

Swami Premeshananda
(of the Ramakrishna Order)

THE GOAL AND THE WAY

Note given by Swami Premeshananda
to a young monastic aspirant
and preserved by Swami Swahananda



Summarises the ideals of the
Ramakrishna Order
The Vedanta in practice.



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WHO IS SWAMI PREMESHANANDA?

Swami Premeshananda (1884-1967), a highly respected monk of the Ramakrishna Order was a disciple of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. Premesh Maharaj, as he was known, was responsible for encouraging many young people, both men and women, householders and monastics, to lead lives dedicated to the ideals of spirituality and service. He did this not only through personal contact, but also through his wonderfully inspiring letters, many of which have been published [together with other material] in the two volumes of *GO FORWARD*, translated by Swami Swahananda, Head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

(From the Translator's Note)



The last chapter of the first volume of GO FORWARD, entitled The Goal and the Way, reproduced here, is an excellent summary of the ideals that the Ramakrishna Order puts into practice.

GO FORWARD is available from Advaita Ashrama and other Ramakrishna Vedanta Centres.

John Manetta

THE GOAL AND THE WAY

[This note was given by Swami Premeshananda to a young monastic aspirant and was preserved by Swami Swahananda.]



Four things are necessary in human life: *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*.

1. *Dharma*: Philanthropic works, holy rites, gifts, etc., by means of which one enjoys happiness both here and hereafter.

2. *Artha*: Property, money, etc., by means of which others can be helped.

3. *Kāma*: Objects of enjoyment, a virtuous wife, good food, name, fame—enjoying which the thirst for enjoyment is satisfied.

These three are called *tri-varga*. They are necessary for those who seek enjoyment. He who has satisfied his thirst for enjoyment becomes a *tyāgī*, a renouncer. He is content with *mokṣa*, liberation, alone.



All the sufferings of man may be divided into three classes:

1. *Ādhyātmika*: the suffering relating to the self, i.e., the body, mind, and intellect. In the body this manifests as disease, old age, and death; in the mind, as anger, hatred, etc.; and in the intellect, as awareness of distinctions such as wise and ignorant, high and low, *brāhmin* and *caṇḍāla*, householder and *sannyāsī*

2. *Ādhibhautika*: the suffering caused by *bhūtas* (creatures) such as flies and mosquitoes, thieves, dacoits, and liars.

3. *Āhidaivika*: the suffering due to unseen causes or nature's fury such as drought, flood, storms, and earthquakes.

These three types of suffering are completely obliterated when *jñāna* dawns in us.

Jñāna: To feel and realize that I am neither the body nor the mind nor the intellect. This is differently described in the scriptures as *ātma-jñāna*, *brahma-jñāna*, *mukti-lābha*, *siddhi-lābha*,

God-realisation, and the like.

To attain this knowledge of the Self there are four main paths:

1. *Jñāna yoga*: To realise the Self through *vicāra* reasoning.

2. *Bhakti yoga*: Loving God and meditating on His form, qualities, and real nature is called *bhakti*. By practising this devotion we may know our real nature.

3. *Rāja yoga* (or *dhyāna yoga*): By meditating on the real nature of the Self, one can realise the Self.

4. *Karma yoga*: Knowledge dawns in us if we keep our minds on the Lord while working, if we work to know the real nature of the Self, or if we work to satisfy Him.

Jñāna Yoga

Vicāra

1. *Avasthā-traya-viveka* (discrimination regarding the three states of consciousness): We forget the present state while dreaming, the dream state while awake, and both in deep sleep. So these three states are all *drśya*, objects of experience, and I am the *draṣṭā*, the observer.

2. *Pañca-kośa-viveka*, the five sheaths:

a. At the time of death the body remains and I leave it behind. The body belongs to the *annamaya-kośa*, the physical sheath.

b. By medicine, *prāṇāyāma*, *yoga*, etc. we can arrest the activities of *prāṇa* but still remain alive. So I am not the *prāṇa*. I direct the *prāṇa*. I am separate from the *prāṇamaya-kośa*, the vital sheath.

c. In deep sleep the mind separates itself from me; so I know that I am separate from the mind—the *manomaya-kośa*, the mental sheath.

d. I am the *Ātman*, fixed, undisturbed; but the *buddhi* the intellect, is not so. Thus it is different from me. So I am also not the *vijñānamaya-kośa*, the sheath of the intellect.

e. Even after realisation one feels “I am, I have achieved *jñāna*, I am separate from the mind and body. I enter into *samādhi*, and I come out of it.” Who is this “I”? This “I” must be

separate from the *ānandamāya-kośa*, the blissful sheath.

When this sense of identification also disappears, there is neither the perception of “I” nor “you”, neither knowledge nor ignorance. Then a man attains perfect *jñāna*.

All cannot reason thus, and even if they try, they do not get much benefit or result from it. He alone attains realisation easily who has the requisite qualifications.

Qualifications: sādhanā-catuṣṭaya—the four prerequisites:

1. *Nityānitya-viveka*: Discrimination between the Real and the unreal.

2. *Ihāmūtra-phala-bhoga-virāga*: Renunciation of the enjoyment of the fruits of action both here and hereafter.

3. “Six treasures”:

a. *Śama*: Calmness—controlling the inner organs.

b. *Dama*: Self-control—controlling the outer organs.

c. *Uparati*: Willingness to engage in *sādhanā* to attain knowledge; abstaining from *kāmya-karma*, worldly actions.

d. *Titikṣā*: Remaining unmoved in happiness and suffering— forbearance.

e. *Śraddhā*: Faith in the words of the *guru*, in oneself, and in the scriptures.

f. *Samādhāna*: Complete concentration, or *samādhi*.

4. *Mumukṣutva*: Longing for knowledge. It is not possible to have knowledge unless these nine qualifications are acquired. But these may come through the practice of *vicāra*.

Bhakti Yoga

Those who have not yet acquired the above prerequisites for *sādhanā* may understand the real nature of God by thinking of His *rūpa* and *līlā*—His form and manifestations in divine sport. Sri Ramakrishna and other incarnations are themselves God. God himself came to teach us spirituality.

Three things need to be known about Sri Ramakrishna:

- 1) his *rūpa*, *guṇa*, and *līlā*—form, qualities, and divine play;
- 2) his *upadeśa*, teachings; and

3) the workings of his organisation.

This idea is parallel to the Buddhist idea of the Buddha (personality), *Dharma* (teachings), and *saṅgha* (order).

Sādhya-sādhana—the means to the goal:

To accomplish the first of the above points, read the *Lilā Prasaṅga* (*Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* by Swami Sarad-ananda) and the *Ramakrishna Punthi*.

To accomplish the second, read the *Kathāmṛta* (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) and the books of Swamiji.

To accomplish the third, be acquainted with the members of the organisation and become familiar with the lives of the direct disciples.

To follow his *dharma* and serve his *saṅgha* is a *sāadhanā* of devotion. But if there is no love for Sri Ramakrishna, it is not possible to perform such service. So the devotional exercises prescribed by the *Vaiṣṇava* scriptures should be followed: *śravaṇa*, *kīrtana*, *Viṣṇu-smaraṇa*, *pāda-sevana*, *arcaṇa*, *vandana*, *dāśya*, *sakhya*, *ātma-nivedana* (hearing about the Lord, repeating His name, thinking of Him, serving Him, worshipping Him, saluting Him, working for Him with humility like a servant, cherishing an attitude of friendliness toward Him, and offering oneself to Him).

To achieve *bhakti*, five attitudes toward God are traditionally adopted: *śānta*, *dāśya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, and *madhura* (the attitudes of calmness, of a servant, of a friend, of a parent, and of a sweetheart).

We generally follow the first two of these attitudes. In the *śānta bhāva*, we think of ourselves as a part of Him, His child. In the *dāśya bhāva*, we serve all living beings and do the work of the *saṅgha* in order to please Him.

To attain devotion, it is necessary to know about and contemplate His previous *lilās* especially as Buddha, Jesus, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Gaurāṅga, Read the chapter on *bhakti yoga* in the *Gītā*, the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, and Swamiji's books.

Learning music is very helpful for attaining devotion. You

should at least learn the songs sung in the Order. It is a *sādhana* to serve all irrespective of caste or creed. Don't give up the chance to serve others. Devotion grows very quickly if all living beings are served with one's body, mind, and speech;

Rāja Yoga

The practice of repeating the *mantra* given by the *guru* is a spiritual exercise of *rāja yoga*. To meditate on the form of the *guru* or *Īṣṭa* is also included in *rāja yoga*. Whatever is practised when sitting on one's seat in order to unite oneself to the Lord is *rāja yoga*.

Since the practice of *rāja yoga* is divided into eight parts, it is also called *aṣṭaṅga yoga*.

1. *Yama*: *ahiṃsā satya, asteya brahmacarya, aparigraha* (non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, non-covetousness).

2. *Niyama*: *śauca, santoṣa, svādhyāya, tapas, Īśvara-pranidhāna* (cleanliness, contentment, holy reading, austerity, thinking of God).

3. *Āsana*: sitting with the spine straight and without moving.

4. *Prāṇāyāma*: breath control, etc.

5. *Pratyāhāra*: gathering of the mind.

6. *Dhāraṇā*: trying to fix the mind on the form of God

7. *Dhyāna*: seeing only the form and nothing else.

8. *Samādhi*: direct vision.

Karma Yoga

Practice *jñāna-vicāra*. Try to understand: "I am a part of the Lord, so whatever I do is His work." Repeat this *mantra* while you are working:

Yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi yaj juhoṣi dadāsi yat .

Yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kuruṣva mad-arpaṇam ..

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, and whatever austerities you practice, O Son of Kuntī—do that as an offering to Me. (Gītā IX. 27)

And sing the song “*Man Bali.Bhaja Kālī*” (“O my mind I tell you, worship Kālī with every action”).

Even the grass of the Master’s ashrama belongs to him. Therefore, be attentive to people, even to dogs and cats. Try hard to see that no loss or harm is done to the ashrama. Think that his ashrama is a great *tīrtha*, a place of pilgrimage, and try to keep it well-ordered and clean. “The ashrama belongs to Thakur and not to the authorities or to any person, so I also do not possess it. Knowing that it belongs to the Master, I will serve it and as far as possible see to the interests of others, giving up my own interests. The ashrama belongs to Thakur.” We must look after it with all our might. But there must not be any attachment. No one should be tormented for the sake of the ashrama. This ashrama is for serving all living beings—not for our eating and living like householders. Its purpose is to please the Master. Then why should we give up the chance of doing more work? Why should we be angry if others do less? The result will vary according to the attitude and quality of the service. Do not work if you cannot regard it as a *sādhanā*, as worship. He who does not look upon work as a means toward his salvation, just like meditation and *japa*, should not be in the Mission, for this institution was created to prove that Knowledge can be gained also through work.

Difficulties

1. *Mukti* cannot be achieved through work unless the work is done unselfishly.

2. *Jñāna-vicāra* alone does not lead to *mukti*—on the contrary, it leads to arrogance and bondage.

3. Through the practice of *yoga*, power is generated, which is also a bondage—Rāvaṇa is an example of this.

4. Through the practice of devotion, emotion increases and the aspirant becomes more attached to objects.

No *sādhanā* can lead to *mukti* unless it is unselfish.

Yadā sarve pramucyante kāmā ye ‘sya hṛdi śritāḥ .

Atha martyo ‘amṛto bhavaty atra brahma samaśnute ..

When all the desires that dwell in the heart are destroyed,

then the mortal becomes immortal, and he attains Brahman even here. (Kaṭha U. II. 3. 14)

Through work one can find out how free from desire his mind is and how much laziness has been eliminated. Through work one can know how much *rajas*, *ahaṅkara* (egotism), selfishness, etc. are in the mind and body. When silent, everybody is a *paramahansa*! When one works unselfishly, his meditation also becomes steady. His mind is calm who does good work. It is easy to calm the mind through work. Unless we work, and concentrate while working, the mind will not become concentrated in meditation.

*Āruruḥṣor muner yogaṁ karma karāṇam ucyate .
Yogārūḍhasya tasyaiva śamaḥ kārāṇam ucyate ..*

For the sage wishing to attain the state of yoga, work is said to be the way. Once he has attained the state of yoga, quietude is said to be the way. (Gītā VI. 3)

To please the Lord is the objective, not work. The swamis, i.e., the *saṅgha gurus*, have repeatedly said that when we serve the people, Thakur is pleased. So to please him we perform three different types of activities.

The ideal of the Ramakrishna Ashrama is to attain liberation through service to *jīvas*. To become fit for service, discrimination must be practised, for attachment increases when there is no discrimination. To do service properly, the practice of devotion is necessary, for when there is no devotion to the Master, there is no willingness to work properly. Again, when there is no meditation or *japa*, there is a lack of concentration, and as a result, our work is not done properly and we become tired of it. All our enthusiasm disappears, and we gradually forget—especially if we do not practice meditation and *japa*—that “we are doing Thakur’s work”. We begin to think that “we are the doers”, and as a result, get entangled and suffer greatly.

No one *yoga* is absolutely separate from the others. While practising *jñāna*, one must also study the scriptures, engage in *vicāra*, perform actions, and develop intense attraction for the realisation of Brahman. And to know Brahman there must be

complete and perfect concentration on It.

While practising *bhakti*, one must also practice *jñāna* by thinking about the real nature of *Īśvara*, engage in concentration by meditating on Him and performing different actions to please Him.

He who does not have *jñāna* cannot have *bhakti*. He whose mind is not one-pointed cannot have *jñāna*. He who is under the influence of attachment and hatred cannot be unselfish or desireless and so cannot have *jñāna*, *bhakti* or concentration.

So, from the very beginning we should associate in the field of action with different types of people, e.g., good and bad, wise and ignorant, pure and impure, and be free from *rāga* and *dveṣa*, attachment and aversion.

In work we can understand to what degree attachment and repulsion, likes and dislikes have left their roots in our minds. It normally takes much time to find this out, but when we practice *karma yoga*, we can observe it daily. To begin practising *sādhana* without first correcting our faults is utterly foolish.

All the secrets of *karma yoga* can be known from Swamiji's *Karma Yoga* and the *Gītā* (chapters 1-5).

Yoga-vighnas: Obstacles on the path of *sādhana*

- Obstacles in the practice of *jñāna yoga*:

1. An excessive desire to read different scriptures.
2. The desire to become a scholar.
3. The desire to be renowned as a *jñāni*.
4. The tendency to spend time in reading at the expense of meditation and other spiritual practices.
5. Being praised by others for talking about *jñāna*. *Jñāna* is for the sake of *mukti*, not for knowing different things.

- Obstacles in the practice of *bhakti yoga*:

1. Uncontrolled passions resulting from excessive sentimentality.

2. Indirectly enjoying the world in the name of God through celebrations, music, varieties of food, or the company of devotees.

3. Suffering by thinking of the devotees' households as one's own.

4. Becoming attached to the human body by thinking about the body of the *Iṣṭa*.

• Obstacles in the practice of *dhyāna yoga*:

1. If the mind is not calm, one may suffer from irritability, mental exhaustion, dangerous fits of lust, and even insanity.

2. Even if the mind becomes calm and concentrated, unless one has discrimination, his mind may become attached to some external object—the ashrama, another person, or some work—rather than to God.

3. Again, if the mind becomes calm, but one simply sits back quietly without doing any work, he will not attain knowledge.

4. Some feel a strong hankering for work even after becoming established in meditation. They then begin to make disciples and preach religion, and end up leading a householder's life though living in an ashrama.

On rare occasions and after a very long time, one or two attain realisation through meditation alone. Generally, meditative people who have no *jñāna*, *karma*, or *bhakti* fail. A *jñāni* at least associates with people, and a *bhakta* sacrifices a little for others. But a *dhyāni*, if not a seeker after liberation, becomes very selfish and goes to ruin.

• Obstacles in the practice of *karma yoga*:

1. It is man's nature to work. Those who do not want liberation take up *karma* in the name of *yoga* to serve their self-interest.

2. "I will serve all beings and, as a result, my selfishness will vanish." Without such an attitude, one sees everything in terms

of his own self-interest and goes to ruin.

3. Fame naturally comes through work. If the *sādhaka* falls prey to it, all is lost.

4. Egotism grows when one's work is successful

5. While working, there is the danger of acting mechanically, without thinking.

6. Those who can work efficiently often look down upon others.

7. To expect gratitude is a great obstacle.

8. *Karma yogis* often have the bad habit of judging others' work.

*Yasmān nodvijatc loko lokān nodvijatc ca yaḥ .
Harṣāmarṣa-bhayodvegair mukto yaḥ sa ca me priyaḥ ..*

He by whom the world is not agitated and who cannot be agitated by the world, who is free from joy and envy, fear and anxiety—he is dear to Me. (Gitā XII. 15)

9. When engrossed in work, people often become egotistical and lose their tempers.

10. The tendency to decrease one's work due to lethargy is harmful. It is equally harmful to increase one's work unnecessarily due to *rājasika* egotism.

11. To pass one's defects off as merits.

12. To repress others and to interpret the defects of one's favourites as merits.

13. To be attached to some particular work.

14. To dislike a particular work and try to avoid it.

15. To judge the results of work without considering one's own spiritual progress or mental purification.

Three types of human minds

1. *Mūḍha* (deluded): Those who do not desire any spiritual progress and are thus unwilling to practice any *sādhana*.

2. *Abhyudayārthī* (seekers of prosperity): Those who are willing to make progress.

a. Some of them want progress in different fields in the world.

They do not practice religion or desist from using any means, good or bad, to reach their goal.

b. Those who want to become happy in this world and the next take to the religious path.

3. *Niḥśreyasa-kāma* (seekers of the highest goal): Those who want liberation.

a. Some of them seek a particular deity, for example Krishna.

b. Some are seekers of liberation and want only *jñāna*.



Mumukṣus (seekers of *mokṣa*) are of three kinds:

1. *Manda-vairāgyavān* (those with a dull spirit of renunciation): They are neither willing to stay at home nor practice *sādhanā*.

2. *Madhyarna-vairāgyavān* (those with a middling spirit of renunciation): Though they practice a little, they like to pass their days in idleness. They do everything—meditation, *japa*, scriptural reading, pilgrimage, service to others, etc.—but neither well nor for a long time.

3. *Tivra-vairāgyavān* (those with an intense spirit of renunciation): They possess great enthusiasm for *jñāna*, *bhakti*, *dhyāna*, and selfless work, and have no desire for the enjoyment of worldly objects.



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