

MY BELOVED PAPA, SWAMI RAMDAS

By

SWAMI SATCHIDANANDA (of Anandashram)



Mother Krishnabai and Swami Ramdas

If anyone wants me to tell them something about Beloved Papa, I ask them to visualise what it would be like if, by some divine alchemy, Love and Bliss were to coalesce and stand before them as one luminous entity. That is how Papa can be seen with the naked eye.

Papa was indeed the very image of Love and Bliss divine. What was the source of that Love? When he opened out his heart to Ram, his eternal Beloved, Ram flooded his heart with never-ending, never-fading Love. This happened when Papa turned to his beloved Ram with pure devotion and utter self-

surrender, turning his back on the world and the attractions it might hold for him. It was born of the realisation of his oneness with the Infinite and the Eternal Self. Every fibre of his being then thrilled to the sweet rhythm of Love. Bliss ineffable flowed over and saturated him, rising like an artesian spring from the heart's core when Papa realised the entire universe of name and form as the *vibhuti* or manifestation of the Self.

In the state of pure Bliss-consciousness he carried on his spiritual ministry till his last day on earth. Through his talks and actions he gave those who sought him a taste of the love and bliss divine. The purest pearls of wisdom that fell from his lips spread sweetness and light all round, dispelling gloom, fear and anxiety that held the people in a tight grip. Earnest seekers were lifted up to higher levels of consciousness, getting a glimpse of the true life of the Spirit, with the result that a deep yearning for that life was kindled in them. Papa's talks were often punctuated with jokes and laughter. The total impression left on the mind of the listener was never to be forgotten.

Once, to illustrate the futility of empty, theoretical advaitic knowledge, Papa narrated the following story. He was staying in a small mandir in Jhansi when a man approached him and asked, "Who are you?"

"I am Ramdas," he replied simply.

"No, you speak a lie there," returned his visitor. "You are Ram Himself. When you declare you are Ramdas, you do not know what you say. God is everything and in everything. He is in you and so you are He. Confess it right away.

"True, dear friend," Ramdas replied, "God is everything. But at the same time, it must be noted God is one, and when He is in you and everywhere around you, may I humbly ask to whom you are putting this question?"

After a little reflection, the man could only answer, “Well, I have put the question to myself”.

Papa always stressed the necessity of absolute honesty and sincerity as essential in the great Quest. Better an honest, dualistic *bhakti* than a hypocritical *advaita*. Whereas *bhakti*, however dualistic, will lead ultimately to *jnana* as *jnana mata*, the mother of *jnana*, *advaita* practised only with the head leads merely to confusion and hypocrisy.

Another incident illustrates this point well. When Papa was staying at Mount Abu he was taken to meet a “great saint”, Swami Kaivalyananda, a young *sannyasin* living in a cave, his body completely shaved, but surrounded by a number of books.

Papa approached him and prostrated.

With a look of surprise, the *sannyasin* asked, “To whom are you offering this salutation?”

“To Ram,” Papa replied.

“Who are you?”

“Ramdas.”

“Ramdas. Ramdas, funny, isn’t it? There is only one Truth. Why do you assume this false duality?”

“It is Ram Himself, being One, who has chosen to be many.”

“Wrong,” retorted the *advaitin*. “He is always One; many is false, illusion.”

“Truth has become God and His devotee for the sake of *lila*, the divine play,” Papa responded.

“Why play?”

“For love and bliss; so when Ramdas prostrates before you, it is yourself who do it in the form of Ramdas,” Papa went on.

“Bosh!” cut in the *sannyasin*. “There is only one, never two.” “Then to whom are you talking, dear Swamiji,” asked Papa, pulling out his *brahmastra*.

The *sannyasin* reflected a while and had to reply, “To myself”.

“Exactly. You assume there are two although in the light of absolute Truth there is only one.”

“No, no—no realised person believes in duality,” maintained the *advaitin*, getting jumpy. “Here, take this book and read it. You will understand things more clearly, I assure you. It is written by me.” He pressed Papa to accept it. Noticing the author’s name on the cover, Papa noted that he referred to himself as “Swami Kaivalyananda, M.A.”!

Papa, known as Vittal Rao in his *purvasrama* days, was born in 1884 at Hosdrug, Kerala, to Sri Balakrishna Rao and Smt. Lalita Bai, a devout Saraswat couple. Papa lived the ordinary life of a householder until he was thirty-six. During that time he experienced many trials and tribulations from the worldly point of view, but in his case they caused him to enquire deeply into the true meaning of life. A wonderful transformation was wrought in him of which nobody had any inkling until he was suddenly fired with an intense wave of dispassion. He came to realise the futility of worldly pursuits, and the need for real, everlasting peace and happiness. Inspired by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ram Tirtha, Papa became thoroughly convinced that God alone can give one eternal peace and happiness. The path of pure devotion and self-surrender shone forth for him with an irresistible appeal.

All attachments to family, friends and business dropped away just as a fully ripened fruit falls from the tree. He was inwardly ready to give himself up wholly and unreservedly to God.

At that critical time, his father, noticing his son's waning interest in secular pursuits and his waxing love for and devotion to God, initiated him into the *Ram mantram* and assured him that by repeating it unstintingly he would, in due time, find the true peace and happiness he was thirsting for. As the *mantram* took hold of him, Papa found his life filled with Ram. It was then that he renounced the *samsaric* life and went forth in quest of God as a mendicant *sadhu*. This first year of Papa's new life is described by him in his autobiography, *In Quest of God*.

It was thus on one morning in December 1922 that Papa left hearth and home by train from Mangalore. He did not know where he was going, nor was he anxious about it. He only knew that he was obeying the divine command of his beloved Ram, and was therefore sure that He would guide him unerringly. The *mantram* "OM SRI RAM JAI RAM JAI JAI RAM" was ever on his lips and in his heart. Besides chanting the divine Name, Papa's practice was to look upon everything in the world as forms of Ram—God—and to accept everything that happened as happening by the will of Ram alone.

Papa was thus directed to Srirangam. Here he bathed in the holy Cauvery and, after offering up his old white clothes to the sacred river, he donned the ochre robes of a *sannyasin* and underwent spiritual rebirth. As prompted by Ram Himself, Papa assumed the new name of *Ramdas* (servant of Ram) and took the inviolable vows of *sannyasa*, renunciation. Papa never referred to himself in the first person ever again.

With the name of God constantly on his lips, Papa continued his travels in the company of itinerant *sadhus*. The journey

took him to Tiruvannamalai, where he stood in front of Bhagavan Ramana and prayed for his grace.

About this experience Papa himself has said, “The Maharshi, turning his beautiful eyes towards Ramdas, and looking intently for a few minutes into his eyes as though he was pouring into Ramdas his blessings through those orbs, nodded his head to say he had blessed. A thrill of inexpressible joy coursed through the frame of Ramdas, his whole body quivering like a leaf in the breeze.”

In that ecstatic state he left Maharshi’s presence and went to spend nearly a month in a cave on the slopes of Arunachala in constant chanting of *Ramnam*. This was the first occasion that he went into solitude. After twenty-one days, when he came out of the cave he saw a strange, all-pervasive light: everything was Ram and only Ram.

Papa continued his travels, which took him to many parts of India, including the sacred shrines in the Himalayas, and then on to Bombay and finally back to Mangalore, where he spent three months in the Panch-Pandava cave at Kadri. It was here that he had his first experience of *nirvikalpa samadhi*. About this experience he writes: “For some days his meditation consisted of only the mental repetition of the *Ram-mantram*. Then, the *mantram* having stopped automatically, he beheld a small circular light before his mental vision which yielded him thrills of delight. This experience having continued for some days, he felt a dazzling light like lightning flashing before his eyes, which ultimately permeated and absorbed him. Now an inexpressible bliss filled every pore of his physical frame. When this state was coming on, he would at the outset become oblivious of his hands and feet and gradually his entire body. Lost in this trance-state he would sit for two or three hours. Still, a subtle awareness of external objects was maintained in this state.

“For two years from the time of the significant change which had come over him, Ramdas had been prepared to enter into the very depths of his being for the realisation of the immutable, calm and eternal spirit of God. Here he had to transcend name, form, thought and will—every feeling of the heart and faculty of the mind. The world had then appeared to him as a dim shadow—a dreamy nothing. The vision then was mainly internal. It was only for the glory of the *Atman* in His pristine purity, peace and joy as an all-pervading, immanent, immortal and glowing spirit.

“In the earlier stages this vision was occasionally lost, pulling him down to the old life of diversity with its turmoil of like and dislike, joy and grief. But he would be drawn in again into the silence and calmness of the spirit. A stage was soon reached when this dwelling in the spirit became a permanent and unvarying experience with no more failing off from it, and then the still more exalted state came on: his hither inner vision projected outwards. First a glimpse of this new vision dazzled him off and on. This was the working of divine love. He would feel as though his very soul had expanded like the blossoming of a flower and by a flash, as it were, enveloped the whole universe, embracing all in a subtle halo of love and light. This experience granted him a bliss infinitely greater than he had in the previous state. Now it was that Ramdas began to cry out, ‘Ram is all. It is He as everybody and everything!’ This condition was for some months coming on and vanishing. When it wore away, he would instinctively go into solitude. When it was present, he freely mixed in the world, preaching the glory of divine love and bliss. With this externalised vision Ramdas’ mission began. Its fullness and magnificence was revealed to him during his stay in the Kadri cave, and here the experience became more sustained and continuous. The vision of God shone in his eyes and he would see none but Him in all objects. Now

wave after wave of joy arose in him. He realised that he had attained to a consciousness full of splendour, power and bliss.”

In his accounts of his travels and dealings with devotees, humour was never far from Papa’s lips. Always a keen sense of proportion levelled the absurd to the mundane and raised the mundane to the sublime.

Once Papa was rambling aimlessly through a bazaar, not begging, indeed indifferent to food, as he was on a water fast.

“Who is that man?” a passer-by enquired of a merchant, pointing at Papa. The merchant replied, tapping his temple, “He is a half-cracked”.

Papa, overhearing the remark, went up to them to correct the merchant’s words. “No, brother, not merely half-cracked. Why not say full-cracked, which is the truth?” So saying, Papa passed on his way.

Any doubt about Papa’s sense of proportion is washed away completely by the “Boot-kick *Puja*” episode. Papa had been staying at Limbdi, where he was being sumptuously looked after and treated with the utmost respect. Every day more than a hundred people came for his *darshan* and *satsang*. Never attached to such externalities, as soon as Papa received the inner command of Ram to quit the place, he left. The tedious train-ride was broken at several places by a change in trains. One occurred at about ten at night.

Entering a third-class carriage, Papa found that it was very full, and everyone was lying down at full length on their bedding, leaving no room for any other passenger. Somehow, however, Papa found a perch at the feet of a particularly short passenger. At the next station, a number of new passengers poured into the carriage. These had to stand in the narrow passage between

the seats, while not a single sleeping passenger made room for them. Papa felt that he should give up his seat for one of them and so quietly slipped down to the floor and stayed there. His former perch was, of course, immediately taken.

At the next station, a fresh set of passengers came in. The rush was now so great that they began tramping through the passage with their heavy boots, searching for some available place to sit. Papa, crouching on the floor like a rabbit, received their kicks with no small delight. He rolled himself down and twisted his body into a figure 8 in order to take up the least amount of room. Station after station new passengers came in. They crowded the passage to well-nigh suffocation point. Some of the sleeping passengers were even forced to sit up. So Papa was treated with boot-kicks from all four sides. Seated passengers had to knock against him when changing the position of their legs. The ones standing in the passage added their share whenever they were shoved. Papa's only covering was a single cloth from head to foot. He looked not unlike a cloth bag on the floor. Reflecting upon the situation, Papa said to himself:

“Ramdas, only a few hours ago you were receiving *puja* (worship) at the houses of several devotees with flower garlands, sandal paste and *arati* (waving of lights). That was one kind of *puja*. Now here you are, immediately afterwards, getting another kind, with boot-kicks! Where is the difference? Is there any less Ram in the one than in the other?”

And so Papa went on chuckling to himself throughout the rest of the journey.

He travelled all over India many times during the next few years and finally settled down in a small ashram built by one of his devotees at Kasaragod, Kerala. It was here that Mother Krishnabai had his *darshan* and decided to dedicate her life to

his service. Mother Krishnabai tells of her own life and realisation in her autobiography, *Guru's Grace*. By God's will, circumstances caused them to leave Kasaragod and settle down in Kanhangad, where the present Anandashram was founded in the year 1931. This Ashram became a field for them to put into practice the universal love they had gained as a result of their universal vision. Although Papa attained *mahasamadhi* in 1963 and Mataji Krishnabai in 1989, the motto of the Ashram continues to be Universal Love and Service.

About man's relationship with God, Papa says, "Man is God playing the fool," meaning that man is essentially divine, but that Divine has put a mask of ignorance on Himself and pretends individuality. When He is ready to tear off the mask, the individual gets tired of worldly life and seeks peace and everlasting happiness. He then goes to a wise man, accepts him as his Guru, does *sadhana* as prescribed by him, and by virtue of *sadhana* and the Guru's grace, all the *vasanas* accumulated over lifetimes are washed away and the mind is made pure. Thereupon the mask is torn off and the individual realises "I AM BRAHMAN". When and in whom He chooses to reveal Himself is a mystery. Papa emphasised the need of absolute surrender to the Divine Will. He would say, "His will is supreme. If we are conscious of this always, there is no struggle in life at all. When we surrender to God's will, we put all our burdens on Him. He is only too willing to carry everything. Surrender means strength, peace, bliss and wisdom. But when the ego raises its head, all these disappear and man becomes a puny, care-worn creature. God has made man a blissful being."

"What is meant by surrender? Surrender means to know and feel that all our actions are God's actions; all our movements are His movements. If we live our life with this attitude, our ego-sense will gradually disappear. The whole universe is the play and form of God's *sakti*. When once we know that all are

forms of the one Divine, all separateness will be lost in the great realisation.”

Papa acknowledged himself as a *visishtadvaitin*:

Papa: Ramdas is not a pure *advaitin*. He believes in the co-existence of *dvaita* and *advaita*. The *jivanmukta* retains a higher subtle individuality; he moves about and acts in the world realising that he and God are one. Ramdas in this body is active in doing things. Whatever he may do, he is at the same time conscious that he is the eternal and all-pervading Reality. So, in that state there is separation and unity simultaneously.

S.: Is there no state when the *jivanmukta* can lose his individuality in the One and be free of birth?

Papa: That is possible. That is what the *jnanis* do. They do not believe in the existence of a higher individuality at all. As soon as the lower individuality is dissolved, they cease to exist as separate entities. There cannot be any rebirth for them. Adi Sankaracharya was one of that type.

Having realised his oneness with the Absolute, Papa maintained a subtle individuality to enjoy his relationship with the Divine as a child towards its mother or a servant towards its master. He had great reverence for all saints and sages. Whenever he referred to them, he would say that he was only a child of all saints. He had great respect and reverence for Bhagavan Sri Ramana. Of him he has said, “Sri Ramana Maharshi was in all respects a remarkable saint. After realising the Eternal, he lived in the Eternal. His advent was a veritable blessing on this earth. By his contact thousands were saved from the clutches of doubt and sorrow. He lived what he preached and preached what he lived. He exerted a wonderful influence and created in the hearts of ignorant men and women a consciousness of their inherent Divinity. He awakened the sleeping soul to the aware-

ness of its immortal and all-blissful nature. By his very presence he rid the hearts of people of their base and unbridled passions. The faithful derived the greatest benefit by communion with him.”

As Papa had attained realisation by taking to uninterrupted chanting of the divine name Ram, coupled with contemplation of the attributes of God, he always extolled the virtue of *nama-japa* in sadhana. Based upon his personal experience, Papa assured all seekers that *nama-japa* would lead them to the supreme heights of realisation of one's oneness with the Almighty. On the power of the Divine Name he has this to say: “The Divine Name is pregnant with a great power to transform the world. It can create light where there is darkness, love where there is hate, order where there is chaos, and happiness where there is misery. The Name can change the entire atmosphere of the world from one of bitterness, ill will and fear to that of mutual love, goodwill and trust. For the Name is God Himself. To bring nearer the day of human liberation from the sway of hatred and misery, the way is the recognition of the supremacy of God over all things and keeping the mind in tune with the Universal by the chanting of the Divine Name.”

May Beloved Papa, who is everything and beyond everything, continue to bless and lead all to the supreme goal!

OM SRI RAM JAI RAM JAI JAI RAM