

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION INSTITUTE OF CULTURE

HOLY MOTHER Swami Prabhavananda

Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) was born in the village of Surmanagar and brought up in Vishnupur, about twenty miles west of Holy Mother Sarada Devi's hometown of Jayrambati. He met eleven of the sixteen monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and from the disciples he heard many stories about Holy Mother. In addition, he met Swami Sadananda, Mahendra Nath Gupta, Girish Ghosh and Sister Nivedita. What follows is an edited transcription of a Sunday lecture entitled 'Holy Mother.' It was delivered on 16 September 1973, by Swami Prabhavananda in the Hollywood Vedanta Society Temple. During the talk Swami Prabhavananda mentioned that some of these stories might not be written down. In some cases, additional information taken from Swami Prabhavananda's other lectures on Holy Mother is included in the text and indicated in the endnotes.

1 These lecture transcripts were all transcribed by Swami Krishnananda (1904-97), the foremost attendant of Swami Prabhavananda at the Vedanta Society of Southern California, and very diligently compiled by Dr Gordon Stavig, to whom we are very grateful.

The life of Holy Mother has been writ-ten beautifully by many authors, and so I will not recount her life story. First, I will give you my own experiences that I had with her. I had the blessed fortune to meet her many times in my life. I shall also relate to you what I have heard directly from the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and you will find how they looked upon her; as well as some stories I have heard from her attendant [Rashbehari], a brother disciple of mine.

Let me first tell you my own experiences with her. Her birthplace, Jayrambati, was about twenty miles from my hometown. In order to go to her home from Calcutta, she would take a train to my hometown Vishnupur. She would get off at the railway station there and have to wait for some time before she could get a bullock cart to go to her village. At that time, practically nobody in our district knew about Holy Mother.

She was staying at an inn and was on the porch the day I first saw her. A friend and I were going out for a walk. I was then only 14 or 15 years old and I noticed Radhu, Holy Mother's niece standing and holding one of the pillars. Then we noticed a holy man who was seated and surrounded by many women, who were also seated there. As my friend and I continued walking, we criticized this sadhu.

'Look at this holy man surrounded by women!' As a result, look what happened to me! When we returned from our walk, it was a little dark. My friend was to go home in one direction, and I was to go home in another direction. But something drew me back to this holy man. He said, 'Will you see Holy Mother?' I got excited because I had read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* at that time. You see, as a young boy I was an atheist. And it was the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* that attracted me. As I read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Naren and Rakhal, these two names attracted me. Of course, Naren [Swami Vivekananda] was not living then, so I had Rakhal on my mind.

said, 'Holy Mother. Do you mean Paramahansa's wife?' 'Yes.' She was right there and so I touched her toes. You see, we did that with our fingers. And she kissed me like our mother's kiss, by placing her fingers on the chin and then putting them to her lips. Then she said, 'Son, haven't I seen you before?' I said, 'No, Mother, I have not seen you.' Of course, mothers recognize their children but unfortunately, children do not recognize the mother who is the Mother of the Universe.

Holy Mother would come to Calcutta and stay at the Udbodhan Office. Visitors were allowed twice a week to come and touch her feet. One day was reserved for the women and another day reserved for

the men. I used to go to see her once a week and she would remain veiled. And so I used to go and touch her toes. She would be seated with her body and face covered. You could see only her feet. Thousands of people would come. There would be rows of people in lines for two or three blocks. Not that I had any special reverence for Holy Mother, because I always considered her to be a simple countrywoman, like my own mother. However, I used to go because I would get a wonderful sensation like an electric shock every time I touched her toes. Later I learned in that way she transmitted spiritual power. But I didn't know. Just for that sensation, I went to see her once a week, because afterwards I would feel a soothing influence in my whole body. Holy Mother used to come and live in Calcutta for six months as a general rule, and then go back to Jayrambati for six months. This was around 1910 or 1911.

One time another friend of mine [who became Swami Amriteswarananda] and I came together to Vishnupur. Unfortunately he died young. If he had lived today, I am sure he would have become the President of our Order. I use to call him Paresh. In our home we stayed, and then we hired a bullock cart and travelled, sleeping in the bullock cart, all night. First, we went to Koalpara [about three miles from Jayrambati], where Holy Mother used to come and stay occasionally. In Koalpara there is an adobe house where there is a picture of Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna. We saw a picture of Holy Mother, which she installed and worshipped herself. And so we had the blessed fortune to see that picture and bow down to it. Sri Ramakrishna himself also worshipped his own picture and said, 'Someday this picture [meaning his own photo] will be worshipped in every home in the world.'

I always carried a picture of Holy Mother. In the Udbodhan Office, I had a friend who gave me that picture. Generally, they did not sell them at that time. I carried that picture all my life. Holy Mother told in a vision, 'I see many in America placing my picture on the left of Thakur.' I think I was the first one who did that. That is the picture you see there in the shrine.

As we went to Mother's house, we were late to arrive. She had told her attendant Rashbehari, a swami [Swami Arupananda] who later recorded the teachings of Holy Mother, 'Two of Rakhal's sons are coming. Save some food for them.' We did not write to her nor was there any telephone, but she knew we were coming!

When we would go to her village, she didn't have a veil or anything like that. Then like a mother she served us food on leaf plates. One very interesting thing: she looked like one's own Mother to whoever saw her. So she appeared to me as my own mother. I saw no difference. It was not only like that with me, but also with many others I have known. When we would see her, she would act and behave just like our own mother. She sat by us and asked us if we liked the food, just as our own mother does. If we liked something, then she would give us more. So in that way she fed us. I have never eaten such food in my life. It was like nectar, I still remember that.

After finishing the leaf plates, we were going to throw them out. Then Mother said, 'What are you doing?' 'We cannot leave these leaf plates here. We ate in those.' Then she said, 'What would you have done if your mother had been present?' So we left them there.

Both of us stayed there for three days and three nights. When we left Holy Mother, she stood by the door and kissed us. And as far as she could see, she kept looking at us. This was the custom she had with everybody that used to go to her. These were wonderful times. We did not have any teaching or anything; she did not teach us anything. Just to see her and to touch her feet was enough.

While we were there, she initiated one young man. As we came back, we saw he was very sick and was dying. And at the moment of death, he sat straight up and chanted the *mantra* that Holy Mother gave him. So it was a wonderful death from that standpoint.

At Belur Math

When we were students in Calcutta, they gave word to us that Mother will be coming to the Belur Math and they needed volunteers. So many of our college boys went there. We stood in rows at the Belur Math. It was not the present big monastery, so there was very little room there. Holy Mother was carried in a palanquin up to the gate, and then they had a chair prepared for her. There were four disciples of Sri Ramakrishna: Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), Swami Saradananda, Swami Premananda, and Swami Shivananda. They carried her on their shoulders. Then Maharaj gave the order that nobody should bow down before Mother at that time. But we saw Khoka Maharaj, Swami Subodhananda. He just rolled on the ground before her. Maharaj said, 'Who is that, who is that?' Of course, Khoka Maharaj in the meantime disappeared. So Mother was carried by these four swamis upstairs to the shrine room. I believe she was worshipped at that time by these disciples. One thing I know that while she was living, she was worshipped by hundreds and thousands of people as a living Goddess.

While living on earth, I saw her only once more when I became a monk and three of us [Prajnan Maharaj and Satyen (Swami Atmabodhananda)] were going to Mayavati. Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] said to us, 'Go and take the blessings of Holy Mother.' So we went. At that time she did not have a veil and of course, she kissed us as usual. Then she offered us each one flower. I do not know what the others did but when the flower dried up, I threw it away.

Other people's experiences of Holy Mother

A funny incident comes to my mind. There was a Brahmin and he came to show his respects to Holy Mother. She used to appear in Calcutta and would cover herself completely. She was seated and you could see only her feet. This old man sat down at her feet and began to meditate, and to practise breathing exercises and all kinds of things that a person does in ritualistic worship before an image. Now, you see, it was a hot day and Holy Mother was perspiring with her veil, all covered up. Then one attendant of Holy Mother, Golap Ma, came and upbraided him saying, 'What is this? Do you think this is a clay image that you have to bring life into her?'

There is another very interesting story. It occurred in the Udbodhan Office while Holy Mother was there. You see, downstairs was the Udbodhan Office, and upstairs was the place for Holy Mother. There was a bedstead and on the other side of the bedstead there was a shrine. She stayed in the shrine during that time. There was one holy man who came, who did not belong to our Order. He prostrated himself before Holy Mother and then came and sat at the Udbodhan Office downstairs. Mother sent three fruits to this holy man, but he kept silent. They said, 'Go away now. Go away now,' but he would not listen to anybody. He sat straight there and would not move. About an hour later Holy Mother sent another fruit. As he received that fruit he began to dance in joy saying, 'At long last Mother gave me liberation.' You see, the three fruits are *dharma*, *artha*, *kàma*. *Dharma* is merit, *artha* is fortune, *kàma* is what you desire. But *moksha*, the fourth fruit, is liberation. So when Mother gave him three fruits he held them and would not move until she sent another fruit.

Now I will tell you how Swamiji, Maharaj, and Swami Yogananda who was her attendant, would touch her feet. Swamiji would dip himself in the Ganges six or seven times. He thought he was not pure enough to touch her feet. And then only he would go and touch her feet. But you see we didn't know. We went under any condition. But Maharaj would go just like a little boy who had done something wrong and was afraid to approach his mother. So he would compose himself first by saying, 'Hello Radhu, how are you?' Then he would bow down to her and try to go away. And the Mother would say, 'Rakhal, sit down.' On other occasions, Swami Brahmananda would approach Holy Mother with spiritual emotion and fervour and his whole body would be shaking. That is, he would be in ecstatic consciousness whenever he would approach to touch the feet of Holy Mother. Swami Yogananda, who

was her attendant, would not touch her feet. Where she would stand, there he would take the dust after she left. Of course, all this happened after Thakur passed away.

Perhaps you know the story how, when Thakur passed away, Mother wept saying, 'O Mother, why did you leave me alone?' What a relationship they had! She called him 'Mother' and he called her 'Mother.' And then she was going to take the dress of a widow. In a vision Thakur said to her, 'I am not dead, just this room and that room separates us, that is all.' She had to live in a village where she wore a white cloth with a red border. You see widows are not allowed to use a red border. Also, a widow is not supposed to have any vermilion here on her forehead. But I learned she used to put vermilion in another place so it would not be noticeable, because she knew he was not dead.

She made no difference between sinner or saint. While Thakur was living, he asked three followers of his to take initiation from Holy Mother. But later, after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, she initiated anybody who asked. Holy Mother made this remark, 'Thakur selected his disciples, but he is sending me them like ants in rows,' and she initiated everyone that came to her.

She looked equally upon all. There was a Muslim robber [Amjad], what we call a 'dacoit.' He had great respect and reverence for Holy Mother. He used to bring fruits for Mother. When a woman of the household was offering him food, she was almost throwing the foodstuff at him. Holy Mother was shocked. She said, 'What is this? He is as much my child as Sarat.' Then she herself served him food.

In this connection there is a very interesting story that I remember. There was a drunken man and Swami Saradananda never allowed him to go and see Holy Mother, because he did not know how he would behave. He remained drunk almost all of the time. At twelve o'clock midnight, he would come and roll on the ground near the Udbodhan where Holy Mother lived upstairs and sing a song to this effect.

'Cherish my precious Mother Shayma, tenderly within, O mind. May you and I alone behold Her, letting no one else intrude.' And then he would add the line, 'Let not the rascal Sarat intrude.' As he would sing that song, Holy Mother suddenly would open the window and bless him.

Holy Mother disobeyed Sri Ramakrishna at one time. There was a woman of ill character, and she wanted to offer food to Sri Ramakrishna. So she carried the food to him and Holy Mother followed her. Then Sri Ramakrishna could not touch that food.

Holy Mother said, 'No, you have to take that food. Whoever calls me "Mother," he is my son or she is my daughter. You have to eat that.' And he had to. She saw no sinner, no saint. Of course, this woman was completely transformed.

Swami Vivekananda used to say about her that Holy Mother lived in *samàdhi* all the time. At the same time she would be active, doing the household duties, talking and appearing in a normal state. It was phenomenal. I have heard Swami Turiyananda say that, 'Mother never comes down from her throat centre. We have difficulty to bring our mind to that centre, and Holy Mother finds it difficult to come down from the highest centre to this centre, and forcibly keep her mind there.' Just think of that, a man of God is speaking! In other words, she lived in *bhàva samàdhi* or *samàdhi* all of the time and at the same time carried on the work. See the power of Mother!

There was the nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, Shibuda [Shibu, Shivaram]. I met him, both Ramlal and Shibuda, the younger brother. He was very much devoted to Holy Mother. At one time Holy Mother was going from Jayrambati to Kamarpukur, and Shibuda was carrying her clothing and what things she required. Suddenly Shibuda turned toward her and said, 'Auntie tell me who you are.'

'Oh Shibu what are you saying, I am your auntie.'

'Well if you are my auntie only, then here is your bag. You carry it yourself.'
Then she said, 'No, I am Mother Kali.' Then he carried it.
Another time also Shibuda made her admit that she was Mother Kali.'

Swami Ramakrishnananda took her to South India. There was a woman who, I believe, was a disciple of Maharaj. This woman did not know any language but Tamil, and Holy Mother only Bengali. But they would talk together for an hour or so and perfectly understood each other. This happened when Holy Mother came to visit the Ramakrishna monastery in Bangalore. I heard this from a famous swami who was present on the occasion. She was taken out for a ride and when she came back, there were about a thousand people gathered there. Mother looked at them and said in Bengali [which meant], 'I wish I could speak your language.' When this was interpreted to the audience, they said, 'No Mother, we do not want to hear you speak, we just want your *darshan*.' Holy Mother meditated on a rock there in Bangalore, and today they have a little shrine there with the picture of Mother.

How she received the Western disciples of Swamiji is something. When Swamiji went back from this country [America], he took some women disciples—Nivedita, Tantine and Mrs. Ole Bull. They were introduced to Holy Mother who was seated near them on the floor. They were given sweets on a plate and, of course, there was no talk because Mother did not know their language. Swamiji was standing and these disciples were taking their food. Suddenly, Holy Mother stooped down and took one of the sweets. Mother said, 'Why should I not eat from the same plate with my own daughters?' That even thrilled Swamiji because he knew that she had accepted his Western disciples.

During her *mahàsamàdhi* all of Thakur's disciples were present there. Her disciples were not allowed to come at that time, except her attendant. Three days before she passed away, she was eating puffed rice mixed with mustard oil and green onions and green chillies. That is the favourite food of our women in that district. She was very sick, and she was eating that. So Golap Ma went and told Swami Saradananda, and he came and bowed down to her. She said, 'My son what can I do for you?' and she was hiding the food like a little girl. Then Swami Saradananda said, 'I want that,' pointing to the food. So Mother gave it to him. After three days she passed away. That made Swami Saradananda feel very bad.

During the period of her *mahàsamàdhi*, when she was passing away, Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] did not come. He was at Bhubaneswar. Swami Saradananda was asked, 'Why is it that all of you disciples are present and only Maharaj is not present?' Swami Saradananda said, 'Maharaj is not like us.' You see, Maharaj had the power to stay wherever he was and yet come [in subtle form] and visit anyone. *So he visited her.* Mother knew. Swami Saradananda also knew and that's why he said, 'He is not like one of us.' At exactly the time of her death Maharaj told Swami Nirvanananda, 'Mother just left her body.' At that time Holy Mother's beauty came out. While living, that beauty was not there, because people might look at her with impure eyes and that would harm them. So her real beauty came out when she passed away.

Now, Swami Saradananda felt very bad that he took away the plate of food from Holy Mother. When Maharaj came to Calcutta, Swami Saradananda told that story and said, 'Maharaj you have to eat this food and let her eat through your mouth.' Then he prepared that same thing and Maharaj in an ecstatic mood took that food.

[Swami Prabhavananda then recited some of Holy Mother's teachings and read a letter over six hundred words in length, from Swami Premananda to Surendra about the glories of Holy Mother].

I should tell you in this connection that Sri Ramakrishna could not touch money. But Holy Mother, whenever any money would come to her, would touch it to her forehead, because that is Mother Lakshmi and that is how we are fed.

Other lectures on the life of Holy Mother: Sri Ramakrishna's disciples

[In other Sunday addresses on Holy Mother, Swami Prabhavananda made the following points:]

Coming into the presence of Holy Mother even for a second, for a moment was enough. You touch her feet and that is enough. This has been experienced by hundreds and thousands of people. And what happened? Their lives were completely *transformed*. If one is prepared, if one is ready, then the reaction to that transmission comes immediately. Otherwise, it has a delayed reaction. This is a truth, a fact, that whoever came and had her blessing, their lives were completely transformed. I have seen the sinner become a saint. Not by lectures, not by gathering information about spirituality or religion, but in silence.

Swami Vivekananda used to speak about Holy Mother this way: 'Mother lives in that transcendental consciousness continuously and yet keeps her normal consciousness.' Swamiji said about Holy Mother that, 'She is the living Durga.' I will tell you how Swami Vivekananda came to this country. First, he had the vision of Ramakrishna who wanted him to come here. But Vivekananda thought, well, I must corroborate this vision and who can corroborate it? So he wrote to Holy Mother without saying anything about the vision. He simply asked her permission—would she permit him to go to America to preach? Holy Mother first thought, 'No'—he is such a young boy to be in a foreign country. So she was thinking of not allowing him to come and was going to write him, when Sri Ramakrishna came and held her arm and said, 'No, ask him to go.' So she blessed Vivekananda and encouraged him to come to this country.

After the passing of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda organized the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Though Holy Mother held no official position, she was the Mother of the whole organization. Whenever there would arise any doubt or difficulty or any problem, she was the final answer to everything. Swami Vivekananda said that with all their spiritual struggles and with the attainment of *samâdhi*, the highest truth, whenever there would be any subtle problems in spiritual life that they could not answer, Holy Mother in her simple way would dissolve all doubts and bring the solution. As Swamiji used to say, 'It is a miracle how that simple country woman knows everything.' Her teachings, as I said, were mostly in silence because there was that power in her.

I heard this from her attendant Rashbehari: Many years after the passing of Sri Ramakrishna, most of the disciples were in Benares for a celebration. Holy Mother also was in Benares, and she gave some money to a disciple to buy a *gerua* cloth for all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Then she said, 'Get a silk cloth for Rakhai.' Rashbehari asked, 'But why, they are all your sons; are they not? Why something special for Rakhai?' And she replied, 'Yes, they are all my sons, but Rakhai is my son.'

In Benares, when Maharaj saluted Holy Mother from downstairs, Golap Ma asked him, 'Mother wants to know why you have to worship her?' Then he danced like a little boy and said, 'Because she holds the key to the knowledge of Brahman.'

They all went to visit Saranath near Benares. Saranath is the place where they went underground, dug and found the relics of Buddha, and then they built a Buddhist temple there. So Maharaj went by motorcar and Holy Mother went in a horse carriage to Saranath. Maharaj somehow realized that when Mother returns by horse carriage, there will be a spook on the side of the road. The horses will shy and the carriage will fall down. Maharaj told Holy Mother, 'You take the motorcar and I'll go in the horse carriage.' As they were coming by carriage, the horse shied and it fell down. Of course, there

was not much injury to anyone. Holy Mother then remarked, 'You see, Rakhal was ready to sacrifice his life for my sake.'

One time, I think it was on the birthday of Ramakrishna, Holy Mother came to the Belur Math to attend the celebration. As she arrived, my Master, Swami Brahmananda, went into ecstasy, into deep *samàdhi*. Just think, just feeling her presence he went into deep *samàdhi*! All the other brother-disciples were a little concerned about him, because he stayed in that *samàdhi* for a long time, and nobody could bring him out of that deep contemplation. Then Holy Mother received a report about it and said, 'Do not be concerned about him, he will come out all right.' Then after a while she came herself, touched his hand and said, 'My son, I have brought some sacramental food for you, wake up and eat.' And immediately Maharaj came back to normal consciousness and prostrated himself before her.

Maharaj once told me that no one can really understand Mother unless She reveals herself to that person. She is still living, and she reveals herself even to those who are not worthy. She showed her unbounded grace and appeared before a disciple of Maharaj in this country. The whole world disappeared, and there was only Mother and what power she bore.

Swami Premananda said to us, 'The poison that we cannot swallow, we send to Holy Mother. That is, the people whom we cannot help, we send them to Holy Mother.' One time a man went to her with a letter from my Master, Swami Brahmananda. Maharaj had requested Holy Mother to bless the man. As Holy Mother saw that person, she said, 'Oh, Rakhal also sends a man like that!' You see, he was so impure! But, of course, Holy Mother accepted him, blessed him, and transformed his life.

Swami Trigunatitananda is regarded as a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and was the founder of our Vedanta centre in San Francisco. There is a story told about him that he was sent to Holy Mother, by Sri Ramakrishna who advised him to be initiated by Holy Mother. Why did he send him to Holy Mother? Sri Ramakrishna repeated a couplet from the Vaishnava scriptures, which expressed the idea that Râdhâ, the divine Shakti of Krishna, has greater power than Krishna.

Additional incidents

One time in Sister Nivedita's house, she invited Holy Mother to listen to Easter music. Though Holy Mother did not understand the words, she caught the spirit of the resurrection of Christ and went into *samàdhi* listening to the music. At another time Sister Nivedita was explaining to her the Western ceremony of marriage, and she was repeating the vows that they take. As Holy Mother listened to those words, she said, 'These are righteous words.' You see, how appreciative she was of everything!

She was conscious all the time that she was the Mother of the Universe. At the same time you could see that she was just like your own mother, a simple little woman. You know Josephine MacLeod (Tantine). She said, 'I never saw anything in her except that she was a very simple good woman.'

Sri Ramakrishna did not have too many disciples, but Holy Mother made at least a thousand disciples. Here is the peculiarity, a most unique thing: no Avatar, no Divine Incarnation was worshipped while they were living the way Holy Mother was worshipped. She was worshipped as the Divine Mother, as Mother Goddess, God the Mother. But you see, she still remained a simple countrywoman.

One disciple once asked her, 'Are you our real Mother?' She said, 'Yes.' And this is a real relationship. Holy Mother is nearer and we have a closer relationship with her, than with our own mother who gave us birth, from whom we got this life. She is our Eternal Mother, more than our own mother. This is the way she made us feel.

One time somebody asked her, 'Mother why do you let such people come to you?' Her reply was, 'If the child gets into the mud, what does the mother do? She just wipes and bathes the child and takes the child on her lap.'

I know another story; there was a so-called untouchable who came to Holy Mother for initiation. But she said, 'You know this is a village, people will think badly of it. Come to Calcutta, then I shall initiate you.' Then this untouchable said with great force, 'Yes, when you were in danger, then you could accept the dacoit and his wife as your parents, but now. . .'. Then Holy Mother told the untouchable, 'All right, you stay here. This is Shiva-puri. Anybody who stays here for three days and three nights will be purified. And then I shall initiate you.' The boy agreed and got his initiation. You see, she looked equally upon all.

The public would come and touch her feet, hundreds and thousands of people standing in rows. Afterwards she would place her feet in cold water, because she said, 'Some people come and touch my feet, and it feels like hot charcoal fire.' You know what they call vicarious atonement. That's what it was, she used to take the sins of others. And then some disciple said, 'But Mother, we will not allow others to do that.' Holy Mother smiled and said, 'Do you think our Lord came just to eat sweets?'

There is one incident about which I knew personally. In our hometown, there was a man who was really shunned by society because of his bad character. He was a great drunkard and did all kinds of other things. When Holy Mother came to the railway station, this man knew about her. And so did another man, a very good soul, who was regarded as a holy man in our hometown. Both of these men came to the railway station to receive Holy Mother. This holy man had an ashrama retreat on the bank of a lake. Years later when the nuns and Krishna [Swami Krishnananda] went with me to India, we stayed in that place by the lake. He made arrangements for Holy Mother to stay at his ashrama and the other man, who was regarded socially as very bad, also made arrangements in his home for Holy Mother to stay. Now, both of these men went to Holy Mother and prayed that she may come to their home. She said, 'No, I'll go with you,' meaning with the immoral man. This man felt that he was so bad he would not even touch the feet of Holy Mother. He would stand at a distance and say, 'No, I am not worthy to touch Mother's feet, I have done so many sinful acts.' And of course, we know how the life of this man was completely transformed. He became holy, one of the great devotees. Any time Holy Mother came and passed by this hometown of ours, she stayed in that house. And now that house has become a sacred spot, a place of pilgrimage.

One time a woman who had lived a very wicked life, became very repentant. She heard about Holy Mother and came to see her. But she did not dare enter the room where Holy Mother was seated. She stood outside and prostrated herself. Mother said, 'Come in child.' The woman said, 'No Mother! I am a wicked woman, I am so impure, I've lived such a bad life. I would not dare to come into your presence. From a distance I will bow down.' What did Mother do? Mother got up, took her by the hand and brought her in and said, 'You have become repentant.' Then instantly she initiated her and, of course, this woman's life was transformed. There are many such incidents.

One time a fellow came and just struck his forehead on the big toe of Holy Mother in such a way that it pained her. And, you know, that fellow said, 'I did that purposely so that Mother would remember that pain and remember me.'

At the time there was a boycott of English goods. One of her brahmachari attendants was asked by Holy Mother to go and buy some English cloth for someone in her family. The young brahmachari said, 'But Mother, don't you know that we have boycotted English goods? I cannot go and buy these.' Then

Mother said, 'Yes, what you are doing is all right, you should boycott. But you see, the English people are also as much my children as you are. I cannot boycott.' She made no distinction while giving that same universal love to all.

This reminds me of another rather political incident. You see, one of the boys reported to Holy Mother how President Wilson was trying to form the League of Nations. He was trying to prevent war in the future. She didn't know President Wilson, but as soon as everything was told to her, Mother quietly remarked, 'They speak with their lips, they do not speak from their heart.'

She said, 'I must be very old. I saw my father die and I saw my Mother die.' I saw so many die, so I must be very old. But she did not mention that her husband had died.

Just lately I found a letter of Holy Mother that came into my hands. Of course, she did not write letters herself, but she used to dictate them. I mention this because there is a wonderful truth there. A disciple of hers, who was a swami, was living at Mayavati, one of our monasteries in the Himalayas. This monastery is dedicated to the practice of the non-dualistic aspect of Vedanta. There could be no shrine room, no altar, no worship, not even offering flowers to the picture. That is the strict rule that is followed in this monastery. This swami wrote to her, 'Mother, if I stay here I have to practise non-dualism and I am not a non-dualist. I want to love God. What should I do?' Then Holy Mother wrote this letter to him, and I got a copy of that letter recently. Holy Mother wrote, 'No, my son, you are not a dualist. Our master, our guru' referring to Sri Ramakrishna, 'he was a non-dualist. All of his disciples are non-dualists, you are also a non-dualist.' There is no quarrel or fight or difference, between loving God, worshipping God, and non-dualism.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Swami Prabhavananda's use of words in public speaking was more informal than his writing style. About 11 % of the events described in this article (primarily in the early part) are found using different wording in Swami Prabhavananda's, 'My Memories of Holy Mother,' *Prabuddha Bharata* (March 1969), pp. 90-92; Swami Prabhavananda, 'The Holy Mother as a Disciple Saw Her,' in *Sarada Devi The Great Wonder* (New Delhi: Ramakrishna Mission, 1984), pp. 158-60.
- 2 Swami Prabhavananda founded the Vedanta Society of Southern California, which includes monasteries and a convent in two locations.
- 3 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Dec. 31, 1961), p. 1. Typed copies of all of these lectures were loaned to me through the courtesy of Joanne Euler, curator of the Vedanta Archives, Vedanta Society of Southern California.
- 4 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Dec. 11, 1960), p. 4.
- 5 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Oct. 7, 1973), p. 3.
- 6 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Jan. 8, 1956), p. 2; (Dec. 9, 1962), p. 4; (Oct. 12, 1975), p. 3.
- 7 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Dec. 9, 1962), p. 2.
- 8 Traditionally, a devotee to show reverence for a holy person touches their feet with the hands, and then places their hands on their head or heart. This is called 'taking the dust of the feet.'
- 9 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Dec. 16, 1951), p.4.
- 10 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Dec. 15, 1957), p. 5.
- 11 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Jan. 4, 1959), p. 4; (Dec. 4, 1960), p. 4.
- 12 Shibuda or Shibu [Shivaram] was the younger brother of Ramlal (1858-1933) and the son of Ramakrishna's elder brother Rameswar.
- 13 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Dec. 11, 1960), p. 1; (Oct. 7, 1973), p. 9.
- 14 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Dec. 16, 1951), p. 2; (Jan. 7, 1962), p. 4.
- 15 (Sept. 16, 1973), cassette; (Sept. 21, 1975), p. 12; (Oct. 12, 1975), p. 9.

- 16 The letter is found in Swami Prabhavananda, *Swami Premananda: Teachings and Reminiscences* (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1968), pp. 155-57.
- 17 An offering is usually given after a Sunday lecture in the West.
- 18 (Jan. 11, 1959), p. 1.
- 19 (Dec. 31, 1961), p. 3; (Sept. 21, 1975), p. 10.
- 20 (Jan. 11, 1959), p. 3.
- 21 (Dec. 19, 1948), p. 7.
- 22 (Dec. 4, 1960), p. 1; (Sept. 21, 1975), p. 11.
- 23 (Sept. 22, 1974), p. 11.
- 24 (Sept. 22, 1974), pp. 11-12.
- 25 (Dec. 4, 1960), p. 1.
- 26 (Oct. 7, 1973), pp. 13-14.
- 27 (Dec. 31, 1961), p. 5; (Dec. 12, 1965), p. 5.
- 28 (Dec. 16, 1951), p.5.
- 29 (Dec. 31, 1950), p. 4.
- 30 (Dec. 9, 1962), p. 3.
- 31 (Dec. 12, 1965), p. 5.
- 32 (Dec. 12, 1965), p. 6.
- 33 (Dec. 31, 1950), p. 3; (Dec. 11, 1960), p. 5.
- 34 (Sept. 22, 1974), pp. 5-6.
- 35 (Dec. 9, 1962), p. 2.
- 36 (Jan. 8, 1956), p. 4.
- 37 (Dec. 16, 1951), p.4.
- 38 (Dec. 16, 1962), p. 2.
- 39 (Dec. 31, 1950), p.3.
- 40 (Dec. 31, 1950), p. 3
- 41 (Sept. 21, 1975), p. 11.
- 42 (Dec. 19, 1948), p. 8.

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