. It is unique and different from history in general, in that the events, which compose it, represent the direct intervention and disclosure of a Manifestation of Brahman-God in the world.⁴ After which it progresses and is preserved by other people. Sri Ramakrishna was concerned almost entirely with Sacred History when discussing the life events of Rama, Krishna, and Chaitanya and their companions, but seldom with Secular History. He lived in the "City of Brahman-God" rather than in the "City of the World." Ramakrishna showed little or no interest in contemporary Indian historical events concerning the current Governor-General or Viceroy, various wars, or in the major political activities and legal changes that occurred at that time. They can aid each other, as Sacred History can create a more peaceful and moral society, and Secular History can educate the people to help awaken their spiritual consciousness.

Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* states, "When goodness grows weak, When evil increases, I make myself a body. In every age I come back, To deliver the holy, To destroy the sin of the sinner, To establish righteousness [a spiritual culture]" (IV: 7-8).⁵ Concerning the time of Jesus Christ the *New Testament* stated, "This generation is an evil generation" (Lk. 11:29; cf. Mt. 16:4).

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) the German-American Lutheran theologian emphasized that, "Kairos is not the

quantitative time [chronos] of the clock, but the qualitative time of the occasion, the right time. There are things that happen when the right time, the kairos, has not yet come.... kairos means that the eternal can break into the temporal and that a new beginning can take place.”⁶ “We spoke of the moment at which history, in terms of a concrete situation, had matured to the point of being able to receive the breakthrough of the central manifestation of the Kingdom of God.” [We are] “dealing with history, not in terms of its logical and categorical structure only, but also in terms of its dynamics.... a moment of history had appeared which was pregnant with a new understanding of the meaning of history and life.”⁷

Sri Ramakrishna was born on February 18, 1836 when the sun was in the zodiac of Aquarius. This was a very auspicious time, when a number of important and highly influential people in the West were anticipating the return of Christ, and some in Islam expected the advent of the Madhi. They differ considerably from Ramakrishna in that they are expected to come as adults and rid the world of all its evil and establish an ideal society on earth.

In Germany Johann Bengel (aka Bengal) (1687-1752), a Minister in the Lutheran Church was the father of Swabian Pietism and of modern pre-millennialism (the belief that Christ will return at the beginning and not at the end of the millennium). Vivekananda also believed that the Sri Ramakrishna the avatar came at the beginning, not the end of the Golden Age. From his study of the Biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, in 1742 Bengel used unusual arithmetic calculations to prove that Christ would return to the earth and the millennium would commence in the year 1836.⁸ John Wesley (1703-91) the distinguished founder of the Methodist religion, wrote, “I know of no commentator on the Bible equal to Bengal.”⁹ Some think that Wesley in his

commentary on Revelation 12 (1755) thought that Christ would return by 1836, but this is questionable.¹⁰

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, “Many godly scholars, in many countries and of many denominations, simultaneously concluded, from their study of Bible prophecy that the coming of Christ was near. Between 1820 and 1830, more than 300 clergymen of the Church of England, and twice that number of the Nonconformists, were advocating this belief. In America, a similar advent movement began, supported by 200 leading clergymen—including Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians and Methodists.”¹¹ After spending many hours and days in meditation and prayer, eighteen-year old Joseph Smith (1805-44) told his followers he received a series of Divine revelations concerning the second coming of Christ and the organization of a new Church to prepare for his return. Consequently, he established the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) for that purpose in 1830.¹² William Miller (1782-1849), the founder of the Seventh-day Adventist religion, deduced from the *Bible* that Christ would return in 1843 (earliest date February 10 or 15), later changed to between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. This reckoning assumes Christ lived from 0-33 A.D., that Daniel’s prophecy occurred in 457 B.C., and that Christ would be crucified in 490 years (Daniel 9:24, interpreted as seven times seventy years) and return to earth in 2300 years (Daniel 8:13-14). The birth of Jesus in 7 B.C. and a crucifixion date of 26 A.D. would yield a revised estimate of 1836 for the advent of Christ. Jesus was born during the reign of King Herod (Mt. 2:1) who passed away in 4 B.C. Miller had between 25,000 and 50,000 followers. About 200 Ministers accepted Miller’s ideas and about 500 lecturers disseminated them.¹³ In addition, the pre-millennialist taught that preceding or during the millennial reign of Jesus Christ that the Jewish nation

would re-establish in the Holy Lands, which occurred in 1948.¹⁴ They expected Christ to return as an adult in full glory, to rid the world of evil, and to establish his righteous kingdom in the world. This is quite a bit different from the advent of Sri Ramakrishna.

An additional spiritual event occurred in 1830 to Saint Catherine Labouré a member of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. In her visitation, the Virgin Mary told her, “God wishes to charge you with a mission. You will be contradicted, but do not fear; you will have the grace to do what is necessary....” In her second visitation the Blessed Mother told her to create a special medallion with the words that she saw, “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.” The medallion was quite popular and encouraged the worship of Mother Mary.¹⁵ She was doing God’s work and not hers, received opposition, but succeeded because of the grace of the Lord.

At Sri Ramakrishna’s request between 1868 and 1871, Mathurnath Biswas took him to the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Calcutta and they witnesses the Mass from outside. Sri Ramakrishna visitation of Christ in 1874 is described this way. Shambhu Charan Mallick who was not a cleric of the Christian Church would read portions of the *Bible* to Ramakrishna. At Jadu Mallick’s garden house at the south side of the Dakshineswar Kali temple, Sri Ramakrishna saw a wonderful picture hanging on the wall, depicting the child Jesus on his mother’s lap. Swami Saradananda explains, “The Master said that one day he sat in that room and intently studied that image, thinking of the wonderful life of Jesus. Just then he saw the picture become animate and luminous. Rays of light emanated from the bodies of Mother Mary and the child Jesus, entering the Master's heart and revolutionizing his mental attitudes. When he observed that his inborn Hindu impressions were vanishing from his mind

and that different ones were arising, he tried to control himself by resisting them in various ways. He entreated the Divine Mother, saying, 'Mother, what are You doing to me?' But the onslaught continued. The waves of those impressions rose forcefully and completely submerged the Hindu bent of his mind. The Master's love and devotion for Hindu gods and goddesses disappeared and his heart was filled with faith in and reverence for Jesus and his religion. He then had a vision of Christian clergymen offering incense and lights in front of the image of Jesus in a church, expressing their inner longing through prayer. After he returned to the Dakshineswar temple garden, the Master remained uninterruptedly absorbed in meditation on those experiences pertaining to Jesus. He completely forgot to visit the Divine Mother in the temple. The waves of Christian faith that swayed him lasted for three days. When the Master was walking in the Panchavati at the end of the third day, he saw a beautiful but unfamiliar Godman with a fair complexion advancing towards him, gazing at him steadily. The Master immediately realized that he was a foreigner, and that he belonged to a different race. He saw that his eyes were large and beautiful, and though his nose was a little flat at the tip, it in no way marred the handsomeness of his face. The Master was charmed by the unique Divine expression on his serene face and wondered whom he could be. Very soon after that the figure drew near, and a voice from within told him, 'This is Jesus Christ, the great yogi, the loving Son of God who is one with his Father, who shed his heart's blood and suffered torture for the salvation of humanity.' Then the Godman Jesus embraced the Master and merged into him. In ecstasy, the Master lost external consciousness and his mind remained united with Saguna Brahman [Personal God with attributes] for some time. With the vision, the Master became convinced

that Jesus was truly a Divine Incarnation.”¹⁶ There is some discussion of this visitation given in Chapter IX, Section 5.

Though Ramakrishna experienced the visitation of Jesus Christ, some people have questioned if he practiced Christianity. Of course, we do not know all the details of Ramakrishna’s Christian religious practices. For example, we assume he was not baptized though this cannot be stated with absolute certainty. While these practices are required for ordinary Church members, they are not at all necessary for an illumined soul like Ramakrishna. He had advanced far beyond these practices.

What is essential is that Ramakrishna experienced the Beatific Vision of Christ. First, Christ is experienced as a separate external being. Second, Christ “merged into him” as part of Ramakrishna’s own being and consciousness. Finally (though some do not believe this is possible), one enters into Christ and has a similar and possibly identical consciousness though to some extent they remain separate beings.

Incidentally, Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) the founder of Jehovah’s Witnesses calculated 1874 (the year of Ramakrishna’s visitation of Christ) to be the year of Christ’s Second Coming and that Christ will be ruling from heaven from that date.¹⁷

Ramakrishna purposely put his mind in a Christian state of thought and vibration that eventually directed his consciousness to that plane of existence. Whatever we perceive is a combination of object and subject. Alter either one and our perception will change. We perceive the same world because we have similar sense organs and our minds are in a similar state of vibration. In this sense the level of vibration is the fifth dimension or the first vertical dimension, in contrast to the four horizontal dimensions of length, width, depth, and time that brings about change in the first three. If a person was travelling lets say at 90% of the speed of light,

would the state of vibration change and would they perceive a different world than we see?

At one time during the 1907-09 period in India, Sister Devamata read the story of Christ's birth from the Gospel of Luke to Swami Brahmananda a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. After finishing the reading there was an "intense stillness in the air" and Brahmananda's "eyes were open and fixed on the altar, there was a smile on his lips, but it was evident his consciousness had gone to a higher plane. No one moved or spoke. At the end of twenty minutes or more the look of immediate seeing returned to his eyes and he mentioned to us to continue the Service." Later Brahmananda told Devamata, "I have had a great blessing here this afternoon. As you were reading the *Bible*, Christ suddenly stood before the altar dressed in a long blue cloak. He talked to me for some time. It was a very blessed moment."¹⁸

This is a highly unique event since it might sound strange to Christians that two Hindu saints could experience a spiritual visitation of Jesus Christ. Some people think in a parochial way and believe that the Lord holds views similar to theirs.

Hasan al-Idwi al-Hamzawi (1806-85) following the Sufi tradition in Egypt, wrote in 1858-59 that the Madhi was born in 1839.¹⁹ The Madhi is the prophesized redeemer of Islam. Bab-ud-Din the founder of the Baha'i movement from Persia (Iran), in 1844 claimed to be the Messiah or Iman who prepares the way for the coming of the Madhi.²⁰ Ramakrishna had three characteristics attributed to the Madhi. There was a space between Ramakrishna's two upper teeth in the centre below the nose, a physical characteristic that some people consider to be a sign of the Madhi. In the introduction to the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (p. 43), there is mention of Ramakrishna's, "slight, delightful stammer." It was prophesied that the coming Iman Madhi "would speak with a slight

stutter,” and “His age at the time of his emergence will be forty years.”²¹ Vivekananda mentioned that Ramakrishna “began to preach when he was about forty.”²² Ramakrishna reached forty years of age in February 1876, unless you consider birth starts at age one. He met Keshab Sen in March 1875 and some time after that he became publically known.

Govinda Roy (Rai) a member of the Sufi Order in 1866 initiated Sri Ramakrishna into Islam. Ramakrishna described his Islamic practices, “I then devoutly repeated the holy name of Allah dressed like the Muslims, and said their prayers several times a day. Because the Hindu feeling had disappeared from my mind altogether, I felt disinclined to visit the Hindu deities, much less to bow down to them. I spent three days in that mood, and I had the full realization of the sadhana of their faith’ While practising Islam, the Master at first had a vision of a radiant Being who looked grave and had a long beard; then he experienced the cosmic Saguna Brahman; and finally his mind merged into absolute Nirguna Brahman.” At that time he devoutly repeated the name of Allah.²³ Was the person with a long beard he mentioned Muhammad (570-632)?

Practicing the Muslim religion, Ramakrishna had the full realization of their religion and for that reason affirmed it to be a legitimate path to Allah-God. He did not consider it important that Islam makes different truth-claims than Hinduism, for example, one-life vs. reincarnation. This is because intellectualism and a rational belief system do not necessarily lead to spiritual growth and transformation. It is quite possible that many members of a faith teaching some incorrect dogmatic ideas are more spiritually advanced and closer to the Divine world, than many people belonging to the religion that teaches the more correct ideas. You do not take a written examination of dogmatic ideas to get into Heaven. Are correct dogmatic ideas essential to our liberation-

salvation? The Buddha did not consider the question whether the universe had a beginning and was created or is eternal, as being important in attaining Nirvana.²⁴ Buddha deliberately dispensed with all metaphysical speculation because following his pragmatic approach he wanted to make people face the realities of life and seek remedies for the ills of life.

The prior stage in world history began in 1492 when Christopher Columbus of Spain discovered the Bahamas in the Americas and in 1498 when Vasco da Gama landed in Kerala in South India. In 1750 came the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism. After 1492 there was a gradual secularizing of the earth associated to a large extent with Western Europe and the rise of the business and middle class.²⁵ In spite of its many virtues this secular movements brought about a decline in world spirituality that necessitated the advent of an Avatar. The new spiritual movement is aided by the presence of the various world religions, universal education, and technological improvements in communication and transportation.

With Sri Ramakrishna began a new phase in world history that combines a new wave of spirituality with the best secular values. Vivekananda wrote to his brother disciples in 1894, "Always remember that Shri Ramakrishna came for the good of the world." The following year in an epistle to Brahmananda he added, "From the day Shri Ramakrishna was born dates the growth of modern India and of the Golden Age. And you are the agents to bring about this Golden Age." This corresponds to the idea of premillennialism, i.e., that the Divine Incarnation comes at the beginning, not the end (postmillennialism) of the Golden Age. Two years later Vivekananda told some Pundits in Calcutta, "In the present age, it is to bring into coalition both these civilisations [East and West] that Bhagavan Shri Ramakrishna was born. In this age, as on the one hand people have to be

intensely practical, so on the other hand they have to acquire deep spiritual knowledge.”²⁶ In 1850 only 10% of the world adult population were literate as compared to over 80% today. In a sense the “Golden Age of Knowledge” has already arrived, since there has never been a time in recorded history where so much was known in almost every area of study. It is a Golden Age because the highest truths that were formally the property of a few can now be studied by many people.

Another unusual event occurred at that time, when in 1836 according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, the Norwegian Mensen E(h)rnst (1795/99-1843/46) ran from Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey to Calcutta, India in world record time of 87 miles per day, lasting 59 days.²⁷

In 1843, the Swedish military General and writer Count Magnus Bjornstjerna (1779-1847) published a book on the Hindus. There he suggested that only “a new Avatar” could accomplish the task that Ram Mohan Roy had undertaken. That of reforming the present Indian religious practices and teachings, and to “return these to their original purity.”²⁸ This is what Ramakrishna and his disciples were able to bring about.

The Abrahamic religions are considered to have a strong historical orientation, as compared to Hinduism and Buddhism. But Ramakrishna and his disciples have added a new historical dimension to Hinduism.

2. Descriptions of Ramakrishna by the People Who Knew Him

The best way to gain the correct understanding of Ramakrishna’s nature is to read the reminiscences of the people who knew him. These extensive, detailed, and interesting reports document that Ramakrishna lived on a daily basis the spiritual message he taught. His biographies by Mahendranath Gupta and Swami Saradananda are written

with remarkable candor, presenting Sri Ramakrishna as he actually is in all of his complexities. No attempts were made to create an idealized Ramakrishna that did not conform to the facts.

Holy Mother (1853-1920) revealed, “Blood dysentery is not a trifling disease. The Master would often be down with it, especially during the rainy season. At one time he was rather seriously ill. I was attending on him. A woman from Varanasi had recently come to Dakshineswar, and she suggested a remedy. I followed her directions and the Master was soon cured. After this the woman could not be found. I never met her again. She had really helped me a great deal. I inquired about her at Varanasi but could not find her. We often saw that whenever the Master required something, people would come of themselves to Dakshineswar and then disappear just as suddenly.” “His complexion was like the colour of gold—like that of harital [a bright yellow mineral]. It blended with the colour of the gold amulet, which he wore on his arm. When I rubbed him with oil I could clearly see a lustre coining out of his entire body. People looked at him wonderstruck when he went with slow, steady steps to the Ganga to take his bath. And when he came out of his room at the temple, people stood in line and said to one another, ‘Ah, there he goes!’” “The Master used to say, ‘I have been suffering for all of you. I have taken upon myself the miseries of the whole world.’” The day after his passing “Golap-ma told us that the Master had appeared to Holy Mother in a vision and had forbidden her to remove her bracelets. He said, ‘Have I gone to another place? Here I am. I have just passed; from one room to another.’” “His complexion was the colour of gold.” “The Master's photograph not only represents him; to the devotee the photo is Sri Ramakrishna. ‘The body and the shadow are the same. And what is his picture but a shadow? If you pray to him constantly before his picture, then he

manifests himself through the picture.’”²⁹

After returning to India in 1897, Swami Vivekananda described Ramakrishna this way to the people of Calcutta, “Brothers, you have touched another chord in my heart, the deepest of all, and that is the mention of my teacher, my master, my hero, my ideal, my God in life--Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped any one in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his. But if there have been curses falling from my lips, if there has been hatred coming out of me, it is all mine and not his. All that has been weak has been mine, and all that has been life-giving, strengthening, pure, and holy, has been his inspiration, his words, and he himself. Yes, my friends, the world has yet to know that man. We read in the history of the world about prophets and their lives, and these come down to us through centuries of writings and workings by their disciples. Through thousands of years of chiseling and modeling, the lives of the great prophets of yore come down to us; and yet, in my opinion, not one stands so high in brilliance as that life which I saw with my own eyes, under whose shadow I have lived, at whose feet I have learnt everything--the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Ay, friends, you all know the celebrated saying of the Gita, ‘Whenever, O descendant of Bharata, there is decline of Dharma, and rise of Adharma, then I body Myself forth. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of Dharma I come into being in every age.’” “God, though everywhere, can be known to us in and through human character. No character was ever so perfect as Ramakrishna's, and that should be the centre round which we ought to rally, at the same time allowing everybody to regard him in his own light, either as God, saviour, teacher, model, or great man, just as he pleases.”

“His face was distinguished by a childlike tenderness, profound humility, and remarkable sweetness of expression. No one could look upon it unmoved.... his frame was a human one only, but everything else about him was entirely different from others.”³⁰

Hid monastic disciple described him this way.

Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922): “Usually Sri Ramakrishna never slept for more than a hour or so at night. He would pass the night sometimes in samadhi, sometimes singing devotional songs, and sometimes chanting the Lord’s name. I often saw him in samadhi for an hour or more.”³¹

“Only a jeweler can know the value of a jewel.” Sri Ramakrishna was “judged according to the worth and capacity of the appraiser.”³²

Swami Premananda (1861-1918): “Though the Master did not know how to read or write well, many books were read to him, and he remembered everything he heard. Once at the Cossipore garden house Swami Ramakrishnananda was reading to him the *Adhyatma Ramayana* [the story of Rama] in the original Sanskrit. Swamiji asked the Master, ‘Sir, you do not know how to read or write. Do you understand anything of this Sanskrit reading?’ The Master replied, ‘Though I have not read it myself, I have heard many things. And I know the meaning of every word.’ Everything about him was unique.” “His love knew no bounds, and one drop of it completely filled us. Each one of us thought himself to be the most beloved of the Master.”³³ At Dakshineswar some people treated him like an ordinary gatekeeper. He never blamed others, bore it patiently, smiled and never complained.³⁴

Swami Shivananda (1854-1934): “He gave God-vision or samadhi by a touch. He had the power to transmit spirituality to others and lift their minds to a higher state of consciousness. He did this by thought, look, or touch. He saw

the Divine Mother abiding in all living beings only differing in degree of manifestation.”³⁵

Swami Turiyananda (1863-1922): “An hour of congregational singing in the company of the Master would fill us with such exuberant joy that we would feel transported, as it were, into an ethereal region.... That bliss would stay with us continuously for a week. We used to feel intoxicated, though we did not know why or how. Who would believe it? It is difficult to convince anyone.” “He came to give new life and interpretation of the old teachings,” but “never took any credit to himself.” “He was all humility and at the same time all strength.” He used to say, ‘Spit on public opinion! Look towards God and try to please Him!’”³⁶ An American woman told Turiyananda, “I wish I could read your thoughts. He replied, “Well, on the surface you will find many of them. But go deeper and there is nothing but Ramakrishna.”³⁷

Swami Vijnanananda (1868-1938): “Another day I went in the afternoon to visit the Master at Dakshineswar. Many devotees were seated in his room. After saluting the Master I sat quietly in a corner. The Master was conversing with the devotees seated on his small cot. In physical appearance he was like any other man, but his smile was something Divine. I have never seen such a smile in my life. When he smiled, a wave of bliss rolled not only over his face but over his whole body. And that blissful smile would wipe out the worries and troubles of those who looked at him. His voice was so sweet and melodious that one never tired of hearing it. His eyes were keen and bright, and when he would look at a person, it seemed that he was seeing everything inside him. I felt Sri Ramakrishna's room vibrating with a tangible atmosphere of peace, and the devotees present seemed to be listening in blissful absorption to the words that poured from the Master's lips. I don't recall what he said, but I experienced tremendous joy within. For a long time I sat there, my whole

attention concentrated on Sri Ramakrishna.... The Master was the living embodiment of holiness and purity. People may think I say this because I am his disciple. It is not so. I tell you frankly that I have never seen anyone to compare with the Master. He was always in an ecstatic mood and his nerve current always flowed towards the highest plane. What childlike simplicity the Master had!... As the Master was absorbed day and night in the thought of the Divine Mother, the fire of the world could not touch him. As a result of constant absorption in the Divine, the Master enjoyed perennial bliss. He was overwhelmed with bliss—sometimes laughing, sometimes weeping in the joy of ecstasy. I never saw him devoid of bliss. It pained him to see us cheerless. He was eager to share with us the eternal joy in which he remained immersed twenty-four hours of the day.”³⁸

In 1937 at the Ramakrishna Centenary Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) disclosed, “We have neither seen nor heard of a character purer, simpler, more chaste, and more godly than that of this ideal Mahatman, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. He was the personification of purity and chastity, and embodiment of truthfulness. His life was a life of absolute renunciation and he never cared for the pleasures and comforts of earthly existence. The only comfort, pleasure, or happiness which he felt in his life was at the time when he was in the blissful state of samadhi or God-consciousness—when his soul, being liberated from the bondage of physical body, soared high in the infinite space of the Absolute and entered into the abode of Everlasting Peace and Blessedness. He could separate his soul from the cage of the physical organism at his will, and he had perfect control over this great yoga power.... Furthermore, he uplifted the ideal of womanhood on the spiritual plane by accepting his guru in the form of a woman. No other saviour or spiritual leader has ever given such an honour to womanhood in the

annals of religious history.”³⁹ He wore common clothes and could understand every word of other people’s conversation in English though he was not taught the language. He did not study Sanskrit or speak it, yet he knew the meaning of every Sanskrit word when it was read to him.

During his conversations with the devotees during 1923-32, M (Mahendra Nath Gupta, 1854-1932) the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* mentioned, “We lived with the Master and watched him closely twenty-four hours a day. He never deviated from God-consciousness. Even while lying in bed at night he would chant ‘Mother, Mother.’ He had very little sleep. He never slept more than fifteen to thirty minutes at a stretch. Such a thing is not possible for an ordinary God-realized person. Only when God incarnates in a human body is such a thing possible. He declared that in his body Satchidananda had manifested on earth. One day he told me, ‘Christ, Chaitanya, and I are one and the same entity.’ Is this the temple priest or God? We were bewildered when his real nature was revealed to us. ‘The Mother of the Universe,’ he said, ‘speaks through my mouth.’ He spoke out of inspiration. ‘I am an illiterate man,’ he said on several occasions, ‘but the Mother supplies knowledge from behind.’” “A woman came from Kamarpukur and said to the Master, ‘I have no one in the world.’ At this the Master began to dance with joy. He said to her, ‘He who has nobody has God.’”⁴⁰

Girish Chandra Sen (1835-1910) a follower of Keshab Sen collected 184 sayings of Ramakrishna and published them in 1878. According to his reminiscences of Ramakrishna, “He expressed profound spiritual truths in simple village language with common day-to-day examples. His conversations were so sweet and captivating that even a grief-stricken person would forget his grief and pain within a few moments. People became enchanted, seeing his smiling

face, his childlike simplicity, his exuberant devotion for the Divine Mother, and his absorption in samadhi. When he went into samadhi his eyes would be fixed without blinking, tears of ecstasy would flow down his cheeks, and a sweet smile would spread over his face. He then had no outer consciousness, and his body would be stiff and motionless like a statue. He would return to his normal plane of consciousness only after someone had chanted 'Om' repeatedly near his ears. He was above all social customs and manners. He always talked about God and spiritual life, and never indulged in worldly talk. He had a tremendous sense of humour and remarkable presence of mind."⁴¹

Protap Chandra Mozoomdar (1840-1905) an associate of Keshab Sen (1838-84) was later the leader of the Brahmo Samaj. In the *Theistic Quarterly Review*, October-December 1879, he wrote:

My mind is still floating in the luminous atmosphere, which that wonderful man diffuses around him whenever and wherever he goes. My mind is not yet disenchanted of the mysterious and indefinable pathos, which he pours into it whenever he meets me. What is there in common between him and me? I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centered, semi-skeptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, shrunken, unpolished, diseased, half-dressed, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee. Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Müller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines? I who am an ardent disciple and follower of Christ, a friend and admirer of liberal-minded Christian missionaries and preachers, a devoted adherent and worker of the rationalistic Bràhmo Samàj—why should I be spellbound to hear him?

And it is not I only, but dozens like me who do the same. He has been interviewed and examined by many, crowds pour in to visit and talk with him. Some of our clever intellectual fools have found nothing in him, some of the contemptuous Christian missionaries would call him an imposter, or a self-deluded enthusiast. I have weighed their objections well, and what I write now, I write deliberately.

The Hindu saint is a man much under forty [age 43]. He is a Brahmin by caste, he is well formed naturally, but the dreadful austerities through which his character has developed have permanently disordered his system, inflicted a debility, paleness, and shrunkenness upon his form and features that excite the deepest compassion. Yet in the midst of this emaciation, his face retains a fullness, a childlike tenderness, a profound visible humbleness, an unspeakable sweetness of expression and smile that I have seen in no other face that I can remember. A Hindu saint is always particular about his externals. He wears the gerrua cloth, eats according to strict forms and is a rigid observer of caste. He is always proud and professes secret wisdom. He is always a guruji, and a dispenser of charms. This man is singularly indifferent to these matters. His dress and diet don't differ from those of other men except in the general negligence he shows towards both, and as to caste, he openly breaks it every day. He most vehemently repudiates the title of being called a teacher or guru, he shows impatient displeasure at any exceptional honour which people try to pay him, and emphatically disclaims the knowledge of secrets and mysteries. He protests against being lionized, and openly shows his strong dislike to be visited and praised by the curious. The society of the worldly-minded and

carnally-inclined he shuns carefully. He has nothing extraordinary about him. His religion is his only recommendation. And what is his religion? It is Hinduism, but Hinduism of a strange type. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, for that is the saint's name, is the worshipper of no particular Hindu God. He is not a Shaiva, he is not a Shàkta, he is not a Vaishnava, he is not a Vedantist. Yet he is all these. He worships Siva, he worships Kàli, he worships Ràma, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedantist doctrines. He is an idolater, and is yet a faithful and most devoted meditator of the perfections of the one formless, infinite Deity whom he terms akhanda [indivisible, undivided] Sachchidananda. His religion, unlike the religion of ordinary Hindu sàdhus, does not mean the maturity of doctrinal belief, or controversial proficiency, or the outward worship with flower and sandal, incense and offering. His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental perception, his whole nature burns day and night with the permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling. His conversation is a ceaseless breaking forth of this inward fire, and lasts for long hours. While his interlocutors are weary, he, though outwardly feeble, is as fresh as ever. He merges into rapturous ecstasy and outward unconsciousness often during the day, oftenest in conversation when he speaks of his favourite spiritual experiences, or hears any striking response to them. But how is it possible that he has such a fervent regard for all the Hindu deities together? What is the secret of his singular eclecticism? To him each of these deities is a force, an incarnated principle tending to reveal the supreme relation of the soul to that eternal and formless Being

Who is unchangeable in His blessedness and the Light of Wisdom.⁴²

The *Modern Review* of November 1910, published Shivanath Shastri (1847-1919), a preacher of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, description of Ramakrishna, “Whenever there was any strong emotion or excitement, he would lose consciousness for the time being and his whole countenance would assume a radiant glow. This seems to be unique to religious persons. It is said of Chaitanya [1485-1533], the famous prophet of Bengal that under strong emotion his figure would assume such an ethereal glow those men would be struck with wonder, and many would kiss his whole frame. It is also said of Muhammad that under deep religious emotion he would fall into an ecstatic state, and that many of his utterances given soon after such a state have been recorded in the *Koran*.... The impression left in my mind from my association with him was that I had seldom come across any other man in whom the hunger and thirst for spiritual life was so great and who had undergone so many privations and sufferings for the practice of religion. Secondly, I was convinced that he was no longer a sadhak [spiritual aspirant], but was a siddha-purusha [perfected soul], or one who had attained the direct vision of spiritual truth. He had direct spiritual visions of the Divine Mother, and from her flowed a fountain of noble impulses in his soul. He loved to speak of God as his Mother. The thought of the Divine Mother would rouse all his emotions, and he would go into ecstasy when singing of the Mother's love.”⁴³

Vaikuntha Nath Sanyal (1856-1936) the author of a Bengali biography of Ramakrishna revealed:

One day I accompanied a favourite disciple of Sri Ramakrishna's [later known as Swami Premananda] to

see him at Dakshineswar. I never dreamed that this meeting with the Master would transform my life the way it did. I saw a wonderful man who, though aged, was childlike in behaviour. His lips were expressive and beautiful, and his eyes were swimming with devotion. His face was radiant, as if he were the very embodiment of bliss. It made a deep impression on me, immediately bringing the idea of divinity to my mind. 'What is this?' I thought. 'Is he so immersed in the thought of God as to lose his identity and sport in an ocean of bliss? What superhuman power of the mind is this in a mortal frame? He is in the world but not of it.' Seeing his unique expression and deportment, all my egotism was shattered and my whole soul was in raptures. I felt him to be my nearest and dearest, and my skepticism vanished altogether. As a moth is charmed by the dazzle of the flame and madly embraces it, my mind suffered a similar fate, and instantly my proud head bent low before his blessed feet. Before I knew what I was doing I had bowed before him, and the Master very cordially asked me to sit near him.

I took my seat, and as I gazed at his remarkable features, I wondered why he was so kind to me. I was a skeptic. How could I deserve his ethereal love? Or did he fathom the secrets of my heart and know I had been thirsting in vain for a haven of peace? Was it this that made him so compassionate towards me? I thought, 'Every incident has its cause, and there must be some cause for the manifestation of this embodiment of light and love. Was it that he was born to deliver erring souls like me from a wilderness of doubt and despair and hold up an ideal of religion before humanity?' Thoughts like these arose in my mind, and the more I listened to his words, the more I became attracted to him. I scarcely

noticed how the day passed. I returned home with loving thoughts about him and his extraordinary behaviour. I was overjoyed that he had asked me to visit him again.

I have already said that from the very first sight I considered him to be very near me—as if I were an intimate relative of his. This feeling gradually deepened. I began to visit him whenever I had the opportunity, but the more I became acquainted with him, the more I considered him to be ever-new, and his tenderness to me took on newer and newer aspects each day. None knew as he how to make others his own. He opened himself to me as to an intimate acquaintance, and I too, moved by his love, poured out my heart to him without the least reserve. Before I had become aware of it, I was a prisoner of his love. And no wonder, for no one who beheld that matchless combination of manly austerity and feminine softness, that firmness and grace, that gravity and lightness, could ever hold himself aloof. I have had the experience of family love and affection, but such selfless love as his I have met with nowhere else. Compared to the Master's love, all other love pales to insignificance. Nobody ever saw or heard of such love. It was inexpressible, known only to the person who enjoyed it. When we went to him, he would be delighted beyond measure. His very manner of caressing, talking, feeding, and joking with us indicated that. I had read in the *Bible*: God is love and love is God. These words now stood explained in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's love. Whoever visited him must have felt this attraction.... He was so active. No one could work as incessantly as he. From early in the morning till ten o'clock at night he would be engaged in teaching, making pleasantries, chanting the Lord's name, or dancing in ecstasy, and so forth, for the welfare of those assembled. On some days he barely had

time to eat, and he would gulp down a meal in five minutes and again begin talking and singing without a moment's rest.⁴⁴

3. His Background and Orientation

Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968) writes about the Ascetic Ideational (Spiritual, Sacred) saint-sage who certainly resembles Sri Ramakrishna. Their entire existence, including activities, thoughts, feelings, and volitions are centered in the supersensory (perceptive)-superconscious (conceptive) existence. They are preoccupied with the inner mystical realm contemplating the eternal Brahman-God as the true Reality, value, and goal of life. The supreme goal is union with Brahman-God or Ultimate Reality, which is nonsensate and nonmaterial.

The ascetic interprets the world around them from the standpoint of a system of spiritual values. There are two options, to consider the external material world as an illusion or appearance, or to spiritualize it. To experience the world as Spirit, the ascetic must be detached from its delusory powers and interprets it following the patterns and traits of his own inner mystical experience.

This form of ethics does not seek sensory happiness or pleasure, but is concentrated on union with Brahman-God. The ascetic's norms and moral values are mainly transcendent and indifferent to transient material values. Their codes of this ethic are sacred and are revealed to the ascetic by a Divine source. These sacred norms and values are the will and commandments of Brahman-God. Therefore, the ultimate authority that underlies this system of ethics is Brahman-God and not the state, legal system, physical force, or economic interests. They are not designed for increasing sensory pleasure, wealth, or utility.

The ascetic's needs and ends are predominately spiritual. Sensory pleasures are to be renounced by withdrawing from them and replacing them with spiritual happiness. Since sensory experience and values are not the highest Reality, the ascetic remains aloof from mundane aspects of empirical existence. Consequently, the ascetic is detached from and indifferent to the sensate-materialistic world upon which he places little or no value. He does not care for it, is not moved by it, or in fear of it. Emphasis is placed on renunciation of earthly pleasures such as wealth, material comfort, and power that yield only temporary satisfaction while disturbing peace of mind. He seeks to be independent of ephemeral objects by being centered on immaterial supersensory existence. The ascetic does not fight for worldly self-interests nor resist injustice to himself, provided his spiritual values are not threatened. He will resist any attempt to violate his main values. Nevertheless, the empirical world is of value because it provides the environment that leads the devotee to self-development and a higher realm of existence. The world is to be treated as a means to a higher world (loka) rather than as an end in itself.

Meditative practices include self-control with the mind focused on understanding modifying, controlling, and mastering the inner life and self. The ascetic lives an inner life of introversion, employing subtle techniques to gain intuitive cognition of the nature of the mind and its inner psychological and mental processes. Being that the highest existence is a supersensory Brahman-God, it cannot be apprehended through sensory experience or reason alone. An integrated spiritual life includes meditation, activity, and study of the highest order.

Truth is revealed to the ascetic through the grace of God, in a supersensory manner by direct revelation, mystical experience, Divine inspiration, and intuition. Divine inspiration

yields revelation and the deepest and most sublime ontological principles defining the Eternal Truths and the ultimate nature of Reality and value. In deep meditation, in a state of higher consciousness attention is on the phenomena of inner mental experience, resulting in the subtlest experiences of ecstasy, mysticism, and union with Brahman-God.

In addition to ascetic practices (introversion), the Active Ideational person seeks to transform the sociocultural world, to reform it along the lines of spiritual existence. He strives to bring the world closer to Brahman-God, to first enlighten himself and then to liberate others (extroversion). Interest is both in the internal immaterial Reality and the external world. Religious, philosophical, metaphysical, ethical, axiological, and theological concepts, theories, and rationale are developed for this purpose.⁴⁵

Sri Ramakrishna chose to be born and brought up as a Hindu rather than in the religions of Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism, or Christianity existing in nineteenth century India. He was brought up in a relatively isolated Indian agricultural village of West Bengal that is reflected in his approach to Brahman (God) and the Divine, and the way he expressed himself to other people. Following the logic of the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936), who in 1912 defined the *Gemeinschaft* pattern of society (social relations between individuals, based on close personal and family ties) as most closely approximated by rural-agricultural societies and to a lesser extent by small town life. These ideas were later developed by Robert Redfield (1897-1958) (who later went to India) an anthropologist from the University of Chicago in his study of *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (1941).

Ramakrishna in his life style and belief system completely exemplified the *Gemeinschaft* personality and character. He was brought up in a *Gemeinschaft* village

society where social bonds are based on close personal ties of friendship and neighborliness, with emphasis placed on tradition, consensus, group solidarity, and informality; family life, the extended kinship group, folkways and mores, and a personal oriented religion. Social interactions are expressed through intimate primary group interactions, a strong sense of common identity, and close personal relationships. People have simple and direct personal contact with each other resulting in spontaneously arising emotions and expressions of sentiment. Other people are generally treated as ends and not as means. In a *Gemeinschaft* society we find cultural homogeneity, traditional oriented beliefs and activities, and a religious life expressed through ritualistic expressions of beliefs and attitudes, and personal experience of the Divine. Ramakrishna lived in a “sacred society” that is more homogeneous, integrated and stable than a “secular society.” Under these conditions most customs, norms, and beliefs, are regarded as transcendent, sanctified, and therefore not subject to alteration. Meanings and interpretations of objects and activities are shared widely and seldom questioned. We might think of the “Sociology of Knowledge,” that Ramakrishna’s ways of acting and thinking were determined to some extent by the social background, conditions and structure under which he lived. Of course, as an Avatar he purposely selected the right religious and social environment to be born in.

By contrast, *Gesellschaft* society (social relations based on impersonal ties) is found in modern urban societies with government bureaucracies and large formal organizations, tending to be rationalistic, utilitarian, and secular in outlook. Human relations are more impersonal and indirect, being rationally constructed in the interest of efficiency or other economic and political considerations. Social ties are formed from indirect interactions, impersonal roles, and formal values

and beliefs. Secondary group relations predominate, being formal, contractual, expedient, impersonal, and specialized. More emphasis is placed on government (rather than the family), capitalist economy, the legal system, and cosmopolitan life. Rational self-interest and calculating behavior patterns weaken the traditional bonds of family, kinship, and religion. People tend to treat one another as means rather than as ends.⁴⁶ Within a *Gesellschaft* society, differentiation of structures, roles, and meaning generates cultural and cognitive pluralization that undermines shared belief systems, while favoring the autonomy of the individual. Some believe that the emergence of the urbanized city produced a new type of a person and a new outlook on life. *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* patterns of society are conceptual ideal types that are approximated to various degrees in the empirical world.

As a villager with little formal education, Ramakrishna had little interest in abstract intellectual thought. His approach and presentation of ideas were often concrete rather than abstract. Concrete thinking involves facts and descriptions about tangible objects known through the senses. On the other hand, abstract thinking involves intangible qualities, ideas, and concepts. It is a mental process of a synthesis of particular facts into a general theory about something. For example, when Narendra (the young Swami Vivekananda) first met Ramakrishna he asked him, "Sir have you seen God?" The instant reply was, "Yes, I have seen God. I see Him as I see you here, only more clearly. God can be seen. One can talk to Him."⁴⁷ He did not ask him have you written a book about Brahman (God) or what logical proofs confirm the existence of Brahman (God). "More clearly" implies a much greater intensity and sense of certainty than ordinary sense perception. Ramakrishna wanted the direct spiritual experience of Brahman (God), not

indirect abstract theories concerning His nature and existence. His parables involve concrete objects that are accessible to the senses and understandable by most people, and seldom highly abstract concepts comprehended by only a minority of people. He was far more interested in the life of Rama and Krishna than in the writings of the philosophers. His enthusiastic statements are in contrast to systematic classical philosophy. Holy Mother and Lord Krishna were also brought up in rural India, the embodiment of the spiritual and sacred culture. According to Ramakrishna pragmatic approach whatever is found in spiritual practice must lie within the scope of the metaphysical description. If the description fails to include the practice, the metaphysics is inadequate and requires revision.

At the village school Ramakrishna became proficient in writing and reading books written in Bengali. He read the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and other devotional scriptures.⁴⁸ Kamarpukur the village he lived in was located on the main pilgrim route to the Vaishnavite shrine at Puri. It attracted a wide variety of travelers, pilgrims, and mystics with whom Gadadhar established rapport. He received a verbal education in his village, where he spent hours listening to the religious conversations of wandering monastics who resided at the village rest house. With a perfect memory he would recall stories of the lives of the Avatars and other events from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavata*, etc. He remembered every religious hymn he heard chanted or sung. His interest was more in biography than in scholarly philosophical texts. Throughout his life he retained the habit of teaching verbally through the spoken word and not using the written word.⁴⁹

Ramakrishna like Vivekananda and M, were not satisfied with what earthly existence had to offer them. This intense dissatisfaction motivated them to seek for and attain the

higher reality. He constantly experienced Divine vision and hence he interpreted events sub specie Divinitas (from the perspective of Divinity). With our mind and five sense organs we interpret events, sub specie terrenus (from the perspective of the earthly). He lived in two worlds at the same time, the Divine and the human. The larger share of his mind was always in the blissful Divine realm. In samadhi, his entire consciousness was in the Divine state of consciousness. Was this the case for Jesus Christ also? Was part of mind always in the Kingdom of Heaven?

The “Verification Principle” was developed by the prestigious British analytic philosopher Sir A. J. Ayer (1910-89). Strong verification refers to observation-statements which are directly verifiable, that is, a statement can be shown to be correct by way of empirical observation. A principle begins as a hypothesis implied by a theory, which is then compared against empirical observations. If the hypothesis is consistently supported by data through empirical verification, it achieves the rank of a “verified” principle. Unfortunately, Ayer being an atheist and logical positivist rejected mystical religious experience until he had a near-death experience. His attending physician Dr. Jeremy George said that Ayer told him, “I saw a Divine Being. I’m afraid I am going to have to revise all my various books and opinions.”⁵⁰

Sri Ramakrishna’s religious experiences are totally supported by the “Verification Principle.” His experiences deal with spiritual perception (perceptual verification), which is different from trying to intellectually verify a religious theory (theoretical verification). In a sense he was a spiritual logical positivist. His relation to Brahman (God) was one of continual direct observational experience working through his spiritual senses. His religion is not based on abstract theory or inference, but on experienced superconscious facts. His

religious visions and visitations were verified by empirical observation and not by theory or pure logic. His spiritual knowledge came from infallible vivid and direct intuition rather than indirectly through inference. During these experiences his mind entered into the blissful heavenly and transcendental realms. What Ayer and the philosophers of science do not understand is that the spiritual sense experiences of Ramakrishna possess a far greater blissful intensity, clarity, and sense of certainty than ordinary sense experiences.

He also mentioned whenever the Divine Mother told him something would occur in the future, the event (no matter how unlikely) always transpired without exception.

Swami Vivekananda asked the question, "What is the proof of God? Direct perception, Pratyaksha. The proof of this wall is that I perceive it. God has been perceived that way by thousands before, and will be perceived by all who want to perceive Him. But this perception is no sense-perception at all; it is supersensuous, superconscious."⁵¹ "The proof, therefore, of the *Vedas* is just the same as the proof of this table before me, Pratyaksha, direct perception. This I see with the senses, and the truths of spirituality we also see in a superconscious state of the human soul."⁵² In later life when Ramakrishna was in samadhi medical doctors with their instruments could detect no trace of pulse or heart activity. They would raise his eyelid and press their finders against his eyeball and there was no reaction.

Consequently, Ramakrishna taught a *Gemeinschaft* type of religion based on a direct informal personal contact with the Lord through religious experience rather than abstract reasoning. He shows more interest in the life of Rama, Sita, Hanuman, Krishna, Radha, Jesus, and Chaitanya than in their teachings. Relatively small in size, villages emphasize personal relationships. By contrast, a *Gesellschaft* religion is legalistic

with emphasis on following prescribed ritualistic rites and in accepting certain formal dogmatic beliefs. For practical utilitarian reasons they are intertwined with the government and ruling powers.

Untouched by European influence this village Brahmin had little formal schooling. Yet, with his a remarkable memory Sri Ramakrishna acquired a vast storehouse of religious knowledge from what was read to him. Being divinely gifted, as vehicles of profound thought he uses analogies, metaphors, parables, and illustrations taken from his daily life, describing scenes that are easily recognized and understood by most people. He remembered every Sanskrit scripture he heard chanted, even once, as well as every religious hymn in Bengali. According to his biographers he had profound wisdom, and in depth understanding of human nature and its problems. Without theological training he was able to offer remarkably apt solutions to intricate religious problems, and was able to express his answers in lucid and inspiring language. His language is simple, frank, direct, and rustic. His words have spiritual power and force that learned and intellectual men are lacking. Why, because he is the embodiment of his sublime teachings, he taught the highest principles and lived by them.

The character and personality of Sri Ramakrishna were greatly influenced by the Little Tradition (localized) of village life and village Hinduism. Traditionally in rural Indian communities, there has been an emphasis on devotional worship of the Goddess in various forms, and an interest in the *Epics* and *Puranas* (Epic and Puranic Hinduism). As an adult he was initiated into the Great Tradition (national, regional) of Vedanta, Tantra, Shakta, Shaivite, Vaishnava, etc. Most often new aspects of culture are transmitted from the Great Tradition and filter down to the Little Tradition that includes the villages. The innovators of new systems of

thought are almost invariably well-educated members of the upper, middle, or professional populations. Sri Ramakrishna is a very unique exception to this rule. McKim Marriott an American anthropologist in India developed the concept of Universalization whereby occasionally beliefs and practices of the Little Tradition circulate upward to become part of the Great Tradition. This occurred in the case of Ramakrishna since his approach to Brahman (God) and the Divine reflects his *Gemeinschaft* village environment.

In the history of India and China most people lived in rural villages. Yet before the twentieth century the history of those societies concentrated on the literature, events, and personalities of the urbanized centers and kingdoms. One early exception was Henry Maine's, *Village Communities in East and West* (1871). If a talented person was brought up in a village they most often moved to a more populous area.

Paul Tillich emphasized, "The prophet always speaks from the vertical dimension and does not care about what happens on the horizontal dimension.... out of the vertical there comes a new horizontal line, that is, a new cultural actualization of the prophetic word."⁵³ Sri Ramakrishna lived in the vertical (Divine-human interaction) dimension with little concern about the major social and political events that were occurring in the horizontal dimension. In Saradananda's biography of Ramakrishna, we find little mention of the historical events of the times. Yet paradoxically, it is Ramakrishna who seemed to have so little interest in these affairs who will have a major impact on all aspects of Indian society in the future. There are many ways to interpret history, from the standpoint of politics, economic, civilization, history of ideas, science, technology, key events, etc. His only interest was in spiritual history, particularly that of India.

Sri Ramakrishna had an inner-directed personality, in that he always followed the dictates of the Divine Mother. “I do not accept anything unless it agrees with the direct words of the Divine Mother.” “I always say to the Divine Mother, ‘O’ Mother! Thou art the operator and I am the machine. I do as Thou makest me do. I speak as Thou makest me speak.’” He had the courage and confidence to act according to the dictates of his inner being, and not out of external pressures to conform to the established norms and beliefs of society where they were inappropriate. His inner-directedness was always Brahman (God) oriented and never ego oriented. By contrast the behavior of the other-directed personality type is determined solely by the expectations and preferences of other people. Their evaluation of themselves is based only on the way they imagine other people think of them (the “Looking-Glass or Reflected Self”).⁵⁴ He said, “The spiritually minded belong to a caste of their own, beyond all social conventions.”⁵⁵

Ramakrishna was just the opposite of the so-called “Authoritarian Personality,” which is “characterized by extreme conformity, rigidity, suppression of emotional feelings, submissiveness to authority, and arrogance to those considered inferior.” This type of person seeks rank and status in social hierarchies combined with an ethnocentric attitude of prejudice toward other groups.⁵⁶

Practically oriented people gain much notoriety while they are alive, because they are able to solve the current problems. Ramakrishna dealt with far deeper and more profound issues and consequently was almost unrecognized during his life on earth, being far ahead of his times. Only a few people recognize avatars during their lifetime on earth. Swami Prabhavananda mentioned that Ramakrishna’s monastic disciples were often underestimated since they did not act like conventional Holy Men.

When Vivekananda set up the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1897, some of his brother disciples objected to the establishment of a charitable organization, which they did not believe Ramakrishna taught. Vivekananda replied, “Sri Ramakrishna is far greater than the disciples understand him to be. He is the embodiment of infinite spiritual ideas capable of development in infinite ways.”⁵⁷

We evaluate people by their external behavior, but Ramakrishna could easily read the internal nature of a person knowing their past, present, and future. This is why he could select potential spiritual giants as his young disciples. To other people these youngsters did not appear to be extraordinary at all. Jesus had a similar power and could tell that a young fisherman like Peter who appeared like an ordinary person would become an outstanding disciple.

Ramakrishna made a most interesting revelation. “When I first had my exalted state of mind, my body would radiate light. My chest was always flushed. Then I said to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, do not reveal Thyself outwardly. Please go inside.’ That is why my complexion is so dull now. If my body were still luminous, people would have tormented me; a crowd would always have thronged here. Now there is no outer manifestation. That keeps weeds away. Only genuine devotees will remain with me now. Do you know why I have this illness? It has the same significance. Those whose devotion to me has a selfish motive behind it will run away at the sight of my illness.”⁵⁸

Empathy has many different definitions that encompass a broad range of emotional and cognitive states. Sri Ramakrishna (and his monastic disciples) possessed a high degree of compassionate empathy, including caring for other people and having a strong desire to help them. He also displayed cognitive empathy; the capacity to understand and feel what another person is experiencing. Perception of

another in need, is one necessary condition for the empathic concern that produces altruism. Ramakrishna could place himself in another person's position and realize for example that the duties of a householder are different from that of a monastic. He intuitively knew another person's internal state, including their thoughts and feelings, and studied other people's bodily characteristics (physiognomy) to discern their nature. Taking on the perspectives of others (cognitive empathy) allows individuals to identify with victims without directly experiencing their discomfort, compared to emotional empathy that involves sharing the painful emotions of the victim. Emotional, feeling, affective, or sympathetic empathy is the capacity to feel the same (or a similar) emotion that another person feels. It also involves responding with an appropriate emotion to another person's mental states. When attending to someone in distress, imagining how that person is thinking and feeling can stimulate empathic concern.

According to the "Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis," feeling empathetic concern toward others motivates altruism, a behavior that is aimed at benefitting another person in response to their problems. Ramakrishna helped his devotees out of genuine concern for their well-being regardless of what he could gain from it. There is a desire to understand and care about people in need, which motivates us to help them. It is a goal-directed motivational state of self-sacrifice with the ultimate aim of increasing another's welfare. Empathic concern includes feelings of sympathy and compassion, and possibly sorrow and sadness for other people. This is in direct contrast to egoism a behavior that is acted out for personal gain and self-interest. Many intellectuals believe that empathic response is the basis of ethics and moral behavior. Ramakrishna also adhered to the moral practice of total truthfulness that does not appear to

be based on empathy or altruism. It is more a principle than a personal relationship.⁵⁹

Thomas Kuhn of the University of California at Berkeley (1922-96) indicated that new paradigms are sometimes discovered by apparently insignificant people, who make their discoveries in isolation from others. We have a young Isaac Newton an undistinguished University student developing his theories of calculus, optics, and gravitation during private studies at home. And then there was Albert Einstein who came up with the Special Theory of Relativity while working as a clerk in Switzerland. Similarly Ramakrishna and Vivekananda during his travels in the Indian subcontinent (1890-93) were not known to the general public, at the time they thought out new ideas that would create a significantly new paradigm in the future.

4. His Mission and Teachings

Sri Ramakrishna represents a new Self-revelation of Brahman (God). He came for two purposes, to prepare people for liberation and to make it a better and more religious world. In doing so he created a new paradigm, a new way of viewing and understanding the world around us. A uniqueness of his method is that first he would practice a discipline and then attain his religious goal. Only after reaching the goal would he teach others how to attain it. His talks are stated with great clarity as compared to the philosophers and theologians who tend to make things complicated. He teaches in two ways, by his life example and through ideas sometimes presented in a homely manner often using illustrations. Ramakrishna has a decided preference for concrete rather than abstract statements. He deals with facts and descriptions concerning everyday tangible objects. Concrete terms refer to objects and events available to the

senses, which are clearer and easier to understand than abstractions. He is far more interested in explaining to people how to attain the highest reality, than in giving philosophical dissertations on the nature of this Reality.

Ramakrishna has the advantage over other Avatars, of being preceded by a long religious and philosophical tradition over many millenniums; combining both scriptures (*Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, etc.*) and their commentaries by sages like Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva. At its origin, Christianity had the *Old Testament* but the religion centers on the *New Testament*. Buddhism and Islam pretty much originated with Buddha and Muhammad without much important prior literature.

Ramakrishna created his own scriptures offering many new ideas and religious practices. One of his disciples Swami Abhedananda emphasized his uniqueness and originality. "He reached the goal of all religions, not by following the path that was laid down by any religious prophet or spiritual teacher of any country, but by following a path which was original and untrodden by any of the Saviours of the world.... Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna gave to humanity whatever spiritual experiences and realizations he had acquired through sadhana [spiritual practice]. Every idea which he gave was fresh from above and unadulterated by the product of human intellect, culture, or scholastic education. Each step of his life from babyhood to the last moment was extraordinary. Every stage was like the unfoldment of a chapter of a new scripture, especially written out by the unseen Hand to benefit the minds of the East and the West and to fulfill the spiritual needs of " our time."⁶⁰

Ramakrishna followed the "melioem partem" method by evaluating other religious groups within and outside of Hinduism in the best possible light. This is in contrast to

“pejorem partem,” which is judging other religious practices and ideas from the worst possible standpoint.⁶¹

His many contributions include:

1) Possibly the most revolutionary aspect of Ramakrishna’s teachings is that even in this materialistic age, he urged a large majority of the people of the world to manifest their innate Divinity and attempt to realize the living presence of Brahman-God while living on earth and not wait for a post-mortem existence. The practice of meditative yoga opens up a whole new inner world for its practitioners. Spiritual experience is not just for the religious professional, a yogi in a cave, or a monk or nun living in a secluded monastery, it is for all people (to varying degrees) who seriously and dedicatedly seek it. Of course, the higher forms of realization are attained “by those who are pure in heart, chaste, simple, and who can devote their whole heart and soul to God for spiritual realization alone, and not for any material gain.”⁶² Ramakrishna indicated, “The goal of human life is to realize God.” “What is required is heart, intense hankering, sincere longing for God. When, to a person, life without God is unbearable, then alone God reveals himself to that soul.” “There are certain signs of God Realization. The man in whom longing for God manifests its glories is not far from attaining Him.” “If the devotee but once feels this attachment and ecstatic love for God, this mature devotion and longing, then he sees God in both of His aspects, with form and without form.”⁶³ A large number of people meditating on a daily basis is certainly for the benefit of society and could bring about a major transformation in the social order.

Ramakrishna wants more people to focus their thoughts, feelings, activities, and volitions on the inner mystical realm contemplating the eternal Brahman-God as the true Reality, value, and goal of life. They should interpret the

world around them as Spirit from the standpoint of a system of spiritual values. The goal is not to seek sensory pleasures that yield only temporary satisfaction, but to be concentrated on union with Brahman-God. Transient material values are to be renounced by withdrawing from them and replacing them with supersensory happiness. Any attempt to undermine the devotee's spiritual values should be resisted. Human birth is a blessing because it provides the opportunity that leads the devotee to self-development and a higher realm of existence. The world is to be treated as a means to a higher world (loka) rather than as an end in itself. Meditative practices include self-control with the mind focused on understanding modifying, controlling, and mastering the inner life and self. Techniques are employed to gain intuitive cognition of the nature of the mind and its inner psychological and mental processes. An integrated religious life includes meditation, activity, and study of the highest order. The ultimate authority that underlies this approach to life is Brahman-God and not the state, legal system, physical force, or economic interests.

Vivekananda expressed it this way, "This is the message of Shri Ramakrishna to the modern world: Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more that this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticize no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realisation. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those that have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light....

Therefore, my Master's message to mankind is 'Be spiritual and realise truth for yourself.'"⁶⁴

2) Ramakrishna taught according to his words and life that to attain our spiritual goal concentrated effort is necessary. We must perform some form of sadhana, spiritual disciplines that require renunciation and asceticism. Moral practices must be followed. See Chapter XI. Renunciation and Morality for more details.

To set an example Ramakrishna's life was entirely devoted to the pursuit of religious experience and superconscious communion. His whole existence was perfectly concentrated on a single-pointed thrust toward the Divine, sacrificing everything to attain that goal. He was a living verification that within every person without exception there is a hidden source of superconscious realization that can be tapped and manifested. He believed that each person is Divine and the task of religion is to help each individual to recognize or realize this fact.

Ramakrishna's method of attaining knowledge was grounded not in abstract thought, but in "immediate experience." This is a unifying experience that combines the manifold aspects of direct perception, knowing, feeling, will, and joy in one single event. Then one comes into direct contact with the higher reality. Brahman-God and the Divine are realized not as an intellectual abstraction, in which the real is chopped up into fragmented parts. The "given" is directly known. The religious event is known not in a piecemeal fashion, but as it actually is as a unity. There is no difference between the state and its contents, since the experiencer and the experience are united. Intellectual knowledge is only one aspect of reality that must be blended with other aspects for a deeper understanding of existence.⁶⁵ Concerning metaphysics and religious practices he did not hold rigid dogmatic beliefs that would turn one person or

group against another. See Chapter X, Section 3. Meditation and Prayer for more on mediation and the method of direct perception.

3) For Ramakrishna, Brahman-God is omnipresent, and not “wholly other” existing only in some far away realm. Because Brahman-God pervades everything and is the spiritual Reality behind it, He can be realized through religious experience. He told his devotees, “There are three classes of devotees. The lowest one says, 'God is up there.' That is, he points to heaven. The mediocre devotee says that God dwells in the heart as the 'Inner Controller.' But the highest devotee says, 'God alone has become everything. All that we perceive is so many forms of God.’” “The inferior devotee says, ‘God exists; He is up there.’ That is to say beyond the sky.” “Rama found that it is God who has become the universe and all its living beings. Everything in this world appears real on account of God’s reality behind it.” “As Spirit, He [Rama] pervades all beings. He is very near us; He is both within and without.”⁶⁶ “A man is ignorant so long as he feels that God is far away. He has knowledge when he knows that God is here and everywhere.”⁶⁷

4) Ramakrishna taught a religion of the Divine Incarnation (Avatar) which is covered in Chapters III and IV. He and his direct disciples are not ordinary people. They were able to accomplish their task because they descended from the Divine world with a special mission to bring about religious reform in the world. What’s more they will return to earth in the future. In a prior life many of his disciples lived during the period of Rama and of Krishna. One of the reasons they came at this time was to restore India’s prestige in the world. This incarnation provides a bigger challenge since it does not deal only with India, but aims to motivate a spiritual upliftment in the entire world.

5) Ramakrishna also came for the good of India. Swami Vivekananda summarized it this way, “I do not care in what light you understand this great sage [Sri Ramakrishna], it matters not how much respect you pay to him, but I challenge you face to face with the fact that here is a manifestation of the most marvelous power that has been for several centuries in India, and it is your duty, as Hindus, to study this power, to find what has been done for the regeneration, for the good of India, and for the good of the whole human race through it.... Political ideals, personages representing political ideals, even social ideals, commercial ideals, would have no power in India. We want spiritual ideals before us; we want enthusiastically to gather round grand spiritual names. Our heroes must be spiritual. Such a hero has been given to us in the person of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. If this nation wants to rise, take my word for it, it will have to rally enthusiastically round this name.... One thing we are to remember that it was the purest of all lives that you have ever seen, or let me tell you distinctly, that you have ever read of. And before you is the fact that it is the most marvelous manifestation of soul-power that you can read of, much less expect to see.... It was so great that if I or any other of his disciples spent hundreds of years, we could not do justice to a millionth part of what he really was. Judge for yourselves; in the heart of your hearts is the Eternal Witness, and may He, the same Ramakrishna Paramahansa, for the good of our nation, for the welfare of our country, and for the good of humanity, open your hearts, make you true and steady to work for the immense change which must come, whether we exert ourselves or not. For the work of the Lord does not wait for the like of you or me.”⁶⁸

A Westerner writes, “Vivekananda taught that Ramakrishna was the living commentary to all of the sacred texts of the Hindus; he encompassed within himself all that

which had been lived in the millennia of Hindu religious life; with his birth, the Golden Age, the 'Age of Truth,' had dawned once again.”⁶⁹ Ramakrishna was the embodiment of the Indian spiritual tradition accumulated over thousands of years.

Most important in his synthesis Ramakrishna included all of the major religious denominations of the Hindu tradition. His inclusive worldview integrated the many diverse aspects of Hindu religion so that all legitimate paths were included. He accepted the bulk of traditional Indian religious thought. In the past throughout the world when a new religion became dominant, it often rejected much of other religions.

6) He proclaimed the religion of the worship of the Deities. Ramakrishna reached spiritual perfection through religious ritual in which the image of Mother Kali became a living deity. He and/or his parents received the visitation of Shiva, Vishnu, Kali, and Durga in addition to Rama, Sita, Hanuman, Krishna, Radha, Jesus, possibly Muhammad, Chaitanya and Nityananda. Previously many people in the world considered these teachings to be mythological. He placed great emphasis on the worship of the Divine Mother of the universe. This idea is now being spread to countries where the worship of God as feminine was previously unknown and unpracticed. Ramakrishna would sit for hours singing hymns and talking and praying to the image of Kali in the shrine as a child to his mother.

Swami Abhedananda affirmed, “Ramakrishna taught that every woman, old or young, was the representative of the Divine Mother on earth. He worshipped God as the Mother of the Universe, and the Divine Mother, as he often used to say, showed him that all women represented the Divine Motherhood on earth. For the first time in the religious history of the world, this idea was preached by a Divine Incarnation ... Up to the last moment of his earthly career the

Bhagavan was absolutely pure, chaste, and a perfect child of his Divine Mother of the Universe.”⁷⁰

Ramakrishna stressed that, “Women are so many forms of my Divine Mother.... You are all images of the Mother of the Universe.” “He who has realized God ... perceives clearly that women are but so many aspects of the Divine Mother. He worships them all as the Mother Herself.” Look upon women as your mother or sister, but Her manifestation is greater in some women than others. “One must show the highest respect to one’s mother, for she is the very embodiment of the Blissful Mother of the Universe.”⁷¹ His wife was his first disciple, whom he worshiped as the living embodiment of the Goddess Kali, the Divine Mother. Coming under his influence some women became saints of a high order.⁷²

For many years he was a priest at Dakshineswar, in a Temple built by the wealthy shudra widow Rani Rasmani. She accepted him as her spiritual guide. His Tantric guru and spiritual guide was a lady sage named Bhairavi Brahmani who was the first to proclaim Ramakrishna as an Avatar (Divine Incarnation). He later adopted the role of a female worshipper of Brahman-God. “Adorned with women’s clothes and ornaments, the Master gradually became so absorbed in the mood of Krishna’s lovelorn gopis of Vrindavan that the masculine consciousness completely vanished. His thoughts, speech, and gestures were transformed into those of a woman. The Master told us that he wore women’s attire for six months while practicing madhura bhava.”⁷³

In the West, contemporary feminist theologians have been struggling with the patriarchal nature of religions that consider God only as Father and the Divine Incarnation only as male.⁷⁴ They believe that Mother Goddess worship and imagery embodies a new power for women, partially expressed through the modern women’s liberation

movement. Not only the maleness, but also the femaleness of the Supreme Being should be deified. The Goddess symbolizes the creativity, strength, and beauty manifesting through women. The Vedanta of Sri Ramakrishna teaches that Brahman-God also manifests as Mother, and his chaste wife Holy Mother is revered as a female Divine Incarnation (Avatar).

7) In some medieval Advaitic texts, there is a tendency to attempt to go directly from the world to Nirguna Brahman (the Absolute), which is too big a burden for most people. Ramakrishna said, "It is only because there is the Relative that you can transcend it step by step and reach the Absolute."⁷⁵ One reaches the roof by ascending a ladder step by step. And this is just what Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Vivekananda and his brother disciples supplied, those missing steps that lead to the roof.

8) Ramakrishna respected all of the major religions of the world and considered them if properly followed as different paths to Brahman-God. Swami Vivekananda's insight is, "To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master. Other teachers have taught special religions which bear their names, but this great teacher of the nineteenth century made no claim for himself. He left every religion undisturbed because he had realized that in reality, they are all part and parcel of one eternal religion."⁷⁶ He accepted the acosmic Nondualistic, pantheistic/panentheistic Qualified Nondualistic, and theistic Dualistic paths to Brahman-God along with all four yogas.

His method of proof was totally unique and absolutely valid. Other people have preached religious pluralism and tolerance, but none attained the highest spiritual realization by practicing the disciplines of many diverse forms of Hinduism along with Christianity and Islam. By deeply

penetrating into the great religions, he discovered that all religions properly practiced ultimately lead to Brahman-God consciousness. He sought mutual respect not only for non-Indian religions but also between each of the Indian denominations and sects.

Pravrajika Brahma-prana a nun of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, later assigned to Dallas, Texas disclosed, “No other world teacher had practiced to their culmination various spiritual traditions—including the sixty-four Tantric sadhanas, the five moods of the Vaishnava tradition, Advaita Vedanta, and Islam. Ramakrishna had also received the vision of Christ, was able to fathom the subtleties of Buddhist practices, and worshipped the photos of the founders of the Jain and Sikh traditions. No other world teacher her had undergone such extraordinary breath and depth of spiritual practices as he and was thus able to proclaim from his own experience the harmony of religions, ‘As many faiths, so many paths.’”⁷⁷

9) His message is universalistic. Vivekananda mentioned that Ramakrishna came to earth “for the good of the whole human race ... and for the good of humanity.” Ramakrishna told Holy Mother, “I felt I was in a far-off country where people were of fair complexion. They were different from us and spoke a language I could not understand. As I was wondering about the vision, the Divine Mother revealed to me they too would follow my teachings. How sincere their devotion was!”⁷⁸ He said he “would have many devotees among the white people.”⁷⁹ Some people might think of Ramakrishna as a Hindu, but the message and principles he presents in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are universal, meant for religious devotees of all countries.

R. B. Rybakov deputy director at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russia Academy of Sciences in Moscow, affirmed, “The prophetic teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and

Swami Vivekananda are of universal import and of great moral worth for the whole of humanity. Transcending the barriers of political frontiers and time, these ideas are bound to be embraced sooner or later by all the people of the earth seeking to reach the realm of truth—irrespective of their caste, creed, colour, sex, social standing, or religion and other doctrinal beliefs.”⁸⁰

Father Francis X. Clooney, S.J. a Catholic Jesuit Priest and a Professor of Comparative Theology at Harvard University Divinity School revealed, “Ramakrishna can tell us a great deal about the future of world religion, if we listen to him—and, even better, do as he did; I for one, have learned much from him—about Hinduism, but also about Christ and being a Christian.”⁸¹

Ramakrishna taught and practiced what Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968) called the Ideational [Spiritual, Sacred] Religion. He wrote, “Ideational truth is indeed the truth revealed by the grace of God through His mouthpieces (the prophets, mystics, oracles, and founders of religion), disclosed in the supersensory way through mystical experience, direct revelation, Divine intuition, and inspiration.... Ideational science, philosophy, and religion are concerned primarily with supersensory reality and values. The basic truth of the ideological system is that of religion ... It is engrossed in the supersensory world, dedicated to the eternal varieties, in contradistinction to the temporal truth of the senses.”⁸² Ideational society consists of sacred: behavior, buildings, Deities, history, holy persons, language, locations and pilgrimages, music, objects that are venerated, religious scripture, ritual, time and holy days, tradition, and worship.

Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples came to bring about a revolutionary change in world culture. Today we live in a relatively advanced secular society. In the future Ideational spirituality and mysticism will combine into a harmonious

synthesis with the best of the higher secular culture creating a new worldwide Integral culture. These events are occurring at this time in history, recognized by those people who have the insight to understand their development.⁸³

Sri Ramakrishna came not only for the Vedanta Society, but to inspire other major religions to bring about a world wide spiritual revival.

His emphasis is concentrated on religious practices and principles and less on philosophy and theology. Unlike Biblical prophets, Ramakrishna seldom or never discusses sacrileges, blasphemy, being damned, heresy, violation of holy days or sacred ritual, rules of intermarriage ceremonies, etc.

There are people who had profound and moving dreams of Sri Ramakrishna before they knew he existed. A young monk who worshiped Rama in Ayodhya, India received a vision that Brahman (God) had incarnated on earth somewhere to the east. Traveling nearly a thousand miles on foot, after a long search he came to Dakshineswar. He was told that Ramakrishna had passed away only a few days before. In despair he went to the Panchavati where he remained without eating for two or three days. One night Ramakrishna appeared before him and fed him some pudding from an earthen bowl. The bowl was preserved but eventually destroyed.⁸⁴

Swamis Saradananda, Abhedananda, and Turiyananda, conducted classes in the home of Mrs. Wheeler in Montclair, New Jersey. Swami Atulananda relates an interesting story concerning Mrs. Wheeler “when Swami Saradananda was living at this happy home. The Swami had often spoken about Sri Ramakrishna, and one day he produced his Master's photograph and showed it to the lady of the house. ‘Oh, Swami,’ she exclaimed, ‘it is the same face!’ ‘What do you mean?’ asked Swami Saradananda. And then she told him that long ago in her youth, before she was married, she had a

vision of a Hindu whose face was the same that she now saw in the photograph. ‘It was Sri Ramakrishna,’ she said, ‘but I did not know it until now. I was so impressed and charmed by the vision at the time, that I remembered the face very distinctly. I have been going about here and there ever since I have had the vision—whenever I heard that a Hindu had come to America—but I was always disappointed not to find the same face. At last I see that it was Ramakrishna.’”⁸⁵

Describing a spiritual vision that she had in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1902 before having any knowledge of the Vedanta Movement, Gertrude Topham (Suniti) wrote, “I wakened one morning with a great peace surrounding me, and there before my eyes was a holy vision of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother sitting together on what seemed to be a high platform. Now, I never heard of Sri Ramakrishna or Holy Mother. But I lay there with a quiet mind looking at them. They were both in yogic posture, although at the time I did not know the posture by name.” Gertrude moved to California where for many years she was an important devotee of the Vedanta Society.⁸⁶

Mr. Adi [or Ady] “was a German soldier who was critically wounded during World War I. One day as he lay dying in the hospital, Adi had a vision of a strange person with a benign face who sat on his bed and placed his hand over his head and body. This vision continued for a couple of days. Adi was then mysteriously cured. After his release from the hospital, Adi was haunted by the memory of that strange person, until 1934 when he came to New York and happened to see in a book a photo of Sri Ramakrishna. Upon learning that some of Sri Ramakrishna disciples were still living, Adi travelled to India and met Swami Akhandananda, who was then the President of the Ramakrishna Order. Adi received initiation and later brahmacharya from Swami Akhandananda, whom he served till the Swami's passing in 1937. At that time, Br. Adi Chaitanya

received permission from the authorities of Belur Math to practice sadhana in the Himalayas. After leaving Belur Math, no one ever heard from him again.”⁸⁷

There was a young woman in India who was married at the age fourteen, lasting only two weeks when her husband died. She incessantly prayed to Brahman (God), “‘O Lord, what will become of me? I am so lonely and helpless. What shall I do? Please show me the way!’ After a year or so, one night Sri Ramakrishna appeared to her in dream and said, ‘Don't weep. My son Rakhal is living in Baghbazar. Go to him. He will help you.’ She did not know anything about Sri Ramakrishna or Rakhal, and she wondered how she could get to Baghbazar which was in another section of Calcutta, far from where she lived.” After learning about Sri Ramakrishna from her mother, she and her brother went to Baghbazar. From there she was sent to Swami Brahmananda (Maharaj) who after hearing of the dream initiated her. This was in the year 1918. After that following Maharaj's instructions, she spent her time in spiritual practices in places of pilgrimage such as Banaras, Brindaban, and Hardwar. She returned to the Belur Math in 1942 as a nun in ochre-colored robes accompanied by a young girl disciple. Her appearance showed a definite spiritual attainment. She passed away in a year or so, while in full consciousness, repeating the names of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Maharaj.⁸⁸

An American devotee E. E. Dickinson was saved from drowning as a child having a life-saving spiritual experience of Vivekananda in 1881. A Mrs. Johnson an English woman living in Russia had a profound dream of Vivekananda, whom she was not able to identify until several years later in 1895-96 when she heard him give a speech in London. In Alipore jail during 1908-09, Sri Aurobindo experienced the spirit of Vivekananda teaching him detailed knowledge over a three-

week period that inspired him to become a yogic philosopher.⁸⁹

The following statements concerning a Prophet by the German religious sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) apply with some reservations to an Avatar-Divine Incarnation like Sri Ramakrishna:

[A “Prophet” is a] bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or Divine commandment. [He may be] a “renewer of religion” who preaches an older revelation, actual or supposititious [or a] “founder of religion” who claims to bring completely new deliverances. [His followers might be] more attracted to his person, as in the cases of Zoroaster [Zarathustra], Jesus, and Muhammad, or to his doctrine, as in the cases of Buddha and the prophets of Israel.... The personal call is the decisive element distinguishing the prophet from the priest. The latter lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the prophet's claim is based on personal revelation and charisma. It is no accident that almost no prophets have emerged from the priestly class.... The priest, in clear contrast, dispenses salvation by virtue of his office. Even in cases in which personal charisma may be involved, it is the hierarchical office that confers legitimate authority upon the priest as a member of a corporate enterprise of salvation. But the prophet, like the magician [miracle worker], exerts his power simply by virtue of his personal gifts. Unlike the magician, however, the prophet claims definite revelations, and the core of his mission is doctrine or commandment, not magic.... what distinguishes the prophet, in the sense that we are employing the term, from the types just described is an economic factor, i.e., that his prophecy is

unremunerated.... This criterion of gratuitous service also distinguishes the prophet from the priest. The typical prophet propagates ideas for their own sake and not for fees, at least in any obvious or regulated form....

But the prophet, in our special sense, is never to be found where the proclamation of a religious truth of salvation [liberation] through personal revelation is lacking. In our view, this qualification must be regarded as the decisive hallmark of prophecy. Finally, the Hindu reformers of religion such as Shankara and Ramanuja and their occidental counterparts like Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Wesley are to be distinguished from the category of prophets by virtue of the fact that they do not claim to be offering a substantively new revelation or to be speaking in the name of a special Divine injunction.... Thus, there remain only two kinds of prophets in our sense, one represented most clearly by the Buddha, the other with especial clarity by Zoroaster [Zarathustra] and Muhammad. The prophet may be primarily, as in the cases just noted, an instrument for the proclamation of a God and his will, be this a concrete command or an abstract norm. Preaching as one who has received a commission from God, he demands obedience as an ethical duty. This type we shall term the 'ethical prophet.' On the other hand, the prophet may be an exemplary man who, by his personal example, demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation [liberation], as in the case of the Buddha. The preaching of this type of prophet says nothing about a Divine mission or an ethical duty of obedience, but rather directs itself to the self-interest of those who crave salvation, recommending to them the same path as he himself traversed. Our designation for this second type of prophecy is 'exemplary.' The exemplary type is

particularly characteristic of prophecy in India, although there have been a few manifestations of it in China (e.g., Lao Tzu) and the Near East. On the other hand, the ethical type is confined to the Near East, regardless of racial differences there. For neither the *Vedas* nor the classical books of the Chinese—the oldest portions of which in both cases consist of songs of praise and thanksgiving by sacred singers, and of magical rites and ceremonies—makes it appear at all probable that prophecy of the ethical type, such as developed in the Near East or Iran, could ever have arisen in India or China. The decisive reason for this is the absence of a personal, transcendental, and ethical God.⁹⁰

5. Divine Visitations

Ramakrishna's Christ and Islamic visitations are described in Section 1. Swami Saradananda tells us of some of Ramakrishna's spiritual experiences. He also mentioned those people who had the good fortune to meet him back during the 1874-76 period, said even then they seldom heard him speak. Often he was immersed in ecstasy nearly twenty-four hours at a stretch. An official of the government of Nepal said he saw him absorbed in samadhi for three continuous days. In samadhi, "His face shines with a heavenly light."⁹¹ Being a mystic Ramakrishna interacted with Brahman (God) directly in a concrete manner as a person. Intellectuals tend to relate to Brahman (God) indirectly in the abstract as an idea.

Concerning Mother Kali he related, "I had a marvelous vision of the Mother and fell down unconscious. Afterwards what happened in the external world, or how that day and the next passed, I don't know. But within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss that I had never before

experienced, and I felt the immediate presence of the Divine Mother. On another occasion, the Master narrated to us [his disciples] in detail the same wonderful vision, ‘It was as if the room, doors, temple, and everything else vanished altogether; as if there were nothing anywhere! And what I saw was an infinite shoreless ocean of light; that ocean was consciousness. However far and in whatever direction I looked, I saw shining waves, one after another, coming towards me to swallow me up. They were madly rushing towards me from all sides, with a terrific noise. Very soon they were upon me, and they pushed me down into unknown depths. I panted and struggled and lost consciousness.’ Thus, the Master told us that during his first vision he saw a shining ocean of consciousness. But was this pure consciousness the Divine Mother Kali, bestowing boons and fearlessness? Did the Master see Her in that ocean of light? It seems that he did. We heard that when he partially regained his consciousness after the first vision, he uttered plaintively, ‘Mother, Mother!’” During the early years, he went through a period where he did not sleep at all for six years. His eyes could not wink and he was unable to close his eyelids even with his fingers.⁹²

Lord Shiva: “The Master entered one of the Shiva temples of Dakshineswar and began to recite the *Shiva-mahimnah*, a hymn in praise of the Deity.... While the Master was reciting the above verse, he intensely felt the glory of Shiva in his heart and he lost himself. He forgot the hymn, the Sanskrit language of the hymn, the order of the verses, and so on, and repeatedly cried aloud, ‘O Lord, how can I express Your infinite glory?’ Tears poured down his cheeks, chest, and clothes, finally dampening the floor.”

Mother Durga: “One day the Master was seated in the Panchavati grove when the Divine Mother Durga came over the Ganga. Slowly, she walked towards him and merged into

his body. The Master later told Hriday, ‘Mother Durga came. Look, her footprints are still in the dust.’”⁹³

Sita the wife of Rama: “One day at that time I was seated under the Panchavati. I was in a state of ordinary consciousness, well aware of my surroundings. All of a sudden, a luminous female figure of exquisite grace appeared before me. Her radiance lit up everything around her. I could see her, and at the same time I could see the trees and plants of the Panchavati, the Ganges, everything. I saw that she was human, for she had no marks of a Divine Being upon her, such as a third eye. But the sublime qualities reflected in her face—love, sorrow, compassion, and fortitude—are seldom to be seen even among goddesses. Slowly she advanced towards me, from the direction of the north, all the while looking at me with gracious eyes. I was amazed. I was wondering who she might be when suddenly a monkey uttered a cry, fell at her feet, and rolled on the ground. Then it came to me in a flash that this must be Sita, the daughter of King Janaka, who had suffered so greatly all her life, and whose whole life had been devoted to her husband, Rama. Overcome by emotion, I cried out 'Mother' and was about to fall at her feet when she instantly passed into my body and became merged in it. Overwhelmed with joy and wonder, I fell unconscious on the ground. This was the first vision I ever had with my eyes wide open, and when I was meditating.”⁹⁴

Lord Krishna: “The Master told us that he was then so absorbed in the thought of Krishna that he forgot his own identity. Sometimes he regarded himself as Krishna, and sometimes he saw Krishna in all being, from Brahma down to a blade of grass. When we were visiting the Master at Dakshineswar one day, he picked a blue grass-flower from the garden and came to us joyfully. He said, ‘When I was practising madhura bhava I used to see Krishna, whose complexion was like this flower.’”⁹⁵

Radha the companion of Krishna: “Knowing that the vision of Krishna is not possible without Radha's grace, the Master began to worship her with his one-pointed mind. He remained absorbed in meditation on her loving form and prayed to her unceasingly with a longing heart. As a result he was soon blessed with the vision of Radha. Her form merged into him like the forms of other gods and goddesses whose visions he had previously realized. He said, ‘It is impossible to describe the incomparable, pure, heavenly beauty and sweetness of Radha, who renounced everything out of her passionate love for Krishna. Her complexion was light yellow like the stamens of the nagakeshara [mesua ferra] flower.’”

Sri Chaitanya: “As he stood outside of his room, the Master saw wonderful waves of sankirtan coming towards him from the Panchavati. The crowd then flowed towards the main gate, finally vanishing behind the trees. In that crowd he saw Gauranga of Navadvip, absorbed in Divine love. Accompanied by Nityananda and Advaita, Chaitanya walked slowly in the midst of a great multitude of people. Everyone around him was intoxicated by his love, some expressing their inner joy by losing control of themselves and some by dancing wildly. The crowd was so vast that it seemed there was no end to the flow of humanity. A few faces in that wonderful kirtan party were clearly imprinted on the Master's mind. When the Master's own devotees began to arrive shortly after this vision, he recognized them and concluded that they had been Chaitanya's companions in their previous births.”

The Holy City of Benares: “Although the Master was distressed when he saw that even in Varanasi [Benares] people were attached to worldly things, he nonetheless had wonderful visions and experiences there that convinced him of the greatness of Shiva and the glory of Varanasi. As his boat crossed the Ganges and approached Varanasi, he saw in

a vision that the city of Shiva was truly made of gold: There was no clay or stone in Varanasi. The subtle form of the city had been made golden; by the priceless love and faith of innumerable monastics and devotees; throughout the ages. The real Varanasi is luminous and full of spirituality while the external one is but its shadow.”⁹⁶

Someone asked Swami Brahmananda if the statue of Sri Ramakrishna now at the Belur Math resembled him. Brahmananda asked which mood of Ramakrishna, implying that he looked noticeable different in varying spiritual moods. His appearance changed as he worshiped Brahman (God) from the standpoint of a son, mother, friend, servant, etc.⁹⁷

It is well known that prior learning aids in acquiring new learning, if it involves similar methods, activities, attitudes, and principles. Consequently, for Ramakrishna there was a positive transfer of training from one form of religious experience to another. He was able to attain the visitations of Jesus and Muhammad each within only a three-day preparation period.

6. Holy Men and Women, and Religious Leaders He Met

Bhairavi Brahmani (c. 1822-68) an ascetic nun of high spiritual attainment, nearly forty years of age came to Dakshineswar in 1861, and remained there for six years. She was skilled in Vaishnava Tantra and Gaudiya Vaishnava bhakti. Upon meeting Ramakrishna with tears in her eyes she joyfully said, “My son you are here! I knew you lived somewhere along the banks of the Ganges. I have been searching for you so long. Now I have found you.” At that time Ramakrishna was experiencing an intense burning sensation over his entire body that lasted the full day. Local doctors could not alleviate the problem. The learned Bhairavi Brahmani realized it was “caused by corresponding changes in his mental

states, originating in his extraordinary devotion to God and transforming his body into a Divine body.... She cited devotional scriptures to show how extraordinary spiritual experiences had caused similar physical changes in the devout Radha of Vrindavan, in Lord Chaitanya, and in other great teachers and yogis of times past.” This spiritual illness required a spiritual treatment. Her remedy “was to wear a garland of fragrant flowers and cover the entire body with scented sandal paste.” While the treatment of the physicians was to no avail, following the Bhairavi’s procedure the burning sensation was completely gone in three days. Ramakrishna had another physical problem and again the Brahmani’s simple religious instructions solved the problem.

She told him, “Who calls you mad, my son? This is not insanity. You have achieved mahabhava [the highest manifestation of Divine love], and that is why you are having all these experiences. How can ordinary people understand your condition? They cannot—so they call you mad. Sri Radha experienced this state and so did Sri Chaitanya. All this is recorded in the bhakti scriptures. I have all these books with me. I will read them to you.”

Ramakrishna accepted her as his first guru. Under her guidance, Ramakrishna practiced 64 major Tantric Sadhanas over a two-year period. The year after she left Dakshineswar they met in Varanasi, and she soon passed away. This extraordinary yogi’s original name was Yogeswari, and Ramakrishna explained that she was part of Yogamaya, the Goddess Durga.⁹⁸ Following the disciplines of Tantra he worshiped the Divine Mother particularly as Mother Kali, and Shakti the active creative force of the world. He heard the great sound Om, had a vision of the Divine Maya, and awakened the kundalini witnessing its rise and the blooming of the lotus in each center, terminating in samadhi.⁹⁹

From the Brahmani, Ramakrishna learned of the

Vaishnava practices that teach the worship of Rama and Krishna. They were taught by Ramanuja, Vallabha, and Madhva, but developed in Bengal by Sri Chaitanya (1485-1533), a Divine Incarnation. Vaishnava is a religion of bhakti, the intense love of Brahman (God). One cannot attain the Lord except through His/Her grace, which is felt in the heart. The mind is purified through bhakti resulting in Divine love and the ecstasy of Brahman (God)-realization. In sattvic devotion there is no desire for material gain, only to please the Lord. Above the three gunas is the unending attraction of the mind to Brahman (God) under all conditions. Vaidhi-bhakti involves religious scripture, methodological worship, prayer, and chanting the mantra. This matures into para-bhakti also known as prema, the supreme devotion. God can be worshiped by a pure mind as parent (Jesus in the *Bible*), master (Apostle Paul), friend (Prophet Abraham), child (Mother Mary), husband or sweetheart.¹⁰⁰ Many of Ramakrishna's teachings are quite compatible with this line of thinking.

After mastering the dualistic religions Ramakrishna proceeded to Advaita Vedanta. Tota Puri a monk of the Naga sect of 700 sannyasins from the Punjab arrived at Dakshineswar probably near the end of 1864. After forty years of strenuous austerities and meditation in solitude, he attained nirvikalpa samadhi. Following his usual custom he planned to remain there only three days. At that time Ramakrishna received monastic vows from Tota Puri. At first Ramakrishna had great difficulty in withdrawing his mind from the blissful Divine Mother, but in three days he achieved his goal. He was able to merge his consciousness into the Cosmic Consciousness in a realm beyond, space, time, and causality; and transcending name and form. Attracted to Ramakrishna's spiritual presence, Tota Puri remained at Dakshineswar for eleven months, and then departed for

Northwest India. After he left, Ramakrishna entered the nirvikalpa state for six continuous months, probably during the 1865-66 when he reached thirty years of age.¹⁰¹

In an amazing statement it was revealed by Swami Saradananda, “From almost the outset of his sadhana, the Master often saw a young monk within himself, like his own form reflected in a mirror. He would follow the monk's advice to solve all his problems. One day while he was telling us about the experiences and visions he had during sadhana, the Master said, ‘A young monk exactly resembling me would come out of my body and instruct me in all matters. Sometimes when he would emerge from me I would have a little outer consciousness; at other times I would lose it altogether and become inert. I would watch his movements and listen to him speak. The Brahmani and Tota Puri only reiterated the spiritual teachings that I had heard from him. They taught me what I had already learned. It seems that they came into my life as gurus in order that respect for the injunctions of the scriptures would be maintained. No other purpose can be found for my acceptance of Tota Puri and others as gurus.’” In this case Ramakrishna received wisdom from his own higher self and it was not necessary to consult another person. This is the highest form of intuition. His two gurus relied largely on scriptural injections found in their religious books.¹⁰²

While at Dakshineswar the Bhairavi told Mathur, “Invite the best pandits, who are well versed in the scriptures. I am ready to prove my position to them.” Mathur doubted the words of an apparently insignificant woman who lived on alms. At that time, he did not consider Ramakrishna to be an incarnation of Brahman (God). How could she influence the greatest pandits? At Ramakrishna's request Mathur in 1865 decided to invite Vaishnavcharan (accompanied by distinguished scholars) a leader in the Vaishnava community

to Dakshineswar. Vaishnavcharan a well-respected scholar and devotee was an authority on resolving religious disputes. At the conference, Bhairavi Brahmani declared Ramakrishna to be an Avatar, an Incarnation of Brahman (God) and challenged the pandits (religious scholars) to disprove it. Vaishnavcharan sensed Ramakrishna's spiritual greatness. He observed that all of the nineteen physical symptoms and emotions of mahabhava recoded in the Indian devotional religious scriptures were visible in Ramakrishna. Afterwards he publicly declared Ramakrishna to be an incarnation of Brahman (God) and like the Bhairavi believed that Sri Chaitanya (Gauranga, 1485-1533) had been reborn as Ramakrishna. The Bhairavi had noticed a number of similarities between Chaitanya and Ramakrishna.

A few days later Pandit Gauri (Gaurikanta Tarkabhusan) of Indesh in Bengal came to Dakshineswar, and returned again in 1871 remaining with Ramakrishna for two years. He was a Tantric expert and an invincible debater. Based on his knowledge of religion and the testimony of the scriptures he concluded, "I see that everything I have read in the scriptures concerning high spiritual states is manifest in you. In addition, I see other exalted states that are not recorded in the scriptures. You have reached a spiritual plane that surpasses anything described in the *Vedas*, *Vedanta*, or other scriptures. You are not human. Ishvara [God], the source of all Avatars, dwells in you."¹⁰³

For many years Jatadhari a wondering Ramit monk would carry a metal image of Ramlala (the child Rama) with him wherever he went. In an ecstatic state, he would see the luminous living form of the child Rama who received his loving service. Jatadhari a bhakta of the highest order would feed and bathe him. This blissful spiritual state would last for a long period of time. After coming to Dakshineswar (somewhere between 1864 and 1867), Jatadhari initiated

Ramakrishna into the Ram mantra giving him the image of Ramlala. “The Master’s love and devotion for Ramachandra were enkindled, and he had the vision of Ramlala’s luminous form. As the feminine mood surged, his heart became filled with affection. He felt the same love and attraction for Ramlala that a mother feels for her child. This loving attraction made him sit beside the image of Ramlala, unaware of how time was slipping away. We heard from the Master that the luminous Divine child would try to keep him near by means of sweet, childish pranks. Ramlala would wait anxiously for the Master's return when he was away and try to follow him everywhere, despite being forbidden to do so.” “He became absorbed in the meditation of that Divine form and soon he saw that: Rama, who is a son of Dasharatha, is in every being; the same Rama is immanent in the universe and yet transcends it.” The metal image of Ramlala stood in the Radhakanta Temple at Dakshineswar for many years until it was stolen at the beginning of the 20th century. Its present whereabouts is not known.

What makes this mystic experience so unique is that with Divine sight, Ramakrishna and Jatadhari would both see the child Rama at the same time doing the same thing. Other people could not see this. Their Divine sight allowed them to experience both the blissful spiritual presence of Ramlala and this empirical world at the same time.¹⁰⁴ Likewise when Gopaler Ma had the visitation of the baby Krishna (that others could not see), Ramakrishna had the same spiritual perceptive experience. This differs from the usual form of samadhi where one is immersed in the Divine realm completely oblivious of the phenomenal world. This is an example of intersubjective verification and agreement concerning a mystical experience that goes beyond the private verification of a single individual. Likewise, at the visitation of Mother Mary in Fatima in 1917, three inspired

Portuguese children witnessed the Apparition at the same time, though the crowd of people could not see it.

Ramakrishna visited Trailanga Swami (-1887) in Varanasi (Benares) in 1868 and affirmed, "I found in him the living manifestation of Vishwanath (a name of Shiva). Varanasi was sanctified and made vibrant by his presence. He was in an exalted state of knowledge. He had no body-consciousness: The sand there gets so hot in the sun that no one can walk on it, but he lay on it comfortably.... In him you see the condition of a true knower of Brahman." In 1883 concerning Trailanga a devotee mentioned, "People say he was formerly in a more exalted spiritual state. He could perform many miracles. Now he has lost much of that power." Ramakrishna's reply was, "That is the criticism of worldly people." In other words, what do worldly people know about spiritual matters? Many well-documented miracles are attributed to this great saint including levitation and possibly living for well over 200 years¹⁰⁵

In 1870, Ramakrishna met the monk Bhagavandas Babaji of Kalna in West Bengal, the spiritual leader of a Vaishnava Ashram that revered Sri Chaitanya. He probably was over 80 years of age. Day and night he sat in one place practicing austerities, while doing japam and meditation while shedding tears of joy. During the visit Ramakrishna became annoyed with Bhagavandas and asked him, "Is that how you think of yourself even now? You think you teach people? You think you will expel this man from your community? You think you can decide to give up telling your beads or not? Who made you a teacher? Do you think you can teach the world unless the Lord who made it allows you to?'... A wonderful radiance shone from his face. He was in such ecstasy that he was not aware of what he was saying and to whom he was speaking. After those few words he became overwhelmed with emotion and went into samadhi." Bhagavandas was

moved by Ramakrishna's ecstasies and held him in high regard.¹⁰⁶ Most interesting in these high states, Ramakrishna's conscious state became unconscious and he did not know what he was saying to people.

In 19th century India, there were many Religious leaders that probably did not meet Ramakrishna. Most of them had the ability to produce miracles and some had sizable followings. They included Dhanraj Giri (1811-1901), Lahiri Mahasaya of Varanasi (1828-95), Ramdas Katiababa (-1909), Swami Bhaskarananda of Varanasi (1833-99) whom Swami Vivekananda met, Vamakshepa (1837-1911), Sai Baba of Shirdi (1838-1918), Charandas Babaji, and Santadas Babaji (1859-1935).¹⁰⁷

Ramakrishna once told Mathur Babu (1817-71), "I have heard that Devendra Nath Tagore [1817-1905] thinks of God. I should like to see him." So accompanied by Mathur Babu, Ramakrishna went to see Tagore the leader of the Brahmo Samaj and father of the famous Nobel prize winning poet Rabindranath Tagore. Opposed to image worship the Samaj members believed in the monotheistic ideal of "One Self-existent Supreme Being who had created the universe out of nothing." He insisted that Ramakrishna come and visit the Brahmo Samaj festival. The following day Devendra sent a letter to Mathur forbidding Ramakrishna to go to the festival, because it would be ungentlemanly not to wear a shawl over his body. Later Ramakrishna mentioned Devendra's all-encompassing devotion and that he was no doubt a great man.¹⁰⁸

Interesting though Mathur was born 19 years before Ramakrishna he referred to him as Father.¹⁰⁹ As Sarada Devi is the Mother to many, Sri Ramakrishna is the Father.

When he was staying in the Baranagore section of Calcutta, Ramakrishna paid a visit to Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-83). This was before he established the

Arya Samaj reform movement in Bombay in 1875. At that time this Vedic scholar who had a red chest from spiritual practice, devoted a great deal of time day and night discussing the religious scriptures. The Arya Samaj under his leadership preached that the *Vedas* are infallible, monotheism without image worship; and social reform opposing the caste system, favoring women's rights, and the expansion of education.¹¹⁰

While in samadhi in 1875, Ramakrishna had a vision of members of the Brahmo Samaj before he met them. He said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, these people hold the view of 'Englishmen [Westerners]. Why should I talk to them?' Then the Mother explained to me that it would be like this in the Kaliyuga."¹¹¹ These Westernized Neo-Hindus represented a secularized way of thinking that would become dominant in India and the world. Ramakrishna then went out of his way to meet the leading Neo-Hindus, perhaps to gain some understanding of the way they thought.

At the request of the Divine Mother, on 15 March 1875 Ramakrishna went to visit Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-84), the charismatic leader of the Brahmo Samaj. After seeing him, Keshab and his disciples first thought he was just an ordinary person. Ramakrishna soon enchanted them using simple language to explain profound spiritual topics. P. C. Mozoomdar wrote, "His appearance was so unpretending and simple, and he spoke little at his introduction, that we did not take much notice of him at first. But soon he began to discourse in a sort of half-delirious state, becoming now and then quite unconscious. What he said, however, was so profound and beautiful that we soon perceived he was no ordinary person.... The very first thing observable in the Paramahansa was the intense tenderness with which he cherished the conception of God as Mother" Though

Ramakrishna was 39 years of age and four years older than Mozoomdar, he described him as a “young man.”¹¹²

In the *Indian Mirror* of March 28 Keshab wrote, “We met one (a sincere Hindu devotee) not long ago and were charmed by the depth, penetration, and simplicity of his spirit. The never-ceasing metaphors and analogies, in which he indulged, are most of them as apt as they are beautiful. The characteristics of his mind are the very opposite to those of Pandit Dayananda Saraswati, the former being so gentle, tender, and contemplative, as the latter is sturdy, masculine, and polemical. Hinduism must have in it a deep sense of beauty, truth, and goodness to inspire such men as these.”¹¹³ They became close friends and because of his influence, Keshab’s gradually began to change his ideas about religion. Keshab published Ramakrishna’s saying in his journal of *New Dispensation* that did much to make him known to a wider audience. Three years later the Brahma Samaj split into two factions, which was a sad event for Keshab. Ramakrishna later told his followers, “When I heard of Keshab’s death, I remained in bed for three days. I felt as if part of my body had been paralyzed.”

Keshab was the most successful leader of the Brahma Samaj. In 1868, after bringing Christ study into his organization, he broke with the older leaders and founded his own Brahma Samaj. It was an elite movement that appealed only to the educated upper classes and not to the mass of people. Influenced by Western culture they opposed Hindu ritual, image worship, and the caste system; while advocating a religion of reason, emancipation of women, and educational and social reform. After meeting Ramakrishna, Keshab became a worshipper of the Divine Mother.¹¹⁴

From his association with the Brahma Samaj, Ramakrishna came to learn to what extent and in what ways Western education and ideas were influencing the Indian

people. They would not accept the teachings of the ancient Indian sages without first comparing them with the ideas of Western intellectuals. Second, through his contact with them, Ramakrishna spiritual ideas were written about in the Brahmo Samaj newspapers and magazines. He became widely known in Calcutta and was able to have a significant impact on the Brahmo Samaj particularly on Keshab Sen. Also in this way many of his future disciples like Swami Vivekananda came to know of him.¹¹⁵

Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91) was a well-known scholar, educator, writer, and philanthropist. Most of his income went to charity, widows, orphans, low-income students, and other needy people. He was the Principal of the Sanskrit College of Calcutta and M. taught at his school. Ramakrishna, Bhavanath, M., and Hazra went to visit him on August 5, 1882. Ramakrishna offered many spiritual teachings that day when he was with Vidyasagar accompanied by his friends and relatives. Showing respect Vidyasagar was modest and humble before the Master. Ramakrishna told him, “You are distributing food and learning. That is good too. If these activities are done in a selfless spirit they lead to God. But most people work for fame or to acquire merit. Their activities are not selfless.... Compassion, love of God, and renunciation are the glories of true knowledge.” “The activities that you are engaged in are good. It is very good if you can perform them in a selfless spirit, renouncing egotism, giving up the idea that you are the doer. Through such action one develops love and devotion to God, and ultimately realizes Him.” As Vidyasagar came to the gate of the compound he carried a light to show the way and stood there with folded hands as Ramakrishna’s carriage departed. Vidyasagar created a branch of his school in Calcutta, and Narendra (Vivekananda) began teaching

there for three or four months as head master beginning around May 1885.¹¹⁶

Ramakrishna met Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838-94) and his friends on December 8, 1884. Bankim was possibly the greatest literary figure of contemporary Bengal, one of the creators of the modern Bengali language who wrote on social and religious subjects. He had a great appreciation for Western thought. Bankim composed the *Vande Mataram* in Sanskrit that inspired the Indian freedom fighters, and later became the National Song of India. It is a hymn to the Goddess Durga, identified as the national personification of India. His doctrine of the “New Dharma” extended beyond traditional duties to the family, caste and local community, to loyalty to the country and even to the entire world. On that occasion, Ramakrishna spoke a great deal on spiritual topics concerning Brahman (God) realization. Bankim asked Ramakrishna to visit him, at his Calcutta residence, but he sent Girish and M. instead.¹¹⁷

The leading Neo-Hindus, like D. Tagore, Dayananda, K. Sen, Vidyasagar, and Bankim were very much interested in the transformation of India. Yet when they met Ramakrishna, they had no idea that he would become a historical person that would greatly influence the future of India. Keshab Sen thought that he and the Brahma Samaj would bring about the New Dispensation in religion, never that Ramakrishna would be the catalyst. Ramakrishna had the answers to the problems they were working on for decades. They never thought of inquiring into his views on these matters. Consequently, there was no discussion of India’s problems and their resolution. In his own humble way, Ramakrishna had no desire to let them know about this. In public he made no claims to be an instrument of God, a world-mover or the proclaimer of a new revelation. Ramakrishna succeeded where they did not, because they made alterations on the surface,

while he penetrated to the depths and came up with a radically new solution far beyond their scope of understanding.

Endnotes

¹ Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, tr. Swami Chetanananda (St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 2003), Introduction.11-12, pp. 72-73. Swami Saradananda who researched and wrote the definitive biography of Sri Ramakrishna, in a prior life is considered to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, identified by some with the apostle Simon Peter. The oldest Christian Gospel in the *New Testament* was written by Mark, who did not belong to Jesus' inner circle of twelve intimate disciples. Mark was born in modern day Libya in North Africa. The Gospel of Mark was based on the preaching's of Simon Peter according to Bishop Papias (c. 70-160), who was said to be a disciple of John by the early Fathers of the Church and by most modern Christian theologians. Mark acted as Peter's interpreter and faithfully recorded his teachings (Louis Hartman, tr., *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963), pp. 1450-51, 1817). In this book the word Divine is capitalized to show reverence.

² Saradananda (2003), I:1.9, p. 79.

³ YouTube: Swami Abhedananda Original Voice; Abhedananda, p. 247.

⁴ Dean Peerman and M. Marty, ed., *A Handbook of Christian Theologians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965, 1984), pp. 341-45 explains this phenomenon from a Christian standpoint.

⁵ *The Song of God: Bhagavad Gita*, Swami Prabhavananda and C. Isherwood, trs. (Hollywood: Vedanta Press. 1951), p. 60.

⁶ Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 1, 534.

⁷ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), III, p. 369.

⁸ T. W. Doane, *Bible Myths* (University Books, 1971) p. 242. Swami Vivekananda mentioned the Golden Age began with the birth of Sri Ramakrishna.

⁹ Letters, June 24, 1788.

¹⁰ Web:

<https://wesleyanarminian.wordpress.com/2011/11/13/failed-predictions-of-christs-return/>

¹¹ *Religions in America*, ed. Leo Rosten (Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 179.

¹² *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Vergilius Ferm (Philosophical Library, 1945), p. 431.

¹³ wesleyanarminian.wordpress.com/2011/11/13/failed-predictions-of-christs-return; Web:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Disappointment; WARHD, pp. 57-58; Jack Pratt, "The Miller Awakening and the Great Disappointment of 1844," *Indian Journal of American Studies*, 3 (1973), pp. 71-82.

¹⁴ Berkhof, p. 699.

¹⁵ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Labouré

¹⁶ Saradananda, II.21.3-4, pp. 350, 356-58; Swami Prabhananda, *More About Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), pp. 115-22.

¹⁷ Web:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predictions_and_claims_for_the_Second_Coming_of_Christ

¹⁸ Sister Devamata, *Days in An Indian Monastery* (La Crescenta, CA: Ananda-Ashrama, 1927), pp. 160-61.

¹⁹ *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (E. J. Brill, 1986), V, p. 1237.

²⁰ E. Royston Pike, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Religions* (Meridian Books, 1964), p. 42.

²¹ Daniel Allen Butler, *The First Jihad* (Casemate, 2007), p. 29; Web: www.islam.tc/prophecies/iman.html; RAWSH, p. 427.

²² *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Hereafter CW) (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1962), VII, p. 24.

²³ Saradananda, II:16.9-12, pp. 318-19; GSR, p. 564e.

²⁴ John Hick, "On Conflicting Religious Truth-Claims," *Religious Studies* (19) (Dec. 1983), pp. 485-491, brings up some of these topics without discussing Ramakrishna.

²⁵ For far more details on this stage in world history particularly after 1800 see, Gopal Stavig, "Vedanta and the Future of World Civilization," BRMIC (Feb-April 2016, pp. 38-42, 12-17, 16-20 and Gopal Stavig, *Swami Vivekananda in a Social-Historical Perspective*, Ch. I Background.

²⁶ CW, VI:274, 318, 463. Some Buddhist believe based on traditional scriptural sources that Gautama Buddha (563-483 B.C) prophesized Maitreya a Buddha would be born in 2500 years, which would be between 1937 and 2017 (Web: www.maitreya.org/english/PBuddhism.htm).

²⁷ Norris and Ross McWhirter, *Guinness Book of World* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 324: Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mensen_Ernst

²⁸ Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), pp. 199, 517.

²⁹ RAWSH, pp. 23, 25 27, 97, 458, 461. *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him* edited by Swami Chetanananda is the best single source for learning about how Ramakrishna's associates described him. To read about what prominent Westerners have said about Sri Ramakrishna see *Western Admirers of Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, pp. 31-199.

³⁰ CW, III:312-13; IV:356; V:203. 389 .

³¹ RAWSH, p. 75.

³² *Prabhavananda*3, pp. 239-40.

³³ RAWSH, pp. 107, 102.

³⁴ "Memories of Maharaj," *Vedanta and the West* 143 (April 1960). p. 11.

³⁵ "Memories of Maharaj," pp. 129, 136, 138.

³⁶ "Memories of Maharaj," p. 191; Swami Atulananda, *With the Swamis in America* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1988), 50-51; RAWSH, p. 208.

³⁷ *Vedanta and the West*, 188 (Nov-Dec. 1967), p. 16.

³⁸ RAWSH, pp. 246, 251, 253.

³⁹ *Studies on Sri Ramakrishna* (Gol Park: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1988), pp. 14-15.

⁴⁰ RAWSH, pp. 297, 306.

⁴¹ RAWSH, pp. 401, 403-04.

⁴² *Great Thinkers on Ramakrishna Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2009); RAWSH, pp. 385-86.

⁴³ RAWSH, p. 394

⁴⁴ RAWSH, pp. 342-44.

⁴⁵ SCD, I, pp. 72-73, 79, 84-86, 87-99; SCP, pp. 607, 620-21, 625-26, 633-34. These sources were used to write the paragraph where Sorokin's name is mentioned down to this section.

⁴⁶ Web:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/228066/Gemeinschaft-and-Gesellschaft>;

George and Achilles Theodorson, *Modern Dictionary of Sociology* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), pp. 170, 173, 360-61; Don Martindale, *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), pp. 83-85, 94-96.

⁴⁷ Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda a Biography* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1953), p. 13.

⁴⁸ Saradananda, I:7.13, p. 131.

⁴⁹ Saradananda, pp. 125-26, 131-32, 707.

⁵⁰ Web: www.focuspress.org/2018/01/06/into-the-light

⁵¹ CW, I:415.

⁵² CW, III:253; Anantanand Rambachan, "Where Words Fail: The limits of Scriptural Authority in the Hermeneutics of a Contemporary Advaitin," *Philosophy East and West* (Oct. 1987), pp. 363-67.

⁵³ HCT, p. 474.

⁵⁴ GSR, pp. 634a, 773a; Theodorson (1969), p. 236. The idea of the "Inner, Other, and Tradition-Directed Personality" was developed by David Riesman, et. al. in 1954, and of the "Looking-Glass or Reflected Self" by Charles Cooley in 1902.

⁵⁵ SSR, p. 95.

⁵⁶ Theodorson (1969), p. 21. The concept of "Authoritarian Personality: was worked out by T. Adorno in 1950.

⁵⁷ Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda A Biography* (New York: Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, 1953), pp. 127-28.

⁵⁸ GSR, pp. 831h-32.

⁵⁹ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy;

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy-altruism

www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195341065.001.0001/acprof-9780195341065-chapter-2

⁶⁰ *Studies on Sri Ramakrishna* (1988), p. 13.

⁶¹ HCT, p. 393.

⁶² HCT, p. 14.

⁶³ RAWSH, p. 109; GSR, pp. 202r, 173h. One example is Kiram Bedi who headed the Tihar Jail in Delhi (1993-95). She initiated a Vipassana meditation program which thousands of inmates took part in. Convicted murders, drug dealers, terrorists, and similar type people underwent a group mediation program in order to manifest their higher

nature. One prisoner mentioned before meditating he blamed all of his misbehavior on other people. It was only after meditating he realized he was at fault (Web: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EkQt-fstOM).

⁶⁴ CW, IV:187. Saradananda tells us in India before the advent of Sri Ramakrishna under foreign influence many in the educated community considered visions and ecstasies as impossible or signs of mental illness. The uneducated held strange ideas based on fear and awe (Saradananda, III:2.1, p. 410). In the West mysticism was poorly understood by a number of prominent Protestant thinkers who were highly critical of it, such as Georg Hegel (1770-1831), Albrecht Ritschl (1822-89), Karl Barth (1886-1968), Friedrich Gogarten (1887-1967), and Emil Brunner (1889-1966) (Geddes MacGregor, *Reincarnation in Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophy Publishing House, 1978), pp. 150-52).

⁶⁵ Robert Mack, *The Appeal to Immediate Experience* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), pp. 12-26. The ideas expressed in this paragraph are based to some extent on those of F. H. Bradley.

⁶⁶ GSR, pp. 396c, 678j, 648d, 162d; cf., pp. 909p-10.

⁶⁷ GSR, p. 568a.

⁶⁸ CW, III:314-16.

⁶⁹ Halbfass, p. 230.

⁷⁰ *Studies on Sri Ramakrishna* (1988), pp. 14-15.

⁷¹ GSR, pp. 168b, 393b, 448g, 572a.

⁷² GSR, pp. 82ij, 432f.

⁷³ Saradananda, II:14.6, p. 297.

⁷⁴ Anne Driver, "Review Essay: Religion," *Signs* 2 (Winter, 1976), p. 434.

⁷⁵ GSR, p. 851c.

⁷⁶ CW, IV:187.

⁷⁷ BRMIC (Feb. 2011), p. 82.

⁷⁸ CW, III:315-16; Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1962), p. 280.

⁷⁹ RAWSH, p. 30.

⁸⁰ Swami Tathagatananda, "Dan Gopal Mukerji and the Face of Silence," PB (Feb. 2006), pp. 167-68.

⁸¹ *Studies on Sri Ramakrishna* (1988), p. 98.

⁸² Pitirim Sorokin, *Society, Culture, and Personality* (New York: Cooper Square, 1947, 1962a), p. 607; *Vivekananda as the Turning*

Point, ed. Swami Shuddhidananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), p. 607.

⁸³ For more details on this subject see: Gopal Stavig, "Vedanta and the Future of World Civilization," *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission of Culture* (Feb-April, 2016), pp. 38-42, 12-17, 16-20.

⁸⁴ RAWSH, pp. 56-57.

⁸⁵ Atulananda (1988), p. 58.

⁸⁶ Gorge, p. 233.

⁸⁷ Atulananda (1988), p. 134.

⁸⁸ *Vedanta and the West* 143 (April 1960), pp. 40-42.

⁸⁹ These events are discussed in more detail in WARHD, pp. 208, 495-96, 517-18, 561-62, 681.

⁹⁰ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 46-48, 54-56.

⁹¹ Saradananda, III:2.21, p. 420; GSR, p. 928e.

⁹² Saradananda, II:6.13, p. 212; RAWSH, p. 15.

⁹³ RAWSH, p. 168.

⁹⁴ Saradananda, II:8.9, p. 228.

⁹⁵ Saradananda, II:14.14, p. 300; II:14.18, pp. 301-02.

⁹⁶ Saradananda, II:Appendix.26, pp. 376-77; III:6.10, p. 487; IV:3.16, p. 609.

⁹⁷ Swami Prabhavananda, Lecture Notes.

⁹⁸ Saradananda, II:10.9-10, pp. 253-54; II:11.30, 12:1, pp. 269-70; II:18.10-11, p. 332; III:8.4, p. 522; IV:1.10-11, pp. 550-51.

⁹⁹ GSR, pp. 20-22; Swami Prabhavananda, *The Spiritual Heritage of India* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 397-99.

¹⁰⁰ GSR, pp. 22-24. Sri Chaitanya (1485-1533) was a contemporary of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546). It is of comparative historical interest that they both rebelled against the elitist and somewhat dry scholastic intellectualism of the Middle Ages, and sought to create a personally oriented religion for a large number of people. Their methods and solution to the religious problems of their times varied considerably.

¹⁰¹ Saradananda, II:15.5, 16-19, pp. 306, 311-13; III:8.23, p. 531; GSR, pp. 26-29, 31-32.

¹⁰² Saradananda, II:8.24(2), p. 237.

¹⁰³ Saradananda, II:10.14, p. 256; II:21.8-9, pp. 362-63; IV:1.6-9, 18-20, 30-31, 35, pp. 549-50, 555-56, 562, 565; GSR, pp. 20-22.

¹⁰⁴ Saradananda, II:8.2, p. 224; II:12.11-13, 18, pp. 275-76, 279; IV:2.11, 16-18, pp. 574-76, 579-80; GSR, pp. 24-24; Torwesten, pp. 58-59.

¹⁰⁵ Saradananda, II:18.7, IV:3.20, pp. 331, 611-12; GSR, p. 201e; Swami Tattwananda, *The Saints of India* (Calcutta: Nirmalendu Bikash Sen Gupta, Undated), pp. 21-31; Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trailanga.

¹⁰⁶ Saradananda, IV:3.33-34, 45-47, pp. 621-22, 626-27.

¹⁰⁷ Tattwananda (Undated).

¹⁰⁸ GSR, pp. 40-41, 650-51, 1022; Saradananda, IV:2.55, p. 599.

¹⁰⁹ Saradananda, III:7.31-32, pp. 516-17.

¹¹⁰ Saradananda, IV:2.53, p. 599; GSR, pp. 607

¹¹¹ GSR, p. 831.

¹¹² *Sri Ramakrishna in the Eyes of Brahma and Christian Admirers*, ed. Nanda Mookerjee (Calcutta: Firma LKM Private LTD, 1976), p. 2.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Saradananda, II:Apend.15-25, pp. 371-76; GSR, pp. 40-42, 318.

¹¹⁵ Saradananda, V:1.1-3, 9-10; V:2.1-6; pp. 721-22, 725-26, 745-47.

¹¹⁶ GSR, pp. 99-101, 108, 267, 888; Saradananda, V:10.1-2, p. 854.

¹¹⁷ GSR, pp. 666-76; WARHD, p. 37.