

Lisa,
Tagore as artist
might interest you.
For discussion sometime
Dad.

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TAGORE'S BURST-OUT INTO REALITY:

A bold disregard for tradition has been seen as an important characteristic of Rabindranāth Tagore by all who have known and studied him. His originality in literature and politics and culture has been celebrated, and the independence of his religious beliefs. But his creativity has not been looked at so carefully in one of its most dramatic aspects. No one, so far as I know, has brought together the materials that reveal the unusual nature of his mysticism.

Mystical experience was fundamental in Tagore's religious life. This statement is not made on the basis of any western dogma that intuitive experience must be central in all religion, nor of any eastern dogma that religious truth must be authenticated by "realizations." That revelatory moments were decisive in Tagore's life and art is his own testimony. Witness to this fact is prominent in several of his autobiographical writings, and incidents have been mentioned in passing by all of Tagore's major biographers.¹ The importance of these accounts may not be evident to readers whose attention is not set on the psychology of meditation. But people of our time have an interest, at last, in matters of meditation and mystical experience. Now may be the time to ask for attention to the *contemplative* life of Rabindranath Tagore.

To perceive what is unusual in the inner life of Tagore, we must know what was usual in the age-long introspective practices of India. The Hindu mystical quest in all its branches started with belief that a living being in inmost essence is a consciousness, capable under ideal conditions of unlimited awareness and of knowing ultimate truth. It is an immaterial Soul at the heart of each person that is the true Self, a sublime consciousness utterly different from the body in its essence.. It is by reason of its illuminating presence within us that we can know anything that we know. By its light we can know even our real self, and also the World-self, the Divine Being. This consciousness lies deeper in one's psyche than the rational mind. Rational mind, because it involves this awareness, is deemed to have come into being only through devolutionary extension of this consciousness into mind that is a lower level of the psyche. Thereafter the rational mind extends itself outward, carrying this consciousness-component with it, into the organs of sense perception. It lends sensitivity to the eye and ear, that would otherwise be impercipient organs of mere flesh. It is that inmost Consciousness-Soul, ultimately, that receives and knows all stimuli incoming from these organs. It is the mysterious unseen Seer and unheard Hearer of the

Upanishads. In mystical experience it is that Soul within that is the knower of the Soul, by that Soul's own power. There are hints in the writings of Tagore that he knows and accepts this traditional Hindu psychology, as far as we have sketched it.²

But traditional Indian mysticism insists that spiritual aspirants must turn their attention inward and only inward if it is their hope, ever, to know this Spirit. The five senses and the mind in their normal exercise are directed only outward, and play only on the material world. That world that the senses know, may fascinate, but it does not yield knowledge of the Soul. In all important matters the world deceives. All that the material world can yield of religious knowledge is dry doctrine, based upon rational inferences. To know God, rather than merely to hear of God, one must take the inward way, turning one's attention completely around. One must go into seclusion, stop up the senses against the unprofitable stimuli whose influx testifies only to material things. Then one must bring into united reflux the streams of consciousness previously wasted on the outer world. One can then throw all of one's collected power of consciousness back across the dark cave of one's inner being. Then at last one may perceive the mysterious Self that is the Immortal. When Seers of old came to that inmost Presence, some spoke thereafter of a radiant individual Person, some of a great universal Deity, some of a universal Ocean of divine Being in which no particularity of persons any more endured. We select for attention only the traditional view that this illumination will come only to seekers on the *inward* path.

Tradition came to a fair agreement on the essential disciplines to be included in that introspection: suppression of desire, removal for meditation to a quiet, even monastic, place; breath controls; stoppage of all sensual inflows into the mind, stopping of all straying of thought within the mind, unflickering meditation for long hours on a single topic; all leading in the end to the inner illumination called *samādhi*. In *samādhi* all the things of the physical world disappear from consciousness, and some meditators testify that all separate persons also dissolve in a single undivided consciousness that is a cosmic ocean of all Being. That is the ancient tradition, world-disdaining and world-avoiding, that had high prestige among spiritual searchers when Rabindranath Tagore was born. We shall try to understand now what was new in his understanding of the spiritual life.

Rabindranath was born in family that had a long history of disdain for religious boundaries. Though the Tagores were brahmans, their purity had been tainted for centuries, in the eyes of the orthodox, by too-close association with Muslims. Their reputation as radicals had become even worse, in more recent times, by reason of their mingling with Europeans, and by the social, ritual, and theological heterodoxy of Rabindranath's father and grandfather. Both were

leaders in the first great modern Hindu reform movement, the Brāhmo Samāj. As ardent Brāhmos, the Tagores held to a vaguely-Hindu monotheism. Their theology was a version of eighteenth-century rationalistic deism, but the community was sufficiently Indian in feeling to try to support its doctrines by finding them in India's great Vedic scriptures. They discarded all rites pertaining to the polytheistic cults, ignored the taboos of caste, and denied the necessity of resorting ever to the solitary life of the world-renouncing ascetic. The art, literature and ideas of the western world, as well as those of India, flowed through the family home. The Tagores chose a credo that expressed with their own convictions and worshiped and lived as they thought best. Other brahmans regarded them as scandalous heretics.

Rabindranath was obstreperous even among Tagores. He frustrated all family efforts to give him a secular education, and he disregarded likewise all efforts to indoctrinate him theologically in the tenets of the Brāhmo faith. "The religious services which were held in our family I would have nothing to do with," says Rabindranath, "I had not accepted it as my own."³ He was little impressed by the logical apologetic of the sect, and less impressed by its transient effort to establish itself on the scriptural authority of the Vedas. He was not concerned with any authority outside his own intuition. He chose *his* own religion. He was a congregation of one. The outcome of his search was a monotheism not greatly different, as doctrine, from the monotheism of the Brāhmo Samāj. But it had a different base. It did not rest on logical demonstrations, nor on the consensus of a community, but on the direct assurances of his own inner life. In *The Religion of Man* he says:

Gladness is the one criterion of truth, and we know when we have touched truth...by the joy of greeting it sends forth to the truth in us. ...I am sure that there have come moments in my own experience when my soul has touched the infinite and has become intensely conscious of it through the illumination of joy.⁴

Epistemologically Rabindranath returns, thus, from the rationalism of the Brāhmo Samāj to a more characteristic Hindu stress upon mystical experience.

But Rabindranath's reversion to mysticism was not a return to the traditional mysticism that we have just described in outline. When we look into the nature of the experiences that he valued, we find descriptions of moments that are like the *samādhi* of the yogis neither in preparation nor in substance nor in consequences. Hinduism in all its literature about its famous seers does not celebrate anywhere, so far as I know, the like of his attitudes.

Rabindranath's longings were for the *outer* world. This hunger may have originated in the fact that, as a child, he was systematically deprived of outer contacts. Though he was born in the spacious home of a family of great wealth, little of the family privilege filtered down to him in the form of social contacts and personal freedom. His mother died when he was a mere child, and his father, who was usually absent, gave him over to the care of strict servants and tutors. They raised him by rule. As a child Tagore was in real life the homebound and wistful child Amal of his later drama, "The Post Office." He dared not venture into the thronging world outside the garden gate. He grew up a restrained and lonely child, starved for affection and for communication with the humanity he could see in the distance, but never meet. From the dry regiment of his home he was sent off at the end of infancy to various drab and joyless schools of both Indian and British varieties. He countered the discipline of the schools by truancy and flat refusal to study. When the controls of home and school could not be resisted externally, he took refuge in unregulated spots in corners of the family garden or in corners of his mind. In these bright retreats he began to make wondrous discoveries. A capacity for adoration emerged.

The earliest notice of this sensitivity is found in his account of how deeply he was moved when, thumbing at school through his Bengali primer, he found on a grimy page these two short lines of poetry:

The rain patters,
The leaves tremble.

When rain falls in India, it is never icy nor even chill; its fall is full, and brings only a blessed coolness. The mental picture of these leaves beaten by the rhythmic fall of the raindrops brought forth in the child, he says, a surprising delight, and a sense of harmony between himself and all being. In his consciousness the rain pattered, the leaves trembled to the end of the day--a day that he remembered ever after. He had been awakened to a dimension of unity and joy in the world.⁵

In a second passage about his childhood Tagore recalls another luminous moment that came on a certain day in the monsoon season. Trudging home from school on his regular beat, from the boredom of the classroom to the boredom of his house, he lifted his eyes and saw in the sky a bank of blue-gray rainclouds towering over the family roof. In response to the billowing sky, the sudden gladness welled up within him again, with a sense of intimate communion with nature.⁶

The emotional force of this happening will be better understood if we remind ourselves of the meaning of rain clouds as an Indian cultural symbol.

There, dark clouds are heavy with suggestion of things that are pleasant and powerful. They manifest the presence of a pent-up power, a mighty force that may burst forth at any moment in a violent beating of the palm trees and a twisting and a tossing of their crowns. Rainclouds are also a merciful shield from the sun; their appearance gives hope of coolness and comfort throughout the remaining day. Their thickness promises nights that will be moonless, obscured by veils of rain, and of paths that will be unpeopled and viable for secret visiting on affairs of love. Clouds therefore suggest romantic unions and, finally, the meeting of the soul with the divine Lover: they suggest nothing less than the power and the immanence and the imminence of God! The theological burden of the cumulus clouds over the Tagore home could hardly have been appreciated fully by this child, but he was not totally ignorant of their religious meaning, either. If it had been meteorological phenomena only that he beheld, he would hardly have remembered the cloud-cover of this occasion, nor been elated by memory of the event. It was an occasion of insight. The divine Presence had been communicated to him in something that the outward eye could see.

Tagore says in *My Reminiscences*⁷ that in his 'teens he used to be amused by a rather silly visitor who asked him, "Have you seen God with your own eyes?" The crank claimed that he had. When asked what it was that he had seen, he replied, "He seethed and throbbed before my eyes!" Tagore laughed. But he remembered, and when he was eighteen, a series of luminous experiences burst in upon him that made him understand how people can make astounding statements of that sort. Religious experiences, he says, came into his life like a spring breeze--lesser and then greater ones--with telling impact upon his entire life.

The setting of one illumination was commonplace: no glorious mountain overlook, nor even the scenery of the pleasant family garden, but the streetside verandah of the family home, giving a view of ordinary houses in constricted Calcutta. There, on a certain porch-sitting evening, the light of day quickened magically, and the glow of the reddening sun fell on the wall of the adjoining house in a certain entrancing way. Suddenly a cover of triviality was lifted. He lost all awareness of himself and was able to see the world truly, he felt, in a new aspect of beauty and joy⁸

The warmth of that interlude went away, but it was revived in no long time by a deeper and more enduring experience, "a further insight," says Tagore, "that has lasted all my life." It was an event of 1888. He writes of it in 1912:

The end of Sudder Street, and the trees on the Free School grounds opposite, were visible from our Sudder Street house. One morning I happened to be standing on the verandah looking that way. As I continued to gaze, all of a sudden a covering seemed to fall

away from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side. This radiance pierced for a moment through the folds of sadness and despondency which had accumulated over my heart, and flooded it with this universal light⁹

Telling the story again in 1930, he says that it was as if some ancient pall of the commonplace had lifted from everything, so that he could see the beauty and profound significance of all things and all men.¹⁰

Particularly interesting in this passage is Tagore's testimony regarding the social implications of the experience. He describes the event as "the sudden expansion of my consciousness in the super-personal world of man." The meaning of this statement is made clearer in his continuing original account, that goes on to say

...the curtain did not fall upon the joy aspect of the universe. And it came to be so that no person or thing in the world seemed to me trivial or unpleasing... As I would stand on the balcony, the gait, the figure, the features of each one of the passers-by, whoever they might be, seemed to me all so extraordinarily wonderful, as they flowed past--waves on the sea of the universe... Friend laughs with friend, the mother fondles her child, one cow sidles up to the another and licks its body, and the immeasurability behind these comes direct to my mind with a shock which almost savors of pain¹¹

Such revelatory visions continued in a succession throughout the poet's life. He bears witness to them also in this 45th poem of his *Gitanjali* (cf. also 43 and 72):

Have you not heard his silent steps?
He comes, comes, ever comes...
Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind,
But all their notes have always proclaimed,
"He comes, comes, ever comes."

But the Sudder Street illumination remained primary for Tagore, a living influence throughout a long life, through his loving recollection of it. Writing to C. F. Andrews in 1928, forty years after the event, he makes it determinative of his career, "I have tried to explain it in my poems," he says: poems in which it was his work "to express the fulness of life, in its beauty, as perfection if only the veil were withdrawn."¹²

The descriptions of Tagore's mystical illuminations have been full and consistent. Tagore has described amply and with some eloquence the intuitions that were precious for him, and typical of him. We are ready for comparisons with traditional yogic mysticism.

The most striking distinctiveness in Tagore's intuitive life lies in the fact that the sense of the Infinite comes to him in moments of wide-eyed extroversion. Even in his times of highest religious elation he is reaching toward something that is presented by the senses and actually revealed in the things of sense. These same sense-objects the yogi regards as the great enemy. If even a glint of his consciousness escapes containment and bursts out and makes contact with phenomena, the yogi fears that all of his precious concentration will escape with it like precious water gushing from a punctured water-bag. Therefore the traditional Hindu holy man seeks vision only within, with eyes firmly closed or made unseeing. His senses must be blocked. Tagore's vision, on the other hand, does not feed on separation from the world, but on breaking through to the full appreciation of the world. In his perception of the Divine he throws the sense-doors open and sweeps the cobwebs from their frames. His moment of truth was a time "When of a sudden, from the innermost depth of my being, a ray of light found its way out and spread over and illuminated for me the whole universe, which then no longer appeared like heaps of things and happenings, but was disclosed to my sight as one whole."¹³ For Tagore the arrow of truth points outward, whereas for the yogi it points *in*. Tagore turns the psychological process of the traditional meditation inside out.

A second striking difference, related to the first, is the absence in Tagore's witness of any reference to having perceived any internal realities of a photic and visionary nature. Indian mystical literature is full of reference to the experiencing, in the course of meditation, of extraordinary hallucinatory images. The second chapter of the Śvetāśvatara Upanishad, for instance, speaks of "Fog, smoke, sun, fire, wind, fire-flies, lightning, a crystal, a moon--these are the preliminary appearances," and the Maitri Upanishad in some of its most dramatic passages (6:18-26) describes extraordinary radiant visions that are seen by yogis as they penetrate inner worlds: vast caves of darkness in which luminous lotuses are seen, and wheels of fire, great gods, seas of light, and often, finally, an endless Radiance beyond all forms and all words. Tagore's spirituality, on the other hand, is not a new perception of supernatural things but a new perception of the high significance and deep value of *natural* things. The realities with which his vision deals are those of everyday. The revelation that comes to him is insight not into their viciousness, but into their sacredness. The realization that comes to him is a sense of the aesthetic, social, and ethical significance of the actualities of our lives.

One might wonder why Tagore is so negative about the inwardness of the traditional mystic's quest. Is he a subscriber to the familiar doctrine that God is a "Thou" and only a Thou? No, Tagore shares in his own way in the monism common to Hindus and to the view that one cannot point in a direction where God is not. Tagore acknowledges that God is within as well as without. "Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well," he says in *Gitanjali* 67. It is apparent in poem 71 as well that Śankara's monism is absent here, that would exclude "the nest" from divinity and even from reality. Tagore says in stead, "Thou settest a barrier in thine own being and then callest thy severed self in myriad tones. This thy self-separation has taken body in me. ... With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me." This monism of Tagore is not designed to provide mental refuge from an illusory earth, but to celebrate the reality and glory of a real earth that is included in God's essence and provides its creatures with ground for mutual reverence.

Why should this God who is truly within as well as without, not be approachable by introspection also, in Tagore's view? This inward move might seem possible metaphysically, but we can perceive how Tagore would deem it to be impossible psychologically and morally. The introvert sets out to find God by self-attention. Such meditators narrow their awareness, thus, to self-awareness, and ignore more and more the Divine presence in their fellow-men and external nature. They make themselves into false centers of the universe. The end of the quest for the One is recovery of loving regard for all creatures. That end cannot be attained by spiritual ways that starve that loving regard. The self-centeredness inherent in introversion cancels all possible knowledge of God, who is one's ontic tie with all creation.

Seeking to see the particularities of Tagore's mysticism from all possible angles, we must ask all the testifiers to supernormal experiences, what the *function* of the experience has been in the dynamics of their lives.. So we ask Tagore, "In terms of *consequences*, what was it, really, that happened to you at this moment in the crossroad of your life?" We ask it of Tagore, but also of the yogi.

The answer of the world-renouncing yogi can be drawn with fair certainty from the exultations found everywhere in the Upanishads. The common statement of those seers is that the day of illumination was the day of the lifting of the burden of mortality and repeated death. With the dawning of vision, the yogi became free of all terrors and depressions about death, and a participant in a free and endless life. Tagore sees his vision as woven into the cause and effect sequence of his life in a different way. In *My Reminiscences* he considers the setting and meaning of these incidents with a good deal of care.¹⁴ And sickness of heart regarding death was not among the great concerns that afflicted him in the

times before his visions. Nor was the healing of any such anguish mentioned among the blessings that flowed from the experience. He pictures himself, rather, as cured by his visions of the profitless emotional storms that oppressed him at the age of eighteen. The communion with nature that had been his as a child had been lost in his adolescent preoccupation with his subjective emotions. The poems of adolescence that he continued to write and publish, he looks back upon as having nothing as their substance but the troubled fancies of an inner world in which he had shut himself up. It was on such a brooding egocentric youth that the dramatic visions broke that we have mentioned. Their seizure of his attention was irresistible. They "obliterated my self," he says, and lifted the cover of triviality from the everyday world.

In one of his verses he enlarges again on the expansion of vision that these moments brought:

"I know not how of a sudden my heart flung open its doors
And let the crowd of worlds rush in, greeting each other."¹⁵

A few pages later he uses a revealing reference to "my coming out of the *Heart Wilderness* into the open world"--a final effort to characterize the mystical transpiration. Henceforth no person or thing would be unpleasing to him, as we have seen, for all were part of the great dance.

On Tagore's own testimony, then, what was it, really that had happened to him in the sequence of these moments? In them he left immaturity behind, he says, and became an adult, a social being, fully human, and a citizen of the universe. Here his lifelong love affair with the world began. Where other meditators claimed to have left the world, entered into realms transcendent, and become immortals, Tagore says he entered into the world and became a man.

Carrying further our comparison of Tagore with the older mystics, we find them different again in their conception of preparatory disciplines that might lead to the moment of truth.. On this matter, it is clear that Tagore had no use for traditional yoga's technical disciplines nor for aggressive practices of any kind. In the records of his life we find no reference to any experiment at all with yoga on his part. When he writes, rarely, a few words about his own contemplations, we perceive that they belong to another and freer order of mental discipline.

Tagore did, rarely, give some advice on meditation. He rejects in it the most elementary principles of the eight-stage yoga, and yet sets forth a discipline that is a yoga-analogue. It is the practice of looking long and quietly upon the world for the world's sake alone, with all attention directed outward. The first step toward true vision is the setting aside of personal worries and concerns and the

viewing of men and nature with complete attention. Personal anxiety, or even spiritual striving, create a darkness in the soul that makes individuals blind to all outside themselves. Tagore believed that his first great rapture, while gazing at the wall of a neighbor's house in Calcutta, could occur only because the startling beauty of the sunset had silenced for a moment the clamors in him of self-concern:

While the self was rampant during the glare of the day, everything I perceived was mingled with and hidden by it. Now, that the self was put in the background, I could see the world in its true aspect....Since this experience I tried the effect of deliberately suppressing my *self* and viewing the world as a mere spectator, and was invariably rewarded with a sense of special pleasure.¹⁶

We can understand what Tagore means if we remember personal experiences of the power of a sudden view of the Himalayas or the Alps: the magnificent vista seizes for once our total attention and thrusts personal worries aside. Tagore adds to our observation the fact that such vistas open up in some people the possibility of reverence. On the relationship between aesthetic and religious experience Tagore has a position of rare clarity: the former is a preparation for the latter. When something of startling beauty steals and absorbs our minds, then ego, the enemy of all universalistic orientation, is temporarily suppressed. The light of the cosmos has a chance to enter.

The second and last article of Tagore's "yogic" teaching is to wait patiently for these revelatory moments. They are not ours. He writes in *Gitanjali* 44 of this waiting in confident faith:

This is my delight, thus to wait and watch at the wayside
where shadow chases light...
I know that of a sudden the happy moment will arrive
when I shall see...
In the meantime the air is filling with the perfume of promise.

Tagore likes to imagine himself as minstrel of appropriate patience at a royal court, whose duty (*Gitanjali* 19) is to sing at the convenience and bidding of the king:

If thou speakest not I will fill my heart
with thy silence and endure it. I will keep
still and wait like the night with starry
vigil and head bent low with patience.

The morning will surely come, the darkness
will vanish, and thy voice pour down in
golden streams breaking through the sky.

Thus Tagore had serious advice on how to be open to mystical experience. One must not grasp for it, as if for one's self.

We have only one autobiographical mention of a thought by Tagore of his taking on the common function of a spiritual guide: "I remember I tried also to explain to a relative how to see the world in its true light, and the incidental lightening of one's own sense of burden which follows such vision; but, as I believe, with no success."¹⁷ Tagore's career as a guru was short.

Tagore's personal opinion of yogis and their ways cannot be mistaken. He mentions them seldom, but with feeling, in his references to a complex of teachings that refer to yoga, and *māyā* in the sense of illusion, and *saṁnyāsa* or world-renunciation. These terms comprise a unity in Tagore's eyes--institutional doctrinal and mystical components of a kind of religious life that is not his own.

Toward the world-renouncer, the sannyasi, Tagore's aversion is open and direct. (See *Gitanjali* 73, and *The Gardener* 43, 44, 75.). His hostility is well-known, and needs little elaboration here.

Toward the philosophy of Śaṅkara he shows the courteous reserve that modern Indian teachers normally extend toward others' doctrines that they do not share. But when such monism begins to intrude into and affect life, Tagore rises up and his remarks are blunt:

Sitting idly in your corner, all you do is sharpen
the edge of your metaphysical mumbo-jumbo and dismiss
as unreal this boundless star-studded sky... Do not shut
yourself up alone and grow prematurely senile. How will
you grow into a man if you do not join in the game of life?¹⁸

In Tagore's few direct comments on traditional yoga, also, a bit of this acerbity shows itself. In several thoughtful pages in *The Religion of Man* (pp. 117, 202-206), he describes yogis in restrained terms as people who wish to be liberated from the bondage of personality through the extinction of individuality. They seek this liberation through yoga. In a yogic state called *saṁādhi* they realize a unity with an impersonal Brahman in which not a trace of humanity remains, nor good nor ill, nor any quality save bliss. Continuing to describe yoga's aims and methods, Tagore avoids polemic, saying yoga is "a

time-honoured tradition in our country." It has its own supporting experience that cannot be refuted by argument. He does not dispute the testimony of these people, but he goes on to say that the extinction of personality that these meditators seek is not for him, and that it is not appreciated by many others also who join him in offering a contrary testimony. "There are many of us whose prayer is for dualism," he says, and who find their fulfilment in love.¹⁹

On what the condition of *samādhi* actually is, Tagore offers a theory that is not much more flattering than that of Sigmund Freud. He joins Freud in a charge of developmental retrogression. *Samādhi*, says Tagore, may be the condition of vacuum that was the original state of humanity before evolution began. But that original state, he hastens to add, was not the perfect state. Man's movement to completion is *forward*. Man is more perfect, even as present man, than in his original state of vacuity or in the yogi's reconstruction of it. "It may be valuable as a great psychological experience but all the same it is not religion."²⁰

This radical judgment is confirmed by a poem--number 72--in Tagore's *The Gardener*. It is even more forthright in picturing the yogi's attention as fundamentally misdirected. The poem described on the surface a worshiper's ultimate disillusionment with his long practice of worship in a dark temple. But the verses are pervaded by allusions to yogic technique. It is obvious that the "temple" is a figure for the body as a seat of meditation, and that it is the internal meditation of the yogi that is being discussed:

With days of hard travail I raised a Temple.
It had no door or windows,
Its walls were thickly built of massive stones.

I forgot all else, I shunned the world,
I gazed in rapt contemplation
At the image I had set upon the altar.

It was always night inside,
And lit by lamps of perfumed oil.

Sleepless, I carved on the walls
Fantastic figures in mazy bewildering lines--
Winged horses, flowers with human faces,
Women with limbs like serpents.

No passage was left anywhere, through which could enter
The song of birds, the murmur of leaves,
Or the hum of the busy village.

My mind became keen and still like a pointed flame,
My senses swooned in ecstasy.

I know not how time passed
Till the thunderstone had struck the temple,
And a pain stung me in the heart.
The lamp looked pale and ashamed;
The carvings on the walls, like chained dreams,
Stared meaningless in the light
As they would fain hide themselves.

I looked at the image on the altar.
I saw it smiling and alive with the living touch of God.
The night I had imprisoned had spread its wings and vanished.

We have Tagore's last word on the most powerful mystical tradition of India. He saw himself as separated from the *samādhi* of the yogis by a line that runs very deep. Yet we have heard his testimony, also, to moments of intuitive insight that are the most precious memories of his life. If we are interested in "moments of truth," we may have established that they occur often, but we are warned that they may differ greatly in nature. Efforts to understand these illuminations run into perplexities at once. One must hope that better occasions to discuss them be found later.

ENDNOTES

1. Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences* (N.Y., Macmillan, 1917). --*The Religion of Man* (London, 1931; Boston, Beacon Press, 1961). Edward J. Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore, His Life and Work* (1921; Calcutta, YMCA Publishing House, 1961), p. 69. Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore, A Biography* (NY, Grove Press, 1962), pp. 101-105; Niharranjan Ray, *An Artist in Life* (Trivandrum, University of Kerala, 1967), pp. 912-95.
2. *My Reminiscences*, p. 87.
3. *My Reminiscences*, p.185.
4. *The Religion of Man*, p. 107.
5. *My Reminiscences*, p 3f, *The Religion of Man*, p. 95.
6. *My Reminiscences*, p, 225,

7. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
8. *The Religion of Man*, pp. 93-96.
9. *My Reminiscences*, p. 216.
10. *The Religion of Man*, p. 94.
11. *My Reminiscences*, p. 217f., passim.
12. Charles F. Andrews, ed., *Letters to a Friend* (London, 1928), p. 24.
13. *My Reminiscences*, p. 222,
14. *Idem.*, pp. 215-227.
15. *Idem.*, p. 219.
16. *Idem.*, p. 215.
17. *Idem.*, 215f.
18. From the poem *Sonār Tarī*, tr. Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore, A Biography* (N.Y. Grove Press, 1962), pp. 164f.
19. *The Religion of Man*, pp. 202f.
20. *The Religion of Man*, p. 117.