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*Just as there is a veil of ignorance for the individual,
so there is also a door to Knowledge.*

MĀTRI VĀNI

There are two kinds of restlessness : one due, to worldly activity and the other, the restlessness to advance on the spiritual path. The latter is the very means to real peace. He who is peace, *Atmā*, God—He becomes known. Only when there is intense hankering after it, Supreme peace will be found. Eternal bliss is also one and the same thing.

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By one's own doing want is created and by one's own doing this want will again be removed. You yourself have to actively aspire after Self-realization. Having chosen to feed upon the objects of the senses, you by your own volition thereby gradually move towards the realm of death. Become a taster of ambrosia, father, feed on the immortal ! Tread the path of immortality where no death, no disease exist.

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Only if there is a spirit of service can God be served. When the intelligence is clouded by delusion, death is the outcome. His Law is very wise. Therefore I say let everyone undertake the pilgrimage to the Highest—the pilgrimage by which all travelling comes to an end. Time must not be wasted in idle pursuits. At every moment remain engaged in the meditation on your true Self. Do not allow your mind to dwell on the fleeting. Because it is said that where *Rāma* is not, there is *Be-aram* (disease). *Rāma* means *Atmārāma*, delight in the Self, repose in the

Self, the essence of Peace, the essence of Knowledge, the Self in its own nature.

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The action that aims at God is alone real action, all the rest is activity belonging to the path of death. The contemplation of the Self takes one in the right direction. Worldly pursuits lead to His manifestation as absence. Everything, with the sole exception of the thought of God is useless—wrong action. Man's duty is to become steady in the practice that helps toward the revelation of his own true Self.

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Man appears to be all want—it is by contemplating want that want is earned. Therefore it is incumbent on man to contemplate his real nature. Otherwise there will be want, wrong action, wrong aiming, misfortune, death. HE is the Self reposing in Itself. In coming and going as well as in true Being is He alone. The blissful Self am I. I have to become established in Knowledge. There is none but you and you and you alone. You are present in everything whatsoever. You are He Himself. In the infinite many there is He alone—am I alone.

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To invoke Him does not go in vain. So long as you do not receive any response, continue to call out to him. Is it not your own Self to whom you are appealing? And it is your own Self whom you have to realize. By ceaseless prayer He, who is whole, who is undivided is reached. It is your own Self (*Ātmā*), the heart of your heart, your dearly Beloved to whom you are praying. The prayer to Him, by which the conflict between renunciation

and enjoyment is dissolved, that prayer must become dear to you.

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There are many kinds of action that lead to death and misfortune—that do not take one in the right direction. From darkness one proceeds to even deeper darkness. Why this should be so cannot be explained. It is His play. As one sows, so one reaps.

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For long enough have you given your thought to worldly matters, now turn your mind towards the Eternal. Look, gradually the path will become clear to you and the thought of worldly things leave you as well. It is fated to disappear. The veil of ignorance will also wear out slowly. The One Who IS, is eternal : what is fleeting must needs be destroyed.

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By God's name sin is vanquished. There is a saying that it is impossible for man to commit as many sins as can be annulled by God's name. Just as a single spark of fire can consume more things than you are ever able to accumulate. By the contemplation of God, by the endeavour to approach Him, all your sins will be obliterated. The destructible will be destroyed and Reality stand revealed.

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When you turn to God in order to be liberated from your desires for sense objects, your inner strength will grow. You must take to some spiritual practice. Keep yourself bound to meditation on God — whether you are able to concentrate or not. There is hope that some time or other you will get interested and also remain absorbed in it.

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Conversations with Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma*

GANGACHARAN DAS GUPTA

Question : Mataji, is a vision of God possible in these days ?

Mataji : Why in these days ? It has always been possible.

Question : I mean direct vision with our eyes.

Mataji : A vision as clear as daylight. There is no doubt about it. It is His nature; if you call Him He is ever ready to appear. He manifests Himself visibly, it is on this account that there goes a saying that *Bhagavan* (God) is ever at the disposal of his *bhakta*. It is the nature of a living being to create life. The human soul is called *jīvātmā* and not *Paramātmā*. The *jīva* moves in a closed circle of birth and death. In a stagnant pool germs of life thrive and develop into living beings. Strain that water through a filter and it will be pure. There was pure water originally and it becomes pure again. So *jīvātmā* is in reality *Paramātmā*. It is *Atmā* all along, before and after.

The belief that God does not exist in you is the chain by which the *jīva* is bound; it is the smoke screen called *māyā* that covers your real Self. Remove it and God will stand revealed in all His glory.

Pitāṅṅ, there is no peace in the world. You get just a drop of happiness in your family life and your face beams with joy. When it is gone there come sorrows and doubts and despair. A child is born and there are shouts of joy. When it passes away, darkness clouds your mind. All your happiness has turned into mourning. Pain and pleasure

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go together like your body and its shadow. Such is human life.

How to avoid this dilemma, this swinging of the pendulum between happiness and misery? You lose yourself in the little happiness you obtain in your worldly life but care not at all to discover the source from which all happiness springs—which is called *Paramānanda* (Supreme Bliss). How long will you move in a vicious circle in this way? Choose one line of spiritual practice. Can you hope to indulge in all the enjoyments of the world and capture at the same time the supreme source of joy by living a worldly life?

There must surely be a way to find the source of supreme happiness. You all desire it. *Ananda* is the very essence of your life; you are by nature pure and immortal; *Jñāna chit* is the sole basis of your being.

You don't want ignorance and affliction nor decay and death, because you are by nature enlightened, blissful, immortal. But the course of events in the world gives a different turn to your life and this causes you grief and despair. You are not asked to retire to the forest or to become inert, unresponsive like a stone to what goes on about you.

You have to start your search from the position God has placed you in. If you repair to the forest let your mind feel that it is your own home for the time being. From there the way will open out to a higher life. Look upon your son as *Bāla Gopāla* (the child Krishna), your little daughter as *Kumāri*, your wife as *Griha Lakshmi*. Don't do any harm to anybody. Let the attachment you have developed for people around you diminish to its minimum limit. When the call comes for your final exit, all the ties of your life will have to be snapped up and you won't have a moment's delay. Why do you weep? Don't you see that this world is only a *dharmasāla* (traveller's inn)? We meet people there who are on the way. The goal of your

final re-union is the Self (*Ātmā*). Forgetting this you identify yourself with your own body and that is the root of all bondage, of all the miseries of life. World means perpetual motion, and the ego is that which is bound. You want to know your birth-right. You desire to be free, to throw off your chains. Try to inquire from where you have come! When the body is seriously ill, the thought of your son, wife, brother or friend vanishes. You are engrossed with the sole idea of saving yourself. From this you can see that your self is the highest object of your love. The Self is none other than *Rama* who dwells in everyone of us. Animals spend their lives enjoying only food and sleep and procreation. But how should a human being pass his life?

Just as there is a veil of ignorance over you all, there is also a way to escape. Gird up your loins and say: "I must try my best to find a way out!" This will-to-be-free is your sheet anchor. "God is and I must find him" should be the motto of your life. See that not a single breath is wasted on worldly pursuits.

Haribhajan or worship of God is one way that should lead you to His presence. It does not mean that there are no other ways. You can go to the station from every house in the locality. What is important is to stick fast to one way and march. Let truth be your refuge. For God is Truth. Abide by truth in all matters of life and God will stand revealed. He is Truth, Knowledge, Beauty. You have such a fine body; God forbid that such an asset be wasted with the poison of the feeling of worldly enjoyment!

Mother continued: "This little girl of yours, *Pitājī*, implores you all to choose one path, here and now. You must not nibble away your time in idle pursuits. You cannot be sure of the next breath. It may stop at any moment. At all times think of the One. This will give you peace. When we desire things of the world we obtain them easily. In your quest of Him do not pray for anything except His

grace. He is indivisible, perfect, complete—the one goal of all men.

Question: In what part of the body is the heart-centre located?

Mataji: Is there any place in the body where it is not? Think of a tree: from the roots right up to the leaves—all was contained in one seed. Is there any spot in the tree from where a branch cannot shoot up and put forth flowers and fruits? The seed that you sow in the soil lies potentially everywhere in the grown-up tree.

Question: There are centres of sight and hearing in the body. Is there not any spiritual centre where God reveals Himself?

Mataji: Just as in the tree there are centres of circulation, of rest, of expression, such centres are everywhere in the body.

Question: Does the word 'centre' not mean the heart of something?

Mataji: (laughing) Let it be the heart then. Wherever God reveals Himself that is the heart. It is one and many at the same time. One person says: "My heart is here!" Another says: "It is there!" But what is called 'heart' is one in reality.

Question: The *Sāstras* tell us where the heart lies.

Mataji: *Pitāji*, you have not taught your daughter the *Sāstras*. The location of the heart is at one place. According to popular belief it lies in one's breast.*

Question: When the heart fails, is it not all over with the man?

Mataji: The heart that fails and the heart centre are different things. The point from where the physical organ originates is its centre. But everywhere in the tree

* Note the difference between the physical organ called heart (हृदयम्) and the heart centre (हृदयम्).

you find the potential seed. From this point of view the heart is everywhere : One expanding into Infinity—Infinity condensing into One. The point from where 'life unfolds' is your heart.

Question : How does the seed come into being ?

Mataji : It is He expressing Himself as seed. There is no seed without Him.

Question : In the *Srimad Bhāgavata* what is the secret of His *Lilā* ? Why does He enter into *Lilā* ?

Mataji : In all walks of life these questions crop up : Whence ? How ? What ? Why ? To solve the riddle what have you to do ? When you observe a thing directly with your eyes, your query ceases to disturb you. Direct Vision of the Divine is what is wanted. One who is ignorant has no questions to ask ; one who has reached the Goal has no questions to disturb his mental poise. But one who studies, one who is on the way has queries and problems. What is the *Bhāgavata* ? *Bhāgavan* (God) and *Bhāgavata* (His expression) are one and the same. All the expressions of his *Lilā* in forms and modes of being are in the *Bhāgavata*.

Question : Why did He express Himself as He did in His *Rāsa Lila* ? Does it not minimize His dignity ?

Mataji : This body has no personal opinion to offer. *Bhagavān* staged a play with Himself in these *Lilās*. Some call it His *māyā* or power of illusion. He splits Himself into two. One cannot play with oneself. There must be two or more. So He divides Himself into these forms to intensify His Divine enjoyment by the game of union, separation and re-union. His counterpart in the game is His own *Swarupa*, *Śakti* or *Māyā Śakti*, which is ever present in Him and under His control. It is said that during the *Lila* of *Rāma* the *Rishis* desired to enjoy union with Him. But He promised such union when He would incarnate as *Krishna*. All are the creative activities of God ;

thus He delights, in His play. He has absolute power to do as He pleases. All are His own images.

Question : At one place in the *Gita* we are asked to engage in *Karma* or perform sacrificial rites and at another place to give up *Karma*. How are we to reconcile these two contradictory injunctions ?

Mataji : Judge for yourself at what stage you are, when to practise sacrificial rites and when to give them up, throwing yourself wholly unto His mercy. These are different stages with their appropriate duties and responsibilities. If you are asked to rely absolutely on Him, is it possible for you to do it all at once ? You have to train your mind and body by constant practice and to purify yourself by spiritual exercises. Read the *Bhagavad Gita* every day. You will find God revealing Himself through His words recorded there. A doubt may arise in your mind : "How can words reveal Him?" You know before the *Gita* is read the book has to be worshipped. By "book", His words and their import are meant.

As you continue to practise day after day, you will gradually reach a stage when absolute reliance on God will be your final achievement. There is nothing higher than that.

This body tells you again : read the *Gita* daily and do some spiritual exercise, you will find answers to your queries revealing themselves in your mind. If your desire to know Him is sincere and earnest and comes directly from the heart, the solution must come. It is inevitable.

Without steady concentration on one aim no result can be achieved. The word *ekāgra* (one pointed) is a combination of *eka* (one) and *agra* (pointed). Our mind is the swiftest thing in creation. Let the mind move at its own speed constantly towards the One Aim which is God. He will shine forth. As long as He is not revealed through His words in the *Gita*, never give up the practice of reading sacred texts.

Quintessence of the Yogavasistha

DR. B. L. ATREYA

Practical Self-realization.

Knowledge, for Vasistha, is not merely an intellectual affair. It must be lived, otherwise it cannot stay. We have not only to know, but also to be and to feel and to expand *pari passu*. To truly know the Absolute, we have to expand into the Absolute (VIb.22.1.5) How actually to effect this expansion is therefore as important a problem as to know the nature of Reality. The practical method of Self-realization is called Yoga by Vasistha. (VIa. 13.3 ; VIa. 128. 50-51). This Yoga is a process along two lines, namely, denial of individuality, which is the same as limitation and imperfection, and affirmation of the Self, which is Perfection and Peace. As our individuality does not consist only of intellect but also of feeling and activity and as the Self is not only Absolute Consciousness, but also Absolute Peace and Bliss, the practice of Self-realization may proceed along three ways or any one of them, for they are only three aspects of the same process, namely (1) Intellectual conviction of not being an individual, but of being the infinite Absolute (*Brahmabhāvana*). (2) Negation of desire, attachment, like and dislike, of imagining to get this or that, of possessing this or that, and of feeling to be an individual, etc. — all of which are various aspects of our affective nature. Along with this negative process, we require positive cultivation of equanimity, universal brotherhood, cosmic feeling of oneness with all beings and love of the Self verging on ecstasy. (3) Practice in stopping of the perpetual activity of life manifesting itself in the constant rising and setting of the vital current (*prāṇa*), which is an external expression of our being in perpetual flux internally. This stopping of

the activity of the *prāṇa* can be brought about by practice in lengthening the usually unnoticed moments of rest which occur when one current of the vital breath has set in and the other has not yet taken its rise. This moment of rest in breathing activity corresponds to that experience of rest in consciousness, however fugitive it may be in our ordinary life, when one idea has ceased to occupy the focus of consciousness and the other has not yet appeared therein. (Vasistha Darisanam, pp. 204-237; The Philosophy of the Yogavasistha, pp. 434-488).

Seven Stages on the Path of Self-realization

Although in reality the Self is ever realized and the individual ever identical with the Absolute, yet from the point of view of the individual himself, it is a gradual process which may extend over any length of time or over several lives of the individual in accordance with the intensity of his aspiration and the earnestness of his efforts. Several stages may be marked on this progressive path of evolution of the individual consciousness into the Absolute. Vasistha notices seven. The first stage is when the individual, having come to the consciousness of the evils of individual and selfish living, aspires to transcend it (*Shubhechchha*). The second, when he philosophizes over and investigates into the nature of the Self and the world (*Vichāraṇa*). The third, when on account of the knowledge of its ultimate unreality revealed by philosophical thinking, the individuality (mind) becomes less and less assertive and is little experienced (*Tanumānasa*). The fourth, when the aspirant begins to feel the being of the real Self within him (*Sattavapatti*). The fifth, when clinging to the objects of the world is finally given up by rising above all desires (*Asamsakti*). The sixth, when all things are realized to be unreal from the absolute point of view (*Padarthabhāvana*), or (according to another reading) when the individual affirms himself to be the Ultimate Reality (*Padaratha-bhāvana*). And the seventh, the

mystic experience of being one with the Reality in consciousness (*Turiya*). This is the last door which opens into the unspeakable *Nirvāna*. Those who live at the 7th stage are called *Jivanmuktas* (the liberated living ones). After the death of their physical body they enter the disembodied liberation (*Videha-mukti*).

The Life of Liberation

The person who has become liberated from individuality and is still living is called a *Jivanmukta*. His way of living is described in great detail in the *Yogavasistha*. For want of space we shall quote only a summary statement of the life of *Jivanmukti*, made by us elsewhere. "He or she (for we must remember the *Yogavasistha* is not prejudiced against the fair sex and admits that women have an equal right to be liberated) is the happiest person on earth. The *Jivanmukta* is neither delighted in prosperity nor dejected in distress. Outwardly discharging all the duties of life, he is free within. He is free from the bonds of caste and creed and is polite and friendly to all. He is busy with the affairs of life, but is free from desires. He has nothing to attain, nor has he anything to give up. He is in solitude even in the midst of worldly activities and is always above the turmoil of life. (*The Philosophy of the Yogavasistha*, p. 72) "Having seen him, having heard about him, having met him, and having remembered him, all creatures feel delighted. (*V. 39. 54*). He has no longer any struggle for livelihood. The guardian angels of the world protect and support him, as they do the entire cosmos (*IV. 32. 38. 39.*)" ('*Yogavasistha and Its Philosophy*', p. 47).

Nirvana or the Final Liberation from the World Experience

Such a man (or woman) is no longer bound by the universal law of Karma to undergo another birth or experience another objective world as a consequence of his

thoughts and activities in this life. He is outside the pale of the law of Karma, because only those acts, mental or physical, have to germinate or fructify into future lives and experiences which are done with a motive, with a conscious desire to attain or avoid something. But the actions which are performed spontaneously, without any desire, motive or attachment, are above retribution, fructification and bondage. (VIa. 87. 19. 21; VIb. 199. 7. 33; IV. 38. 16. 17). Thus the sage who has transcended all desires, is free from attachment and is above selfish willing is beyond the pale of the law of *karmaphala*. He is not bound by any of the actions done in his freed life to experience its consequences in this or any other life (VIa. 10. 31; VI a. 2. 43; V. 42. 14). His personality (mind, individuality, finitude, etc.) will be dissolved in the infinite ocean of Bliss, after the death of the present body—the effect of his previous *sankalpas* (IV. 42. 13). It has also to be noted here that according to Vasistha. “It is not necessary or compulsory that the liberated individual should totally cease to continue as an individual (after the death of the physical body). He may or may not do so. Some freed sages continue to exist as individuals, of their own accord, and take part in the Cosmic activities, disseminate knowledge and help other individuals in working out their Liberation. Vasistha, Krishna and Buddha are some examples.” (The Philosophy of the Yogavasistha, p. 548) The kernel of Liberation according to him is conscious realization of complete oneness with the Brahman. It makes little difference whether this occurs in an embodied state or in a disembodied one (II. 4. 5) (Ibid, p. 548).

Sacred Places of Kashmir, Jammu and Ladhak

by a Devotee

Kashmir with Jammu and Ladhak forms the northernmost state of India. Situated on the mighty Himalayas it is the head of the holy Aryavarta, the crown of India and an elysium on earth.

According to the ancient scriptures, the Himalayas were under water long, long years ago. In that water there lived a demon called Jalodbhaba, who committed atrocities in the neighbouring regions. The gods and the goddesses killed this demon, desiccated the water, opened up the valley and bequeathed the beautiful land to the great sage Kashyapa after whom it is called Kashmir.

He performed meditation for thousands of years. Indeed Kashmir is a place "very suitable for meditation." The Nagas (divine serpents), which are much respected and worshipped in Kashmir, are said to be the descendants of the great sage Kashyapa.

There are many references about Kashmir and its rivers and mountains in the Vedas and Puranas. Lord Narayana incarnated in Kashmir as the great Fish (*Matsya Avatār*) in order to save the Vedas from destruction during the great deluge which occurred in ancient times. Later the Lord incarnated as the great Boar (*Varāha Avatāra*) here in order to save the earth from the clutches of the mighty demon Hiranyaksha.

It is said that the throat and the right ankle of the dead body of the goddess Sati, wife of Lord Shiva, fell somewhere in Kashmir and Ladhak. The goddess Shârdadâ, one of whose other names is Saraswati, is ever present in the sacred soil of Kashmir which in ancient times was referred to

Shāradā Desha, the land of Shāradā. The actual spot which is the seat of the goddess is called Shāradāpith. It is in Shārdi village, now under the occupation of Pakistan.

From ancient times till 1342 A. D., Kashmir was ruled by the Hindu and Buddhist kings. From 1342 to 1818 A.D. it was ruled by the Muhammadans, who demolished most of the famous ancient temples of Kashmir. In 1819 A.D. it was conquered by the Sikhs and from 1892 A. D. till independence, it was under the protectorate of the British. After independence a part of Kashmir was invaded by Pakistan and, as a result, a portion of this holy land is still under Pakistan's occupation.

There are many sacred spots and shrines in Kashmir. Although the ancient temples have been ruined, partly due to the ravages of time and mostly due to the fanaticism of alien rulers, yet the spots are there, no one could snatch them from the bosom of mother earth. The places have not been forgotten. Tradition, as everywhere else in India, preserved them from generation to generation. New shrines, though small, have sprung up in many of these places, and pilgrimages have been restored whenever peaceful conditions prevailed.

In the paragraphs that follow, a very modest attempt has been made to narrate in brief about the sacred places and shrines in Kashmir, the holy mountains, lakes, pools and springs, which are regarded as the emblems of gods and goddesses by the followers of a faith that sees the omnipotent God manifested in all good things of life and nature. Some quotations from ancient scriptures together with their English translation have also been given.

AHRĀBAL

Ahrābal is a celebrated waterfall formed by the Veshan river in a rocky gorge situated at a distance of about ten kilometers south-west of Shupiyan, which is about forty-six

kilometers south of Srinagar. It is about three kilometers south of Sedan village.

The waterfall is regarded as very holy.

इमा आपः सर्वेषां भूतानां मध्वासामयां सर्वाणि भूतानि
मद्बु यश्चायमास्वप्सु तेजोमयोऽमृतमयः पुरुषो
यश्चायमध्यात्मं रैतसस्तेजोमयोऽमृतमयः
पुरुषोऽयमेव स योऽयमात्मेदममृतमिदं ब्रह्मेदं सर्वम् ॥

“These waters are like honey for all beings, and all beings are like honey for these waters. The shining immortal person who is in these waters and the shining immortal person who is ensouled in oneself and is existing as the seed—he is indeed just this Self, this Immortal, this Absolute, this All.”

AMARĀVATI

Amarāvati is a small sacred stream situated at a distance of about twenty-five kilometers north-west of Srinagar in the Kashmir valley. It falls into the Mansabal lake at its northern extremity. The ground over which it flows looks like a foaming cataract.

The stream is sacred to Karkotaka Nāga who turned its waters into milk. Karkotaka Nāga is held in great esteem by the Hindus. There is a reference about him in the story of Nala and Damayanti in the Mahābhārata. The utterance of his name destroys all sins.”

कर्कोटकस्य नागस्य दमयन्त्या नलस्य च ।
ऋतुपर्नस्य राजर्षेः कीर्तनं कलिनाशनम् ॥

“The recital of the names of Karkotaka Nāga, Damayanti, Nala and the king Rituparna destroys the evils of Kali.”

* Brihadāranyakopaniṣad, Second chapter, fifth ‘Brahmana’, second mantra’.

AMARNĀTH

The shrine of Amarnāth is situated in a picturesque cave of the Bhairabghāti range of the Himālayas at a distance of about one hundred and forty-two kilometers east-north-east of Srinagar by road. The cave is on the western side of a snowy peak, locally, called Kailās, nearly 17,300 feet high. The cave is at an altitude of about 13,000 above sea-level. It is about fifty feet long, fifty-five feet wide and forty-five feet high. A small stream called Amara-gangā flows by the left side of the cave.

The Shiva-linga in the middle of the cave shrine is formed by nature due to the freezing of water which oozes from the rock day after day till it attains its full size on the full moon of Shrāvana when the special worship is performed. Two other images of ice, one of the goddess Pārvati and the other of Ganapati, are also formed inside the cave.

It is said that in ancient times some devoted people approached the great sage Bangrish and requested him to tell them the quickest way of attaining salvation (moksha). The sage told them to go to Amarnāth and worship Lord Shiva there. As advised by him they proceeded on a pilgrimage to Amarnāth but were unable to reach the sacred spot because of the demons (*Rākshasas*) on the way. They therefore returned and told the sage about this. He then advised them to pray to Takshaka Nāga, the divine serpent-king of the Nāgas, for safety. Accordingly the devotees prayed to Takshaka, who, pleased at their devotion, gave them the staff of Lord Shiva and asked them to carry it on their way to Amarnāth so that the *Rākshasas* might not be able to harm them. The devotees then safely went to Amarnāth, worshipped Lord Shiva and attained their objective. The practice of carrying a staff, which is locally called *chhari*, by the pilgrims on their way to Amarnāth is still in vogue. The following important places fall on the route to the shrine.

1. Pāhālgām. It is a picturesque town situated ninety-seven kilometers east of Srinagar by road. It is about 9500 feet above sea-level. At Mamal near Pāhālgām there are the ruins of an ancient temple of Shiva called Mammeshwara.

2. Chandanvāri. It is only thirteen kilometers from Pāhālgām.

3. Shesh Nāg. It is a sacred mountain lake situated at a height of about 11700 feet above sea-level at a distance of about eight kilometers from Chandanvāri. Pilgrims bathe in its deep blue waters.

4. Wāvjān. It is about 12,200 feet above sea-level situated at a distance of only five kilometers from Shesh Nāg.

5. Panchatarani. It is a confluence of five rivulets at a height of about 12,800 feet above sea-level. It is thirteen kilometers from Wāvjān. Amarnāth is only six kilometers from here.

According to the *Amarnāth Mahātmya* (the book describing the glory of Amarnāth) the goddess Pārvati was once alone in Kailāsh. At that time the sage Narada came there sthit. In order to create a quarrel he told the goddess that Lord Shiva himself, was immortal but he purposely had not made her (Parvati) immortal. Pārvati was very sad to hear this from the sage. When Lord Shiva returned to Kailāsh, he, finding Pārvati in that state of grief, understood it to be the doing of Nārada. He tried to pacify the goddess by all means. When Shiva agreed to give her what she wanted, Pārvati requested Shiva to teach her the very essence of all knowledge so that by listening to it she could become immortal. Shiva agreed but said that such an invaluable talk could only be given at a very lonely place so that no one could over hear it. The Lord with his consort then came to Amarnāth, struck the mountain with his trident and the cave was formed. Both of them then sat inside the cave and Lord Shiva got absorbed in *samādhi*. After awaking from

that state of infinite bliss the God said to the goddess, "I am now beginning that sacred talk by listening to which you will become immortal. Please utter the word 'hum' at every stage of the narrative so that I may know that you are following it". Pārvati gave her assent and the talk began. Soon after Pārvati fell asleep and could not indicate to Shiva by uttering 'hum' that she was listening. At that time there was a parrot in that cave. The bird in its previous life had been a virtuous king, who due to the curse of a sage had become a parrot in the next life. The bird was all along listening to the talk. When Pārvati fell asleep the parrot, fearing that Lord Shiva might discontinue the talk, began to cry 'hum' at every stage of the narrative. When Lord Shiva finished his talk, he was surprised to see that Parvati was asleep. He then woke her up and enquired from her whether she had heard all he had said. Pārvati sorrowfully replied that she had not. Shiva then wondered who had uttered the word "hum" and had listened to his immortal talk; looking around in anger he perceived the parrot and ran after it with his trident. The bird flew away in fear for its life, and seeing the wife of the sage Vyasa on the bank of the river with her mouth open while performing tarpan* entered into her body through her mouth. Lord Siva had no alternative but to control his anger and he left the place. The parrot is said, to have been born as the famous Sage Shuka, the son of Vyāsa.

When pilgrims visit the shrine they very often see one or two pigeons fluttering in the cave. This is regarded as a good omen. The *pāndas* (priests) of Amarnāth say that the pilgrimage is considered successful after seeing the pigeons. In olden days a Muslim shepherd first saw a pigeon here and then discovered the cave shrine. Only after this happened, Amarnath became a place of pilgrimage. For this reason the descendants of that Muslim shepherd still get one fourth of the collections, which the pilgrims offer to the deity at Amarnāth. (To be continued)

* Tarpan is religious offering of water to the deceased relatives.

Guru Nanak's Sikh Religion

PROF. A. N. GHOSE.

Dense forest. A thick veil of solitude enveloped in darkness. All still, all silent. Endless, ghostly. A forlorn passer-by gliding along with slow steps on the dismal forest path. He hears a distant call, he shudders.

Question : What can I do for you ?

Answer : I pray for *Mukti* (liberation).

Question : But what is your promise ? What can you sacrifice ?

Answer : Why, my life is ready for the sacrifice, for its attainment.

Question : Life ! It is insignificant. Anybody can sacrifice it. Anything more ?

Again silence, pin-drop silence. The passer-by stumbles. He is bewildered. He mutters; "Even sacrifice of life is not sufficient to attain liberation ? O my Lord !"

It is pitch dark. Long extended deep forest valley—endless. He stands face to face with the Infinite. Beside himself with despair, he suddenly drops down senseless. He is in the lap of Mother Earth. He sleeps peacefully and dreams—liberation. Liberation ! He hears a *mantra*. A gentle hand touches him. He dreams : "Liberation is greater than life, and it is attained by *bhakti*."

This was the inspiration of Guru Nanak, this was his life long slogan to his disciples and to the world, this was the Sikhism of Guru Nanak, the pious founder of the Sikh religion.

To think of Guru Nanak one has to go back to the 15th and 16th centuries in the history of India, the age in which he was born. It was an age of ignorance and strife. The advent of Islam had shaken Hindu society to its very

foundations. The temples were turned into mosques and the Hindus indiscriminately put to the sword. The Moham-
medan conquerors raised pyramids of human heads as they
advanced from one place to another in their victorious
career. The Punjab was the centre which was much affected
when the "firmness of the Islamic government was acutely
felt." It was a time of unrest, the religious pursuits were
mostly formal. Nanak's pious heart revolted. He uttered
in deep despair : "Men are men only in appearance, in be-
haviour they are dogs*." It is found in history that "the
unity of the Godhead was lost in the worship of numerous
Avatāras and divinities, *pirs* and *dāryahs*. Pilgrimages and
empty ritualistic practices had taken the place of real devo-
tion; blind faith and superstition had driven away the
search after Truth, The *Brahmins* and the *Mullas* wrangled,
social and political inequalities reigned and there was strife
everywhere."

Nanak was restless and cried out : "There is no
Hindu, no Mussalman. How will deliverance come?"
About the Brahmins he says : "You Brahmin, you wear a
loincloth yet you earn your living from the Mlechhas". And
about the Mohammedans : "You devour men, you Muslims,
yet you recite the Namaz !" Nanak's message was definitely
Upanishadic, i.e. faith in One God and he was dreaming of
universal brotherhood. His declaration was, "Everybody
is primarily a man and only afterwards a Hindu or Mussal-
man." He wanted to organize a Band of Pious Warriors
who would be revolutionary in action to convert the hypo-
crites and the fanatics to the path of righteousness. In the
opinion of the English critics, Sikhism was almost like a
church religion, which wanted to get rid of the dry formal-
ties of the existing creeds. It may thus be compared to the
cult of Gautama Buddha of the olden days and to the
Theosophical teachings of modern times. When Guru Nanak

*Ref. Macauliffe cp cit. Vol I, pp. 75-76.

visited Sheikh Brabun at Pak Pattan, the latter asked : "There is only one Lord and two ways; which shall I adopt and which reject ?" In reply Nanak said : "There is but one Lord and one Way; adopt one and reject the other. Why should one worship a second who is born and dies ? Remember the one God who pervades sea and land."

He wanted to save humanity from *avidyā* and *himsā* (ignorance and hatred), his mind was not only reactionary, it was also revolutionary, though it was saturated with the nectar of heavenly devotion to the Name of the One, the Supreme Cause of the universe. The singing of the Name as we call *Nāma Kīrtana* in Hindu religion is pure and simple and brings communion with God and this Name and Word is the essence of the Sikhism founded by Guru Nanak. He goes beyond Hindu Vedanta and says : "Purity is the supreme test of true religious life and this purity is inward devotion. Impurity of mind keeps man enmeshed in worldly desires and he pays the price for his indiscretion by sufferings through repeated rebirths."

So Nanak's religion was a religion of faith and devotion for God and in this bhakti cult he was influenced by contemporary reformers, such as Ramanand, Gorakhnath, Chaitanya, Kabhir, Vallabh etc. His inspired mind wanted to bring about a wholesale reform of the age of conventionalism hypocrisies and superstitions.

There is a school of critics, both Hindu and Mohammedan, which remarks that Nanak's idea was destructive and that he wanted to establish his new faith in disregard of the ruling religions of the time, and we find such statements also in Sikh literature. But the historians do not support this view. According to them Nanak was neither against Hinduism nor Mohammedanism. He was against the hypocrites of all religions and had no mercy for them. Mohsin Fani says : "Nanak praised both the Hindu as well as the Muslim religions, their *Avatāras* and Divinities, but he knew that their objects of veneration were created and not creators and

he denied their descent from Heaven.”* He says : “The more one wandereth in pilgrimages the more he bableth,” his criticism is directed more against the man than the practice itself. “One *Māyā* in union with God gave birth to three acceptable children. One of them is the Creator, the second the Preserver, the third the Destroyer. This is the Trinity in toto, but God directeth them by His orders.† By hearing the name of God, man becometh as Siva, Brahma and Indra.”‡

“The thousands of Purānas and Mohammedan books tell that in reality there is but one Principle.....If God can be described by writing, then describe Him, but such description is impossible.§ “The four Vedas.....came down from the High under the orders of the Lord God.”|| He advised Mian Mithan. “Act according to the Koran and thy sacred books.”** “What availeth thee to read the Vedas and Puraņas ? It is like loading a donkey with sandal wood whose perfume he valueth not.”

From the above (mostly gathered from his own writings) it may be safely concluded that he had no disregard or hatred for Hinduism or Islam. History also supports “that his idea was neither destructive nor revolutionary.” He did not believe in the caste system. He said : “Even an outcaste with real devotion to God is superior to the Brahmin without devotion.” Guru Nanak was an eager student of the medieval bhakti movement which believed that “the supreme impulse of love dominates everything. Love preaches equality and the question of caste does not arise there. “Nanak came not to kill but to heal, not to destroy but to conserve”.

* Debistan, Vol II, pp. 248-249.

† Ref. Japaji

‡ cp. Mundakopanishad : “He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman indeed”.

§ Japaji XXII.

|| Ref. Kharan Singh P. 343.

** Ref. Macauliffe pp. 23,123.

The question naturally arises as to how such a religion of catholicity and simplicity could later develop into a military order and how the religious devotees of Monism and Universal Brotherhood could convert themselves into "soldier saints." Every student of Sikh history knows about this development. It is clear that the seed of this militarism for personal safety was found imbedded in the bhakti religion advanced by Guru Nanak.

The term "Guru" is an important factor for the understanding of Sikh religion. Sikhism says that the spirit of surrender to the Name or God is not possible without the instructions of the Guru. The Guru only can show that the abode of God is the heart of man." "The Guru giving God's name is my ladder, my boat, my raft. There could be no salvation without the Guru." But—

"Only that man finds peace who meets the true Guru,
And enshrines the name of God in his heart;
And that too, Nanak, if God sends him Grace."

Nanak says: "Man need not worry about fate, karma or God. He has only to surrender himself to the true Guru and depend on what the Guru does for him. The Guru is thus the pivot upon which everything else hinges."

Hence Guru worship was sown in the hearts of the disciples when he said: "That man finds peace who meets the true Guru and that too if God sends him Grace"—a definite Hindu conception. The *Granth Sahib* of the Sikhs is nothing but a "Collection of the preachings of the Gurus from Nanak to the present day" and the Sikh language is known as "Gurumukhi" (coming from the mouth of the Guru). Some call Sikhism destructive or one-sided when the question of Guru is raised. But all religionists hold the view that a superb magnified mind makes its appearance in every religion to serve as a bridge between God and man for showing the path of redemption to the fallen.

No need to go further into Sikhism as founded by Guru Nanak. He was a devotee at the feet of God and was searching for pure *bhakti* in all religions. We find in *Grantha Sahib* hymns by Jayadeva, who was a worshipper of Krishna, by Ramananda who adored Rama as Vishnu, Pipa, Sain.....It is also said that the pantheistic teachings of Sikhism were simply meant for faith but its actual slogan was Monotheism.

Modern Sikhism is different from the preachings of non-violence of its founder Nanak. The present Sikh is a soldier-saint on whom the sword is imposed as an obligation for self-protection.

It goes without saying that this brief survey of Guru Nanak's religion is not meant to cover the wide field of historical research. It is a small presentation trying to convey to the reader that it was the Hindu Vedic influence based on the medieval Bhakti School of India which influenced the 'simple' Guru to preach his religion as a protest to the conventions and hypocrisies of his time.
