

Sri Ramakrishna and the Thirst for God

Om. A-sa-to ma sad gam-ma-ya. Ta-ma-so-ma jyo-tir gam-ma-ya. Mri-tyor ma a-mri-tam ga-ma-ya. Avir avir ma e-dhi. Rudra yat te dak-shi-nam mu-kham. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam.

Lead us from the unreal to the Real. Lead us from darkness unto Light. Lead us from death to Immortality. Reveal to us Thy Resplendent Truth and evermore protect us, Oh Lord, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face.

This morning's service is in honor of Sri Ramakrishna, the great spiritual personality of the last century. The title of my talk is: Sri Ramakrishna and the thirst for God. His birthday, his one hundred and forty-eighth birthday will fall on this coming Wednesday according to the Indian calendar. So this is the Sunday close to that so we shall be paying our homage to this great spiritual teacher.

Many of you, who have been coming here for some time have now been familiar with the life and teachings of this great man. You see his picture on our altar. First you see Lord Buddha; then you see the picture of Lord Jesus Christ, and in the center we have the symbol "Om," the word-symbol of the Divine and next to that we have this picture of Sri Ramakrishna which was taken in his lifetime when he was in a high mood, spiritual mood. Next to him is Swami Vivekananda, his most important disciple who brought the message of Vedanta to this country in 1893.

In 1893 in Chicago there was a parliament of religions in connection with the World Fair. And Swami Vivekananda as a young monk of thirty came to represent Hinduism. And he was very successful. He was received with great enthusiasm. During the Parliament of Religions he had given more than one dozen talks. Then he stayed in this country for about one year then he went to Europe. Again he came back. Then he went back to India in 1897. Again he came back [to the United States] in 1899. So altogether Swami Vivekananda was spent in this country three years and a half. He lived a very short life, a life of only forty years. Now Swami Vivekananda used to say that his teacher Sri Ramakrishna is the personification of the Vedantic truths, the great spiritual truths collected together as Veda and Vedanta. Sri Ramkrishna's life is a living, glowing example of that – that these truths are not just theological assertions, are not just poetical fancies, but these truths can be transformed into life. These truths can be lived! That we find in Sri Ramakrishna.

He was born in 1836 in a very remote village of Bengal, West Bengal – then Bengal. He had... he was born in a very respectable Brahmin family but he had no education as such. He was... his guardians tried to send him to school but school frightened him, made him very nervous. So his schooling was very meager, though his handwriting... He could write, excellent handwriting, but he had no school education. And later on he would say, "For the realization of God, study of books is not important. What is important is thirst for Him, thirst for God." Just as in our life we have thirst for many things, so the same kind of thirst has to be... has to be generated in our mind and heart. If one can sincerely pray

for God's... God experience, for the vision of God, then God does respond. When we follow his own life, he... his father died when he was very young, just a boy. Then his elder brother became his guardian. And since he did not like to go to school, but he had other, he had other abilities.

He was very much given to art and nature. He could draw and he could make figures of clay and all, and more than that, he's... from his boyhood he had such a sweet and charming nature that he became the pet of the whole area: men, women, boys, girls, old people. Everybody was charmed at this young boy. He could sing. He could dance. He could act. And those were his hobbies in his boyhood and even in his adolescent years. In the village he had gathered many companions and he would train them and play some drama... or like this. So the whole village was very happy to have among them such a boy. So this went on till he was about sixteen or seventeen. Then his elder brother thought... [the] elder brother was a Sanskrit scholar. He was running a Sanskrit school in Calcutta so he thought he should be taken to Calcutta and given some kind of, if not formal school education, he could be taught to become a priest. So he was brought to Calcutta. Then his brother wanted him to learn these different ways of worshipping the deities and all.

In India the Hindus, each house has some shrine and temple and some Brahmin would come and do the formal worship and they would be paid. Like this, it is a profession, the profession of a priest. But he was not eager to learn even that. He said, "I don't [like] that kind of education whose aim is to earn bread. Even though you are trained to worship the different deities, worship God, but its purpose, in the mind the purpose is to earn money. I am not for that." So the situation became almost impossible. But his elder brother had great affection for him because the father had died when he was quite young.

So his elder brother let... gave in, "All right you do whatever you like." But he did not... He would not do anything wrong. His character had a basic harmony, a basic inclination for the good. And more than that, slowly a spiritual hankering was growing-- a spiritual thirst was growing. And he would sometimes become very moody. He would sit quiet[ly], like this. Then it so happened that in the one suburb of Calcutta, a village called Dakshineswar, a rich woman named Rani founded, built a temple – a temple main... with many shrines. The main shrine was the shrine of the Divine Mother, Kali, but there were temples of Shiva, the temples of Krishna and it is a big area. And she was in need of a very qualified priest to stay there and do the worship of the main temple. And it so happened by coincidence Sri Ramakrishna's... this brother, elder brother, whose name was Ramkumar Chattopadhyay¹, he accepted that responsibility.

And so when that day of inauguration of the temple came, Sri Ramakrishna accompanied him to that place, Dakshineswar. But then he came back. He said, "I am not going to stay here. I've joined the function. You stay here, I shall go back to Calcutta." So he came back to Calcutta. And then he would come occasionally [to Dakshineswar.] Now it so happened it was there that his latent spiritual urge, his thirst for God came to the surface more and more, more and more. He would go to the temple of the main temple and his brother would ask him, "Well since you are here, why don't you help me a little. I

am not asking you to do the worship, but you can do some... some other work like some decorating the image or doing something in connection with the worship. So Sri Ramakrishna agreed to that. So slowly he was confronting this temple of this Divine Mother, Kali.

He would come there and then he would think that, "Is it just a child's play. There is a stone image and people are worshipping, offering flowers, singing, offering prayers. Is there really a conscious God at the back of this stone image?" Then he would cry. He would sit when nobody else was there, comparatively quiet he would sit before that image and he would say, "Well, Mother. They call you Mother, but I... I am a fool. I have no education and... but I want to know whether you are true, whether you are real or not. If you are real, I must have a vision of thee. I must feel that you are not stone, you are really...you are really God, you are really that infinite consciousness."

So he began to pray in that simple way. Later on, he would say, that is the most effective way of sadhana, spiritual practice: "Cry with your whole heart! Cry for the vision of God." In other words that thirst for God-- that hunger for God. Just a child, when the child is hungry, the child cries and comes to his mother, prays to the mother, "Give me food. Give me this." So he would say that the most effective way of spiritual realization is that frankness. Open your heart to God. Whatever may be your ideal of God, [it] doesn't matter. You may worship God with a form or without form. [It] doesn't matter.

In Hinduism as you know there are many concepts of God, many approaches to God. God is looked upon as impersonal reality. He is looked upon as the personal god. He is sometimes worshiped with the help of images. Sometimes that ideal of God is a male principle, like Vishnu or Shiva, sometimes a female principle like Kali or Durga, like Lakshmi and so on. Sri Ramakrishna would later on say that man must somehow feel that urge for God and that is important because man is just not flesh. Man is not just a combination of body and mind. He is more. There is a divine principle in man and there is a great agony in man. That divine principle, which we call our soul, is somehow imprisoned in this body and mind and [has] forgotten its true nature.

All the time there is [an] urge, a latent urge for that freedom, latent urge for the spiritual realization. Sometime it must come, but he would say that the purpose of human life is to realize God. Man is caught up in this world and he has to face many obligations. Sri Ramakrishna would say that does not matter. Let there be obligations but you should, man should understand, should know that the truest and the greatest purpose of his life is self-realization, is spiritual realization – in simple language, to **see** God.

Now this began to happen in the life of this young man. Later on his brother, on his brother's request he accepted to do sometimes the worship and he does [that] sometimes in the Kali temple or in some other temple. But then this hunger, this thirst began to grow keener and keener. But he was not following any known principles of yoga. You see, his sadhana, his spiritual practice was just crying, crying for God. He would, after his duties are finished he would come... that place in those days was a big place with many... a kind of forests. [The] adjoining forest is quite solitary and by the side of the river Ganga.

So he would come there and sit there and cry. Sometimes he would... at dead of night he would come to that forest, sit under a tree, a banyan tree, and there try to pray. In this way, his thirst, his hunger was growing and growing. And it came to such an intensity, that he would sometimes roll on the yard as if he had a very shooting pain inside and people would stand and say, "What has happened to this young man?" They would not understand. But he would say that another day when it was going to be evening after sunset he would again pray to the mother, "Another day of this transient life is gone and still you have not fulfilled my desire." Like this.

Then one day it became so intense, that agony of the heart, that he wanted to kill himself. He gave an ultimatum to the Divine Mother that today I am going to kill myself if something does not happen. And something did happen that day: his first vision of the Mother. Now he described that vision. You know the Kali, mother Divine Mother Kali has a form but his vision he described was a formless vision. He felt, he would say, that "in that vision I felt that I was enveloped by light from all sides – not physical light, but the light of consciousness. What was before me disappeared. Even my body disappeared. My sense of individuality disappeared. And there was light like waves, like waves of light it was enveloping me. I was not conscious of my surroundings. I was not conscious of where I was. Instead it was light, and it was not merely a light of consciousness, but it was joy." It was bliss-- so much so that he had lost external consciousness, what in the books we read call samadhi, the super-conscious state where man, his individuality merges into that infinite knowledge, that infinite reality. There is more any duality, "me" and "God," no subject and object. It has become one.

In the Indian spiritual literature they call it samadhi, super-conscious state and he had that. And he would say, "That was the Mother. I knew then that the image was just a symbol and the real Mother was that Infinite Divine – was no form, even no name. And he was happy but he did not stop. He felt that he was just a child before the Mother and he began to grow a complete surrender to the will of God. He told Mother, "You do as you like with me." And the Mother began to do many things with him, for twelve years. Even though he had that vision of that Supreme Consciousness yet he could not stop. He began to do what is called sadhana, spiritual practices.

In Hinduism as I mentioned, as there are many ideas of God, so there are many approaches for God realization. It is called a yoga, a way, the way of bhakti or devotion, the way of knowledge – jnana, the way of concentration, the way, like this. Many different practices are prescribed. Now Sri Ramakrishna began to feel that he should practice as many ways as possible. He was very much interested. He wanted, he would say, just as a person wants to taste a particular kind of food with different preparations, the same food may have different preparations. Like that, he began to feel that Infinite God, His expressions, His manifestations may be numerous. And he, though his heart was quiet, but he wanted what is called to taste God, just as one tastes some sweetmeat, so he wanted to taste God. He was not satisfied by just worshipping God as Divine Mother, [in a] particular form. He wanted to see what the

Vaishnavas, how the Vaishnavas practiced their sadhana. Like this, one after the other these different spiritual practices he began to take up. And he was successful. Within a very short time he was blessed with this corresponding vision, this corresponding experience. Later on a great Vedantic teacher came and that teacher initiated him into the practice of this jnana yoga – self knowledge, and gave him sannyasa, the vows of renunciation. So all these different practices were continued through twelve years.

Then when all these different ways of Hinduism were over he was interested to... to see what the Christians do, what the Muslims do. So he also practiced the Christian way – not for a long time, just as an experiment, but his mind was so keen and his heart was so pure. So whatever way he followed, the result came quickly. He had a vision of Christ. In the Islamic way he had also the super conscious vision. And then his conclusion was, “each religion, each way is just a different path to God. Man can realize God. If he is sincere, if he is pure he can come to God in any way he likes, through the Islamic way, through the Christian way, or even in Hinduism there are so many ways -- the ways of the Vaishnavas, the ways of the Shaktas, the ways of the Shaivites. And he respected [them all]. He himself found out that, that what is needed is a sincerity of purpose, is your keen eagerness and if you follow a particular way you are bound to come to the... the intended goal.

After this period of sadhana or spiritual seeking was over, then he ... by that time Mother was his... a living companion. He would be communing with his Mother at all times. For him, Mother was not in the temple, the Mother was always with him-- the invisible Mother. And he would... often he would converse with his Mother. Those were... people around him say, “with whom he is talking?” And he is talking with the invisible Mother. So one day he heard a voice of this Mother. The Mother said, “You have... you have many more things to do. You... Many devotees will come. You have to show the path to many sincere people.” Now by that time, though he was quiet by going through all these different spiritual disciplines and spiritual search. He had really-- spiritually speaking he had attained what is to be attained through these different ways by then, when he heard this Mother’s voice, “There is something more to do. You have to help others. You yourself are satisfied. All right, but that is not the mission of your life. There is another mission in your life. You have to help others.”

Just as it had happened to Lord Buddha, when Lord Buddha attained nirvana, the highest knowledge and he was free, but he wanted... his kind and compassionate heart wanted to be in this world, be with people and helping them, to attain that spiritual knowledge. The same thing happened to Lord Jesus Christ as we know, which we call the period of ministration. So that period was to come to Sri Ramakrishna. Mother’s voice [said so].

He was waiting. He was ready for that, but nobody was coming. Though he was ready, but nobody was showing up. People did show up, but they are not that kind of people, the earnest God seekers. Not this. People would come out of respect for a holy man. They would come and he would talk, but that did not satisfy him. Mother said there is pure hearted people will come. Young people

will come. And they are the real seekers of God and you have to help them. But that was not happening. So he was waiting, waiting, waiting. Sometimes he would go on the roof of the building, one building of the temple and cry, "Where are you? Where are you? Mother has said that you will come. Where are you hiding?" Like this he would. And slowly these young... his future disciples began to come, future disciples like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda and all. See? They began to come and through a period of about six years he was busy in his spiritual ministrations. He would often... He did not care for his own rest. He was eager, very eager to help the seekers. And at the age of 50, he died. He died at the age of fifty, but then his mission really began after his death, because these disciples, they formed... joined together, the householder disciples also. He had many women disciples also.

So slowly he was... he began to be discovered and his nature was so simple and his talks are so inspiring. Many of his conversations were... later on... He was recorded by one of his householder disciples, M. He was a school teacher. And later on they were developed into what is now called The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. It is a wonderful book – and [it recorded] day to day his encounter with different kinds of people, men, women, young people, old people. And he was... he would talk of God. And his main emphasis, he had... he would say, "I do not know anything but the Mother." And one would feel that. When persons would come to him they would feel, "This man is through and through... through and through imbued with God. God is entered into his very being. His thoughts, his emotions, his feelings, his activities... everything were grounded in God.

So he was really a wonderful teacher. And his teachings were very simple. And as I mentioned earlier, he would say... often he would say that the world you see, this life you see, this is an impermanent, transient life. Not that we have to run away from this life, but don't think that the goal of man is to be encumbered with his life and studies here without his spiritual purpose. He would say rather that, knowing for certain that the great purpose of human life is to realize God. And don't think, "that is an impossibility." "Everyone," he would say with great emphasis... Householders will come; women will come. They would say, "You speak of God realization and you yourself have experienced God in so many ways. But what about us? We are weak people. We have so many duties and responsibilities. How can we realize God?" Then with great assurance he would say, "Of course you can realize God. The first thing necessary is to... is to grow an interest, a thirst, a hunger. That comes by the company, by the association, by holy company." Holy company, he would say is a very important thing. When you come in the company of some persons who are living that life, who are practicing sadhana, who have really grown love for God, in their company you feel a kind of contagion. You imbibe. You imbibe that hunger and thirst when you associate with people.

But somehow one has to, has to generate that thirst or hunger. He would prescribe many simple things. He would say, that, "Don't think that spiritual life is a very complicated thing. You have to do this kind of nyasa[?], this pranayama, and for these things – in the books we find so many things. But he would say

that, don't think that God is deaf. If you sincerely open your heart to God and pray to God that I want to have Your Experience, and God will surely respond. He would emphasize this bond very much. Somehow feel interested in spiritual life.

Your worldly duties and responsibilities are there. It is not necessary for you to shun those. But make your life you see, tune to God-- your worldly duties, as we read in the scriptures... The Bhagavad Gita says our daily actions and duties have to be spiritualized. The Bhagavad Gita uses one expression called "yajna," sacrifice. All that you do should be a sacrifice to God, what is called karma yoga. And Sri Ramakrishna would teach that, particularly to householder devotees. He would say, "Let God come into your life not for one hour or half an hour – but all through your life. All that you do, let... let all your actions be attuned to God. Don't forget God—whatever you do." That was his simple formula. So in this way we have to ... we have to grow a real thirst. Be a child, you see. Just as a child with simple heart of a child that comes to its mother and wants food or toy. Like that God-Mother is a real mother! God is a real God.

In this way, he would, in his presence one would feel that. One would feel that God is certainly real. And all that we do: prayer or the repetition of Holy Name, or singing... devotional songs, these things are really meaningful. And Sri Ramakrishna would demonstrate that. When once we read in that book, Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna the descriptions of the days that were going on... you see he would sometimes dance. He would sometimes sing with great expressing and he would sometimes make fun. He would always keep people joyful... joyful in a spiritual sense. He would say, "God is the... is the source of all joy." A man who is remembering God, who is praying to God can never be miserable. His face should always shine with the joy of God.

So his life, his personal life, his day-to-day life was a demonstration of what he taught – that love for God, a keen love for God, a keen hunger for God. So in this way we find in his life and his teachings what we call God-consciousness. God-consciousness is something very real and every person can develop that. Not every person, because there is such a thing as karma. All persons can... cannot really realize God in one day. But the assurance is there. When once that interest is grown, just as we feed a plant, with manure with water. Like that, our spiritual life is like a plant. It has to be fed by the daily practice of prayer and contemplation.

And he would not practice... he would not give prescription you see, elaborate prescription. He would say simple things. Sometimes he would say, "Well if you are so busy, then at... in the evening when all your work is done, you just clap your hands and sing the name of God [a] few times." He would say, just as if you before evening when the evening all the birds come to big trees if you stand under a tree, all the birds are there, hidden in the leaves. If you clap your hands, all the birds fly away. You see. Like that, this body is like a tree. And many birds, evil birds have taken shelter, like lust, greed, and passions this. But if you sing the Name of God with clapping your hands, "Rama, Rama, Rama" or like this, then all the birds will fly away. That means that will purify you, your mind. He would emphasize very much repetition of the Holy Name. Just as we

find in many religions, the Holy Name of God is the great purifier. And he would often show how to do that. He would... so he would say these simple prescriptions. Do your worldly duties and if you are too busy at least in the evening... at least in the evening you just sing the Name of God for some time. Even if you cannot do that to one devotee he had once said... He was a very busy man. He would say... he was a devotee of Divine Mother... he would say, I to have no time to meditate. I have no time for contemplation or prayer. Then Sri Ramakrishna prescribed to him, before you go to bed, just remember the Divine Mother, just for a short time. Remember the Divine Mother. So he used to do that and he... later on he said, well I feel great comfort in that.

So his young people who have not entered into this world and have a natural, a pure trait of character he would very much like them. So several young people gathered around him, schoolboys. And he could by simple looking and exchanging a few words, he could know the nature, the inner nature of that boy. And he would encourage them, "If you have not entered in this world, if you are brave, if you can renounce, that is good. If you can renounce everything for God, that is really praiseworthy." So to the householders he would encourage them, "Do your duties, but try to bring God into your life. Offer all your actions to God." In this way, simple prescriptions he would get and if somebody would ask, "Do you think that householders can realize God?" And he would say, "I... of course they can do... Of course they can do." So in these conversations we find that: the great assurance and encouragement to the men in this world. But if there were some young people who were ready to renounce everything for God, he would also encourage them. And that is why after his death several of these young people embraced the life of renunciation and from that beginning grew what is now called the Ramakrishna Order. You see those of us who come here, we belong to that order.

So he was a... his life was a synthesis of what is called the life of this world and also life of renunciation. He was a synthesis of all the yogas. See, he was a great devotee, crying when he would ... shedding tears of love, and a bhakta, a great lover of God. At the same time he was also a jnani. Often his mind would go to super-consciousness and he would be in samadhi for sometimes two hours. In his teachings we find that his teachings are not dogmatic. People of all denominations – Christians would come, even Muslims would come, Vaishnavas would come. And each person would find him, would think that he belongs to my sect. He is a Vaishnava, first-class Vaishnava. A wandering monk, a jnani yogi would come and he would talk about the Vedantic teachings with them and they would feel that he is a first-class Vedantin.

And so, we find in him the harmony of all these spiritual paths and also harmony of all religions. He was... he accepted and respected all forms, all the ways and sects of Hinduism and other religions like Christianity, like Islam. So he would not allow anybody to criticize. He says, "You see there is a God at the back of things. These different paths have come and they are staying by the will of God, by the sign of God. Don't think that things are happening by themselves. There is a God who is watching. So if some religion, some spiritual path is there,

you should respect it. You should not criticize.” He could not tolerate any criticism.

In India, Sri Ramakrishna is called the Prophet of Harmony, and this harmony as I mentioned is because [of] three levels. One is the harmony between the life of the world and the life of God, because God is the... God is everywhere! So in God, there can be all kinds of harmony. Our worldly life can be harmonized with our spiritual life. That also we find in him. He had married when he was twenty-four and he was mad for his spiritual sadhana. Everybody thought, “He has become crazy.” So his mother and his elder brother thought that if he could be... if he could... marriage could be arranged for him then all this craziness for God, this spiritual craziness will go. And when this proposal was made to him, he did not object. That was very strange. The man was day and night he was in search for God and crying for God. And when this brother and mother said, “You have to marry” he said, “All right. Find out a bride.” And the bride could not be found, unfortunately.

They are seeking here and there... here and there. At that time, Sri Ramakrishna had come to his native village for just a few months rest. Then when he found that his relations are trying to find a bride and could not find her, then he laughed. He said, “Go to that village. There a bride is waiting for me.” They are surprised. What is this he is speaking about? Anyway they went there -- the village which is three miles from his own village of Kamarpurkar, a village called Jayrambati. And they went and they found... he had described... in such and such a home there is a bride. And how... this bride was just a little girl of five years.

There is a story, a very funny story, incident in his life when he was just a boy... maybe just a young man and he had gone to his nephew’s house and there was a kind of ceremony there. And many villagers have come, women had come, and children had come, and one lady was carrying a little girl. At that time the girl was maybe three years old or four year old girl. The girl was in her lap and sometimes the relations, ladies make fun with children as you know. And Sri Ramakrishna as a young man had also gone to participate in that ceremony. And... some woman relation of that girl asked that girl, “Well.” You know so many young people are there. “Who... whom do you choose for your future husband?” And the story goes, at once this little girl pointed out to Sri Ramkrishna. His name was Gadadhar. And Gadadhar was standing near. This little girl pointed [to him]. He is my future husband. And it so happened that that girl was found. Her name was Sarada. And he, later on... they are married. And later on this girl became a wonderful woman. She was a spiritual partner of Sri Ramakrishna. Later on all the devotees used to call her the Mother – Holy Mother.

So even though he had married... for him it was not just an irresponsible... like a hobby. He was fully conscious that he had... he had married. Not married for worldly enjoyment. They had never any physical relation, but she was to be his spiritual partner. See? His unfinished work was left to her, and it was also left to the young disciples... Vivekananda. But a major part of his future mission was left for this lady. This lady had her, her spiritual

training under him. She came to Dakshineswar, lived and Sri Ramakrishna even though he had taken the formal vows of renunciation from his Vedanta teacher, Totapuri, but he never said that... he never concealed that he had a wife.

Sometimes he would tell the householder devotees, "Well, I have also a wife. I have also a home there." So simultaneously that was again a great synthesis in his life. He said a wife is not just a... your pleasure doll. Wife is patdharmani³ -- spiritual partner. And respect your wife as a form of Divine Mother, as he himself did. During this period of sadhana once, Sri Ramakrishna literally worshipped his own wife as Divine Mother. He made the wife... her name as I said, Sarada Devi, made her sit in his front in a seat and meditated. Both were meditating. Both minds, both these, Sri Ramakrishna as also Saradi Devi both were in deep samadhi. Hours passed in samadhi. You see that was a strange... a unique phenomenon an incident in his life. He raised his own wife to the... to the status of Divine Mother. And later on these devotees found the... really she was counterpart of Sri Ramakrishna. She, when Sri Ramakrishna died, he was ~~thirty-three~~ [fifty] and she had lived after another more than thirty years. Through this period she had also a wonderful ministrations. You see, to men, women and all.

So in Sri Ramakrishna's life we find these three phases of harmony. One is the harmony of your whatever life you have -- you are in a householder's life with the spiritual life. Spiritual life has to be combined with... with your practical life. There can be a harmony and God is that power of harmony. And another harmony is with different spiritual practice, which we call the yogas. These yogas can also be harmonized into what is called an integrated yoga. Simultaneously a man can be a bhakta, a jnani or a yogi, a meditator. These things are possible. It is demonstrated in his life.

And the third phase is the harmony among all faiths, which is very much necessary in the world as a whole, because as we see... As days pass we see that Sri Ramakrishna has, is not ~~back-dated~~ [out-dated]. Rather the more and more he is, the wonderful spiritual inspiration of his life is becoming known more and more in India as also outside India, without mentioning his name. So nobody may have mentioned [him] but [they give] the fundamental teaching, the first teaching that man has a spiritual part in his life. Spiritual search is... is an important necessity in human life. In spite of your progress in science and technology and commerce and all, don't forget that spiritual life should be the center of your life. In other words, a living interest in spiritual life, that is the first inspiration we find from him. The man has a spiritual life, a religion, the word religion is not always sufficient to lead us to that spiritual thirst.

Religion can be just formal. People are saying that they are religious. They are going to temples and churches, but religion is not bringing any kind of transformation in them. The same passions, the same lust, greed, violence, everything is there. But still they say that they are religious. That is why Sri Ramakrishna said, "The test of religion is... [whether] you're sincere, hankering for God, whether really that [is] an urge for God-- that I want to love God; I want to see God; I want to experience God." This thirst is the criterion of.. of religion.

So his teachings are spreading, sometimes visibly, sometimes invisibly. If we watch the tendencies in the field of religion we find that there is a ... that this tendency of experience is coming to people's mind – that in our religious life, unless there is some kind of experience that religion is really no good. So the emphasis on experience is... this idea is spreading – in all religions. And the other idea, the harmony of faiths is also invisibly entering into the mind of man. What we call dogmatism – that there can be only one religion – all people must come to one religion, these ideas are slowly disappearing. So these... here we find the touch of Sri Ramakrishna, the invisible message and power of Sri Ramakrishna.

An interest in spiritual life! You see so many books are published every year even in this country. “The Way of Spiritual Consciousness,” “How to Expand Consciousness,” “How to Touch the Divine” ... so many books. And by... you see, sometimes these books are not written by wise men. But it shows the interest, the growing interest in spiritual experience, the experience of consciousness, the experience of the inner spiritual reality of man. These things are gaining ground. And the other idea, that respect for other faiths we find that. It is... it is gaining more and more momentum. The respect for all religions.

So Sri Ramakrishna's inspiration, his life and message are really acting in the modern context. And Sri Ramakrishna himself had declared that His Mother, His Mother was working through him. And it is the Mother's will. It is God's will that will be fulfilled, you see. So that is why in India many people, thousands of people look upon him as an avatara, as a divine incarnation, like Rama or Krishna, or Buddha or Christ, and so [also] through his life. But, Swami Vivekananda said, “It does not matter whether you look upon Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation or not, but his life is a great beacon light to us.” His life and teachings can give us great inspiration in molding our own spiritual life in helping us to experience to grow that thirst for God! That thirst for... When Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “In the early dawn when you see that disk [become] gold” ... [he would say, “After such a sky the sun must rise.”⁴ Like that, when you are really sincere, when you grow that intense thirst for God, when you are crying, crying, crying for the vision of God – God will surely respond.]

[Transcriber note – Available tape ends with the word gold, so I tried to complete the last sentence and the thought, using words and phrases he used earlier in the lecture.]

1. “Ramakrishna.” Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramakrishna> accessed March 3, 2014.

2. “Meaning of the Sanskrit Word: yajna.” Sanskrit Dictionary.org <http://sanskritdictionary.org/yajna> accessed March 22, 2014.

3. Meaning of the Sanskrit Word: patni <http://sanskritdictionary.org/patni> accessed March 26, 2014. [Not quite sure you can split the term for wife (patni) and add dharma in the middle, but that is transcriber's guess at the word used in the lecture.]

4. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, c. 1942, p. 338.