

# Shri Ramakrishna And The Common Person

By Swami Tathagatananda

## An Incarnation Of Love

Brahman the ultimate Reality is characterized by Satchidananda—sat, chit, and ananda. Sat is Pure Consciousness, the changeless ground of all existence. Chit is self-Awareness or limitless Knowledge, meaning self-luminous and spiritual amidst all material objects. Ananda is intrinsic Bliss, which we enjoy in life in our own way. The Taittiriya Upanishad says that Divinity is “the soul of truth, the delight of the life, and the bliss of mind, the fullness of peace and eternity.” The Infinite and Absolute Being, out of love for suffering humanity, accepts suffering by being born as a human being. Satchidananda comes to us as the Avatara—the Avatara is God in human form. The Avatara comes to inundate the world with a flood of divine compassion which brings life-transforming spiritual vibrations to the entire universe.

Shri Ramakrishna, the Avatara of the modern age, is the Incarnation of love. He is the living God Satchidananda. According to Shri Ramakrishna, “It is God alone who incarnates Himself as man to teach people the ways of love and knowledge.” Shri Ramakrishna says:

And we see God Himself if we but see His Incarnation. . . . If you seek God, then seek Him in man; He manifests Himself more in man than in any other thing. If you see a man endowed with ecstatic love, overflowing with prema, mad after God, intoxicated with His love, then know for certain that God has incarnated Himself through that man.

There is no doubt that God exists in all things; but the manifestations of His power are different in different beings. The greatest manifestation of His Power is through an Incarnation. Again, in some Incarnations there is a complete manifestation of God’s Power. It is the Sakti, the Power of God, that is born as an Incarnation.

Ramakrishna saw God everywhere with such intense devotion that his body glowed with pure consciousness and his eyes shone with a spiritual luster, two infinite pools of compassion. He experienced the full joy of the Source of endless Bliss. Nivedita calls it “the solitary grandeur and freedom of the soul.” He felt the vivid and powerful reality of God within and without. Every stage of his earthly journey was illumined by God-knowledge.

But Shri Ramakrishna did not want to keep this knowledge to himself. His entire being throbbed with the desire to convey it to souls bound in the mire of worldliness. His burning love for devotees leaves us rooted in motionless wonder and reverence. No secular love can ever approach that love of Shri Ramakrishna; no saint comes close to his intensity of love for God and concern for man's welfare. He was mad for God and for man. He cared deeply about the fallen, the helpless, and the rejected, about all who struggle in the sea of ignorance. He is the friend of the hopeless and gives them his boundless love and consolation. Every one of his teachings is filled with love for the sunken man or woman. He did not reject or condemn anyone. However stained their record of life, prodigal sons and daughters were never shunned by Shri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda says, "He was the Saviour of women, Saviour of the masses, Saviour of all, high and low." Worshipping God as the Divine Mother, the Master saw only the Divine Mother in every woman. Speaking about Shri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda has said:

This man (Shri Ramakrishna) meant by worshipping woman, that to him every woman's face was that of the Blissful Mother, and nothing but that. I myself have seen this man standing before those women whom society would not touch, and falling at their feet bathed in tears, saying, "Mother, in one form Thou art in the street, and in another form the universe. I salute Thee, Mother, I salute Thee."

Narrow-minded critics, however, strongly disapproved of Shri Ramakrishna's loving and protective attitude towards drunkards, prostitutes and other impure persons. They accused him of not rejecting them on moral grounds. The respected German orientalist Max Müller responded to these accusations by writing, "If, as we are told, he did not show sufficient moral abhorrence of prostitutes, he does not stand quite alone in this among the founders of religion."

Out of his profound compassion, Shri Ramakrishna transformed many souls and made them worthy of being redeemed. Though constantly immersed in God-consciousness, with his irresistible power of his love for God and man Shri Ramakrishna unceasingly and tirelessly brought goodness into the world. He was the consoling friend of the bereaved and the oppressed as well as God's passionate devotee.

Being thus consumed with love for humanity and a desire to serve God in every being, Ramakrishna cheerfully faced insult and dishonor in his labor of love. Transforming his love for God into dedicated service of God in man, Ramakrishna was a veritable hymn of service. His song of love, "Yatra Jiva, tatra Shiva," "Where the human soul is, there the Divine is," resounds in our mind. He shares God's mercy and love with every one. Swami Vivekananda says:

The first part of my Master's life was spent in acquiring spirituality, and the remaining years in distributing it. Men came in crowds to hear him, and he would talk twenty hours in the twenty-four, and that not for one day, but for months and months, until at last the body broke down under the pressure of this tremendous strain. His intense love for mankind would not let him refuse to help even the humblest of the thousands who sought

his aid. Gradually there developed a vital throat disorder, and yet he could not be persuaded to refrain from these exertions. As soon as he heard that people were asking to see him, he would insist upon having them admitted, and would answer their questions. When expostulated with, he replied, "I do not care (for this body). I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man." There was no rest for him. . . . "While I can speak, I must teach them," he would say, and he was as good as his word.

Ramakrishna gives every wretched soul his unconditional love and compassion. With his own purity he purifies others. Teaching us to love God with his own love, he gives others hope for a better, spiritual way of life. Ramakrishna is the wish-fulfilling embodiment of divine love in this world and has made us heir to that invaluable treasure.

"Service to All"

The various compilers of Shri Ramakrishna's teachings provide us with insight into this aspect of the Master's selfless love for humanity expressed through service. There is a moving narration by one of them, Suresh Chandra Datta:

Once, a slender and obviously poor man entered the Master's room. His feet were dirty. He addressed the Master, saying, "Hello, Ramakrishna," then sat on his bed. He patted the Master's shoulder and said, "Brother, prepare a smoke for me. The Master immediately rushed to prepare tobacco, but his devotees took the tobacco bowl from him and prepared the smoke. That man silently smoked for a while, then left, saying, "Brother, I am Ram." When he left, the devotees asked: "Master, why did you try to prepare tobacco for him? You could easily have asked us to do it." The Master replied, "What is wrong with serving others?"

Swami Vishuddananda narrates another episode:

Once a friend of Mathur came to visit Dakshineswar and noticed that the garden was full of flowers. He saw the Master nearby and thought he was a gardener. He asked the Master to make a bouquet for him. The Master immediately made a beautiful bouquet and presented it to the gentleman. He was very pleased and told Mathur: "Look, your gardener made this bouquet for me. Where did you get this wonderful gardener?"

Mathur said: "Let us go and see the gardener." Both went and found the Master. Mathur said to his friend: "He is not a gardener. He is the paramahansa."

Now we turn to the special feeling that Shri Ramakrishna kept in his heart for women. Because he worshipped God as Mother, Ramakrishna saw only the Divine Mother in all women; therefore, he could not bear to see his Mother undergo difficulties of any kind. We read in the Gospel of two young mothers, the wives of two brothers, who fasted before visiting Shri Ramakrishna. After giving them both much satisfaction and showing them his deep affection, Shri Ramakrishna said, "Why have you fasted? You should take

your meal before you come here. Women are but so many forms of my Divine Mother. I cannot bear to see them suffer. You are all images of the Mother of the Universe. Come here after you have eaten, and you will feel happy.” Then the Master served them by requesting Rakhai to feed them from the various Temple offerings of food, fruit, sweets and drinks. Shri Ramakrishna was greatly relieved and said, “You have eaten something. Now my mind is at peace. I cannot bear to see women fast.”

From his own revelation, Ramakrishna offered his disciples the flower of their spiritual manhood. Coming down from the state of Samadhi, he told them: “How foolish to speak of compassion! Man is an insignificant worm crawling on the earth—and he is to show compassion to others! This is absurd. It must not be compassion, but service to all. Recognize them as God’s manifestations and serve them.” Initially, only Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) caught the blazing flame of Ramakrishna’s suggestion and painstakingly forged it into the bold mission of his life. Before leaving the Master that day, Narendra turned to the other devotees and said:

What a wonderful light I have discovered in those words of the Master! How beautifully he has reconciled the ideal of bhakti with the knowledge of Vedanta, generally interpreted as dry, austere, and incompatible with human sentiments! What a grand, natural and sweet synthesis! . . . Those following the paths of karma [action] and yoga [contemplation] are similarly benefited by these words of the Master. The embodied being cannot remain even for a minute without activity. All his activities should be directed to the service of man, the manifestation of God upon earth, and this will accelerate his progress towards the goal. If it be the will of God, I shall one day proclaim this noble truth before the world at large. I shall make it the common property of all—the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, the Brahmin and the pariah.

On May 1, 1987, the Ramakrishna Foundation was established by Swami Vivekananda. He said shortly after, “I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in tamas [inertia] to stand on their own feet and be men inspired with the spirit of karma yoga.”

The master’s love for SUFFERING HUMANITY

“He who was Shri Ramakrishna, whose stream of love flowed with restless might even to the Chandal (the outcast); Oh, who was ever engaged in doing good to the world though superhuman by nature . . .”

—Swami Vivekananda, Hymns to Shri Ramakrishna)

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and The Great Master contain innumerable anecdotes of the Master’s unbounded, infinite love. His love consoled everyone high or lowly. Though his greatest joy and motherly tenderness poured forth upon his innocent, pure-hearted young disciples, his grace flowed freely upon all devotees and every Tom, Dick and

Harry. Our present humble aim is to convey the impact of only one aspect of Shri Ramakrishna's grand and sublime life: his undying concern for the common person. We are citing only a few examples to briefly illustrate the power of God's love through the Avatara Shri Ramakrishna. We begin with an incident at Dakshineswar that will acquaint readers with his loving attitude towards one of his young disciples. This is followed by illustrations of the Master's love for the poor, the lowly and humble, of his mercy for an envious temple priest, of his loving manner towards bohemians, of his transforming touch, and of his love for the plight of helpless, dumb creatures.

## THE MASTER'S LOVING WAY OF CORRECTING A YOUNG DISCIPLE

Latu Maharaj (Swami Adbhutananda) was the first young disciple to come to Shri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. The Master gave him various spiritual instructions and guided him carefully in the development of his character. Latu had come to the Master with a habit of making blunt remarks, which Ramakrishna gradually corrected. One day, when a devotee at Dakshineswar did not behave well, Latu reprimanded him with hurtful words. The Master happened to see Latu's harsh treatment of the devotee. The Master was filled with kindness and forbearance. He waited for the devotee to leave. Then he spoke lovingly to Latu, that his correction might take full effect. "It is not good to speak harshly to those who come here. They are tormented with worldly problems. If they come here and then are scolded for their shortcomings, where will they go? In the presence of holy company never use harsh words to anyone, and never say anything to cause pain to another. Tomorrow, visit this man and speak to him in such a way that he will forget what you said to him today." Latu was humbled by Shri Ramakrishna's loving words and gracious attitude towards him in his weakness. He obeyed.

Latu Maharaj visited the devotee the following day. He spoke to him sweetly and returned to Shri Ramakrishna with a lightened heart. The Master asked him, "Did you offer him salutations from me?" Latu was amazed at the Master's wonderful words and had to admit that he had not done so. Shri Ramakrishna told him, "Go to him again and offer him my salutations." When Latu did this faithfully, the devotee was overcome with emotion at the Master's grace and burst into tears. Latu was deeply touched and returned to tell the Master what had happened. Shri Ramakrishna poured his grace upon Latu Maharaj and said, "Now your misdeed is pardoned." The humility that Latu saw in the Master gradually brought about his complete transformation; after this he was unable to hurt anyone's feelings. Under the Master's vigilant guidance, Latu also made great progress in meditation.

## THE MASTER'S LOVE FOR THE POOR

### THE STARVING CITIZENS OF DEOGHAR

Shri Ramakrishna's love for the famished beggars during his visit to Deoghar is well known. In 1868, Mathur Nath Biswas accompanied Shri Ramakrishna on a pilgrimage to Varanasi and other places in North India. On the way they stopped for a few days at Deoghar to visit the local Shiva temple, a renowned place of pilgrimage. The Master was shocked to see the extreme poverty of the village people. He wept and was very much pained to see their wretched condition. He told Mathur, "You are but a manager of Mother's estate. Give these people sufficient oil to cool their heads and each a piece of cloth to wear and feed them to their fill once." Mathur replied, "Father, the pilgrimage will require much money, and the poor are too many. I may later be in want of money if I begin to do all that. What do you advise under these circumstances?" Ramakrishna cried out in anguish, "You rascal! I will not go to your Kasi. I will remain here with them; they have none to call their own; I will not leave them behind and go." The Master immediately sat down with those poor villagers and refused to take another step. Seeing the depth of the Master's compassion, Mathur fulfilled the Master's wish, making the villagers very happy. Ramakrishna felt their joy as his own and proceeded gladly with Mathur to Kasi.

#### MATHUR'S POOR TENANTS AT RANAGHAT

Another time Shri Ramakrishna visited Ranaghat, Mathur's native village. There also his love and overwhelming compassion poured out for Mathur's poverty-stricken tenants and requested Mathur to stop taxing them. Mathur stopped taxing his tenants, though very reluctantly. In this way, Ramakrishna's desire to mitigate the condition of those poor tenants was achieved. The Master's selfless love for the poor is a pure reflection of his attitude towards money, the touch of which caused him extreme pain.

#### THE MASTER'S LAST DAYS AT COSSIPORE

The well-known physician Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, a homeopathic doctor of Calcutta, was invited to manage the care of Shri Ramakrishna's final illness of throat cancer, first at Shyampukur and later at Cossipore, where the Master spent the last eight months of his life. At Cossipore, Shri Ramakrishna told M. that it was impossible for him to bear the aches and pains of his ailing body: "I have gone on suffering so much for fear of making you all weep. But if you all say, 'Oh, there is so much suffering! Let the body die,' then I may give up the body." Despite his own suffering, the Master remained aware of the plight of the poor, who are with us always, as the following episode illustrates.

During these last days of the Master at the Cossipore garden house, Sashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) hardly ever left the premises. During the Chariot Festival of Lord Jagannath in 1886, the following event took place. The Master asked Sashi to go to the festival. But Sashi was very reluctant to leave the Master's side and went only when the Master insisted. He tore himself away from the Master's side and managed to find a place very close to the garden where he could attend the festival and fulfill the Master's wish. He happened to see a small paring knife being sold for only two pice. Thinking of how nicely it would cut lemons for the Master, he bought it. When Sashi returned to the Master's side, Shri Ramakrishna was really happy to see that he had purchased something

without being told. He said, “You should not fail to visit such festivals and make some purchase, however small. Poor people prepare so many things on these special occasions and bring them to the fair for sale with the hope of earning something. Try to keep up the ancient traditions as far as practicable and encourage others to do so.”

## THE MASTER WITH THE LOWLY AND HUMBLE

### RASIK, THE humble SWEEPER

No person is too lowly for God’s grace, as the familiar story of Rasik, the sweeper of the Dakshineswar Temple courtyard and steps, illustrates. Rasik was simple and guileless; his pure heart longed only for God but he suffered under the restrictions of his caste and lowly status. He craved to approach Shri Ramakrishna, whom he called “Father” but suffered under the restrictions of his caste and lowly status. He could only watch with longing as others came close to the Master and were redeemed. He wept much for Shri Ramakrishna’s grace. One day, he prostrated himself before Shri Ramakrishna as he was returning from the Panchavati, absorbed in a spiritual mood. “What will happen to me?” he cried. Ramakrishna’s heart was very much touched by Rasik’s wretched condition. Gazing at Rasik with full compassion, he gave him his greatest blessing: “You will see me at the time of death.”

Two years after the Master’s demise, Rasik became feverish and gravely ill. He rejected all medicines. He only accepted the sanctified water (Charanamrita) which sustained him and gave him some energy. The fever ended. He spent his waking hours chanting God’s name and praying earnestly for His grace. Lying on a mat in his tulsi grove, his rosary in hand, the blessed Rasik died with full consciousness visualizing the presence of the Master. Shri Ramakrishna’s great assurance to Rasik was literally fulfilled.

Rasik’s story has been well documented. A similar event occurred in the life of Hazra, who is familiar to all readers of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Hazra used to call Swamiji his friend; when Swamiji intervened on his behalf, Shri Ramakrishna was constrained to grant Hazra his grace. Hazra died peacefully and happily in a manner similar to Rasik.

These events remind us of the story of Bhartabhari, the illiterate temple gardener who was loved by Ramakrishna for his simple, good life. One night, Bhartabhari saw a bright radiance flowing from Ramakrishna’s body while the Master was meditating under the bel tree. It was brighter than lightning, brighter than the sun. He was so astounded that he left the spot in fear but the next morning he fell tearfully at the Master’s feet and said, “Master, please bless me.” Ramakrishna gently raised him up and said, “Meditate on the form that you saw last night. Clean this path that leads to the Panchavati. Many devotees will come here in the future.” With these words, Ramakrishna assured his devotee that obedience to his instruction was all that was needed for his mukti.

### DINA MUKHERJEE

Dina Mukherjee was another very good devotee who lived near Baghbazaar. He was very poor. The Master so loved the pure in heart that he did not wait to be invited to their homes. One day Ramakrishna asked Mathur to take him to Dina's house. It was so small and crowded with people that they could not find a place to sit. On their way back to Dakshineswar, Mathur complained to Ramakrishna about these inconveniences but the Master remained very lighthearted about it.

#### THE MASTER'S MERCIFUL ATTITUDE TOWARDS a TEMPLE PRIEST

It is well known that Chandra Haldar, a priest of the Kali temple at Kalighat and Mathur's family priest, was envious of Mathur's steadfast loyalty to the Master. He had applied all his magical art to control Mathur and was convinced that the Master had secretly cast a stronger spell over Mathur to make him his loyal devotee. For this reason, he asked Shri Ramakrishna to teach him the alleged charm-like mantra so that he could control Mathur and captivate the minds of other influential people. The Master repeatedly told Haldar that all devotees came due to the grace of the Divine Mother and not through some magic formula. Haldar did not believe him. He kept insisting that Ramakrishna teach him the secret art of controlling others. Haldar's failure to extract a magical formula from Shri Ramakrishna festered long in his mind. He had no genuine interest in spirituality.

Haldar often visited Mathur's Janbazar house. One day he arrived at Mathur's house and found the Master there alone in a poorly lit room. Ramakrishna was lying on the floor in an ecstatic mood. Looking down at him, Haldar was convinced that the Master was only pretending to be in a state of Samadhi in order to impress Mathur and gain his financial support. The sight of Shri Ramakrishna in Samadhi at Mathur's house was more than Haldar could tolerate and all his accumulated anger and jealousy were released. He kicked the Master several times as he lay there on the floor. The boots he was wearing left black marks where they struck the Master's body.

The Master is an ocean of mercy. Shri Ramakrishna related this story one day at Shyampukur to Narendra and other devotees only because Doctor Sarkar asked him about it. Ramakrishna said, "Everybody wanted to tell Mathur Babu about it, but I forbade them." Ramakrishna never reported the matter because he knew that if Mathur learned about Haldar's violence towards his beloved Master, he might punish the priest harshly. When Mathur did in fact find out about it he remarked, "Father, if I had known that then, he would have been killed." The Master's reply to Mathur speaks volumes about his profound humility and compassion: "You see, Haldar really believed me to be the possessor of some magic charm. I tried my best to remove this false idea from his mind, but I could not do it." The Master's direct disciple Swami Shivananda commented on this incident: "You see, our Lord had different moods. With respect to Haldar he was not in the mood of the Guru transforming the disciple; in relation to him he was like an ordinary devotee, who must see the Lord in the ignorant, in the wicked." Mathur Babu eventually



had to dismiss Haldar for a serious dereliction of duty some time after his violent act towards the Master.

The master WITH BOHEMIANS

GIRISH CHANDRA GHOSH

Girish Chandra Ghosh was a great devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. He was already a hopeless Bohemian the first time he came before the Master. His personal account of Shri Ramakrishna's love for him is familiar to all of us. In spite of the well-known fact that the Master's purity would not allow him to touch any impure person, still, Shri Ramakrishna made Girish feel his eternal love. Girish could hardly control himself when he was drunk, and one evening, he was drinking heavily with friends and talking about the Master. Around 11 pm, Girish felt such a strong urge to see Shri Ramakrishna that he went to the Arhiritola Ghat and hired a boat to take them to the Master. They reached Dakshineswar after midnight. Finding the Master's door open, they saw that he was in a state of ecstasy. Notwithstanding, they staggered in and bowed low before him. He was not repulsed, nor did he accuse his drunken visitors. With unfathomable compassion he set about to transform them. Taking hold of their hands he began to dance and sing, drawing them nearer and nearer to God:

I drink no ordinary wine, but Wine of Everlasting Bliss,  
As I repeat my Mother Kali's name;  
It so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk!

How could they resist his love? The intensity of his God-intoxication overwhelmed them. Two hours passed in this way; Girish emerged sober from this extraordinary experience. He gave his own testimony of Ramakrishna's expression of genuine love for him, though he had visited the Master in that shameful state:

One night, in a euphoric and drunken mood, I was visiting a house of prostitution with two of my friends. But suddenly I felt an urge to visit Sri Ramakrishna. My friends and I hired a carriage and drove out to Dakshineswar. It was late at night, and everyone was asleep. The three of us entered Sri Ramakrishna's room, tipsy and reeling. Sri Ramakrishna grasped both my hands and began to sing and dance in ecstasy. The thought flashed through my mind: "Here is a man whose love embraces all—even a wicked man like me, whose own family would condemn me in this state. Surely this holy man, respected by the righteous, is also the saviour of the fallen."

As Girish was returning to Calcutta in the early morning hours with his friends, he said, "Have you noticed the Master's compassion for a wretched fellow like me? He is God. There is no doubt about it. He has incarnated to deliver horrible sinners like me."

After the passing of Shri Ramakrishna, during a weekly meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission at the house of Balaram Bose (August 15, 1897) Girish said, "I have never

received such love from anyone. To me, Sri Ramakrishna is the Lord; he is God-incarnate. A single utterance of his removed the doubts of a lifetime from my mind. Even now, if I see doubts begin to stir, I think of him. Immediately they vanish and do not rise again. I find that it is not difficult to obey him, love him, and worship him. But indeed, it is difficult to forget him.”

One very hot afternoon Girish came to visit Shri Ramakrishna in the Cossipore House. Shri Ramakrishna’s sickness was so advanced at that time that he could not turn over on his side without someone’s help. His body was in a painful, emaciated state. The Master asked Latu to give Girish some snacks which had been bought from Fagu’s famed shop located in the Baranagore bazaar nearby. While Girish was enjoying his refreshments, the Master knew that he would need something cool to drink. There was an earthen jug in the southeastern corner of his room. “There is some nice water here,” he said. The Master’s disciples who were there were utterly amazed to see Shri Ramakrishna slowly and painfully crawling across the floor to the jug so that he could offer Girish water from his own hand! The Master found that it was not cool to the touch but since no better water was available, he gave it very reluctantly to Girish. Such was the Master’s deep apologetic feeling towards his devotee. It may be recalled that Girish’s good friend Kalipada Ghosh, a bohemian like himself, was also blessed by Shri Ramakrishna and became his very close devotee.

At Benares, the monks of Benares asked Girish about Shri Ramakrishna. He described the day at Dakshineswar when he had seen Shri Ramakrishna weeping profusely like any ordinary bereaved person. He had never seen the Master cry in this way. Extremely taken aback and unable to understand the cause of the Master’s weeping, he asked the Master to explain. Shri Ramakrishna told Girish that his weak constitution always required him to travel by boat or horse-carriage to visit devotees, whereas Nityananda, a disciple of Shri Chaitanya, could easily travel to the homes of devotees because he was blessed with a strong body. Had he been endowed with good health, he would have been able to walk to his devotees’ homes.

#### BHAGAVATI THE MAIDSERVANT

Bhagavati was the elderly maidservant of the temple owner at Dakshineswar. She had led an immoral life in her younger days and still retained a proud ego. Shri Ramakrishna had known her for many years and was very compassionate towards her. In an early chapter of the Gospel, we find her speaking rather intimately and proudly with the Master in his room at Dakshineswar (June 4, 1883). M. and Rakhai Maharaj were also present. Bhagavati took full advantage of the Master’s way of speaking with her in the loving manner of infinite universal love and touched the holy feet of Shri Ramakrishna:

Like a man stung by a scorpion, Shri Ramakrishna stood up and cried out, “Govinda! Govinda!” A big jar of Ganges water stood in a corner of the room. He hurried there, panting, and washed with the holy water the spot the maidservant had touched. The devotees in the room were amazed to see this incident. Bhagavati sat as if struck dead.

Again, Shri Ramakrishna saw only the Divine Mother in all women. He never reprimanded Bhagavati and relieved her sense of shame, saying gently, “You should salute me from a distance.” The Master then sang three songs about the Divine Mother to console her. Bhagavati later fulfilled two requests of the Master that day at Dakshineswar: she went on several pilgrimages and made noble use of her money by giving it to charity.

## The master’s TRANSFORMING TOUCH

binodini

On September 21, 1884, Shri Ramakrishna left Dakshineswar to see a performance of the religious play of Shri Chaitanya’s early life, Chaitanya Lila, at the Star Theatre. Girish had selected the actress Binodini for the main role of Shri Chaitanya. In spite of her unchaste lifestyle, Shri Ramakrishna praised Binodini and blessed her profusely after the performance. The Master poured his love upon her by pressing his hands on her head with the words, “Mother, be illumined.”

After receiving Shri Ramakrishna’s blessed touch, Binodini began to regard him as the living God. He fulfilled her longing to see him again during his last days at Shyampukur. There, he spoke briefly with her and was satisfied that she had improved her way of life. He gave her some simple spiritual instructions “that she might have faith in and reliance on God, and bade goodbye to her soon afterwards. She shed tears of joy and repentance, touched adoringly his holy feet with her head and went away . . .” She touched his feet when he was in an ecstatic mood.

In her autobiography, Binodini wrote, “I don’t care if people of the world look down upon my sinful life. I was blessed by Sri Ramakrishna. His loving, hopeful message still sustains me. When I am terribly depressed I see his sweet, compassionate face in my heart and hear his voice, “Say Hari guru, guru Hari (God is your guru, and the guru is your God).” To her credit, after the passing away of Shri Ramakrishna, Binodini, at the height of her career, voluntarily gave up her profession (on January 1, 1887). She married and began to live normally. She proceeded to worship God with devotion. We do not want to elaborate further.

## MANMATHA

There is also the case of Manmatha, the notorious powerful wrestler and robber who was hired to intimidate the Master and prevent him from visiting devotees in Baghbazar. Yogin Ma lived in that area, in Nebubagan and used to visit Shri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. But her brother Hiralal strongly disapproved. When Yogin Ma invited the Master to her house at Nebubagan, Hiralal hired Manmatha to intimidate the Master so that he would no longer visit devotees in that locality. Due to his reputation as an expert fighter, Manmatha was feared by the toughest gangs of Calcutta. In his reminiscences, Swami Akhandananda wrote, “After Manmatha saw the Master and heard a few words

from him, he fell at his feet and said to him weeping, ‘My Lord, I am guilty. Please forgive me.’ The Master replied: “All right. Come one day to Dakshineswar’.”

Manmatha did visit Shri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar a few days later with Swami Akhandananda, who agreed to go with him after Manmatha requested him to do so. When he approached the Master, Shri Ramakrishna simply touched him. The Master’s mere touch gradually transformed Manmatha completely. At Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna treated him tenderly and affectionately. He asked Manmatha to wear again the sacred thread which Manmatha had removed some time before and led him to the Kali temple where he blessed him.

Manmatha became a most ardent devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. Within one or two visits he was so transformed that he began to repeat “Priyanath, Priyanath” (Dear Lord, Dear Lord) constantly. He remained in Calcutta and some time later, people saw that he had become transformed outwardly as well as inwardly; his thin body reflected his severe austerities. Swami Akhandananda knew him well and reported that he saw him when Manmatha visited the Baranagore Monastery in 1980, when Swami Vivekananda and other swamis were there. Manmatha’s hands always remained folded, his lips repeating constantly, “Priyanath, Priyanath.” He had become completely detached from the world, and died peacefully in the due course of time.

## THE MASTER’S LOVE FOR DUMB CREATURES

### HOMELESS CATS OF DAKSHINESWAR TEMPLE

Two cats used to roam about in the compound of the Dakshineswar Temple. No one was taking proper care of them. Though Shri Ramakrishna was always absorbed in God-Consciousness his compassionate heart noticed the pitiable condition of those helpless stray cats. He could not bear their wretched condition.

After a good deal of hesitation, the Master humbly asked a lady devotee whether she could relieve his anxiety by taking care of those two cats and to give them food and water at her house. Although Shri Ramakrishna’s word is a command to the devotee, one has to note the manner of Shri Ramakrishna in approaching that devotee. Of course, she was overjoyed at the Master’s proposal and immediately responded to his appeal. She did it with such a loving heart that Shri Ramakrishna also extracted from her the promise to take care of the cats herself and not send them to anyone else. This very great devotee, admired both by Shri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi for her high spiritual quality, was none other than the blessed wife of Navagopal Ghosh, in whose house Swami Vivekananda spontaneously composed the soliloquy: “Om! Obeisance to you, Ramakrishna, who established dharma (on earth), who is the personification of all dharmas, and who is the best of avataras.”

### carriage HORSES

Shri Ramakrishna would often go the homes of devotees in a horse carriage. Sometimes, the horses were undernourished and he was painfully aware of their weary burden whenever they had to pull a heavy load of passengers. If the coachman whipped the horses to spur them on, Shri Ramakrishna felt as if he himself was being whipped with every lash. For this reason, the Master usually requested to be driven in a carriage sent by his devotee Beni Pal, who always provided a carriage with strong, healthy horses whenever Shri Ramakrishna needed this service from him.

We will not elaborate further since it is sufficiently known that Shri Ramakrishna's heart always bled at the sight of all misery, that of creatures and humans alike.

## IN Conclusion

Shri Ramakrishna came to recall mankind to God's righteous ways. He came to weld our shattered energies into a united force that would continue operating in the entire field of human life and endeavor. The spiritual wave of divine love that swept over humanity with Shri Ramakrishna's advent produced sacred literature, hymns of sublime majesty and various sanctified artistic forms of expression. Shri Ramakrishna spoke little and was wholly immersed in devotion to God. His utterances about God and spiritual life are a Godly condensation of Truth, the light of which penetrated the hearts and minds of all who heard them.

The pithy words of Shri Ramakrishna have a consummate, lasting effect in the formation of our spiritual character. His words in the Gospel give us a taste of spiritual bliss. Our humble acknowledgment and highest form of charity is to make them known to the world so that all humanity may receive their redeeming benefit.

## End Notes

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