

found and experienced even in the least promising circumstances. Its abode is not always to be sought in the palaces of the rich, for it can be found in the humblest home of our poverty-stricken countryside. It is something in the nature of an elementary urge which requires development and opportunities to come in contact with the immortal creations of the past and the monumental creations of the present.

An organized endeavour is needed to train up a whole people to rise to its native sense of æsthetic enjoyment. Art cannot be ignored or banished from the life of a nation without doing irreparable damage to its soul. It must

have a place in the homes as well as in the class-rooms, in the temple as well as in the hospital, in places of amusement as well as in places of worship; for it is a thing of the spirit and no nation has yet arisen without the exaltation of the spirit. When the futility of mere literary training—of book learning—has been found to be more than a mere waste of time and opportunities, is it not time for the country to turn to something the results of which cannot for a moment be doubted? The past splendour of India lay not in her mythical wealth, but in the imperishable monuments of her artistic and creative mood.

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## HOW I FIRST MET SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

BY SWAMI BODHANANDA

In 1890 when I was a student in the Ripon College, Calcutta, I had the greatest blessing of my life to know of Sri Ramakrishna. With some of my class-mates and friends I attended the anniversary of the dedication of the Temple at Kakurgachhi in the month of August of that year. There we first heard of Sri Ramakrishna from one of his greatest devotees, the late Ramachandra Dutt. His devotion to Sri Ramakrishna is indescribable. Only those who knew him personally can appreciate it. We often chant the sacred verse "Thou art our Mother; Thou art our Father; Thou art our Friend; Thou art our Companion; Thou art our Wisdom; Thou art our Wealth; Thou art our All in All," but Rama Babu was one of those who realized its true meaning. To him Sri Ramakrishna was really his "All in All." He worshipped no other God than Sri Ramakrishna; never visited

any other Temple than the one at Kakurgachhi in which Sri Ramakrishna's ashes were interred; never read or preached any other religious doctrines or discourses than those he had heard from Sri Ramakrishna.

Master Mahasaya (Babu Mahendra Nath Gupta) was our Professor. We heard that he was also a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. One day we approached him and introduced ourselves to him. We had a little talk on Sri Ramakrishna. He recommended us to visit the Math at Baranagore where Sri Ramakrishna's Sannyasi disciples were then living. He was naturally a very reserved man, but was most cordial to us and candid in his opinion about a devotee who lives in his family and a disciple who has renounced the world to devote his whole life to the practice of religion. He used this simile: The former is like a sour mango, but quite ripe and the latter (a Sannyasin) is like a mango of the

highest grade (*Fazli* or *Langra*), but not yet ripe. Master Mahasaya's illustrations were very much to the point. He further said if we wished to see the living examples of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna we must go to the Math.

Shortly afterwards, we visited the Math. Our first visit was on a week day, as we went directly from the College. It was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon when we reached there. We first met Sasi Maharaj (Swami Ramakrishnananda). He was delighted to see us and enquired about us. When he learned that we were students he asked us some questions and advised us not to neglect our studies. We stayed until 5 or 6 o'clock. He took us to the Chapel (Thakur Ghar) after the doors were opened at 4 o'clock, gave us some flowers from the altar and *prasada* (dedicated fruits and sweets) which we valued most. We prostrated before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna on the bed and the wooden receptacle (*Kouta*) on the altar in which his sacred remains were preserved. There were four or five other Swamis. We saluted them all, one after the other, and they also very kindly spoke to us and blessed us with their well-wishes. When we parted they invited us to come again. We walked back home and all the time we talked of the wonderful visit—the renunciation of the Swamis and the peaceful atmosphere of the Math.

Master Mahasaya then lived in *Kambuliatalah*. On our way home, we stopped at his house and told him of the visit to the Math. He congratulated us and urged us to go there often and render personal services to the Swamis, such as shampooing their feet, preparing tobacco for their smoking, etc. To see them and serve them, to him, was like seeing and serving Sri Ramakrishna himself.

Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) had just left the Math for a pilgrimage in the North-Western Provinces of India. This time he wanted to live so exclusively that he very seldom wrote letters to the brothers at the Math. In fact, for a year or two nobody knew where he was.

Sasi Maharaj, Baburam Maharaj, Mahapurushji, Yogen Maharaj, Kali Maharaj and Niranjan Maharaj were at the Math then. They all told us about Swamiji and Sri Ramakrishna's love for him and his love to Sri Ramakrishna. Some of them even then assured us that Swamiji would be pleased to initiate us to Sannyasa when he returned to the Math.

Strangely enough several years before that time (most probably in 1887) when I was a student in the Metropolitan School, Bowbazar Branch, I saw Swamiji, who was then Headmaster of that School for a few weeks. I belonged to a lower grade and did not have the privilege and pleasure of hearing him teach our class. But I used to watch him from our class-room window almost every day as he entered the School compound. I still vividly remember the scene. He was clothed in trousers and Alpaka Chapkan with a white scarf (*Chadar*) about six feet long around his shoulders. In one hand he carried an umbrella and in the other a book, most probably the text-book of the Entrance Class. With sparkling eyes and smiling face he looked so indrawn that some would be attracted to him for his charming personality and some would not dare approach him for his extreme gravity and solemnity. It was not however until I came to the Baranagore Math that I knew that the great Headmaster who impressed me so much was Swamiji himself.

He returned to India in December, 1896, from his mission in America and

Europe. He landed in Colombo and arrived in Calcutta in January, 1897. I was then a teacher in a High School in a village near my home about twenty miles west of Calcutta. The Anniversary of the Birth of Sri Ramakrishna then used to be celebrated in the compound of the Temple gardens at Dakshineswar. The Swamis then lived in the Math at Alambazar about two miles from the Dakshineswar Temple gardens. That year the Anniversary took place as usual either in the last week of February or in the first week of March. The day before I came to the Math. That was a Saturday as the public celebration was held then as it is now on Sunday following the actual Birthday (Tithipuja).

Swamiji was then temporarily living in a house on the bank of the Ganges about three miles from the Math. Early in the morning on Sunday I saw him there. It was about six o'clock—still dark—when I arrived at the house. Swamiji was an early riser. He first saw me from the window of his room and came downstairs to open the door. I saluted him and he received me very kindly as if he had known me long before. He talked to me in a familiar way and asked me to fetch him a glass of water. He was then washing his mouth. When he learned that I was preparing for an examination he was pleased and gave me his blessing. Mahapurushji was there too. He told Swamiji that I was one of the group of young men who had been coming to the Math for several years and that I was planning to join the Order. On hearing this Swamiji said he would initiate me to Sannyasa in the near

future. Those words made the hope of the realization of my dream brighter.

A few days before the public anniversary—most probably on the actual Birthday of Sri Ramakrishna—Swamiji initiated four Brahmacharins to Sannyasa and on that day gave Mantra-initiation (Diksha) to one or two devotees. At about 8 o'clock he arrived at the Math. I came with him, by his permission, in the same carriage. Shortly after arrival he took his bath and went into the Chapel for meditation. We followed him. It was a most inspiring occasion.

At about 11 o'clock he went to the Dakshineswar Temple gardens where the public festival was being held. There was a vast concourse of people at the gardens and Swamiji's presence was another reason for that great crowd. Many requested him to deliver a lecture near the Panchavati (the cluster of five sacred trees). But the crowd was so enthusiastic and noisy in their expression of joy at his sight that he found it impossible to make a speech. At about 1 o'clock he returned to the Math for a rest. I was with him all that day and had the privilege of rendering him a little personal service as an attendant. That was a most glorious day of my life. Its impression is indelible in my memory. As I think of it now I still seem to feel the thrill of the joy I felt then.

The next day I had to return to my School duties with great reluctance. The sense of gratitude and exaltation of this unique occasion remained in me several days afterwards. I longed to see Swamiji again and sit at his feet for his further grace and guidance.