



BEING AND BELONGING

PANDITA RAMABAI (1858-1922)

My father, though a very orthodox Hindu and strictly adhering to caste and other religious rules, was yet a reformer in his own way. He could not see why women and people of Shudra caste should not learn to read and write the Sanskrit language and learn sacred literature. He found an apt pupil in my mother, who became an excellent Sanskrit scholar.... They were obliged lead a pilgrim's life. My mother told me that I was only about six months old when they left their home... Thus my pilgrim life began when I was a little baby.

[Before he died] I shall never forget my Father's last injunctions to me. His blind eyes could not see my face; but he held me tight in his arms, and stroking my head and cheeks, he told me, in a few words broken by emotion, to remember how he loved me, and how he had taught me to do right, and never to depart from the way of righteousness. His last loving command to me was to lead an honorable life if I lived at all, and to serve God all my life. He did not know the only true God, but served the—to him—unknown God with all his heart and strength; and he was very desirous that his children should serve Him to the last. 'Remember, my child,' he said, 'you are my youngest, my most beloved child. I have given you into the hand of our God; you are His, and to Him alone you must belong, and serve Him all your life.' He could speak no more. My father's prayers for me were, no doubt, heard by the Almighty, the all-merciful Heavenly Father, whom the old Hindu did not know. The God of all flesh did not find it impossible to bring me, a great sinner and unworthy child of His, out of heathen darkness into the saving light of His love and salvation. I can now say to the departed spirit of the loving parent—'Yes, dear father, I will serve the only true God to the last.'

"I was desperately in need of some religion, hungering after something."

In London the [Christian] Sisters took me to see the rescue work carried on by them. I met several of the women who had once been in their Rescue Home, but who had so completely changed, and were so filled with the love of Christ and compassion for suffering humanity, that they had given their life for the service of the sick and infirm. Here for the first time in my life I came to know that something should be done to reclaim the so-called fallen women, and that Christians, whom Hindus considered outcasts and cruel, were kind to these unfortunate women, degraded in the eyes of society. I had never heard or seen anything of the kind done for this class of women by the Hindus in my own country. I had not heard anyone speaking kindly of them... The Hindu Shastras do not deal kindly with these women. The law of the Hindu commands that the king shall cause the fallen women to be eaten by dogs in the outskirts of the town. They are considered the greatest sinners, and not worthy of compassion.

5 Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar... Jacob's well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." "...The Samaritan woman asked, "Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (Jews and Samaritans didn't associate with each other.) Jesus responded, "If you recognized God's gift and who is saying to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would be asking him and he would give you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you don't have a bucket and the well is deep. Where would you get this living water?... Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come

here to draw water!"... Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you and your people will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...But the time is coming—and is here!—when true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. The Father looks for those who worship him this way. God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth." The woman said, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will teach everything to us." Jesus said to her, "I Am—the one who speaks with you." Just then, Jesus' disciples arrived and were shocked that he was talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" The woman put down her water jar and went into the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who has told me everything I've done! Could this man be the Christ?" They left the city and were on their way to see Jesus. —John 4, Common English Bible

I realized after reading the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel, that Christ was truly the Divine Saviour he claimed to be, and no one but He could transform and uplift the downtrodden women of India. ... Thus my heart was drawn to the religion of Christ.... While the old Hindu Scriptures have given us some beautiful precepts of loving, the New Dispensation of Christ has given us the grace to carry out these principles into practice; and that makes all the difference in the world.

People must not only hear about the kingdom of GOD, but must see it in actual operation, on a small scale perhaps and in imperfect form, but a real demonstration nevertheless.

"Proclaim LIBERTY throughout the Land unto all the inhabitants here." Leviticus 25:10

When starting from San Francisco, and on landing in Bombay, I had resolved in my mind, that although no direct religious instruction was to be given to the inmates of my Home, yet I would daily read the Bible aloud and pray to the only True God in the name of Christ; that my countrywomen, seeing and hearing what was going on, might be led to enquire about the true religion, and the way of salvation... No one was urged to become a Christian, nor was any one compelled to study the Bible. But the Book was placed in the library along with other religious books. The daily testimony to the goodness of the True God awakened new thoughts in many a heart. Every pupil admitted in the school has been receiving religious instruction, retaining perfect liberty of conscience. Many hundreds of the girls and young women who have come to my Home ever since its doors were opened for them have found Christ as I have. They are capable of thinking for themselves. They have had their eyes opened by reading the Word of God, and many of them have been truly converted and saved to the praise and glory of God. I thank God for letting me see several hundred of my sisters, the children of my love and prayer, gloriously saved. All this was done by God in answer to the prayers of faith of thousands of His faithful servants in all lands, who are constantly praying for us all.

I was a Christian woman, and I had a home of my own, and a daughter for whom I thought I must make a home. I had made the resolution of Joshua, 'As for me and my home, we will serve the Lord.' That shall be my resolution to the end. I let my girls do what they like; but I have the freedom with which Christ has made me free: and why should I keep my light under a bushel? I do not mean to do it. When I had my family worship in my own room, not in the school-hall, some of the girls began to come in; and we gave them freedom to come, if they wanted to. My Hindu brethren thought it was going too far, and that I was Christianizing those girls. They wanted me to shut my room when I was reading the Bible and praying. I said, 'No; I have the same freedom to practice Christianity which these girls have to practice their religion. Why should I shut the door of my room, which I do not shut at any other time during the twenty four hours of the day?' The Hindu friends were much offended at it, and wanted to pull our school down, and raise another school in its ruins; but I am glad to say that the foundations of this school have not been set on the sand, but on the eternal Rock, and it stands there to this day, and it will stand forever.

"A life totally committed to God has nothing to fear, nothing to lose, nothing to regret."

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