

ON ENDEARING ONESELF TO GOD

By Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – July 1964; Vol. 51; page 203

VARIOUS ARE the human propensities and diverse are man's aspirations; still; mankind can be broadly divided into two sections: as those possessed of good tendencies and those with evil propensities, or if we are to speak in the language of the Gita: those having *daivi* (godly) and *asurā* (devilish) tendencies. The godly tendencies lead to liberation and the devilish ones make for bondage says the Gita¹. This, however, does not mean that you can meet everywhere people exclusively good or exclusively bad. Man is a conglomeration of both dispositions and when in some the good proclivities are prevalent they are said to be good, or righteous; on the other hand, when in others the evil inclinations are predominantly manifesting they are said to be wicked or unrighteous. But there are a few who are wholly and completely filled with godly qualities. Such persons gain liberation when even present in the body. No wicked action is possible for them, nay when they attain that state not even an evil thought crosses their minds. Such a man's one ambition in life is to endear himself to God. To such a person 'that is the highest duty, supreme righteousness by which he attains motiveless, unimpaired devotion to the Lord; attaining which his inner Being pervades with an ethereal bliss'.²

But very rare are such people. This is not an over-statement. It is almost a truism. For though many do profess religion and conform to the dogmas and creeds and rituals enjoined in it, few can be said to be exclusively wanting God. They may want Him and at the same time want something else also. Rather they may be said to be wanting God for getting those other things. Sri Ramakrishna has repeatedly expressed his regret about this attitude of the people. 'Alas!' he remarks, 'who wants God? People want everything else but God!' Why is it? Is God so elusive? Sri Ramakrishna affirms that it is the other way about. He states, 'God is so eager to meet the devotee. If you take one step towards Him, He comes ten steps towards you.' In spite of it occasionally only some one is seen to want Him and Him alone. Now, how can we take this one step is the question.

Usually one's heart is filled with endearments to father, mother, wife, husband, children, friends and the like. Every endeavour is made to please them, but it is always not a successful attempt. Nevertheless people indulge in it. Why? Because of attachment. This attachment sometimes becomes morbid. The son illtreats the mother but she clings to

him all the same because of this attachment, which she mistakenly thinks as love, says Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna calls this attachment or compassion to relations as *māya*, whereas compassion to all beings he terms as *dayā*. And this compassion to all beings forms one of the disciplines by which we endear ourselves to God. How do we know that? The theists would certainly believe that this universe is the creation of God and it does not take much effort to conclude that God would definitely be pleased if his creatures are served. For does not Sri Krishna say, 'One who worships Me dwelling in every being, in a spirit of Unity, is a Yogi. Whatever his mode of life, he lives in Me?'³ Still, it is not compassion in the ordinary sense of the term but worship, that is demanded of us, to all creatures. Jesus also said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'

Again the Advaitists cannot but be worshipping all as they see, at least intellectually, that 'there are not many here.'⁴ 'Everything movable and immovable is to be covered by the Lord' says the *Isāvāsyā Upanisad*.⁵ About the Supreme Being or the worlds beyond the senses we can know only through the scriptures and persons who have transcended the senses and have had actual experience of Reality. The scriptures declare, as we have seen, that we have to see everything as God. So, as we take for granted many of the scientific theories, although we do not know them by our own experience, in a similar manner about the science of the soul, (Atman) or Brahman too we have to learn to trust in God-men and the scriptures, which are nothing but the record of the experiences of sages in this direction.

However, to get a perfect mastery over this discipline it is to be aided and strengthened by other virtues. For this, seeing God in everything, is not a matter that can easily be accomplished. A great deal of foundational work is necessary for the purpose. Purity of heart is an immense help to it. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' All the efforts of yoga, of all actions, of all pilgrimage and the like are to attain this purity of heart.

What is purity? How is it to be attained? We have knowledge of clear water. We see stainless white garments. We also know the care with which a scientist selects his substances for his experiment — they should all be pure otherwise the experiment will not be a success; results will be not be accurate; on the other hand, if the ingredients are impure the results will be misleading. Likewise our hearts should be unstained — unstained by desires, jealousy, hatred, pride, anger and the like. When such purity is attained, the heart, like a mirror devoid of all dross, reflects God.

This purity can be attained by being guileless. Guile is the greatest enemy of spiritual life. What happens is this: A man of guile hides his inner feelings and desires under the cloak of opposite ones. Simultaneously his inner Being also gets enshrouded by those very cloaks, until the encrustments become too thick for penetration, and a

clear vision of his own inner being is made impossible. Clothed in these several disguises the conscience looks hideous to the very man; and he is afraid to dive into himself. That is where guile leads him — to the bottomless abyss of fear, fear even from his own conscience. That is why the sages ask us to be truthful in mind, word and deed. Sri Ramakrishna loved people of guileless nature very dearly. The very sight of them sometimes would put him into ecstasy. He would say, 'One cannot be guileless without a great deal of spiritual discipline in previous births. A hypocritical and calculating mind can never attain God.'

The above is a significant saying when, in these days, every act is weighed and judged from the material benefit it can bestow; utility as they would call it; pragmatic value of the act as the philosophers would term it. There should be no calculation as far as the spiritual life is concerned; love towards God should be motiveless (*ahaituki*), that is what is implied in the above statement. Swami Vivekananda says, 'Love knows no bargaining. Wherever there is any seeking for something in return there can be no real love; it becomes a mere matter of shop-keeping.' On another occasion he remarked, 'Perfect love is very rare in human relations, for human love is almost always interdependent and mutual. But God's love is a constant stream, nothing can hurt or disturb it.'

We see that a love that bargains is no love at all, and unless man is desireless he cannot love in this wise. It is said that God is a jealous lover. He won't brook any share in love. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'If there is any one in charge of the store-room the master of the house will not go there. He would say "What would I do there? There is already some one."' Similarly if our heart is full of desires, full of egoism, God has no place to enter there.

The common impediments in the life of the spiritual aspirant are lust and greed. They overpower man, specially the former has a great drag on him and with lust comes also greed. It is inevitable. That is why so much stress is laid on *brahmacharya* for a person who desires to endear himself to God. When the base desire of lust is controlled and turned Godward, a sixth sense, as it were, grows in man and he views the world in quite a different light. He sees that it is God alone who has become everything. But this cannot be done in a day. Those who want quick results will therefore be disappointed if after a year or two they think they have not made any progress. But depression which leads to abandoning of the path is bad, whereas if it makes him resolve more firmly to reach the goal, whatever the consequences, is commendable.

There are, what is stated in Christian theology, 'the dark nights of the soul'. The aspirant undergoes a tremendous anguish at the loss of vision of his Ideal, a glimpse of which he had had for a time. It may be from the layman's point of view, a trying time. But the person himself is unaware of it. His eyes, so to say, see nothing. He feels nothing except a great hankering for God. When such a yearning possesses man, God comes to him. Sri Ramakrishna gave the example of a teacher who taught

his disciple how he could come face to face with God. The teacher took the disciple to a river and as the disciple dived into the water, the teacher held him down and did not let him off until he began to struggle wildly. On the disciple's recovering his breath the teacher asked, 'What did you desire most at that time?' The disciple replied, 'A whiff of breath and nothing else.' The teacher said, 'When you desire God in that way He will come.' Then will that person be dear to God.

Besides lust and greed, pride also happens to be a bad stumbling block for the man on the path of God. Pride of wealth, beauty, power, scholarship, physical strength and so on. Each of them is an insurmountable barrier for the common man. But before a man who loves God they fall away like houses of cards. 'Thou alone art my father and mother, Thou my relation and friend, Thou my knowledge and wealth, in short, O! Lord of gods, Thou art my everything,' sings a poet. But how to get rid of this pride? By discrimination. Reason out: What is beauty? How long does it last? A few years and everything fades away. Power is unstable like the drop of water on a red hot pan. Why are we so enamoured of our physical strength? A day's fever and man lies prostrated. Scholarship: What will it give man? At best some wealth, some name and some fame. But what use is all this when the life eternal is taken into account?

Sri Krishna in the twelfth chapter of the Gita, deals at length with the type of person who endears himself to God. He says: 'Devoid of hatred to all creatures; friendly and compassionate to every being; free from egoism, and possessiveness; equanimous in pleasure and pain; always contented; of controlled senses and of right resolution; and whose mind and intellect are surrendered to Me, such a devotee is dear to Me.

'Such a person who causes not anxiety to the world nor in whom the world is ever able to cause anxiety; who is free from feelings such as happiness and anger, fear and anxiety, he is dear to Me.

'Non coveting, pure, dexterous in action, indifferent to worldly gains and losses, free from sorrow and one who never of his own accord moves to manifest his will, such a one is dear to Me.

'One who is neither elated (by gaining desirable objects) nor dejected (by adverse circumstances), neither grieves nor desires, and one who discards both good and evil, that devotee is dear to Me.

'Equal to friend and foe, equanimous in praise and blame, bearing heat and cold alike, without company, homeless, steadfast in devotion, satisfied by what chance may bring such a one is dear to Me.'⁶

Sri Krishna also categorically states that these three—desire, anger and greed—are the open and wide gates to hell and hence of one's own destruction, we may say, of spiritual destruction. 'This desire and this anger is born out of rajo-guna. They are of inordinate appetite and most sinful; know them to be enemies here,'⁷ declares he at another place. How these sense objects drag man down is beautifully given in the second chapter of the Gita. 'A person who always thinks of sense pleasures gets

attached to them. By this contact desires arise. And when these desires are not fulfilled anger is generated. And when anger overcomes man, he gets infatuated ; (he loses all sense of decorum or decency). Due to infatuation all memory and reasoning fail him. When memory fails his intellect succumbs. And with it his spiritual death is complete'⁸ says Sri Krishna.

How short-living these physical enjoyments, pleasures, are has been brought out in a beautiful verse by Robert Burns thus:

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow'r its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white — then melts for ever.

Such is the end of all earthly goods and vanities begotten therefrom. 'Who then, having seen the unageing gods, and knowing these pleasures and goods of heaven and earth subject to destruction will indulge in them for any length of time?' asks Naciketa of Yama. Therefore for one desirous of knowing and seeing God, there is no other way than to discard all of these things and take shelter in Him alone.

¹ Gita, 16.5.

² Bhagavata, I.2.6.

³ Gita, 6.31.

⁴ Br. Up. 4.4.19.

⁵ Isa Up., 1.

⁶ Bhagavad Gita, XII, 13 to 19.

⁷ Ibid., 3.37.

⁸ Ibid., 2.62 & 63.