

An Extensive Anthology of Sri Ramakrishna's Stories

by Babaji Bob Kindler

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by Swami Satyamayananda

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An Extensive Anthology of Sri Ramakrishna's Stories. Babaji Bob Kindler. Sarada Ramakrishna Vivekananda Associations, PO Box 1364, Honokaa, Hawaii 96727, USA. E-mail: SRVinfo@srv.org. 2004. xxix + 732 pp. \$30.

'Verily I tell you I know nothing but God', said Sri Ramakrishna. And Sri Ramakrishna spoke of the God that he experienced — within and without, day and night — in simple language, stories, anecdotes, parables, metaphors and allegories. Seeing God directly in all His aspects and speaking about Him has made Sri Ramakrishna's life a veritable encyclopedia of religious, spiritual, mystical, philosophical and metaphysical experience. Sri Ramakrishna was also a great teacher and he inspired and urged others to realize God, which he said was the goal of human life. Aspirants who came to him were numerous, of various temperaments and at different levels of development. He instructed and guided them according to their needs, warning them of the obstacles in their way. So his teachings and instructions too — dealing as they do with paths, disciplines, pitfalls, signs of progress, and so on — are an encyclopedia of spiritual life.

An Extensive Anthology of Sri Ramakrishna's Stories has taken Sri Ramakrishna's God-experiences and teachings and strung them into a beautiful garland. The range is breathtaking and comprehensive. Here we see Sanatana Dharma, Eternal Religion, at its best. Sri Ramakrishna's profound words of wisdom make the materialistic mind start questioning its experiences, the truth of which it usually takes for granted. However, the Great Master does not leave it in uncertainty; he is an ocean of compassion who replaces our illusions with divine grace.

The teachings and stories in this massive anthology are mainly taken from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The author, Babaji Bob Kindler, has at times slightly reworded some stories and parables without marring their meaning. His modern titles are very striking. Altogether 687 stories are categorized into three main parts: 'Eternal Principles', 'Obstacles to Realization', and 'Spiritual Path'. These are further classified topic-wise. 'Eternal Principles' has sections on Brahman, Shakti, Ishvara, Maya, and so on; 'Obstacles to Realization' has sections on Worldliness, Ego and Egotism, Ignorance and Bondage, Desires, and the like; and 'Spiritual Path' has sections on Yearning for God, Holy Company, Sadhana, Self-surrender, Character, Devotion, Knowledge, Renunciation, and more arranged under three subdivisions: Necessities for Successful Spiritual Practice, Specific Practices, and The Results of Spiritual Practice.

Each section contains many sayings/parables, and every one of them is uniquely commented on with wonderful insight. One might imagine that the commentary on one story in a particular section would tend to repeat itself elsewhere, but amazingly it does not! For example, the section on Ego and Egotism has twenty-six sayings/parables, but the commentary on each story is different. The average length of a story and its commentary is about a page.

Each saying/parable is given in bold, followed by a short, succinct explanation of two or three lines in italics. Then comes the commentary, which stays close to Sri Ramakrishna's core teachings. Here the author also draws support from various Indian scriptures, philosophies, mythologies, spiritual traditions, mysticism, the teachings of saints, devotional songs, etc. He has, at times, allowed himself some latitude in the commentary, but this becomes necessary in order to give creativity a little play. His lucid language makes the deep spiritual topics comprehensible.

The categorization of the stories is wonderfully and logically accomplished so that the book tends to unfold gradually, expanding our minds and letting the spiritual luminosity of Sri Ramakrishna flood our hearts. There is a very helpful Sanskrit Glossary, a Vedic Teachings Glossary, a Vedic Teachings Appendix and a Cross-reference Index to the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

This book is a real mine of spirituality for all types of aspirants of all religions. Sri Ramakrishna's teachings are universal and the anthology adheres to that high ideal. The essential teachings of Sri Ramakrishna are so simple that even a child can grasp them. This anthology too has kept things simple and is heartily recommended to everyone.

The production is flawless: the typefaces are large enough to allow for easy reading, the interline spacing is judicious, and the overall printing superb. Numerous black-and-white graphics embellish the stories and the book.

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