

SRI RAMAKRISHNA - VIVEKANANDA

by Nikos Kazantzakis

*(Preface to a Greek translation of
'The Ideal of a Universal Religion')*

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Sjt. Dilip Kumar Roy of Sri Aurobindo Asram, to whose kind courtesy we owe this translation from Greek, writes: "This is the translation of a preface written by Nikos Kazantzakis, to a book in Greek to be shortly published by Mlle. Eleni Samios, the author of 'La Sainte Vie de Mahatma Gandhi'. This book is a collection of Swami Vivekananda's lectures and other writings translated from English into Greek. Nikos Kazantzakis, tells me my friend, Monsieur Jean Herbert of the League of Nations, is a great writer, poet and philosopher, and the author of a monumental epic poem in which he has striven to express poetically all the philosophies of the world. He has translated into Greek, Dante, Goethe and Shakespeare, is the author of a number of philosophical novels and is an advanced Yogi."

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At the heart of all religions, is in travail a pan-human aspiration for the Beyond. Below the subsoil of all rigid and fanatical dogmas which create schisms between the religions, there stirs a tremendous breath, a wind—the self-same sigh of Man, which overflows from this earth. And behind the multicoloured religious mythologies is often hidden, incomprehensibly, a Verity which is extremely simple, eternal, without vainglorious ornaments. The lead of this aspiration, this sigh, this Verity, has shown in all times the *one* path which has carried the mystic soul to its salvation. For, it is at the end of this path that has always appeared the *one* reality to which different people and different epochs have given different names: the Idea, the

Thing-in-itself, Atman, God.

There was the path, and the aim was to be united with this eternal Reality, to be one with it. But not only to be one with it, but even more, to understand that for centuries past we have been united with it. Our road was not a going forward but a return home.

India has given birth to spiritual giants such as no other country on earth has; she has produced giants who have aspired for the Supreme Union with a glowing intensity of feeling married to a radiant intellectual luminosity. They were veritable "Bacchants of Light"—in the Hellenic acceptance of the phrase. In no other country have the "God-possessed" perceived with a similar spiritual intensity and passion that behind this series of complex phenomena there exists an Essence which is simple and immutable, that at the back of all these masks an eternal visage gazes steadfastly at the human soul with eyes that watch over and attract him like a shining beacon from behind the herbs, animals, men, ideas.

The Christian and the Mussalman mystics envisage the soul as a virgin lover who approaches more and more her supreme Beloved: the more she draws near the more she rejoices; and the more is Matter transformed into Spirit until she attains the perfect contact and enjoys the ecstasy of the supreme wedlock.

The Hindu mystic follows, often, another path. After being first persuaded by reason that there can be but one Divine Breath—the Atman—and that the human soul can but be one with this Divine Breath, each soul follows up the path along various lanes in the measure of the grace conceded to it—to return at last to its eternal birth place, that of Divinity.

The mystics of ancient Greece had followed three pathways

to attain to the supreme union:

- (1) God descends in man, chases away the human ego and takes possession of the body and soul.
- (2) Man, through spiritual *Sadhana*, ascends to the Divine and unites with Him: he then becomes God which the Germans call ' *Vergotterung*' (Divinisation).
- (3) God and man become one. Man does not indeed become God but he comprehends at last that he has been one with Him, in all eternity: *Vergotterung*.

These three paths were followed also by Gnostics, the Christian mystics and the Mussalmans. An Arab Gnostic of the second century wrote to his friend: "Do not seek God outside thy self. He is within thee. This is how thou must call to Him: 'My God, my spirit, my reason, my soul, my body'."

According to the Hindus there are four ways which lead to the supreme union: the way of Love (Bhakti Yoga), the way of Works (Karma Yoga), the way of the Intellect (Gnana Yoga) and the mystic way (Raja Yoga).

It was the way of Love that had been followed in the last century by the spiritual giant, Sri Ramakrishna of India. The human soul has rarely experienced with such a depth of intoxication the anguish and the rapture of Divine Love. Like to Maria Magdalene dei Pazzi, the mystic devotee of the Middle Ages, Sri Ramakrishna too had followed the call of the soul crying : Love ! Love ! Love!

Sri Ramakrishna aspired to invoke—to quote the great Byzantine mystic Nicholas Cabasilas—"not only a ray of light but the entire disc of the sun." That is why he did not want merely a Christian, a Mussalman, a Brahmin, or a Buddhist conversion: he aspired for the whole disc, to re-experience what

Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Buddha, Christ, Mohamed did. He would have nothing whatever intervene between his soul and God: no dogma, no myth, no idea, no idol. Nothing. Absolute nudity.

He had felt the same necessity of direct contact—the need so boldly and exquisitely expressed in the thirteenth century by Mechthild of Magdeburg.

The Lord said to the human soul:

– "Dame Âme, reste." (Virgin soul, rest)

– "Que veux-tu que je fasse, Seigneur?" (What is your wish, O Lord?)

– "To unclothe Thee."

– "O Lord, I am ashamed!"

– "Dame Âme, we are one in so much that nothing must stand between us: neither shame, nor fear; nay—nor virtue even."

– "Lord, here is my naked soul."

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Only words of human love can express so completely Love Divine. For either party has the same flight, the same effervescence, finding the same obstacles and the same reactions, achieving at last the perfect contact, the great joy in victory.

Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna's disciple, followed another path to find God and revealed this way to men.

Sri Ramakrishna was a Brahmin, poor, ailing, full of tenderness. Vivekananda was a Kshatriya (the caste of warriors), his family aristocratic, rich, his body that of a robust and exacting athlete. He loved the joys of the body, did not attach an inor-

dinate importance to spiritual austerities, was not interested in religion,— having been weaned from it all by his western education and the so-called scientific, plebeian, materialistic ideology of the epoch,

One day, in 1880, when he was about seventeen years old, he met the man who was to revolutionise his life: Sri Ramakrishna.

He sat at the feet of his *Guru* for years, and when the *Guru* died, rose, alone to preach the gospel of his preceptor. But his way was not Bhakti Yoga, the path of, Love: it was Karma Yoga, the path of action. Vivekananda could not reach out for the supreme union save through action. He imposed on his own life a great mission, which demanded for its realisation action, movement, travel through continents, contact with men, discussions, questions and answers—struggle.

May all men join hands and understand that all religions are the same, that all Gods are but one God. May the Orient and the Occident be brothers, making their common salvation depend on their mutual contact and their collaboration. The Occident will bring her science, her technical discoveries, the feats of the intellect which subjugates matter: the Orient will bring its spiritual glory, its researches in inner life, its marvels of abstractions. Without this collaboration of the two hemispheres humanity cannot but be in perpetual danger.

In 1893, after the death of his *Guru*, Vivekananda preached at the Congress of Religions at Chicago. His voice was warm, puissant, flaming with faith. In Europe and America he preached the unity of all the religions and stressed the need of a psychic renaissance. In India he emphasised social progress, the lights of science and the need of a certain material comfort. For he was well aware, as had been his Master be-

fore him, that "Religion can mean little for hungry stomachs."

Vivekananda lived from his depth and loved with the same love the men of the East and the West. Sri Ramakrishna lived in God, Vivekananda—in men. Somebody had once asked a Rabbi: "How can one love God?" "By loving man," the priest had replied. It is thus by loving Man that Vivekananda attained the luminous sphere of his Master.

But Vivekananda was not merely a Karma-Yogi, an athlete of action. His voice was surcharged with human knowledge and intellectual acumen. He never sought to sweep his audience away into a mystic ecstasy: on the contrary, he sought to persuade them by reason, to enlighten their mind, to win them over by the strength of his dialectic to his own point of view so as to persuade them into collaborating with him in his work. Vivekananda was also a Gnana-Yogi, a master-mind of knowledge. He was what Maxime Homologete, the Byzantine mystic, called: "The robust Man, and the robust Man is one who welds knowledge and action into a harmony."

Sri Ramakrishna had found his salvation through love of God, through losing himself utterly in the Divine Essence. Vivekananda found his salvation through love of Man, through action among men indefatigably, full of faith and love and intellectual force.

His voice was silenced abruptly on the 4th July, 1902 by death, at the age of thirty-nine.

But his immortal message had been delivered by his mortal breath. That could not die with his last breath. It lives still—this word, luminous and ardent in thousands of souls in the East and the West—it is still potent, battling and fertilising. All that Vivekananda, the mortal, contained of the immortal—was saved. His lectures taken down by his faithful stenographer

and disciple Goodwin, have become the gospel of thousands of noble and pure souls, and help our fervent aspiration for love and brotherhood, even at the heart of this horrible fratricidal war of our epoch.

Let us hope that this translation in Greek of a lecture delivered by Vivekananda in California on January 28th, 1900¹ will not be lost upon us.

"The inspired word sets the circumambient air in motion, and the movement increases more and more till it impinges on the human ear. There, through it, it penetrates far, into the human soul itself, and bears fruit."

The word of the great Rabbi Machman instils courage into our hearts.



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1 THE WAY TO THE REALISATION OF A UNIVERSAL RELIGION (Delivered in the Universalist Church, Pasadena, California, 28th January 1900) – Complete Works Vol.2 –published in Jnana Yoga.