

# HOW TO CALL ON GOD

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A FEELING of non-response, insufficient response, or response not commensurate with one's efforts oppresses every aspirant some time or other, for a shorter or longer duration in the course of his spiritual life. This is sometimes called the 'dark night' of the soul. This happens to be the crucial point in the spiritual career of man. Doubts then arise as to whether he really has chosen the right track; whether after all God and visions and things like that could not have been chimerical, illusory, without any substance, induced by fasting and the resultant metabolic process — a fevered brain — or by drugs, as some of the present day psycho-analysts persistently argue and want to prove. In some this doubting condition happens to be a passing phase but in some others it has a severe reaction. They give up their efforts and turn away from religion, nay may turn quite antagonistic to it.

Why does this happen? Let us analyze. What does man expect from religion, from being spiritual? If we send a depth-charge, of thought, into the motives that move man to any activity we will be able to explode the fact that desire for freedom and happiness lies at the root of all activity. Each one, however, thinks that happiness will be his if he obtained but a particular object, attained a particular goal. Thence arise all his efforts to possess the object or reach the goal. But it is not always a pleasant experience that awaits him on acquiring what he longs for. He finds that the object falls short of his ideal or what his imagination conjured it up to be; the goal seems to be paltry when it is neared and happiness seems to be as far off as ever, freedom appears to be as distant as when he started. Failing to attain anything nearest to freedom in the outside world some one directed his thought inward and cutting off all attractions realized that happiness and freedom lay in his own Self, which is the Spirit. We hear of it from the records left to us by these sages and are attracted towards it. The picture that is painted of the man of realization is glorious, almost alluring. Lured by this pen-picture some either after or before seeking happiness in other directions come to religion; religion not as the common man understands it, i.e. as a denomination, a sect, a community, a belief in certain creeds and dogmas and nothing more, but something which speaks of a higher entity which is not bound by these labels.

However, prone as he is to sloth, expectant as he is of easy success, man meets with a hard taskmaster here, in religion. So the efforts which he himself considers as Herculean do not enable him to make any headway in spiritual life. The reasons are not far to seek. First of all, there is a tendency in man to overvalue his efforts. Even the laziest will find it a great burden and an unheard of attempt if he were asked to shift himself from one position to another.

Secondly, behind the efforts, there is not that real sincerity of purpose. We do not say that every one begins that way but there is every likelihood of man's losing the grit with which he started. To sustain the enthusiasm with which one starts any enterprise, even in the face of mountain high obstacles and impediments is a matter that few hearts are capable of. It is more so when the result is not tangible, not what can be perceived by the senses. Many get bogged down in their very first attempt and thenceforwards do not even try to extricate themselves from the situation.

Thirdly, the strong contrast that the religious life bears to the way of the world is an added reason. The two types are poles apart and there is no way of bridging them. It is this attempt to make a combination of these two paths, the *yoga* (spiritual) and *bhoga* (enjoyment), that makes a hash of spiritual life. Tulsidas, the famous poet-saint of North India, has said in a couplet of his, 'Where there is *kam* (desire) there cannot be *Ram* (God) and where *Ram* is there cannot be *kam* (desire)'. This statement of Tulsidas appears almost like a paraphrase of the Upanisadic texts: When all desires, that are residing in the heart of man, are destroyed then the mortal becomes immortal and here and now enjoys the bliss of Brahman<sup>1</sup>; and 'cut asunder are the knots of the heart, wiped away are all doubts, and destroyed are his *karmas* (the fruits of one's actions) when that Highest is seen.'<sup>2</sup> So it should be clear that it is a folly on the part of one who is in search of the ultimate good to combine these two paths.

## II

Sages say that religion brings man eternal happiness and eternal freedom. Let us not mistake it as worldly happiness and freedom. A soul that has taken a body is bound and has to suffer pains. It is inevitable. True bliss, therefore, can only be in the non-temporal, transcendental Reality, which is the essence of man. Knowing this and being able to separate the Eternal Spirit from the body, with determination and courage, alone can make us joyful and liberated.<sup>3</sup> The path is narrow and dangerous and calls for extreme caution and perseverance. The goal cannot be purchased by wealth nor can it be bartered for any other

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<sup>1</sup> Katha Upanishad, 6.14.

<sup>2</sup> Mundaka Up., 2.2.9.

<sup>3</sup> Kathopanishad, VI.17

worldly entity. 'Neither by work, nor by progeny, nor by wealth but by renunciation alone some one attained immortality,'<sup>4</sup> says the *Kaivalyopanishad*. 'Lust and lucre' as Sri Ramakrishna was never tired of repeating, is what stands in the way of man's attaining liberation. Renunciation of these is, therefore, incumbent on every practicant. It forms the keystone of the spiritual edifice.

We know how compellingly strong the attractions of the world are, how our mind is, as it were, soaked in them to the fullest extent; like a saturated solution it would not absorb anything more. This is specially the case of the present day youth. God has no place in their day's programme. We have to begin with such a mind. Of course, it would have been infinitely better to have a pure mind. But every one is not fortunate to possess an unsullied one. Again, purity of mind cannot be had for the asking, it requires cultivation, and purity cannot be cultivated by thinking more and more about the things of the world. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'As you move towards the east, the west will be left behind'. Likewise, when we move towards God the attractions of the world will loosen their grip on us. So this moving towards God is to be practised. We are apt to say: How can we with our sullied minds call on the Lord who is purity itself? To this there are counter questions. When will you begin then? How will you purify yourself? If we wait for all our impurities to be blown away before we start calling on God, we will be like the person who went to the sea to take a dip and waited for the waves to subside. Neither the waves subsided nor the person took his bath. So we have to begin the moment we feel that there is an entity which is eternal and can liberate us from our bonds. And in life the earlier we begin the better it is. For if we run in the old ruts for any length of time the furrows of habits will widen and run deeper and hold us down more and more firmly until at last we will sink into those habits altogether with no hope of redemption. As said earlier the two ways of life are diametrically opposed, so the farther you go on the worldly side the greater will have to be your exertion to retrace your steps. And man does not grow young always. Youth fades away yielding place to old age, when the faculties reach a moribund state. At that stage one cannot take to a new line of action, cannot strike out on a new path. Man is willy nilly driven along by the momentum of his old habits. All of us know how strong habits are; they are almost impossible to break through. Therefore, before they grow into our nature we have to discriminate and discard them when they are found to be a drag, a useless burden. A start along this higher path should somehow be done and then it is to be adhered to with utmost tenacity; then results will come. But results or no results the practicant should be undauntedly striving towards the goal without let or hindrance.

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<sup>4</sup> Kaivalyopanishad, 1.3.

### III

People call on God for various reasons. Some want wealth, some progeny, some help to tide over physical difficulties or mental worries. But few want Him for His own sake. That is what Sri Krishna declares in the *Gita*, 'Four types of people, who are of good merits, O Arjuna, worship Me: those who are in difficulty, those who are eager to know, those who are in need of something and the man of knowledge. Among them the man of knowledge being always united with Me and of one-pointed devotion excels. I am very dear to him and he is very dear to Me.'<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly those who take the name of God, believe in His existence and call upon Him are people with meritorious deeds to their credit but the man who does not know anything but God is the most loved by Him. Why? Because the first and the third type want to use God to their own ends. The second class simply wants to know about His Existence but the last class of devotees need Him for His own sake, and want Him as they need their very life breath. Those who reach such a state really worship God, others are only playing at it.

There is a dictum in Sanskrit, which forcefully brings out the idea of the above statement of Sri Krishna. 'Becoming like God one should worship Him.' When one's mind becomes as pure as purity itself then one's worship can be said to be worth the name. Such being the case we should ask ourselves as to what right we have to complain that we have not been able to achieve anything, that God has been cruel and so on.

The point now is how to purify this sullied mind. It is by trying to remember God, calling on Him always. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Hold on to the feet of God with one hand and do your work in the world with the other and when you are free from your duties hold on to Him with both your hands'. This is an injunction to remember Him always, even amidst our duties. Does not Sri Krishna similarly enjoin on Arjuna, 'remember Me at all times and fight'?<sup>6</sup>

This world is a battle-field where each one has to fight his own battle of life. As another man's taking food does not nourish us, so too another's struggle and efforts do not benefit us spiritually. It may be asked, 'What then about the vicarious suffering?' How many can do that? Only Incarnations of God and their apostles are able to do it. And the Incarnations come once in a while. Even then how many really come in contact with such personalities, how many really take shelter at their feet? Sri Krishna says, 'People, who are dull-witted, without knowing Me as the Lord of all creatures think little of Me who have taken this human form'.<sup>7</sup> True, very few are able to recognize an Incarnation when he lives with us in the human form. We do not have that divine sight, we do not have that purity of the mind which reveals things as they really are.

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<sup>5</sup> Gita, 7.16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Gita, 8-7.

<sup>7</sup> Gita, 9-11.

Under such circumstances we have to struggle and work out our own way out of this labyrinth. Incessant practice of the spiritual disciplines along with a constant remembrance of God is the only method by which we can overcome our drawbacks.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Establish some relation with God: of a servant, of a child, of a friend, whichever suits your temperament. Make Him your own.' How much does not a mother love her children! The mother sacrifices her sleep and food to attend to the child when it is ailing, she takes infinite pains to attend to the smallest needs or comforts of her children. We have friends, real and good, whom we long to see; whose presence gives us joy. Again, a servant, true and faithful, will not mind even harsh words or treatment of his master. For he knows that at heart his master can have no ill-will towards him, as such he continues to discharge his duties as if nothing had happened between them. In a word his fidelity to his master remains constant and unshakable. By that the servant wins over his master's gratitude and grace. These are some of the human relationships which can be daily met with in our life. What is required of us is to cultivate one of these attitudes towards God. We can think of Him, as Sri Ramakrishna commended, as the Master and ourselves as His servants. For the Divine Master, who has planted compassion in the hearts of all beings, can He be less merciful? The human master may err but not the Divine. Sri Krishna assures that to us, 'Even the most wicked person, if he with one-pointed devotion, thinks of Me, should be considered as a person of exemplary character for he has rightly resolved. He is soon transformed into a righteous person and obtains eternal peace. Know it for certain, O son of Kunti, My devotee never perishes.'<sup>8</sup>

#### IV

We are not forlorn as long as we remember that there is One who has brought us into this world and who residing in us looks after our welfare. Perhaps, we may be afraid that he is watching us when we go wrong. That sense of fear also is good. For it will put a curb on our evil propensities, and help us cleanse our minds. In fact nothing escapes His perception, nothing is beyond His purview. He is the Indwelling Spirit in every one of us. How then can anything remain unknown to Him? Should we then tremble and fall down and weep and wail fearing the wrath of God? Of course, we must be ready to reap the fruits of our actions, good or evil. But weeping and wailing does not help if we do not mend our life. God like a loving mother forgives our faults and makes us strong to bear the burden of our actions, when it falls on us. He sees to it that we do not miserably sink down into despair. That is the result of calling on God. We shall be steadfast to Him, even though it means passing through fire and

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<sup>8</sup> Gita, 9.30-31.

sword. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that we can see God if we call on Him with earnestness, with a yearning heart. He was wont to sing a song expressive of this thought.

*Cry to your Mother Śyama with a real cry, O Mind!  
And how can She hold Herself from you? How can Śyama stay  
away?  
How can your Mother Kali hold Herself away?*

Again, he said, 'God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions to the worldly man, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife.' When we reach this state we can be said to be really calling on God, nay living in Him. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, again, 'Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.' But to have that longing is not a matter of a few years of discipline, it is a lifelong struggle. The path is long and arduous but a brave heart will never quail.