

Box 863, Johannesburg, S.Africa  
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My dear Friends:

I have been working in Durban, that sunny seaside of South Africa, for nearly two months, and shall soon be going in to Cape Town. After that I plan to remain in Johannesburg and Pretoria a whole year. There are some splendid young people in those parts, and I want to get them together in a special group. These young members rejoice my heart, for soon we members of the "old guard" will pass on and I would like to see the great work in the hands of trained and dedicated younger people soon. We shall be losing our star lecturer here, Mr. Dudley Gower, He is returning to England to be with his mother. For his sake I am glad, for he will have many splendid opportunities there. But on the other hand, we are gaining experienced people from the older countries, like Mrs. Hammond and Mr. Banks.

I wish to thank those of you who have sent me snaps of yourselves. Do all of you sometime do the same. I would like to have a book with a picture of everyone of you in it.

I have recently been reading the life of the great Hindu saint, Ramakrishna, who was the beloved Master of Swami Vivekananda. In many ways he reminds me of the little Christian saint, Therese of Lisieux. He had just the same childlike nature and simple, intense love of God. One of our Group who has a trained, scientific mind, has just written me a letter about her. You will all be interested in what he writes. "In some ways the book (of her life) has disappointed me and in others inspired me. Being a bit intellectually inclined, I expected some more definite teaching along spiritual lines, and there is not so much of that. Her ways are so utterly simple and childlike--which naturally one realizes more and more are really valuable assets in a spiritual life. Intellectuality does introduce many complications! But this need not be, it seems to me. The point of danger is too little childlikeness and too little knowledge. When I first came into Theosophy I alternated between 'scientific' spells and 'Theosophical' spells. They gradually became shorter individually until now they mostly are a good blend--a Theosophical background all the time which does not hinder, but helps, my scientific work."

Simplicity is the hall-mark of true greatness, I feel. H.P.B. says that in the life of meditation one's concepts grow steadily simpler and more inclusive, until the day comes when we leave all concepts behind and merge into the Universal. Ramakrishna is very illuminative on the subject of the Eternal with, or without, form. You will remember that Arjuna asked the Lord Sri Krishna which was the better way, to worship God in his unrevealed, unbodied aspect, or as God revealed in some dear and lovely form. The Lord replied that the second was the better way for most, for "Oh, Arjuna, the path of the Unmanifest is hard for the embodied to reach." This is the way Ramakrishna puts it: "There is no distinction between the Impersonal God on the one hand and the Personal God on the other. God is formless and God is with form too, and He is That which transcends both form and formlessness. He alone can say what else He is. God with form is visible, nay, we can touch Him, as one does his dearest friend."

Ramakrishna uses a very simple simile. "They are like ice and water. When water freezes into ice it has form; when the same ice is melted into water all form is lost. To a devotee God manifests Himself in various forms. Think of a shoreless ocean, no land visible in any direction; only here and there are visible blocks of ice formed by intense cold. Similarly under the cooling in-



fluence, so to say, of the deep devotion of His worshipper, the Infinite reduces Himself into the finite and appears as a Being with form. Again as on the re-appearance of the sun, the ice melts away, so in the appearance of knowledge, God with form melts away into the formless."

In the East such images of Deity are called "Ishta-devas." A devotee chooses such an Ista-deva to channel his thought of the Eternal. Ramakrishna advises that an Ishta-deva, once chosen, should not be changed. Numerous are such personalized forms of Deity in the East. Every pious home has a chosen Deity, whose image is garlanded and before whom prayers are offered. The nearest approach to this in the West is the Catholic manner of choosing a patron saint, or keeping a statue of the Saviour or Our Lady in the house before which flowers and prayers are offered. This is so much easier and warmer than the high, still altitudes of the impersonal approach to God. The Ishta-deva is a beloved and adorable form through which shines the effulgence of the God-head. To the Christian this would take the form of the Lord Christ; to the Buddhists, the Blessed One; to the Hindu, the divine forms, Krishna, Rama, etc. And to the metaphysical Hindu each such form has His Shakti or power, visualized in female form. Thus Rama has the lovely Sita; the boy Krishna, the Gopi Radha; and these are sometimes worshipped together. Perhaps to many Theosophists the Ishta-deva may well be the figure of a Master of the Wisdom. But let us always look beyond and through the Ishta-deva who is the window through whom shines the Eternal Light.

Ramakrishna said that a man could live in the world and yet be a devotee. But he advised him to take periods when he could go into "retreat" as a Catholic would phrase it, and then ever to live and to do all acts as an offering to his Chosen Deity. "Give up everything to Him, resign yourself to Him, and there will be no more trouble for you. Then you will come to know that everything is done by His Will. To live in the world or to leave it, depends upon the Will of God. Therefore work, leaving everything to Him." He also said: "That the mind may be thus unattached, and fixed upon God, it is meet that you should often retire into solitude where you may be left absolutely to yourself, praying to the Lord with a yearning heart for the True Knowledge."

And that True Knowledge was to Ramakrishna the Knowledge of God, not psychic powers. When one of his devotees took to seeing visions he told him: "My boy, for some days do not meditate. Those things, seeing visions and so forth, are obstacles to the realization of God." He said we should cultivate the two wings of Viveka (Discrimination) and Vairagya (Renunciation). (Shall we discuss these in another letter?) Says Ramakrishna: "When you are engaged in what is good work, if done without an eye to results, it will conduce to devotion and love for God. By working this way one realizes God."

Let us each take our Ishta-deva by the hand, worship Him, love Him, trust our lives to Him. Never will He desert us. But it must be for love of Him and not for gain to ourselves. Let me close with the beautiful words of Sri Krishna to Arjuna: "Listen thou again to My supreme word, most secret of all; beloved thou art of Me, and steadfast of heart, therefore will I speak for thy benefit. Merge thy mind in Me, be My devotee, sacrifice to Me, prostrate thyself before Me, thou shalt come even unto Me. Abandoning all duties (that means not being wrapped up in them) come unto Me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins." Master and Friend, Father-Mother, adored and blessed One, we call Him ourselves by our purity and simplicity of heart, and by doing our appointed round in His Name and for the love of men.

Your affectionate friend,

CLARA CODD