

The Original Gospel of Ramakrishna: Based on M.'s English Text, Abridged

Ramakrishna

Joseph A. Fitzgerald, Editor

Swami Abhedananda, Editor

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While followers of some religions continually seek to discover what their leaders actually taught or meant, disciples of the Rāmakrishna Order of Hinduism have an account of Rāmakrishna's teachings recorded by a direct disciple in diaries during his life and compiled, translated, and authenticated by multiple direct disciples within years of his death.

This Gospel's text is a compilation of Rāmakrishna's stories, parables, conversations, and teachings over the last four years of his life, as recorded by his secretary, Mahendranath Gupta. Versions of the Gospel's fourteen chapters are readily available in multiple translations in previous print editions and for free online. This printing is part of the Spiritual Masters: East & West Series of World Wisdom's Library of Perennial Philosophy, which reprints spiritual works from various religions with supplemental materials.

What makes this new volume unique is that it contains an edited and abridged version of the original 1907 English translation by Swāmī Abhedānanda, a direct disciple of Rāmakrishna, rather than the later, more widely available English retranslation by Swāmī Nikhilananda, from 1942. Alexander Lipski and Joseph A. Fitzgerald, two American scholars, add a foreword and a preface that explain Rāmakrishna's importance in world religions as well as the history of the Gospel text. Swāmī Abhedānanda's 1907 preface is retained to recount the origin and authenticity of the text. While hagiographic, the added biographical introduction written by Swāmī Vivekananda provides additional context to the teachings and a devotional perspective from a direct disciple of Rāmakrishna.

While firmly rooted in Hinduism, the text presents teachings that transcend to more universal concepts on spiritual and physical life. The teachings are mostly easy to read and understand, with the intended meanings of the parables often clearly explained. Un-translated words from Bengali and unexplained concepts from Hinduism will send many readers to the included glossary or outside reference works for clarification. Whether you agree or not with Rāmakrishna's conclusion toward the end of his life "that all religions are like paths which lead to the same common goal," reading this revered spiritual leader's teachings will likely result in deep reflection on your own beliefs and actions.

The Original Gospel of Rāmakrishna's recommended reading for those broadly interested in religion and philosophy, as well as to those interested specifically in Rāmakrishna and Hinduism.

C. WILLIAM GEE (January 16, 2012)

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