



What a Vision

Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna sat facing the north in the large room upstairs. It was evening. He was very ill. Narendra and Rakhal were very gently massaging his feet. M sat near by. The Master, by a sign, asked him, too, to stroke his feet. M obeyed.

The previous Sunday the devotees had observed Sri Ramakrishna's birthday with worship and prayer. His birthday the year before had been celebrated at Dakshineswar with great pomp; but this year, on account of his illness, the devotees were very sad and there was no festivity at all.

The Holy Mother busied herself day and night in the Master's service. Among the young disciples Narendra, Rakhal, Niranjan, Sarat, Sashi, Baburam, Jogin, Latu, and Kali had been staying with him at the garden house. The older devotees visited him daily, and some of them occasionally spent the night there.

That day Sri Ramakrishna was feeling very ill. At midnight the moon was flooding the garden with light, but it could wake no response in the devotees' hearts. They were drowned in a sea of grief. They felt that they were living in a beautiful city besieged by a hostile army. Perfect silence reigned everywhere. Nature was still, except for the gentle rustling of the leaves at the touch of the south wind. Sri Ramakrishna lay awake. One or two devotees sat near him in silence. At times he seemed to doze.

M was seated by his side. Sri Ramakrishna asked him, by a sign, to come nearer. The sight of his suffering was unbearable. In a very soft voice and with great difficulty he said to M:

"I have borne much suffering for fear of making you all weep. But if you all say: 'Oh, there is so much suffering! Let the body go,' then I can give up the body."

These words pierced the devotees' hearts. And he who was their father, mother, and protector had uttered these words. What could they say? All sat in silence. Some thought, "Is this another crucifixion—the sacrifice of the body for the sake of the devotees?"

It was the dead of night. Sri Ramakrishna's illness was taking a turn for the worse. The devotees wondered what was to be done. One of them left for Calcutta. That very night Girish came to the garden house with two physicians, Upendra and Navagopal.

The devotees sat near the Master. He felt a little better and said to them: "The illness is of the body. That is as it should be; I see that the body is made up of the five elements."

Turning to Girish, he said: "I am seeing many forms of God. Among them I find this one also [*meaning his own form*]....

MASTER (to the devotees): "Do you know what I see right now? I see that it is God Himself who has become all this. It seems to me that men and other living beings are made of leather and that it is God Himself who, dwelling inside these leather cases, moves the hands, the feet, the heads. I had a similar vision once before, when I saw houses, gardens, roads, men, cattle—all made of one substance; it was as if they were all made of wax. "I see that it is God Himself who has become the block, the executioner, and the victim for the sacrifice."

As he described this staggering experience, in which he realized in full the identity of

all within the One Being, he was overwhelmed with emotion and exclaimed, “Ah! What a vision!”

Immediately Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi. He completely forgot his body and the outer world. The devotees were bewildered. Not knowing what to do, they sat still.

Presently the Master regained partial consciousness of the world and said: “Now I have no pain at all. I am my old self again.”

The devotees were amazed to watch this state of the Master, beyond pleasure and pain, weal and woe....

Sri Ramakrishna looked at the devotees, and his love for them welled up in a thousand streams

Sri Ramakrishna passed away five months later, on Sunday, August 15, 1886.

The Gospel of Ramakrishna (1907)

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