

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, THE APOSTLE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

SWAMI HARSHANANDA

NEARLY two thousand years ago Jesus Christ, commended and commanded his chief disciple Simon Barjona thus : ' And I say to thee that thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church, and gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give thee keys of the kingdom of Heaven and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in the heavens, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosened in heaven.' Simon the poor fisherman now became the Apostle Peter, the rock on which Christ built his mighty church, possessing the keys to the kingdom of Heavens and invested with the power and authority ' to bind ' or ' to loose ' things on earth.

One thousand eight hundred sixty years later, a similar scene was enacted in the big room of the Cossipore garden house. The Paramahansa, ailing for nearly a year, was imparting final instructions to his beloved Naren (the future Swami Vivekananda) to keep his ' flock of sheep ' together, to train them in a life of renunciation and to work with their help for the spiritual regeneration of this ancient land of India. Even the direction to build a new type of monastic organisation incorporating within it the ideal of serving suffering humanity as a manifestation of Divinity came from the Master himself. Given the guidance and armed with the spiritual power tangibly transferred by his guru into himself, ' the king of men ' (Narendra) ere long became ' the king of ascetics ' (Yati-rāja) distributing wisdom and bliss (Viveka and Ānanda) to a large section of humanity both in the East and in the West.

An ' apostle ' is ' one who is sent ', ' an envoy ', ' a legate '. Sent by whom ? May be by men, may be by godmen, may be by God Himself. All the great religious leaders,

teachers, messiahs and prophets were apostles of God, messengers from the Most-High. They had their own apostles too. Mahavira had his Gautama. Buddha had his Mahakassapa and Ānanda. Christ had his twelve apostles led by Peter. Prophet Muhammad had his Abu Bakr. Śaṅkara had his four apostles. So were Guru Nānak's successors who were all his own apostles in a way.

An apostle is chosen by his Master, trained by him and guided by him. When the Master departs, his glory and power descend upon the apostle to inspire him to fulfil the commission entrusted to him. Working for his Master with unflinching devotion, meditating upon him constantly, the apostle in course of time gets completely identified with the Master himself. That is why in the apostolic succession, each of the persons who occupies the seat is revered as the original apostle or the Master himself.

The choosing of Vivekananda as his apostle by Ramakrishna was done before either of them was born in this world. Ramakrishna's vision of the seven sages and of one of them being chosen by the Divine Child to follow him down to this earth testifies to this. He even knew when Narendra was born, since he had a vision in which he saw a ray of light from Kāśī entering the Simla area of Calcutta.

The first meeting between these great souls at Dakshineswar has been graphically described by both of them. It is clear from these descriptions that the Avatār had met and recognised his apostle, whom he had been eagerly expecting, though the apostle himself had yet to go a long way in recognising his Master.

After getting confirmation of his earlier visions by testing Narendra on his second

visit, Ramakrishna started the spiritual ministry of his disciple in right earnest. Dry intellectualism, bordering often on sarcasm or cynicism or atheism which was slowly gripping young Naren's mind as a result of the study of Western philosophies, had to be knocked out first. Ramakrishna's earnest attempts in this direction often met with little success. Naren could hold his own. Poor Ramakrishna would sometimes be nonplussed by the scintillating logic of his brilliant disciple. But then, the Divine Mother would come to his rescue! What he could not do through logic, he would achieve through 'magic', by the magic touch of his hands, thereby helping his beloved disciple to transcend the bondage of his own intellect and get at the truth by direct experience. Within the space of about three years, the mighty intellect of Narendra had been sufficiently chastened, humbled and refined to accept the super-sensory experiences of his guru and Master and to surrender at his feet.

The Master always bestowed a very special attention on his beloved apostle Narendra, sometimes lavishing his love on him, sometimes subjecting him to severe testing and at other times giving a direction to his self-confidence or exuberance or enthusiasm. As a result of such meticulous training Narendra was now fully ready to start on the road to the fulfilment of his Master's cherished dreams.

Towards the end of his earthly drama, Ramakrishna spent long hours in privately instructing Narendra about the work he had to do when he himself was gone. He gave him a taste of the Nirvikalpa Samādhi for which he had been hankering, but subsequently 'locked up' that experience. He specifically entrusted 'the boys' (his future monastic disciples) to his care and transferred his spiritual powers to him three days before the final departure.

The main mission that Ramakrishna entrusted to Vivekananda was the regeneration of the Motherland in which spirituality had fallen to a low ebb. No man, however great, can accomplish such a task without a well-

organised effort. Hence the second task that Ramakrishna put on his shoulders was to prevent 'the boys' from returning to the world and to make excellent monks out of them. With these monks he had to found a new type of monastic order. To build such an organisation and to work through it, material help was necessary. To get this, he could go out of our country. That Ramakrishna himself had willed this is evident from the fact that he appeared in a vision to Vivekananda urging him to go to the West and subsequently confirming this in the vision he granted to Śrī Sārādā Devī, the Holy Mother.

After the Mahāsamādhi of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda toured the country extensively to get a first hand experience of the nation's problems. He discovered to his dismay that the greatest problem of the teeming millions of India was hunger and want. It was a crime and madness to teach them religion. Had not his own Master told him this plain truth? So, the first task in this regard was to work for the amelioration of the masses on the physical plane by building orphanages, feeding houses, free dispensaries and hospitals. Relief work in times of emergencies and calamities, natural or otherwise, was also a part of this scheme. Another phase of the work was the building up of educational institutions to disseminate the right kind of knowledge which helps man not only to earn his bread but also to build up his character. Finally, the great teachings contained in our Upanishads and the Gita which had been relived and corroborated by Ramakrishna in his own life, but which had been sealed all these years from the masses, had to be broadcast far and wide.

It was with these ideas revealed to him on the Rock of Kanyākumārī, that he set out for the West from where alone he could hope and expect to get the necessary help. But then, as he himself has said, he did not want to go as a beggar. India had enough spiritual wealth accumulated over millennia, which she could freely give away and of which the material West was badly in need. He could distribute this wealth in return for the help he

would get from there. His Master had shown by practical demonstration that all religions were true and that all of them lead to the same goal. He could give this most wonderful message of the harmony of all religions. That he did give this message to the West and succeeded to a marvellous extent in another aspect of fulfilling the duties of his apostleship, is now a matter of history.

Before he voluntarily shed his mortal coil on the 4th of July 1902, Vivekananda had established a mighty movement and had put it on a firm foundation. The momentum given to it by him would carry it forward for a few centuries more. Not only that, his life, personality and teachings had already become a primary source of inspiration to many a great Indian who would work vigorously for the uplift of the Motherland.

The regeneration of a nation often needs a reappraisal, a reinterpretation and even a

readjustment of its ancient philosophies and values in the context of the changed circumstances. This is exactly what Ramakrishna and Vivekananda did. They brought out and broadcast the esoteric truths to the masses in a way they could understand. Vedanta was made practical by connecting it with day-to-day life. The dividing line between the sacred and the secular was wiped out by showing that the secular can be elevated to the sacred by just changing our attitude towards it. Humanitarian service was converted into the worship of the Cosmic Spirit. Monasticism was released from its cocoon of personal liberation and recharged with its real spirit of dedication.

Looking back now, we can safely assert that the Prophet of Modern India was absolutely right in choosing his Apostle, who has faithfully and forcefully carried out his Master's commands.

SYNTHESIS OF YOGAS IN SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

SWAMI NITYABODHANANDA

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA preferred the term 'synthesis of yogas' to 'harmony of yogas'. And this for very good reasons. Harmony is the combination of parts so as to form a consistent and orderly whole and the peaceableness that issues from this whole. Synthesis is more active and more complete than harmony. It is the action of understanding in combining and unifying data into a whole. The yogas are not parts; they are autonomous wholes in the sense that each one of them, independently of the others, can bring man to the zenith of perfection. But, only highly gifted persons can do that. Take for instance Buddha. By Karmayoga alone, by the central teaching of Karmayoga, self-abnegation, he reached the zenith. Once on the summit, Buddha manifested the highest perfections of other yogas like Bhakti and Jnana. They were made to converge. What shall we,

smaller individuals do? We can discover in us the 'dominating sentiment' and strengthen and deepen that sentiment by fervour. Then the other sentiments that represent other yogas will come to join forces with it. This they do because they are autonomous wholes and possess an integrating power innate in themselves. So then synthesis in the present context means three things :

- (1) recognizing the autonomy or completeness of each yoga ;
- (2) unravelling the 'dominant sentiment' in us ; and
- (3) strengthening the latter so that the other sentiments come to join their forces in a converging and synthesizing effort.

Man is one complete unity. The yoga teaching affirms this unity and the 'wholeness' of the human individual.